

Victor Maslov

DARING TO TOUCH RADHA



IN PLACE OF A FOREWORD

Detective stories usually describe events and conversations, and one only learns what the heroes were thinking at the end. The present work is my confession. I tried to convey events and conversations faithfully, but I still don't know what was hidden behind them. So there will be no solution of the mystery at the end. I tried to be exact in quoting direct speech. Perhaps I have forgotten something, rendered a confused story or missed some facts, but that is not very likely. It would be interesting to compare my account with recordings of conversations made at the time.

I believe a comparison would show that the wording was identical; nevertheless, I wonder whether all this could be true. Could it really have been a murder? Actually it is not so important. Or, to be more precise, important only to me.

In any case, having put it all down on paper, I experienced a certain relief. It is the relief of a person who screams instead of clenching his teeth. But, of course, one should be ashamed of screaming.

THE RIGHT TO DIE

*A tender soul can write love for violins,
without doubt,
Or arrange it for drums, if he
is rough enough,
But only I can turn myself
inside out...
V. Mayakovsky*

A lovely creature, a graceful Princess Cinderella, flashed by on the third floor of the Physics Department, and I pretended to be going in the same direction. I followed her until she disappeared behind the door of a laboratory. She had noticed me, giving me a happy and carefree look. It was an ordinary look, quite friendly. She was oriental.

A lot has been erased from the tape of my memory. Something else has been recorded. Sometimes the recordings are imposed one upon another, and it becomes difficult to find an event in this kaleidoscope of recordings. But this scene has been retained in my memory and is frequently replayed quite clearly from beginning to end. Probably this is because we fell in love subsequently. But I am unable to recognize either her or myself in the scene. I cannot identify myself with that citizen. As to Anh, I recognize my elder daughter in her.

She remembered it as follows: he was handsome and well dressed. I think this did not accord with her subsequent idea of me. But the most remarkable thing was that she thought: it is *vhe!*

I would like to explain a few things at this point. The man who encountered her accidentally, and then turned out to be *ne*, was on friendly terms with a small company of her friends, and two of her girlfriends had told her a lot about this man. I had met Fouk, Tinh and Huan back in 1972.

Yes, the year was 1972, and the laws were very severe in their country, Vietnam, at the time. When I was walking in the street with Tinh from a typist acquaintance of mine who had typed something for her, Tinh was afraid of passing buses — what if a compatriot of hers were in it and would see her with a Russian.

"Then I'm lost," she murmured.

I was told that when the diplomatic corps was at a ballet, her compatriots had to sit with tightly closed eyes so as not to see the indecencies on the stage.

A few months after the first "marvellous encounter", the company introduced me to Anh — she wanted to study mathematics.

It was in the walls of the Physics Department again. It was only a glimpse. Anh came out of a room with one of our mutual friends, I think it was Fouk. I agreed to consult her. She was beautiful, still a child, eyeing me curiously. Apparently we did not impress each other particularly on this occasion.

Once my father had told me a French saying: the best wives in the world are the Annamese. I recalled these words when I later looked at Anh. Gradually I began to like her. I was drawn to her.

I remember offering my hand to her when she was crossing a puddle next to a truck, but she instinctively leaned on the truck instead. I laughed:

"You prefer the truck to my hand."

Anh was embarrassed, thinking that she had really done something tactless.

She told me a bit about her life. She had come from South Viet-Nam, then a small state with a puppet regime. She Lived in the countryside and carried water from the river on a yoke. There was hunger. At 17 she was accepted to the Communist Party. I knew it was not easy for her in the guerrilla area of the country and people were accepted to the Party for special services, perhaps heroic actions.

She was such a princess, thin, gentle and beautiful — it did not accord with a village, buckets, hunger and bombing. I was amazed. If one were to search for the moment when I fell in love , this was probably it.

Later I told Anh laughing:

"You attracted me by your stories about the village and your life. If I had known that you were the daughter of Le Zuan, the Secretary General of Viet-Nam and granddaughter of a duke, things might have happened quite differently."

Anh was not deceiving me. It was prohibited for her and her compatriots to say whose daughter she was. I don't know why, perhaps to confuse people, she was registered at the embassy of South Viet-Nam from which her mother came. And Anh had lived in the village for ideological reasons.

As to her grandfather duke, she attached no importance to this fact. Later she would say:

"My grandpa worked as a duke."

* * *

I was simply infatuated. I even began to teach an optional course at the Physics Department just to be able to see her. (The Physics Department was my home, I had studied there but taught in another place.) But I was unable to prepare for the course and could not read it brilliantly.

At first there were many people. Then fewer and fewer. Finally she was left alone. I sat down next to her and we talked. Subsequently I joked: "Since you were left alone, I was obliged to marry you as a decent man."

Sometimes she would disappear for about ten days. I tried to find out where she had been, but Anh remained silent. It turned out that she travelled abroad with her father but was so afraid that I would inquire and blame her for being away for a long time that she often interrupted very interesting trips to return alone.

She came to my country house. It was obvious to her that I liked her. Later I asked when she began to feel something towards me.

"Remember your girlfriend came to the country house. All of a sudden I felt jealous."

Finally we were walking past a fir tree, very much in love, I tried to embrace her, she broke free but beamed. She returned to the house very happy for some reason. Since then the expression of joy was on her face always when I saw her. Exactly the same expression is on the face of my daughter Yelena. This radiance must have been reflected on my face as well.

Once we were sitting in Moscow on a couch, and I tried to kiss her. My mother entered unexpectedly with a tray and saw the following scene: Anh was turning her hand and lips away from me. The scene made such an impression on them that both wept for a long time, almost embracing. Apparently, my mother and Anh were equally old fashioned about such things.

I was hypnotized by her face and read her thoughts. When her eyes narrowed slightly and her face became more oriental, I knew I could kiss her. She never responded to a kiss but did not resist, closing her eyes. But in a minute her eyes opened, and I read on her face: that's it.

Now I looked forward to seeing that grimace at our every meeting. Anh came, we talked and listened to music, studied, I awaited that moment. These minutes were her secret which she confided in me.

Sometimes Anh went away afterwards without saying a word. Once these minutes were interrupted by the doorbell. Anh regained consciousness, and I went to open the door. When I returned she was gone. She had jumped out of the window.

* * *

I realized that a declaration of love would violate her secret and frighten her away. I must not notice that she herself was allowing me to transgress the line which had been drawn in their country over the centuries and not merely by contemporary law. From time immemorial they had regarded loving a European as a betrayal of the country. The Europeans were conquerors. They have a derogatory word signifying such a woman. Even if their girl walks hand in hand with a "long-nosed" person (a European in the language of the common people), the word is shouted at her, stones are thrown at her, and she is spit at. This is stronger than any religious ban. It is prohibited by tradition and rigorous law. Before being sent to a labor camp, a person is picked to pieces at Young Communist League and Party meetings and expelled with shame. And if a girl suddenly felt something for a European, she would keep it secret from herself so no one would notice such instants and never speak of them. It was in such secret moments that Anh deceived herself: I kissed her forcibly and she resisted. Occasionally she would be angry.

* * *

Later I learned that she had tried as hard as she could not to see me. She seated her friend Zung, whom she singled out among her numerous compatriot admirers, in her room to study, so as not to think about me and not to visit me. She didn't understand that forcing herself would only strengthen her feelings. She kept thinking that she would not come at all. Then she yielded to her feelings and would find a pretext to go, which was not the same as simply going when she wanted to.

It was impossible for a European to understand why she had to deceive herself. There were laws, traditions, reprimands. But no one would learn what happened when she was alone. To understand something here, let us try to imagine such a European situation. A Russian husband has divorced his wife because he was not the father of the daughter the wife has given birth to. The daughter, mother and grandfather live abroad, and many years later the daughter returns to the Soviet Union to study and meets her father who teaches in another college. The latter is still quite young and appears to be much younger than his years, has no children, is carried away by the prospect of introducing a charming young girl who regards him as her father to Russian culture and educating her. She has an instinctive need for a father of his age; the grandfather is unable to replace a father because of the natural sequence of generations. She doesn't know that he is not her real father, and he, perhaps, cannot tell her on moral grounds. Gradually he becomes infatuated. She

responds in kind, but does not realize what her feelings are and is afraid of admitting them. She is jealous of other women, but that could happen to a daughter as well. He knows there is nothing bad about their love. But she regards it as a terrible crime against law, morality and parents, and he is afraid of destroying her rising feeling and tries to lessen her sense of guilt. And he seeks to make a secret of the emotion they are overwhelmed by.

This picture might provide us with an idea of Anh's state at the moment.

However, our situation was much more complicated: our laws, their laws, the father's position, international relations, Anh's specific upbringing as the daughter of the head of state, her party membership, ideological affiliation — all this merged into a confused tangle which could not be cut with one blow like the Gordian knot.

* * *

Anh continued to visit me. And the secret moment's lasted longer each time. She, therefore, believed that she should no longer see me. There was a struggle with herself again, yet she came once more. Our secret mutual infatuation grew stronger. But this could not go on forever, the denouement was inevitable and it came.

Although inevitable, it was a discovery. (The second discovery occurred when Yelena was born.) Elation. We looked at each other. You and I. Could it be? Who are we now? Where are we? I realized that we were in an apartment we had just exchanged to live together with Mother after my stepfather's death. It was an unfamiliar half empty room. There was no curtain on the window. It was light. It was almost summer. I saw it all anew. My eyes were opened. I was seeing everything for the first time. Had I ever been here before?

Anh's heart was beating somewhat slower. She had become a princess again. I loved her. I love you Anh. Love you. Be my wife. I beseech you.

"Anh, dearest, I'm madly in love with you. Be my wife. I beseech you."

"It's impossible. Our laws strictly forbid it."

"But our laws allow it."

"Not one of your registry offices would carry out the ceremony. Your government has promised ours."

"If the law permits it, I'll manage it."

"No, it's impossible."

"Why?"

"I don't love you."

"But I can't live without you."

"All right, I'll think about it."

Mother returned and Anh left; she seemed to me to be rather calm. But why did I have to talk about marriage right away? Because I was a decent man? I sought her out at the university two days later. She was avoiding me. I found a moment to ask her. She replied without looking at me:

"I don't love you."

I could see this was her remorse speaking out. Condemning herself and me. She had been remorseful before, as I had noticed. But then she had come again. I must have patience and wait, and she would come.

However, she did not appear this time.

My memory is confused as to how I waited and how I lived at the time. I knew that Anh was to go to a sanatorium but couldn't find out which one. The telephone at the dormitory did not work during examination time and student holidays. Everyone

had left. I began to rush about. Fouk was the only mutual friend of ours left in the USSR. I couldn't find her, however. If I openly showed an interest to Anh, it could be reported to the embassy. I decided to wait for September 1.

She had disappeared.

Finally, in September I risked calling the lady who supervised foreign students at the Physics Department. She was an acquaintance of mine, but surely had certain affiliations...

"Anh? Why she's gone home. Got married all of a sudden. She called her father from here, but you understand, he is meeting Brezhnev! She flew back and got married. She's arriving on the twentieth, the husband will come in October, he's entering a postgraduate course."

I felt my legs giving way. It was something I hadn't anticipated. I regained my balance with difficulty. It is then that I guessed who her father was. I told Mother and she said:

"It can't be."

I learned what had happened later from Anh. The first day after the event she could not sleep and considered committing suicide. Then she went to Zung, the close friend she studied with. She told him everything. She described things through the eyes of her world outlook in her new state.

She did not love me and had wanted nothing of the kind to happen. I had forced her. She was terrified. He suggested that she urgently marry him.

They decided to say nothing about all this and urgently marry. She would never meet me again. Later I asked her:

"Did you tell him you loved him, Anh?"

"Yes, I did. And that I would try to love him even stronger. If it did not work out, we would divorce."

"Didn't you even think of marrying me?"

"My girlfriend has an admirer, a famous outlaw, chief of a large band. They exist in our country, you know. Well, if you were an outlaw, it would be easier than being a Russian, a foreigner, an European. I would have simply killed my father. Besides, I was sure you didn't love me; you were simply pretending."

A sudden marriage without preliminary negotiations with parents and their permission was a scandal for her country. Her father forgave her everything. But Anh's friends suspected that there was something behind it.

Anh said she did not want to return to Moscow. What? To discontinue studies at Moscow University? Her parents insisted that she return. Fortunately, her husband said nothing about what and who was waiting for her in Moscow. Anh left thinking that the marriage had put an end to our relations anyway.

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On the very first day she saw my wasted face when she met me at the Physics Department. I asked her to come and see me, everything was finished anyway —• we were simply friends. To tell the truth, my spirits rose when I saw her face.

She, Fouk and I went to my country house and went riding in a boat. I behaved as if nothing had happened, joyfully and in a friendly vein. Mostly I talked with Fouk. All of a sudden, Fouk accidentally fell out of the boat. It was cold autumn water. I rushed to the nearest house on the river and took two quilted jackets. We

warmed her, rubbed her, put one jacket on her arms and the other on her legs, and I rowed them home on the boat.

I carried Fouk who was weeping on my shoulders and gave her liqueur to drink. She fell asleep and Anh and I kissed quite naturally.

Then she visited me alone.

* * *

The artificial dam which she built for our love had burst. We were drawn into such a whirlpool of passion that Anh simply shut her eyes and let herself go.

It was obvious that she was watched and should return on time to the dormitory, otherwise everything would be lost. But Anh said:

. "I won't go there."

"They'll discover your absence and then arrest you!"

"I don't care."

"Don't you want to marry me?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then be sensible!"

"It won't work out anyway. I don't believe it."

"The law is on our side. Of course I won't challenge it openly. It is more difficult to overcome lawlessness than the laws. But we have certain rights. And that is the most important point."

"What rights? The child of a member of our government and the child of a member of the Hungarian Politbureau fell in love. They were not allowed to marry and committed suicide. And there were many more suicides of this sort."

"But you also have a constitution, laws and rights."

"We have only one right — the right to die."

* * *

*I'll hide from the swords of your pashas
In the tocks of Caucasus on high,
From their ears that distinguish all noises
And from their penetrating cold eyes.*

M.Lermontov

Now Anh had the following problems: 1) to hide our relations; 2) to obtain a divorce; 3) to register our marriage; 4) to secretly give birth to and register a child.

I carefully considered each of these points as an analytical scientist. Anh asked her father to help her obtain a divorce. This was the first blunder, contradicting 1) I had to study all the laws, rules and loopholes in detail and then act. It turned out that a legal divorce could be obtained in the Soviet Union, but only in one registry office for foreigners. Now the husband had to agree to divorce her.

I decided to register the marriage in Troitsk, near my country house where there are many research institutes. My co-students and colleagues worked at these institutes. Of course, I couldn't tell anyone except my closest friends about the marriage, so as not to violate point one. But I could ask them to do me a secret service under some other pretext. Of course registration of the marriage did not depend on them, although many were, members of the Troitsk executive committee. But they could help significantly to establish friendly relations with the people I

needed. Most of the latter were honest and decent people. But their rules of the game were somewhat different from mine.

The point is that, despite my appearance, I am a typical scientist. Both my grandfathers, my mother and my father were scholars. Two of these four were well known scientists. And I must say that family traditions often got in my way. For example, I am unable to give a bribe. I can't even pay off a traffic policeman not to take away my driving license. If I force myself to offer money, they don't accept it from me. A friend of mine is a virtuoso in the field and never fails. When he comes to a person who takes bribes, they recognize each other instantly.

Mother had two family pieces of jewelry. Of course she would give them to me, and I could use them to pay for registry of the marriage. But how?

I did not have the required talents. I remember when I had to have a synopsis of my thesis printed urgently, my uncle told me there was a printing shop where it would be done quickly. And it was. Then he asked me to take a letter from him with gratitude to some boss. I arrived and went through an enormous reception room filled with girls at desks. Some of them had typewriters. And his room was on one side and the door from the enormous room was open. I handed him the envelope and said: "It's from Dmitry Petrovich." He rubbed the envelope with two fingers, felt the bill and shouted fiercely.

"It's a shame."

I rushed out, red in the face, trying not to look at the girls who all stopped working and stared at me. It was a disgrace which I will never forget. Yet I am not shy by nature. Having left himself with the envelope, the man felt that he had behaved superbly.

On another occasion I asked the doctor, an assistant professor, what I owed him. The answer was devastating. Before that I had gone to professors with my Mother, she paid them and no one said anything rude to her. Even Mother knew how to do it. And if she were to present a necklace to an employee of the registry office, she would have done it so simply and graciously, that the former would have accepted, helped and behaved with respect towards Mother. But of course I could not involve Mother in such risky matters. And I can give a present to a person only on the occasion of a birthday, as a close friend.

In this case I would have given a bribe if I could have. How does this appear from the legal and moral standpoint? It is unlawful that our marriage is not registered. Like any Soviet citizen.

I would like to marry my beloved — I am unlawfully being refused. If I do not offer a bribe, my life is ruined. I give a bribe and the marriage is registered. I compensate material and moral losses to the office employee which she suffers when she is fired for not observing rules contradicting the law. Am I guilty of giving a bribe? And she of receiving it? Does she not render me an enormous service agreeing to take the bribe and registering the marriage?

All these were empty questions because I simply cannot give bribes. And I was certain that no one would take a bribe in Troitsk. That is why I needed long preparations to establish friendly contacts with the chairman of the executive committee, the secretary and the deputy who attend the marriage ceremony. My friends, members of the executive committee, helped me successfully. In particular, I

worked out certain calculations for the needs of the city. When I could not do them, my Moscow friends did. Thus it was difficult work, but I did it naturally and inobstru-sively. Eventually, the chairman, secretary and deputy owed me something and, of course, could not refuse minor requests. But if I told them who Anh was and what I wanted, none of them would agree to do it. In this respect I had to deceive each of them, unpleasant as it was, and think of a legend for each. It was important that after registration of the marriage no one would be punished. I was certain that no one would say anything to them. But the psychology of officials is such that when it concerns high spheres, the official cannot do anything without consulting the higher echelons. Even if the official were to find himself in my situation, he would be unable to overcome the psychological gap and would go and consult his superiors, even at the cost of ruining his life.

Let us now pass to a concrete account of how we solved these four problems.

1) We failed to keep our relations secret. The usual procedure in such cases went as follows. The Soviets reported the existence of relations between a foreign national and a Soviet person secretly to the corresponding embassy. The embassy officially applied to the Soviet police, alleging that the given person had disappeared, and the latter was delivered by the police to the embassy. Then in the company of two attendants the guilty party was sent home to a re-education camp. It could happen that the guilty one escaped along the way, but anyway ne or sne would be found. I had heard a lot about such escapes.

However, our case was particular. She was the daughter of the Leader. Our relations were not reported to the embassy. About a year later the fact was ascertained and reported to the father. A family council was held. Everyone believed that Anh should return from the Soviet Union immediately. But how? Everyone was afraid of talking with her about it, and none of the relatives told her anything, not even hinted. Only a friend of the family took her to the Anna Karenina ballet and said:

"This is what happens with women who are unfaithful to their husbands."

It was very naive, and we laughed a lot about it.

Eventually her father refused to recall her: she is officially married; I just won't touch the girl, and that's that.

When we learned about this in a roundabout way, I made Anh write a letter home. She had a friend, a prominent scientist who helped her in her studies and he would soon be celebrating an anniversary. Please, send something as a gift.

Of course I was much older than Anh, but it was still long before I had an anniversary. It could be an anniversary of scientific activity, however.

They sent a set of cut-goblets, and her father was soothed. And old scientist was merely his daughter's friend, and look what they've invented!

Everything was highly precarious nevertheless.

2) The situation with divorce was also difficult. Anh sent her husband away into another room and, following several showdowns, began to hate him, and he ended up in a neurological clinic. He refused to grant her a divorce. For one and a half years Anh demanded a divorce from him unsuccessfully.

I tried to explain to Anh how she should behave: more mildly, without depriving him of hope. She should tell him: "Don't you understand that by not giving me a divorce, you hold me in bondage which is contrary to my nature. That is why

we are enemies. When we got married you said you'd agree to divorce at any second. If you agree to divorce me at least in a Soviet registry office, first, I agree not to tell anyone about it. Second, this divorce would be void in our country. Then I would see that you're not a deceiver and don't want to keep me in bondage, and we'll be friends again. I still love you and only your unprincipled actions make me loathe you."

I explained to Anh that his father was pursuing a swift career. It was as important for them to conceal the divorce as it was for us. While your father thinks you're married, he won't be so concerned about your affair with a Russian.

All this naive lying was repugnant to her, and she refused to undertake anything.

I replied:

"Do you think it's not disgusting to me? What can we do? I will fight with all my strength, resorting to all means."

When Anh became pregnant and there was a danger that the child would be regarded as his, she put the plan into action. The plan Worked, although with difficulty. A drowning person clutches at a straw. They applied to a special registry office for foreigners. Two months later she dragged him back there, and to his surprise, the divorce was stamped in their passports. But Anh, on my advice, had said that if worse came to worse she would lose her passport.

Hurrah!! We had the divorce certificate!

* * *

*Our address is not a street or a city,
Our address is simply USSR.*

From a Russian popular song

3) Registry of the marriage. First, a few words about the laws.

Article 161: Marriage between Soviet citizens and foreigners shall be contracted in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic along general lines (i.e. according to Article 13).

Article 13: Marriage shall be contracted in state registry offices.

Article 166: If international treaties or international agreements in which the USSR or the RSFSR take part establish rules differing from those in the legislation on marriage and family of the RSFSR, the rules of the international treaty or international agreement shall be valid on the territory of the RSFSR.

Thus, Article 166 generally cancels Article 161 and Article 13. It was necessary to know all the agreements published in the Vestnik of the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and the RSFSR during all the Soviet years. We had to search for an agreement, if we did not find it, we would attempt to prove to the official of the registry office that there were no such agreements. In the legal advice office on foreign affairs I was told that there was no special agreement with Anh's country, but they were not allowed to issue information on the subject . At least we now knew!

It followed from the above that it was possible to register the marriage. Because if a marriage is registered in some office as a result of ignorance of the rules or due to private interest, it would be impossible to challenge the lawfulness of the marriage. The difficult thing was to keep the whole thing secret.

Such were the laws. And what was the practice?

In the so-called stagnation period (the Brezhnev era) no person of Anh's nationality were able to contract a marriage with a Soviet citizen.

To begin with, their passports do not indicate whether a person was married or not. Therefore they had to obtain a statement from the embassy. The known consequence was a labor re-education camp.

Secondly, and most importantly, there was a secret request on the part of the government of her country not to register marriages with its citizens or between its citizens. Fortunately, they forgot about divorces.

If a couple comes to a registry office, according to Article 161 or 13, they are immediately sent to a special registry office for foreigners. We know what follows: it is reported to the embassy, etc.

We had an advantage: a divorce certificate. That meant there was no need for a statement from the embassy saying she was not married.

