

"To hake," said the captain. Jack dutifully downed his drink.

"To capitalism," said Jack. I translated reluctantly.

"To communism," retorted the captain, as the commissar slid to the floor. Shevchenko shoved him under the table with his feet. Jack didn't notice. I sipped politely at my champagne.

"To friendship," proposed Jack, a subliminal plea for mercy.

The captain opened a new bottle, this time filling both tumblers to the brim. He grinned savagely—a killer on the loose. "To world peace."

"To world peace," repeated Jack, a look of determination on his face. He raised the glass and chugged the vodka, setting the glass down in triumph.

The captain tipped his glass in Jack's direction and swallowed the contents easily, setting his glass on the table. The two stared at each other. Shevchenko poured another round.

"To vodka," said Jack, and fell off his chair.

"To vodka," said the captain, and downed his drink. He set the empty glass on the table, steady as Gibraltar. "Call the *Hilo*," he said to me, rising. He picked up the bottle, stepping around Jack's body to head back to his bedroom. "Tell them to come and pick up their captain." He disappeared through the doorway.



The *Hilo* resumed fishing with us two days later.

## Chapter Three

### "You Know Too Much, It's Time to Kill You"

I WOKE UP IN THE depths of depression. I'd spoken nothing but Russian for two weeks. Heard nothing but Russian, felt nothing but Russian—even smelled nothing but Russian: acrid detergent and rotten fish. I was sick of it. All I wanted was a burger and some fries from McDonald's and an uninterrupted night's sleep on something that didn't move.

Laura had warned me of this. Apparently all reps went through periods where they hated everything Russian, where even their comprehension of Russian faded, as if whatever power we used for peaceful understanding and coexistence temporarily burned out in the face of a brash and overwhelming intransigence. Laura blamed it on the ship's atmosphere: the tension of being in a new and sometimes hostile environment; the pressure of seeing the same, inescapable faces day after day.

She had a point, but I thought the problem went deeper than that. It was rooted in the Russian language itself.

Most European languages fall into what is known as the Indo-European language group. Let us say, for the purposes of solipsism, that English lies on a branch at the center of the Indo-European language tree. Crowded close to it, then, would lie the other Germanic languages: Frisian, Dutch, and German. Slightly farther away would lie the Scandinavian languages, then the Romance languages. Even farther away, the Baltic languages. Scattered around the outside of the tree, as far away from English as they could get and still cling to the tree, would lie Gaelic, Sanskrit, and last but not least, Russian. Russian is to English as Nome, Alaska, is to Miami, Florida. They may lie on the same continent, but man, are they different.

Sure, there are cognates, those lovely old proto-Indo-European words: whiskey, cognac, vodka, gin, (and even gin-and-tonic), cocktail, and bar. But don't hold your breath waiting for them.

Let's take the English "to bring." In German that's "bringen." Russian? "Nosit" and "Nesti"—to bring by carrying, as opposed to bring by leading or rolling or driving or pulling or lugging, all of which have their own pair of verbs. And if you happen to be bringing something in instead of out, you'd better say so in Russian, even if you could care less in English. Actually, there are about twenty different prefixes you can stick onto that one simple verb, depending on what shade of meaning you want to convey. And if you're going somewhere in Russian, you'd better know exactly how you're going to get there. You can walk, ride, fly, climb, or crawl in Russian, but you can't just go—Russian doesn't have a word for it.

Where English has spelling as its *bête noire*, Russian has accent. An accent can slip from front to back to sideways, all depending on whether you're making it plural or genitive or dative or what-have-you. "Ah," say those of you acquainted with a second language, "but there are rules for these kinds of things." This is true. You are unwittingly quoting *Russian's First Rule*: "There is a Rule for Everything." However, there is a problem with this rule—a problem best articulated by *Russian's Second Rule*, which is: "For Every Rule, There is an Exception." Rules in Russian curl back in on themselves like some endless recursive nightmare, growing ever more convoluted and complex. For example, *Russian's Third Rule* is: "For Every Exception, There is a Rule."

When you study Russian in class you are introduced to these inanities slowly, with plenty of time to scratch your head and puzzle over them. Out on the boats they come at you in a constant barrage, with the background white noise of the ship—the rumbling of the engines, the ever-present shifting and swaying and rocking, the constant rattling and clattering of the machinery and things bumping into each other, to say nothing of the interruptions—making it difficult, if not impossible, to concentrate.



