

PART ONE

The End

Nothing can justify tears in children's eyes.

Fyodor Dostoevsky

CHAPTER ONE

Zinovy Efimovich Kozlov ducked his head as an icy wind, howling off the canal, whipped the scarf from his face and poured its bitter mid-winter chill down his neck. He pulled his collar tighter and quickened his steps, moving around the building, cursing the iron fence that forced him past several closer doors, and ran up the steps into the front entrance of the FSB headquarters.

He avoided eye contact with the ancient plaque above the door. After twelve years of walking under it, he knew the words by heart: “The Church of Our Savior on the Spilled Blood.” The spilled blood part was appropriate, considering the current use of the building. In its forty years of existence, the FSB had shed more blood than the KGB had in twice that time. Zinovy grimaced, remembering the first words on the plaque. All religious relics should be gone by now, but remnants still remained.

A wave of warm air, heavy with the smell of coffee, met him in the entranceway. He pushed past the espresso machine, resisting the urge, and walked down the hall to the small office he shared with two other FSB agents. He opened the door and stepped through, nodded to them both, and walked to his cubicle, unzipping his jacket as he went.

“Your fly’s open, Zinovy,” Vladimir said, rocking back in his chair and hiking his feet up on the desk in front of him.

Zinovy picked up the stack of pink message slips from his desk. “Your mouth’s open, Vladimir.” He flipped through the notes, glancing over them before dropping each into the shredder.

“Why can’t I ever surprise you, Zinovy? You never so much as lift an eyebrow when I tell you something. I’d give a year’s pensionable earnings to see your jaw drop just once.”

“It’s because he doesn’t care,” Markov said. “Zinovy doesn’t care about anything.” He looked at his watch. “That’s why he turns up two hours late for work on Monday morning.”

Zinovy waved a pink slip in the air. “What’s this message from Anton? How did it get here?”

“Special messenger from head office. He said the boss was mad. Seems you’ve been ignoring his phone calls. Not too smart, considering.”

Zinovy headed across the room, stopping to thump Vladimir’s forehead with his finger. “You should zip up your mouth, comrade. If there were anything in that skull, it might

fall out.” He turned at the door, giving them both the universal sign of dismissal, and walked out.

Halfway down the hall he spotted her, and his pulse backfired. It always did. Her raven-dark hair fell straight to her shoulders, framing a classic face—a Roman nose he used to kiss, and smooth, high cheekbones he’d loved to run his fingers over.

She looked up and saw him, her eyes sending a brief message of recognition before she passed into her office.

He sighed and moved on, turning three more corners in the maze of passageways before he came to his supervisor’s office. *General Anton Vasiliev, Director, Special Security Services, Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti, St. Petersburg Division*. Another plaque he’d rather avoid. He grunted, opened the door and walked in.

The receptionist looked up and arched an eyebrow. “You better wait,” she said, as he headed for the inner office behind her. She punched a button. “He’s here.” She listened a split second, then nodded to Zinovy, but his hand was already on the doorknob.

Zinovy opened the door and reconned the area as he entered. Anton sat at the steel gray desk in the middle of the room, flanked by two tall windows in the wall behind him. Two other men were in the room. Sergei Voronin leaned against a metal file cabinet to Zinovy’s right. Yuri Pronichev stood by the window to the left, his hands in his pockets, looking out into the garden. The video screen on the wall was turned off, the only artificial light in the room coming from the dim fixture overhead in the high ceiling.

Zinovy scowled at Anton, who returned the hard gaze without blinking. “You come, Kozlov, finally. Your delay is inexcusable. When I send word, you are to come immediately.”

“I’m sorry,” Zinovy said. “It’s hard to remember you are no longer the rug on the floor beneath the feet of this department.”

Yuri straightened, removed his hands from his pockets and turned from the window. The pock marks on Anton’s round cheeks paled against the red creeping up his neck. He looked down and shuffled some papers on the upper right hand corner of his desk. “You are being given an assignment,” he said. “Urgency is required. You have used up two days of your deadline with your delay in reporting. The job must be done by Friday, this week.”

“Who’s the target, and what’s the reason?”

Anton picked up a file on the desk in front of him. “The reason does not concern you. She is an agent who is no longer useful to us. She has become a security threat and must be disposed of.”

Zinovy stiffened. “She? I don’t do women.”

