

A.G. Bukrinskaya

Viktor Zhdanov—my Husband

Elena Tatulova's Diary

Moscow – 1996

From the author

There's only one real character in this book—Viktor Mikhailovich Zhdanov, the world-renowned scientist, creator of molecular virology in our country, humanist, patriot, and romantic, who died on the threshold of reconstruction. All that is written here are reliable facts about his life. As for any other characters, they have made-up traits and names.

Foreword

When I first read this book many years ago, when my mom was still alive, I thought that it was about her and not about my step-father. This annoyed me a little, and I did not want to come back to it. Now, re-reading the book after my mom has passed away, I realize how close and happy they were together, how they loved each other, even though what I and Victor, my brother, saw was mostly their discussions of scientific papers or quiet sitting side by side writing research manuscripts or books. The book may not provide all the details of Viktor Zhdanov's biography or his outstanding achievements in science and public health, but it gives an inside view of his life from the person he loved and cherished. It is a tribute to both these great people, Viktor Zhdanov and Alissa Bukrinskaya.

Michael Bukrinsky

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The Best Person Who Ever Lived is an Unknown Ukrainian Man

William MacAskill

In researching for an answer, I came across a list that *Esquire* had published called "The 75 Best People in the World." The writers suggested that the number one spot should go to... Matt Damon.

This seems unlikely.

A good contender for humanity's greatest achievement is the eradication of smallpox. Smallpox was a horrific disease. In the twentieth century alone smallpox killed more than three hundred million people — more than the total death toll in that time from all wars, all genocides, all terrorist acts and all political famines combined. Around 30 percent of those infected died, sometimes from shock because the pain was so unbearable, and even those who survived were usually left badly disfigured. Yet, in 1977, we eradicated the disease.

If we're looking for the Best Person Ever, we could start by looking at those who helped in this effort. In fact, much of the responsibility of smallpox eradication can be attributed to just one man.

In 1966, a 38-year old Ohio-born doctor named D. A. Henderson became the leader of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Smallpox Eradication Campaign. Despite just 10 years of clinical experience and being 15 years younger than most of the other doctors in the program, Henderson excelled at his job. When he took charge of the campaign, he proposed an ambitious goal: to completely wipe smallpox off the face of the planet within ten years.

Astoundingly, his campaign succeeded, and between 1967 and 1971 the number of smallpox endemic countries plummeted from thirty-one to five. In 1977, the last naturally occurring case of smallpox was diagnosed in Somalia, making it the first disease ever to have been eradicated.

Henderson's success resulted in a string of accolades. He won more than a dozen major awards, including the Public Welfare Medal, the National Medal of Science, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom—the highest civilian award in the United States. He received honorary degrees from 17 different universities, and immediately after 9/11 he became President George W. Bush's lead expert on bioterrorism. He was even knighted by the king of Thailand.

But D. A. Henderson is not who I'm nominating for the Best Person Ever.

By the time Henderson was hired, the political will to eradicate smallpox already existed. There was a job opening and Henderson filled it; he didn't even want the job initially. This isn't to say he didn't rise to the challenge or that he wasn't a hero, but if he had never taken the job, someone else would have done so instead. This person might not have been quite as good as Henderson, but it seems very likely that smallpox would have been eradicated all the same. Henderson was acting as an agent, rather than a principal: he was carrying out other people's intentions, rather than creating the idea himself.

Instead, we should look to a much more unlikely hero: Viktor Zhdanov, a Ukrainian virologist who died in 1987. At the time of this writing, he has a mere four-paragraph Wikipedia page, and there are only a few grainy black-and-white photos of him available online. I'm not aware of any major accolades for his work.

In 1958, Zhdanov was a deputy minister of health for the Soviet Union. In May of that year, at the Eleventh World Health Assembly meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota, during the Soviet Union's first appearance in the assembly after a nine-year absence, Zhdanov presented a lengthy report with a visionary plan to eradicate smallpox. At the time, no disease had ever before been eradicated. No one knew if it could even be done. And no one expected such a suggestion to come from the Soviet Union; in fact, Zhdanov had had to fight internal pressure from the USSR to convince them of his plans. When he spoke to the assembly of the WHO, he conveyed his message with passion, conviction, and optimism, boldly suggesting that the disease could be eradicated within ten years.

Since smallpox was an exclusively human disease, he argued, it would be easier to eradicate than mosquito-borne infections such as malaria. He pointed [to] his earlier success at eliminating smallpox in the Soviet Union despite its vast territory and poor transportation networks. He referenced Thomas Jefferson's letter to the inventor of the smallpox vaccine, Edward Jenner: "I avail myself of this occasion of rendering you a portion of the tribute of gratitude due to you from the whole human family. Medicine has never before produced any single improvement of such utility...Future nations will know by history only that the loathsome small-pox has existed and by you has been extirpated." On behalf of the USSR, [Zhdanov] offered 25 million doses of the vaccine, and logistical support to many poorer countries.

By the force of his arguments, Zhdanov was successful. The WHO abruptly reversed its position, agreeing to form a campaign to completely eradicate the disease. Smallpox is still the only human disease to have ever been eradicated, and attempts to eradicate polio and guinea worm have only had such investment because of our success with smallpox. If it were not for Zhdanov's actions, smallpox might not have been eradicated

even today. Zhdanov acted as a principal, not an agent, and due to his efforts there are millions of people alive who would otherwise have died.

The lesson for us is that making a difference requires doing something different.

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Chapters

Chapter 1. A Business Trip to Amsterdam.....	8
Chapter 2. Viktor Zhdanov—the Pages of His Life	12
Chapter 3. Family Life	20
Chapter 4. From the Past to the Present	29
Chapter 5. AIDS Comes to Russia	33
Chapter 6. Back in Amsterdam	37
Chapter 7. Viktor’s Death	42
Chapter 8. Venice	50
Chapter 9. Farewell	54

A.G. Bukrinskaya

Viktor Zhdanov—My Husband

Chapter 1

A Business Trip to Amsterdam

I saw Erik right away, as soon as I got through customs. He stood at the barrier in the crowd of people greeting each other, tall, dark-haired, gray-eyed. He waved at me, came over, hugged me, and asked, "Do you want to go to the hotel right away? Or maybe get something to eat at my place?"

"Of course," I responded, smiling, "I'm not tired at all."

His two-story brick house was situated on the bank of a small river in a small town not far from Amsterdam. In his garage, there was a dark green car—a "Volvo." Below, on the river, a white boat glinted in the sunlight. We made our way through the small garden that was thickly planted with rosebushes. They weren't in bloom yet; it was only the first day of spring, March 1st. I knew that Erik himself planted the roses and tended to them.

In the spacious living room with its comfy dark gray leather couches and armchairs, I met his wife, a slim, young woman with dark eyes, and his daughter, a 20- to 22-year-old girl with her father's light gray eyes.

Over lunch, I talked about the plight of science in our country. There was no money for equipment or reagents. Payment often came late, and it was impossible to live on no matter when it arrived, anyway. Every one of my coworkers was busy looking for a way to pay the bills. My old scientific colleague laid cement during the day and came to work in the evening, day in, day out. One talented woman, a researcher from a Moscow university, sold fruit on the roadside. Many excellent young people had already left for the west—the institute was practically empty.

During one of the academic councils, the director said, "I cannot argue with my colleagues that a salary of 20 dollars here is better than 2,000 dollars there."

The institute owed a lot for water, gas, and electricity. When the director applied to the Duma for help, they responded, "You don't have anything to pay for these services? Then your institute will close."

The laboratories that received American grants were the ones that prospered. These were mainly grants from the Soros Foundation, which really helped save our science. My AIDS research in the last two years had only been possible thanks to a long-term Soros grant; unfortunately, it expired. I talked to Erik about how our rulers in the Duma offended Soros, calling his assistance to Russian science "a method of laundering—dirty money." And so, there were no more Soros grants that year.

Erik asked me about my sons, Mitya and Seryozha. Mitya was having a successful career at an American university working on the AIDS problem and had already received the title of professor. As for my youngest son, Seryozha, who was 22, he was studying at a medical institute. But he didn't like medicine and was reluctant to study. I insisted that Seryozha at least went on to higher education, but he rebelled, saying, "To you, a person without a degree isn't a person at all!" Fortunately, he was at least still willing to study.

After a long conversation, it was now time to leave Erik's home. We looked for the hotel for visiting scientists; it was hidden behind tall trees and bushes.

I liked my room. It was unusually long and roughly split into three parts: bedroom, study, and dining room with a small kitchen. There were balconies on both sides, one of them with a magnificent view of the canal, bordered by thick bushes and lush grass. I thought about Moscow, where just this morning, there was snow piled high.