"We're setting now, Barb. This place is crawling with fish," said Jack. I looked again at the *Izumrudny's* fish finders. Jack was right. Blotches of ink scribbled their way onto the scroll of paper—sonar traces of the schools below us.

Fishing had petered out after the first few days I'd been aboard the *Izumrudny*. We'd been looking for fish off the coast of Oregon for over a week now, searching with our detectors through the plateaus and valleys of the ocean depths for the tell-tale signs of hake. For lack of anything better to do, the bridge crew and I had spent hours together staring at the screens. We'd never seen schools anywhere near this big.

"Just look at those dollar signs," Jack continued, as his trawl winches whined in the background. "It's enough to make your wallet salivate."

"What's he saying?" asked Kolya, impatiently.

"He's just being materialistic," I said.

Kolya nodded and looked back down at the finder. "I would be, too." The second mate, I'd discovered, was one of the few watch officers who took a serious interest in fishing. On Kolya's watch I could finally just sit back and do my job, translate. His shifts were my favorite times to be on the bridge, except when he was drunk and they wouldn't let him stand watch—or, worse, when he was drunk and they would. His only real problem was that he couldn't steer the boat worth a damn. I got nervous during transfers.

The other mates were inept at best: the chief mate had been, I gathered, a chief mate far longer than usual—he was capable enough, but only when he felt like it. He rarely seemed to feel like it. The third mate was hopeless: a non-stop talker with the liberated attitude of a twelfth-century Mongol. The fourth mate stood watch with the chief mate, as was the usual practice aboard the trawlers. He had little to do by way of actual work, but he was great to kid. When I corrected him at fumbled attempts at English, he would eye me, trying to understand whether I was teasing him or whether the whole English language was just completely screwy. He would often come up to me to spit out a short sentence in English, after which he would walk away to stand by himself, looking out a window. For a while I kept thinking I had unwittingly offended him, but then it dawned on me that it simply took him a couple of minutes of silent concentration to figure out his next sentence in English.

The first mate stood no watches at all. He was the political commissar. Technically, he was second in the chain of command behind the captain—senior even to the chief mate. In practice, he had a bare minimum of maritime training, and it showed. His responsibility was the crew's political "enhancement": spreading the gospel of Marx according to Lenin as modified by Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. He also monitored the crew

for signs of sedition and, I was to discover, contamination by foreign influences: me. Unfortunately, he showed an endless enthusiasm and ferret-like devotion to his task.

"Wow, look at that one," said Kolya, pointing to an ink blot the size of a silver dollar. The pen of the fish finder jerked again, beginning a trace of what looked to be an even larger school. We were cruising slowly directly ahead of the *Hilo*—Jack would be passing over these same schools within a few minutes.

I thumbed the mike: "It's even better up ahead of you, Jack. Some really thick schools up here."

"Great," said Jack. Relations between the *Izumrudny* and the *Hilo* had improved a little since our tête-a-tête in the Captain's cabin. I wasn't so sure, however, whether I liked Jack nice any better than I'd liked Jack nasty.

"What've you got here?" Shevchenko appeared at my elbow. Kolya drifted imperceptibly away.

"Some big schools. The *Hilo's* setting right now."

"Is it?" The captain scratched his belly, sweating from a self-imposed workout on the walkway just aft of the bridge. Several of the men exercised daily with the weights and chinning bar located there. I'd begun sneaking out there myself, although using a jump rope on a weaving deck can be a bit of a challenge.

Shevchenko bent down to examine the paper more closely. "How long did you say Jack has been fishing?" he asked.

"Eleven years."

"Eleven years." Shevchenko laughed. "He's not fishing, he's rinsing his net. This is feed."

"What's feed?" I asked.

"Small fry. You know, little fish the bigger fish feed on."

I looked back down at the paper. The pen scratched frantically at the paper, sketching out yet another large school. "How can you tell?"

"It's circular, for one thing. Hake schools don't look like that—they tend to be more irregular looking. See how the edges look hazy? Hake schools show up with crisp edges. And the school's very low in the water." He pointed to the jagged line indicating the ocean floor. "In these depths, at this time of day, the hake tend to school up mid-water." His finger moved back up on the paper to smudge the ink.

"Oh," I said. Jack had spent hours bragging about his hundred thousand dollar fish-finding equipment, with the latest in computer technology showing every aspect of the ocean floor and the fish below on a giant

color monitor. It was hard to believe he could be wrong. Still, the captain had fished this area for hake long before the Americans. "Should I tell Jack?" I asked.

