



Harry is a Ukrainian immigrant. He is desperate. He posted something at work about the Ukraine and now he's accused of being a communist. He fights back against the FBI. He learns that to remain righteous he must resist all dogmatism.

Our Man from the Ukraine

By Allan LeLoup

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**OUR MAN
FROM THE
UKRAINE**

ALLAN LeLOUP

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Chapter One: Entrapment

The factory whistle whined at the end of Harry Zakal's day supervising the rolling section of the Fargey Ferguson plant. Looking at the combine harvesters as they moved to the loading platform on the rail track he wondered where they were headed; north, south, or across oceans. Closing in on his sixty years he had put on a bit of weight. He wanted to reduce his food intake and tell his wife Cynthia to pack him a smaller lunch but he dropped the idea because saying so would upset her.

He thought that he heard his name announced over the loudspeakers amidst the roar from the factory floor, "Harry Zakal, please report to the Personnel Office" so he decided to drop by just in case it was about his request for overtime pay that had been recently denied for some inexplicable reason. The administrative wing where all the big wigs worked was toward the parking lot and out of his way. He trudged up two flights of stairs with treads painted bright luminescent yellow to avoid tripping in his heavy steel-toed Kodiak work boots. The door to the office was open and two men were seated with their backs to the door and the Plant Manager, John Thistle was behind his desk.

"Harry, come on in and let's clear this matter up," said John beckoning him into the room gesticulating with his right hand while speaking in the remnants of his Yorkshire accent.

"What's wrong with my overtime card?" Harry asked, puzzled.

"Nothing about that; you'll be paid out for it next payday but there is this other matter," said John glancing at the two men seated across

from him. Harry sat quietly. He was unsettled in the presence of the two men with their similar grey suits and thought to himself that this meeting was not fortuitous and most certainly had nothing to do with my overtime work.

“My name is Laidlaw. We work for the RCMP and the FBI,” said Laidlaw looking first at Harry and then at his smaller effeminate looking companion who nodded dutifully in acquiescence to his statement.

Harry asked, “What does that have to do with me?”

The larger of the two with a face like the man on the Marlboro cigarette package said, “ Again I’m Laidlaw, please just let us ask the questions and maybe this minor matter can be quickly cleared up to everyone’s satisfaction.”

“Harry, did you emigrate to the United States in 1929, asked Laidlaw.”

Harry replied, “Well, yes and no. I came first in 1929 but went back to the Ukraine because conditions were getting worse here due to the depression. I punched my ticket back to the U.S. again in 1932 along with my twin brother Paul. We fled seeking freedom from famine. The food shortage and resulting starvation levels made us run for our lives. No one wants to die and hunger can make you do anything. I can’t tell you how indescribable the second sight of the Statue of Liberty was to us.”

The unnamed man seated beside Laidlaw inquired, “Your brother, Paul, he still lives in the States?”

Harry answered, “Yes, he owns a restaurant, a diner, in Poughkeepsie, New York.”

The man asked again, “But you emigrated again to Canada in 1934?”. Harry noticed the deep lines around the man’s eyes like a sailor gets from excessive squinting or sun damage in bad weather.

He said, “My brother married an American woman. I felt like I was getting in their way a bit, two’s a party and three’s a crowd sort of thing so I left Poughkeepsie. I’d read in a newspaper that it was still possible to get free land in Manitoba so I went up there to look at it but it was too far north for good farming so I took the train to Kingston. The small and still unnamed man asked him, “Why Kingston?”. Harry quickly replied, “I applied for a stationery engineering job here and got it but I still think about Poughkeepsie a lot. When you are born here you can take much for granted. I left behind the old world with all of its political problems and I embraced my newfound liberties and optimism. It’s a gift and it is priceless. I cannot explain how very hard it is to live without hope under a foreign boot.” One could hear the emotion in his voice as Harry recalled his early days of migration.

The small official further asked, “Your wife is from Kingston?”

Listening to their incisive questions, Harry thought that these two guys didn’t mind stepping on other peoples’ toes, so he answered ruefully, “Yes, her parents emigrated to Kingston from Edinborough, Scotland when she was still in the womb in 1918 but what does that have to do with anything?”

John, his manager, sounded agitated said, “Just answer their questions, Harry.”

The effeminate man yet to introduce himself again asked, “You have three children?”

Harry replied, “Yes.”

Then came his next question, “What are their names?”

