

## **Introduction**

### **A Phoenix Cry**

What is it that ignites mountains, cities and the sky?

What is it for which mortals cry?

What is it that lightning cannot scorch?

What is that dragon fire cannot torch?

It is you! Oh Phoenix, bird of fire!

Your tragic life is there to inspire!

For our sins, your blood must shed,

And you keep rising from the dead.

And when the Phoenix ends her flight,

She builds her nest by night.

Then she sits huddled in a sodden nest,

Curled up for a final rest.

She shivers, her power spent,

Plumage sopping, torn and rent.

Over her chest, her head is bent.

She picks herself in great torment.

The flames burst out into the sky,  
A burning body, a final cry.  
A heap of ashes, the end of light,  
Then comes darkness as if it were night.

From the ashes there shall rise  
A fiery Phoenix to the skies,  
Whose burning wings shall re-ignite  
the light that in our hearts reside.

And once her time passes,  
She will ignite into ashes  
until the crimes done today,  
are forever burned and purged away.

## **Prologue**

**“The greatest test of true love is not how long love endures, but how one handles love when deception is discovered.”**

**Bo Braze**

**Tel Aviv, Israel**

**In the House of Mikhail Andropopov's Israeli Wife**

**13 Mar 06, 0500 Hours**

The Middle Eastern sun peaked through the window and filtered down onto Yetta's jet black hair, making it even more radiant with the auburn highlights sparkling as if afire. Mikhail stood admiring her beauty from afar, not wanting to interrupt that sensual moment. The bedclothes had fallen away exposing her nakedness and he drank it in with pleasure. Yetta was beautiful. She was five foot, eleven inches in her stocking feet. Her long hair cascaded over her shoulders and tumbled down her back in soft curls. Her slim muscular figure was the product of a strict diet and structured exercise regimen. She opened her eyes, blinked hard, sat up and looked at him.

“It’s not time to leave already, is it?” she said rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

“Yetta, you know that I must catch the plane or I will lose my job,” he answered softly.

“Can’t you call and tell them that something has come up or that you’re sick? Say anything so that we can be together a bit longer,” she pleaded.

Just then the baby let out a wail and arms and legs began to pummel the mattress and the sides of the crib.

“I’ll get him. You stay in bed. I want to say goodbye to him before I leave anyway,” Mikhail rushed to the crib in the other room.

*He is such a good father*, she thought to herself, knowing well that it would be awhile before she and little Moshe would see him again. He would miss so much of his son's growing up. The baby would experience many changes before Mikhail's next visit. She hated his job, but he did provide them with everything they could ever wish for. His love for them couldn't be denied. She and Moshe had more than any family could expect from a husband and father.

“Moshe, you are a fine strapping boy and your papa loves you very much. I have great plans for you in the future,” Mikhail chortled, holding him high in the air and wiggling him back and forth, then suddenly dropping him and catching him.

Moshe gurgled ecstatically, both arms and legs flailing the air in anticipation of another lift into space.

Mikhail walked into the bedroom. Yetta was putting on her bathrobe as he entered. “Take him now,” he said. “He’s not only soiled his diapers, but he’s hungry and I can’t provide him with that pleasure.”

Yetta smiled at the impish grin on his face. She took Moshe and walked slowly to the bathroom, cooing to him all the way. A few minutes later, she

returned with the little boy, complete with clean diapers and over-shirt. He had a big frown on his face.

“He’s hungry. I’d better feed him before he wakes up the whole neighborhood.” She propped herself up on the pillow, pulled her bathrobe back and guided him to her nipple. He eagerly stretched out his hands and grasped her breast hungrily. His mouth found the nipple and he sucked ravenously.

She looked up at Mikhail and said, “Must you go now? Your plane doesn’t leave until nine o’clock and it’s hardly past five now,” she pleaded once more.

“You know what a pain in the ass Israeli security is when you’re trying to leave the country,” Mikhail said. There was annoyance in his voice. “Getting in is easy, but getting out is a major undertaking.”