"If you'd like." Shevchenko sauntered towards the door.

Kolya drifted back, shame-faced. "Actually, I was just going to say it looked like it might be feed."

"Of course, Kolya. And my mother wears army boots."

"Does she?" Kolya asked, curious.

I picked up the mike: "*Hilo*, *Izumrudny* here."

"*Hilo* back."

"Captain Shevchenko says he thinks what we're seeing on the screen is feed."

"Captain Shevchenko is full of shit."

I improvised, since the captain had already left. "The captain says he is not full of shit."

"Well," said Jack, flustered, "I mean, tell him I think he's wrong."

I paused again. "The captain says we'll see."

"Damned straight. We've just hit another big school. We'll start hauling back in another minute or so."

Jack had only been trawling about five minutes. The usual tow lasted anywhere from half an hour to three hours. He must really think he's hit it big, I thought.

I grabbed the walkie-talkie and headed with Kolya for the railed passageway just beside the bridge, eager to see what came up in the nets. "The winches have started," said Kolya. He handed the binoculars to me and I scanned the *Hilo*, cruising slowly a thousand yards sternwards and to port. Water sheeted off the twin cables as they surged from the spray behind the American boat, winding up over the deck and onto the winches.

Kolya and I waited impatiently at the railing. Depending on the length of cable, it could take anywhere from ten to twenty minutes of hauling back for the bright orange trawl net to begin emerging from the water. It would take another ten minutes to get the trawl itself aboard, and only then would we be able to get a good look at the codend.

Kolya pointed at last. "There's the trawl."

"Let me see." I wrestled for the binoculars.

The brilliant orange trawl came sharply into view. Even as I watched, more of its hundred-yard length floated to the surface. I zeroed in on the tail end. Was that the codend bobbing there? I fiddled with the focus. It was too far away to tell.

The trawl reeled slowly on board. Sandy and Ed, Jack's two crewmen, stood carefully minding the net, pulling and tugging at the trawl as it was pulled aboard to ensure it fed properly onto the huge drum just aft of the bridge superstructure. Kolya grabbed for the binoculars.

"Do you see anything?" I asked.

"Can't tell. Can't tell." He adjusted the focus.

"Let me see, Kolya," I pleaded.

"Mine," he said, slapping my hand away.

"Any fish?" I asked.

He sucked in a breath, then handed me the binoculars. The codend had just arrived at the *Hilo's* stern. As I watched, it flipped up onto deck and twirled up and around the trawl drum—empty. The junior-sized fish had slipped through the large meshes of the trawl, leaving nothing behind to funnel into the codend.

I lifted the walkie-talkie: "*Hilo, Izumrudny.*"

There was a very long pause. "*Hilo* back."

"Do you want an estimate on that codend?"

"Fuck you," said Jack.



We spent several more days in the area off Coos Bay, Oregon, scratching up a few tons here and there, but finding in the main only immense schools of feed—young hake, mostly, with some herring and even some jellyfish thrown in.

The Pacific hake, *Merluccius productus*, also known as whiting, spends late winter and early spring spawning off the coast of central California. It then migrates back north, where it masses in great schools all the way from northern California to the Gulf of Alaska from spring to early autumn. Hake is like gold—once you find a vein or a pocket, there's a good chance there's more nearby. But it's the finding in the first place that can be difficult. Each year has its own peculiarities. The hake may school up around fifty fathoms one year—around two hundred the next. Fishermen all have their own ideas about where to look for the fish; good fishermen aren't about to let you know what those ideas are. But water temperatures play a part, of course, as well as the path of the California Current, and even the amount of sun falling on the water that particular day.

Our fleet consisted of five Russian trawlers and eight American catcher boats. The American lead representative, in consultation with the Soviet

fleet director, decided to split the fleet to maximize search capabilities. The *Alexandrovsk* and *Tigil* headed to the far north, to search the shallow waters off Washington state. The *Mramorny* and *Muis Yegorova* would continue the search off the coast of Oregon.

The *Izumrudny* would head south, towards central California. And I would get to take a bath....

I'd been taking spit baths for the past few weeks, sticking my head under the ice-cold tap of my sink every few days to rinse off as well as I could. In the long run it had been a losing proposition, although I was certainly far cleaner than anyone else aboard. I'd known something was afoot one morning when I spotted Gleb, the factory director, in the hallway with a towel, wet hair, and a rosy pink brightness to his cheeks. "*S lyokhkim parom,*" he'd said, happily. "With light steam?" I'd wondered. And then it hit: it was shower day.