After Erik left, I unpacked my suitcase and went out onto the balcony that faced the canal. A family of wild ducks drifted on the surface, and a stork flew low over the water. On a narrow path along the canal, two girls riding on white horses turned toward a long white building, apparently a stable. In the distance, there were one-story cottages with red-tiled roofs and picturesque Japanese gardens leading down to the canal. Everything was unusual and nice in this strange, foreign country.

I hadn't seen Erik in almost three months, not since the conference on AIDS in Berlin. On the last day of the conference, I couldn't decide for a long time if I should go to the farewell banquet or not. Our Russian delegation wasn't going to go—the tickets for the banquet were too expensive: 50 dollars. But at the last minute, I decided to spend the evening among people, to forget my pain and despair for a while. I entered a noisy, lively hall, lined with tables for four. The middle of the hall was cleared for dancing. The orchestra was playing. I went to a table that had two empty seats and saw a dark-haired, light-eyed gentleman come up to the table from the opposite direction. He pulled out my chair for me and said, after reading my name and country on the card pinned to my suit, "Oh, you're from Russia!"

He sat down opposite me and introduced himself: Professor of the Free University of Amsterdam, head of the AIDS department.

"I knew one Russian scientist, a wonderful person—Viktor Zhdanov. Do you know him?" He asked me.

I looked at him and quietly said, "I am his wife, or now his widow. He died five years ago..."

"I didn't know that...I'm sorry...I met with him several times. He was President of the International Society of Virology and organized the First Virological Congress in 1968 along with Joe Melnick, Peter Wildy, and Nils Oker-Blom. For several years, I helped him organize a congress in Holland. Then I met him at a convention in Mexico..."

“And he gave a speech at the opening ceremony in Spanish as a sign of respect for the country. He learned Spanish for three months, with two different teachers, to get ready for the convention.”

Erik said thoughtfully, “I remember his speech very well, although it was many years ago. He spoke about the dangers of creating biological weapons using genetic engineering methods. He was very concerned about it and considered it necessary to establish strict controls to prevent it from becoming a possibility...”

“After the Congress, he received many letters from various countries with approval. The letters were from prime ministers, from the Pope in The Vatican, even from your queen. I recently reread them...”

The orchestra started playing again, and Erik asked me to dance. We danced until late at night. When I was about to leave and began to say goodbye, he asked, “Couldn’t we meet tomorrow?”

“But tomorrow is the last day of the conference, and I wanted to spend time with a lot of people.”

But Erik said, “Lena, I will be waiting for you on the bench at the main entrance when you arrive.”

“Well, okay,” I replied, “just don’t expect me earlier than 1 PM.”

And we met. After lunch in a large restaurant in the center of Berlin, we went to a nearby store, and I bought a beautiful wristwatch for Seryozha. Then we went to the Berlin Zoo. On the way, I told Erik about my work. I wanted to discuss the role of one of the proteins of the AIDS virus in the progression of the disease. In my laboratory, we had already obtained important facts proving this concept and had published two papers in an American AIDS journal. It followed from the results that this small protein transported the viral genome into the nucleus of the infected cell and was responsible for the infection. However, this concept had not yet been accepted by specialists, and it was necessary to find additional convincing facts. But my Soros grant had ended, and there was no money for further research.

Erik listened attentively and suddenly said, “Lena, you can finish your research in my department on AIDS in Amsterdam. This work can be framed as cooperation with my colleagues.”

Amsterdam! I never even dreamed of going to this famous city, not to mention working at an Amsterdam university.

“And you think you can get money for that kind of cooperation?” I asked in disbelief.

“Don’t worry, that’ll be for me to worry about. What do you think, will three months be enough?”

“Sure. I wouldn’t be able to come for any longer because of my son.”

Eric took me to the hotel and kissed my hand. In the evening, we left, I—for Moscow, he—for Amsterdam.

This night, my first night in Amsterdam, I couldn’t fall asleep. My mind returned to the past that I lived through all these years. I never stopped thinking about Viktor, about my life with him, about how carelessly I had lived my life without realizing that everything in this world comes to an end. The shock of his death was very strong. I forgot how to smile.

But who was Viktor Zhdanov? I will allow myself to give the uninitiated reader a short description of his life’s journey.

Chapter 2

Viktor Zhdanov – the Pages of His Life

Viktor Mikhailovich Zhdanov was born on February 13, 1914, in the backwaters of Ukraine. To be more specific, he was born in the village of Shtepino, near Artemovsk, into a rural doctor's family. Later, his family moved to Artemovsk.

His career was unusual. Without a proletarian origin, in those years, he could enter the institute only with work experience. He acquired it at the age of 17, right after graduating from school, when he was hired as a construction worker on the railroad. It's significant that despite his young age and home education, the workers elected him the foreman.

Viktor later graduated from medical school and was sent to be a military doctor for the border troops in the Turkestan military district. It's hard to believe, but in difficult military conditions, he worked to conduct extensive epidemiological research on infectious hepatitis and summarize his experience into a Ph.D. dissertation. Two years later in Moscow, he presented his doctoral dissertation, "Infectious hepatitis." His three opponents, all well-known experts, gave the work of a modest military doctor glowing reviews.

After 10 years of military service and demobilization, Zhdanov was invited by the head of the epidemiological department in the Kharkov Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology. Within two years, he became its director. From this time on, he firmly associated himself with the study of viruses and was carried away by the problem of their classification. His impressive published work attracted the attention of foreign specialists, and, as a result, Zhdanov was elected to the International Taxonomy Committee for viruses, where he actively worked until the end of his life.

His lively work at the Kharkov Institute did not go unnoticed, and he was invited to Moscow by the head of the epidemiological department of the USSR Ministry of Health. Soon, Zhdanov became deputy minister. For eleven years, he was in charge of administrative activities and was involved in monitoring infectious diseases, mass vaccination, and sanitary and hygienic services for the country's population.

Viktor's major accomplishment as deputy minister was the organization of vaccination against poliomyelitis. With his help, contact was established between the creator of the Sabin live vaccine and the USSR Ministry of Health. The vaccine was purchased, and the mass vaccination of children was carried out. Ever since, polio has no longer been one of the major health problems in our country.

Zhdanov proved himself a man of bold and creative solutions. His most historically important accomplishment is the initiative of the global eradication of smallpox, a virus that took tens of thousands of human lives every year. In 1958, using the platform of the World Health

Organization (WHO), Zhdanov, director of the Soviet delegation, proposed a program for the eradication of smallpox. The program was adopted and implemented 20 years later.

Despite his high administrative post, he did not break with science and continued research on influenza and hepatitis, leading the department at the Institute of Virology. He graduated from Leningrad University's mathematics department to expand his education and development of mathematical approaches to biological problems.

For his scientific accomplishments, Zhdanov was elected a member of the Academy of Medical Sciences. He was then 39 years old, and for many years he was the youngest academician in it. His colleagues joked that the Academy is growing old with him.

In those years, Viktor had a memorable appearance. To look more serious, he let his beard grow out, and in combination with his crewcut and young, smooth face, his long, sparse beard produced a strong impression. He joked: "I shave my hair where it grows, and let it grow where it doesn't."

Fifteen years later, after he shaved off his beard, the chief doctor of one of the sanitary and epidemiological stations asked him when they met, "You wouldn't happen to be the son of that famous guy Zhdanov, the deputy minister?"

Viktor Mikhailovich was not satisfied with his work at the Ministry of Health. Almost all of his time and energy was spent fighting party bosses and bureaucratic organizations, which got in the way of his desire to improve the structure and quality of healthcare in the country. Dissatisfaction and frustration with administrative work led to his decision to leave the Ministry and take the position of director at the Ivanovsky Institute of Virology.

Before his arrival, our boring institute was engaged in the routine diagnostics of viral infections. Zhdanov began to intensively develop molecular virology. He organized new laboratories to study the structure of viruses, the synthesis of their genomes and proteins, and their interaction with human cells. The institute acquired modern equipment. Construction of new buildings began. Young physicists, chemists, and biologists came to work. In just a few years, the institute turned into a modern scientific center with large departments of molecular virology and genetic engineering.

Zhdanov was undoubtedly the founder of molecular virology in the USSR. Research that began at his institute was a turning point in the history of Russian virology. The gap in science from the West was growing every year—we were reliably isolated behind the "Iron Curtain." The way out of this situation was cooperation with our Western colleagues. Zhdanov was able to prove to the government the expediency of cooperation with foreign scientists, and soon they adopted programs of cooperation with the USA and England on influenza, hepatitis, and cancer—Zhdanov opened the gateway to the Western world. The cooperation continued even during the times of the Cold War.

To get acquainted with modern concepts and methods of virology, Viktor visited several American universities and spent three months in the laboratory of a famous scientist, working from morning to night. He had never been an experimental scientist, but he became one in three months. The head of the laboratory recalled with a laugh that Zhdanov had depleted the supply of reagents that he had ordered for the whole year. Over the years, I've visited this laboratory. On the walls, there are pictures of Viktor in different moments of his work: at the table with a pipette in his hand, at centrifuges, at the radioactive counter.