“It will take me two hours just to clear the first barrier of security agents even with my diplomatic immunity. What with the weapons that I must reclaim, it will be another hour before I even get to the gate. I cannot delay or I’ll miss my plane and then my business in Denmark will be compromised. My superiors are the kind of people who do not tolerate mistakes or excuses. I must leave now and that is all I want to hear about the subject. Just always remember that I love you and little Moshe more than I can tell you. I will be seeing you in the next couple of months as usual,” he said.

She pouted and turned her head away so he couldn’t see the fire and tears forming in her eyes. “Sometimes I just don’t understand you. If you love us like you say you do, then why can’t we be with you in Russia? I don’t understand why we have to be apart like this.”

With impatience in his voice, Mikhail shot back, “I have explained many times that the secrecy and security level of my position in the new Russian government prevents me from sending cards, letters or telephone contact. This is done to ensure diplomatic secrecy and more important, to protect you and Moshe. We still have many enemies who would like nothing better than to get to me through my family. I cannot and will not let this happen.” His voice softened. “Take heart, my lovely wife, because I am working on a way that we can be together forever and always. There will be no more absences after that. Will that satisfy you?”

“Oh Mikhail, tell me when. Please tell me when,” she cried. She removed the baby from her breast, rushed to his crib and laid him down, placing his rattle with the bells in his tiny fist to occupy him.

She turned and flew into Mikhail's arms, kissing his neck, his cheeks and hard on the lips. Mikhail returned her kiss in kind. He pressed his lips hard upon hers and he drew her to him wanting once more to feel the voluptuousness she brought to him. It was a long and enduring kiss. Unfortunately, it would be the last kiss she would ever receive from him. Moshe was nine months old now and Mikhail's plans dictated that when he reached one year old, he would be taken to Siberia for his education and indoctrination into the Russian Phoenix.

“Nothing is definite yet, so you will have to be patient. In Russia, these things take time. Just believe me when I tell you that it will not be long now and let's just leave it at that.” With that he straightened up, put his hand casually to the

brim of his hat in a mock two fingered salute, grabbed his suitcase and briefcase and walked out the door.

As he departed the house, he stood on the stoop and observed the taxi driver slumped down in the seat waiting patiently by the curb. Through habit he stopped, his right hand resting on the rail of the porch step. His eyes slowly took in the deserted street, quick to pick up any sudden movement or abnormal activity. The street was deserted.

The driver straightened up when he saw Mikhail approach. He opened his door and moved toward the passenger side of the taxi. He was a sparsely bearded man in his late 60's. He was wearing a badly soiled shirt and equally soiled baggy pants. His shoes must have seen the Millennium War because they were curled around the edges and squeaked when he walked. He stooped over with short shuffling steps as he ambled towards Mikhail. As he approached, his offensive body odor was overpowering.

Mikhail waved him away in disgust with his hand. "Never mind opening the door. Just get behind the wheel and get me to the airport in record time. Do you understand? There's a good tip in it for you if you do," he said in a disgusted voice.

"Yes sir, yes sir, yes sir," the driver mumbled as he shuffled around the hood of the taxi and jumped into the driver's seat.

He turned to look at Mikhail, who threw his briefcase and suitcase to the other side of the seat and then slipped into the taxi. He reached over, fastened the seat belt and then immediately opened the window to purge the taxi of the foul

smell. The driver turned to the front, slammed the taxi into gear and they started with a jolt. As they moved away from the curb, Mikhail turned and looked back. Yetta, with little Moshe in her arms, was standing on the stoop. She had his little hand in hers, furiously waving goodbye, tears streaming down her face. He waved back until the taxi turned the corner.

Turning to the front, he relaxed, put his head back and contemplated the drudgery of going through the painstaking process of getting to his private jet and the boredom of his upcoming Denmark visit. This would be the fourth of his visits to his seven wives and already it was becoming tedious. If it weren't for his children and the part they would play in his master plan, he wouldn't even be here.