All foreigners knew anyway that our officials would be afraid of registering without permission from the embassy. Then we had a stroke of good luck. Anh asked permission from the embassy to sign a contract to do work for her country's economy in order to change it into a permission for marriage. The people at the embassy suspected something and either stamped it but didn't sign it or signed it but didn't stamp it. They said that such was the procedure. Cunning Anh realized that if the paper were turned upside down and the text cut away we obtained a small piece of paper with a stamp. The stamp, however, was not on the right side but on the left and upside down, but no one would notice that.

We typed the permission on behalf of the embassy attache. This was not required by law. After the marriage was be registered, we would remove it from the file.

Unexpectedly, a pretext emerged to register the marriage in Troitsk. The local architect, seeking to increase the weight of his service in registering the garage at my country house, referred to an old law according to which a garage may be built only at the place of permanent residence. Of course, no one paid any attention to this law, but I said: "All right, I'll register my permanent place of residence at the country house." He gaped, because this meant I was willing to lose my right to Moscow residence, a very coveted privilege. Permanent residence in Troitsk provided a natural pretext to register marriage in Troitsk.

I went to the assistant chairman of the College of Moscow Barristers.

"Do I have the right to register permanent residence at my private country house?"

"You definitely have that right."

I met the police chief of Troitsk.

"I want to register permanent residence at my country house."

"Any time. Fill in form No 15."

"Yes, you have to drop in to the passport section chief Pela-geya."

I met Pelageya in the street.

"No, you also need permission from the executive committee."

I submitted the question to the executive committee. All of a sudden I found out that the executive' committee chairman was leaving on the next day on holiday. I went to her home.

"I'm having difficulties with my garage. Please register permanent residence. I've cancelled my residence in Moscow, and my bride is pregnant. Didn't have time to register our marriage. Here's the application and pregnancy certificate. Please write instructions to register without delay."

She wrote a note on the corner of the application:

"Urgently register marriage following executive committee decision concerning residence."

The executive committee assembled with the assistant at its head.

"He's having difficulties with a garage. We must register permanent residence so he won't have to demolish the garage."

The decision was adopted.

I spoke with the senior deputy who registers marriages:

"It's a delicate affair. Completely secret. I want to marry a foreigner, but secretly. A commission will be checking on all personnel at the institute where I work in December, if it learns about the marriage, I'll be dismissed — the institute does secret work. If it becomes known afterwards they won't be able to fire me for five years until the next check."

"But can we register marriages with foreigners? We don't have a real registry office yet. The ceremony is carried out by the secretary of the Soviet and me."

"Here is the marriage code, read for yourself. And here are the papers."

"Yes, indeed. A good thing she's not Korean. Relations with them are not very good. Do you have permission from the embassy?"

"It's not obligatory. Read the note on page 221. But we have such a permission."

"Well, show the permission anyway."

"Here it is."

"Now let me see the bride."

"Come in."

After examining her he said:

"A fine girl, not a spy. I can see. We'll do it. What about the secretary? Won't she let the cat out of the bag?"

"I'm sure of her."

Anh was so happy she gave him the goblets sent as a gift on the occasion of my "anniversary".

Then there was trouble. It happened that the secretary was dismissed and replaced by a new girl. She was a Young Communist League worker from Podolsk. What could we do? Go through with it anyway? On Saturday there would be wedding cars, and the wedding feast at home. Flowers, photographs, champagne. Would we have to call everything off? Perhaps we could turn off all the phones, so she couldn't call to find out.

What if they found out that marriages with foreigners were to be registered according to the rules and not in Troitsk, but in Zagorsk? Or later talked about it everywhere?

I called a friend, a great ladies man, and asked him to take her out on Saturday morning. Then she would entrust the deputy to register the marriage and would sign later. He went to Troitsk.

On the next day I received a note: "Everything OK. Get tickets for Saturday morning." I bought tickets to an East German jazz concert.

The deputy arrived and said that the secretary was very embarrassed and asked the ceremony to be carried through without her.

I filled in the form for Anh in such a way that it was impossible to tell that she was a foreigner. In the empty place for nationality I wrote Kinh (which was true: most ethnic Viet-Nameese are called Kinh in their own language), for place of birth I wrote Kuangchi, DV, Seashore district (also correct, but misleading — any Russian would think DV meant Dalny Vostok, Far East, not Democratic Viet-Nam). I put down the closest Russian equivalents of her name. (In the certificate of marriage, everything was strictly correct.) Later, in the Central Committee, they said: "By means of deceit, you,..." At that point I presented the certificate of marriage.

That was how no one knew in Troitsk, except for the deputy, that I had married a foreigner.

My head went round at the wedding. Did anyone ever kiss not only the bride at a wedding but also a certificate of marriage?

Only the closest friends were present at the wedding. Mother gave Anh her exquisite diamond as a present. It is difficult to imagine how it suited Anh. It is something I can't understand. A beautiful dress, a certain color or a hairdo is one thing. But here was a tiny platinum chain one could hardly see. I loved it when she was in the necklace. But she agreed to put it on only after I made a major show of temper and only a few times in her life. Anh was shy of jewelry.

As to Mother's mother-of-pearl necklace with large irregular pearls which Mother gave Anh to wear so the pearls would not fade, Anh wore it on her body under her underwear.

Now I had to complete registry of residence in Troitsk in order to register the child here instantly and without hindrance. Then the marriage certificate would seem more natural. But, most important, we had to register the child urgently. Indeed, when later I had to register our second daughter Tatiana in Moscow, there was much red tape because of Anh's foreign passport.

Thus, having obtained the executive committee's permission to register residence in Troitsk, I went to the passport section chief Pelageya.

"Here's the permission you requested, here's the passport. I have cancelled my residence in Moscow. Please make it quick, there's a taxi waiting for me outside."

"Cancelling of residence does not give you the right to register residence in another place."

"But here's permission of the executive committee."

"It doesn't mean anything for us."

"But you laid down the condition."

"I thought they would turn you down. The permission contradicts the law."

"The local chief of police..."

"I'm not subordinated to him."

"And whom are you subordinated to?"

"Directly to Idiotovski Lane."

The legalist lawyer had thrown me off! I had no experience in such matters and tried to find the truth directly.

"Well, let's call Idiotovski Lane."

"If you please."

She telephoned Moscow and talked with someone.

"Go to Moscow and see Colonel Voldasov, he'll receive you."

An hour later I was at the colonel's. I repeated my story. I wanted to register residence at a country house belonging to me. I had cancelled residence in Moscow.

"Cancelling residence does not give you the right to register residence in another place."

"There's a poster in the hall saying that a citizen who has not registered residence for 75 hours has broken the law."

"Cancelling of residence does not give you the right to register residence in another place."

"I haven't been registered anywhere for nearly a month. What should I do?"

"You know what, as a friend, I'll tell you. Go back and register yourself back, although cancelling of residence does not give you the right to register there again. People have left me in tears. How many heart attacks I've seen! Your case is hopeless. No one can help you. Not the executive committee, not the Supreme Soviet, not even the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet himself." Things had come to a head.

O Idiotovski Lane! How much time of my life I spent there with requests, applications, certificates. Fortunately, my institute was next door. I should have made friends with Pelageya, it was probably so simple. It was a trifling matter for her to register me. Now I had to visit these people whom other people's heart attacks had made callous.

We searched and searched for some avenue and finally we found one. The niece of my Mother's closest friend had gone to school with the deputy chief of the regional police department. She went to see him: better to register me than have the garage torn down, I'll sign the papers.

The paper had not arrived in Troitsk yet, but the news had already reached the passport section.

"We'll register you, you can drop in."

Pelageya was not there, it was some one else.

"You want to register at a country house. We need a registry book, where is it? What about the dormitory in Troitsk?"

"All right, let's make it the dormitory."

I couldn't care less.

"Register with the military authorities and we'll register residence."

I went to the draft board where I was registered and signed out. Then I visited the local draft board in Troitsk. The official was seated at a desk shouting into a telephone receiver:

"I'm a pensioner, my wage is sixty rubles and I'm not obliged to get fish for you!"

I addressed him jokingly clicking my heels.

"Do you sign up volunteers?"

He replied in a hostile voice:

"We don't!"

"Actually, I'd like to register."

"Where's your passport?" he examined it. "You're not a resident."

"In the passport section they told me I have to register at the draft board first."

"I won't register you without residence."

I found a friend who was deputy and he arranged everything for me. Now I had two stamps in my passport: marriage registered in Troitsk and residence also registered in Troitsk. I look at them in admiration .

* * *

*Thanks for having breathed life into us
And then not having bothered with the rest.*

V. Vysotsky

The next tasks were: 1) to hide that Anh was pregnant; 2) secretly give birth to a child, and obtain a birth certificate in Troitsk.

1) In order to conceal the fact that she was pregnant, Anh arranged for a business trip for 4 months to Kiev. Actually she was hiding at my house. Anh's letters to her relatives were sent to our friends in Kiev and from there to her country so the letters would have Kiev postmarks.

It was all not particularly difficult since nothing could be noticed when Anh was five months pregnant.

2) Give birth to a child in secret. A girlfriend of mine arranged for an excellent gynaecologist to accept Anh to his maternity ward without any papers (ahead of time, on the day her father would arrive in Moscow). It was the most reliable way of hiding her.

"Don't tell him who she is under any circumstances. That would frighten him," my girlfriend said.

We invented a new version.

I also needed a paper stating that Anh had given birth to a seven month baby. Otherwise, according to law, the former husband could be registered as the child's father, because the official divorce was obtained only seven months before the birth. But although subsequently lawyers had closely checked our papers, as I was told at the Central Committee, they had failed to consider this possibility or had rejected it as too crude.

It was this reason that I offered to the gynaecologist for the secrecy: the husband of the young lady was to think that she had given birth prematurely, because he had only returned from a business trip abroad seven months earlier and would now leave again.

My wife made a strong impression on the gynaecologist. The girlfriend who had introduced me to him quoted him as saying that he had never seen such a beautiful woman before. And neither was he probably destined to. It will be explained why below.

Now her father arrived and demanded to see his daughter. She could not be found. He was told that she was hiding with me. He was very troubled. This never happened before that, when he arrived in the Soviet Union, she did not appear, or to be more precise, was not brought to him immediately, wherever she was.

"What would you do with such a daughter?" he asked the interpreter.

"I would simply beat her up," he replied, making things still worse.

Two weeks passed, and Anh had still not given birth. I was afraid of approaching the maternity ward in case I was being watched.

Finally, on October 31, 1977, my daughter Yelena was born. Bursting with joy, I got hold of a paper certifying birth and went to Troitsk to register it.

The happy father came to an official lady in order to register the child in Troitsk with flowers; an enormous box of candies, a bottle of champagne and carefree (to the extent it was possible) expression on his face. The lady was delighted by the gifts, did not even look at Ann's foreign passport, and wrote the birth certificate as I dictated it.

"I'm very sorry, I can't write Moscow as the place of birth," she said suddenly looking sideways at the bottle of champagne, "I'll write the town of Troitsk,"

"Yes, of course!"

"You know, everyone wants to have Moscow as a birthplace."

"Never mind, it's quite all right."

Thus, the issue was settled. I was no longer afraid of anything.

My gratitude went to everyone who helped me.

* * *

Eight days later I brought home Anh and a beloved little being wrapped in a blanket tied by a wide ribbon — our savior.

Anh said:

"I'll go now and tell everything to Father."

"That's crazy! He must be prepared. Send pictures of the wedding and the baby."

"I'll tell him everything myself. On the way back I'll call."

It was useless to argue, and my friend and I took Anh to a cottage on Vorobyovskoye Highway.

I was not afraid that something would happen to Anh. I simply shivered for no particular reason.

Anh came into the cottage. Everyone was dining. She set down next to her father. He did not have a word of reproach. After dinner he took her away and said in a peculiar voice (Anh knew this meant that he was deceiving her).

"My girl, I know you wanted to divorce your husband. We'll return to our country, and it'll be arranged. You realize it's not approved of, but it'll be permitted for you."

"Father, I've obtained a divorce already in the Soviet Union."

"Is it legally possible?!"

"Yes, it is. I'm legally divorced. And I've married, Father."

"De facto?"

"De jure."

How can I describe what happened at this point? Her father was furious. Anh knew him very well and was convinced that what he said then about us Europeans, about Russians and for some reason about Africans was not his real viewpoint and only a result of anger. (Anh had told me that he believed everything he said was being wiretapped.) Or about his wife, her mother, who was partly Chinese, and it was Chinese blood that was to blame for everything. His hands trembled, and Anh thought he wanted to hit her.

(As a Russian I was shocked, it sounded so barbarous! But think a little, I bet you remember Europeans carrying on in a similar way. Don't you?)

Anh made no reply, simply turned and left.

She came out of the cottage and headed for Moscow University. It was dark, and a black car started and drove slowly aiming its headlights at her. Anh ran and the car followed her. Finally she reached a stop, jumped into a lighted trolleybus and came home in tears.

Nevertheless, I was happy she had returned. I had some friends over, and they tried to console her.

"What's wrong? What happened?"

"I didn't think he'd react in this way."

"Did you tell him you had a daughter?"

"I didn't."

"Well, then it's not so bad. You weren't arrested. It's no tragedy that he scolded you. As they say: better bad weather than no weather at all."

I really thought that the child was our trump card. And so there was nothing to worry about.

On the next day her sister called, a daughter from her father's first marriage. Father was sorry for having blazed up, he hadn't slept all night. Asked to be forgiven and would like to see her.

I prompted Anh to tell her about Yelcna.

"You know, we have a daughter. Congratulate us."

"Don't be silly. You have to be pregnant to have a daughter. You were never pregnant!"

And she refused to believe her. I don't know what she thought. Perhaps that Anh had invented the story to force her marriage to be acknowledged? What nonsense!

They made a date to meet near home and go to the cottage.

"Anh, I won't let you go."

"I'll go anyway."

We went together. Her sister arrived .

"Hello."

"Hello."

They talked with each other in Viet-Nainese. Anh told me:

"I'll go and see Father for a short time."

"By no means. We have to go and tell mother and you must feed the child before you go."

They spoke with each other again. Then they came to our house. We entered and her sister saw Yelena in the carriage.

She was amazed, wept and embraced Anh. I told her:

"Anh is running a temperature and not feeling well. Is it really necessary to go see your father?"

Her sister decided that it was not and left.

Later she told us that their father had not slept all night and consulted his personal physician on how to bring Anh back home.

Yelena had saved us.

*All night long I await
the dear guests due to come
And like fetters I work the door chains in the hall
O.Mandelstam*

Before this incident Anh had not been particularly afraid of her father. I had been more afraid of him. Now, after Yelena's birth and registration of the marriage, I did not fear a kidnapping or anything of the kind. But Anh began to be very much afraid.

Whenever a black car drove up to the country house, Anh would be so frightened she could no longer breast-feed the baby. She was constantly tense. Relative's letters hurt her: you have betrayed your homeland, traitor. Without any publicity she was expelled from the party, allegedly for not paying dues. I was indignant: what did it all have to do with betraying one's homeland? Anh said:

"It's true. I knew what I was doing. Now I'll never see my country. I'll be punished."

"But who will punish you? Father? Buddha?"

"I don't know who. But I'll be punished for sure."

"That means I'll be punished as well. But I'm not guilty of anything. Maybe guilty of having dared to touch Radha?"

She was afraid of her people. When she saw them she took fright.

"I'm afraid they'll summon me to a meeting to decide my case."

She took a sabbatical at Moscow University.

In the garage mentioned earlier, I had built a special room with loop-holes and an iron door where I hid Anh during her pregnancy when I had to go somewhere. It had been difficult to force her to stay there at the time. Now as soon as I left she would go there with the child and lock herself in with my hunting shotgun.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Can't you understand that since Father was prepared to behave in such a manner, he knew I wouldn't submit. That means the marriage is detrimental to the party, and he can sacrifice me for the sake of the party."

"What does the party have to do with it?"

"It may weaken his authority. He identifies with the party. If he ceases to exist, it'll be bad for the party. There is no one to replace him. Others don't see what he sees. It is really so. No one can predict events as he does."

"Of course, Father loves me very much. But since he was ready to sacrifice me, it's the end. I always knew that, marrying you, I would die. I was not afraid until Yelena appeared. Now without me, you won't be able to take care of her."

"Anh, dearest, I can predict events too. I assure you, in a few years everything will change. And very quickly. The staff of your embassy will be allowed to open their eyes at our ballet performances. The thing is that our country also passed through all that. Only the details were different. Anyway, it is more natural to get rid of me."

"Father and I know each other well enough. And he knows what to expect from me if something happens to you."

When Anh had to go to the hospital with Yelena, she left a letter saying that if she were seized they should not speak on her behalf. She wanted her child to be brought up by me.

I was not afraid of anything like that. Nevertheless we decided to have another child right away.

* * *

*O golden days
Of stolen happiness.*

A. Vertinsky

It was prohibited to mention Anh's name in her father's house. However, he left on his desk the small gifts his daughter had given him, even as a little girl. And when one of these gifts disappeared, he raised hell and demanded a search. Relatives wrote that this meant Father still loved her.

He secretly tried to find out our relations. He asked Politbu-reau member Suslov, his oldest friend: "I would like to know whether it is real love". As Anh's sister told me laughing many years later, an expert on love was dispatched.

Anh and I lived at the country house in the forest in total isolation the year round. In our enormous room with enormous windows beyond which endless birch trees stood in the snow illuminated by a mercury-vapour lamp, there was a black piano and the candle flickered, its light playing on the mother-of-pearl on her neck. And I recorded her sleeping pale face again and again on the tape recorder of my memory, to replay it secretly when I sat at meetings in my job in Moscow.

When the baby squealed at night, Anh would run to her, looking as if she'd just come off a painting by Francois Boucher. Then — hallucinations, and everything blended in confusion:

*... The overturned ceiling,
The shimmering windows,
The drunken old walls...*

We were alone in the world. Or so we thought. But it turned out that the expert was not idle at the time, spying on us through the windows and analysing. The result was reported to Anh's father: it was real love. !

Unfortunately, as I was later told, it was the only positive report to go through secret channels. Lies were even circulated at the time that I favoured perestroika and glasnost (before these notions became approved political slogans). Not completely of course, they did not go that far, but somewhere deep down, experts reported. I was accused of having a perverse sense of humor.

"Of course, we understand jokes too, but not to such an extent!" it was reported. "It was hinted that I could ridicule my own father (or father-in-law)."

A year later he arrived in the Soviet Union and wanted to see Anh, secretly from his entourage, but I didn't let her go. Anh was pregnant again, and I was afraid the meeting might upset her. Anh's mother said he was profoundly disturbed by the fact. Anh had loved him very much before. More than anyone else in the world.

I was very concerned that Anh possibly missed her country and relatives. But she did not. Only she didn't like it when we had guests. Once a guest asked her whether she was homesick. She replied naively:

"Only when we have guests."

I taught Anh to ski. We liked to come out of a forest and ski across an empty white field. I bought her Finnish skis. Anh was afraid:

"I won't be able to ski on them . How fast do they go?" I felt as if I had grown ten years younger, experiencing a fresh surge of energy and scientific inspiration. I had never worked so fruitfully. New ideas poured forth.

Anh and I tried not to part at all. We even drove together to buy special baby yoghurt every morning.

If we did part, and I went to Moscow alone, I yearned to go home, and my heart beat when I made the last turn before reaching the house. And I knew that Anh would come out to meet me when she heard the sound of my LUAZ-968A car. And I would be absorbed in the life that was higher than any other job and before which science, friends, and activity receded into the background. Perhaps it was worth going away once in a while to experience the joy of returning and seeing her face on such occasions.

And how much we travelled together!

* * *

*I can render the sound of the ocean
From a plate of uneaten jellied fish.*

V. Mayakovsky

We were driving along Kaluzhskaya Road in my car. There was a sign setting the speed limit at 40 kilometers an hour. A line of cars was driving fast down a hill towards us. I asked Anh:

"Would you like me to make them all drive slowly?"

"How?"

"Just look."

Abruptly all of them slowed down and began to move at the same speed. An impressive sight! I had signalled to them with my headlights (Soviet drivers warn each other of a traffic inspector with a speedgun in this way).

"That's something! How did you do it?"

Is it possible to impress a Soviet girl with such a cheap trick? And what did Anh know about our real, unwritten laws which are strictly observed ? I liked to shock her with these laws, to tell the truth I frequently exaggerated.

Once we were driving with her. A bus without a license plate passed us. It had a sign saying MICRORAYON. I told Anh:

"It's a 'left-hand' bus."

"What?"

"There's a special stop at Belyaevov underground station. I'll show you: people stand there. It's a stop for 'left-hand' buses. They go non-stop to Troitsk or to Microrayon the shortest way.

It's fast and convenient. They work in the morning from seven to nine and in the evening from six to eight. Ordinary transport is unable to cope with the large number of people who go to Troitsk and back at that time."

"And whose buses are they?"

"They belong to some organization: research institutes or construction firms. The money is collected from the passengers and handed over to the driver."

"Then the driver is a rich man?"

"I don't think he earns more than a thousand rubles a month. The rest goes to his superiors, traffic police and others. It's a kind of additional pay. Possibly the drivers would not work without it, and the traffic inspectors would leave their jobs. Or their superiors would have to arrange for them to receive another wage for non-existent work."

"And everyone knows about it?"

"Of course they do. And no one informs against them."

"And it is not punished?"

"If it were to be stopped, how would Troitsk get to Moscow, on foot? And Muscovites to Troitsk?"

"Can't public transport carry them?"

"It's impossible. If the required transport were provided, the rest of the time it would remain idle. If 'left-hand' travel were stopped by force, the blood circulation would end and death would set in. It is impossible to end."

"Why?"

"If an organization were to be set up to supervise the process, it would only make travel more expensive, because that organization would also have to be supported. If they try to remedy the situation, the result will be the exact opposite. That's why these are the real laws of the current economy."

"Do you know those laws?"

"I have considered the question and thought about it."

"And what did you conclude?"

"You've heard enough from me."

"It's a very grim picture you draw."

"It's not that bad, we live on."

* * *

On one occasion we drove in my car through the nearest villages sightseeing and at the same time trying to find a nurse for our child from among the village women. We went along dusty dirt roads. The new buildings in the villages were strangely out of place. We asked passersby about a nurse. It was useless. Anh was thinking about something else:

"No, Father and our people will never change their attitude to me. Prominent people never change their viewpoint."

"But they do, Dostoyevsky was a revolutionary in his youth, and then quite the opposite. He wrote *The Possessed*, a book in which he ridiculed revolutionaries." "Your Pushkin never changed,"

"I'm not an expert of course, but as I see it, Pushkin changed completely and became a monarchist at the end of his life. The last words before his death as reported by Zhukovsky were: "Tell the Tsar that I've changed completely" or something like that — the words were not invented by Zhukovsky, it was the truth. The *Bronze Horseman* which I read to you is a purely monarchist work! The flood refers to Pugachov's uprising which prompted the Decembrists: Yevgeni personifies the Decembrists, the *Bronze Horseman* — the tsar's rule. The natural elements subdued resulted in Yevgeni's closest people perishing, just as Pugachov's uprising led to the death of people close to the Decembrists. During the flood, remember I read you the lines:

*... his generals brave,
Cross deluged streets before them lying,
At once set forth, the floods defying,
The drowning, fear-crazed folk to save.*

You know, in notes to the poem, to justify the reference to generals, Pushkin said something rather vague about General Milo-radovich. And it was the latter who was shot during the December mutiny. The names of the Decembrists, as Yevgeni's name,

*... might have shone and been accorded.
A worthy place in Russian lore.*

Following his reeling and roaming, on the very square where the December mutiny took place, Yevgeni whispered to the Tsar shivering in anger: "Just wait and see!" After which he fled. And Pushkin demanded submission from the people:

*... your fury
Contain, O Finnish waves, and quell,
Forget the old feud and endeavor
To let it buried stay forever,
And undisturbed leave Peter's sleep!*

Perhaps this interpretation is not indisputable, but why did he become a courtier and why was his family close to the Tsar's family?"