Every ten days or so the captain turned on the ship's hot water for baths. In the rush of my first few days, I'd missed the last cycle. Today, apparently, was bath day again.

The showers reminded me of nothing so much as the decrepit facilities one sometimes finds in second-rate campgrounds—the white paint peeled by the steam, the walls showing eruptions of rust and crud from years of use. Heavy wooden pallets kept the bather off the floor, and a filthy and torn plastic curtain kept a little of the water off clothing stacked on the ledge outside. The water, desalinated ocean water, was rusty and discolored.

The men had an additional perk on bath days—the ship was equipped with a steam bath. There were only six women, counting me, in a crew of eighty-five, so the men basically had dibs on the sauna. Russians enjoy steam baths in a thoroughly masochistic fashion—they roast themselves silly, then take ice cold showers and beat themselves with branches. Occasionally, they go a bit overboard. Irena had told me about the man on the *Kontaika* last year who had taken a steam bath while plastered and had fallen asleep with the heat turned on high. They'd found him parboiled early the next morning.

But if the showers were bad, the toilets were worse. For starters, there was no toilet—there was only a filthy flat catch basin on the floor with a hole in it. Two rusted and encrusted plateaus rose off the bottom of the basin—places to stand slightly above the squalor in order to do one's business over the reeking hole.

The hole itself was an excellent wave indicator. Every time the waves rose over ten feet, it surged. I could always tell how high the waves were

when I got up in the morning by whether or not I got goosed when I hit the toilet—a whole new way to start the day.

Completing my business was never a simple matter. In heavy seas the floor bucked wildly while I attempted to squat. All the while, obscene looking goop lapped at my drooping trouser legs. I was hesitant to grab at the walls for support—they were pitted and corroded with urine and unmentionable matter. As for toilet paper—I'd been warned to bring my own from shore. Russian toilet paper would put Ajax to shame as an abrasive, and there was hardly ever any in the head, anyway.

This morning, I'd been happy with just a little hot water to wash in. Then I'd taken a half hour out and washed my clothes by hand in the sink in my cabin. There was a laundry on board—Irena had taken my things a few times and returned them nicely folded. But the soap the Russians used had eaten a hole in one of my pairs of jeans, and my shirts had been faring poorly as well, so I'd stopped letting Irena take them. Besides, not only was the soap strong, but it also left an oily residue, so that the clothes felt dirty even when they were clean. And it stank with an odor that overpowered even the cabbage in the kitchen and the fish rotting out on deck.

But now, after an easy day of showering and lounging as we traveled south, it was time for me to begin my usual evening's translation duties.



"Individualism's all right," said Major Burns, "as long as we all do it together."

Canned laughter echoed through the officers' mess. It was eight o'clock—just after dinner, and the cabin was filled nearly to bursting with curious Russians. Two days before, the radio operator had rewired the ship's two television sets so they could receive American broadcasts. Now I generally found half the crew watching television in the officers' mess after dinner each evening, and the other half squeezed in front of the TV in the tiny radio room on the bridge. First up on the screen this evening was an old rerun of "M.A.S.H.", and as translator, I was temporarily the most popular person on the ship. Last night the men had been in a delirium of excitement over a beauty pageant; Shevchenko had pronounced the program "very nearly sex itself," although that hadn't prevented him from watching every minute of the two and a half hour program with everyone else.

"This 'M.A.S.H.' is disgusting," murmured Shevchenko beside me, his eyes glued once more to the screen. The episode was a set piece on

homosexuality; the reaction: a hushed silence. Although homosexuality had at last been officially recognized as existing in the Soviet Union, it was still illegal: such things were not considered tasteful for a public forum.

A commercial came on, and I left off translating. The men were spellbound, anyway. Maidenform bra commercials need no translation.

Simultaneous translation is a difficult art even for those who speak both languages like a native. A good translator stays about a sentence behind; the better to see the full thought, and rearrange it, if necessary, for proper grammar in the target language. You need an accurate, facile memory for that kind of thing, as well as a ready command of the vernacular. As a simultaneous translator, I was a washout, but since I was the only translator within a hundred miles or so, nobody complained.

"Barbara, come with me," whispered the captain in the darkness. We clambered over seated bodies and out of the darkened cabin. A feminine hygiene commercial had popped onto the screen—nobody even noticed our leaving.