After finishing his work, he published two articles in American magazines and returned to Moscow full of new ideas and creative designs. From then on, in addition to the overwhelming demands of being the Director of the Institute, he worked in the laboratory himself, carving out several hours from his tightly packed schedule each day, and it was the happiest time he had. He told the secretaries, "Ladies, I'm running to the lab. To be a good director, 'you need to be hands-on.' So remember, call the lab only if it's the Minister or President of the Academy."

One day, when he finally slipped out of the office and quickly walked down the corridor in his black chemical coat, there were three business people—in suits and ties, briefcases in hand, walking towards him.

"Oh, hey, man, where's the director's office?" One of them asked.

"Straight and to the right," Viktor answered and ran on.

The visitors confessed to the secretary that they mistook Viktor for a plumber. They had to wait a couple of hours to see him.

When Viktor's work was frantic, the laboratory assistants could not keep his equipment stocked up. On Sundays, after getting back from his country home, he came to the laboratory and washed 200-300 test tubes and bottles for the entire next working week.

He often left the institute after one in the morning, when the metro was already closed, and dropped off all his coworkers at their homes.

And at 8 a.m. the next day, when one of them ran into the office and proudly showed him a carefully detailed schedule of the nighttime experiment, he laughed, saying, "What, do you think I haven't done that?"

He opened his work journal and showed them where, on the last page, he had neatly drawn the data from the night's experiments.

When he went on business trips, young employees from his laboratory would come into his well-equipped room to get the most out of his instruments. They once worked until late in the evening, as Viktor wasn't expected at the institute until the next day. But from the airport, he rushed to the institute and immediately went to the laboratory. He saw terrible chaos everywhere and began to put the room back into order.

The next day, when the confused younger employees apologized, he looked at them sadly and quietly said, "I washed the floor..."

A huge number of detailed reports of his experiments no longer fit into our apartment, and they were assigned a place in the very large room with a fireplace in our country home. But overwhelming tension in the following years led to the fact that he went to the laboratory on the fourth floor less and less...

After Viktor was gone, I didn't touch his house things, his books, stamps, or records. I felt like he was here in this office, in the world, next to me. His participation in my life went on. After all, his last words were words of love, love for me... Only five years later, before leaving for Amsterdam, opening his desk drawer for the first time, I found a record there, written just before his death:

"I stopped working in the laboratories... Of course, there is an excuse: I'm too busy working as the director. But I don't accept my own excuse. This is laziness, inertia. How I hate myself for it! So much effort has been spent in vain, and now I have no strength left, no time for real science. I did not do what I should have and could have done in my life... "

He could have done a lot: move mountains, find a new code of life, invent a cure for all viral diseases. But for that, the brash, fearless, and selfless person that Viktor Zhdanov was, should have been born at a different time or place.

I missed him very much when he was in the States. He would call and, every week, he sent me letters describing what was going on in his life. Finally, those endless months passed and I met him at the airport, happy, cheerful, and loving, his eyes sparkling. What a joy it was to hug him, touch him, and look into his shining blue eyes!

However, soon his cheerful mood was ruined by the Minister of Health. "What a disgrace! Our distinguished academician worked in the USA as a junior researcher!"

"But I'm sure," Viktor replied, "that our science will only benefit if Soviet academics work in American laboratories."

"You discredit Soviet science with these words."

"What do you mean by 'Soviet science'? Is there a 'French' or 'German' science? Science on its own has no borders."

Soon, his conflict with the minister worsened. Viktor, with his big sense of humor, celebrated our son's first birthday with an article in an American magazine, signed "Zhdanov and Zhdanov junior," with thanks to Elena Tatulova for her "technical assistance." When the minister found out about this, he flew into a rage.

"Can such a frivolous person be the director of a major scientific institute?"

But Viktor survived, and remained the Institute's Director under five different ministers of health. We often discussed this situation with Yuri Somov, our closest friend who worked in Viktor's laboratory. Usually, our conversations took place over a cup of coffee during our lunch break.

"Yura, isn't it a miracle that Vitya is still a director?"

"I don't think so," Yuri answered. "The minister would have met with strong resistance from the academy if he dared to kick Viktor out. You know how highly our president thinks of him. Our institute is renowned both in the country and abroad."

I shook my head doubtfully.

"I'm not sure if that's enough to feel safe. In my opinion, his relationship with the Ministry of Defense is much more important. They're interested in our research on viral vaccines and antivirals."

"I agree, but he's still a giant figure, and the minister has to take that into account. Every virologist has his books and textbooks."

"You know, I especially like his books on the evolution of life and the evolution of viruses. His idea that viruses aren't just the enemies of humanity but can actually be useful to us is especially interesting. He believes that viruses have enriched the genetic fund of our planet and were important to the evolution of life."

"Can you explain this hypothesis?"

"I certainly can. You just need to remember that viruses have the amazing ability to enter and exit cells. Why can't they transfer human genes while they go from cell to cell? Viruses can make mistakes just like people can."

The classification and evolution of viruses was a favorite problem of Viktor, a hobby that he devoted his evening hours to. He worked for many years on the fifth monograph, "Evolution of viruses," which was the most voluminous and fundamental monograph on this problem. He believed that the evolution of the organic world and the evolution of viruses as one of the forms of life went in parallel. Humanity would be different if the evolution of life took place apart from the evolution of viruses.

Yuri finished his coffee and said, "Yesterday, Viktor wrote a program for our laboratory for next year. Our main focus, as before, will be to study the complexities of viral molecules and cellular proteins."

"It turns out that the cell helps the virus to destroy its own organism."

"It's the sophisticated parasitism of viruses."

We were silent, and Yuri said thoughtfully, “Yes, Viktor is a superman. I’ve always been amazed at his extraordinary breadth, curiosity, efficiency. He often jokes that every seven years he changes his specialty: biologist, microbiologist, virologist, cytologist, evolutionist, and now a genetic engineer.”

“Do not forget that when a catastrophe hits, he throws himself into hot spots and works as an epidemiologist.”

And we began to list epidemics and outbreaks of viral diseases where Viktor played a major role in their liquidation. We remembered the cholera epidemic on the Volga, the outbreak of smallpox in Moscow—when an artist returned from India infected with the smallpox virus, and infected others—the outbreak of poliomyelitis, and the influenza epidemics, especially the fourth pandemic.

A pandemic occurs when the immune system no longer works—when the virus's proteins change so much that their immune cells do not recognize it. In this case, the whole world is seized by a disease with a high mortality rate. The “Spanish flu” in 1918 claimed the lives of 20 million people, more than the First World War.

The influenza virus that caused the fourth pandemic was first isolated by the virologists of our institute. They couldn't believe their eyes: the pathogen turned out to be the same “Spanish” virus that disappeared 20 years ago. It was back! It became clear why only young people had the flu. People younger than twenty were affected—anyone older was from a generation immune to the virus. Viktor immediately sent a sample of the virus to the influenza centers of the World Health Organization (WHO), and from our sample, the vaccine was prepared and sent to influenza centers in different countries. Only our Minister of Health refused it and insisted that the same drug be produced in Soviet institutions. It was an absurd idea since the necessary changes in the structure of the virus did not take 2-3 weeks, as in WHO centers, but 1-2 years. “The USSR against the USSR” is how Viktor summarized the actions of the minister.

Suddenly, however, our success turned against us. The Western world would not believe that the return of the old virus was a fluke of nature, rather than the intent of scientific villains. Where had the virus been hiding for 20 years? It was clear where: Soviet virologists kept it in refrigerators and then released it into the human population. “Soviet virus,” “Russian virus,” and the “red virus”—newspapers and magazines around the world were full of such headlines. But Zhdanov resolved this crisis using scientific facts. His lab staff compared the structure of the virus and found clear differences in one of the proteins: the new virus was still different from the “Spanish” version. Chinese virologists also helped establish the truth. They insisted on the fact that the pandemic began in China, and not in the USSR, although they were slower to isolate the virus. Together with Soviet scientists, they showed that antibodies against the influenza virus in young people appeared three months earlier in the Chinese population. We were completely rehabilitated in the eyes of the public.

I would like to briefly talk about Zhdanov's other scientific interests and accomplishments. The problem of viral hepatitis remained an area of his special attention. An unusual study was conducted in our Central Asian republics on viral hepatitis, a disease transmitted by the gastrointestinal route. Its distinctive feature was the severe course of the disease in pregnant women, where it was often fatal. A study of these infections in cooperation with American colleagues led to the discovery of a new form of hepatitis—hepatitis E.

In Zhdanov's laboratory, work was carried out to develop a genetically engineered vaccine against viral hepatitis.

