

Nuclear Waste Re-Processing Plant 19, Murmansk.

(Severomesk Naval Base - Russian Northern Fleet Command.)

Contrary to Standard Procedures, Dymitri was in the Control Room alone. It was Friday afternoon and the weekend "Vodka Races" had already begun. He reckoned he was the only man on the base who did not drink or smoke. He was certainly the only one in the Plant from Valerian Kuybyshev Military Engineering Academy in St Petersburg. The others were part of the Moscow mafia of engineering graduates, "the elite" as they openly bragged. He knew they talked behind his back, that they called him a 'Fitness Freak' because he loved to run, even using the machine when the weather was bad. Dymitri ignored their jibes because he liked to keep fit. It would save his life. This passion and the fact that someone along the line had been 'cutting' the analgesic capsules by drilling and draining off the fluid for personal use, topping up with deionised water.

Doktor Engineer Dymitri Dryonov flipped through the pages of a well-thumbed "Times" magazine, his left hand was twirling a small silver crucifix with a gold Christ. It was all that he had left of his mother and he wore it constantly but never openly. Unlike his wife Svetlana, Dymitri was not a believer. He smiled as he read the article "What really makes you fat", amazed at what Americans ate on a daily basis. Again the lies he had been taught at school made him angry.

He looked up from the magazine and checked his watch: fifty three minutes to handover and then the long train journey back to the outskirts of St Petersburg for two weeks home leave with Svetlana and the boys. Because of 'the panic', he had not seen them for nearly seven months, forced to get by on ten minute weekly phone calls and relying on his photographs to remind him of what they looked like. The latest estimate was three more months of this assignment and then he would be able to go home for good, away from this miserable place, back to the Academy and the lecturing post he had been promised now that his post-doctoral project was finished. He would build his boat and take the boys on camping and fishing trips.

The amber light began pulsing slowly and the alarm beeping quietly. There was no real danger, merely another 'situation' that must be 'managed' because there was no money for a proper shut-down for the repairs and replacements that everyone acknowledged were needed.

Dymitri rolled his chair across the polished concrete floor to the Master Console, flipped up the switch, rotated the dial and watched the pointer slow down, stop then swing back into the green safety zone. The light went out and the beeping stopped. He

rolled back to his work-station, pulled open the drawer, cleared the contents and lifted out the sheet of metal which formed the false bottom to retrieve his personal log. He checked the time again, added his entry and returned the log to its hiding place.

He rolled across to the computer terminal, called up the Master Log and made the entry. On a hunch he scrolled back to check the details of the previous alarm three days earlier. There was no entry showing. After a short pause to consider this he scrolled back through the previous weeks since the problem had started. None of his other alarms was recorded. There were no alarms at all. He logged out, then back in again (illegally) as his supervisor Valerik Yezhov.

Twenty minutes later he picked up the red telephone and called Nuclear Installations Central Control in Moscow.

'Professor Matvel Anosov. This is Comrade Doktor Engineer Dymitri Dryonov, Plant 19.'

'Hold.'

'Engineer Dryonov? Vice-Principal Gushchin. Anosov is in hospital. Liver cancer; it's terminal, they say.'

'Oh, I am sorry to hear that, Comrade. Professor Anosov is a...'

'Yes, yes. What is it Engineer Dryonov, that brings me from my meeting at this inconvenient time?'

'Well, Comrade Principal Gushchin, I have uncovered an irregularity of incredible...'

'Silence! You know such things cannot be discussed on an open telephone line, idiot! Do you have proof? Or is this another ploy to escape from your duty at Severomesk?'

'No, Comrade Principal Gushchin, I have proof. I have kept a personal log with all the details.'

'Oh, I see. Wait a moment, please, comrade.'

As the minutes ticked by Dymitri racked his brains for the name Gushchin without success. The man's accent was Moscow but there was a strange bark to it. Maybe he had been on the Chinese Programme. They said that they had lived like princes over there, in luxury accommodation and learning Chinese had changed them. Perhaps if he had been chosen to learn Chinese rather than English he might have been sent.

'Comrade Dryonov, bring this 'log' of yours to the Security Office *at once*. I have a replacement team on its way to the Control Room. Leave Plant 19 on automatic, on my authority. I have arranged a flight for you. I must see this information of yours at once, and get your help to decide what to do. I see you are down for the Academy? Perhaps we can find a promoted post for you? Good afternoon, Comrade Dymitri Dryonov. You have done well to report this to me.'