**Dulles Airport to  
Middleburg, Virginia  
15 Mar 06, 1000 Hours**

Mikhail climbed in the taxi at Dulles and laid his head back. He was exhausted. This was his seventh and final visit. These trips every six months truly zapped his energy and he was still a young man. Mikhail Andropopov was a study in perfection. Six feet, three inches tall, his sandy blond curly hair, muscular physique and piercing blue eyes attracted attention, especially from women.

He had carefully chosen each wife according to height, intelligence, and family genes consistent with his own. The predicted mixture of his genes and theirs in reproducing the ideal offspring was a given. So far, it all had turned out like he had planned. Looking at his children, male and female, was like looking

into a mirror. He could hardly wait until they were old enough to be an integral part of Russian Phoenix.

Someday the little boy from Siberia would rule a new Russia and then they would all pay for their ignorance and eagerness in giving up a government that was once feared throughout the world. New Russia would rise from the ashes like a Phoenix. *I can wait*, he thought. *Time is but a short glance into the mist until the goal at the end of the fog becomes a reality.*

He was jolted upright in his seat. “You sure you want to take a taxi to Middleburg, man? I mean, like that’s a damn long drive and it will cost you a pretty buck,” the taxi driver shouted, looking over his shoulder at Mikhail. “You will have to pay the fare back to Dulles too. There’s a bus that goes right by where you want to be dropped off and it’s a helluva lot cheaper. You know what I mean?”

“The cost is not important. Just get me there in a hurry.”

“Hey man, you’re the boss. I was just tryin’ to help ya’all out. I never argue with the man with the bread. You know what I mean? It’s like I got to make a living, right?” He paused for a moment and then said, “Tell you what. How’s about takin’ ya’all off the meter and I will drive you there for . . . say \$120.00 even? Sound fair to ya’all?”

It was a rip-off and Mikhail knew it, but he said, “No talk, just do it.”

He sat back and relaxed, drinking in the awesome beauty of the Northern Virginia horse country. It was still as beautiful as he had always remembered it. He would be with Mary and little John very shortly. He loved all of this children,

but he loved John the most. When he looked at him, it was like looking into a mirror. He saw many traits in John, at this early age, that he himself possessed. He had his father's piercing blue eyes and blond hair. He would have his pick of the most beautiful women in the world when he grew to adulthood. They would fight to be with him. To Mikhail, just to hold him in his arms once again would be worth all the travel and time spent getting to Virginia.

He was also looking forward to returning home to his gulag in Siberia and his luxurious dacha in the wilds of the cold country. He yearned for some good Russian Vodka with a bite to it. Not like the American piss they tried to pass off as vodka. His gulag was now completely operational and running like a well-oiled machine. He had everything. He had the gulag, he had great wealth and most importantly, he had his children.

At the tender age of 26, Mikhail Andropopov was the youngest Commissar of Gulags in the history of Russia. His position allowed him the latitude of pursuing the long trips to visit his wives without question. It just added to the sweetness of his master plan.

He jolted upright and looked out of the window as the taxi rolled into Middleburg and stopped in front of the historic Red Fox Inn and Tavern.

The driver stopped the taxi and then turned to look at Mikhail. "You have a reservation at the Inn, man? I hope so because this place is almost always booked solid. I don't know how many times I've taken a fare here and find that they don't have a reservation. Then they can't get a room and we have to turn

around and back to the big city to find a vacancy. Then we have a helluva time finding a room there. I mean.....”

Before the driver could say another word, Mikhail leaned over and said, “Here’s your money. Take my luggage and put it by the curb.”

“Yes sir,” the driver said as he opened the door. “And might I say that it’s been a real pleasure. You ever been here before, man? You German, right?” the driver queried as he moved to the trunk.

“Yes, that’s right. I’m German,” Mikhail lied. “How did you know?”

“Hey man, when you’ve been driving a hack as long as I have, you get a pretty good feel for languages and where the fare is from. Know what I mean?”