"You're a monarchist yourself but attribute monarchism to Pushkin, as is customary in your country," Anh laughed.

"To be a monarchist in our time is like being an advocate of the feudal or the slave-owning systems. The wheel of history turns on, and socialist revolution was inevitable in our country. It is as silly to oppose laws of history as it is to go against laws of physics. The laws must be studied and enjoyed. You know how a motorcyclist hit a lamp-post head-on and lying half-conscious muttered: "How fortunate that it's divided in half." An old lady asks: "What's divided in half?" "MV2, grannie.""

"Stye that you don't hit a post yourself, philosopher."

We drove on and on. There were many soldiers along the road. Soldiers were repairing the road, digging a ditch next to the road, building a house.

"Why are soldiers doing all this?"

"Its part and parcel of military service. Actually it's forced labor. Unproductive, if we are to believe Marx."

"Aren't they paid?"

"They're paid peanuts. But the soldier tries to avoid working when he can. I don't know how it is at state construction projects, but in building country houses, officers 'lease' soldiers very cheaply, they work very poorly and lazily."

"What do you mean, lease their soldiers?"

"Well, they make them build a private house and take all the money for themselves."

"Do the soldiers get anything?"

"Usually the sergeant allows some laxity in discipline. But always tells them: not a kopek for soldiers! They built our neighbor's house, did you notice how badly the bricks are laid?"

"But the house isn't finished."

"One of the soldiers went AWOL, the sergeant got scared of check-ups and they all quit."

"Don't the soldiers denounce the sergeant?"

"They're probably afraid. But I don't really know army structures. I have heard that older soldiers make slaves out of younger ones, stronger ones — out of weaker ones. I was only in military camp as a student in an officer training program. But it did me some good: I became stronger and healthier, got used to physical exercise, running. They disciplined us hard."

"I can't imagine you as a soldier."

"I was a very smart soldier. I knew the regulations by heart. I still remember them. What is a sentry? It is a soldier guarding a post. What is a post? It is a place guarded by a sentry. But what is a sentry? And so on. No one knows where it begins and where it ends, not even our great military commanders."

"How did you command attention?"

"Atten-chun!"

"Isn't that something! Now order something else."

"Present arms! As you were!"

"Whom do you give the arms to? The enemy?"

"No, it's a military posture, 'as you were' means to cancel the order."

"Kiss me! As you were! You're crazy, you'll wreck the car. I said as you were."

"As you were means cancel the order: take the kiss back."

We had meanwhile reached the local church. It was a weekday service. The choir consisted of old people. There was only one village girl with a plain face. Very few people. An old woman was praying on her knees, bowing low, to one side. I had taught Anh to light candles for various occasions. We lit a candle to St. Nicholas. The woman selling candles and small crosses showed an interest in us. She offered to sell us a church calendar for that year, a most valuable book only one copy of which she had.

* * *

Anh examined the handsome and expressive faces of the bishops and looked in the calendar to see how we should name our future children. Meantime I tried to find a nurse among the believers.

"You yourself said that the overthrow of religion was the major accomplishment of the revolution. Yet you're looking for a religious nurse."

"So what? The absence of nurses is also an achievement of the revolution."

"Did the revolution lead to equality?" Anh asked when we were getting into the car.

"The revolution was followed by Military Communism, as I see it, a period of maximum equality, everyone seemed to be equal, but the economy came to a standstill, the country's blood circulation stopped and there was universal impoverishment, it seems that even salt disappeared. In addition, there was pressure from outside, and the only thing to do was to retreat and introduce the New Economic Policy, free enterprise. The economy came alive instantly. There were quite enough nurses then. But the law of the trend towards equality began to level out living standards between different sections of society."

"What kind of law is that?"

"I think there is such a law of history. It can be explained in primitive terms as follows. Psychologically, a person doesn't want a neighbor to live much better than he does. However, he doesn't envy people in another sections of society. But the time comes when the psychological barrier falls for the entire section and mass hatred flares up for another section of society. Revolution breaks out and with it levelling, the given section reaches another energy level, as a result enormous kinetic energy of the masses is released, leading to expansion to other countries, particularly successful since it involves the population of these countries, simultaneously consuming part of the population in the original country. The latter process is particularly intense if there is no opportunity to attack other countries. The economy was supported for some time by this wave of enthusiasm and purely religious discipline. Then gradual stagnation and disillusionment set in. The law of levelling operates spontaneously, until the economy collapses."

"What about today?"

"It seems to me that despite the unwritten laws and rules I told you about, despite the chaos and extensive stealing, on the average there is levelling which involves more and more layers of society. If you earn or steal too much, share what you get with others, otherwise eventually it'll be worse for you, and for that reason living standards are levelled out. Now look, a skilled carpenter I hire earns 35 rubles a day which means it is senseless for him to take less. That's why you can't find a nurse to look after your child. In view of these specific conditions the role of money in the country has fallen: this also determines the indifference of retired women on pension to additional earnings. But I'm not referring to the special section of officialdom who live a separate life, enjoy free services and have their own laws and rules of a game unknown to me."

"Why has the role of money fallen?"

"There are conditions that cannot be bought at any price. And when these conditions are used to pay off people, it is difficult to find a monetary equivalent for them."

"What about a private nurse?"

"For example, a deputy minister helps his nurse's daughter go to college and get a flat. What money could compensate these favours? Of course there is a system of bribes, but this is regarded as immoral both for the person receiving a bribe and for the one giving it and is severely punished. Only exchange of services 'in kind' is considered to be decent: the nurse works and he helps her by making relevant telephone calls. But a telephone call with a request means that the person who is called may subsequently also address a request to the caller. That is why a written request by the given person is not reacted to unless there is a telephone call to back it up. It is particularly so in officialdom which even has its special telephone system known as *vertushka*: dilly-dial. A request made over this system will never be refused. There are two categories of employees, those who have received their job as a result of such a telephone call and those who have not. An official who has a *vertushka* in his office can do a great deal for his friends and relatives. In the past only the highest echelons had the *vertushka*, they were like the boyars of old. Now a much broader circle has obtained the *vertushka* and other benefits becoming a new class of nobility. My sister calls these officials people of convenience. She married

the son of a government minister and received an excellent flat. Subsequently the minister was dismissed and exiled as an ambassador to a minor capitalist country. This kind of punishment is called ambassador to Hell. My sister had received "food rations" in the so called therapeutic nourishment lunchroom and what she and her husband did not eat they passed on to their friends and therefore they lived very well."

"Did they pass on the food for money? Did they sell it?"

"They took money for it. But their friends were only too glad to buy the food, because it was top quality, made at special plants. Then her husband divorced her and married her girlfriend, and my sister told me sadly that the dilly-dial now does its good turns for someone else."

"Do you mean that a new class of nobility has emerged?"

"Well, no, it was a figure of speech. Although there are some similarities. In order to distribute the benefits of the boyars among a broader section of nobles, the latter needed the dictatorship of Ivan the Terrible who destroyed the boyars, suppressing them by the most atrocious methods. But at the present time the benefits I referred to are not inherited. Only a widow retains privileges but children do not. Only in specific cases. Grandchildren receive nothing at all."

"All this is not right."

"I wouldn't say that. The system is well thought-out. A person yields power and enjoys wide opportunities. If the state were not to provide him with benefits, he would obtain them from the people whom he helps. Either in money, which is prohibited by our moral code, or in work for him, supply of do-it-yourself products and so on, which is not banned by today's moral rules but was banned 10-20 years ago. In the past, if an official were removed from his post, he would lose all his privileges and occasionally even be sent to prison or executed. That was if certain forces stood behind him."

"Even if he was not guilty of any serious crimes?"

"If certain forces stand behind a person and his very existence represents a danger, he is destroyed."

"But it's shameful since he's not guilty of anything."

"Alexei, son of the last Tsar Nikolai II, was shot. He was only a child and not guilty of anything. But certain forces could rally behind him, his name, the very fact of his existence could be used. Was it fair to execute him?"

"I don't know."

"See! And when there are no forces behind him, let him retire due to health and enjoy all the privileges or be sent as an ambassador. That is the rule today. Officials fear such punishment enough as it is. And those who have remained in power think: it can happen with each of us, so access to benefits must be more stable."

"It's fortunate that benefits are not inherited."

"Yes, but parents do think about their children. Formerly it was regarded as morally wrong in Party terms to help children, buy them cars and country houses, advance them in the same field. Now all this is in the past, and parents take care of their children. And the children, taking advantage of their influence on parents, act decisively. The sons-in-law have turned out to be particularly agile. Son-in-law has become an honorary title. With time there have appeared sons-in-law of sons-in-law."

I knew one son-in-law of a son-in-law who could easily secure a telephone call on behalf of the person concerned, for which he was promoted and received gifts. A relevant telephone call means a great deal, as I said, for the person concerned, it may be a question of life and death. So the fact that benefits are not passed down by right of inheritance is double-edged. To inherit is wrong, not to inherit when power and privilege do not correspond results in chaos."

"Could a son-in-law help us find a nurse?"

Anh- asked the latter question as we drove up to our house, where another applicant to become nurse stood at the gates waiting. AH sorts of weird people responded to the ad I had run in a newspaper. This particular lady was bare-footed and strangely dressed. As I guessed correctly after talking with her, she had just escaped from a lunatic asylum.

* * *

We never went to the theatre. It was not advisable for us to appear in public and publicize our marriage. Before we had registered our marriage Anh had told me:

"Do you want to go to a theatre? I can ask for tickets."

It was on the eve of Easter. I said:

"Ask for two tickets to the Easter service at the Yelokhovskaya Church, I'd like to see the Easter procession."

She telephoned. They replied laughing:

"Are you calling the Central Committee or the Patriarchy?"

And we went to a church on Zachatyovsky Lane where my father's funeral service had been performed, and I remembered the priest. We came early. Then groups of foreigners appear, and the police. We were forced back by the police who formed a circle. Other foreigners were let id. When the Easter procession was underway Anh asked a policeman:

"Why can't we go with them?"

"Because they were already in the church."

"Since they were already in the church, now it's our turn to go in."

The policeman realized that it was not the logic of a Soviet person and let us through.

* * *

Once we went to a performance by the famous bard-singer, V.Vysotsky in the small auditorium of a college. Despite the fact that we were not seated in the front row, after the performance he rushed to Anh. Anh thought that he had mistaken her for someone. The singer greeted her as if they were good friends, asked how she was, displayed extreme courtesy, elated by the success of his performance. He insisted that she be photographed with him in a room with the sign Party Committee and behaved as if no one else existed, including me. And that despite the fact that I replied for her on several occasions:

"I explained the meaning of your lyrics. She did not catch on to all the intricacies. By the way," I was trying to stop him by a different approach, "our country houses are quite close by. Drop in when you're there. Anh and I would be very glad," I invited him without particular enthusiasm. "I rarely visit my house", he replied, finally realizing something and subsiding.

"You see what it means to be the daughter of a great man," said the organizer, a friend of mine who had invited us.

"But how did he know?"

It was not long before his death. He limped slightly.

Once Anh had been courted by a famous Cuban singer, her sister told me. And by many other outstanding and handsome young men. And generally she had lived an exciting life, gone abroad, been to receptions, at congresses, Olympic Games, stood on the Mausoleum during parades. And I had confined her to a remote place where only owls called in the night and an expert on sexual questions was snooping.

Perhaps we could go to Moscow, at least for a short time?

* * *

The lawyer told me that I could register residence at my former Moscow flat if I had been absent for not longer than 6 months. And since it was a cooperative flat and I officially owned the flat, I could resume residence after any period of absence. I decided to register residence again in Moscow five months after I had cancelled it. I came to the police station. A police major repeated the same formula, which was unknown to the lawyer:

"Cancelling of residence does not give you the right to register residence again. Try it through the Moscow Soviet. But it's very difficult at this point."

A friend of mine, deputy director of an institute at Troitsk, advised me to pretend I had been sent to work at his institute and wrote a paper to the police which went approximately as follows: the supreme authorities had sent me to Troitsk to work from such a date to such a date. My job had been completed and I was no longer needed in Troitsk. Something of this sort but in more official language. The suspicious major asked:

"When did your business trip in Troitsk begin?"

I went to see his superiors. The superiors said:

"Can't you see it was the supreme authorities that sent him. Register his residence."

With the birth of Tatiana, relations changed drastically. Anh's relatives realized that our family could not be split up. All of them except for the father arrived to offer their congratulations. They excused themselves for the former letters ("we were ordered to write them"). Anh was very pleased that I behaved not as always but more respectably, as people were supposed to in their country. So the relatives responded quite positively to me.

Their country adopted a new law allowing marriage with a foreigner, provided there was a child and certain other conditions, all of which existed in our case. Thus, Anh, although this was postfactum, had no longer done an unlawful act in marrying me. It was grandfather's first step to completely forgiving his daughter and acknowledging our marriage. And the people would gradually become accustomed to such instances. Everything seemed to be coming right. Contacts with my children's grandfather were possible, but only in the future.

Right after the law was published, Anh's girlfriend who was in love with a German from the DDR called her.

"Anh, we'll build you a monument! You're our heroine! You've broken down such a wall. I'm glad your father realized what an absurd and cruel law it was banning

marriage through the example of his own family. How could such a law exist when it was declared everywhere that there is friendship between the people of the socialist countries. Remember how your brother applied to the kamikaze squad, and then the squad was disbanded? Your father learned what the parents of a member of a suicide squad felt. Now you've destroyed a cruel law with your own hands. I rejoice for you, for myself and for all of us."

After reconciliation with her family Anh and Yelena went to see grandfather, who was staying at Khrushchev's former house. He had asked them to come during the holidays, when his assistants would not notice them. But when he began to play with the child, he forgot about the secrecy. He wanted a cot to be brought to the house so Yelena could be with him during his stay in the USSR. At first Yelena responded negatively.

"She instinctively feels a danger from me," he explained to Anh.

He resorted to the method of Academician Pavlov. All the bananas in the house were removed and only he in person treated her to bananas.

Yelena would disappear for a long time and everyone looked for her. Then she would appear with a banana which meant that she had been in grandfather's study.

Anh said he was very fond of Yelena.

"Why do you think so?"

"I saw him watching her through the window taking a walk and noticed how he waited for her."

When they were seeing him off at the airport Yelena embraced and kissed him. This was very rare for Yelena. She was very restrained in this respect. I was surprised.

"Did you tell grandfather that it was rare for Yelena?"

"My dear, there was no need for words."

Even before he left, his assistants and secretaries, deciding that there had been a reconciliation (or pretending to have decided), arrived in a crowd at our house without notifying him, apparently dying of curiosity.

I was in good form and behaved not at all seriously, amusing them all evening. Anh was embarrassed and even refused to interpret some of my jokes. Grandfather was displeased and angry that they had come. But he was glad that they praised me. After all, I was his granddaughter's father.

On each visit to this country he took Yelena to the circus; he even took her to the opening ceremonies of the Olympics, where she began to cry at the most inappropriate moment.

* * *

Here is another revealing episode. It happened during the conflict between the socialists of Indochina and the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea.

Strange as it may seem, Anh showed interest and sympathy for the Khmer Rouge. Pol Pot and Yeng Sari had a definite theory and idea of communism which Anh was interested in. I said:

"They have destroyed the country's culture."

Anh objected:

"Any revolution does not spare culture at first."

"But they're puppets of the Chinese."

"Do you believe our press? Why the first thing they did was to expel or destroy all the Chinese in the country. It's just that both the Chinese and the Khmers are against us. That's what unites them."

"You once told me how they beat up a child because he had eaten an extra potato."

"But they would have done the same thing to any leader. They're all equal. They all eat the same food."

"How many victims!! How many people they murdered!"

"Was not Sacre Coeur built in honor of the victims of the Paris Commune? The Paris Commune provoked fear and was described in the press in the same terms."

I laughed:

"I would have been unable to marry you under such a regime. One needs a good reference there to marry. I wouldn't have gotten it."

"You would have gotten it if you loved me: and it would have been easier to reeducate you."

Now that was the truth. There was something in it.

"I would not have liked to be there as a tourist. You told me yourself that the Viet-Nameese ambassador had to go home in order to sew a button on the overalls they had issued him. They probably give tourists overalls too."

"What tourists? They only had two ambassadors: Viet-Nameese and Chinese. They dressed like everyone else. The staff was Kampuchean. And they all ate together. I'd like to go there myself."

"To live there?"

"No, to have a look."

"But the people refused to accept the regime."

"They accepted it all right. Look what forces cannot defeat them!"

I don't know what Yelena heard from these talks and what she understood. But at the height of the war, at a reception where she was seated next to her grandfather, she suddenly asked:

"Grandfather, won't you break your teeth?"

Anh said that if the interpreter had not attempted to translate the phrase several times differently, perhaps it would not have attracted universal attention.

"What did grandfather answer?"

"He showed Yelena his teeth."

I rebuked Anh for telling her father too much.

"You're like a spy. What do you blabber about with him? You were the one who told me it's all wiretapped. I bet our people think I prompt you."

"You know I'm not talkative like you are. But Father has a way of asking which makes it impossible not to answer."

"You told me, for instance, how he repeated Brezhnev's words about a good harvest of cotton in the USSR, and you said our sheets were ripped. Did he ask you? Then, not accidentally, Mazurin took you to the closed section of the Central Department Store and you bought new sheets."

"Well, the result was positive, why are you displeased?"

"I don't give away the secrets you tell me about your leaders."

"Why, your people don't even know what our whole country knows. And they refuse to know it. Don't even want to learn what's decent for us and what isn't. Brezhnev kisses Father on the lips. Can you imagine? We don't kiss at all."

"Well, Brezhnev doesn't have to know your etiquette. Your father does a lot of things one is not supposed to do in our country. You don't say anything to him, do you?"

Relations with our side had also changed. Once we were at, a minor reception at Ann's sister's. Two Soviet officials were present: Lbov and his deputy Mazurin. Lbov came from a worker family and had learned Oriental languages. He had recently been promoted. Before that he had been an envoy in their country. Anh liked him very much:

"He'll come and solve all the problems. He can do anything."

When her father became angry with Lb'ov for a ceremonial mistake, Anh and her sister intervened. ("He's of worker origin, he can't understand our intricacies, forgive him, Father.") And he eventually forgave him. Having returned, Lbov tried to make it clear to Anh that he was no longer the same.

"I live at a villa now," he explained to her, Anh told me laughing.

Anh also liked Mazurin.

"Only don't get in his way, he's cunning, he'll trick you," she warned me jokingly.

"Why doesn't Father ask him to be replaced, if he's deceitful?" "But it's written all over his face, and if they appoint another man, it won't be clear what he's up to."

* * *

*Uncle Lenin discovered the way,
Uncle Stalin constructed the way.
From a village "chastushka"*

Immediately the after reconciliation, offers of benefits came pouring down on us. I had a friend over when Anh received a call offering her a flat. Anh said into the receiver:

"An ordinary flat, to live and to work in."

My friend whispered:

"Ask for a bigger one."

Anh said into the receiver:

"You don't have big flats."

Over the phone:

"We've got everything. I'm afraid you might get tired of sweeping the floor."

Anh:

"No, I don't need a big one. Just an ordinary flat like everyone has."

My friend:

"Anh, you should think of your children. They'll grow up soon. It'll be too late when your father's gone. Try to call the man you're talking to then, you'll never reach him."

I said:

"When grandfather is gone, I'd like to see what'll happen to you, his children. We've had the same experience in our country."

"It's different in our country: Father will be respected after his death too."

"Not for a long time. Then they'll rename everything that's been named after him, they'll remove his body and blame everything on him. Your history basically repeats ours. As any other formation, socialism has its laws. In your country your father is like Stalin in ours. And the Ho Chi Minh was like Lenin."

"That's nonsense. There was another general secretary before Father. Now he really pursued a hard line."

"Your president was Party chairman then. Does that mean the general secretary put up a good front while actually the Stalinist period began under Lenin, so to speak? It's happened. Mao Tse-tung, for example, turned from Lenin into Stalin very quickly. As Cromwell turned from a Robespierre into a Napoleon. Generally, as opposed to the English Revolution, the Great French Revolution saw a rapid succession of leaders: the next leader executed the previous one. Yet Joseph Fouche remained under all the regimes. In the bloodbath which follows a revolution it is not only difficult to remain in power, but even to stay alive for the participants. The revolution's leaders are replaced by the next group which had reached a new energy level with their help but which, as a rule, was at a lower stage in development than the revolutionaries. So that those who carry through the revolution should either remain in the background as did Abbot Sieyes who was asked: "What were you doing all this time?" to which he replied: "I was staying alive," or change color at the right time as did the greatest policeman Fouche."

"And what about your country?"

"It was the other way around here. Stalin remained despite all the important changes, while the leaders of the security police were replaced very often, and the next leader executed the previous one."

My friend put in:

"Only the first two died abruptly of natural deaths, but then Yagoda, Yezhov, Abakumov, Ryumin and Beria were all executed in turn."

Anh:

"Fouche adapted himself to those who were stronger. But Stalin was the chief force himself, and when he died everything changed."

"As Fouche betrayed his masters and colleagues, so did Stalin who headed the next group which was supposed to have replaced the latter objectively. If they had not done so, both would have fallen together with their friends, just as if Stalin had failed to change his line during the war, he would have lost his post together with his marshals — Budyonny, Kulik and Timoshenko. At the end of Stalin's life, a new section was to come to power objectively. At the 19th Congress the Politbureau was transformed into the Presidium of the Central Committee and Stalin, who had a good nose, introduced new people into it, including Brezhnev who became a secretary of the Central Committee although before the Congress he had not even been a member of the Central Committee. Stalin supported the new people, forestalling events somewhat, unable at the same time to destroy the old guard as he had done earlier with other groups of Stalinists. On this occasion he only sent their wives to prison. That is why he died shortly before his death, as Averchenko liked to say."

Anh:

"Do you want to say that he was poisoned?"

"The doctors treating him were removed by a master stroke, for example. After that the old guard dismissed all the new people. In particular, Brezhnev was expelled from the Central Committee, Andropov exiled as ambassador and so on. But objective historical reality cannot be avoided, and, relying on the middle sections of the new forces, a member of the old guard Khrushchev decided to depose the other bonzes and inflicted an unexpected blow against the personality cult while aiming at his rivals. The latter, forgetting past quarrels, colluded (of the new people only Shepilov joined them) and outvoted Khrushchev at the Politbureau. But the new trend proved to be stronger: nearly the entire Politbureau was declared to be an anti-Party group. Subsequently, Khrushchev was deposed easily as a transition figure who eventually attempted, unsuccessfully, to adapt to the new section."