As he locked the Control Room door Dymitri heard the loud slurred voice of Valerik Yezhov and the shrill replies of his fat sidekick Leo Yenin booming along the corridor. Dymitri slipped into a cleaner's cupboard until they passed.

As he approached the Security Office he felt a sharp stab in his shoulder then nothing...

ooOoo

Svetlana and her two boys waited until the last of the passengers had left the station. She did not know what to do and so she went home. All night she prayed for a telephone call that did not come. She was not supposed to know where Dymitri was working and did not have a number for him. She did not want to get Dymitri into trouble. She did not trust her telephone to call anyone. Late next morning, when there was still no Dymitri and no phone call, she took the bus, the train and the local bus to her father's place on the lake to ask what she should do. She had never got on well with him, but he still had some influence, or so he said.

Before perestroika Papa Ogursov had been a high Party Official, and pretended that he still kept in touch with the leadership while hoping they would not take away his little dacha at the beach and the old leaky boat that Dymitri refused to use. Although he was no longer on the local committee, Boris Ogursov had been an 'obedient' Chairman and believed he was still well respected.

He listened to his daughter with growing unease. He went to see Vlad Yozhin the Secretary, a man who had 'adapted' and whose son was 'high' in the new regime in Moscow. What Boris learned made him fearful. He wished he had not asked, unsure what Yozhin would do.

On his return he pretended to Svetlana that there was no news, that there was 'nothing going down'. They decided to wait, say nothing, and hope. As he ran them home in his rickety old car Svetlana said that she would take the boys to church the following day to say special prayers for Dymitri.

On his way home he went to the illicit liquor shop and bought a bottle of vodka to blot out what might happen.

Train R 1204/2

The three men in the Western designer suits knew there was no need to bind the renegade; he would be out for hours. At the railway station they found Train R 1204/2 and dumped him in the guard's compartment with Babouchka Kargin. At fifty-nine Dominika Kargin was a Party Member of the old school, used to obeying without question. They could still take away your house, your benefits or even dispose of you like this. And nowadays they even paid! As soon as she saw their fancy BMW she decided to chance it. By whining and sniffing about her old bones she had got them up to 10,000 Roubles (around 200 USD). They were from Moscow, and did not know that she would have done it for 2,000 Roubles, maybe less, with half to the Driver for stopping at the bridge, and half to herself for heaving the body over. As soon as they drove off she almost ran to the liquor store to buy four bottles of vodka, one special one, "Stoli Cranberi" (Cranberry) to start and ordinary ones for later, when taste did not matter.

Hours later, as the train approached the river tumbling with spring meltwater, Comrade Driver (Second Grade) Anton Koslovsky closed his mind to what was about to happen, stopped the train over the 200 metre drop and took a swig from the bottle Dominika had given him. This was his seventh disposal. All men, she had said, cackling as she described them in detail, filling his nightmares. The others had already been dead, but this one was alive she said. He never got any share of her 'pickings' from the bodies. He prayed for the victims and their families every Sunday, asking that they forgive him, but still they came at him, filling his nights, driving him again to escape into vodka.

Koslovsky checked his watch, sent out a long screech from his whistle into the darkness, and eased up the lever, coaxing his aged DM62 diesel locomotive back into motion to begin the long slow acceleration to his maximum operating speed of 80 kpm. This has been stipulated to avoid breakdowns, derailments and to increase fuel economy. He set his huge alarm clock for ten past two to be sure that he would be awake ahead of the next siding where he would be required to stop and let the Up train pass. At least his cab was warm. The old crone Kargin in the guard's van had to make do with a charcoal heater and three heavy coats.

Although he did not know it, the sound of the whistle reached Dymitri's brain. He opened his eyes to see the edge of a dirty carpet. Icy cold air was blowing into his face through a slit in the wooden floor. The rattle and sway told him he was in a train, an old

train. He rolled onto his side and tried to sit up. Lights flashed across the back of his eyes. He closed his lids but the lights still flashed. He kept trying to open them but all he could see was a grey fog with a dim light behind it. His eyes were watering and the taste in his mouth was of coal dust. His head was spinning and he could not think clearly.