As Mikhail was getting out of the taxi, a blue Mercedes careened around the corner, wheels screeching to a stop behind him. The driver’s door flew open and a tall, natural strawberry blond jumped out and flew into Mikhail’s arms. She was six feet tall in her stocking feet. Her legs never seemed to end and she had the kind of breasts that emphasized the curvature of her body. Not too big, not too small. She was Playboy material in the rough. She was the kind of woman that turned men’s and women’s heads as she passed by. And to add to all that, he had picked her because she was perfect breeding stock.

“Oh Mike, I missed you so much!” she shouted as she smothered him with kisses. She started kissing him on the neck, her hands intertwined in his hair, pulling him to her.

The driver opened the trunk and carried the briefcase and suitcase to the curb. He turned and looked at the couple next to him, lost in another world. “Hey

man, it looks like you got it all under control so I will make my way back to metro. Ya'all have a great visit, you hear?" he said as he drank in the beauty of the woman in Mikhail's arms. He walked around to the driver's side and got into the taxi. *Some people*, thought the taxi driver, *sure had it great in this world*.

Mikhail ignored him, lost in the moment of the kiss and not wanting it to end. His hardness was proof of that. Without saying a word or breaking the kiss, he swung his hand out, flipped it into the air and rudely dismissed the driver. Taking the hint, the driver touched his hat, hooked a U-turn and roared back towards the city.

The kiss lingered and lingered. Slowly he pushed away from her and held her at arm's length. He observed the innocent portrait she most likely portrayed to the casual observer. This innocence made her even more appealing to wandering eyes.

Of all his wives, Betty was the one lady he loved coming to visit the most. That innocence was what made her unique. That look hid the sensuousness she exuded with every step she took and every movement she made. She was like a Siberian Tiger. She was breathtaking, but dangerous, if you didn't know how to handle her. He had tasted her hidden pleasures and for that very reason, she was the one woman that held his heart. *It would be hard to do what the future held in store for her*, he thought, *but it had to be done*.

The moment was shattered by a shriek. Little John was straining, arms outstretched from his car seat. He woke up and let everyone know his displeasure in being left behind. Mikhail went to the car, opened the side door and helped

little John escape from his captor. He raised him up and dangled him at arm's length. He was already a handsome child at nine months. Mikhail could hardly wait to see what the future held for him.

He drew John protectively into his strong arms and said, "Let's go home. I have had a brutal trip and I just want to rest and catch up on what has been happening during my absence."

They hopped into the car and drove off. Mikhail played with John and looked out the window. From the corner of his eye, he could see Betty taking short glances at him. She tried to hide the frown on her face, but her concern was growing steadily by the minute.

Finally she said, "Mike, I am really worried about you. These long trips from country to country can't be good for your health. You're really pale and you don't look good at all."

He turned and looked at her for a long moment. Finally, he smiled warmly and said, "It is almost over now, Betty. The next trip will be you and little John being picked up and brought to me in Siberia. Would you like that?"

Her head jerked violently to look at him and the happiness and warmth of the smile that spread across her face was living proof that she was more than pleased.

"Keep your eyes on the road," he laughed as the car veered slightly off the road. "We will discuss it more in detail when we get home. We have two glorious weeks of love and planning ahead of us. You do want to come, don't you?"

“Oh Mike, let’s just pack and leave tomorrow. All I want to do is love you the rest of your life and be with you until the day I die,” she said, excitement glowing in her eyes.

*You will be with me until the day you die, he thought, but it will be sooner than you could imagine.*

“That’s impossible right now, but I promise in three or four months you will be with me forever,” he said softly.

All was going well. He had informed his wives in Israel, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Africa and China that they would be joining him soon and the response was always the same. They would join him at the drop of a hat.

Each of his wives had one thing in common. Each was selected because they had no relatives, close family or friends. They were not allowed to work, so they didn’t have an opportunity to make friends. If they did cultivate new friends, he would have no choice but to eliminate them later on. He was his wives' family and no one else. He was the only one they could come to in time of trouble and he made sure he was always there when they needed him.