My friend:

"Wait, but Stalin initiated the case of the doctors himself."

"To his own detriment."

"And what if Stalin had managed to destroy the old guard?"

"Then the transition to the Brezhnev era would have been smoother."

"Still, I think Stalin was omnipotent. The great leader of the people."

"Undoubtedly, in order to remain omnipotent, it was necessary to maneuver skillfully, occasionally changing one's position completely. That is, to adapt to the new party section and feel the psychology of the most active and strongest masses of the population. Stalin had acquired all his power in Lenin's lifetime. I would not be surprised if it turns out subsequently that he had physically destroyed the bedridden Lenin who was attempting to oppose him. In any case he isolated him. The only person who linked Lenin to the outer world, and after his death tried to explain something on Lenin's behalf, was Lenin's widow Krupskaya. It is rumored that she was told: "If you don't stop behaving in this manner, I'll appoint Comrade Zemlyachka Comrade Lenin's widow!" But despite all this, despite Lenin's letter to the Congress in which he insulted Stalin cruelly, Stalin did not humiliate his predecessor as Brezhnev did with Khrushchev and Khrushchev did with Stalin. On the contrary, he canonized him. And put himself in second place. So there was continuity in leadership, providing for stability and not undermining ideology."

"Lenin had such prestige that it was indisputable."

"A weak spot can be found in any person. For example, they went as far as to send a secret paper to all party organizations containing a list of Beria's mistresses. If one scrutinizes a man's private life as well as his public activities, he is sure to find something. For example, during World War I Lenin was a defeatist, he favored Russia's defeat, and this did not correspond to the zealous patriotic concept of Russia's history which was subsequently advocated by the official press. Even Shamil, a fighter for his people's freedom but against the Russians, was branded an 'anti-Soviet' figure. So it was possible to criticize Lenin for being a defeatist during those times, but they preferred to gloss over that fact in his biography."

"What about Stalin's personality cult?"

"It depends what you're referring to. The original meaning of the term was that everything positive was ascribed, contrary to Marxist theory, to the role of personality, one man — Stalin. Now, unofficially it is possible to ascribe, contrary to the same theory, all negative things of the time to Stalin. They forget that to declare

that God created not good, but evil, is not atheism, but only another form of religion - what is known as the worship of Satan - inevitably linked to the rise of the cult of a new God, as follows from the history of religion. If the term refers to a certain period, then all socialist countries pass through it to a greater or lesser extent. The only thing that depends on the character traits of the leader is whether he overdoes it or not. In your country, say, it was not overdone, while Stalin went very far. But the main phenomena remain the same. I mean the policy with respect to the peasantry, victorious wars, cruel pressure on culture, strict measures regarding foreigners and, in everyday life, a force of inertia which led the system to crisis. Incidentally, Stalin's philosophy is still admired. Your philosophy dictionary is a translation of ours from the Stalinist age. We also have our re-education camps. They shaved the heads of prostitutes and prisoners of war in them and made them study Marxism by force."

"That's not physical torture."

I laughed:

"We should ask them what they'd prefer. By the way, I've been enrolled in the Marxism-Leninism University. So I'll be coming home late on Thursdays. They say there's an excellent teacher there. Everyone admires him."

"Couldn't you say that you've got little children."

"I'm the last person not to have gone through the university."

"I'll give you a paper saying you've gone through our reeducation camp..."

My friend:

"I'm an eyewitness."

Anh:

"I don't know about philosophy and politics, but we don't have such a personality cult of my father. It's your Brezhnev who pins one medal after another on himself and grabs all the titles. What title has he not got yet?"

I retorted:

"People's Artist of the Soviet Union."

After my friend left, it turned out that Anh was offended because of what I had said about her father and was seriously upset:

"Keep in mind that all your attacks sooner or later reach Father. My sister already told him you didn't respect him."

I tried to justify myself and cheer her up:

"Of course, it's not at all like us. Why can't I even joke. Don't be angry. It was in our country that people were jailed for telling jokes."

"What jokes?"

"For example, there was a rule to end speeches with the words: 'My gratitude to dear Stalin for our happy life'. But one man joked, or maybe it was merely a slip of the tongue, and said: 'My gratitude to happy Stalin for our dear life'. Of course he was arrested. People were arrested for telling anecdotes or reciting ditties. Radek, for example, was shot. He was a man of sharp wit and invented anecdotes himself. Before being executed he admitted to being a spy at his trial. The public prosecutor, Vishinski, read the verdict and then asked: "Are you going to tell any more anecdotes?" Radek replied: "No, my speech was the last anecdote." Occasionally, people were put in prison for unknown reasons. There's a story. One prisoner asks another: what's your term. 25 years. For what? For nothing at all. Ah, you're lying,

they give 10 years for nothing at all." "See, and you compared your country with ours."

"Of course, the scale is different in your country, but the country is also smaller," I couldn't stop.

"You're going on?"

"No, I won't. I'm not an expert, dearest. I don't know what the share in the economy of forced labor by prisoners was; I don't know if the process of liquidation of kulaks and repressions was enslavement of a section of the population. Or whether it was necessary to develop, say, unhealthy industries. And I don't know the role of forced labor in your country. That's why my comparisons are highly superficial. Now, say, did your father ever write poetry?"

"Yes, he did when he fell in love with Mother."

"So did Stalin; but about Lenin." I recited.

*Remember, love and study our Il'ich
Who teaches, leads us one and each.*

"What kind of husband do I have? Can you quote something that is not anti-Soviet?"

"What's anti-Soviet about it? On the contrary. However, if you want ideologically correct ditties, I know a boatload."

*The state farm is where I was born,
Where my dear mother lives and cooks,
The state farm is where I have learned
To read Vladimir Lenin's books.*

And I recited them continuously until she finally cheered up and forgave me.

* * *

Anh with her shyness was always making things worse for other people. Take the case of the flat. Her ambitious mother, who had already said that we lived in a shed (no furniture and disorder¹), would see the inferior flat, and the people who had given it to us would be blamed. I remember a pupil of mine was driving Anh when she was pregnant, from Moscow. He drove too fast or stepped on the brakes too abruptly, and Anh started to have pains. She took some medicine but was too shy to ask him to drive more carefully. As a result I had to make her injections of magnesia for a whole month, and was very angry with my pupil for his inattentiveness.

As a student Anh never accepted the money her father sent her with his secretary and lived only on her scholarship. But she didn't tell her father anything. She didn't say anything, because as a little girl, she accidentally betrayed a worker who took for himself the money sent for her to study music when she lived in China. She told her father that they had not paid for the lessons and for that reason she had not studied. She was very fond of that worker, but was unable to protect him from Father's wrath. I remember an episode Anh and Fouk told me about. They were in their first year at the university. One friend of theirs, a member of government, suggested:

"I have a plane. Do you want to go home for a week? You'll return with Fouk's father (a minister)."

¹ Anh told her: "We don't have any money. He spends all our money on the country house. I put up with it. Others spend all their money on drink but he spends it on building."

Together with their niece, off they flew. Along the way there was a stop in China where the member of government had matters to attend to. He left them at the embassy without notifying anyone and went away on business. He was delayed and only returned on the next day.

The girls had been sick in the plane, now they felt better and wanted to eat. They went to the lunchroom, but they had no yuans. Anh recognized a plump man who had once worked at their house. He failed to recognize her and she didn't tell him who she was. She asked him to exchange rubles for yuans. He refused. Anh said:

"We're hungry. Do you have any bread to spare?"

"I've got bread, but I need it myself."

They went into the embassy courtyard. They began to eat the fruit from the peach trees. A guard noticed it and shouted at them. He allowed them to eat only the peaches on the ground. But they were rotten and the girls got stomach aches.

The member of government arrived on the next day and asked his niece:

"How's it going?"

The niece burst into tears:

"We're hungry."

The man gaped:

"What?!" and he raise a great hue.

I don't know what happened at the embassy, but it is easy to imagine.

I asked Anh:

"Did you tell Mother about the plump man?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did she remember him?"

"Of course she did."

Well, I think that after the event he lost a lot of weight. It was a story straight from the Prince and the Pauper.

* * *

Meanwhile the children were growing up, joyful and happy.

Yelena began to talk very early, when she was still a tiny tot. One day, when Anh and she were at the Kremlin Hospital in Kuntsevo walking outside she came up to a young woman with a baby carriage and asked:

"Is Tatiana cold? Have you covered her well?"

It just so happened that the baby's name was Tatiana and it was cold. The amazed mother covered her child.

Tatiana did not begin to talk for a long time. Once when Anh and Yelena went to see Father, we were alone with Tatiana and she was sleeping calmly in her cot. Suddenly I heard a man calling me. Afraid that he would wake Tatiana, I leaned out of the window but didn't see anyone. He called again. I rushed here and there. It turned out that it was Tatiana calling out from her cot in a bass voice. She had learned how to say my name, but for a long time she did not say any other words. It began to worry us. One day I saw a drunkard sit down at the fence and look at Tatiana. I approached him, and he immediately disappeared. But as he left Tatiana cried out:

"Drop in by all means when you have a free moment."

I went running to tell Anh who was amazed and refused to believe me. I couldn't believe my own ears. Perhaps I had been hearing things? Five minutes later Anh appeared visibly astounded:

"She's talking!"

"How do you know?"

"She was mumbling the phrase over and over again."

* * *

"Well ", my neighbor said.

"Saw your light and went."

"What did you invent?"

"Invented something? That's not me —

Just saw your light and came for tea."

No one lived in our community in wintertime. But in the neighboring one they did. It was a co-operative with enormous country houses and land allotments. It was known as Music, the Cinema and Literature.

The writers lived in their country houses, working there continuously. When their memories were exhausted, poets would describe the view from their windows and prose writers were following the example of the Barbizon artists who all together painted one and the same landscape. Of course, I cannot rival those penmen and therefore I hope they cannot be recognized in my descriptions, but I could always recognize who they were writing about. One writer, for example, recorded his conversations with passers-by from the bus stop to his house, and I immediately recognized each person. In addition I guessed that his car had broken down and he, quite upset, took a bus and, under the strong influence of this event, directly wrote a short but brilliant story.

They called each other by pet names or diminutives. For example, if a young lady says: Pete and I are going to a kaffee-klatsch, it doesn't mean she's going with a boy but with a person of advanced age. It is out of the question to ask who Pete is and what this klatsch she's referring to is. It is only clear that Pete is a person, as Bulgakov said, "risen so high that he doesn't even have a last name".

I didn't know what the reunion was all about. I only saw there was a lot of preliminary bustle on the roads:

"Is that you, Faydish? Where's Zyama?"

How can you find out who they have in mind? You can't ask. Eyebrows will be raised. Fortunately, there are rare names such as Elrad, Caesar, Eldar, Yulian, Zinovy, Orest, but what about the common names? Moreover, people with rare names often have the most ordinary diminutives.

This made it easier for Anh. She mixed up the residents of our community as well as my colleagues anyway.

"Why can't you remember them?"

"Because they all end with -ov."

The trouble was that I referred to them by their last names. Names and patronymics were also difficult for her as for any foreigner. I remember when the baby nurse came in and asked the first name, patronymic and last name of Yelena, Anh said she hadn't learned them yet.

The breed of dogs kept in the community was the fiercest in the world. One such dog bit off the nose of a distinguished lady (the writer N.Ilyina), and the owner of the dog shouted from the window to the owner of the nose:

"Pick up your nose, dearie!"

People said that this greatly offended the lady. Yet it was a good piece of advice since the dog spit out the nose, and it could be sewed on again.

When my girls went to a child's birthday in the community, it was a real holiday for them. Usually the parents drew up a plan for the celebrations. But their dog, locked up somewhere on the second story kept trying to burst out during the entire holiday, gnawed and clawed at the door, and if it were not for the unusual foreign locks and bolts, the community boasted, it would be terrible to imagine how the holiday would have ended.

The main dog-breeding facilities belonged to the writer Yulian Semionov. His dogs, continually reproducing, according to the theory of Academician Lysenko, increasingly terrible-looking dogs, once dug a hole out of the open-air cage, jumped over a tremendous fence and pounced on a worker. He didn't die, however. Yulian had to pay such a sum that the local boys only whispered it to each other:

"How long we could drink on that money!" they fancied.

Yulian gave me one puppy as a gift. We were hardly acquainted, though he called me "old man", apparently unable to recall my name but I couldn't make myself call him Yulik as everyone else did.

"Old man, put twenty kopeks on that table," he shouted to me, immersed in his work, as if he were afraid of losing the thread which he was putting down at a terrific speed. (He had in mind the old Russian superstition of not making a gift of a dog, but selling it.)

I put the twenty kopeks, in accordance with superstition, on the edge of the card table which for some reason was piled with large crumpled currency bills. But this precaution did not help. As soon as the puppy reached the age of six months, it easily jumped over the fence and when put on a chain howled continuously.

Finally, it escaped in an unknown direction and, perhaps, is running free like the Hound of the Baskervilles.

In addition to dogs, the community bred cats, squirrels, and one former ballerina even fed the local rats. The community's animal kingdom was varied: an attractive lady with a delicate monkey, Zyama limping slightly with a large parrot on his shoulder, which pecked cruelly at anyone who attempted to kiss Zyama on the lips as was the custom in the community. At one time a man walked a lion there, but this was before our time. He only showed us a photograph of the handsome beast and of his neatly kept grave. The unfortunate animal had to be short after he tore a passing policeman to bits. (Apparently he had simply ignored all the other people.) Or perhaps, another lion had done the deed, but this one had been shot by mistake.

Anh did not respect monkeys and lions. The big monkey that lived in their house always ridiculed her and made faces, because the other children - the children of the staff - often tricked the monkey, offering it mustard in a banana peel. Anh only liked elephants. They were clever and faithful and could run 20 kilometers an hour. In the presence of the nurse I said that I'd write for one to be sent here and put it in the garage instead of the car.

"I'll travel to work on the elephant."

"I'll leave you, for shame!" the nurse muttered in alarm.

Holiday-makers often lived in the houses next to the garages in the writers' community, they were friends, people of the same milieu. But widows occasionally let part of the main house, the first or second storey. In such cases, the people who lived here were not only from the world of the arts. Thus, one day, out walking with the nurse or Anh, our children made friends with a boy of their age and his dignified nurse and mother, a young lady growing rather full, with an attractive plain face. Later we were invited with the children to the boy's birthday. It was in the winter. Dressed up we walked in line around the snowdrifts on the dark lanes of our settlement and came out on the light-filled straight avenue of the writers' community. We brushed off the snow here and were born anew. Now we proceeded in a bunch, the children concerted with wrapped gifts, Anh on high heels and I with my fur-coat open. We approached the villa which they rented from a widow known as Froska. The gates were open, we were welcomed by the young hostess, the nurse. Everyone was overjoyed, we took off our coats in the hall. The kitchen was near, it was obviously filled with pies. Moderately polite, the young host with well groomed hair and moustache was dressed in something soft, even his slippers seemed soft. He was not short and not tall, not lean and not stout, not blonde and not dark-haired. Although actually he was rather dark-haired, and the hostess more of a blonde.

The table was splendidly served, there were foreign wines in all sorts of unusual bottles. The children finished eating quickly and began to play, we were still seated at the table, and I admired my girls in a civilized environment. There were only a few children and a few guests. The host did not drink, and the hostess cheered up and behaved slightly more frivolously than was permitted in my prim scientific milieu. She insisted that we stay and the children go home to sleep with their nurse. Then everyone except me focussed their attention on a new game the children had received as a gift: little motorcyclists charged over hill and dale, set in motion simultaneously. Which one would come to the finishing line first: the blue, red, green, or brown motorcyclist? The hosts showed us how it worked, then each named two colors and the race began. Anh named red and blue and won. The person who played for the first time always won. I had already gambled at horse races and won, nevertheless, the two colors I happened to name finished first.

It turned out that the stakes were one ruble and Anh had won six rubles. The guests open their wallets, exchanging money. I gaped at the rolls of hundred-ruble bills and signalled Anh that it was time to go home. I excused myself, saying that the children might wake and call us, and if we're not there, they would not go to sleep again. The hostess would not let us go, she was slightly more insistent than it was permitted in my scientific milieu. As to Anh, she was simply furious. On the way back she said:

"I can't live in a country where there are such women, I don't want my girls to grow up and be educated in a country with such women. People don't behave like that in my country."

"It depends where in your country. And when. Everything will change very rapidly. When European civilization and European morality is mixed with Oriental life, the hybrid that emerges may be much worse than anything our hostess can

imagine. For example, in Uzbekistan, according to the old rules, if a married woman walked arm in arm with another man, the husband had to either turn her out of the house or kill her or both; that is he was to turn her out and then kill her outside. But once a woman has allowed another man to take her by the arm, this means that for her there are no more obstacles. Now imagine that according to European morality any man can take her by the arm. Do you realize the implications?"

"I don't know, but the company that gathered there was rather strange. The one who set on the left was a topical sales clerk, the man who didn't say a word resembled a businessman in the Klondike, and the one across from us looked like an artist."

"Judging by the name, he's the son of a famous film maker, a gifted film maker himself I think, and I didn't pay any attention to the rest of the crowd, it would be interesting to know what the stakes were later, they had a lot of money, did you notice?"

We learned subsequently that the "sales clerk" was actually in charge of a section in a large food shop, the "businessman" was director of an old furniture repair shop, the host was the son of a retired police general, and as he said himself, wrote the speeches and articles for a high-ranking official, and spent the rest of his time dealing in diamonds and also lending money for interest with antiques as security; a very modern young man, absolutely honest according to the rules of the game. The stakes later reached a hundred rubles. The section chief of the food shop lost a lot of money. Her husband even arrived in a car to bring more money. When we reached our dear, empty snowed-over settlement, Anh relaxed. I am more tolerant of different companies and people. We heard our fox terrier Beam barking, it had accompanied us to the party, waited for us, and then returned home with the children, feeling its responsibility in the absence of the adult owners.

* * *

No one lived in our community in wintertime except for us. As compared with the nearby writers' community, the land plots were smaller and most of the houses too. As soon as a new owner began to build a house which stood out, anonymous denunciations were sent to official quarters. Then officials with stern faces began to arrive and examine the house. They would leave with less stern countenances. Finally, at a community meeting, when the people began to denounce the absent owner, I explained:

"This house will serve as a lightning rod. It'll be the first to be robbed. And if the owner is put in prison, the house will be converted into a kindergarten or rest home. It'll be worse for you."

The possible existence of a kindergarten in the middle of the community frightened everyone to such an extent that the anonymous letters stopped, and the owner sighed in relief and finished building the house. But thieves broke into his house continually, so later he "sighed not in relief but rather more often"².

Life in our own community went on somewhere on the side. Occasionally echoes of events reached us. Invariably when we passed a house with numerous annexes, the same person leaned out of the window and inquired avidly:

² This expression is used in regard to the Ukrainian people who "sighed in relief" on the occasion of Ukraine joining Russia but the ... (The History of Russia, Satiricon Publishers).

"You goin' to the shop?" ,meaning the liquor store. Prose of the lower classes!
What a contrast with the writer's community; there you can hear something like this:

"Adrian, are you going to the croquet pitch?"

Or once Anh and I passed another house and heard the owner, an official philosopher, shouting in a high voice: Sakharov! followed by something indiscernible. Then in a tragic low voice:

Sakharov, bla bla bla. Anh stopped short:

"What's wrong with him?"

I guessed that he was rehearsing a speech against Sakharov.

Or a worker would drop in:

"Pour me one, boss. Need anything done?" "Please bury the garbage."

After burying half, comes back in:

"No fuel left."

Meaning he needs another drink.

Another time:

"You've got another black dog?"

"It's a stray dog that's joined Beam."

"Want me to liquidate it for a bottle?"

Anh did not drink at all and disliked drinking parties. Out of a feeling of solidarity I promised her not to drink. But I kept vodka in the house just in case.

We rarely went out. I wrote a lot, she studied for her exams. Occasionally one of the neighbors dropped in. Anh was very hospitable, managing to turn an ordinary tea party into an aristocratic reception.

* * *

The East's aflame - the new dawn rises.

A.Pushkin

I'm afraid of lying. If one lies: "I can't come, the children are ill", most often the children do fall ill. The same thing happened with our lies about my anniversary: it finally did come. Not a real official anniversary, but a rather unpleasant round date. I decided to get anyway from it as far as I could and went to Vladivostok to a conference. Anh naturally got ready to go with me. All of a sudden, an obstacle appeared: Vladivostok was off limits for foreigners. Anh was a foreigner and had to obtain permission from the highest echelons. Anh appealed to an official. He told her: "Your trade minister waited three months for permission".

For the first time Anh began telephoning high officials. I left without learning of the result. Several days later Anh arrived without permission. Having failed to obtain any result and learning that it was possible to reach a place near Vladivostok without permission, she decided to travel the rest of the way like a spy crossing a border on foot. Having obtained a visa to Khabarovsk she flew in. There she showed my invitation to the conference, our marriage certificate and said that she wanted to join her husband. , The young railway policeman could not resist the charms of such a lady, bought a ticket himself and she arrived in Vladivostok illegally.

She arrived in my hotel. I was overjoyed. She brought me gifts. What force of character! No wonder her relatives were afraid of her. I had not expected such a turn of events: it had become a long delayed honeymoon!

We went to one of the leading scientists in Vladivostok, I introduced Anh and whispered:

"She's here illegally, can't stay at the hotel." The scientist took us to the naval authorities and introduced us. A naval officer assigned us a cabin on a small ship, we were fed in the ward-room. It was all like a fairy tale!

Elated, we roamed the city for two days, went to the cinema, restaurants and beaches. In the evening we took a ferry to our island, the ship. In the morning there was an excellent breakfast in the ward-room and then, like sailors we were let off the ship. We walked about aimlessly. At the conference we were seated together, but I couldn't take my eyes off her. The participants said:

"It's a pleasure to look at you."

In other words, we were only a nuisance.

We walked through the port. A sailor was rubbing the deck of a submarine. I asked Anh:

"Do you want to see it?"

"Is it allowed?"

"Hey, mate, will you show the girl your boat?"

The sailor straightened out and smiled:

"Come in please."

We crawled through the submarine, stunned by the nautical terms the sailor showered us with, demonstrating all the parts with pride and pleasure.

We went to a museum. It was open only for excursions. I went to the director.

"I am escorting a foreign scientist. I would like to visit your museum."

"We'll give you the best guide in just a second."

"Galina Pavlovna, could you show the museum to a foreign guest? Don't worry, he's accompanied by a Soviet, he'll help you."

Closing the receiver she asked me:

"Will you help her? She's afraid."

"Of course I will."

"A fine young man. He'll help you."

I told Anh:

"You're a foreign scientist. Let's go."

The splendid guide rubbed her eyes when she saw the "foreign scientist". Mother of two children, Anh seemed to be 18-19 years old. Her waist was that of a dragon-fly. But her unaffected manners were disarming. She was used to my simplicity in behavior.