Harry answered, “Raymond, Mary and Charlie. Mary died of polio fever several years ago. Charlie is a bit slow and as such life will be hard for him.” As he answered his gaze fell downwards trying to banish the thought of Charlie’s umbilical cord wrapped around his neck when he ventured forth into the world through the birth canal deprived of oxygen for a while thinking how dangerous it was to be born.

“Do you and your family attend the Ukrainian Hall on Jarvis Street?” the Laidlaw asked.

Harry replied, “Yes, we go there so that the kids can learn Ukrainian but they are not much interested in it. Their mother is of Scottish descent and she cannot speak it to them at home. We go there for the financial help you know small loans, down payments on cars and property.”

Laidlaw asked, “How many properties do you own?”

Harry replied, “The bank really is the owner, but I have mortgages with deeds on four rental properties in the vicinity of Queen’s University.” Harry forgot to tell them that he had got the money for the down payments from Beryl Springer a Jewess who ran a small property business in town after her husband’s death. Her terms were better than

the Ukrainian Hall, the banks, the trust companies and the credit unions so he went to her for terms.

Laidlaw inquired again, “You rent them out to university students?”

Harry responded, “Yes we do, but it’s hard to make money from them.”

Laidlaw said, “Do you have any religious inclination, Harry?”

Harry replied, “Well, the kids attended St. Mary’s Catholic School and now they are at Notre Dame High School. My mother was Catholic and my father was Jewish so there was always a tug of war at home about who was worshipping the right God. Seeing their conflicts I vowed to myself that I would submit to my wife’s faith tradition so that I could have peace at home, but in keeping with Jewish tradition my two sons are circumcised.”

Sounding pained Laidlaw queried him, “By a rabbi?”

Harry answered, “Yes.”

Laidlaw said, “Speaking about confusion, Harry, we need you to consider the nature of your relationships at the Ukrainian Hall. Well, let me ask you if you know Steve Kushman?”

Harry replied shrugging his shoulders, “He is the President of the Ukrainian Hall. I know him.”

Laidlaw asked, “Are you committed to a free Ukraine Harry?”

Harry said, “I live here now and hold out very little hope for a free future over there because of their history under the Austrian and now Russian boot.”

Laidlaw posed another question, “Is it possible Harry that some people prefer the Russian Communist boot to the Capitalist system?”

Harry said, “I would rather be in prison here than live over there.”

“Exactly,” Laidlaw said, “you’re just the man, our man, that we need at this delicate time in our relations with the Americans. You have American citizenship, don’t you?”

Harry said, “Yes, I’m a proud American, a proud Canadian and a proud Ukrainian émigré.”

The other officer interjected, “But never a Soviet, and you’re Jewish?”

Harry said, “Well half Jewish but never a Soviet and I’ve never thought of my Jewish aspect as a citizenship sort of thing.”

Laidlaw’s yet unnamed partner said, “I had to inquire; you see, there are some Jewish Communists and some are happy that they are not discriminated against under the Communist system based on religion because there is no religion. Anyway, from this point on everything that we discuss will be in secret and you must take an oath to that effect if you agree.”

Harry asked curiously, “What happens if I don’t agree to do as you ask?”

Laidlaw replied, “Then, we have the problem of the pamphlet you posted to the bulletin board in the cafeteria.” Thistle’s face had turned red and he was about to say something to them about spying on his people but he bit his tongue.

Harry observed Laidlaw’s craggy face and thought how similar all officers’ faces looked to him in uniform or civilian clothes. Their eyes fixed on some far-off objective that had nothing to do with the moment’s reality. Harry heard himself again say, “What if I don’t do as you ask?”

With his voice trailing off Laidlaw said, “Then, you may risk being deported as an enemy alien back to Poughkeepsie and God only knows what would happen to you across the border. You know, Joe McCarthy is turning everything upside down looking for communist infiltrators. You would lose everything you have worked for and everything you may yet have, Harry.” Harry thought for a moment and replied, “So you’re not really asking, you’re telling?” which elicited no further response.

“My name is Roscoe Tanner,” spoke the previously unnamed Englishman who looked every inch an old Etonian who spoke for the first time in his bespoke pin stripe suit. He looked at Harry furtively as though there was a secret he could not impart for fear that others would hear him asking “You have another brother back there in the Ukraine right?”

Harry answered, "I had a much younger brother, Alex who was born in 1914 in Lviv. Unfortunately, he died of his war injuries just after World War II."

Tanner asked, "How did he die?"

Harry answered, "I'm not exactly sure because all mail was interrupted during the war years. I just know that he died of his injuries suffered under the Nazi's in early 46."