He crawled towards the light, recoiling when his hand touched a boot. The foot did not move. He touched it again, feeling his way to a thin leg clad in thick woollen stockings. A woman. He tentatively tugged at the stocking but its owner did not respond. He pushed himself to his knees and the fumes made him cough, stung his eyes. Her wrist had no pulse, her skin cold and clammy. Crawling on his hands and knees he felt his way to the door, found the bolt, wrenched it out of its keeper and hauled at the door. It opened to about half a metre then jammed. Cold air flooded into the compartment clearing the fumes. It was dark outside with sleet in the air.

From the lamp above her head he saw her more clearly. This was only the second dead body he had seen. The old woman's face was bright red. Carbon Monoxide poisoning, just like his mother. The face became his mother's and he reached instinctively for his crucifix. It was gone. Then he saw it, on the woman's neck. He felt for his silver-plated pocket watch - gone. His wallet - gone; his identity card - gone. Slowly everything that had happened came back to him and Dymitri Dryonov knew that he was the one meant to be dead.

He checked the charcoal stove and found the blockage, cleared it and re-lit to heat water for tea. He closed the door and ate her food. He searched her but she did not have his things, only a bundle of Roubles stuffed in her inner coat pocket: she would not need them where she was now. Her outer coat fitted over his uniform and now that the food had kicked in he was feeling better. Although it was relatively slow, the train was too fast to jump from. Through the small grimy window he saw it was dark, raining heavily with pulses of sleet hammering the side of the compartment. So far he had not seen any lights. He had no idea where he was. He waited and thought through his options. The train trundled on through the night, across the flatness and desolation around it.

Centre 103

Screeching, the train began to slow down and Dymitri swung out, stood on the rungs that served as steps. A tall thin building glowed brightly in the distance. After a struggle he rammed the door shut. There were no other buildings to be seen, just a grey flatness stretching into the distance. As the train passed the building he flattened himself against the side of the compartment and read "Signals and Administration Centre No 103". A hundred metres beyond the building the train finally juddered to a stop. He dropped to the ground and ran across many sets of rails to a scattering of rusting passenger carriages on a siding, slipped under the nearest carriage, crawled between the wheels and climbed up out of view to haul at a door on the far side. The third door opened and he scrambled in. Through the dirty window he watched the driver climb down from his cab and hobble along beside the track to the Guard's compartment. He saw that the man's right leg was shorter than his left. Dymitri waited. The man remained inside with the corpse for a long time then re-appeared, climbed down, and limped off to the Signals and Administration Centre.

An Up train sounded its whistle and rattled through without stopping. Time passed. An ambulance arrived and the corpse was removed. Later an elderly man arrived in a taxi, climbed into the Guard's compartment and the train left. Dymitri began to relax. He had thought there might be a search. It was as if he did not exist. There were no people around that he could see. No one had left the Administration and Signals Building.

He began exploring the carriages. They were used by track-menders, he deduced. Inside a dirty brown bag made of heavy canvas he found a selection of rusting tools including an ancient blunted axe and a nearly new adjustable spanner. In the next carriage he found a black oilskin greatcoat with a hood. The belt and buttons were missing; it was filthy and ripped in places but still serviceable. In a cardboard box he found a large coil of thin green propylene cord and risked the noise of a chop to make a belt for his 'new' oilskin coat.

When he was sure that there was nothing else of value to be found, Dymitri decided he would head in the direction 'his' train had taken. He based this on the hope that since it had taken him from Murmansk, by following it he would be travelling in the general direction of St Petersburg. He took the axe, coil of rope and adjustable spanner with him, carrying them in the tool bag. Perhaps I could act dumb and pretend I am a track-mender, he thought.

Bridge 197

After a few minutes Dymitri got used to walking at the pitch of the sleepers and started to make a good pace, helping him to keep warm. After what he guessed was two hours the rain stopped, the wind dropped and the sun broke through. He almost cried when he saw it high in the sky and slightly to his right. He realised that he must be losing track of time. It might be around noon, he guessed, and if so, he was heading almost due south. He felt the track vibrate and turned to see a train rolling towards him. He scuttled off the track and hid behind a bush. He stared at the cab to see if the driver had seen him but saw no face. It was a freight train and soon gone. He was alone again.

The track began to curve to his right. In the distance he saw a bridge. Standing beside it he looked first downstream, westwards, to the sea, towards St Petersburg, he hoped. There were no buildings to be seen, just water racing swiftly and silently along, wide and flat between steep vertical banks. Disappointed, he turned and looked upstream, eastwards, where the river curved out of sight into the interior, towards the mountains.