It was a very interesting museum. I was particularly amazed by one sea fish. I asked about it. Suddenly Anh said:

"But I cooked that fish for you, don't you remember?"

What can you do with such a foreign scientist?

There is particular pleasure in going somewhere with a very beautiful, distinguished lady, not alone but in public. One sees how delighted people are to be introduced to her. One admires her in various situations, taking part in different scenes. Photograph her in one's memory against the background of ships. It is inspiring, one breathes freely.

It was an Eastern sea, and Anh on the beach in Eastern ornaments, mother-of-pearl, was like a princess from an Oriental tale!

For the first time I experienced the feeling of jealousy. I had not been jealous of the singer in the episode described above. It was simply unpleasant that he behaved towards me, his admirer, disrespectfully.

We were standing in a queue in some shop. There was a tall young man ahead of us. I looked at him and was stunned! I had never seen a more handsome man in my life. He was standing quite proudly, not paying any attention to anyone despite the fact that I gaped at him. My heart faltered. What if Anh sees him and compares us? What happened to my inspiration?

However, Anh did not notice him. When we came out I said:

"There was a fantastically handsome fellow standing in line in front of us."

"Show him to me."

"He's gone already."

Finally, my birthday came. I told no one, and Anh and I went to a floating restaurant on the seashore. In the middle of the room there was a railing around a bit of sea. One could look at the sea through the windows.

"What if you meet another woman, fall in love with her and abandon us."

I make no notice of nonsense. I said:

"I'd like to come and live here in the future. Your country is quite close, we'll go there."

"It'll be difficult for you here without pupils and colleagues."

"You're right. No one would be willing to live here. Its very provincial. The further from Moscow, the more secluded a place is."

"Why is that?"

"Centrifugal force. Everything is decided in the centre, in Moscow. Say, even if it is permitted for us to travel to your country with some permanent passport as an exception, any other scientist would have to travel to your country or Japan through Moscow."

We returned to our ship. It was dark. We stood on the deck. There was a breeze. And then, suddenly, a miracle! All the shins turned on their, lights. My birthday must have coincided with some naval holiday.

* * *

Anh was expecting a child again and busy with her flat in a large-panel house which she had chosen herself. It was much worse than our cooperative flat. But I realized that Anh, who had no one and nothing neither in Moscow nor in the USSR, was overjoyed at the opportunity of having her own den, where she could go, for example, in case we quarreled. The only alternative was to return to her country. I remember only one quarrel, and it was due to a misunderstanding. I was listening to the radio in the evening in English, Anh didn't understand the language and retired to sleep in the children's room. I firmly closed the door so she wouldn't hear the radio and fell asleep without turning it off. Anh tried the door but it was firmly closed, and she decided that I didn't want her to return. In the morning she went to visit her sister who was an exchange student in Moscow whom she had long promised to see. In other words, the flat gave her a sense of independence.

One of her girlfriends who was married asked Anh once:

"Do you quarrel often?" "Never."

"And we quarrel all the time! How do you manage to avoid it?"

"He always lets me have my way."

Her relatives, on the contrary, marvelled at how Anh's character had changed. She had been so stubborn at home, but here she always obeyed me.

We bought the cheapest furniture for the flat, sometimes second-hand, simply so there would be something. But Anh liked it to be clean, so everything would look neat and new.

Meanwhile, ominous things were happening at the country house. The black cowardly dog which had appeared from nowhere and which I had refused to have liquidated held dog nuptials under the house. A large number of dogs of different size, breed and character walked around. Beam guarded the basement from them, and they guarded the house from passersby. The neighbors began to hate me:

"If you don't immediately remove your dogs, I'll kill them using this stick and nail. They tore my coat!"

Despite Beam's protection, the black dog refused to sit under the house all the time and left side by side with a huge red dog. The whole company took off and Beam followed. At night he returned, crawled under the house, sighed twice and died. It was a fearless dog which fought to the end. We pulled him out with a hook and buried him in the forest.

* * *

*All will be still — what sang and struggled,
What shone and tore.*

M.Tsvetaeva

Mother lived in Moscow with my aunt.

One day my aunt called, her voice sounded apologetic. She said something vague about Motiur. I asked for Mother to take the phone. Evidently the telephone was carried to her bedside.

"What is it, Mother?"

She could hardly speak:

"I'm all right."

I raced into Moscow: It was an apoplectic stroke and paralysis. I took Mother to a hospital and hired nurses to attend to her round the clock. We moved to Moscow and fought for her life.

Things evened out somewhat. Mother felt slightly better and we gradually became used to it. I procured medicine through Anh.

My life had passed under the sign of love for Mother. From early childhood I worried about her life, because she suffered from endocarditis. If Mother was feeling well, it was written all over my face. I knew the signs of coming spasms and knew better than Mother when she should lie down and rest.

It seems to me that sons who love mothers so much always marry rather late. Anh's sister told her:

"Look, he loves her mother more than you."

But Anh did not respond. She was fully involved in the effort to help my mother. Her sister complained to their father, but he approved my behavior:

"I loved my mother very much too."

What is remarkable: today, recalling events, I see them as if they concerned another person, without experiencing the pain again. But I do not remember, I feel how charming Anh had been in Moscow, how she came to the hospital or sat on the clearing across from the window and I watched her from Mother's ward, the impression she produced on my acquaintances who were also treated at the hospital. And now it seems to me that I was happy at the time. Pregnancy did not have any detrimental influence on Anh, and in Moscow either she seemed to come alive or perhaps civilization went well with her. It was May 1981.

Mother was discharged from the hospital in an improved condition, and we returned to the country house. Mother now lived in the room above the garage. The sick-nurse who taught her how to walk again and took care of her slept in the anteroom-kitchen next door.

The children's nurse also lived in the house, and finally they sent us a nurse from their country, something I had wanted very much, and Anh had asked from her parents rather reluctantly. I couldn't afford all this, of course, and had to urgently sell cut-glass items, the family silverware, paintings and books.

Anh's father sent his only gift with nurse Shil: the shell and skeleton of an enormous tortoise. Here it is, hanging on the wall in front of me now. Anh was frightened and alarmed by the gift. She said that these tortoises must be given in pairs, because the male and female love each other so much that when one dies the second immediately dies too. A pair of these tortoises serves as a symbol of love and married life together. One tortoise was a bad sign.

"Are you superstitious?"

"Of course not. But Father knows traditions. However it is possible that he simply took the tortoise from the wall and sent it without thinking."

I wanted the nurse from their country chiefly so the children would learn their mother's language. Without a language environment, without adult conversation Anh was unable to teach the children to speak her tongue. When one is in a hurry and the child doesn't understand, it is only natural to say everything in Russian. But the nurse didn't know any Russian. Anh had asked for an old nurse, some former friend of her mother's. Although relations seemed to be improving, Anh feared that with the approaching congress where her father was to be re-elected some danger might emerge for us again. And a fifth column in the house represented a major risk. In the case of her mother's old friend, there would have been nothing to fear. In addition, Anh thought that the desire of relatives to break up our family might serve as the reason for a special girl being sent to seduce me.

Her father's position was indeed precarious. And, as I heard, his opponents had taken advantage of our marriage as an argument against him. The Soviet side feared that a candidate of a different orientation might be nominated.

Nevertheless, the nurse sent was young and pretty and rather lazy. The children began to understand her a bit and chattered some themselves. Anh once asked me:

"What do you think they said to you before going to bed?" "Good night?"

"No, they said: Glory to Ho Chi Minh!" The nurse selected was ideologically trained and had an excellent record ("total absence of Chinese blood").

Anh did not feel very well. The Japanese acoustic device showed that it would be a boy and Anh would give birth in a month. But judging from the symptoms and my calculations she might give birth at any moment. I told her:

"You should stay at the maternity ward."

"I don't want to go to the maternity ward on Vesnin Street (a privileged government hospital). They are capable of anything to secure Father's election. I feel I'm going to die. Then you will marry the nurse."

"Stop talking nonsense, or I'll put you into an ordinary maternity ward. I'll call an ambulance."

"Never: a whole month in a maternity ward?"

Nevertheless, I wanted to put her in the ward as a precaution. But the gynaecologist who had assisted in the first birth had been sent to prison for something. Besides I was absorbed in Mother's illness. The maternity ward where Anh had given birth to Yelena was a new one - there was no danger of catching staphylococcus. On the other hand, I considered Anh's fears to be silly. In that maternity ward she had a separate room with a telephone and TV set. She was doing research she didn't want to interrupt, and there all the facilities to continue it were available in this ward. (When she had given birth to Tatiana the doctor had said in amazement: "she's doing research in the hospital!"). Nevertheless, I began to search for an acceptable alternative. But Anh said as a joke that I evidently wanted to remain alone with nurse Li for a month ; this also slowed down my search. In addition not all the test results and certificates were not issued to the patient: it was as if she had to go to the maternity ward on Vesnina Street by law. If I put in another maternity ward without papers, according to the rifles she would be placed together with VD patients. If something happened I would be held responsible: why hadn't she gone to the proper, place? All this delayed the search, but I continued it slowly. It seemed to me that there was plenty of time.

July 5 was Mother's birthday. Seated in her bed, Mother received visitors. Then she sat at a table outside. Anh kept drawing something, paying no attention to the guests although the famous lyrical poet and singer Bulat Okudzhava whom she admired and had wanted to meet for a long time.

"What are you drawing?"

It turned out that she was drawing a plan for how to arrange the furniture in her new flat. Finally Anh had started to make a nest, while she had reproached me for building the country house!

We had let the sick-nurse go a while ago. Li and I took care of Mother, and the Russian nurse looked after the girls, and they cooked together with Anh. At the end of Mother's birthday the nurse left for her day off. I spent the night near Mother, and Anh and Li were in the house with the girls. The telephone enabled Anh to keep in touch with me and summon me if need be. In the night she dialled the phone. I woke up and asked: "It's starting?" Dialling with difficulty, I called an ambulance from Troitsk and from Moscow, from the 4th Department (the agency responsible for medical services to leading Party and government personel). When I had finished arranging for the Moscow ambulance, the Troitsk ambulance was already standing at the gate with its headlights on. The doctor said: "We can only take her to Podolsk." "What nonsense."

We took Anh to Moscow and arrived at Maternity Ward 25. It was closed for repairs. Only a doctor was on duty. She examined her and said:

"There's still time."

And she called an ambulance, referring to Anh's paper from the 4th Department where Anh's medical record was kept, and we nevertheless drove to Vesnin Street.

A most rare concurrence of circumstances: my gynaecologist disappeared, the maternity ward was closed. It was fate that brought us to Vesnin Street. The maternity ward, like the out-clinic and chemist's shop, was in an ordinary house with no sign on it. I didn't allow Anh to walk, although the doctor said she could. I explained:

"She had a foreboding."

We carried her in. The doctors examined her. Everything was all right. I wanted to wait in the reception room. But suddenly I realized that Mother was alone in the small house. The doors were not locked. Li spoke no Russian. If the ambulance arrived, it might frighten Mother. I found a taxicab and rushed back to the country house. Everything was quiet. The ambulance had not come. Why? And what would have happened if I hadn't called one from Troitsk?

A boy was born at 7 a.m. I telephoned:

"How's the baby?"

"Fine."

"How's the mother?"

"Come and see the doctor, he'll tell you."

My car wasn't working. I rushed to my neighbor. He said:

"Don't worry, relax. We'll go in a second."

"Easier said than done."

We raced into Moscow. Vesnin Street is one-way, but we drove against the traffic. I burst into the ward. The doctor was occupied.

"We can't say anything."

Then the doctor came down.

"Hemorrhage. We've all contributed blood. The bleeding has been stopped by clamping veins. More blood is being brought."

"Is her life in danger?" I couldn't recognize my voice.

"We're fighting for her life."

Anh and I were always fearful that happiness would end, that something would happen. It was a superstitious feeling. We clutched for happiness with both hands. It was only recently that the tension had begun to abate for me, I relaxed and let myself go into a fairy tale. Waking up in the morning I asked myself: could this be me?

The girls were also happy. Their faces were happy even in their sleep. We couldn't believe that it would last. I didn't deserve it.

Now, when there was a real threat, I refused to believe that Anh might die. I stood in the courtyard and heard a woman talking with her husband through the window about a French exhibition of paintings.

I asked the nurses:

"How is she?"

"We don't know, wait for the doctor."

Finally, one nurse felt sorry for me and whispered:

"Everything's all right, a brilliant operation. She'll come through.

"Thank you so much. From the bottom of my heart. Thank you for my heart."

I went to find out the situation from other doctors. They said the uterus had to be cut out. A simple and effective operation, but it had to be done immediately.

I returned and waited. Then the Volga cars began to arrive. Something was carried in. I felt it was for Anh. Two more young men were carrying something.

"Hey boys, what is it, please help us!"

"We're only the blood transfusion unit," said one of them but the expression on his face was: damn it all, what if we don't manage it!

A man wearing a state prize medal arrived. Three more men drove up. Everyone remained silent. I felt it was bad.

A man, not young, with a kind and worried face appeared.

"It's the chief surgeon of the 4th Department," the reception nurse whispered.

Helping him put on slippers, I begged hopelessly:

"Please help, cut out the uterus. We don't want any more children."

He replied with sympathy:

"We'll do everything we can."

Then they began to leave. First the three. Then the man with the medal. I rushed to him:

"Is she dying?"

"Only a young organism gives us hope."

I ran out and for some reason took a taxicab to her sister's. I told the driver:

"My wife is dying."

We drove up to her house. The daughter of my friends skipped along joyfully. She was happy to see me. I said:

"Anh's dying."

She fled in horror. Anh's sister appeared.

"Something wrong with your mother?"

"Anh is dying."

"Anh?!"

We raced back to the maternity ward. She telephoned the embassy, and as she talked, the doctor came down:

"She's passed away. Nothing could help. But you said she had a premonition."

They poured me half a glass of some liquid.

I gulped it down automatically and asked to see her. They let me in.

She lay there gentle and beautiful. The dead princess. She was never more beautiful. And no one was more beautiful. I kissed her hand which hung down, lifted the arm. My God! Her entire body was as if it had been scalded with boiling water: it was bluish-crimson, covered with blisters. At that moment, two hospital attendants who had apparently been waiting rushed in and dragged me away.

A LEGACY OF CHILDREN

*And this voice is yours. For its meaningless sound
I will give you my life and sorrow,
In my dream your familiar ephemeral hand
I will press to my lips till the morrow.*

Alexander Block

I was not permitted to see Anh any more. Only at the cremation ceremony which, for some reason, only took place ten days later (the body was embalmed). Either her father had come secretly or it was expected that he would but he couldn't. Without even showing me the urn, they sent the ashes to her father, contrary to the law. Her mother flew in immediately.

I was stricken by a redeeming case of influenza, bedridden in the tiny room with loop holes next to Mother, taking large amounts of sleeping pills and sedatives. Events, facts, arrivals of people have become blurred in my memory. Once I woke, my heart beating madly. With shaking hands I drank some heart drops. She was poisoned! Her skin and subsequent events. Poisoned.

It was me who had taken her to that maternity ward. It was me who had refused to believe Anh and insisted that a nurse be sent from their country. It was me who had failed to arrange everything in time with my gynaecologists. It was me who had relaxed and revelled in happiness. I could have prevented all this.

Everything focused clearly in my mind, like a mathematical proof. Amazing that I had not understood it before. The "Fourth Department" is a classified agency, everything in it is veiled in secrecy. Even when I had photographed Lena in the children's clinic, I was summoned and "interviewed". And if in ordinary, "open" psychiatric clinics doctors carry out the orders of political authorities, here such practices must be even more common. Since at the present time undesirable and dangerous officials are no longer executed, there must be a mechanism for their secret assassination. Rumors had circulated about general Beriuzov and Politbureau member Masherov, killed in automobile accidents. A person connected to the system from a city near Troitsk had warned a friend of mine: don't associate with Maslov, you risk death in an automobile accident. A prearranged traffic accident is a tricky thing, while it's so simple to wink meaningfully at a trusted doctor of the Fourth Department! That's why the medical personnel of the Department is so poorly qualified: "genius and evil are incompatible". In fact, all government officials in disfavor ("pensioned off") are under the attentive surveillance of Fourth Department doctors. And if the official in disfavor becomes dangerous - if there are forces backing him or he wants to expose someone or whatever, then what? Who, in our days, is to calm him down? The retired official lives in a huge dacha, strolls in the backyard, never walking beyond the fence, rarely takes rides in his chauffeured car. Whom should he fear above all? The system is organized so that the Fourth Department can be avoided only by surreptitiously running away from it, as the famous airplane designer Yakovlev did when he had appendicitis. And why did Stalin fear his doctors so much? Because he knew that some doctors can carry out orders. Of course the leading medical authorities are not involved, although they eventually sign the post-mortem. I knew all this. I knew how the medical bulletins about Stalin's health were still being signed after he had already died.

If somebody among the people monitoring Le Zuan had convinced their superiors that Anh's death was advisable, the sequel was predictable and simple, someone probably even received a bonus for a job well done. That is why I was not allowed to see her for 10 days. And when I told Mazurin that in an ordinary maternity ward such a death would be qualified as criminal and require an investigation, his answer clearly implied that any action on my part in this connection would be meaningless.

All the small and substantial facts gathered into a single word, pulsing in my mind: "poisoned..."

Later I was told that blood vessels burst in a hemorrhage. Subsequently I met the chief surgeon of the 4th Department. I asked him how it happened. He answered that when' a person is in good health, it is "difficult psychologically to undertake an operation. The doctors were not morally ready for it.

"I'm not an expert in the field, however," he added.

Apparently the people summoned were not experts but high officials to draw up the papers and sign the postmortem results.

During my illness Mazurin called me, he had just returned from grandfather. The latter was stunned, had wept and said:

"I must help my son-in-law. We'll take the youngest children."

I retorted:

"By no means!"

I remember what Mazurin said at the funeral. He pointed out that Anh had been a remarkable wife and explained it as follows. When she went to a shop with him, she never bought anything for herself, but chose something for her husband on Mazurin's advice, although she said that her husband wanted her to buy this and that for herself.

The grandmother, a lady of about 55, mourned with me. We felt very close them. She had made friends with Mother earlier and looked after Tatiana. Both spoke French. Then Mother grew displeased with her arrogance and behaved rather dryly with her. The grandmother was a bit afraid of Mother but was very peremptory with the nurses and servants generally.

I gave her Mother's pearl necklace which had been nourished by the warmth of Anh's body. She said she would wear it until her granddaughters grew up. And judging from photographs, she did indeed wear it all the time.

She darned my ripped linen, looked after the girls. Once at the table she said:

"It'll be difficult for you with the children . Would you like us to take them for a while."

I replied:

"Impossible. I have no reason for living without them."

"Only for a short time. The younger ones. They'll live in good conditions for a while."

"It's out of the question. Come to Moscow more often."

I kept back the fact that Anh had died from Mother and the children. But apparently Mother had understood something or heard it and suffered a second stroke. I had her placed in a separate room of the country hospital and hired a sick-nurse. But I felt that it was hopeless.

Grandmother begged me to let her take the girls to Moscow with her. I knew it would support her, but I couldn't remain without them myself and slept in their room. Finally the interpreter persuaded me to let Tatiana go for one night. Tatiana left with the nurse Li. They promised to bring her back in the morning.

But they didn't bring her back. I telephoned.

"Grandmother is busy," I was told. "They'll bring her back when she's free."

I had to go visit Mother all the time. Her condition was deteriorating.

Tatiana was not brought back for two days. At this point I began to suspect something. Their maid had been sent to take away Anh's things, since her sister wore the same size. As I saw it, the Russian nurse and maid was terribly jealous and decided to take something for herself so they would not get everything.

"They rule a state, but steal rags," the nurse murmured.

And the nurse told me:

"They also stole children's clothes."

I took no notice of the fact, too many things were happening. Now it dawned upon me: what did they need children's clothes for?

They've kidnapped my daughter: that's what they needed the clothes for!

I called the maternity ward.

"How's the child?"

"Doing well."

"Can I take the child?"

"No, we're transferring him to the hospital and can't give him to you."

"I'll come and take the birth certificate."

"Please do."

The grandmother, an experienced Underground agent, who had worked among enemies masquerading as a Chinese, intended to kidnap the children. I must take myself in hand and not relax.

A large picture of my wife stands on the piano in my study. It seems that Anh is looking at me from the portrait wherever I am in the room. I was walking round the room, pondering over the situation, and Anh was looking at me. Multiplying my strength.

I telephoned grandmother's quarters:

I had to find out the address. The interpreter answered the call.

"How's Tatiana?"

"She's all right. Grandmother is busy now, there's a reception."

"Tatiana's out walking?"

"Yes, of course."

"She's not used to Moscow air."

"She's walking with Li along the embankment and in the city park."

In this way I found out that her quarters were in a house I knew only too well.

Then I rushed to a colleague of mine who knew French and we set out on his car. I went to the house-management office. Grandmother's telephone number was not listed. There was no such phone in the house. Had the interpreter deliberately misled me?

I rushed about (a detective with a beating heart). It turned out that there was a flat for foreigners. That must be it.

We went up. I told my accomplice (he was already my accomplice without knowing it):

"As soon as they open the door, I'll put in my foot so they can't shut it."

A quiet and polite man, he realized that he was being involved in an adventure. He submitted but with a certain amount of fear.

I rang the bell. The lock clicked open and we walked right in. Two ladies, riot very young and rather short, blocked the way in the enormous hallway. Politely, in a friendly manner and rather sadly I explained who I was. They brightened up:

"Please come in."

They eyed me with curiosity and sympathy. My accomplice remained in the hallway.

I entered the dining room. An enormous table was set with bottles and glasses. The first impression was that of a reception. But grandmother with Tatiana on her knees and Lbov facing them were the only ones at the table. The rest were maids and nurses bringing in something. Lbov was the only man, all the others were women.

Tatiana was stiff. She failed to react to my arrival. Lbov and grandmother watched me inquisitively - I had interrupted their conversation.

But a lady -the chief of the Russian domestic servants - offered me a seat. I sat down and declined to have any vodka or food. Only mineral water.

I explained:

"Mother's dying (my appearance supported the fact). She's running a temperature of 40. It's the end."

Lbov tried to be sympathetic:

"It happens to everyone sooner or later."

"Mother wants to see Tatiana for the last time."

They talked in Viet-Nameese. I don't know what they said. But it seemed to me that claws appeared from grandmother's fingers. A scene from Gogol. I said:

"It is absolutely necessary, you must understand. When Mother dies, if Grandmother permits, I'll bring the children for several days so they don't see the body. Until the funeral."

Lbov:

"Of course. There's no doubt about it. They will be well taken care of."

They spoke in Viet-Nameese again. Lbov obviously felt sorry for me and persuaded Grandmother. He had been deceived by my maneuver. However, the situation was quite natural for normal relations of kin.

I couldn't stand it any longer and got up: "You know, unfortunately I can't wait for long. There's a car waiting downstairs. Mother might die."

