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Twenty-Ten

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A man is hunched over a desk in a sparse office. Several other men sit patiently on the other side of the desk. The man reads the following letter beneath a small green desk lamp.

Friends and Comrades, My name is Demitri Zelnykhov, but please to call me Demetri. Excuse my English as I've not been out of Soviet Union in some time. I write this from some God-forsaken gulag in the far north of Siberia, and if you are reading this I am successful in my smuggling attempts. It is my story. My confession. I write not for redemption, for I am beyond such things. I write so people will know.

To begin, I work in Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Leningrad. My official title is "First Consular Minister of Foreign Oversight." In my capacity I report directly to Foreign Minister Gromyko in Moscow, thus I have indirect access to Premier Khrushchev. I have been in same room with Premier three times when summoned to Moscow to discuss foreign operations in West, specifically United States. These are not truly discussions of consular relations, no. Rather they involve ongoing operations of foreign intelligence gathering in West. You see, many people speculate that Ministry is simply arm of KGB. Publicly, I deny this with all that is my being. But for purposes of this document which you are now reading, I must confess that I am KGB agent for many years, more than I can remember, but even this does not approximate truth, which is that for as many years I have been double-agent for West, code name Twenty-Ten.

It is simple, really. I leave Soviet Union at ten years of age, before big war, to live with relatives in United States. After high school, government men in wool suits come to Uncle's house in United States and ask, well, ask is not really right word, they tell me I must go with them or rest of family will be returned to Soviet Union. I feel I have no choice in matter. In this it is much same way as when I live in Soviet Union under that madman Stalin. Government says jump you say how high and inform them that your neighbor is bad mouthing Republic. The government men send me to university for a year for my Russian, which is still quite good as I speak to my Uncle and Aunt in native tongue all these years. Then I go to Virginia woods and learn to sneak around. Despite my cooperation, they send my aunt and uncle away.

The Americans give me documents, new identity, background, everything I need. When I turn twenty I return to Soviet Union as Demetri Zelnykhov. Ten years old I come, twenty years old I go back. Agent Twenty-Ten. The Americans are able to get me into Soviet Union through Finland and many harsh days of travel. I sometimes do not think I will survive. But I do.

The Americans assign me Soviet handler by name of Aleksandr Koslov. He is code name Blue Cab. I know not why. Alek becomes my mentor and best friend even though he is years older, which also mean he is years wiser, and I learn much from him. Alek is already high up in Soviet bureaucracy, and with his recommendation and my false credentials I am given mid-level post in Soviet Ministry.

I know you now thinking but Demetri, how you rise so high in government so fast? Well, it

wasn't fast, not truly, I become Consular Minister at thirty-five, and even this not tell real story. In those fifteen years, to prove my dedication to Communist Party, I am forced to do reprehensible acts.

Since this is confessional, I must tell truth now, no matter how difficult. When I'm first sent to United States, it is by Soviet Ministry in order for me to become Russian agent for Soviet Union. Confusing, yes, I know, it is confusing for me also. My aunt and uncle also Russian agents, and they train me and indoctrinate me for years, but men in wool suits know this. Aunt and Uncle not sent back to Soviet Union when I'm taken away, no, they are set in chairs in front of me and men in wool suits put pistol up against their heads and I am covered with brains of relatives. Men in wool suits tell me that Soviet Union is to blame for their assassinations, that Soviet Union sold them out. I'm young and confused, and this I believe is when my brain-my mind-start to not be mine anymore, understand? And men in wool suits do send me to University, but I go to Virginia woods first where I really lose my brain. At this point I now want nothing more than complete destruction of Soviet Homeland. I can't explain but these are true feelings when I return to Soviet Union.

Which brings me back to reprehensible acts. In order to prove to Soviet Ministry that I am good soldier for Communist cause and loyal recruit for KGB, I must demonstrate loyalty. They know we were found out by the Americans, and they buy my escape back to the mother country, but Communist are some kind of paranoid. So again my brain becomes twisted as KGB bring me to bunker under ministry building in Leningrad. I am taken to cold cement room with single light bulb where my mother and father are sitting in metal chairs, their hands and legs bound with twisted wire, their mouths stuffed with rolled up Pravda. This is the first time in many years I see parents. KGB agent walks in room and tells me my parents have been disloyal to cause and are agents of United States. I know this not to be true, but that is of no import. Agent hands me Makarov pistol. Its dull grey steel feels cold in my palm. Agent tells me to put one bullet in each of their brains. My God. I am trying to think, but there is no time. Most horror I have ever seen in my life fill eyes of mother and father, pleading. But I know what I must do, and, I believe, my parents know also. I decide to shoot mother first so she is spared horror of seeing husband die. She tries to scream as she shakes head like mad woman, but Pravda muffles her and she sounds like bleating lamb at slaughter. I place barrel at her temple, there is a "pop" and then silence as her head slumps to her shoulder. Father just stares, his eyes filled with tears. He is easier as I've already crossed line. Another "pop" and his head lolls back, the life gone. To this day I hear mother's muffled cries and see my father's tear filled eyes. These I can never escape.

This is a common KGB tactic, using the family. I know in movies they always say to leave the families out of it, but that not true in actual life. In actual life families always used this way. For leverage. That is why Soviet spies don't have their own families, the KGB not allow. Now, in America with all the freedoms many CIA have families. I will say only once, this is stupid.

Having proved my ability to perform reprehensible acts, I am not only good Communist, but now I am sure of my mission to destroy Soviet Union. I know this is, how you say, contradiction? But as I say, my brain is no longer mine. This is not first nor last of reprehensible acts forced and not forced upon me to perform. I know KGB consider these reprehensible acts tests, to see how dedicated one is to cause. But these tests to me are more like cement that holds together my hatred of Communist Party and Soviet Union. They drive me to be not good double-agent, but best double-agent in entire world.