They wanted for nothing. Anything they desired was freely given without having to explain why they wanted it. Each had been warned not to discuss him with any merchants, medical personnel or anyone due to the sensitive nature of his business. They well understood that failure to protect his anonymity would sever their relationship with him immediately and they would never see him again. His plan would never work without total compliance to this one crucial condition.

**Middleburg, Virginia**  
**The House of American Wife Betty**  
**15 Mar 06, 1100 Hours**

The car pulled up to a huge historic civil war farmhouse that was in ruins. An open porch flowed continuously from one side of the house across the front to the end of the other side of the house in true southern tradition. Broken boards were scattered throughout the expanses of the porch and the front steps had succumbed to time, making the house unapproachable unless one wanted to brave a climb up and through a broken window.

Three gables stood majestically at the front of the house projecting traditional southern architecture of the period. Four chimneys rose from each side of the farmhouse. Bricks from the chimney were scattered loosely around each fireplace on the roof, lending a touch of modern art to the old building. An observation deck sat in disrepair perched atop the house with a rusty weather vane that squealed noisily whenever the wind blew.

Hardly a window remained intact. The breeze blew freely through the windows lifting the time worn curtains high and suddenly releasing them when the breeze subsided.

It brought a smile to his face each time he saw the house. He had his own private Disneyland Haunted House. No one lived in the house. He had paid cash for the house for that very reason. The closest neighbors were hundreds of acres

away. He had many offers to sell, but had turned them all down. The house was a perfect smokescreen for his activities.

The car turned onto a long gravel road bisecting the farmland and disappearing over a slight rise. A short way from the back of the farmhouse twenty-five or thirty small shacks spread out in complete disrepair. The slave quarters were just large enough for beds and that was it. Rusty cooking pots were scattered around the ground. It was a depressing sight. Mikhail turned his gaze back to the road.

Topping the rise, a carriage house slowly came into view. From the outside, one would think that the interior matched those of the rest of the buildings on the property. It was constructed of huge stones and mortar and required extensive renovation to upgrade it to a livable condition. Russian workmen were brought in from his gulag in Siberia to complete the renovation. All materials, furniture and comforts were purchased with cash in Fairfax, Alexandria and other local area businesses. Once purchased, Russian construction crews picked up the materials and transported them to the coach house.

No one turned onto the gravel road until no one else was in sight. When clear, they moved quickly down the gravel road and out of sight. Everything they did was designed to eliminate drawing attention to his family. It was completely private and secluded from the world.

Once the renovation was completed, the workmen returned to Siberia, never to be heard from again.

When the car stopped, Betty jumped out, ran to the trunk and opened it. “Don’t worry about my luggage right now,” Mikhail shouted as he opened his door. “Let’s you, me and little John take a walk so I can loosen up before we go inside.”

An hour passed before either spoke. Hand-in-hand, they walked slowly around the woods and surrounding pastures, soaking in the tranquility of the moment. Mikhail held John in his arms. The early afternoon sun glimpsed occasionally through the trees from the cloudless skies. *If anything could rival the beauty of his Siberian tundra, it was this horse country nestled deep in the Northern Virginia countryside*, he thought.

“Let’s take John back to the house and put him down for awhile,” Mikhail said, glancing mischievously at Betty and then looking lovingly down at his son fast asleep in his arms.

Betty moved quickly away from him. She turned her head, looked over her shoulder and said impishly, “Sure, and you might even get lucky if you’re a good little Russian boy.” The look on her face told him he was in for a great afternoon and an even better evening. He hurried to catch up, careful not to wake the baby and spoil the anticipation of their lovemaking.

It was more than intense on the morning he had to leave. Making love with Betty rose to new heights and total fulfillment for him. His stamina was drained and he welcomed the chance to get on his private jet and sleep all the way to Siberia. He had seriously contemplated staying a few more days, but the intensity of reaching his goal overshadowed everything else. He had his bags

packed and was ready to leave. The limousine would be waiting in Middleburg and there was no sense in prolonging his departure.