Anton rose and glared at Zinovy. “You will kill who you are ordered to kill. As always. The gender is irrelevant.” He dropped the file on the desk and pushed it toward Zinovy. “You are to dispatch the target by whatever means you choose.” He sneered. “Do it your way if you like, no blood. Then dispose of the body and bring us photographic evidence

that the mission has been accomplished.” He paused. Zinovy stood, unmoving. Anton said, “You will do it immediately, without further questions or delay.”

Zinovy put his hands on his hips and considered his options. His first choice, preferred but not practicable, would be to put Anton’s broken body at the bottom of the canal.

He picked up the file and flipped it open. The name at the top of the document hit him like a stun gun to the chest. It took a full five seconds for the realization to settle into his brain, another two for the anger to erupt.

“You are insane,” he bellowed. “You are absolutely insane. This woman is no security threat. She’s a competent agent who does her job with integrity. She’s the last person to be a security risk.” He slammed the file down, sending its contents skittering across the desk and onto the floor at Anton’s feet.

Anton frowned. “Help us to understand this, Agent Kozlov. Are you refusing the order?”

Zinovy leaned down, put his hands on the desk in front of the chief and spoke in his face, enunciating each word. “I will not kill Nadya.”

Then he turned on his heel and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

* * *

The windows quit rattling and silence filled the room. Yuri walked over to the door and picked up the framed document certifying Anton’s successful completion of the FSB Anti-terrorism Training Program. He checked to see the glass was intact, and hung it back up on the wall. Then he turned, shot a quick glance at Sergei, and waited.

Anton scooped the papers up off the floor, tossed them back into the file and sat down. He gestured to the two straight-backed chairs lined up against the wall between the windows. “Please.”

The men sat down.

Anton swiveled in his chair to face them. “You both want to rise in this department. What do you think? Zinovy has crossed the line. Tell me what is the next logical step?” He leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms.

The agents looked at each other, hesitating. Finally Sergei spoke. “It seems strange you would give him that assignment. You should know he would resist, under the circumstances.”

“Of course I knew.”

“Then why—”

“Zinovy needs to learn that he is not in control. The last administration was lax. He has had his way for too long. This is a matter of personal and professional discipline. If Zinovy cannot obey an order from his superior—any order—he does not belong in this service. His refusal is tantamount to treason. He will be lucky if he gets away from this incident with his life.”

Yuri hesitated. “I don’t know. Zinovy’s our top agent. I don’t see—”

“Not any more, he isn’t,” Anton said. “As of this moment, Zinovy is nothing.” He paused, allowing the statement to register. “It’s his own fault. He broke the cardinal rule when he mixed his balls with his business. That mistake has destroyed him.”

Yuri frowned. “I don’t think Zinovy will go down that easily.”

“Oh yes? You watch how this will happen. While I’m in charge, discipline will be enforced in this agency.” Anton looked from one to the other, then he leaned forward.

“Here are your orders. Sergei, I want a tracker put on Zinovy immediately. I want to know every time he hiccups, do you understand?”

“How should—”

“Put it on his Kawasaki. Get the agent in their apartment building to do it. What’s his name? Goldov? Have him fix it in the garage as soon as Zinovy goes home today.”

He turned to Yuri. “I want you to follow up on the woman.” He flipped the file open again and tapped her picture. “Goldov is supposed to be on her already, but you double check. I want to know when she leaves the apartment and where she goes. We don’t want that little chicken to fly the coop.”

He paused, waiting for their response, getting none. “Did you hear me?” he said. “Go, now.”

* * *

Zinovy opened the door of his third floor apartment, scanned the passageway outside, then headed down the hall and into the dingy stairwell. The stench of old urine filled his nostrils. Two flights up he left the stairs and walked down the hall to number 59. The muted sound of music drifted from the room. Tchaikovsky, The Pathetique.

He ran his tracer around the doorframe and got no signal. Nothing planted there yet. He scraped his Air Force ring across the door. He still had a key, but using it would surprise her into a response, and he wanted her quiet.

The door opened a crack. He shoved it all the way, clapped his hand over her mouth and pushed inside, kicking the door closed behind him. Then he put a finger to his lips. When her eyes lost their terror, he released her and walked across the room to turn the radio up.

“What are you doing?” She spoke with a mixture of amazement and anger.

He gazed at her loveliness, unaffected by the shapeless sweatsuit she’d changed into after her workday, and frowned. “Anton sent me to kill you.”

She stared at him. “He sent you?”

Zinovy nodded.

She straightened and the muscles in her jaw tightened. “Is that why you’re here?”