Without warning the air was filled with a loud "Chop-Chop-Chop" sound. He threw himself down the bank and rolled under the thick bushes that lined the edge of the river. The helicopter slowed, hovered and dropped over a mound and the sound stopped. Below him the river gurgled and plopped, making sounds he began to imagine were voices. He waited and soon the helicopter rose again, hovered then headed south, following the line of the railway track.

Eventually he reached the top of the mound and spread his oilskin. He lay down with the heavy coat over him, in case the helicopter returned. Below the mound, about three hundred metres away, he saw four cabins. Streamed out behind a jetty were three matt black aluminium boats with powerful outboard engines. By watching Dymitri discovered that there were twelve fishermen, dressed in western style clothing, rigging their rods, drinking bottles of beer and shouting and laughing to each other. Dymitri thought they might be speaking in English but they were too far away for him to be sure. There were four men in military style clothing and black balaclavas. The tall burly one, who seemed to be the leader, was toting a machine pistol on a lanyard around his neck and shoulder.

Following what seemed to be a mild argument, the fishermen persuaded their minders to take them fishing. They were loaded into the boats and headed off upstream, probably to a tributary where they could wade or bank fish properly, Dymitri thought. No one wore a life-jacket, something Dymitri would never allow in any boat he travelled in. His father, a non-swimmer, had drowned by slipping and banging his head while boarding a boat in harbour.

The sound of engines died away. Dymitri waited. There did not seem to be anyone else around. He hid the coats under a bush. With his heart thudding Dymitri forced himself towards the huts, dodging from bush to bush, carrying his brown canvas bag. He ran the last twenty metres to the nearest hut; the largest one. Through the window he saw a dining table set for twelve. There was a kitchen area and a bar with whisky, gin, rum and vodka optics and tins of Coke, crates of foreign wine and beer. There was large plasma screen, DVD player, a dart board and a half-sized snooker table. He opened the door, moved quietly across to the refrigerator and took a large bottle of UHT milk, two packets of foreign cheese and a loaf of dark bread, loading them into his bag. From the drawer he took a small sharp knife. He searched the cupboards and found a large bag of sugar.

A check through the windows of the other three huts showed them to be sleeping accommodation and toilets for the fishers. He looked at the expensive fishing tackle. These men seemed to have five or six rods each and spare clothing in abundance. Their wallets, passports and mobile phones were lying on their beds. He opened the door and crossed to the nearest bed. The sound of firing in the distance spooked him. In a panic he grabbed a Nokia phone in a waterproof bag and a fancy self-inflating life-jacket and ran from the huts and back to his eyrie at the top of the mound. The boats returned and the fishermen clambered out, slightly drunk. One of them stood for photographs, a bottle in one hand and a huge salmon in the other: maybe 15 kg, Dymitri reckoned. Dymitri celebrated with them -this river must connect to the sea!

Leaving two boats moored at the jetty, two minders left in the third and headed back upstream. The fishermen headed to their cabins while the two remaining minders went into the largest hut, probably to prepare a meal, Dymitri reasoned.

There was no signal for the Nokia but he could now tell the time and date. It was Saturday, 17.54. He knew now that he had not been unconscious for more than a few hours before coming to in the guard's compartment.

It had been dark for just over an hour when the third boat returned, weaving badly. The minder held a huge floodlight searching along the bank for the huts. When he reached the jetty he came to a noisy halt, thudding into the other boats in the process, shouting for his companions to join him. As the two 'cooks' spilled into the boat, cursing and laughing, it was obvious that all three minders were already drunk. Soon the boat was off again, powering erratically upstream. A few minutes later the only sound above the moan of the wind was the snatches of the fishermen singing, shouting and laughing.

Huddled under the heavy coat on the damp hillside Dymitri waited, watching the outlines of the men as they showed from time to time in the bright windows. Just after midnight they staggered to their sleeping cabins. The moon was up with grey clouds scudding through and Dymitri forced himself to wait until he was sure they must all be asleep.

ooOoo

Wearing the life jacket under his oilskin greatcoat to conceal its fluorescent flashes, he loaded three fuel containers into the boat and lashed them down. He estimated there were thirty others under the tarpaulin, all now sabotaged with sugar. He hoped they would not notice three were missing. When he moved to the bow his foot kicked something under the seat. It was a large fishing box. Strapped to its sides were two rod cases. He untied the painter from the bow, leaving the other end fastened to the jetty as evidence that 'his' boat had come adrift because of a poorly made knot. He then pushed hard off the jetty and used the oars to hold himself in the middle of the river.