This is my thinking, with head so large, when I make suggestion to Alek that he, how you say, take temperature of company men back in United States about possible wet work. Alek just looks at me. *Assassination Demitri? Who exactly my friend?* And I look at Alek and he

knows I'm serious, and I say, *You know who*. Alek backs away from me, *No no no, not Khrushchev, Demitri, that's crazy*. Alek tells me it's a bad idea to even suggest it to the men in wool suits, they'll think I've lost my mind and pull me out. Or worse. I tell Alek, I say, *Look Alek, I lost my mind long time ago, you know this, no?* And I can tell by the look in his eyes that yes, he knows, of course he knows. You don't do what we do and not lose your mind. Hell, our minds are the least of our losses. It's our souls that I'm worried about, yes, our souls, which we all lost a long time back. All we can do is hold on to what humanity we have left, and for me, that's taking out bastard Khrushchev living off sweat and labor of comrades in Soviet Union.

So I tell Alek, I say, *Alek, take it to men in wool suits, tell 'em Twenty-Ten is as stable as any other operative, and if you don't do this my friend, well, let's just say I know secrets, okay? A lot of secrets*. I know this is a dangerous play, but that is what makes me a good spy. There, I've said it, I'm a spy, a traitor, a whore, or anyway you want to look at it. Worse yet I'm a double-agent, a traitor's traitor, a whore's whore, but that is my cross to bear, my burden, and so this confession. And Alek knows this, he's no better, no worse, and he knows the danger I'm putting us both in, but he nods his head anyway, sad, and says he will pass on my suggestion to the boys in Virginia.

I love Alek like brother, but something in his manner is troubling, I can't put finger on it, and it is very much bothering me. But I can't worry about Alek, I must plan for assassination. So for next few weeks I put my plan into motion. In two months time I will be called to Kremlin to meet with higher ups and Premier Khrushchev himself, and that's the date I will give myself to United States, because this is suicide mission. That doesn't really bother me though. In truth I've been dead for long time anyway.

A couple weeks pass and I haven't heard anything from Alek. I go to our usual drop point and finally there's a message from Alek, he tells me we have to meet that afternoon at 3 p.m. at the Leningrad Zoo. I don't like this, but it is not for me to question Alek. I meet Alek at designated hour, and he is smiling. *Good news Demetri, our friends in Virginia have sanctioned your plan*. I am always amazed at speed which CIA works compared to KGB. With KGB plan needs to be notarized by A which needs okay by B which has to go through committee C which goes to bureaucrat D which...well, you see my point, no? But still, this is very fast. Too fast? I don't judge. Perhaps they just want it done and over with.

Whatever is reason, the plan is a go. No one but Alek and I know of plan. I go to Moscow several days before my meeting with Premier. Alek wants to meet one last time, so we arrange to meet in Gorky Park, his choice not mine. He likes open, public places like zoos and parks. Me, I like little tables in back of coffeehouses, or loud, crowded bars, enclosed places where I can see everyone and everything. So I get to Gorky around nine at night, another thing I don't like, shadow meets. Again, can't see your surroundings. But it's Alek's meet so I agree to terms.

I think I see Alek seated at a bench beneath a lamppost. I approach him from behind, and when I come around to front I have to resist urge not to puke all over myself. Alek's face is sliced and bloody, and he has been carved down his sternum, skin and muscle flayed outward like a butterfly, warm blood steamy and dripping, melting the white snow into pink beneath him. I look around before I take off down the path, my heart pounding, my mind racing-Who? What? Why? The who is easy, filleting, that is pure KGB, what is more difficult is, do they know of plan? Of course they do. This is message to me, or whoever KGB thinks me is. Do they know now? Were they watching? I must get out of here, get to safe house. There's a phone on the corner.

I dial the number imprinted on my brain. It rings. A woman answers. *Khurychev Florist*. I

look around before I respond. *This is T as in Tango, dash October. I need a dozen roses.* Line clicks. Man comes on. *You are not to call here unless you've been compromised, do you understand, T dash October?* Yes, I say, *hell yes, and yes I've been compromised. Blue Cab is dead, do you understand?* *We understand* says man's voice. *Good Luck Twenty-Ten.* And line goes dead. I hang up phone then hear the familiar sound of Makarov being cocked, and then cool gunmetal against my temple.

And that's how I find myself here, in a filthy cell, freezing, skin taut over weak bones, rats my only companions, horrid dreams my only escape, stale bread my only nutrition. I wish they would kill me, I do. I won't do it myself, won't give them the satisfaction. But yes, I wish I was dead.

Why I was not killed at phone booth in park I don't know. Why CIA sold me out I don't know. Maybe they want to keep Khrushchev alive, I've seen weirder things. Maybe it was KGB, maybe they find out about me independent of company. Maybe it was Alek. He was acting weird. That would be the worst. He was like family. Hell he was only family I ever really had. That would at least make sense. Like I said, that's always how KGB gets their man, through family. Or maybe it was just fate, payback, karma, whatever you call it. You know. For all the reprehensibles. Signed, Demetri Zelnykhov.

Alek turned the over the last page of the letter and looked across his desk at the three men, two in suits, the third in a General's uniform. Each nodded and said *Da*. Alek held the pages of Demetri's letter over a garbage can, pulled a Zippo lighter from his coat pocket, lit the papers and dropped them into the garbage. As ashes drifted toward the ceiling, the light from the flames illuminated Alek's face, his grave countenance betrayed only slightly by the shimmer reflected in his eyes.