As if he was imparting urgent information Laidlaw leaned forward and stated, "Well, Harry, your brother fought as a partisan against the Nazis for three years. He was captured and died shortly after being tortured in a camp in 1946. Did you know that the Russians put up a statue for Alex with a big gas-fired eternal flame beneath his bust?"

Harry responded with some surprise in his voice, "No, that's news to me."

Laidlaw ventured their next question, "Do you think he was a communist, Harry?"

Harry said, "No. I think that he was an anti-fascist. You see, we were under the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of 1918. Paul, my twin and I were conscripted into the artillery in 1916 from the University. We studied engineering. When I last saw my younger brother Alex in 1932 he was definitely not a communist. He saw how the communists treated the kulaks by deliberately taking their land away and creating famine. Laidlaw interrupted Harry asking, "You can be both though, an anti-fascist and a communist at the same time?" Harry

deftly responded, “Maybe, but only if you look past the crimes of both groups and Alex could not have done that because of the artificial famine. Bread was weaponized against us by the Russian communists and the Ukraine was the bread basket of Europe. Tanner nodded at Laidlaw as if to signal satisfaction with Harry’s answers thus far and said, “Tell me a bit about your father?” My father was Jewish and he became a Boyar by marriage, Ukrainian nobility. He was an accountant. Some of the Austrian officers were virulent anti-Semites. They brought their disease with them to my former country. Let me ask both of you, did either of you not notice the pro-German pamphlets about the German economic miracle on the plant bulletin board with the letterhead from the Austrian Hall? There seems to be free speech for some and limited speech for others like me depending on who is spinning the yarn.”

Tanner said, “Maybe you’re right, Harry but we’re no longer at war with Germany.”

Laidlaw deadpanned, “The victors write the history books Harry.”

Harry said while looking at them, “Your methods are far below your ideals.”

Tanner said, “It’s good to know that your brother was on the right side of the issue during the war because some and I mean more than a few of your countrymen were not on side so to speak and many ended up in Displaced Person’s camps.”

Harry said, “Yes, my mother would be proud of him but the vast majority of people in those camps were not Nazi’s or even Nazi sympathizers. Most were just apolitical refugees fleeing from the Soviets who had no homes, farms or communities to live in anymore. The war destroyed their lives that had already been ravaged by the famine, but nonetheless there may have been a few bad apples amongst them.”

Tanner continued, “I was a young officer in one of the British Section of Berlin camps. After reeducation many were sent to Canada, Australia, Great Britain or elsewhere and some had no choice. It was either go away or go home or be killed by the Russians as traitors. Did you know that Kushman was in a displaced persons camp?”

Harry said, “No I did not.” Tanner continued relentlessly saying, “He met his wife there too; she is a Croatian.”

Laidlaw looked at Tanner as if signaling it’s enough for today, but Tanner continued speaking and said, “At this point, Harry, I think we should knock off for the day. It’s 5:30 pm, and you’ve got properties and stuff to look after. We will contact you from time to time and please think about the situation that you are in and seek legal counsel. You need to put some distance between yourself and those who present false narratives. You see that’s the real danger of posting even one pro Soviet pamphlet.. The headline reads Russian Communists Help Win the War, but the subliminal subtext is Russian Communists Win the Peace, which is why clear thinking is required by all right now.

Laidlaw added, "It might even be sedition."

Tanner said in retort, "No, it doesn't fit the definition of sedition but at Oxford I read in *A Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith the capitalist creed which is "A man's self-interest is Gods' Providence" which is the opposite of the Communist creed; "From the few, unto the many, for the benefit of all."

Laidlaw, having been corrected already trying to sound erudite and contrite at the same time said, "We've all got to pick a side eventually."

Returning home after the meeting Harry had a lot on his mind. He never expected that the mere act of putting a pamphlet onto the bulletin board could have such consequences. He spent the rest of his day puttering around quietly at home and went to bed early. The next morning, Harry looked at his reflection in the bathroom mirror. His skin was clear; he'd always had good skin but his beard was greying and his hairline was in some sort of a strange melancholy retreat as if announcing; I am dying. His grey eyes had taken on an aspect of furtiveness since he had first arrived not like those of a man in flight from justice but rather his eyes were those of a man who had never been convinced about very much at all. Wiping the last remnants of soap from his face and placing the shaving brush back in the bowl he rubbed some hair pomade on his hands and into his hair and went downstairs for breakfast.

Cynthia looked at him approvingly and said, "A night's sleep did you some good; you looked so grey yesterday when you came home; I

was worried about your heart. You should take those glycerin tablets that Doctor Munroe gave you for your heart condition, don't you think"?