He moved to the side of the window and glanced out, checking for unusual shadows or movement. Then he drew the shade and turned to her. “Of course not. You should know better.”

“How could I know better? You’re a dedicated agent.” Her gaze was penetrating, and his eyes fell. She took a breath. “Then why are you here?”

“To warn you.”

“I don’t need a warning, Zinovy. I knew when I told him I was quitting he would try to kill me.”

“Then we must plan.”

“I’ve made plans.”

“But I must help. It’s different now.”

She shook her head. “No, it’s not.” Zinovy started to speak, but she stopped him with a decided shake of her head. “We’ve been there. There’s no going back.”

He stared at her, unable to accept her words.

She stood looking at him for a moment, then she walked to the kitchenette and continued the task he’d obviously interrupted. When she’d folded the rest of the laundry, she looked up. “Why you?”

He shrugged. “It’s no secret. He hates me. He’s got some power now. He’s using it to screw me.”

“Does he know you’re not going to do it?”

He leaned against the wall and nodded. “I informed him.”

“So now, what about you?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t thought that far.” He watched her deft movements as she slipped a stack of dish towels into the drawer. Then he tried once more. “Are you sure you—”

“Yes, Zinovy, I told you.”

He folded his arms across his chest and sighed. Finally he asked, “Is it a boy or a girl?”

“It’s a boy.”

A pause.

“Did the picture show what he looks like?”

The lines around her mouth relaxed and she almost smiled. “No, Zinovy. His features are still forming.” She studied his face for a moment, then she did smile. “When he’s grown he will look like a Cossack warrior, with a mop of curly dark hair, a stern mouth and a firm chin that some woman will one day describe as stubborn.”

He frowned. “Yes. He will certainly have the firm chin. He has no chance to avoid it.” She gave him a warning look and moved across the room to her bed, smoothing out the wrinkles and tucking the spread under the edge of the mattress.

“When will you go?”

“Soon.”

“Where?”

“It’s best you don’t know.”

“Will you contact me?”

She shook her head. “I cannot. You know that. I have to disappear completely.” She carried the small laundry basket to the front door. “If you want to help, give me a head start. Let them think you decided to follow the orders. Tell them I’m dead.”

That was it. He should kiss her one last time, but the wall between them was thick, impenetrable, so he nodded instead and reached for the door handle. She turned away as he stepped through. His last sight of her was in profile, head bent, dark hair curled around one ear. Her right hand, the one that could have worn his ring, curved protectively around the small mound in her belly that was a part of himself.

He closed the door behind him, looked up and down the hall, and slid a motion detector above her doorframe. Then he went back to his apartment, checked for recently installed devices above his own door, and went in to wait.

The alarm sounded thirty minutes later. He slipped a switchblade into his pocket and left the apartment, moving through the hallway to the stairwell and running three flights down to the exit he knew she would take. Stepping outside, he slid around the corner of the building, pulled his collar up against the chill wind of the early evening, and waited. A minute later she came out, dressed in a dark faux-fur coat and carrying nothing but a large handbag.

It had started to snow. Several inches already covered the ground, silencing her steps but marking her trail. She would be counting on the heavy flakes to cover it quickly.

She walked halfway down the street, checking behind her twice, before a dark figure stepped out of the doorway and started after her. Zinovy waited until the man had settled into a steady pace, slipping along the hedge bordering the narrow sidewalk, then he followed. Zinovy looked back, checking for a second shadowy tail behind him. Nothing. The man ahead plodded on without a backward glance. A good sign.

The woman turned left at the corner, walked twenty paces, then crossed the street and continued down the other side. The tail faded into the hedge until she’d finished her reconnaissance, then he resumed his tracking, paralleling her movements from across the street.

She was headed for the metro. Once she reached the more populated area Zinovy would need to be closer. The tail was in the way. Time to deal with that.

Zinovy quickened his pace. He took the man from behind, wrapping an arm around his face and thrusting the knife through the jacket, feeling the resistance of the cartilage between the ribs before the blade slid home. He flipped the body behind a hedge and withdrew the knife, opening the wound, releasing the blood. Then he turned and wiped his blade clean against the new fallen snow, fighting hard against the waves of nausea rolling up through his gut. He wasn’t about to leave a DNA trail.

He turned back to the body, ignoring the crimson fluid spreading across the ground, and fished through the pockets. The wallet contained a small wad of paper Euros. He

pocketed the cash and tossed the wallet on the ground, scattering the cards. With luck, they'd think it was a mugging, and the blood would throw them off his trail.