"Would you care for some tea?" he asked as we reached the hall.

"Sure," I said. I knew what that meant.

We hesitated briefly as the captain knocked on the commissar's door; the key rattled inside as he answered. The commissar was the only one on the ship who kept his cabin door locked, and he kept it locked constantly, whether he was inside or out.

"Pavel Alexandrovich, would you care to join us for some tea?"

"Of course." The commissar disappeared for a second, then reappeared with his set of keys and carefully locked the door behind him.

The commissar and I were, apparently, expected. Inside the captain's cabin Irena was just putting out a plate of fried potatoes and some oil-drenched cold slaw. A dish of caviar stood beside a basketful of bread. Fresh tomatoes lay in a bowl, sliced and seasoned. A teakettle sat off to the side, and, in the middle of the table—a bottle of vodka.

"Pavel Alexandrovich and I have been learning some English in our spare time," said Shevchenko. "We thought maybe we would practice it a little this evening."

Oh well, I thought, as good a reason as any for a party. Things had been a little dull lately, with no fish coming on board.

"Have a seat, Irena," said the captain.

Irena sat, smiling at me. We'd gotten to know each other after a fashion; she was rather shy. I liked her. As the senior stewardess, she looked after me and my cabin, just as she looked after most of the officers,

particularly the captain. Only this morning I'd caught a glimpse of her ironing the captain's shirts in his cabin. Irena's work days ran from about 5:30 in the morning, when she began setting up for breakfast, until about 11:30 at night, when she finally finished washing up after the late evening tea. All this with never a break for months on end. Of the five women in the crew, she had one of the easier jobs—the cooks had even longer hours. And if the deck crew's work near the turbulent waters of the open sea seemed perhaps more dangerous, a bounding kitchen full of steaming pots and pans and vats full of boiling oil was no safe haven, either.

"How do you say '*vint rulyevovo upravleniya*' in English?" asked the captain, setting out glasses: smaller shot glasses this time.

"Huh?" I asked.

"You know," he said with a shade of impatience. "*Vint rulyevovo upravleniya*."

There was no way around this one. Apparently it was something I was supposed to know. "Would you spell that, please?"

Shevchenko spelled it and poured a round. We downed our shots. Irena's cheeks flushed an immediate rosy red.

"Excuse me for a minute," I said. I had a glimpse of the commissar looking befuddled, then I was out the door and down and around the hallway to my cabin.

"*Vint rulyevovo upravleniya*" I muttered to myself. "What in the hell does '*vint rulyevovo upravleniya*' mean?" I paged through my dictionaries.

Third dictionary. Third try. There it was: *vint rulyevovo upravleniya*. Controllable pitch propeller. Hell, I thought. What's a controllable pitch propeller?

Back I went to the captain's cabin. "Howdy," I said, in English.

"What does 'howdy' mean?" asked the commissar. He pronounced it "khow dee."

"It's like hello, but a lot less formal."

"Khow dee," said the commissar. "Khow dee."

"How do you say '*vint rulyevovo upravleniya*'?" asked the captain again, as if I'd never left.

"That's 'controllable pitch propeller,'" I said, nonchalantly. "Why?"

"Would you write that down please?" asked the captain.

I wrote it down. Sounded like that was it for tonight's English lesson. A far cry from Captain Alex's "Give me five" on the *Muis Yegorova*.

"What's your slang word for Coast Guard?" asked the commissar.

I thought for a minute. "I don't know. But we've got slang words for policemen. Like 'narc'—it's a derogatory term for a police officer who investigates narcotics violations."

"We don't have 'narcs' in our country," said the commissar with a straight face. "We don't have any illegal drugs."

The captain poured another round and we all drank.

"Do you believe in God, Barbara?" asked the commissar.

"I'm not really sure, to tell you the truth."

"Here," he said. "This may help you." He reached behind to a shelf and handed me some literature: an English edition of the Soviet Union's constitution and some more leaflets. The captain handed me another fistful of brochures from a lower shelf. I felt like I'd just been attacked by a group of Hare Krishnas.

"Oh well," said the captain, apropos nothing. "They gave him a year." In Russian it rhymes: "*Nu vot, dali yemu got.*"

"What does that mean?" I asked. "They gave him a year?"

The captain smiled mysteriously and poured another round. "You Americans believe the strangest things," he said. "I had to laugh about that news brief." The captain was referring to the evening news we'd witnessed the night before. "They were saying sugar was bad for you. Everybody knows sugar helps build strong bones."