Harry replied, "You remember our first landlord? What was his name, Jugovaz from Serbia? He went in for a physical last week, got a clean bill of health and dropped dead just outside the Doctor's office."

Cynthia mulled over his comment for a moment and said, "Well, as I recollect, he was 300 pounds so there might be an innocent explanation for his timely death, but who knows. But Harry, what troubles you?"

Harry wondered about telling Cynthia. Laidlaw had suggested that he seek legal counsel. Thinking about the conversation with Laidlaw and Tanner, Harry lost his appetite. He looked at his scrambled eggs with a distaste that comes up from the gut to the mouth when you're upset. Not quite vomit but acidic bile that leaves a very bad taste and odoriferous breath.

He took a sip of his coffee and said, "Cynthia, we need to do something for the FBI and RCMP if that is who they really represent."

Cynthia looked at him and said, "Harry, the war has been over these past seven years. Mackenzie King is Prime Minister, Churchill will be elected again and Truman, not Roosevelt is President. Stalin will die just as all mortals do. There is nothing to do."

Harry looked at her and said, "Wars begin when diplomacy fails and end when they become unprofitable. Their aftershocks reverberate. You only notice them like you notice the warm pockets of heat when you make the bed."

Cynthia said, “Yes, but only if you make the bed within the first couple of hours after sleeping.”

Harry replied, “Exactly, because we are only a few years away from the last war there are reverberations.”

With a look of consternation on her face, Cynthia said, “What are you talking about, Harry?”

Harry said, “We are talking about Steve Kushman, the President of the Ukrainian Hall.”

Cynthia became hysterical cried out, “Somebody has lost their mind? Steve is an imbecile. He has never held a job. He has never sold any of his stupid wood carvings. He lives off of the avails of his wife, Clara, who is a seamstress and a good one at that and anything he can quietly slip into his pocket from the Ukrainian Centre. Does someone think that he is committing fraud, Harry?”

Harry said, “I’m not sure about it, Cynthia, but I think it’s about loyalty or something.

Cynthia’s voice was now laced with worry and concern. She said, “Why can’t they speak to him directly or arrest him or something?”

Harry answered, “They need evidence against him in order to do that.”

Cynthia asked, “Who needs this evidence, Harry? This sounds very strange to me, Harry. You should go to our lawyer. Go see Lawyer Leach; he’s done the deed work on our properties. Maybe he can lend some insight about this idiotic request. Someone must have rocks for

brains. It just goes to show how authorities everywhere engage in make-work projects. Do your best to get out of it.”

Harry wanted to tell her about the pamphlet he had posted on the bulletin board at work but decided to go and see Leach.

He said, “Cynthia, call lawyer Leach and see if you can get me in for an appointment soon but don’t tell him the nature of it.”

Chapter Three: Belly of the Whale

Later that week while on break from work, Jonathon Lunt tapped Harry on the shoulder and said, “Let’s talk about your little overtime conundrum. We’ll talk outside in the courtyard so that it looks unofficial rather than in my office, which always signals to management that something is wrong.” Lunt was a short, stocky man and every inch a machinist who later became a tool and die maker cut from the midlands of England, Sheffield. He had fought as an infantry man in World War I. Lunt had lost part of his nose due to a piece of shrapnel hitting it. A Canadian doctor had given him a new one from skin he had grown by placing saline balloons beneath the skin on his forehead. He had no sense of smell and his new nose created a jarring effect because it altered the natural symmetry nature had imparted at birth. His nose became his face in the sense that you could not look past it.

Lunt said to Harry while sipping his tea, “So they didn’t like the bit about the pamphlet, did they?”

Harry answered, “Jon, it was a mistake on my part. I should not have brought politics to the union hall but I’m not a communist. I’m against fascism.”

“Well, what I know is the higher-ups believe communism is cancerous and if not eradicated it will become a terminal illness. You see, it’s all about profits, Harry. as Calvin Coolidge said, the business

of America is business.” Lunt said as he glanced towards the sky as if to beckon some other not-for-profit God.

He continued, “Do you remember Harry when in 48 we made our first crack at unionizing this place. I’d just got out of the hospital for my knee surgery and we went to certification drives; what happened next? They sent the Pinkerton Dogs on us. They spied on us before work and after work and some guys who work in this plant and who benefit from the union now actually helped them initially to resist the union drive. Old George Willoughby was killed when they hit him so hard that his skull cracked like an overripe watermelon. We only won because they let us win. They decided that it was easier to negotiate wages, benefits, and working conditions every four years rather than negotiate individually. Hence, we save them time and money – profits again.”