Finally she let go of the child. We left the lunchroom. My accomplice stood at the door. I introduced him to Lbov: my interpreter. The accomplice mumbled in embarrassment:

"Please convey my best wishes to Madame, etc.," although he could have said it to her directly. Without replying to the greetings (they were acquainted, he had already interpreted for her one and a half years before), she disappeared in the bedroom. As if an idea had struck him abruptly Lbov looked at me, at my accomplice, eyeing him from head to foot, frankly. The nurse said to me:

"Have a rest in the living room, we'll change Tatiana." "I'll help you."

I kept Tatiana within my sight all the time, helping dress her, getting on my knees, picking her up and carrying her out, wet from my tears which were flowing although I had spoken quite calmly.

I went to visit my poor mother. She was lying alone, the sick-nurse was not there. I gave her some water. She drank it greedily. She looked at me with such gratitude and love. It was her last glance. I was not with her in the last hours.

I returned in the morning: she had passed away. I took the body to the country house.

The grandmother arrived with the interpreter, to show her last respects to my mother. She said:

"You promised to give me the children."

"I organized it so they would not see the body. And the girls do not feel well. So it's out of the question."

She asked:

"When is the funeral? I want to come."

"What for? It's only additional stress for you. You've paid your last respects."

"I was very fond of your mother and respected her. I want to come."

I explained to the interpreter when and where the funeral would be. Meanwhile I thought to myself: would grandmother come to the country house at that time to kidnap the children?

Tatiana fell ill. She had a temperature of 40. She was lying in Mother's room in the garage. Grandmother demanded that she be sent back, allegedly because I couldn't have her taken care of properly. But the doctor visited the child every day. I asked him to call grandmother and assure her that the child was being cared for.

For the time of the cremation I sent Yelena to my friend's house, and locked Tatiana with a relative in the room at the garage. I told them not to open if grandmother were to come. The nurse was ordered to say that the children had been sent to friends. But no one believed that grandmother might come.

I must have had second sight. Grandmother arrived during the cremation. She said she had mixed up the place. She rushed through the country house and left in a fit of anger. Later she said:

"How could you send Tatiana somewhere when she was ill? Not to me but to some strangers."

"I didn't send her anywhere, she was home." "She was nowhere to be found."

" "You know, there's a room at the garage. I put her there so she would not inflect Yelena."

"I tried the door, it was locked."

"You should have lifted it slightly and pressed harder, it's a tight door."

"And where was Yelena?"

"Yelena was with a girl relative, I took her to the neighboring community so she wouldn't see the coffin."

"But your nurse said that the girls had been taken away."

"She was referring to the latter two girls only." The question was settled. Now Yelena and Tatiana could be taken away only over my dead body.

* * *

One day Anh's sister arrived exuberant. Father had been elected once again! It had been rumored that he would be demoted to chairman. It's wonderful!

But I thought that it would now be even more difficult for me to fight for Anton.

At the maternity ward he did not yet figure as my son. I had taken out the birth certificate and waited for him to be transferred to the Kuntsevo Hospital so that when the ambulance entered the hospital gates he would be registered according to the birth certificate. I managed to have this done. They missed their chance. The question of Anton did not raise any doubts from the outset, and if he were transferred not under my name, which was easy to do, it would have made his kidnapping from the hospital much easier. I was not allowed to take him, allegedly because of his state of health. But without my permission the hospital did not have the right to let anyone else take him. As a legal person the hospital was held responsible for a child's disappearance. But, of course, this was a special hospital and the head physician did not submit to usual laws and did not have to fear the responsibility. Anton was in the hospital already, and the officials thought he was still at the maternity ward.

I made arrangements for a wet-nurse, an unmarried mother, with excess milk to live at my place. I could pay her by selling my library.

Other possibilities were discussed with friends.

Three nurses were on duty with Anton in turn. I came, took him out in a carriage for a walk, but the nurse would not leave us for a second. I said:

"It's raining, have a rest. I'll walk with him alone."

Apparently the instructions were strict: they refused to leave the child even for an instant. I knew there were large holes in the hospital fence, it was very easy to pass the child through them. Of course, it would be impossible to hide from such a company, but it would be very difficult to take the newborn from me. Naturally I did not want to wash dirty linen in public, but if the newborn were kidnapped from home, it would be possible to hush up the scandal! It was something that would not improve matters. If the scandal were to break out it would be all the same for the Soviets: they could take away all the children, saying to the grandmother that I had gone mad from grief. But this was not a very good solution either.

Grandfather and I had too many acquaintances in common, children of their leaders, students and researchers. But the grandmother would not allow them to make orphans of his grandchildren. Grandfather had ordered something (or had he?), grandmother was writing something to him, keeping him informed. Someone was reading the letters, wiretapping, compiling reports - and decisions were taken at some level. I had to guess about all this in time, or some faulty decision would be adopted at a sufficiently high level. They'll try to make up for their faults, but they'll show up in other places. As a result, it'll be worse for everyone.

"Let me speak directly to grandfather."

"Don't even dream of it."

Officials came to persuade me. Then Mazurin arrived. He said:

"All right, we'll leave the girls, you've become attached to them, but give them the boy."

"But the grandfather said, 'we must help him' doesn't mean 'we must take the child away'."

"No, he said, we must take him away. Let him leave for two years, then he'll return. You can visit him in their country."

Then he added confidentially:

"When Anh was still alive, and grandfather was meeting you-know-who here, I was alert all the time, afraid that grandfather would ask, and the question be settled. They would take away Anh and Yelena."

It turned out that we were in great danger. Or perhaps he was only attempting to intimidate me in concealed form?

"All right, I agree. But let the boy grow stronger first. He'll live here, and I'll let him go at about eight months."

"Of course, he must grow strong first. But the conditions are not right here. He'll grow stronger in the hospital and then we'll send him off."

"Only the question concerning the state of his health must be decided by a professor whom I trust. He is a consultant at the hospital."

Once I visited grandmother. I asked the matron quietly:

"How long is grandmother expected to stay here?"

"Until she takes one the children, I guess."

The interpreter told me privately:

"You must understand that she does everything according to instructions from her husband."

I could see the interpreter was not lying, she really thought so. But it could be that grandmother had convinced her that this was so. The interpreter rather sympathized with me. I recall how grandmother once said:

"You must pay nurse Li, whom I am taking away, for a month of work and her ticket back."

In response to my perplexed glance (Anh had said nothing about payment for the ticket, and they had arranged the nurses of Anh's sister to be paid as if they were on business trips):

"The terms are in the contract I signed with her."

"And where's the contract?"

"It's at home."

"Of course I'll pay. But the contract was for three years."

"The contract was in Anh's name, but she's no longer with us. That's why I'm taking the nurse away."

"Here's a month's pay, as to the ticket I won't be able to pay for it at this moment."

I told the interpreter:

"Tell me where and when I must pay for the ticket." I remember she had gaped at grandmother's words. Then she had said it was a misunderstanding.

Thus, having considered everything, I decided not to refuse but to delay until grandfather arrived. Then we would see.

A certain Saranchev called me, he was an official from the Ministry for Interior Affairs.

"Give us your permission to let your son go in half a year. Meanwhile we'll do the paperwork."

"I don't see the point. When you need it, you'll get the papers in order in one day."

He kept calling me. Finally I asked:

"Renuald Ivanovich, do you have a son?" In an unexpectedly happy voice, he said:

"My son's just been born."

"Well, why don't you sent him?"

I thought I heard him choke at the other end. He stopped calling. However, the plot thickened two months later. I began to understand that they had to send off the child before a certain deadline. Therefore, a decision must have been made at some level. They'll write him into grandmother's passport and send him off.

Mazurin told me:

"If you refuse to give permission immediately, we'll report it to your place of work and things'll be very bad for you. Grandmother complained that you showed disrespect to her not only as the wife of a high official but also as a woman (I wondered what that meant). Moreover, all your conversations are known to me. You will be held responsible for them. And I know all the options, for example, the Korean one."

"Excuse me, but grandmother is not the wife of a high official for me but my mother-in-law. And I respect her greatly. As to my conversations, don't intimidate me. I could have said nothing reprehensible. Could I have a word with your first deputy?"

"You can write to anyone you wish, but you won't get to talk to anyone."

As to the option of getting Anton from the hospital, I did indeed consider a Korean option. Where had he learned about it? But since he said that I could write to anyone, this meant that my son had been taken away from me. The question had been settled.

I went to grandmother. I angrily told her about my talk with Mazurin. She denied nothing and said:

"I'm leaving on such and such date. You can give permission or not. I must be back in my country."

"But the professor said that the child was not well enough yet."

"I am responsible for the health of the child."

She was not persuading me and spoke calmly. It was obvious that the decision had been taken.

I visited my son, pushing the carriage under the vigilant surveillance of the nurses. They would take him away and refuse to return him while grandfather was alive. But at least I needed papers so I could appeal to a court later.

I sought the advice of lawyers. Then I went to see Saranchev at the Ministry of Interior Affairs and wrote permission for them to take Anton for two years³.

The child was taken away by plane in a separate compartment with a nurse. There were stops in India and somewhere else. Doctors were ready at these places.

On the same day that Anton's plane arrived at its destination, grandfather set out for Moscow. Of course I had not known of this ahead of time. So that was the date and the reason for the rush.

But why? Why couldn't the child be taken back in a week on grandfather's direct flight? What was the logic?

Grandmother's logic was clear. What if grandfather decided on the spot that if the father objected so strongly, why not leave the child? But the Soviet side? Shhh! You understand, international affairs.

The child's passport was not shown to me. But I pulled it out of the pile of papers on the desk of the young frontier guard at the airport and photographed all the pages. Then I put it back (Fool! I should have taken it, as I learned later.) My friend made pictures of the whole departure. A lawyer advised me to send money to support the child and keep the receipts. I said it was not fitting to send money. Then he suggested sending parcels of things worth a certain sum. I did send parcels which all returned and were left at the post office. I received notices about their return all the time. I did not take back the parcels so as to have substantial evidence in the direct sense of the word. But I only paid for the delivery of the parcels to their country. Who paid for their delivery back again?

* * *

Such coincidences do occur! I slept badly, took sleeping pills. I would wake up in the night, listen to English broadcasts, and then fall asleep again. Once I switched on the radio and happened to hear, very badly, a program in Russian . Radio Liberty was transmitting an article from the Los Angeles Times. My heart beat when I heard my name. They said that a prominent Moscow.

Subsequently (more about this below), grandmother said that Anton had already been written into her passport by the Soviet officials. I don't know whether this was the truth.

scientist had married the daughter of a Communist leader, Anh Le Zuan, better known in Moscow as Ania Maslova. This was all inexact: Zuan could not be part of Anh's last name (it was her father's first name) and the "better known Ania" was apparently due to a mix-up with my own half-sister Ania, who was indeed well known in some Moscow circles.

The garbled version of events continued. There had been a gross medical blunder, and the grandfather had taken away the grandson. This was followed by a list of other mistakes made by doctors at the 4th Department.

Still sleepy, I didn't understand all they said. I called friends, one had heard the program and said it would be repeated.

I tried to catch Radio Liberty for a whole week and failed.

Meanwhile, I had trouble at my job. I called Mazurin:

"What's going on?"

"Nothing at all. But I have the Los Angeles Times and Paris Match (I hadn't known what the latter had written about me) in front of me. It's about you."

"But why do you blame me?"

"Shouldn't talk so much."

"I'm not one of those who gain publicity by such means. My friends and acquaintances have nothing to do with it either. They all know my wife's name and who took away my son. And they don't know anything about the other medical mistakes. And keep in mind that my marriage would have been sensational news for

the journalists. However, nothing ever reached the foreign press. So we have nothing to do with it all."

* * *

After this I was seriously ill for a long time, but pulled through. When I was bedridden at home I looked after the children, with the nurse and tutoress Flora Ivanovna to whom I had made my Moscow flat available. I didn't tell the children that Anh had died, but they told everyone: "We've got no Mother". Yelena became quite grown-up all of a sudden. She took me aside and whispered:

"Did they bury Mother?"

When I had to stay at the hospital for a long time she made up tragic verses about mother. She would wake up in the morning and recite them. Here, for example, is a poem sent to me in the hospital and, perhaps, revised by Flora Ivanovna:

*Our teacher plays with us
But we are a little sad
That the lighted ambulance
Drove away with our dad.*

*I'm so happy, so is Tania
That we've bought a little boy
But they've flown him to Viet-Nam
And he's not ours to enjoy.*

*We sometimes kiss our mother
On the picture on the wall
But she never climbs out
From the picture frame at all.*

It was about the portrait which always looked at me. The girls and I kissed it.

There was a moment when I saw on the doctor's face that she thought I would die. But I knew I would pull through. I simply had to survive.

I had a constant feeling of anxiety: what would happen with the children if I were also... It was a burden I could not shake off.

And I had another burden: the fear that Anh's image would disappear with me. Now I have gotten rid of that burden. I draw her face like an Icon-painter. I do not leave it on a canvas but on paper, turning myself inside out before the Orthodox world.

I am not a believer, even deep down. Moreover, I am a materialist and a determinist in science. I think that religion slowed down the progress of science. But I would have liked to have been a believer: it would have helped me survive my sorrow. I would not have fallen so seriously ill and would not have written this confession, but would have confessed to a priest. Faith helps in misfortune, and religious rites also help. The ritual of the lament and weeping make it easier. But faith is not the most important thing.

The most important thing is Anh's grave. A place where one can go, take care of the flowers, where a monument can be set up, where one can have mental conversations and report. The children and I do not have such a place. A vague belief that I will also be buried here, nearby. Something like a dream of reunion after death.

And the grave must be in a cemetery, not separate from others. Because that is our common human grief, common like love and pity for children. Everyone must see the monument and the inscription.

For me perhaps, Anh's face has been imprinted on the towel that touched her face. But others do not see it. That is why I have done something no one has done before in this form: written a confession, described my spouse's life with me and her life in me and the children.

It is difficult to display one's sorrow in public, as Anh's mother did when she cried and beat her head against the coffin at the crematorium. It was not fitting to behave thus in front of strangers, even from our standpoint. Only a person who doesn't even know where his beloved wife's grave is and cannot go there might understand my impulse, the desire to erect a monument without defaming the confession by falsehood. I have now, again, fallen ill after describing all this. It is difficult for me to cry in front of everyone, as I did in the confession, but I knew then, in the hospital, and later, that I would do it.

* * *

After two months in the hospital I returned home prematurely. At the hospital I was visited by Anh's sister, who, having spoken with the doctor, learned that I was supposed to stay there for a long time. Only I returned home on the next day: a police captain, a lady, appeared with instructions to have the children placed in a children's home.

It was a simple idea. The Soviet authorities that safeguard the interests of children would display vigilance and put the children into a state home. Then, according to law, relatives are contacted to learn whether anyone wishes to take the children. It would turn out that grandfather and grandmother did. And the children would be sent to them. Father returns from the hospital, and where are the children? Then they could say:

"Very sorry, it was a mistake. The local educational and police authorities were overzealous. But nothing bad happened, the children are in the hands of relatives."

I took the paper from the police lady and photographed it. (Later she called me: "Please promise not to show anyone the copy, otherwise I'm lost".)

The paper was sent from a section of the Executive Committee of the District Soviet to the superintendant of the District Education Board and chief of the District Police Department: "According to Article 306 of the Code of the Russian Federation we request you to consider the possibility of placing the children in state homes". The deputy chairman of the Executive Committee signed for the section head, while actually a lower-ranking official is supposed to sign in such cases. The paper was rushed through four offices, and the outgoing number was registered later than the signature. The final resolution read: "Comrade Kravchuk, jointly with the District Education Board, take measures to place the children."

However, I was already home, so first some article of the Criminal Code had to be applied against me, and only then could the children be taken away.

It is not to be assumed that were I not at home, the children would have been taken away. The nurse who lived with us was sufficiently intelligent to explain to the unsuspecting police tap-tain that the case was not so simple. And she would not have let the children be taken away for anything in the world. I called from the hospital

continually, so I would have learned about the fact immediately. Therefore, this absurd action would have failed anyway.

Now if the children would have been in a kindergarten, then they would have taken the children away.

* * *

Generally, given my position, an enormous role was played by nurses. The problem of getting a nurse to look after the children! Anh and I had a lot of troubles with nurses. We found excellent, ideal nurses, but a short time later they became terrible: tyrannized Anh, grew more insolent and even abused us. With me the nurse became the mistress of the house, a member of the family.

I immediately disliked the first nurse my friends recommended for being meddlesome, nervous and displaying an elated Young Pioneer spirit:

"Girls, let's run. Come here! Forward, etc."

Anyway I hired her. She was way beyond fifty, received a pension, but appeared to be no older than 35 unless closely examined. But due to this incongruity, her appearance was rather unpleasant. She ate only raw food, but prepared it for a long time, carefully and the result was quite delicious. She walked barefooted, slept on the floor sprinkled with rubbish. The first night I heard a trampling noise. In the morning I asked:

"What was that pounding in your room?"

"I was running in place."

When she was at home I asked her to put something on her feet. In the wintertime she took off what she didn't need and the traces of bare feet on the snow made passersby recall that my stepfather (the former owner of the country house) was the definitive authority on the Abominable Snowman.

The nurse did not know how to do anything, but worked intensely, continually breaking dishes. She didn't believe in drugs and medicine, only fasting. On her day off she fasted, and when she returned the next day, she would eat only fruit. She told me that a large amount of fruit had the effect of a laxative on her.

She was relatively well bred and argued all the time with me concerning the children's diet and treatment. At the table she actively interfered in conversation. To tell the truth, I could hardly stand her, and she reciprocated fully. She was a very expensive nurse: very good for the children, and lived with us for a long time. She taught them to go in for sports.

I could rely on that nurse fully: it was possible to take the children from her only by force. She had a circle of close friends with whom she went hiking. It was she who lived in the house when I was at the hospital. And she was there when I went to the Congress in Poland.

* * *

When I was still in the hospital, I received the news that I had been chosen to deliver a plenary report at the Congress. I decided to dedicate the report to Anh.

Like Olympic Games, international mathematical congresses are held once every four years. Several thousand mathematicians from all over the world come to the congress. The people who are to deliver section and plenary reports are chosen by secret ballot in what are known as panels. Each panel corresponds to a section, and

each section is devoted to one of the main branches of mathematics. The congress leadership appoints 7-8 of the most prominent experts in the given field to each panel, and these experts chose the people to deliver the approximately 25 section reports and to propose 2 plenary reports. Subsequently the consultative council approves most of the section reports chosen by the panels and selects the plenary reports from among the 11-12 proposed. According to an unwritten rule, a section report may be assigned, like the Nobel Prize, only once a lifetime. And being elected to make a plenary report is regarded as an extraordinary honor. I had earlier been chosen to deliver a section report, and now had been approved to make a plenary report.

The Congress Vice President from the Soviet Union, my friend Ludvig Faddeev, only said that the members of the consultative council requested that I make the report simpler to understand. It was known that my lectures were not easy to understand and also that I did not lecture very well.

However, since I decided to devote the report to Anh, I had to prepare for it properly. The idea was to set forth everything I had done in mathematics during our life together, when she was my source of inspiration.

This was also a chance to pass from one category to another in mathematics. There were cases when the repercussions from a brilliant report delivered at the Congress lifted a mathematician to another level. And although it was clear that the balance of power in the struggle for the children would remain unequal anyway, I had no right to ignore the possibility of raising my prestige in scientific circles, which the authorities would be forced to take into consideration whether they liked it or not. I conceived the report in the hospital, then wrote it at the country house. This activity restored my strength. I thought that when I would recite the dedication, the projector would show her picture on the screen, and if there would be two projectors, the picture would remain on the left side of the screen for the entire time. I reread and recited aloud the famous speech by Dostoyevsky at the opening of the monument to Pushkin. It was a brilliant speech which fired the imagination of the listeners. He read the text. But the impression was that it had been written the night before in one sitting: so fresh was the inspiration, so great was the rush of thoughts and emotions.

In delivering reports I occasionally experienced inspiration, but only provided the results I described were quite new, I was elated by them, and my interest in them had not waned. And that inspiration affected the audience, although it made the report rather muddled. But in such cases I communicated with a small audience, they asked questions and I offered improvised answers which were shaped even before the question had been finished.

However, here, the results were not new, the audience large, and I had to read a text, rehearsing it many times so as to make it exactly one hour, not more and not less. When one knows the text very well, it is easy to fall into a stupor, reading automatically and thinking about something else. The audience would immediately sense it. In order to seize the attention of the audience, I had to behave as if the results were fresh for me, as if I had written the report the previous night, and my interest in it had not waned. In other words, like an actor, I had to assume my role, invent and learn the intonations listening to my speech replayed on a tape recorder. Even my girls probably learned the report by heart, amused by the sight of their father learning his part.

Additionally I wanted to excuse myself for the poor English translation of my book which I had edited, and for my poor English pronunciation.

All this demanded a lot of work, and occasionally I got up at night to change some phrase. Hardly any of the other participants prepared so carefully for their report.

As I said, the Congress was to be held in Poland. The Polish authorities requested that the Soviet side send all its participants, because there was a danger that the Americans would boycott the Congress if they did not. Despite the fact, far from all the applicants were sent. In one case, a brother had been jailed for some offense, in another the paperwork had not been done properly to send an article abroad and so on. But most importantly, the Soviet mathematician V.I. Arnold, who was to make the other Soviet plenary report, was not allowed to leave the Soviet Union. He was given a bad reference by Moscow University. This could provoke a scandal. It would also harm me: if I went and he didn't, it would be an act of discrimination. Moreover, he was an old friend of mine, we had gone to the same school. The question was settled at the last moment. The Vice President of the Congress, Faddeev, called the "upper echelons" and vouched for Arnold's behavior in Poland, and he went with the 300 Soviet delegates. We occupied a whole train. Both he and I, as authors of the plenary reports, travelled with our prominent scientists and leaders. In Poland special facilities were given to the two of us. The American lecturers mostly came (why refuse the honor), but the reports were dedicated one after another to Polish dissidents.

Against this background, dedicating my report to Anh did not seem to be the proper thing to do. And I decided not to do it. Only to think about her, and, if the report were brilliant, my prestige among mathematicians would be enhanced, and this would be useful in my struggle for Anton.

My report was appointed for the fifth day, and I could still gain experience and take into account the mistakes of the previous lecturers. I invented a specific form for my report. I would read the report from the rostrum facing the audience, and not half-turned to the screen with a pointer as the others had done, so as to feel the reaction of the audience better and carry home my ideas better. And I would ask two scientists to assist me. One would point to the relevant formulas on the screen, and the other would operate the projector. And I decided to use both projectors. I told Dima Arnold, the other plenary lecturer:

"Let's assist each other," and explained my idea.

He replied:

"Of course I'll help you. But as for me, I'll do everything myself."

Arnold is one of the world's best lecturers and has the rare ability to explain ideas in popular form both on paper and orally. Moreover, he could speak English and French fluently and had lived for a time in France. For that reason, was more closely associated with foreign scientists and could be at ease with this audience.

When it was my turn to lecture, I made him put on a tie (which he couldn't stand) to cover his chest, and having read Dos-toyevsky's speech for inspiration again immediately before my report appeared in full dress on the stage of the enormous theatre where the congress was being held. (It was hot, and despite the air conditioning, the Americans lectured without jackets or even in T-shirts.)