He studied cancer viruses with colleagues from an institute of carcinogenesis and leukemia, and a new carcinogenic virus was described that occupied its place in the classification table of cancer viruses.

Viktor was interested in the mechanisms of penetration of viruses into cells. While working in his department, I discovered an unusual phenomenon: infected cells fused with each other, forming extensive fields without cell boundaries. Viktor came to the bold conclusion that we came across a new mechanism for the penetration of viruses into a cell, in which one of the proteins of the viral shell dissolves the cell membrane. We published this data in our first joint article. No one believed us then: another theory of virus penetration into a cell reigned at the time, the theory of endocytosis. But suddenly, after 20 years, the mechanism we described was not only confirmed but turned out to be the main and universal method of penetration for all viruses. Of course, no one quoted our work for years. We sent in an application to the State Committee for discoveries and inventions, and two years later, after a thorough review, our work was registered as a State discovery. Our articles appeared in many newspapers, entitled "How the virus breaks through the cellular armor," "How a viral infection occurs," "The discovery of Soviet scientists," etc.

A brilliant popularizer of science, Viktor wrote several popular books with his colleagues, one of which, *Mysteries of the Third Kingdom*, has been translated into several languages. His popular lectures, public articles, and brochures familiarize the general public with the world of virology and its actual problems.

The unique personal qualities of Viktor Mikhailovich led him to create a unique team. He approved a democratic style at the institute and opened up great opportunities for scientific creativity, encouraging initiative and individual thinking in young scientists. He trained several generations of virologists, highly qualified candidates, and doctors of sciences.

One of his greatest talents was the ability to use scientific ideas and achievements in a purely practical way to create new methods of diagnostics and treatment of viral infections. Unfortunately, along the way, he came to terms with "bureaucratic sadism," which created an insurmountable barrier between scientific research and its practical implementation.

Zhdanov founded the first virological journal in our country, *Problems of Virology*, and was its permanent editor. The journal was an important milestone in the development of domestic virology, and was published in English in the United States. Together with three Western

colleagues, Zhdanov organized the first International Virological Congress in Helsinki. Since that time, the congresses have been held regularly and are important events for uniting virologists from all over the world. Zhdanov was elected Fellow of the International Society of Microbiologists and Virologists, and for five years in the administration he did everything to raise its international authority. Throughout his life, Viktor also provided invaluable services to the WHO. He was a member of the Expert Council on Diseases, as well as other committees. The WHO Centers for Influenza, Hepatitis, and Arboviruses are actively functioning at the Institute of Virology.

Zhdanov was elected an honorary member of many foreign scientific societies and was a member of the editorial board of several international magazines. He dedicated the last years of his life to the fight against AIDS. This fight hastened his death, but that's something we'll talk more about later.

Viktor Zhdanov was a scientist with a sharp and flexible mind, the gift of foresight, an ardent enemy of dogmatism and bureaucracy, the last romantic. His contribution to Russian virology was huge. He was a multifaceted, bright, and complex person who will undoubtedly attract biographers and take his proper place not only in the hearts of his contemporaries but also in the history of Russian science.

Chapter 3

Family Life

When Viktor Mikhailovich, then still the Deputy Minister of Health of the USSR, came to our institute after returning from either America or Europe in an elegant suit, we watched his broad-shouldered figure with admiration as he walked quickly through the institute corridors. He was about 50 years old, but thanks to short brown hair without a hint of gray, sharp, blue eyes, and an easy gait, he looked much younger. Life coursed through him; talent, humor, and love for others burned brightly in his eyes. We admired him when he spoke at the podium; he was witty, brilliant, and charming. There were legends about his productivity. They said that he wrote articles and reports on airplanes during flights, that he prepares reports for the government and his next presentations while sitting in on meetings and conferences. He wrote at an accelerated rate, with two hands, using his left hand to help move the pen in his right. And naturally, there was a lot of talk about his success with women.

I was a research fellow in Viktor Mikhailovich's department when our love began. He kissed me for the first time in the car when I saw him off for a short trip to America. I waited anxiously for his return. I worried that there were so many women around him, including me, who might not mean all that much to him. I really wanted to tell him that he was worthy of great love and tender devotion. I wrote to him, saying, "Only recently I began to relate to you as a Person, not a being of a higher order or a different order, but a person whom I have come to understand a little. "

When he returned from America, the institute became lively again. Viktor came to my laboratory often. He said, "You mean a lot to me. You're just so charming! I'm so afraid to scare you away with a careless word. You have such a startlingly helpless expression on your face, and then I want to protect you from the whole world. As soon as I have a new thought, I want to immediately share it with you. I run to you right away, and our conspiracy is so transparent. I know I put you into a tough and uncomfortable position at the institute, but it is impossible to hide my feelings for you." (Oh, he didn't spare a thought for his own difficult situation).

Soon after he got back from the United States, he left for Geneva, then went on to Central America.

Somewhere inside of me, there was a pain that always throbbed and stung. It probably happens when you love someone, and you know how you often lose what's most precious to you. How difficult it was for me to work and think about a thousand daily little things! Everything fell out of my hands, and the meaning of what used to fill my life was lost. I did not understand how other people lived without him. I saw, I heard, I felt him nearby.

"I don't want to wait for anything but your precious steps," I repeated other people's words, and they became mine. "You are not in Moscow," I thought. "Where are you now? I need you. I cannot live without you. How dear you are to me, how I love you! You are my secret, my joy!"

He wrote to me, “My dear! Remember always that you are: a) very, very beloved, b) smart, c) beautiful, d) the very best of all. I'm going crazy with longing for you. It's been very hard without you. It's agony! What makes me even more terrified is that I'll never get to see you and that you'll forget me. I know I'm far from a treasure, and this thought makes me even sadder. I'm just not myself.”

In another letter: “I lost my head and am ready to forget about everything, just to see you. How I love you, how you so close to me! Every night I fill up on sleeping pills. Otherwise, I won't sleep—I will think about you, only about you, only about you... I suffocate without you, but what can I do if I love you, love you, love you! Well what I can do, if I love you, miss you, love you, love you! More than a year without breaks, without the slightest pauses, my love is overflowing. Scold me for everything except my love for you.

And later: “In this confusion of life, one thing is important to me and undoubtedly, namely, that you exist and that I love you. This is from the category of purely physical phenomena: when everything floats, it is necessary to choose a reference point and take it as a constant value.”

And one more letter: “I lose my head when I see you or think about you, darling. I'm a little crazy after meeting you, it seems I was becoming a neuropath. Request: don't send me to hell, don't frown at this nonsense. I offer you my hand and heart. I'm tolerant. I'm caring. I'm not too mean. I won't be too bad of a husband. Do you need my love?”

He got divorced and left his big academic apartment, leaving it all to his wife and daughter. I hesitated: I had Mitya, my 10-year-old son, and I didn't know how he would feel about a relationship with his new stepfather. Viktor met him by inviting us to the theater for a children's play and assured me that we would be OK together. Finally, I made up my mind. We got married in front of our witnesses, Yuri and Vali.

The next morning, our laboratory assistant, Nadia, ran down the corridor of the administrative building and shouted in a frenzy, “Zhdanov married Elena Sergeevna! Zhdanov married Elena Sergeevna!”

Intrigued employees ran out into the corridor and excitedly discussed this news, some with joy, and some with indignation. Most of the latter were ladies who were close to Viktor at one time. He never missed a chance to be with someone in his former life.

Family life began, and I learned what it meant to be a beloved wife. He also showed his special talent. I learned what it was to love a person, to be completely devoted to him, to be happy at his side. I was happy going to work and returning home, happy at the thought that I would see him and tell him about all the events of the day, and that he would tell me what happened during a day at the institute, academy, and Ministry. I allowed myself to criticize what I did not like—sometimes he presented poorly prepared reports and wrote shallow articles.

“You are smart and strong,” I said. “There’s no one better than you in the world. And your reports and papers should always reflect just how talented you are.”

Soon he announced to his loved ones, “Lena weaned me from writing bad articles and reports.”

He really began to carefully prepare his reports and didn’t rush with his publications, correcting his articles many times.

Viktor was an avid smoker, smoking several packs of cigarettes a day. Once, I timidly pointed out that it would be nice for him to quit smoking. He immediately reacted, “It couldn’t be easier! Tomorrow I’ll announce to the academic council, my wife, and my secretaries that I am quitting smoking. I am a man of weak will but strong desires!” He quit smoking the next day, this person of “weak will.”

To commemorate our union, Viktor bought a country home. It was located near Moscow and stood in the forest, surrounded by old tall pines and birches. Two blue spruces climbed the corners of our log house. Adjacent to the house was a large plot of land that led down to a babbling brook. That first spring, I planted flowers near the terrace—peonies and roses—and Viktor planted a garden and proudly showed guests his cucumbers and tomatoes (in the American folio called “Who’s Who,” Viktor’s hobby is listed as “stamps and vegetable growing”).