“They haven’t paid me my overtime and I want you to file a first-level grievance for me, Jon. I’ve got the form filled out right here” Harry said as he slowly passed the grievance form to Lunt who quickly placed it within his black steel banged-up lunch pail.

Lunt said, “I can help you with the overtime, Harry, but not with the political stuff. The Teamsters who represent us are a business union. We are not a political union. In fact, the Italian guys I have met at the upper end seem to be on the other end of the political spectrum and probably would not take kindly to any mention of socialism. They were an Axis power during War with Mussolini and all that if you care to remember.”

“I remember, I remember, so the union can do nothing to get me out of the clutches of the authorities?” Harry beseeched him in desperation.

“No, nothing. My advice to you is to keep your head down. Complete your shifts and hope that it blows over eventually” Lunt said.

Harry said, “If only it were so simple Jon but they’ve asked me to do something for them.”

“Well Harry, I don’t know exactly how many men I killed in the first war or how many widows and orphans I created. They asked me to do something and I did it. Now I work with the Knights of Columbus which does charity work as part of its charter. It’s sort of an expiation of my sins. You can do the same. You’re not going off to kill people. Listen to me Harry, don’t bring any of that political shit here again. I don’t like it and most don’t like it and that’s it. We are about wages and benefits and working conditions,” Lunt said.

“That’s all-true Jon and I catch your drift but there’s something you’re forgetting,” Harry reminded.

What’s that?” asked Lunt with a look of exasperation in his eyes.

“The union exists because of the legal right to associate,” Harry responded.

“God damn you Harry stop conflating shit. It’s not the same because our purpose is to help individuals and not to overthrow the fucking elected government. Now let me eat my lunch in peace,” Lunt said angrily. His tone was no longer sympathetic towards Harry.

Harry got up slowly and said, "It's a sad fact, Jon, that when you needed my signature I signed and when you needed me to stand with you and Willoughby and risk getting my head cracked I did. Never once did I ask you how you voted or how many people you had killed or why you left England. You're so right the union is a business so now I ask you what were you really fighting for or did you ever really know?" and with that he turned away. He felt that he had reached too far trying to make his point in exasperation. Lunt just looked into his lunch pail unmoved saying nothing.

The next day, Harry was again called to Personnel Office. The two grey suited plain clothed officials were waiting for him. "So, Harry, have you decided for Jesus?" asked Laidlaw looking directly at him with his hand outstretched.

Harry shook his hand and quickly said, "It is very complicated. I have never engaged in any small talk with Steve Kushman and he does not invite small talk. I am the recorder of minutes for all of the Board meetings at the all. He'll definitely think it strange if I try to befriend him. That's where your wife comes in, Harry," Laidlaw said.

Harry with a rising tone of irritation in his voice emphatically replied, "Cynthia will never be involved in this, ever!."

Laidlaw smiled and asked, "But she already knows Harry. I assume that you have told her haven't you?"

Harry answered looking down at his Dack's shoes, "I told her that you wanted me to obtain banking information about him."

“So, you went to see Leach?” inquired Tanner.

Harry looked back at Tanner his eyes watering with rage that his presumptively private conversation had become known. “Yes,” Harry replied.

“Look Harry,” Tanner continued, “We understand your paranoia and a little bit of paranoia is what we need right now at this moment in history. We need men like you who have seen the other way to be paranoid for peace.”

Harry said, “I still don’t see what that has to do with Kushman.”

“Well, let’s take a look at these for starters,” Tanner said, reaching into his briefcase and pulling out a brown credenza file with scrap pieces of paper which he looked down upon as if they contained preordained answers to questions yet to be asked. These are banking statements. Don’t ask me how I got them, but...”

Laidlaw interjected, “Under the Finance Act, we have broad powers. The important thing Harry is that they show a pattern of debits and credits, the ins and outs of Hall’s accounts that do not comport with Hall’s status as a charitable temple, as you so nicely put it last time we met.”

“I don’t get it,” Harry said, confused and shocked, “I know nothing about accounting matters and neither does my wife.”

Laidlaw said, “It’s the human dimension, Harry, that requires your input. Behind every transaction there is a buyer and seller with a

handshake of a kind. You shook my hand when we met today and now, we are engaged in a conversation.”

“What are you selling me?” Asked Harry.

“Quite possibly peace of mind Harry, it’s as simple as that. You choose your side, your hill to die on,” said Tanner, “but your friends are on the same hill with you side by side.”