He checked to see that the street was empty, then sped across, following the woman's rapidly disappearing trail to the station. She was climbing the stairs when he arrived, moving between a group of night shift workers and a starushka in a bright red coat. She wouldn't stay beside the red coat long. He cursed her training and picked up his pace, shortening the distance between them before she melted into the metro crowd completely.

She boarded the airport shuttle. He stepped into the train car behind hers, moving to a spot where he could see her leave in case she bolted. She stayed on all the way.

At the airport, he watched her buy a ticket, hoping to God she was using untraceable plastic. He breathed again when she headed, unmolested, to the security line up. Then he went to the window and bought his own ticket for a return trip to and from Moscow.

He skipped the security line-up, pleased to discover his FSB ID had not yet been rescinded, and headed through the terminal, checking the waiting rooms as he went. She was sitting at Gate 17. No suspicious persons nearby. When her flight was called, she'd head off to the correct boarding area at the last minute. Then she'd be safely away to wherever she was going.

Satisfied, he headed to his own gate at the other end of the terminal, reaching it just as the last call for boarding reverberated over the intercom.

* * *

The Aeroflot flight on the ancient IL-96 took one hour but it felt like five. Zinovy resisted the urge to take over in the cockpit. He texted his contact: "mst c u. urgent. txt rdvx time & loc." Then he busied himself with his handheld, reading the news and checking his messages.

He cursed the lateness of the hour. Kostya would be home, either in bed with company or deep into the Vodka, in any case not reading his mail until morning. Tomorrow he'd be at work. They could meet there if necessary, but Zinovy much preferred a more neutral rendezvous location. A Russian agent roaming around the New World International Regime headquarters would be conspicuous.

The plane landed at last and sat on the runway for another hour before releasing its passengers. Zinovy moved down the exit ramp behind a large woman with two small children and entered the terminal, looking around for inconspicuous lurkers in the waiting room before checking his handheld again. Still no reply.

Resigned to an overnight stay, he hailed a taxi, directed the driver to the Baltschug, and made plans for a pre-dawn trip to the NWIR headquarters to intercept Kostya on his way to work the next day.

He did not sleep well. It was the dreams—not nightmares, just vague images and undefined activity, confused and plotless, leaving him restless when he woke each time. The first was about the fetus. Her fetus. He was flying it somewhere, in an ice chest, like a transplant organ. He woke before he finished the mission, realizing as they entered a fog bank he had no idea where he was supposed to be going.

In the second dream, he was searching for her, slogging through a forest, mired in mud up to his shins, climbing over roots and branches, aware he was getting farther away with each step. He woke with a start, sweating and shivering. He pulled his legs from the tangled bedcovers and squinted at the clock. O-Five hundred. Too early to get up but too late to go back to sleep. He showered and dressed and slipped out the door, checking the hallway for unusual activity before he headed down the elevator and out the door onto the street.

The bridge was nearly deserted. One man trudged along on the other side of the road, hunched down in his collar, the bulge of a sidearm distorting the line of his coat—a security guard, heading to work at the Kremlin, its lights dim and hazy in the early morning fog up ahead. It was nearly six o'clock and still dark as midnight.

Zinovy hated the city in winter. He didn't know what he hated most—the long, dark nights, the unrelenting snow, or the winds that howled through the steel and concrete canyons, always in his face, never at his back. He needed to be someplace warm and bright.

Inside the Kremlin walls was a kiosk, just opening for the day. He ducked inside and ordered coffee, strong and black, and sat down on a stool in front of the window facing the street. He waited until 07:00 before calling Kostya's landline. He cursed under his breath when the message machine came on, and sat for another two hours before getting a short, garbled text message, saying Kostya was heading to work.

The clock over the entrance to the Kremlin read 09:35 when his comrade finally came plodding from the parking area. Zinovy headed over to intercept him. Kostya saw him coming and raised a hand. "Can't talk now. Got to put in some work time before I can leave the office. We can meet at noon."

Zinovy caught a whiff of his friend's unwashed breath as he passed by. So it had been a Vodka night. He spoke to the retreating back. "We need to talk. Soon. Are you sure you can't—"

"No. I can't." He put his hand up again. "Don't shout, Zinovy. My head is pounding."