We took a driver’s course. I was more successful than Viktor—the instructor often praised me and said, “She will drive, but he won’t.” But the opposite was true: after one accident when I scratched the neighbor’s car while parking, the car’s owner shouted at me, and I refused to drive after that. Viktor, however, mastered driving and soon was already driving calmly and confidently. Now, we went to the country home not in the company car, but our own. Throwing bags of groceries into the trunk and sitting down in the passenger seat next to Viktor, I immediately abandoned the worries of Moscow. An hour on the road was invaluable time for sincere conversations and revelations. We looked forward to two days of rest among the majestic pine trees away from the annoying thoughts of a difficult tomorrow and endless phone calls. Immediately after our arrival, two village black and white mongrels came up to us. Viktor affectionately called them “baddies,” pleasantly shook their paws, stroked their muzzles, and treated them to tasty food he’d stored for a week. While Viktor was chopping wood and setting up the oven, I went to the village for fresh milk. It was already dark by the time I headed back. It was scary, but coming up towards the highway, I was relieved to discern a bright spot on the other side—he was waiting for me and carefully led me along a narrow path to the house, already warm, with cozy wood crackling away in the oven.

The country home became our favorite place for work and rest. Here, many articles and chapters of his books were written, business meetings took place, and staff dissertations were discussed. On Sundays, it was crowded. Yuri came, and colleagues and friends came. Viktor was lighting a fire in the forest, and I was stringing pieces of mutton on skewers mixed with onions and tomatoes. While the kebabs roasted, endless conversations were conducted. On the New Year, we decorated the blue spruce under the terrace window and chilled champagne in

the snow; each stroke of the clock jumped out on this frosty night, breaking the snowy peace and quiet of the dark forest.

At the invitation of our colleagues from the Belarusian Institute of Epidemiology, we once went to Minsk on vacation, and on the same day, in two cars, we went to Belovezhskaya Pushcha. We drove into Putna in the evening and were sent to walk to the hunting lodge where they were waiting for us. Thick pine air, intoxicating forest smells, and a moose running out of the thicket created a special mood, and I couldn't handle it—I gave way to the feelings that overwhelmed me and started running, leaving my companions behind. Without turning, I could hear rapid steps behind me—someone was following me. It was Viktor. He hugged me, we laughed happily and ran on. Among the beautiful moments of my life, it is this moment that had to end... We ran to the house and stopped, catching our breath. The smiling owners came up to us as we entered the house, where the tables were already laid. Our happy feast began.

Viktor loved other people. He was fond of PEOPLE, passionately and ardently. He was always joyful about discovering a new talent and talked about it enthusiastically. He spared no effort or time to achieve recognition of the new “genius” and create optimal conditions for him in his or another institute. Where his trust and kindness turned against him, he jokingly said, “Not a single good deed goes unpunished, but good deeds are still cost-effective.”

Viktor was the coordinator of the Soviet-American cooperative celebrations on influenza and cancer, and every year, we were visited by colleagues from the USA. In addition to restaurant receptions, Viktor almost always invited them home, and these evenings were much more interesting and warm. Naturally, these events were not coordinated with the KGB, but they always learned about it from their informants, and new pages appeared in our files.

One of the meetings with American virologists began with a seminar in Sukhumi, at Stalin's former country house, in a huge botanical garden by the Black Sea. After arriving in Moscow after the seminar, the guests visited our institute. When they entered Viktor's office, they saw a huge portrait of Dmitry Ivanovsky, the Russian botanist who discovered the first virus in 1892.

“Who's this?” asked one of the guests in a whisper.

“It's Lenin,” John Moloney, head of the delegation, whispered back. When John told us about his guess, we burst out laughing.

The receptions for these delegations were in restaurants and, of course, in Aragvi, and then our house. More than twenty people were in our apartment, some sitting on sofas, armchairs, and many on the floor. The delegation members were famous American oncovirologists. John Moloney discovered the leukemia virus, which has his name and which is widely worked with in cancer laboratories. Other members of the delegation, MacAllister and Tom August, are classics of oncovirology. And suddenly I hear a loud “meow, meow” and a burst of laughter—that's MacAllister's friends making fun of him: the virus he discovered, which he described as human,

turned out to be feline. The youngest member of the delegation is a slender, red-haired boy, Wade Parks. Soon after leaving Russia, he wrote a letter to Viktor, where he asked for advice: he thought about leaving scientific research and going into pediatrics. Viktor immediately answered him, advising him to combine clinical activities with scientific research. I met Dr. Parks at New York University, where I was invited to give a talk. My friends said that he is the most famous specialist in the field of AIDS in children. I hardly recognized that red-haired shy young man in this majestic gentleman.

Howard Temin, Nobel laureate, author of the most famous discovery of the 70s—reverse transcriptase—was also our guest. I served him Armenian dishes with spices my sister sent me from Yerevan.

When I met him by chance in the USA years later, he said, “Thank you for your wonderful Armenian food in Moscow!”

“How do you remember that? It was 15 years ago, back in 1978!”

“No, that was in 1977,” he corrected me. What a memory!

Viktor usually kept all his troubles and disappointments to himself, so as not to disturb me. In those years, he hid heart disease from me.

I told him, “Vitenka, it would be so nice if you went to the hospital for a couple of weeks just for prevention, for examinations, like the doctors keep suggesting.” (I meant the doctors at the outpatient clinic; he didn’t have a personal doctor.) I was struck by a sudden barrage of emotion.

“Why are you saying this? You know that I’m running out of time, and next week I’ll be going on another business trip to the USA. For six years, they didn’t let me go abroad. Now, with a new minister, my hands are untied, and I have this time to implement all the things I’ve got planned.”

I let it drop, not wanting to annoy him. But I could and should have insisted on hospitalization; I should have persuaded him. But I didn’t. I thought that it was his big moment. Now, I chide myself for my carelessness.

My friends argue that he was happy too: he had a beautiful and intelligent wife who loved and understood him, he had a son—the object of his adoration and pride—he had a comfortable and cozy home, he had an institute that he created. But now, I realized that I could have given him much more.

I went up to him, hugged him, and asked, “Tell me, dear, what can I do for you?”

He usually replied, “I’m doing fine, Lenchka, don’t worry. You’d better just take care of Seryozha and spend more time with him.”

But I didn't have time for children, nor for my husband, and nor for my home. There was too much science in my life and far too many mistakes.

Eight-year-old Mitya asked me, "Mom, what do you love more, me or your job?"

My youngest son, Seryozha, grew up with a nanny. One day I happened to run home for a forgotten magazine and saw our old nanny asleep on the couch while Seryozha was unsupervised, eating pills covered in a chocolate coating that he had gotten from her first aid kit.

I stood paralyzed for a minute, and then, instead of calling an ambulance, I began to sob, "Seryozha, you could die!"

At that moment, Viktor called from the institute, hoping to catch me at home. I shouted into the phone, "Seryozha is dying!" Viktor jumped into the car and, 10 minutes later, was home. He made Seryozha drink a few cups of water and caused vomiting by repeating this procedure several times. Seryozha was saved.

Recently, I was shocked by Seryozha saying, "I hate my childhood. I remember I would try to get in between you, and both of you shook me off, saying, 'Can't you see we're busy? Go find something to do.'"

I tried to convince him, "Sergei, how wrong you are! You know how your father loved you. Yes, he was really very busy, but he always found time to write down your every step in a diary and paste all your poems and drawings into an album. How many affectionate nicknames and verses you heard from him! And what games, what beautiful books and stamps he bought you! Don't you remember how we spent holidays in Crimea, in Valdai, on the Curonian Spit in the Baltic States, on Lake Issyk-Kul?"

But Seryozha stubbornly answered, "I remember that my father spent holidays in the library."

No, he didn't want to listen to me. He had his memories of his childhood grievances. He pulled away from us very early, at 13 or 14 years old.

I understood how wrong Viktor was when he said, "There is nothing better for Seryozha than our example: always busy, always at work." Only recently, five years after Viktor's death, when we gathered around late at night in our now cold and empty country home, Seryozha was drinking a beer, and I silently looked out the window into the dark forest.

He said, pain in his voice, "How wrong I was about Dad! I would change everything now if he were alive..."

I think about my life with Viktor, filled with the mysteries of the "third kingdom"—the kingdom of viruses. How does a virus get into a cell? How does the infection develop? Which way do antiviral drugs block the virus from replicating? Often when I suddenly wake up early in the morning, I see many things in a new light, and the facts obtained fit well into a coherent hypothesis. I think: how easy it is! Why didn't I figure it out earlier? Now, I know what

experiments need to be done. And when the concept is confirmed, I'm already in a hurry. First of all, I need to discuss the results with Viktor. Hearing my version, he usually grinned and teased me: "The auntie's new plan!" but always listened to me with pleasure as I laid out all the information into categories. If they convinced him, I would start writing an article, adhering to the golden rule for scientists: "study, finish, publish."