“I’m not so sure,” responded Harry, looking out into the French painted window whose multiple coats of paint were peeling, revealing different colors according to different tastes at different times, centuries even.

Laidlaw’s fist hit the desk top with a thunderous sound. The banking statements floated off the edge of the desk and looked to Harry for a brief second as though they were suspended in space and time by the ferocity of Laidlaw’s fist who then said, “I’ve fought and killed for this country Harry.”

Harry said calmly, looking at Tanner, “Well, it is good to know the common fact that we’ve all killed for one country or another but I’m no good with numbers.”

“Goddammit Harry, you leave the numbers to us,” Laidlaw said and handed him a white sheet of unmarked paper with four typed questions on it. Read the questions Harry and put the answers into the muzzle next week.”

Question One:

Ask Kushman if he has family in Kiev?

Question Two:

Ask Kushman if he wants to go home again?

Question Three:

Ask Kushman if he fled from justice?

Question Four:

Ask Kushman what his politics are?

Skimming through the questions, Harry said, "Okay, I've got it, family, home, law and politics. By justice, I assume you mean Nazis?"

Tanner said, "Maybe Harry, look at me." Harry looked at Tanner who said, "This is where Cynthia comes in. This is where she can help you."

Laidlaw interjected, " You're right; it would arouse suspicion if you were asking the questions but if Cynthia, who is very attractive Harry in her pleasant way were to elicit the information from the old guy you're off the stage more or less and out of range of suspicion."

"You want the answers, next week?" asked Harry in desperation. He felt sick to the stomach and his heart was racing so he reached into his pocket for a glycerin tablet. Laidlaw passed him a flask concealed in his suit coat pocket of rye whiskey that he had ready for moments like these and asked, "Problems with the heart, Harry?"

" It's all in the blood," said Harry, "my father had a bad ticker and my grandfather too."

"Too much inbreeding," retorted Laidlaw.

“So true,” echoed Tanner, “ultimately our bodies fail us, but our spirits Harry, they can rise, they can rise” Tanner repeated with his voice rising in crescendo to the words he spoke.

“Maybe, it depends on what you do,” said Harry, to which Leach interjected, “ Or don’t do Harry.”

“Alright, you will have your answers in the muzzle after the next Hall meeting. It will be after Ukrainian Easter and lots of drinking which may loosen tongues,” Harry said as he took a swig of whiskey from Laidlaw’s flask.

“Very good Harry,” Tanner said after Harry finished drinking. Tanner’s vocal intonation sounded to Harry as though he had taken communion of something. Laidlaw quickly added, “Yes, but now it is time for the oath, so repeat after me:

“I, Harry Zakal, do hereby and hereon swear that I will always conceal and never reveal any of the secrets or mysteries imparted to me in the service of the just cause. The punishment for revealing such sacred material is death by disembowelment and the banishment of your near and dear ones to distant lands.”

Harry heard himself repeating the words but his sense of foreboding surfaced and he felt that his heart would explode. He had seen the Masonic ring on Laidlaw’s hand and had immediately recognized the oath as a corruption of the Masonic oath he had taken so many years ago at a lodge in Ukraine. Recently, he had paid back his demittances from his old lodge and joined a new one in town.

“I swear,” Harry said while standing up due to his agitated state of mind, “that this is a wild goose chase. You guys are trying to take a sow’s ear and turn it into a silk purse and I can assure you that Kushman will never become a spy’s silk purse at the end of the day. He’s not a Russian. He’s not a real commie. He was never much of a fascist and I’ll bet on that fact too” and then Harry abruptly left.

Afterward, Tanner grimaced at Laidlaw and said, “You went too far with that inbreeding stuff; be careful, or we’ll lose him.”

On his way back to the plant floor, Harry processed the information shared by Tanner and could not think of a way out of his political imbroglio. He started to think about Cynthia and the children. It seemed like Cynthia, and the children were in the thralls of a tornado the genesis of which no longer mattered. All that mattered was that they were being tossed around within its clutches by forces beyond their control just like it was back in the Ukraine when the Communists came.

Harry completed his shift, went home and he was smoking his pipe after dinner in the backyard overlooking Cynthia’s rose garden when he heard her yelling, “Harry, your coffee is ready.”