"If it helps build strong bones, why does everybody here have such rotten teeth?" I asked.

Shevchenko ignored me. "It's all a distortion. Like the films they showed of the Poles rioting. If that really happened, I'm sure it was because the Poles were paid to riot."

"Whoever's paying the Poles must have an awful lot of money," I said, dubiously. There'd been thousands of people in that footage.

"Do you know how many Russians were killed in Poland during World War II?" asked the commissar.

"No, but I'm sure a lot more Poles died."

"Barbara," said Irena, her first words of the evening. Her eyes were bright from the vodka. "Do you have a Sears catalog?"

"No, sorry." I wondered if the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty had been negotiated with the aid of Sears catalogs.

The captain poured another round. We mulled our drinks quietly for a moment, then downed them.

"Why do the Americans hate Negroes?" The commissar renewed his onslaught.

"Most Americans don't hate Negroes," I said. "There are just a few who do, and they make it worse for everyone."

The commissar looked unconvinced. "What about the Jews. How many Jews do you have in America?"

"I couldn't really tell you. Are there many in the Soviet Union?"

"Actually," the commissar said in a holier-than-thou tone of voice, "we have a separate state set aside for them in Siberia. But hardly any of them live there." His voice lowered to an intense whisper: "They're clever little bastards and like to live in warm climates."

The captain gave the commissar a warning look and he fell silent.

It was time to change the subject: "Do you have a phrase in Russian for 'a hair of the dog that bit you'?" I asked, explaining the sense that a morning shot of whatever you'd drunk the night before could help stave off a hangover.

All three Russians burst into laughter. "No," said the captain, "but it's a great concept. How did you say that in English?"

"A hair of the dog that bit you," I said slowly.

"A *khair* uf the dogk that beet you," said the commissar. I nearly fell off my chair. The commissar's mellifluous and suave Russian had disappeared into a cacophony of butchered English.

"That's right," I said.

The captain poured another round. "I noticed," he said, "you exercise every day."

"Not every day. Sometimes I'm too lazy. And you can't really do that much on the ship." It had taken me a while to adjust to not being able to do my daily two mile jog.

"Back on shore I run a mile every day," said the commissar proudly.

"That's not too bad," I said, "considering."

The captain burst into laughter and the commissar looked embarrassed.

"Spies have to stay in good shape," said the commissar.

I nearly choked as I downed my glass. I came up gasping for air. "What?"

"You were in the army. You were a captain."

So that explained the suspicion. They knew about my military history. But where had they learned about *that*?

"Everybody makes mistakes," I said. I'd been a lousy military officer. "Captain Grim is very well liked by her subordinates," my evaluations had said. "Captain Grim speaks her mind." The kiss of death, in military parlance.

"We have ways," said the captain. He looked into his drink and smiled. "Oh well, they gave him a year."

"What does that mean?" I asked again in irritation.

"It means they gave him a year. In the camps," said Irena. The captain shot her a dirty look, but she was looking down at the tablecloth. "The saying goes: 'They gave him a year, but he got out early with only twelve months.'" She had a distant look in her eyes, as if she were remembering. "Have you ever heard of Stalin?" she asked.

"Of course." I'd noticed a picture of him on the captain's wall.

The captain looked surprised. "You have?"

"Yes." I tugged at the tablecloth and continued. "Did you know Stalin was responsible for the deaths of at least twenty million people during his purges?"

"Have you ever known anyone who lost somebody during those so-called purges?" he scoffed.

"Yes," I said. "Most of my teachers lost at least one member of their family."

"Oh," said the captain. He'd thought he had me. "Well, as you say, everybody makes mistakes."

"How can you believe that communism is a good system when such terrible things can happen under it?" I probed.

The captain glanced at Irena, looking uncomfortable. "What we have now is not communism, it is socialism. That's why we have problems. When the whole world is communist, there will be no problems."

"Maybe it's time to go get some sleep now," I said, standing. Irena stood as well.

"Goodnight." We shuffled out the door, leaving the captain and the commissar looking at the bottle of vodka.

"Barbara," said Irena, glancing back down the hallway as the captain's door snicked shut. She came close and spoke in a low whisper. "There's another favorite saying the captain has. He just doesn't say it around you."

"What's that?" I asked.

"*Sliskom mnogo znat', para ubivat'.*" The rhyme tripped gently off her tongue. "You know too much, it's time to kill you."