To write an article, especially the "Discussion" section, is a great pleasure. It should be logical and based on the facts obtained, but the author is also allowed to express his ideas. That part acts as a bridge to the next stage of work. I constantly think over my results, whether I'm going home, shopping at the store, or getting lunch ready. The best chapter in my book, for example, was written when I was waiting for my turn at the hairdresser. I came home late and worked in the evenings. My studies didn't annoy Viktor; on the contrary, he was proud of me and showed our friends my articles and books and celebrated my invitations to congresses and conferences.

Our tables in the office were near each other, along the windows. How different they were when we finished the job! His desk was empty, all the papers were laid out in special folders with what and for whom. My desk was chaos. I did not have the strength to restore order. I was exhausted, and I immediately went off to sleep as soon as my head touched the pillow. Viktor lay down significantly later, too anxious after a long nervous day, especially after visits from Vadim Petrovich, a tall blonde man with a long flat face. Vadim Petrovich worked for the KGB. He explained to Viktor that he could not call him at work or meet him at the institute. The best way was to see each other in the evenings at our home. During each of his visits, Vadim Petrovich supplied Viktor with "new information," all of it very unpleasant. After he left, Viktor could not sleep, and so went from room to room, re-pasting stamps in albums and drinking cognac to relax.

Before Vadim, we were "supervised" by Vera, a colleague at our institute. We often invited Vera to our Moscow house and country home. Seryozha became attached to her, always rejoiced in her coming, and they played Seryozha's games and even went to children's concerts. It was like that until we realized that everything that happened in our family was passed along to the KGB—our conversations, our plans, our guests, and we decided to look into Vera. In her presence, we discussed how we were going to receive American virologists in the next week. I proposed taking them to the country home and organizing a picnic with kebabs, together with our friend, also a virologist, who lives in a neighboring country home. Of course, we were well aware that the KGB did not allow foreigners to leave Moscow, just as it did not allow Soviet people to meet foreigners in the absence of representatives of the KGB. There were several employees at the institute who Viktor had to invite to receptions with foreign guests. After two days, our neighbor with the country home contacted Viktor. He was confused and told Viktor that he was visited by a man from the KGB who asked about the arrival of a delegation of American virologists and whether he was going to receive them at his country house. He said he didn't know anything about it. Only then did we understand who Vera was. She acted like a live microphone in addition to those that were built into the telephone and walls of our apartment. We were already used to not talking at home about anything important and conducting all our conversations in the alleys near the house and on forest paths around the cottage. Vera had years of romance with my former graduate student, a Hungarian man, and

thanks to her semi-professional activities in the KGB, she had the opportunity to travel annually to Hungary. Of course, we met our American friends and took them to our country home, but we did not tell our neighbor anything about it, so as not to cause trouble for him.

Unlike Vera, Vadim Petrovich immediately opened up. "Viktor Mikhailovich, I work for the KGB. I'm not here to watch over you, but to help and protect you."

"From whom?" Viktor asked sarcastically.

"From internal and external enemies. The KGB takes care of your security. I wish you would trust me, and you will soon make sure that I am trustworthy. By the way, I can inform you about what is being said about you at the highest level, in the security departments of the Ministry and academy. I can also inform you about new materials about you and Lena that are sent to the KGB. The information on you is extensive. The latest information concerns three evenings of Vladimir Vysotsky and exhibitions of avant-garde art at your institute. It seems you may have acquired an abstract painting from this exhibition? Unfortunately, my superiors are considering limiting your overseas trips."

Vadim Petrovich was associated with Viktor's third deputy, who was always a KGB man and was doubly obedient. One of the deputies organized a wide network of informants in the institute, at least one in each laboratory. Some of them were paid by the KGB, others were rewarded with trips abroad to congresses and conferences, while others appropriated other people's foreign invitations. A typical case happened with Yuri. On the eve of his flight to London, he ran into my laboratory, gloomy and depressed.

"Lena, my trip has been canceled. Boris Savitsky is coming instead of me, and he will report my data at the congress. Can you imagine how he would answer the questions?"

"Why are you surprised?" I asked. "Everyone knows that Boris is a KGB informant. They know about everything that happens in your laboratory. Maybe he is being sent to London to look for other delegates."

"But I can't understand why I'm being punished. What have I done?"

"Don't worry, you won't ever understand. The 'facts' that our informants report are never verified. Viktor's trips are also often canceled an hour before check-out, and he could never understand why. And last time in Geneva he was settled in our embassy, where entry is prohibited in the evening, and he couldn't meet with many friends."

Yuri calmed down a bit. He asked me, "What's the story with your trip to West Berlin?"

And I told him what happened to me in Germany. I was invited to a conference in West Berlin just before the unification of Germany. My path was through East Berlin where I was supposed to get a pass at the Soviet consulate for crossing the "wall."

The consul greeted me warmly, offered me coffee, and calmly said, "We advise you not to participate in this conference. There were conflicts on the border with West Berlin tonight."

I asked with surprise, "What does that have to do with science? It's a great honor for me to be the chairman of the section as a Soviet scientist. I should be giving my report in two hours..."

The Consul interrupted me, "You shouldn't have accepted the invitation. Call and say that you got sick and stay in East Berlin."

He didn't give me a pass. I returned to Moscow that evening.

Chapter 4

From the Past to the Present

Erik came to get me the next morning, and we went to the Free University of Amsterdam. I saw a beautiful, modern building, with six floors all covered in glass walls. The walls were a real art gallery decorated with reproductions of paintings by Monet, Cezanne, Pissarro, and Toulouse-Lautrec.

We went up to the laboratory where I was to work. It occupied a huge space and was superbly equipped. Erik introduced me to my immediate boss, John. John had recently returned from the USA where he spent five years working in the laboratory of the famous Malcolm Martin. He was a relatively young man, about 30 to 35 years old, and his light eyes were friendly and attentive from behind his thick glasses. John said everything was ready for me to get started. There were AIDS virus mutants obtained from the USA and monoclonal antibodies from London. I could start my research in accordance with the Russian-Dutch cooperation project funded by the Dutch AIDS Foundation. The research term was three months. I was introduced to the rules of work in the laboratories, which are very strict when it comes to the AIDS virus and radioactivity. The laboratory used methods I had never worked with before, and my first task was to master them. I worked all day, and I couldn't even find time to make a cup of coffee. I just looked on with envy as the laboratory staff drank coffee several times a day around a large, round table.

The women in our group helped me a lot. They had pretty faces and adorable figures, and I wondered every time at how poorly they were dressed: shabby jeans and oversized shirts. I could feel how out of place I was here in my suit and jacket bought by Viktor in America or France. It was time to change into jeans and T-shirts and replace my shoes with sneakers. Goodbye high heels!

A week later, Erik left for London. He was going to represent the Dutch AIDS Group at a European Conference and present the results of the long-term European programs for the treatment of AIDS patients with azidothymidine. It was already known that the results were terrible; so far this was the only remedy and, when carefully checked, it turned out to be ineffective.

Erik called me that evening, saying, "I'm calling you from home."

"How's that possible?" I was surprised.

"We have now adopted the following program: the conference is being held at the airport, lunch is served there, and in the evening all participants return to their home countries. This routine saves a lot of time. It will be the same for our next meeting in Paris."

"As for me, I would prefer to stay longer and wander through the European capitals."

“We usually go to Paris for the whole day. We arrive on our friend's plane, visit museums, and have lunch at a good French restaurant. By the way, tomorrow I'm going to The Hague for a conference. Would you like to come with me? While I sit in on the meeting, you can take a walk around the capital.”

“Thank you, I can't,” I replied. “I have too much work tomorrow.”

“But we'll be back early, and you'll have time to do everything.”

I smiled to myself and said, “It's impossible to refuse such a tempting offer.”

Erik came to pick me up early in the morning. I was waiting for him on a narrow street by the channel. His silver car stopped near me, he opened the door, and we smiled at each other. He turned on music—Brahms, then Mozart—and we went to The Hague. And suddenly all my anticipation for a pleasant day was spoiled by a question.

“Were you married to Viktor? Why is your surname different?”

I suppressed my indignation and began to calmly explain, “Listen, Erik, it would be absolutely impossible for the director of a large academic institute to live 20 years with his girlfriend without being married. He would be immediately expelled from the party, and he would have lost the position of director.”

“Was he a member of the Communist party?”

“Of course, otherwise, he would never be a director.”

I was silent for a minute and continued, “It is also impossible for a Russian woman to live with a person without being married. Unlike Western women, we feel humiliated by that kind of arrangement.”