“I’m coming; just let me finish my pipe,” Harry answered. He took a final draw, turned his dark brown and bone black pipe upside down and watched the last of the burnt Dunhill tobacco fall into the ashtray. He was forbidden to smoke in the house and he knew that given his heart that he should not be smoking at all. He consoled himself thinking he used to smoke two packs of Johnny Player’s specials a day. He still

missed looking at the package with the man in the sailor hat. He wondered about the man in the hat. “Was he really a sailor or just some Madison Avenue concoction? Anyway, we are sailing to unknown or altered shores” and he went inside the kitchen.

Cynthia said, “You’ve got to quit that smoking, Harry; it’ll be the end of you.”

“Not now,” Harry said, while holding her hand, “come and sit down; we have to plan out what we need to do. I couldn’t shake them off. They knew that I had gone to see Leach and Lunt. It sounds like a law firm, Lunt and Leach or Leach and Lunt. Lunt rhymes with you know what.”

“Don’t be crass Harry; it doesn’t suit you,” Cynthia said, smacking his hand.

Harry said, “We’ve got to go to the Christmas eve after-party at the Hall and get some information for them. They want to know if he has family in Russia; if he wants to go home before becoming incapacitated and what he did before the war.”

Cynthia inquired, rubbing her chin, “Which war Harry, there were so many?”

“The second, I think,” Harry answered.

Harry and Cynthia went to attend the after-party at the hall. The band played something like oha, rock a chocka oha, and the folk dancers were leaping five feet into the air like whirling dervishes. True Cossack folklore thought Harry as he took a good long drink of his Peach

Cocktail punch laced with several ounces of Smirnoff Vodka. I wonder if their children and grandchildren will still remember how to dance like that he thought to himself. Mine certainly won't because once you marry out of it the subculture dies out he thought sadly. Cynthia had made the punch. He always insisted on using potato vodka because that was how they made vodka back home, out of rotted potatoes. After all, the Czar or the communists were always confiscating the wheat. He eyed Kushman across the room but rather than moving in his direction he decided that he would let Kushman work his way towards him as he worked through the throng of revelers.

“Just like Christmas years ago in Lviv,” he said, smiling at Kushmin.

Kushman's round beatific face with slightly slanted eyes beamed back at him, and he said, “You know, I have this dream about going home but it always stops halfway as though for me time has stopped and I find myself adrift, not knowing if I made the right call coming here.”

Harry said, “My dream or rather nightmare is that they are still starving over there. I was almost starving before the first war as a student in Lviv. The only time it was half decent was from 1890 to 1914 and then it went back to shit politically and economically speaking. What did you do before the War, Steve?”

“I worked as a typesetter in a publishing company. We printed reprints of old books, the Bible, Torah and various pamphlets along with print advertisements. The guy who owned it was Jewish; Springer was

his name. He was a good guy but he sold out and left for America too,” Kushman answered.

Harry shouted above the noise so that Kushman could hear, “I had this dream that I was sitting in front of my mother’s grave speaking to her, saying goodbye, she died in 42, right in the middle of the war” and his voice trailed off.

Kushman said, “It’s a dream to go home but if I were to go back I’d go back to die no matter what. At my age, come what may. I suppose they could arrest me for being a Nazi pamphleteer, but I did that because I believed in a free Ukraine which was what was sort of an offer from the Germans.”

“I suppose,” Harry heard himself saying ad-libbing because the conversation had gone in a direction that he had not anticipated, “the only way to go back safely for any of us would be as part of some sort of delegation sponsored by the Government. You know, maybe, I should propose a technological transfer of some kind and we could go and make our peace with the place.”

“There are people I would like to see,” said Kushman, “but it is a pipe dream.” He turned and walked back into the throng as if toward the safety of his own diaspora.

Harry was still sipping his punch when he felt a gentle tap on his shoulder and he knew that his wife wanted to dance. Since Harry had already extracted the answers from Kushman he didn’t see any need to involve Cynthia in the fiasco. He indulged in a slow dance and Harry

always liked the slow ones and as Cynthia pressed up against him he held her tighter and tighter until she gasped and pushed him away saying, “You’re three sheets to the wind,” to which he said slurring his words from too much imbibing, “I’ll be sober sometime next week after the holidays.” He decided as he was dancing with her not to tell her about what Kushman had said. Harry needed time to think and to ponder the inexplicable. Later after 2 pm, they walked home too drunk to find the car they drove in. He was glad that he kept her out of it for now.

Five days after putting his report in the tank’s muzzle, Harry was again in front of Tanner and Laidlaw.

“Brilliant, just brilliant Harry, you have a knack for this subterfuge, you really do,” extolled Tanner.