When he judged he was safely out of earshot he hauled at the starter cord. The engine started at the third pull. He kept his speed low and hoped the quiet burble would not be heard. If they tried to follow him they would find that the fuel in the engine of the boat at the jetty also had sugar in it. That left them only their third boat with clean fuel in its tank. With enough of a start he could outrun them. He hoped he might have until breakfast time before the discovery of the missing boat was made, and mid-morning before the fuel problem was detected. The worry was that they might call in the helicopter again.

High Water Mark

Dark clouds covered the moon and light rain fell. The river gurgled and swished through the branches of overhanging bushes. A thin horizontal line of light appeared to his right, on the far side of the river. Dymitri swerved away from it sharply and forced his way into the bushes. He fashioned a new painter from three strands of cord and tied the boat to a thick branch and checked by hauling hard. Satisfied, he checked the Nokia - no signal; it was 04.58, with around two hours to dawn, he guessed. Studying the source of the light he saw the dim outline a dam wall. The fishing party still had one boat operational; if he did not get past this obstacle he might be trapped here all day. Although this was a good hiding place he must try to keep moving.

He stowed the old woman's coat between the fuel containers and stuffed the rolled-up oilskin into the canvas bag. After a struggle he levered himself through the branches and scrambled up to the high bank. Using the greatcoat to conceal his light grey uniform he made his way toward the source of the light. As he neared it he recognised a run-of-river power station. On the far shore there was a squat building with a long slot window spilling light onto the corner of the dam wall.

He found the narrow fish ladder and beside it the overflow weir. His heart leapt. The spillway was wide enough to take the boat and although it was steep, the overall drop to the river below was only about twenty metres. Because of the spring meltwater, the river was near to its high water mark. If he could somehow shutdown the turbines, even for an hour, he should get enough draft to get the boat over the weir into the spillway.

Moving slowly, keeping his eyes on the bright window high above him, Dymitri made his way across the metal gangway which ran about two metres above the dam wall. He remembered from his undergraduate studies that such plants seldom gave trouble. At this time on a Sunday morning he guessed that there would be only one man on duty and that he might be sleeping or at least dozing. There was also the possibility the plant was running on automatic. He had heard this had been happening now they were part of the "New and Efficient Russia". He edged his way slowly around the outside of the building, testing each door. None of them was locked; all opened outwards, all revealed blackness within, except the wide heavy door into a stairway leading down into the well-lit turbine hall. The turbines were running almost silently, making only a low hum.

At the rear of the building he cursed softly. There was an ancient Moskovitch Aleko, even older than Papa Ogursov's. He felt the bonnet; it was cold. There might be someone on duty, or this vehicle might be unserviceable, abandoned. He checked his Nokia - no signal, 05.47. He added a handful of sugar to the fuel tank then ran softly up the road, away from the plant. At the second pole he shinned up and worked at the telephone lines, bending them backwards and forwards, twisting them and finally neatly

slicing into them in several places making it would be hard to spot the incisions. When he slid down his thigh muscles were aching from clinging on.

Dymitri heard the man whistling before he saw him. He was an older man, wearing a skipped cap, a long yellow overall, rubber boots and carrying a pail with steam rising from it. He hauled open the turbine hall door and disappeared inside. The next fifteen minutes seemed to last forever before the man re-appeared and threw the dirty water onto the roadway, filling the air with a smell of disinfectant. He then made his way around to another door and disappeared inside. Following the man Dymitri thought, he is a watchman/cleaner, not a Technician. Dymitri waited then cracked open this door enough to see the dim outline of darkened stairs rising to a door with a slit of light under it. There was a radio blaring out old fashioned dance music. The Control Room, Dymitri judged, warm and cosy. Using the knife he sliced a wedge from the axe handle then rubbed dirt into the freshly cut wood. He used this slim wedge to jam the door shut. He tested it first with a gentle pull, increasing the pressure gradually and finally tugging fiercely. It would give way eventually, but the old man did not look like the energetic type. Dymitri made a second wedge for later.

He ran back to the turbine hall and down the stairs. He had been right; the controls had been upgraded and the plant was now automatic. He opened the master control panel door and studied the diagram on the inside of the door. When he was sure, he applied his knife to short the low voltage controls on the mother board. This caused a high whine which lasted about three minutes while the inlet gates closed, stopping the flow of water. The twelve turbines slowly wound down then stopped. The turbine hall became silent. If the system was alarmed then it must be sounding elsewhere.