"All right. Noon sharp then. I'll meet you here." Kostya waved without looking back. Zinovy watched until he'd disappeared through the double wooden doors that led to his office building inside the Kremlin wall, then he turned away, swearing. Two and a half hours to kill and his toes were already frozen.

Zinovy spent two hours circling the Kremlin wall and the next forty minutes waiting impatiently in the Square, pacing back and forth in front of the Spasskaya clock. Kostya's office was in a building just inside the entrance. A two-minute stroll to the gate. Zinovy checked his watch again and sat down on a rock wall, his eyes fixed on the door.

At last Kostya emerged from the entranceway, shrugging more deeply into his coat as the wind outside the wall hit him in the face. Zinovy waited until he'd cleared the shadow of the tower, then fell into step beside him.

"Let's go someplace warm," Kostya said. "My Harley's over here."

They crossed the parking lot to the corner section reserved for two-wheeled machines. Kostya unlocked the bike and climbed on, fastening his helmet over the fur cap that came

down over his ears. Zinovy got on behind him, hunching down into his comrade's broad back and pulling his jacket up over his head as they eased out of the parking area and picked up speed through the square.

Zinovy cringed as Kostya bullied his way through the traffic jam at the intersection and zipped down Znamenka, banking left and right around cars and buses and scattering at least three groups of tourists who didn't know that crossing the street in Moscow was a proven method of committing suicide.

A red light finally stopped them at Arbatskaya. Four impatient, roaring revs of the engine, a green light, a leaning left, a right, and another left, then a short sprint down the street before Kostya slowed down and squeezed his bike into a six-foot space between two American-made cars parked in front of the Hard Rock Café. Zinovy climbed off the bike and wiped his brow with his sleeve.

Inside, they found a table next to the wall and shrugged out of their coats. Zinovy breathed deeply, warming his lungs with the smell of burned coffee grounds and hot grease. Busy chatter, a mixture of English and Russian, drowned out the background music, a jukebox jumble of American songs from the 1960's. Kostya ordered a hamburger with strong black coffee, and Zinovy ordered fish and chips.

When the waitress left, Zinovy leaned forward and filled Kostya in on the events of the previous day. As he spoke, he studied his friend's face, watching for any gleam of enlightenment to dawn in the bleary grey eyes, but he finished his story without detecting the slightest sign of intelligent life.

Kostya looked at him and frowned. "Let me get this straight. Anton ordered you to kill Nadya, and you refused."

"What else could I do? I couldn't kill Nadya."

"And you didn't just say a simple 'No.' You told him he was insane. No, wait. You yelled at him and told him he was insane."

"He is insane. How he ever got into that position I'll never understand."

"That is not the point. The point is that you told him so in a very loud voice."

Zinovy said nothing.

"Just what were you planning as your next move?"

Zinovy shrugged. "I wasn't planning a next move. It came up too quickly."

Kostya studied his face for a moment. Then he said, "Zinovy Efimovich, you are an idiot."

Zinovy frowned. "That is neither here nor there. What we have to do now is fix things. Nadya is the most important consideration. We have to make sure he can't get at her. What can you do about that?"

The waitress came to splash refills into their cups and left again. Kostya took a swallow of coffee, grimaced, and rubbed his forehead. "I can put out a regime protection edict on her. That should cover it."

"How long will that take? It needs to happen right away."

“I can do it when I get back to the office. Don’t worry. That’s the easy part. It’s you I don’t know what to do with. We need to get you away for a while. Give things in your office a cooling off period.”

Zinovy leaned back, stretched his legs out from under the table, and waited, relieved to see a glint of shrewdness flash beneath his protector’s droopy eyelids at last. The coffee was working.

Kostya stared at the ceiling for a moment, moving his eyes around the edge of the fragmented mirror above them and finally settling his attention on the golden globes dangling from its center. Then he sat up and snapped his fingers. “That’s it,” he said. “I’ve got it.” He leaned toward Zinovy and lowered his voice. “We need a cosmonaut on the space station for the next few weeks. Gregor was supposed to go up, but he fell on the ice Sunday and broke his wrist. I just got the order yesterday to find a replacement.”

“The space station?”

Kostya nodded. “You still have your certification, don’t you?”

“Yes. It’s good for another six months.”

“That’ll do. You’ll only be up for a month or so.”

“What’s going on?”

“The Regime is abandoning the station. They have to bring all the equipment back down, and our government wants their own man up there to make sure everything that belongs to us gets back okay.”