“I agree, many are called but few are chosen Harry and you’ve been chosen by providence,” Laidlaw stated and next asked, “Any trouble with the tank and all that?”

“No, it was dark but easy to find in the moonlight,” Harry answered.

“Yea, that’s right, the moon reflects off the water and lights the way through the dark Harry,” replied Tanner. Harry wondered if Tanner had studied literature or something. He looked vaguely effeminate and too prim and proper for the disheveled nature of his occupation. He looks out of place, thought Harry, whereas Laidlaw just looks like a member of the RCMP on his horse riding in for the kill. One guy would kill you with a stroke of his pen and the other with a crack to the skull.

Tanner said, “You see Harry you may be able to go home again. Have you read the book “You Can’t Go Home Again” by Thomas Wolfe?” perchance.

Harry said, “No, but I read he died of some kind of brain infection.”

“You’ve got to have an infection of some kind or other to write like that I suppose,” said Tanner.

Harry said, “It’ll be a classic I’m sure but, Shakespeare didn’t have a brain infection and look what he wrote.”

“Don’t be a contrarian Harry; you’ve got to learn to let it go rather than retort unnecessarily all the time. We know you’re smart but don’t be a smart ass. Now listen up. In your report you write that Kushman said that there are people he would like to see. Is that correct?” Tanner asked.

“Yes, he did,” Harry confirmed.

“Did he elaborate at all?” asked Tanner again.

“No, it was just a throwaway comment an aside, as you English might say,” Harry answered.

“I must say Harry that the quality of your penmanship is really very good. Altogether unexpected for an engineering man who works in a factory.” Tanner commented.

“I’m full of surprises just like you I’ll bet Tanner,” replied Harry with a smirk.

Tanner said, “Here’s the thing, the Minister for External Affairs is trying to reposition the Canadian brand on the world stage and his

people are looking for economic counterweights. You see, ninety percent of the manufactured goods in Canada are exported to the United States. Hence..."

Laidlaw interrupted Tanner saying, "Hence our vastly inflated standard of living. If three maybe four percent of Canada's foreign trade could come, say from Britain, France, Italy, Europe, or perhaps Russia, there would be more latitude in terms of bilateral relations. You get it, Harry?"

"I get it but what do they have that we want?" Harry inquired.

"Harry we're back to old Adam Smith; 'if one nation can make something better or cheaper than us, better buy it from them than waste resources trying to make it ourselves'. It's called trade specialization." Tanner said sounding puffed up about his erudition.

"Quite right," said Laidlaw.

"But not quite right," interjected Tanner, "because for Smith, it was mostly economics and he went light on the political dimension."

"Are you saying that we need new friends? Harry asked looking bewildered toward Tanner.

"If we were to stop doing business with regimes that we do not like in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere Harry soon there would be a room filled with saints and no sinners. No good can come from that aspect," Tanner answered.

"No fun either," said Laidlaw adding, "There's got to be good guys and bad guys, Harry. We should export democracy using our economic

influence rather than through military methods. The thesis as yet unproven is very rudimentary; once people are exposed to democratic values and market capitalism they embrace freedom of choice, conscience, religion, association and eschew forever restraints like price controls, production quotas, slipshod services, bribery, corruption and all the other ills found in godless communism. Kill a commie for Christ. Your kin have not yet had the chance or choice to reject the benefits of our way of life but maybe at the next Agri plex show in London, England we can start a new dance with them.”

“I can propose something to the plant manager but getting me on the plane with the executives and Kushman seems improbable,” Harry said.

“Don’t rush to conclusions, Harry. How’s your Ukrainian?” asked Laidlaw.

“Rusty,” replied Harry.”

“How’s Kushman’s?” Laidlaw fired another question.

Harry replied, “He says his Yiddish is better than his Ukrainian and his Russian is pretty good.”

“How the fuck did he learn Yiddish?” Laidlaw asked looking surprised toward Tanner.

“I guess from his interactions” Harry answered.

Laidlaw next turned and looked at Tanner and said, “Jesus, what a concoction they brewed up over there, Roscoe.”

He then turned to Harry and said, “Well, no mind. That’s how you’ll get on board the plane with your linguistic skills. Before I forget, can a Ukrainian understand Russian?”

“Yes,” replied Harry, “but you would need a translator for a complex legal transaction like selling a smelter or something.”

“That’s down the line, later, much later...smiled Laidlaw.”



Harry is a Ukrainian immigrant. He is desperate. He posted something at work about the Ukraine and now he's accused of being a communist. He fights back against the FBI. He learns that to remain righteous he must resist all dogmatism.

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