Dymitri ran up the stairway and out into the night, closed the door, wedged then tested it. Hopefully when the make-shift wedges fell free they would be unnoticed.

Ten minutes later he was standing at the weir watching the water rise slowly but steadily. There was no sign of activity from the watchman. When the water was running at 200 mm depth over the weir, he ran back to the boat. He could not risk damage to the outboard in the slipway and using his spanner, released it, hauled it inboard where he lashed it to the centre seat before wrapping it with the oilskin for protection. He tied the oars into the rowlocks, freed the boat from the bushes and hauled his way free, out from the bank and rowed towards the weir.

Plan B

As a grey light crept into the sky Dymitri was many kilometres downstream of the power station. It was misty but the rain had stopped. At 08.37 he saw a small house, high on a hill in the distance. There was still no signal for the Nokia. He pulled into the side, moored and examined the fishing box. It had decals on both sides:

Glasgow Angling Centre

find us @

www.fishingmegastore.com

Inside the box was a selection of reels and fly boxes. One large box was made of varnished wood. A small bronze plaque engraved with black letters displayed:

Julian Ledbetter

Champion, 1933.

Auchenhowie Angling Club

A see-through plastic case revealed expensive Rapala lures and spinners. A bright orange wide-brimmed skipped cap with a leaping fish logo on it had a sewn-in label, "Adrian Ledbetter". It fitted perfectly. Dymitri now wore the life-jacket outside his oilskin coat and hunched down in the stern, beside the engine. With the short boat rod rigged with a lure, Dymitri was now a boat fisherman. As he motored steadily downstream he exchanged waves with the occasional shore angler.

Two hours later the river began to widen and slow down. He was in an estuary. It was misty with light rain. He kept to the centre and de-rigged the rod, took off his bright cap and put the life-jacket on under the oilskin. He checked the Nokia, five bars. It was 11.14. He dialled his home. It rang and rang and rang.

He dialled Papa Ogursov. Just as the old man answered, Dymitri heard a familiar sound far to his right - three blasts, a ferry leaving harbour. In his left ear he heard exactly the same blasts from the mobile phone. He was near St Petersburg! It seemed like as a miracle. The mist cleared and he saw the twin piers of the harbour at Lomonosov. Now he knew where he was, Dymitri disconnected without speaking. Plan B, the better but more risky plan might be possible. He decided to take a chance and dialled his friend and mentor, the brilliant Matvel Anosov. It was Sunday morning and Matvel would probably be at home in his luxury apartment, high above St Petersburg, playing chess against his teenage son.

As always Matvel answered at the fourth ring and with his usual bark.

'Anosov!

'Professor. Can we meet, please?' Dymitri whispered.

'Ah-ha! And quite right too Comrade Sister Katya Kunda. Thank you. Yes, this evening. Would that be acceptable?'

'Yes. Thank you,' said Dymitri, adopting a high register.

'Until then, *proshchaniye!*' barked Matvel Anosov, slamming the phone down, as he always did to annoy the Listeners.

ooOoo

(In his dacha Boris Ogursov filled the cup to the brim, slurped half and filled it to the brim again. He lay back in the old chair and closed his eyes. It had started. First they would use this slow torture, telephoning and then hanging up. Eventually, they would come for him. But he still had his revolver - if he had the courage to end it first.)

ooOoo

The long service finished at noon and as the congregation filed out, Svetlana felt a soft tug on her sleeve. The man was unshaven, bleary eyed and his breath was stinking of stale vodka, as her father's used to every morning before he gave it up, a deathbed promise to her mother.

'Comrade Sister Dryonov, I need to speak to you, about Dymitri. I'm sorry, I have bad news.'

'What!'

'Perhaps if your sons could wait here, for a few minutes? We could go back to the front, near the altar. Please, this is very important to me. I need to ask for your forgiveness.'

His eyes were pleading. She glanced down: his suit was threadbare but his shirt was clean and he wore a shiny blue tie. He wore a made-up boot, one leg shorter than the other.

'Boys, wait by the door but do *not* go outside. Do you hear me?'

'Yes Mamma,' they chorused, weaving their way through crowd to catch up with their friends.

Huddled together near the Confessionals, the man explained what had happened.

'Are you sure Dymitri is dead?'

'Yes, he must be, his face is in my dreams, just like the others.'