“Why can’t I drive you to the airport?” Betty pleaded. “It will give us more time to be together and I want that so badly.”

His voice had a slight edge to it when he said, “You know I don’t want you and John to be driving in the big city unless it is an emergency. If I would have wanted you to do that, I would’ve bought a house in town. You’re safe here and that’s the way it has to remain.” His voice softened, “Besides, in a short time we’ll never be apart again.”

Holding her by the shoulders, Mikhail stood back a little and looked sharply into her eyes. “In a few months a plane will arrive to carry you and John to Siberia. From that time on, John will be spending the rest of his life with me. You won’t be returning here. Is this all right with you?”

Wrapped in euphoria, the implication went right over her head.

“Oh yes.....oh yes, Mike. I’ve been waiting for this to happen since the day we met. You are my reason for living. I love you so much,” Betty purred as she returned the depth of his gaze.

The tears in her eyes and the trembling of her body told him that she was ready to commit to the next step.

“You knew the time would come when you’d have to answer certain questions to secure your entry to Siberia, right?” She nodded. “Before we married, I asked you not to make any new friends, cut the ties with old friends and other people in your life.” She nodded again.

“I also asked you to keep all contact with the outside world to a minimum and never to discuss me or our marriage to anyone. I realize it has been very difficult for you to do this, but the urgency of my mission warrants secrecy. If you have kept these requests, you will be on your way to me in a few months.”

“Oh Mike, I have only you and John and that’s all I want in life. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I don’t need anyone else. I haven’t told anyone anything about us and I never will.” Tears flowed down her cheeks and onto the ground.

“That is a big relief to me. It would have broken my heart to leave you and never see you again.” A warm smile spread across his face and his eyes burned from the tears that he was holding back.

He reached out and drew her to him. She melted into his arms and trembled. She laid her head on his chest and cried. He placed his finger softly under her chin and lifted her head. Kissing her roughly, his tongue searched for the button that would refuel her passion. It seemed like a lifetime until he broke the moment. He pushed her away from him slowly. He walked over to the crib. John was sleeping soundly. Mikhail placed his hand gently on the boy’s forehead, knelt down and placed a light kiss on his left cheek and then on his right cheek. John didn’t move.

“I love you little guy,” he murmured softly. “It won’t be long and we will never be separated again.”

He turned to Betty and said, “We have to hurry or I will miss my plane. Get John ready for the trip into town. My bags are packed and I am ready to have the limousine drop me off at the airport. We need to go as soon as you are ready.”

Betty picked up John, wrapped him in a light blanket and walked out to the Mercedes where Mikhail was loading his luggage. When he had closed the trunk, she handed him little John and climbed into the driver’s seat.

Before entering the automobile, Mikhail stopped and looked around the land and beautiful surroundings. He would surely miss the horse country and the comfort he had always enjoyed when he visited Virginia. He suddenly broke the moment, climbed into the car and said, “Let’s go. The limousine is waiting.”

**Siberia, Russia, Stalin Gulag**  
**Ground Level Reception Area**  
**20 Jun 06, 0900 Hours**

Mikhail could hear them from down the hall. The screaming and anger was proof that they were not happy campers. Inwardly, he smiled. This was last of the first phase of Russian Phoenix. The next phase would be the waiting. He dreaded this when he put the plan on paper, but it was the only way he could conceivably bring the plan to a final working solution. *By that time I will be an old man*, he thought. *Well, not that old*. He smiled.

The two guards stationed at the door snapped to attention as he entered the room. It was a dark and dreary room. It was this room that all prisoners became

familiar with before they entered the gulag proper. The dark gray paint on the wall was dirty, cracked and pieces of plaster had broken free to the ground and commanded one's attention when entering the room.

Further proof that the best of things did not happen in this room were the imprints of heads having been smashed against the wall, dried blood running down to the baseboards. The indents were numerous and deep. There were no windows. Only the ill lit lamps that hung from the ceiling by chains gave any semblance of light.