I didn't want to get stuck on this topic. The morning was pleasant, cool and sunny, everything was calm and beautiful, and behind the road were low green valleys, well-fed cows pacing along them, a few mills—everything was like a painting on an old Dutch canvas.

Erik suddenly said, “Oh, my Russian beauty! Should we go to the conference or to the sea? I want to show you our wonderful resort.”

“What about the conference?” I was taken aback, “you are expected. There will be people from the government.”

“Don't worry! They can get by without me.”

Viktor would never do that, I thought, but said nothing. Erik turned onto another road, and around the bend, there was an unexpectedly magnificent view of the sea and the sandy coast. The terrace of a huge modern building with a hotel overlooked the sea and a restaurant. We went out on the terrace, and Erik ordered coffee and apple pie. When we were done with coffee,

Eric showed me “Kandinsky's room” with several of his abstract pictures on the cream-colored walls. Then we finally got to the Hague and drove past the royal palace. The flags were lowered, which meant the queen was not in the palace... Then we drove up to the Parliament building, where, in Erik's words, “stupid decisions” were made. We walked by the prime minister's house and finally entered the famous Mauritshuis museum, in which there were many paintings by Rembrandt, Hals, and Breugel. My attention was drawn to the painting, “Adam and Eve in Paradise,” but I could not identify the artist. Coming closer, I read under the painting, “Figures by Rubens, landscape by Breugel.” That was news to me! I never connected the work of these two famous masters. Then we returned to the university, and I worked late into the night.

I couldn't achieve the desired results. John attentively looked through my films and graphics but wasn't satisfied. Erik often looked into our room to see my results and listen to John's opinion on what I should do next. Several times he invited me to his office for a cup of coffee. I looked into his light gray eyes, which radiated—what? sympathy? Friendly feelings? Maybe tenderness?

Erik was the coordinator of the Dutch study program of AIDS, and their main patients were homosexuals.

I used to say, “Erik, you control the entire AIDS program, you have your hands on this huge stuff. In this regard, the Dutch group is undoubtedly the leader in all Europe. Why don't you summarize data or write articles and reports? Your deputy uses all the material. He has so many articles!”

Erik replied, smiling, “I'm not as ambitious as you are. I am not dying to be famous. Everyone in Holland knows me, and that's enough for me.”

But I persistently continued, “But Erik, you're a scientist, not an administrator.”

Erik coldly repeated, “I want to be useful for my country, not for the whole world. The world is too much for me.”

Maybe he's right? I thought. He gets to enjoy all the good things in life. He floats on his boat, travels across the Caribbean on a yacht with his American friends, has winter skiing holidays in the Italian Alps, summer holidays in the south of France on horseback, enjoys gourmet food in French restaurants... And yet he is deprived of that joy that creativity and scientific inspiration bring. I involuntarily compare the two scientists. How different their lifestyles are! One of them lived in a wide range of scientific ideas and creative searches with a passionate desire to save humanity from the threat of deadly diseases. The world was not too much for him; on the contrary, he saw that through the international cooperation of scientists there were ample opportunities to fight against illnesses that torment the populations of large and small countries. He was a man of the world, and at the same time, an exemplary citizen in the highest sense of the word, and in any situation, a stalwart patriot of his homeland. The other, without a doubt a gifted person, doesn't give up any of the pleasures of his European life.

Of course, there is room for science. And you can't say that his lifestyle is unpleasant—and of course, he's very attractive. But I'm sure that if Viktor had been in Erik's place, he would not

have changed himself; he would not have lost his burning, passionate attitude toward science, and would have retained his lifestyle and its scale. Erik seemed to me such a small figure next to this man—this giant.

Chapter 5

AIDS Comes to Russia

After focusing our efforts on influenza and hepatitis, both scientific problems that dominated the institute, the AIDS virus was discovered. AIDS has become the number one focus of our institute, our passion. Viktor was sure that AIDS would soon reach our country and thought about how to prevent the epidemic in painstaking detail. It's only been two years since the isolation of the virus when the "Abbott" firm created the first diagnostic testing system. It has not yet been found in our country, but the human immunodeficiency virus and its genome were sent to Viktor by his American friends. He decided to prepare his own diagnostic system and tests confirming the diagnosis.

However, although the system worked fine, Viktor couldn't achieve widespread production, because he couldn't, despite all his efforts, overcome bureaucratic obstacles. "I cannot breach this bureaucratic fortress" he complained to the Minister of Health... His system was held while similar test systems were prepared in other institutes led by high-ranking directors.

"There is no time to waste; otherwise, it'll be too late," Viktor urged the Minister of Healthcare.

"You shouldn't worry, Viktor Mikhailovich," the minister answered. "In our country, there can be no AIDS epidemic. The social structure excludes this possibility. We do not have high-risk groups such as prostitutes, drug addicts, or homosexuals."

"But these groups, despite prohibitions against them, exist, and they're even more dangerous because they're all underground and inaccessible to our control. It would be an unforgivable mistake to believe that AIDS will just skip over our country. Epidemics don't recognize geographic borders. We must take urgent action. In addition to monitoring the AIDS of foreigners and long-term absent Soviet citizens, donated blood needs to be checked. You must create education programs for nursing staff, provide widespread information to the population..."

All his efforts were in vain; the Ministry ignored his suggestions. But newspapers and popular magazines willingly published his articles: "What is AIDS," "Plague of the 20th century," "AIDS Epidemic in the USA and Europe," and many others.

His relationship with the minister deteriorated more and more, especially after their dispute over the origin of the AIDS virus.

"You should write in your articles that the AIDS virus was created by American scientists hired by the Pentagon as part of a plan to create biological weapons."

"Then why did they spread the virus in their own country? Doesn't that assumption seem absurd?"

“Apparently, it happened by accident. Experiments were done on prisoners who were released, and they spread the infection.”

“It sounds extremely unlikely. In addition, you must realize that the human immunodeficiency virus is very complex. You couldn’t artificially create something like this.”

The minister said irritably, “I don’t understand why it is so difficult to come to an agreement with you.”

There was a hint that Viktor might lose the director's chair because of his stubbornness.

“But Sergei Petrovich, I know that this is a lie, and my American colleagues know that I know.”

That evening, Vadim Petrovich visited us.

“Viktor Mikhailovich, my superiors in the KGB advise that you do not insist on your version of the origin of the AIDS virus. They see it as a mistake. Think, because you’re due to take trips to the United States and England next month.”

Viktor looked at him with narrowed eyes and said curtly, “Okay, I'll keep that in mind.”

Next week the newspapers *Izvestia* and *Literary Newspaper* came out with articles in which he strongly rejected the absurd theory about the artificial creation of the AIDS virus and expressed his point of view on the origin of the virus: it was an ancient virus, a descendant of those viruses that inhabited organisms that were predecessors of man and ape, evolved from a branch of human evolution, and acquired pathogenicity as a result of mutations in the mid-twentieth century. The *Washington Post* immediately picked the story up. An article appeared that was called “Soviet AIDS policy bewilders the United States.” The authors of the description of the AIDS situation in the USSR expressed their surprise that the Soviet scientist Zhdanov was allowed to publish in Russian newspapers that the AIDS virus was not created at the Pentagon.

Soon the minister was removed, and the new minister, also a director of an institute and academician, contacted Viktor for advice when staffing the all-Union AIDS program. Viktor included all his suggestions for the program, and the minister appreciated all of them. By then, the number of AIDS sufferers in the US had doubled. The AIDS epidemic also began in Europe. The first cases appeared in the Soviet Union, and the diagnosis was still made by foreign test-systems.

A special session of the Politburo of the CPSU was being prepared that was dedicated to AIDS. The Minister decided to acquaint the Politburo with Viktor's program and present him to Gorbachev. Viktor reported his suggestions. Gorbachev liked them, and the program was approved. The main points of the program were: strict AIDS control of foreign citizens, deportation of foreigners infected with the virus, the enactment of the legal liability laws when it came to deliberately infecting one’s partners, etc.

In our press, of course, there was no information about this session. However, the next day, TASS received the so-called “red press” in its special channels with articles from American newspapers the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* with detailed information about the Politburo session and Gorbachev's meeting with Viktor Zhdanov, first head of the AIDS program in the Soviet Union. The conversation between Gorbachev and Zhdanov was quoted word-for-word. Since the meeting was closed, with no press, it should have been concluded that the information was received by the Western newspapers from a member or members of the Politburo.