'No, I can't believe it! I would 'feel' it. He must be alive!'

'No, Sister. I'm sorry but no one could survive that drop. The river was in spate, a torrent.'

'But Dymitri is a strong swimmer, he could have got out.'

'The bridge is in the middle of nowhere. That's why she chose it.'

'You are sure?'

'Yes, I'm sorry. I hope this will help, until you get sorted.'

He passed her a package wrapped in brown paper, tied with thick rough string, exhorting her not to open it until she was safe at home.

'How did you know where to find me? How did you know I would be here?

'I see you every Sunday, sitting there; two rows from the front, with your boys. I think to myself when I see you, perhaps if I had found a nice wife, my life would have been better. I hear the people speaking to you, so I know your name. One time I saw your husband outside, waiting for you and the boys. You looked so happy together, kissing and cuddling. I wanted to kill him, take you for myself. I'm sorry. That was a bad thought. But I promise you, Comrade Sister, I did not know it was your Dymitri that she had back there until I found her cache of papers and his things on the top. I burned the rest, but I could not burn yours. There is some money, from her and from me. It's the best I can do, I'm sorry. I don't know what will happen. Maybe they will leave you alone. If I can help, just ask. You will find me here on Sundays, most Sundays, God willing. Now, go to your boys. God go with you.'

'Please, what is your name?'

'No! No, no name. No. I'm sorry. If they come to me I will deny everything. Sorry.'

The man rose and stepped past her into the side aisle. He was a small sad figure, shoulders hunched, his hands in his coat pockets. He tried to smile but failed then turned and hobbled away, back to his lonely life.

ooOoo

At home she left the boys watching afternoon television, a special treat, and locked herself in the kitchen to open the packet. The knots were too difficult and her fingers were leaden. In the end she used a knife.

- Roubles amounting to nearly 25,000 plus \$543 in US Dollars
- Dymitri's Identity Card.
- His silver watch, still in its felt bag.

Seeing his face made tears well up, run down her cheeks. She checked several times amongst the notes and in the package but his mother's valuable crucifix was not there. She knew it was irrational but this gave her hope.

The telephone rang and before she lifted it she knew it was Dymitri. She must warn him. 'Ah, Papa, thanks for ringing. How is your laryngitis?' she said.

'Getting better, now I hear your sweet voice, daughter,' Dymitri croaked.

Svetlana's sides shook with hysterical giggles but she controlled herself.

'Shall I bring you some medicine, Papa? Some cough mixture?'

'Yes, but I'm staying with my cousin, at his other place, where you twisted your ankle when you were dancing. Do you remember it?'

'Of course, Papa, I'll come at once.'

It had been their honeymoon holiday, at Matvel Anosov's mother's house on the seafront on the outskirts of Kunda, in Estonia, where his sister Katerina (Katya) now lived. Svetlana would take the daily train, she decided, or if she missed it, the bus to Sillamae and then the connecting bus to Kunda. She packed all her most important things and a few changes of underwear for the boys, and raided the box fixed underneath their bed for their savings. Maybe someday she might be able to return.

Stormy Waters

Dymitri's problem now was fuel but he was fairly sure he had enough. Fortunately the wind had dropped but the sky was black; there was a storm on the way. He set off at a steady pace, around 15 kph, he estimated. He must stay close to the shore and if he saw a patrol ship he would revert to being a fisherman again. The journey could take five or six hours. This might mean arriving in the dark, making it difficult to find the correct beach. To move faster might attract attention and would use fuel quicker.

At 17.39 he had drained the last dregs of fuel into the engine fuel tank. For the last hour the wind had been increasing steadily and with it the height of the waves. As he rounded the final headland scanning for the familiar landmark, the ruins of Toole Castle, near to Kaya's house. His rush of joy as it emerged from the gloom was crushed by a deafening thunderclap. Huge hailstones thudded down on him, rattling on the aluminium base and sides of the boat like machine gun fire. One hit his left cheek like a fist and he cried out in pain.