“You’re joking. Why would the Supreme Commander abandon the station? I thought he just bought a new shuttle. The space program is his pet project.”

“Was his pet project. Things are different now. I think he might be hurting financially.”

“That’s impossible. He’s got all the money in the—”

“He’s got control of the money, yes, but it’s all on paper. The whole system is screwed now that it’s all under one, very controlling individual. I’m suspecting he’s got a real cash flow problem.”

Zinovy raised his eyebrows. “Be careful what you say, my friend. You work for the guy, and he’s got ears everywhere.”

Kostya looked around, frowning at the table full of rowdy tourists beside them, and spoke in a low growl. “Something’s happening with the Regime, Zinovy. Fifty packets stamped Top Secret have passed over my desk in the last two weeks. That’s five times the normal traffic. There’s something fishy going on in Babylon right now—something big and bad. I don’t know what it is, but it smells all the way to Moscow.”

They downed the cold dregs of their coffee and stood to leave. Zinovy pulled the dead operative’s Euros out of his pocket and tossed them on top of the tab the waitress had left on their table. On second thought, he reached down and retrieved a couple of the bills. Waitresses tended to remember big tippers.

On the way out the door, Zinovy thought quickly. “When would I leave?”

“You need to be ready by this weekend.” Kostya pulled the Harley keys out of his pocket. “But that works well for you. The sooner you get out of Anton’s reach, the better.” He looked up and shook his head. “You’re a lucky man, Zinovy. You must have a guardian angel up there somewhere. Six or seven, maybe. It would take that many to keep you from destroying yourself by your reckless stupidity. What have you done with your brain?”

Zinovy put an arm around Kostya’s shoulders and squeezed. “You’re my guardian angel, comrade. Once again you have saved my *shkooru*.”

Kostya shoved away from the bear hug and pulled his earflaps down. “You better smarten up, my friend. One of these days you’ll use up all your guardian angels. Then where will you be?”

They parted beside the Harley. Kostya took off up the street toward the Kremlin, and Zinovy trotted to the metro station at the end of the block. Downstairs, he took the airline ticket from his inside pocket and threw it in the trash. Then he caught the metro to the light rail station and bought a ticket on the afternoon train to St. Petersburg. He was back in his apartment by 19:00. He pulled off his jacket and put the knife in the drawer of his table, checking first to make sure it was clean, and headed upstairs. In Nadya’s apartment, he made a sandwich out of leftover chicken from the fridge and wandered over to look out her window as he ate it.

The lids were down on the dumpsters, their contents no longer bulging over the tops. He finished the sandwich, wiped his hands on his slacks, and sat down to e-mail Anton.

“Assignment completed. No photographic evidence. You will find the body in the third dumpster to the north behind the apartment building, unless the trucks came by last night.” It would take them two days to verify the location of the garbage in the landfill site, and another three to sift through it for the body. By that time, he should be gone.

He took one last look around the apartment, checking to make sure she hadn’t left anything incriminating. She would have cleaned it thoroughly, but a second run over the area wouldn’t hurt. He walked to the kitchen counter and picked up the notepad. No indentations in the clean page on the top, and nothing beneath it. A handbag she’d been carrying sat on the end of the couch. He picked it up and found the tracking device she’d obviously discovered in the lining. He carried the bag to her closet and stowed it on the top shelf beside a pair of sandals.

He moved to the bookcase against the wall and ran his eyes over the titles. Two English books—a copy of Plato’s Republic and something by Kafka. He pulled them out and readjusted the bookends. Neither would be acceptable to the Regime—Plato too Western and Kafka too Jewish. She should have disposed of them long ago. He grunted, remembering the arguments they’d had about Kafka. She was sure the man was a brilliant philosopher, in spite of the irrationality of his writings.

Zinovy moved to the window and pulled the drapes together. Then he turned out the lights and left with the books under his arm, locking the door behind him.

The next morning he found a tracker on his KLR. He left it there, riding dutifully to and from work for the next two days, parking in the garage at night under the watchful eye of whatever agent they had assigned to replace the mole he’d disposed of.

At work, he avoided Anton and treated everyone else with disdain, playing the part of the disgruntled government employee. It was not difficult.

On Friday morning, he got orders to report to Canaveral.

By Saturday night, he was in Orlando, where he bought three pairs of underwear and got his hair cut.

On Sunday, he received a scalding text message from Anton, which he deleted, and on Monday he boarded the Regime's expensive new shuttle and took off for the Space Station.