The theatre was packed. For an instant the audience was surprised to see me on the rostrum with two more familiar scientists (I had not been abroad for over ten years and not taken part in international conferences) who also appeared and began to arrange something on the stage, exchanging comments.

I felt that I had stunned the audience with the power of my voice. Everyone was used to calmer and quieter lectures, and did not feel any contact with the listeners at the beginning. In the middle of the lecture the audience was enthralled. I caught my breath, made a small pause in dead silence. I leaned on the rostrum — I had not fully recovered and occasionally felt rather wobbly — realizing that real and not artificial inspiration had come to me. And I continued. The interest of the audience was growing: I had not reached the culmination yet. Finally, I rounded up. Through a mist I saw that Faddeev, the Vice President, and his friends in the first row were showing that it had been superb. I glanced at my watch: it had been exactly one hour. I lowered my voice abruptly:

"You can read all this in my book, translated into English as brilliant as the English you heard just now," I said sadly and seriously.

The joke relieved the tension. After the outburst of applause I was engulfed in a human sea. One rather short, grey-haired and prim man shook my hand enthusiastically and said with admiration:

"You're a real political orator. Reminded me of Hitler."

I recoiled from him and fell into the hands of a lady journalist who dragged me into a dark room where I mumbled something into the microphone. (Later I rewrote the text of the interview. It was published in the newspaper *Polityka* (which cannot be subscribed to in the Soviet Union) with three other interviews having to do with the Congress: with the President and two leading members of *Solidarity*.)

My "assistant", Arnold, decided to deliver his report in the same way and asked me and a pupil of his to assist him.

Following my first slip, I learned how to get rid of reporters. One young man, for example, barged into my hotel room in the evening accompanied by a pretty Polish girl. He explained:

"I brought, her along to help persuade you to give an interview."

I said:

"I've already given one. It would be improper to give any more. But there's the room of another Soviet lecturer along the hall. He'll be glad to oblige," I set him upon Arnold.

The journalist knocked on the door and no one answered. I said:

"He's hiding."

They watched his room for a long time, listening and spying through the keyhole, but there were no signs of life. They left, but before going the reporter said sadly:

"Tell him, he's just robbed a young man of 300 zloty." I conveyed these words to Arnold on the next morning at breakfast, not without spite. He was excited:

"I wasn't home, went swimming in the Vistula." The American who sat at our table asked: "Did you go to the evening report? It was an excellent lecture." "Why, I was the lecturer!"

"Really? I didn't recognize you on the rostrum." Of course, I was dressed up then, well groomed, but still. We discussed the lecture. It turned out that he had understood everything in a different way.

I recalled the terrible comparison of the grey gentleman. Was it really inspiration? Or the ecstasy of a pop-singer loudmouth who hypnotizes and carries away the audience for a short time? It was fortunate that I had not dedicated the lecture to Anh, saving her this time.

However, I had achieved my goal: later, despite strong opposition from the Central Committee of the Communist Party, I was elected member of the Academy of Sciences.

* * *

*I take out of my huge pants
A duplicate of something invaluable:
Look, read and envy me, for I am
A citizen of the USSR!*

V. Mayakovsky. Soviet passport

I returned to my girls, and directly the weakened yogi nurse left us, departing on a difficult hiking trip. I don't know what happened during the trip to her, but she disappeared from my sight.

I could not rely on other nurses as I had on her. Of course she also had her faults like most nurses, but they were the most innocent ones. The faults of the next nurse were rather of a different nature. The thing was that the next nurse was the retired chief of a personnel department, Alexandra Ivanovna Seleznova. In addition to the money factor, she was attracted by the opportunity of educating the grandchildren of a great man.

She set about the matter with great zeal, but whole days on end she would indulge in reminiscence in which the chief place was taken by an exaggerated cult of the application form.

"A detailed form presents a face in all its nakedness," she explained.

She spent a lot of time teaching the children to fill in forms long before they entered school. Formerly the forms were lengthy, marvellous, up to ten pages long! But at her last job, it was very bad, only 4 pages, so short one had to read them very attentively and only intuition helped her learn who the person behind the form was. Gradually the subject grew larger and more thrilling.

Indeed, it was a major problem. But only a real writer, a scribbler from the neighboring community would be able to give credit to the problem. Alexandra Ivanovna was living history, reflecting the evolution of the Form. Therefore it is impossible to describe her personality without dealing with the Form.

Once there was a point on the Form saying "Family background". Possibly, a citizen would write with steady hand:

Family background

cossacks

another person, looking at it, would hiss:
would sadly write the long expression:

"The bastard!" Still another person

Family background

hereditary honorary citizens

or shorter and more timidly:

in the faint hope that the officials would think that he was a nofbody and not from the former nofeility.

The years pass by, this point disappeared, and a different one appeared: "Did you or your relatives deviate from the Party line?"

Later it was: "Were you or your closest relatives in the occupation zone?"

However, the scribbler should not describe the second-rate citizens on whose form it was written that their relatives had been liquidated as a "kulak's servants", but rather those who hid the fact, failing to mention it on the form; their lives in constant fear of being exposed. Their efforts to prove by their entire life that it had not been. And a portrait of Alexandra Ivanovna scrutinizing the forms, defending the interests of the people.

I knew one person, a communist party member, who did not write on his form that he had been in German captivity and had escaped. When the Germans were shooting prisoners, he managed to roll down a gully and hide. I met him when fear of being exposed had altered his personality completely. Then he confessed his secret to the doctor under an anaesthetic during an operation. In my uncle's passport the year of his birth had been changed: this was due to the fact that during the revolution he had been a Cossack junior officer in a unit deployed in Persia, and his parents wanted to conceal the fact. I didn't know anything and asked him at his birthday celebration at what age he had graduated from military school. Although my uncle was on his deathbed, he became very worried. My cousin took me aside and explained everything. This was about ten years ago, when the relevant point in the form was no longer valid but nevertheless troubled him, a prominent scientist.

That is why I fully support Alexandra Ivanovna in advising people never to lie or gloss over facts on their forms. Write only the truth. None of these nob., lying only makes it worse. Look, read and envy me, for I am a citizen of the USSR.

An experienced chief of personnel will always spot where the applicant faltered, where he wrote a garbled version. Alexandra Ivanovna exposed quite a few people. She was particularly proud of her intuition. One short man, for example wrote in his form:

Where you a member of the
Communist Party?

No

Were you reprimanded, when and
for what?

never, for nothing

It was formally correct, but she sensed something, and it turned out that the frightened mouse of a man was not a "real Soviet patriot".

When she worked in an office near Moscow, one local drunkar.: applied for a job and on the form wrote:

Were you ever been elected to local
organs of power?

no

Location of the organ

same place as for everyone else

Quite instinctively she did not take him. Subsequently terrible

things were learned about him.

At her next to last job one totally bald man wrote:

Nationality	Ukrainian
What foreign languages do you know?	Russian

And also:

Color of hair	none
---------------	------

Having studied the form carefully, Alexandra Ivanovna made the following note in her book which she passed on to a younger replacement: "Wrote in Ukrainian, but actually must be a Pole!"

A tall brown-haired man overdid it:

Nationality	purely Russian
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Something a purely Russian person would never write about himself.

"You should examine the person visually too," Alexandra Ivanovna explained. "Pay attention to the nose. And whether he hasn't changed his last name to a better one."

"And what if he's changed it to worse?" As did one of my friends, after advertising in the papers: "Will exchange name Smirnov for two-room apartment."

Most probably, this lady would have discovered what I was concealing when I filled in the form for Anh at our wedding. Her distorted sense of responsibility would have exposed us.

In her own words, Alexandra Ivanovna was always polite and sympathetic with people whose forms did not give rise to suspicions, she always helped those who made mistakes due to inattentiveness or ignorance and corrected the forms. Now the inexperienced new chief could not explain properly to people, did not have the right approach, knowledge or skill. She was boorish to everyone without exception.

Yelena always answered her endless questions without hesitating.

"Your nationality?"

"I'm Russian."

"Whom do you love most at all?"

"Mother and Father."

"Your grandfather's nationality?"

"He's Viet-Nameese."

"Whom do you love most among Viet-Nameese?"

"Anton."

"Why?"

"Because of the photograph."

"What's the color of your eyes?"

"I'm dark eyed."

"Your address?"

"The country house."

"Your address?"

"7 Lesnaya Street."

I would add: "Our address is the USSR."

"What dish do you like most of-all?"

"A banana."

Then Tatiana would join in:

"The little green rug got into my eyes. I almost started to cry."

"Wait, Tatiana. Elen, what do you like best - cast or dogs?"

"I like everybody."

"Do you like Lenin?"

"Yes."

"Who was Lenin?"

"Well.. .Well, Lenin died. I've never seen him."

"Ever see him on a photograph?"

"When?"

"Whenever. Or on TV."

"Or on TV? I don't know, don't remember."

"What story do you like most of all?"

"The story about Mother."

"Which one?"

"About Mother. I don't know which one." Alexandra Ivanovna missed her work very much, which was why she didn't stay with us long. Recently someone broke the sugar-bowl, the last item in the set with rose circles which Alexandra Ivanovna had bought when she was trying to change our rather uncomfortable life at the country house to her liking. And the children also forgot the chief of personnel Alexandra Seleznova.

* * *

Then one of my acquaintances, publishing an add inviting a nurse, without suspecting it, wrote a text which was a concealed form of marriage proposal. The call was answered by the teacher Zoya Timofeyevna: arrogant nose, tall and imposing, a grenadier of a woman. And although the mistake was quickly discovered, she stayed with us for a long time, making raids against local prospective fiances from my fortress.

A suitor appeared immediately. He was the postman Yuri who had always left the mail in the box on the street, but suddenly began to bring it to the house, lingering here for increasingly long periods of time. Yuri was a tall old man — hollow cheeks and a hanging bourbon nose, who said whatever he thought, mumbling it under his nose. He could neither read nor think himself.

Zoya Timofeyevna gave little snorts of laughter, grew red, but on every occasion probed him: "Doesn't your old woman worry? Doesn't your old woman feed you?"

"She died a long time ago, the old woman," Yuri retorted and the teacher grew more docile.

All of a sudden Zoya Timofeyevna became active. She bought wallpaper and began to make repairs at the country house very quickly and skillfully. Yuri helped her and only shook his head:

"What a housewife!"

Yuri now ate porridge every day at our house. He would always produce a bottle of beer and pour himself a glass under the table. Zoya Timofeyevna did not approve of this:

"What a miser! He could offer me a glass sometime. I would refuse anyway." And she made sorties, seeking more suitable parties.

But when she was not there, Yuri left some sheets of paper with very standard frivolous verses:

*Rose are red, violets are blue
You must love me, as I love you
(What more does he want?)
I'm lonely for a word written by you
As the swallow longs for the blue.*

(A written answer did follow: "No word will come. For a good reason: I don't want to. But in Moscow I don't have time to be lonely from all sides.")

Yuri began to borrow a set of false teeth from a rich neighbor friend and grew notably bolder, unexpectedly displaying the qualities of a real village Casanova of the old times. He adjusted the false teeth with a fork mumbling:

"Gave me teeth that are too tight, damn Jew."

"He doesn't look like Yuri to me," Zoya Timofeyevna concluded once.

Surprisingly, she turned out to be right. I once heard her call him in a feminine voice: "Yuri!" and he laughed quietly, saying to himself:

"My name is Pavel Eliseevich."

Then he brought his passport to show it to Zoya Timofeyevna. It also showed it to me. I was dumbfounded: Pavel Eliseevich Tchegoliev. In the time I stared at this combination of names, recollections passed before me one after another.

His name coincided completely with that of a famous literary critic. The son of that literary critic, Pavel, a historian, was my father's friend, Mother and Father lived in his flat. Pavel was the author of an intelligent book which my stepfather wanted to quote and praise in his thesis, but his supervisor, the famous academician Tarle, had crossed out the paragraph, because Pavel, also a student of his, in fact his favorite student, had written a derogatory article about Tarle in Pravda after which the latter had been arrested (or rather he was arrested in connection with the case of the Industrial Party). Tarle was imprisoned for only a month and in the same cell as my grandfather. My grandfather, a prominent economist and academician, was the well known menshevik Piotr Maslov, famous for his polemic with V.I. Lenin on the agrarian question. Every night after the interrogation Tarle wept that he had incriminated someone. Grandfather asked to be separated from him.

Once a long time ago, when I was still a schoolboy, I came home with my friends to have lunch. A yellowed page lay on the dinner table. It was an old letter in exquisite handwriting addressed to a prince and signed Pecherin.

I guessed that the maid had been cleaning and had found it behind a cupboard. Pecherin was Herzen's contemporary who became a Catholic monk. Tchegoliev's father was known to have collected materials dating back to the age of Herzen and Ogarev, had stolen letters from the Imperial Archives which he himself was in charge of, hiding them in his cuffs. And his son probably gave the stolen letter to my father. I guessed nearly everything correctly, except that Pavel Tchegoliev had given the

letter not to my father, but to my stepfather, whom he also knew. It was lost. Now it had been found, and my stepfather later presented it to the Lenin Library.

"What did you see there?" asked Yuri smirking.

What had I seen? Lives, fates, interweaving of circumstances.

Finally, Zoya Timofeyevna visited Yuri's home to see what it was like. She returned quite glum. After that Yuri brought his last touching verses:

When you are together with me,

Then I am together with you,

When I am together with you,

Then you are together with me...

But Zoya Timofeyevna said:

"He's lying. Nothing of the kind happened. I don't want that scoundrel to be my rascal."

Having made a many-day-long sortie, Zoya Timofeyevna finally returned with a fiance. She introduced him to me, held a gala reception. The fiance was self-centered and decked out with medals, and I was polite to the point of sweetness. As to Yuri, he apparently spied on her, because he told me later about her bitterly:

"I've seen a lot of snakes, but this one's a real viper!"

And he even left his job. But Zoya Timofeyevna, unfortunately, continued to leave the house in search of a third, better man. So that she wouldn't leave the children for long, I would always tell her that the man she had brought had called in her absence. She stopped leaving. As soon as she went out the fiance called. Finally by this cruel trick I led her to go out to look for him, although she didn't know his address. He had gone somewhere, and she followed him. And disappeared.

Zoya Timofeyevna had profound, I would even say sacred, respect for herself. She subjected the children to her will completely, but never raised her voice, because it was always strict and overbearing. She put it into their heads that they loved her and smiled complacently when they timidly toadied with her.

* * *

Then there was Grandma Zina, a highly qualified nurse with a foxy face and conscientious attitude to the children and household chores.

Gradually, however, she began to regard herself as the mistress of the house, a close relative, mother-in-law, etc. To begin with, she brought her granddaughter to our house, a remarkably colorless girl who made a nuisance of herself. She came to my study, stood staring at me, asking questions from time to time.

I usually tried to settle all scientific and business matters without leaving the children. Everyone, even my senior colleagues, took my situation into consideration and came to my house.

Grandma Zina served them refreshments but grumbled after they left. Grandma Zina also hated my girl's friends, both girls and boys, and chased them out of the house angrily. She made sure they removed their shoes and didn't eat all the candies. The leader of the company, an older girl named Nadia decided to teach Grandma Zina a lesson. They worked out the plan carefully, drawing it on paper with color pencils: who would go into which room and who would call me so Nadia, could freely enter Grandma Zina's room. The plan was put into action and Grandma Zina's keys were stolen from her bag. Tatiana, a favorite of all the nurses and everyone

generally, hinted to Grandma Zina vaguely. Fortunately, Grandma Zina checked her bag before leaving for Moscow and noticed that the keys were not there! She immediately suspected the children and persuaded them to admit in a sweet voice. I couldn't believe that my children were capable of such an act. We looked for the keys until Tatiana said:

"Look in the garage."

The keys were found and then the children admitted the whole undertaking and showed us the plan. I was very angry, and Grandma Zina gazed at the plan in amazement and began to be seriously afraid of the neighborhood children.

"I'll be watching outside in the evening and Mash a will take a brick and smash my head!"

I was forced to prohibit all assemblies in the house for the time being.

Soon Grandma Zina began to spy on me, on the assumption that:

"I know all those men, they'll all the same."

"Grandma Zina, why do you pick up the receiver of the other phone when I'm talking, do you listen to what I'm saying?"

"It's my extinct," she explained, confirming my suspicions.

Apparently, it was her habit to spy on her son-in-law, "that damned wolf", from whose former wife she received letters of approximately the following content: "Maybe you can't stomach it, but the meanness done by your clever daughter Liza to our family has broken our life and made Volodya an orphan..." Grandma would be indignant, cursing and gesturing fiercely.

Some time later Grandma Zina would make scenes in the presence of guests.

As I said, I no longer drank any alcohol. I poured the guests brandy and myself tea. One couldn't tell the difference, and Grandma Zina looked reproachfully at me.

On another occasion I poured the guests vodka and myself water, saying that I no longer drank.

Grandma Zina suddenly commented sarcastically,:

"With some he drinks, with others he doesn't."

I didn't go to the theatre, concerts, receptions, birthdays, evening seminars, funeral feasts or other occasions. I was forgiven for this. I didn't even attend my scientific teacher's anniversary: on the next evening I dropped in to congratulate him. He was in the kitchen, grating himself some carrot:

"Want some?"

We ate carrots, and I offered him mineral water. I came home slightly later than usually. There ensued a real slum scandal. It is revolting, even to recall the way she compared me to some village widower drunkard.

"I know you men!"

I endured the whole scene, went into my room, lay down and wondered: "I'm living in the lower depth,!"

From then on Grandma Zina began to behave in an offensive way. The children were friends with a boy from a nearby house where Grandma Zina had worked earlier. The boy came with his mother who asked to use my phone. I offered her a chair. Grandma Zina pulled the chair away and said viciously:

"Site's no landlady, can just as well stand!"

The mother from next door told me over the phone:

"Grandma Zina is absolutely insane."

Grandma Zina overheard us:

She's criticizing me!"

The neighbor tried to reason with her.

"Maybe I'm in love with 'im!" the witch hissed.

I was forced to fire her, sighing in relief when she left. For the children this was another small tragedy. She was ideal for them.

* * *

Grandmother had told me that she would find a nurse for Anton who knew French. I also thought it would be useful for the girls to learn French, so they would understand Anton subsequently. I found an old Swiss lady who had married a Soviet a long time ago. She arrived in the community, and without looking for the street, immediately began to shout my name and patronymic. She just walked and barked it out. Finally a neighbor who knew me came out and showed her the way. She produced a very strong impression on him. She could hardly walk, her legs were bandaged, she was hunchbacked and appeared to be about 80. Yet she was perfumed.

Having come in she introduced herself:

"Madame Cecille. Keep in mind that I'm not a common woman. I used to have my own servants in the house. There's a lot of soul here (she hit herself in the chest with force). Why don't they value governesses in Russia?" and so on and so forth.

Then she told me how a charming young man had given up his seat to her in the bus. She wondered why he had done it:

"Or what, did he want to sleep with me?" she shrieked suddenly, leaving me gaping.

And she looked to and fro proudly. Then it turned out that this was her favorite expression which she always said in a shrill voice.

"You'll assign me a separate room, won't you? You don't want to sleep with me after all!"

Madame Cecille proved to be very agile, despite the fact that she could hardly move. Although she spent two hours on her morning toilet, she did everything in time. She taught the children good manners for their whole life. She cooked French food. Choking on the food (I'm no gourmand and prefer ordinary porridge), I praised her cuisine. One day she gathered some mushrooms valued in Switzerland and cooked them in sour cream. She did not eat them because she had a liver condition. I ate the whole lot fearing that the children would be poisoned. Then I looked in the encyclopedia to see what kind of mushrooms they had been. Outwardly they strongly resembled the most poisonous mushroom of all. A person who eats it dies forty hours later. I retched but was unable to vomit. I rushed to my neighbors. They went through the community and brought some disgusting liquid which I gulped down and felt ill. But at least I didn't die.

Madame Cecille was fond of Tatiana, but hated Yelena.

"Yellow race, Annamese eyes," she hissed meanly.

Finally, one day, when some colleagues were in the study and Yelena came in, which was impermissible according to Madame Cecille's etiquette, a bony arm of the hunchbacked lady appeared and yanked Yelena out of the room. I rushed after them and saw the Swiss lady throw Yelena on the bed viciously. I could not stand physical

punishment, and sharp words were exchanged, Madame Cecille, frightened by the expression on my face, shrieking and crying 'in French', collected her things. She did it automatically, shouting something, but quickly and deftly like a sales clerk.

Subsequently, if Yelena failed to observe French etiquette or behaved badly, I threatened to bring back Madame Cecille, who had repented, often called and wanted to return very much.

* * *

It was generally difficult for Yelena to get used to nurses. But when she did, it was most painful for her to part with a nurse. Tatiana easily became a close and good friend, but easily parted and flew to the next person. Yelena resembles Anh, she is very beautiful but not as tall and feminine. Tatiana inherited from Anh a dull color of skin and the oval of her face. She possesses that unique and unstudied quality that is known as charm.

What is it, where does it come from and why? Charm does not mean that a person is good and honest, although these traits often coincide because, as a rule, the traits of a scoundrel are usually reflected on the face and are naturally repugnant. A charmer may be like Prince Myshkin or like Maupassant's ami. Charm is a mystery. Generally why do we like some things and dislike others? Why the loathing for rats, vultures, hyenas and their appearance? Perhaps it is derived from our ancestors who were closely related to them. And why do Tatiana's movements, a turn of the head, her low voice, funny combination of words, and ingenuity fascinate us?

Now Tatiana has grown and has become pretty, at the same time her appearance bears no relation to Yelena's. Nevertheless, next to her Yelena seems less attractive. Tatiana squints, had an abnormal occlusion and regards herself as ugly.

"What a wonderful girl!"

"No, I'm bad."

"What? Don't say silly things."

"I climbed on the roof and swallowed bits of iron."

"What iron?"

"From welding."

"Why did you swallow them?"

"By accident. I showed them to Yelena, put them in my mouth and accidentally swallowed them."

"Were they big pieces?"

"One was like a grain. Another was smaller. Father took me to the hospital. They X-rayed me and saw one in my tummy."

"What happened after that?"

"Then it came out of me. Father found it. He said he was working like a gold prospector."

"You won't swallow any more?"

"I won't ever."

"Then you're a good girl?"

"No, I'm bad."

"Why?"

"I climbed on the roof." And so on.

Before the children went to sleep I would play a record with poetry recitals. All of a sudden, Tatiana read me a long poem by heart, very expressively and pacing back and forth in the room. She has a better memory than Yelena. They both dance naturally and rhythmically. Tatiana also sings very well, repeating the performance on the record quite closely. And she makes up the longest stories: "One day, by accident, a horse gave birth to a kitten. But didn't like it..."

As I did when they were still small, I still open the door and put a chair against it so it doesn't close, to hear my girls sleeping. The same birch trees stand in the snow outside the large windows lighted up by the mercury-vapor lamp. The same desk and piano. Only now the large portrait of Anh who always looks at me is on the piano.