The Castle disappeared for a few minutes then the hail turned into heavy rain and the wind veered violently pushing him sideways, parallel to the beach he was heading for. Katya's house was visible but there were no lights showing. It seemed empty. He pointed the bow at the beach and as he did so a huge wave came over the gunwhale swamping him. The propeller bucked up out of the water and whined viciously behind him. He lost his grip and he fell forward. The elasticated cord of the dead man's lasso fixed to his wrist stretched to its limit and jerked the cut-out pin and the engine stopped. With the bow filled with water the boat submarined. As he went under the automatic life-jacket exploded forcing him back to the surface. If he had known where the beach was he would have struck out towards it. Another wave broke above him and he felt a thump on the back of his head as the stern of the boat swung up and hit him.

ooOoo

When Dymitri came round he was jammed in a niche between two rocks. It was dark. His left arm ached and he wondered if it was broken. He was very cold, shivering, soaked from head to foot. He checked the Nokia in its waterproof bag hanging from the cord around his neck. No signal. The time was 20.13. The storm had passed and the sky glittered with stars. The moon hung on the horizon and seemed too large to be real. The top of the cliff was about five metres above him. He removed the shredded remains of the life-jacket and started to climb, amazed to find that both arms worked.

Looking along the coast he could see the beach and the Castle ruins above it. He started to jog, slowly at first and then, when he saw the lights come on in Katya's house, he ran as fast as he could.

New Lives for Old

Two days later Dymitri and his family boarded the Tallinn Ferry bound for Helsinki. It would be the first stop on a journey that would take them to Bearsden, near Glasgow, Scotland.

Doktor Engineer Dymitri Dryonov carried two letters, both from the world-famous nuclear physicist Professor Matvel Anosov. One was addressed to the Head of MI6 and the other to the Head of the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington, near London. Dymitri also carried a report which he and Matvel had prepared which detailed the many failings at Plant No 19 and giving recommendations for upgrading.

Dymitri left Svetlana and the boys in the small hotel in Bayswater which had been recommended by Professor Anosov. From a public telephone box he made the call. As instructed he stood under the clock at Euston station. He had to wait for nearly three hours, leaving his post only to visit the toilet and buy a coffee and doughnut.

The interview processes were thorough, detailed, exhausting. Dymitri spoke to many different people. When his English failed he used Russian. Some questions were technical and their questions were repeated in Russian by a woman who sat behind him. She identified herself Yuliya and spoke perfect Russian with a slight German or perhaps Polish intonation. Dymitri was discouraged from turning to look at her but he did catch a glimpse. Gradually he realised that Yuliya was in charge. He did catch a glimpse: she wore a severe almost mannish pin-stripe trouser suit and her red hair clashed with her piercing blue eyes. On the second day she suggested Dymitri submit to a truth drug test and he agreed. Eventually she was satisfied.

Following high level discussions between the British Foreign Office and the Russian Ambassador in London, the Management Team at Plant No 19, were removed and replaced with a new team from the Valerian Kuybyshev Military Engineering Academy in St Petersburg. Funds were injected to upgrade the plant thus averting the environmental catastrophe which had been very close to happening.

Recruitment

The Dryonov family were issued with UK passports and identities. Given his exposure to nuclear radiation at Plant 19 and for reasons of security it was agreed that his future would not be in nuclear engineering. He was offered a list of Universities where suitable positions could be created. He saw that Strathclyde University was in Glasgow and remembered the box of flies so chose the SERC funded post in the Faculty of Engineering, teaching and researching Prosthetics and Orthotics.

ooOoo

If you visit Glasgow you may see Professor Derek Dysart. He regularly jogs to work from his home in Bearsden. He and his boys are enthusiastic members of the Loch Lomond Sailing Club. Occasionally he is a guest of the elderly Julian Ledbetter on outings with the Auchenhowie Angling Club. Susan Dysart is a regular attender at a St Andrew's RC Church and is an alto in the Kelvin Choir. The boys are in the elite squad of Allander Swimming Club. Stuart and Craig Dysart have a sister, Fiona Katya Dysart.

ooOoo

Three years after his re-settlement, Derek was approached by an attractive blonde woman in the corridor of the university's Royal College Building. Her piercing blue eyes told him this Yuliya. He glanced behind him, fearful, believing that his cover had been blown.

'Relax Doktor Engineer Dymitri Dryonov,' she said in Russian. 'You seem to have settled well in Glasgow. Congratulations on baby Fiona Katya. She's nearly six months old now?'

'Ah, I'm sorry, you must have the wrong person, I'm...'

'Wait! Yes, let's use English, makes us less noticeable. OK, let's start again, shall we?'

The woman's hand shot out.

'Maisie Kaywood. Good to meet you again Professor. You are free for a few hours, I believe? Shall we go for a coffee? Tinderbox in Ingram Street is good. I have a proposal for you.'