



The Threat



Ivan Nazaroff strode along the snow-filled Moscow street, trying hard to pretend that nothing had happened.

Behind him, he could hear the running footsteps of his sister, Katya. Her heavy boots were thudding through snow that had been falling all day and was swirling like

clouds of smoke around the hunched and hurrying people.

‘Ivan! Wait for me!’

Ivan wondered how many times he had heard that call. Sometimes it was tiresome to be always waiting for a ten-year-old sister, two whole years younger than he. Today it was worse than tiresome. He wanted to think.



IVAN AND THE INFORMER



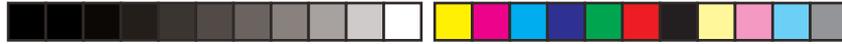
Katya's face was bright with cold as she laid a thickly-gloved hand on Ivan's coat sleeve to steady herself and catch her breath. 'The bus was so crowded, I almost missed getting off,' she gasped. 'Didn't you wonder where I was?'

Ivan marched on ahead, hoping his sister would not

notice he was upset. 'Certainly not. You're much too old to have a brother leading you around. Besides, I saw you shoving your way off the bus.'

Katya glanced quickly at her brother's stern face. 'Why was Boris Petrovich waiting for you after school today?' She asked the question with a stab of fear. She knew Boris had just had his fifteenth birthday and was a new member of the Komsomol, the communist youth organization.

A gust of wind flung itself at the children, making them stagger against its force. Ivan fought ahead, pushing out his anger at Boris. He was grateful that the wind made it impossible to answer Katya.



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But the turning of the corner gave them relief from the wind, and Katya, with her usual persistence, repeated the question.

‘Same as always,’ Ivan finally answered. ‘He knows I am a Christian. He likes to make fun of me.’

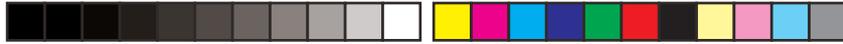
‘But it wasn’t the same,’ Katya retorted, her eyebrows tense with concern. ‘I saw him pushing you. He’s a bully.’

Ivan sighed. Katya had a way of persisting in her questions until she finally got the whole story, no matter what. ‘He said that as a Komsomol member he has a responsibility to convince me that Christianity is old-fashioned superstition. I told him I didn’t have to listen to him, but he thinks he can make me.’

‘How will he make you?’ The wind almost carried off Katya’s words. ‘He can’t make you listen!’

Ivan was trying not to think about it, let alone talk about it. But Katya’s glance was insistent. ‘He’s on the hockey team. The others know I am a believer and







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say nothing. The coach knows, but he is interested in a good team and I am a good player. But if Boris protests my being on the team, the coach will have to remove me. After all, the team is for the Young Pioneers, and believers don't belong to that!

'But you have worked so hard! And it is such an honour to be chosen for the team. He's horrid!' Katya flung the words out with such indignation that an old woman, bent double as she slowly shoveled snow, stiffly raised her head and glanced briefly at Katya.

'We had an argument. I walked away. He would have come after me, but his bus was coming. He said he would be waiting for me after school tomorrow. He means to fight me.'

Ivan pulled open the heavy door of the apartment building for his sister. It was a great relief to be in the long hallway and out of the wind and snow. He spoke quietly. 'Say nothing of this to Momma, Katya. We don't want to worry her.'

The wonderful smell of borscht greeted them as they entered their apartment.

'Momma, we're home!' Katya called, pulling off her boots with stiff fingers. Ivan sat down at the large table in the centre of the living-room, smiling as his mother bent to kiss him.

'What a cold day, children!' she exclaimed. 'I have some hot tea ready for you. Katya, get the pot from the kitchen please, and I'll bring out the glasses.'



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Ivan was glad this was a day his mother was home early from her job at the factory. He liked to smell the thick borscht soup already hot and to watch her steady hands laying out glasses and spoons and pouring the tea.

The children sat quietly, breathing the steam from the hot tea and feeling it warm their icy faces.

Mother sat at the table with them, mending silently and smiling when she glanced at the two children.

Katya sipped her tea slowly. She wanted to make it last, but Ivan was already beginning his homework, his glass set carefully beside his book.

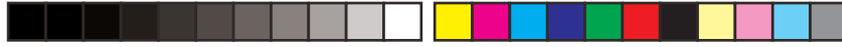
It would be at least an hour, Ivan knew, before Father returned from his factory job, and in that hour Ivan could get a good start on what he had to complete for school tomorrow.

A good feeling settled upon Ivan. The threats of Boris seemed far away. The tension of being the only believer in his classroom, the only one not to wear proudly the red neck scarf of the communist Young Pioneers, seemed eased.

What if the others made fun of him? Here in this room, with the tea still warming him and the quiet face of his mother bending over her sewing, the difficulties at school subsided.

Ivan raised his head from his book to smile at Katya. He was sorry he had been so irritated with her after school. But as he glanced up, the soft lace curtains at the window across the room suddenly





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lifted as a blast of cold air swept in from the open front door. He turned in his chair with astonishment.