* * *

*I'll take my heart
Sprinkled with tears
Carry it as a dog carries its foot
Cut off by a train, to its kennel.*

V. Mayakovsky

Another days passes. And many others. The sequence of nurses is like confusion at a train station. Perhaps, however, it is not so outlandish since life consists of strange pieces. And my heart is filled with love for my gentle, fine endlessly beloved wife Anh, the one who loved me very strongly and deeply, with whom we merged into a single whole like Siamese twins and always sought the utmost intimacy and closeness, unity of views, souls and bodies. And we were always sure that the wild and impossible desire to be still closer to each other must give rise to a union, what she and I are together, the unity both of us were unable to create by mechanical intertwining however strongly we tried to combine and merge with each other, grow into each other, however strongly we attempted to knock and ram into each other until we were absolutely exhausted, when not we but only our hearts sought to unite and our desire for each other reached the point of tears. And that union, natural and remarkable, was born in my beloved, filling my heart with a feeling of satisfaction and joy, and then it appeared in the world and we lost our wits from happiness, ready to give up our lives.

And Anh gave her life for Anton who is growing somewhere, strong and tall. Our union and a splinter from that life.

O tell me, relatives of my wife, what door must I push, whom must I beseech for the child to be returned? Pray to Buddha? O Buddha, return me my son, return my girls their brother! Give Anton back his father and sisters! Our leaders, the masters of our lives, sacrificed my son so you would not be cross. Have pity upon me, have pity on the children, do not separate them forever!

That is what I told the younger brother of my wife who had come to Moscow on an exchange program. "I'll talk with Father, I'll talk to him," he told me and called in the evening: "Father responded — will send Anton."

Probably, if it had been permitted for me to talk directly to grandfather, he wouldn't have taken away the child to begin with. After all, it was much more difficult to do it now, when he'd grown used to him for three years.

Finally, my boy arrived. But with a nurse whom he called mother (and her husband, father). And he was not allowed to live with me, but with the family of his

brother-in-law in Dubna, and was terrified of me. He wouldn't even let me take him by the hand. And wouldn't take two steps away from his nurse, who anticipated his every desire like a slave. He didn't fear other Russians, though. I tried to embrace him somewhere, he broke free and ran to her.

She said something to him in her language, but I didn't know what it was. I asked the brother-in-law to give me my son for a short time, at least for a day, even with the nurse. But he said grandmother didn't allow him.

I had to calm down and muster patience. Now they would be unable to take away my boy without my consent. Meanwhile, let him at least learn Russian. Month after month passed. No changes, now he only understood his sisters a bit.

At this point grandmother arrived and took Anton to her quarters. She summoned me for a talk.

Her ruse was obvious. Look, how we've tried, the boy hates you and can't get used to you. We'll take him back. Write permission.

I arrived. Lbov was at grandmother's, Anton seated on his knees.

Grandmother delivered the speech I had approximately expected. "You see, he sits on Lbov's lap, but doesn't want to have anything to do with you. First read some books on children's pedagogy, then look after children. We talked with my husband and decided to take the child back."

And something quite new:

"I have the same rights in respect to the child as you. And I'll take him back as soon as I return from a holiday in the Crimea."

"Is he written into your passport?"

"Yes, he is."

"Under what name?"

"Won't remember."

"May I see the passport?"

"It's not here."

"When was he written in?"

"He left the USSR written into that passport."

"That's not true. Here's a copy of his Soviet passport (I had it with me). Where's the Soviet passport?"

"I don't know. We didn't need it."

"Give me the child for five days and he'll become fond of me."

"That's impossible. If you want to, you can put him in a privileged kindergarten permanently. You can visit him there and see how he likes you."

"Then I'll put him in a five-day kindergarten and I'll take him home for the weekend."

"No, only a summer kindergarten for the whole week."

"But children are visited only once a week there!"

"I'm giving you a chance."

It was not a chance, of course, she simply wanted the girls and me to become acquainted with Anton, then she'd take him away.

During the talk Lbov shoved me under the table — don't get indignant.

We came out together with him. He said:

"You see, all the rights are on their side (I eyed him inquisitively). So please try to persuade them. There's no other way."

"And if I take the boy and carry him off?"

"It's impossible. He's not a Soviet citizen."

* * *

I sought the advice of a lawyer. He said:

"There are many such cases in legal practice. The mother dies, and the mother-in-law attempts to take the grandchildren. There were even cases in our country when grandchildren were stolen from the father and carried away to the Far East. It was impossible to find them. The grandmother had not even committed a criminal offence under the law."

"Personally I realize that grandmother loves Anton strongly, cannot live without him, and of course, she thinks my material conditions are much worse than hers. She has a chauffeur, a bodyguard, servants. Anton occupies a whole floor in their house, and the food is worse in my house. It is possible to understand her standpoint. Even my wife's brother, who sympathizes both with me and with his mother, said: "Anton must go to his country, as he sees it, their country is Anton's homeland, as I see it, it's this country. And I don't blame him and can't persuade him, but the law is on my side."

"And grandfather?"

"He is very fond of my children. I don't know about Anton, but he loves the girls very much. But he's a reasonable man and a man of his word. I trust him. I sent the girls with his daughter for four hours, and exactly four hours later he returned them. I was never allowed to go there."

"What about now?"

"Now he's been convinced by his relatives that I don't love Anton and he doesn't love me. Possibly they've persuaded him that I was bringing up the girls incorrectly. The girls often fall ill, and he's told that our climate is to blame. Something of that sort. And these words fall on fertile soil since he, of course, wants to take the girls very much. It's also in his interests because he's being accused of allegedly having hostages in the Soviet Union as a result of which he cannot pursue an independent foreign policy."

"Why didn't he ask Brezhnev to take them away?"

"He knows he's old, and that he'd kill me. He doesn't want the girls to be orphans."

"But grandmother is rather young, isn't she?"

"Still he doesn't want to take away the grandchildren at the cost of blood."

"And now?"

"At this point, you see, they have a party congress coming. Anh always told me that it was a critical moment, and political considerations may outweigh others. But our people probably do not want him to remain in his post so strongly any more."

"It's a very complicated case. Please keep my part in the affair secret. Do not telephone me."

We arranged to meet secretly, and he gave me several pieces of advice. From now on I acted according to his instructions.

At this time, a distant relative of my wife arrived, a friend who was completely on my side. He warned that the question of taking away Anton had been settled between grandfather and the Soviet side. That grandfather was coming soon, and if grandmother failed to carry away Anton, he would do it. Moreover, it was also agreed that the other children would be taken too. They would have a congress again soon. Grandfather could hardly be elected, but perhaps he still hoped. Either he wanted to take the grandchildren for political considerations or intended to devote himself to their education upon retirement.

"That's all rubbish," I told him. "As to the girls, it's absurd. But I won't give up Anton either. The old leaders are losing power now."

But he continued to insist that the question had been settled. I didn't take the possibility of the girls being taken away seriously.

It was the summer of 1985.

He also told me the name Anton had come under: An Nguyen. It was not even his mother's last name.

* * *

Thus, I began to appeal to all echelons of the bureaucracy, following the advice of the lawyer. Even if I were to receive an official refusal, it would no longer be possible to say: "It was an accidental mistake", "We didn't know", "Why didn't you write!", "We were misled".

I addressed letters to the Ministry for Interior Affairs, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Supreme Soviet, and the Passport control.

Of course I tried to talk with the main figure first, section deputy chief, Central Committee member Rakhmaninov. But however insistently I asked his secretary, calling all the time, I failed to have even a short telephone conversation with him.

I also telephoned his deputy Smirnovski, although I knew that he could not solve the problem. I was told that he was a very polite and considerable person but very careful. The secretary also refused to make the connection. Unexpectedly, one day he took the receiver himself. He said:

"What do you want? We know that you are an abominable father. They say your daughters go hungry. And you do nothing for their education. They don't even attend school."

I said:

"Excuse me, but it's too early for them to go to school. Yelena is only seven this year and will go to school this autumn. As to them going hungry, I don't think children go hungry in this country any longer. To say nothing of mine. At this moment the nurse is persuading them to eat home-made cottage cheese. Why don't you get in a car and come and see for yourself. I'm an ordinary Soviet member of the Academy of Sciences, I work a lot, publish many books, don't steal, but live quite decently and have devoted my life to the children. You know that it is possible to take children away from a father only through the courts."

"But you're the father and act like a father. Solve the problem with your relatives yourself."

Now that was a good sign! Don't worry, I'll solve the problem! Only give me an opportunity. That was a useful talk!

I called Lbov, he said:

"Have you gone mad? All those letters. Don't you understand that they'll come to me anyway? And making calls where you shouldn't."

And Mazurin warned me:

"Some people say: he's a madman, should be shown to a psychiatrist."

"You won't manage that with me. But thank you for telling me, I'll get papers from the best psychiatrists saying that I'm quite sane."

"You didn't support your child, and the courts will rule that he be taken away from you."

"How could you think I didn't consider that contingency? Let them appeal to the courts."

The answer from all levels was the same and always oral: it's not within our competence.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs replied that it was a case for the Interior Ministry, since the child was in the country. When he's abroad then appeal to us.

Passport Control stated that it was also the Interior Ministry which was responsible. If it issues papers for them to leave, they had no right to detain them.

The Ministry for Interior Affairs said that the child, according to their data, had left the country and not returned. He was not registered at the ministry. Appeal to the Foreign Ministry.

The representative of the Judicial Section of the Supreme Soviet Presidium stated over the phone:

"All the rights are on your side, by no means can you be deprived of your child."

"Can I refer to your statement."

"You can."

Mazurin told me:

"Keep in mind the following: according to our laws, Anton is a Soviet citizen, according to their laws, he's their citizen. And since in this case he arrived as their citizen, we must take their laws into account."

My gratitude to Mazurin. Thanks to these words I began to find out what the situation was with their laws, and discovered quite clearly that everything was the other way around. Due to surviving feudal traditions, citizenship is determined only according to the father, even if the child was born in their country. I repeated this to Mazurin. He replied without batting an eye:

"All right, we'll take it into consideration."

I also went to see many officials personally. An adviser of a very important general tried not to let me in:

"These are your personal family affairs, why are you appealing to the general?"

"It may be a personal affair while the boy is here. But as soon as he approaches the border of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, it is no longer a personal affair."

The general himself wanted to help me as best he could. He thought out loud:

"But a border guard can't take away a child from a lady of such rank. It would be an international scandal. Go to the Foreign Ministry, to the consular section to so and so."

"It won't help. I already received an oral reply from the ministry."

"You look the official in the eye," the general advised with great sympathy.

However, I was unable to look the official in the eye. The eyes of the consular head were downcast. Very expressive hands lay on the desk, and I could see by the hands how unpleasant it was for him. At the end he suddenly spoke in a human voice, rather sheepishly:

"You know what I'll advise you: appeal to so and so, only don't under any circumstances say I sent you."

I appealed to so and so. He waved at me:

"It's none of my business. Whoever sent you to me?"

At the Interior Ministry, the same official Saranchev was flabbergasted when I showed him the photograph of Anton's passport.

"How'd you manage to get that? There's a border visa here. And where's the passport itself?"

"I don't know, they refuse to return it."

"I could hold you responsible for losing the passport." he said thoughtfully, "but I won't do it. You don't have any documents showing that your son came back across the border. And An Nguyen, as you call him, arrived as An Nguyen and will leave as such."

"In such a case where's my son Anton?"

"Now that's a matter for the Foreign Ministry. They should make an inquiry addressed to their country."

According to unofficial feedback (the general took an unofficial part in my fate), nothing came of it. Almost everyone was sympathetic, but it was not within their powers. As I later learned, the letter I wrote never reached the Foreign Minister.

* * *

At the same time I attempted to arrange for Anton to attend a very privileged kindergarten not far from my country house. The requests from different quarters which I collected did not help.

"All the places are taken, see how many of our personnel have been refused places."

I invented the following course of action. Children of the staff of the kindergarten were accepted, a form of additional payment. I hired a nurse who agreed to work at the kindergarten provided I also paid her. At the same time she would keep an eye on Anton. I proposed it to the lady director. She was afraid and refused:

"You know how strict it is! Someone will inform the authorities that he's not her son! That's how people are!"

Then, suddenly, she agreed: there were not enough nurses and everyone at the kindergarten insisted that she take her on.

I told grandmother that she could take Anton to the kindergarten. A very arrogant new interpreter from the Academy of Social Sciences repeatedly refused, in grandmother's name, to receive me. One day it was raining, the next it was too hot, then grandmother had a headache. I told her:

"The kindergarten accepts new children only at this particular time."

It didn't help. Finally I came to see grandmother. Lbov was sitting there. She refused definitely.

"I've decided to take him to the Crimea."

I said:

"I 'm absolutely against it, doctors do not recommend it at such an age. Besides, I've hired a nurse to..."

And I told then how I had managed to get Anton accepted to the kindergarten.

A few days later grandmother agreed. I suspect that Lbov helped me. Perhaps he explained that there were no conditions for a child in the Crimea, or something of that sort. I could see that he sympathized with me: grandmother first said one thing, then quite another. Madame was too capricious. He must have been fed up with her whims as well.

Anton was taken with great pomp to the kindergarten . The interpreter e'xplained to the director that I should not be allowed to see the child often because it was bad for him and other nonsense. But the director was used to the children of officials who were brought not on a bus but individual in cars and with all sorts of whims.

As soon as they left and Anton was left, I put a written request on the director's desk not to allow anyone except me to take Anton. I told her:

"You must realize that if the child disappears, I'll take you to court and not those who order you give him up over the telephone. Demand a written order. Believe me, no one will dare sign such an order."

The head physician said simply:

"I don't care where they come from, I won't let anyone but the father have the child."

The trap had closed.

I asked the local police chief:

"Could you warn the policemen on duty at the kindergarten not to let the child be taken away. They can say it's not permitted and nothing can be done about it."

He said:

"Goodness no! The grandmother'll appear with such reinforcements it's hopeless!"

I established a liaison between the country house and all the entrances to the kindergarten, the director and the nurses. All the guards knew that if they sounded the alarm in time, they would get four bottles of vodka. Everyone was eagerly waiting for the grandmother to arrive.

Despite the obvious displeasure displayed on the face of the head physician, I dropped in to see Anton every day. We made friends instantly. I even took him out secretly and pretended that he was driving the car seated between my legs. It was the greatest pleasure for him.

Of course I could take him away and with the whole family go to some remote spot. If they managed to find us in such a place, it would be easier to take away the child than in the kindergarten in full view and overcoming the resistance of the hired nurse, the kindergarten nurses, various ladies I now knew and local lovers of drink who had nothing to lose except their chains. The working men, whom I never let down in a difficult moment by refusing to pour them a glass, would never betray me. And what would be done to them if they helped me? They knew only too well what to expect from me if they did not help me. The local police would take a stand of neutral sympathy. Everyone knew that Troitsk was for me. And anyway, deep down,

everyone was for me. Thus it would not be easy to kidnap my son in broad daylight. And the officials were put in a position where the child could not be taken away in roundabout ways and by deceit. Someone had to assume full responsibility for the decision. The issue could not be sidestepped.

On the other hand, by taking him away to a remote place, I would help the officials blame everything on me: he's fled, nothing we can do about it! That would not be convincing for the grandfather, for he knew that it was impossible in the Soviet Union, but it would be better than refusing outright.

So in order to go to a remote place, I had to learn the standpoint of our newly elected leadership.

It was clear to me, of course, that all my written statements piled up at Lbov's and he couldn't be bypassed. I already felt that my problem could be solved only by the highest authorities and began to search for some indirect way to reach them. My question was purely personal, a family matter I would say.

I described my problem to an intelligent, kind and attractive lady I knew, whom I happened to meet and who was an assistant to USSR Academy of Sciences Vice President A.A.Logunov. She prompted me:

"Of all the scientists, I would advise you to speak with A. Gro-myko Junior, the foreign minister's son. He has contacts."

"But we're not acquainted."

"He's certain to know your name. Go to his reception room."

"You think he knows my name?"

"Undoubtedly."

I called and made arrangements for my visit. I arrived with a friend who drove me on his car, unfortunately, he embraced me in the presence of the door-keeper and said:

"Good luck!"

After that the door-keeper and a lady at the entrance refused to let me in: "He's very strict, we'll be reprimanded for letting you through". Were it not for the friend, I would have simply walked straight through, putting on airs.

Gromyko was already on the premises but not in his office.

The secretary was not there yet. I began to wait at the door, engaged in friendly talk with the door-keeper. Finally, a very nice secretary came in: "Why are you standing here, please, come in."

And in strict voice to the woman at the entrance:

"Why didn't you let the academician come in?" The woman made a wry face, showing that she had been blamed anyway.

I was led into a splendidly decorated custom-made office. I sat on a chair to the side awaiting the end of Gromyko's talk with two staff members. He gave them a severe dressing down. I observed the distinguished face of the prominent scientist.

Then the staff left and I sat facing him. He now seemed rather tired. I began to talk, and his fatigue disappeared instantly. I showed him photographs of our wedding, us with the children and me with the girls and Anton.

"Hasn't grandfather ever met you?"

"Never."

"Never?"

"Never!"

"But does he know that you loved your wife?"

"That's the one thing he certainly knows. The one thing he knows. And he knows that I love her now."

"What a complicated case! If the rank were a bit lower. And what does deputy head Rakhmanin say?"

"He flatly refuses to meet me. Hasn't even spoken to me over the phone."

"Now that's going too far. Write him a letter, I'll transmit it. I promise that your request will be read. Tell the whole story and insert the photographs."

"Thank you so much. On my behalf and on behalf of the children."

He presented me with the copy of his latest book. We parted friends.

I sent a photograph where I was embracing three children, Anh's old statement which sounds like her last will:

"If I am taken to our embassy with our daughter or without her, it will be an act of violence, against my will, whatever statements the embassy might issue subsequently on my behalf. I want to live with my husband and want him to bring up our daughter."

In my letter to our leadership I wrote in particular:

"In 1981, in Moscow, while giving birth to our son Anton, my wife died (the marriage had been registered in 1977). My wife and I already had two daughters. According to Soviet law, all our children, including our son, are regarded as citizens of the USSR and have permanent residence registered in Moscow.

"I was not allowed to take the newborn child either from the maternity ward or from the hospital where he was subsequently transferred. It was insistently recommended that I give permission to send my two-month old son for two years on a private trip with my wife's father and conveyed to him through my wife's brother my passionate request to have my son returned to me. In 1984 my son arrived in Moscow together with his grandmother.

"I submitted to all the demands made by my foreign relatives concerning the education of my son during the transition period, certain that Anton had been returned for good. However, the grandmother who had arrived again informed me through an official that she had decided to take back Anton and the decision had been discussed with her husband. Most importantly, it turned out that my son had arrived in the USSR not as a Soviet citizen but under the name An Iluan, which is not even my wife's last name.

"Therefore, in view of these papers, which do not correspond to my son's origin, my rights as a citizen of the USSR and the rights of my son as a citizen of the USSR have been violated. I have been deprived of my son and Anton has been deprived of his father, making him an orphan. In accordance with Article 33 of the Constitution of the USSR, I request on my behalf and on behalf of my son as a minor that our rights be safeguarded.

"My wife and I wanted our children to be Russians and to be brought up together in their family by their own father. I do everything within my powers for the children to be happy, joyful, healthy, not to feel that they are orphans and to love each other. I cannot endure living apart from any of my children any longer.

"P.S. It seems to me that if my wife's father did not want to return Anton to me, it would have been illogical to bring him to this country. What was the sense of hurting the father still further and having further official difficulties. I think that my wife's mother, carrying out her husband's orders to return Anton, deliberately or not, hoped to bring back Anton and for that reason took out papers for him under a different name. She made it difficult for me to communicate with the child by means of the nurse who accompanied him. And she allowed me to have contacts with my son without the nurse only after she had persuaded her husband that the experiment had failed and my son should be taken back.

"It is my view that those comrades who were used to guessing the desires of high-ranking guests were only making things worse. Actually Anton loves me, and I cannot part once again with my son whom my wife and I had awaited with such impatience."

This was immediately before grandfather's arrival in Moscow. I later asked N how the leadership had reacted. He said:

"They read the letter and learned your viewpoint, and it was quite sufficient."

I called Lbov. I didn't say a word about my letter, engaging in small talk. Suddenly Lbov said:

"I always said all the rights were on your side."

This meant everything was going fine. He had revised his stand.

Grandmother arrived at the kindergarten somewhat earlier to take away the child. I was not there, but the director and head physician firmly repelled the attack. She left in a fit of anger.

The director begged that I take the boy:

"I won't withstand another such offensive. The interpreter screamed and virtually tried to grab the child and take him away by force. Moreover, a girl in our kindergarten has been stricken with an unknown disease. Please take Anton."

I took Anton and set out with all the children, the nurse and Anh's portrait into the depths of Belorussia. I left my friend to endure all the attacks at the country house.

Two days later grandmother arrived with relatives in two Volga cars. She was told at the kindergarten that his father had taken Anton.

In a fury grandmother drove to the country house, but we were nowhere to be found. What happened then! The interpreter undertook a search, rummaged through the drawers of my desk, and found the doctor's sick-leave certificate which was not terminated. (I had high blood pressure from all the worry and stayed at home).

"Scoundrel, rascal. Left without even having his certificate signed!"

What logic?!

* * *

The odor of cut grass and mint hit my nostrils. I was unable to make the slightest movement. My head lay next to the pillow and my legs stuck out off the bed. I had walked in, opened the window wide and dropped my body on the bed. Outside the window — Belorussia.

This was a big house rented for us by friends in a remote part of Belorussia. The owner, a very old sturdy man, kept telling me something, but I couldn't understand what it was. What I gathered from his mumbling was that the house had

belonged to a Mistress Yadviga. The old man had been young then, and recollections flooded his memory, making his tongue talk of Bulak-Bulakhovich, their compatriot who had brought to power Pilsud-sky himself. And the cherry orchard, this manor, these sandy hills covered with pines, these shrubs, fields of mushrooms, bilberry plots took us into a world untouched by civilization. One walked out into the pitch darkness, approaching the pond from which a duck fluttered up or a boar rushed noisily. The firewood crackled in the oven. The children were asleep. And the old men and women instinctively took us for the owners of this mansion and not for refugees fleeing to hide their children in this dying village, inaccessible to civilization. They brought us milk, eggs, honey and vegetables.

The children were dazed by the swimming, fishing, crayfish, and storks that live on the roof. The girls were fond of Anton, and he enjoyed general love and attention.

A month later I went to the nearest large village and with some difficulty reached my friend, my wife's relative, by phone.

He told me:

"Your people believe all the children should stay with you and grandfather will apparently consent. If the father loves his children so strongly..."

Finally, judging from the newspapers, the delegation headed by grandfather had departed. I returned to the village. I called grandmother's flat. No one answered. She had left.

We can return to Moscow. There is no more danger. Our children are with us, my dear Anh.



Ann at Moscow University in 1975



Le Zuan with Anh



Anh and Victor



Lena and Tania



Anh's sister, mother and Victor