Around the room were pictures of past Russian Premiers hung at odd angles. The absence of pictures of Premier Gorbechev and his successors was evident as one looked around the room.

The room was huge. It could accommodate 100 prisoners comfortably if the numbers warranted it. The floor was concrete. It was in disrepair with chips of loose concrete on the floor. The room was always cold due to the below zero temperatures on the frozen Siberian tundra. Mikhail made no attempt to heat the room since those who entered never returned to the outside world.

The minute Mikhail entered the room, the volume raised several levels. He raised his hands and kept them there until silence fell upon the room. In front of him sat his seven wives, arms and legs shackled to chairs and held from behind by large muscular prison guards.

“Mike, what is happening? They took John from me. Where is our son? Why am I tied up? Who are these other women? This must be some huge mistake. Tell them,” Betty shouted, anger and panic in her voice.

The room erupted into chaos, screaming and struggling again.

“Quiet!” Mikhail shouted loudly. The angry look in his eyes conveyed the seriousness of their situation. Any resistance or noise would result in unpleasant consequences. The room became deadly silent.

“Who are these other women?” Mai Ling, his Chinese wife, demanded of him. She was still struggling to break free from her restraints and the prison guard's tight hold.

“Like you, Mai, they are all wives of Mikhail Andropopov,” he said with a evil smirk on his face.

Shock replaced fear as each woman looked at the other not understanding fully what was happening to them.

“Their fate will be the same as yours. You will never see my children again and they will never see you. You will never see the outside again. You will die here. How long you live and survive will depend on how resourceful you can be in the surroundings you will live in,” Mikhail paused and then added in a deadly voice, “Any trouble now and you will die now.”

He turned to the ranking prison guard and said, “Take them away and I want guards on them one hundred percent of the time for the first six weeks. By that time, escape attempts will be impossible and never enter their minds again, *if they survive*, that is. Any requests to speak to me will be denied. Is that clear?”

The guard smartly clicked his heels, saluted and held it until the Commissar returned the salute.

The women erupted into protestations, disbelief, tears and anger again. Mikhail turned smartly on his heels and walked out of the room, down the hall and beyond the noise. He walked out into the prison yard, put his hands on his hips, took a deep breath and breathed in the vastness of his beautiful tundra. It was a wonderful day. A large smile appeared on his face. He slapped his knee in joy and walked away from the prison yard.

Mikhail entered his office, put his coat and hat on the rack, sat in his chair and put his feet up on his desk. He placed his hands on the back of his head and closed his eyes in total satisfaction.

The guards released the women from the chairs, stood them up and started pulling them out of the room. Those who resisted were mercilessly beaten and kicked. A good lesson for anyone else who had the same idea of resistance. When calm was restored and resistance broken, they were led down the hall to the first elevator. The door opened slowly and the panel displayed six floors up and one floor down.

The women were pushed into the elevator, the shackles biting into their ankles. The door closed and the elevator began to descend. The elevator shuddered as it hit the lower floor and stopped while the door opened.

The senior guard pointed to Betty and said, "I want this one brought to my room. I have plans for her."

The toothless grin, his foul smelling breath and lack of cleanliness made Betty shout, "No, please no! This has to be a mistake. This has to be a dream.

Please, no!" The guard slammed her against the wall and sent her into unconsciousness.

"I don't care what you do with the rest of them. When you are through with them, they go to the Lower Level Eight. These are special prisoners. Anyone who fucks up and doesn't do what they are supposed to do will end up in the prison graveyard," the ranking guard stated sharply and matter-of-factly. The other guards nodded their heads in compliance.

The Andropopov wives looked around with terror, despair and tears in their eyes. They had all come to Russia thinking they were going to be reunited with their husband and live the rest of their lives in luxury and happiness. Instead, they had entered hell. One continuing theme ran through their thoughts only, *What would happen to them now?* One guard turned to them as they entered another elevator. He leaned down and put his face directly at eye level, his glazed eyes moist with anticipation and whispered harshly, "Welcome to Hell, bitches."