Viktor's program started in late autumn 1987. Thus, two years were lost, two critical years. By this time, the AIDS virus had crossed our borders many times. The outbreak of AIDS in the south of our country, in the Elista and Rostov regions, might have been prevented if the program was adopted earlier. Children were infected in hospitals by ignorant nurses, as drugs were introduced into the subclavian artery with catheters that need to be flushed daily to prevent blood clotting. The nurses did not change the needles when flushing the catheters. One of the children was sick with AIDS. He was born from an infected mother, who in turn became infected from her husband, a sailor who served two years in Africa. One of the infected children moved to another city and again went to the hospital, where history repeated itself. A three-year-old spent only one day in the hospital and only got one injection, but he was infected with the AIDS virus and died after six months. Another child spent three days in the hospital and died after 6 months. Many children died within two years.

Adults also died from AIDS, usually with the wrong diagnosis. A sensational story happened with Olga, a “high-dollar” prostitute in Leningrad. Olga was ill for over two years. She had typical AIDS symptoms: prolonged pneumonia, deep mycosis, and herpes infection. She was treated unsuccessfully in many hospitals. Doctors were puzzled, but the diagnosis was never made. Only after her death was a high concentration of the AIDS virus detected in her blood.

Employees of Viktor's laboratory compared AIDS viruses circulating in various regions of our country. It turned out that all viruses isolated from children in Elista and the Rostov region were identical, while the viruses circulating in large cities, including Moscow and Leningrad, were different versions. These results confirmed that there was one source of infection in Elista and multiple sources in the bigger cities.

The complete ignorance of the medical staff regarding AIDS indicated an urgent need for the immediate introduction of educational programs for doctors and nurses. After many efforts and disputes with ministerial officials, Viktor achieved his goal: the courses were organized for doctors on AIDS. I was entrusted with organizing courses, lecturing on the AIDS virus, and teaching the principles of disease diagnosis. By this time, I was head of the Department of Virology at the Central Institute for the Improvement of Doctors and I worked on a voluntary basis at the Institute of Virology. Every month, 40 to 50 doctors from different regions of the Soviet Union arrived in Moscow. I talked about how the infection arises and progresses and how dangerous all the measures that activated the immune system were. I talked about T cells and

macrophages, which protect the body from bacteria and viruses, but in AIDS, they play a sinister role of the Trojan horse, carrying the virus through the body, transporting it to the brain. Usually, I ended the lecture with the words: "There is only one way to be sure someone won't die of AIDS—make sure they don't get the virus in the first place." And they listened, holding their breath.

At the next meeting, the minister warmly congratulated Viktor, "Your program, Viktor Mikhailovich, will start working soon."

Viktor smiled and said, "I still think, Evgeny Ivanovich, that the victory over AIDS will require a global effort. Coordinated actions in many countries, more active control over the infection, and the systematic exchange of information."

The minister looked at him with interest and said, "Send your suggestions immediately to the International AIDS program Director, Jonathan Mann. Emphasize the need for more active AIDS control based on the collaboration of WHO Member States."

Proposals were written and sent to Geneva. They made a strong impression on Dr. Mann; he could feel that they were written by an experienced specialist. From Geneva to Moscow flew questions: who is behind the program? Viktor was named and immediately invited to Geneva for consultations. After their meeting, Mann made a decision—Zhdanov would be appointed coordinator of the international AIDS program. They decided to hold a serious discussion in Moscow in two weeks.

Viktor came back to Moscow content and happy. When I met him at Sheremetyevo, his blue eyes were shining, and he was brimming with joy and optimism. He was busy in the car talking about the details of his trip and his meeting with Mann. At home, he unpacked his suitcase. As always, he brought gifts for me, Mitya, Seryozha, and his secretaries. Nothing for himself.

He said with a happy smile, "Lena, Jonathan Mann will be in Moscow in two weeks. Just two weeks! I have so much to do, so little time. We have a lot to discuss to find real solutions. Lena, we'll invite him back to our place, okay?"

"Of course, Vitya! I'm so glad!"

And at that moment, the phone rang. Viktor picked up the phone. The even voice of the secretary of the president of the academy said, "Viktor Mikhailovich, the President again received an anonymous letter about your institute. You will have a commission tomorrow. Please attend it in the morning."

"Vilen, again Vilen," I thought in horror.

Chapter 6

Back in Amsterdam

I usually get up early and arrive at the university when there is still no one in the laboratory, and everything is closed. I open doors with my key. All the equipment, centrifuges, power supplies are available. I can start the experiment.

I am not happy with the results. A new method that is widely used here proved to be unusable for my purposes. We need to find a different approach, but there's so little time left, only a month and a half.

Our room is almost empty. Two girls who are so kind have been helping me, took a week vacation, one of them went on a hike over the mountains of Spain, another to his friends in London. Both travel with their boyfriends. No one in hotels requires their passports as proof that they are married as is accepted in our country. Live with whoever you want; travel with who you want. The state does not care about your morality.

Eric and his wife also left, this time taking a car to Milan for the performance of a new open-air opera featuring the famous Italian tenor. When he returned, he invited me for coffee in his office and introduced me to his guest, an epidemiologist from California, with whom he studied at Harvard. A lively conversation ensued. The guest wanted to show me his work in the village and took a fat album with red binding and the word "Smallpox" written on the spine that he had recently published in the USA. He began to leaf through it, and on one of the first pages, Viktor looked at me with his vibrant blue eyes.

"This is Viktor, my husband..." I said, whispering for some reason.

"Oh, is this your husband?" The epidemiologist asked in amazement. "I knew him well. He was the initiator of the World Program smallpox elimination project and presented it from the podium of WHO during one of the sessions when the program was adopted. He put in a lot of effort to get the program accepted. His passion for stamps helped a lot. He knew the history and geography of large and small countries perfectly and very skillfully used it in conversations with his colleagues. He had many friends and allies among them."

The American guest looked at me with interest.

"Tell me more about Viktor," he asked. And I started to talk about his collection of stamps, one of the most valuable in Moscow, about his pride—stamps from German concentration camps, Russian "Zemstvo" stamps from the last century, and a large collection of Soviet stamps. Then the conversation returned to the campaign for smallpox liquidation. Viktor was then Deputy Minister of Health and had more opportunities to really help this program both with money and experienced virological personnel. Finally, victory! India had the last case of smallpox! Smallpox

was eliminated, the virus is destroyed and left nowhere but in special laboratories... It took 20 years to eradicate this deadly disease. But only two years have passed, and a new deadly disease, "AIDS," shocked humanity...

The American guest remembered how magnificently the WHO celebrated its victory over smallpox. Participants and nonparticipants were awarded the Order of the Bifurcation Needle, the needle that was used to inject anti-smallpox vaccines. Portraits of Viktor hang on large posters in the conference room, and his name was uttered many times in solemn speeches. I told him how Viktor was depressed when the Minister of Health canceled his trip to Geneva for participation in the ceremony, and the minister went there himself. The order of bifurcation needle was presented to Viktor in Moscow on a smaller scale by an official from the Ministry who accompanied the minister to Geneva. The guest was shocked by the idea. He remembered that many asked why Zhdanov, the initiator of the campaign, did not come, and the minister expressed regret that an illness kept Zhdanov from this significant trip.

The guest is gone. I sat silently, everyone in the grip of that conversation, re-experiencing the cruel, unfair insult and humiliation to which Viktor was subjected. Eric tried to distract me from my sad thoughts. He persistently began to invite me to his riding club. The last time I refused without expecting anything interesting from this visit. The sport was of little interest to me. How wrong I was! It was so beautiful! Sixteen horses and riders to the beat music rode in eights, fours, twos, then galloped across the arena, galloped in a circle, then eight men formed a tight ring, lining up the horses with facing inward, and eight women pranced around. This performance was amazingly beautiful and so perfect that I felt some kind of sadness, a touch of hard-to-explain sorrow...It seemed to me that Eric was the best of the riders. He sat lightly and gracefully in the saddle and had a restless chestnut horse. The other riders were good too, especially the two handsome, blond ladies. The lesson lasted about one day. When it ended, the riders put the horses in the stables and, after changing their clothes, everyone gathered around a large round table in a cafe located above the arena and ordered beer, wine, and light meals. The whole group seemed to be close friends because they met weekly for many years. From time to time, they had sumptuous lunches together, and Eric got together with several friends from this group every year to ride to the south of France and enjoy the picturesque countryside and drink French wines.

It's time to think about my visa to Italy—my theses on the action of an effective drug against AIDS, sent from Moscow, are included in the program of the International Conference on antiviral medicines in Venice. Eric and his colleagues will also go to Venice. Naturally, they don't need a visa to Italy, as they are citizens of the E.U.

On one of the following days, we went to the Italian consulate. It was a sunny morning filled with the smells of spring. We drove along narrow streets, along numerous canals, and picturesque squares, past graceful houses made of red bricks with red-tiled roofs. Eric took my hand in his and said, "Look at these flowers."

A huge round flowerbed in the middle of a small square was covered with the first flowers of spring—crocuses in purple, white, blue, pink, and yellow.

Eric looked at me and asked, “Would you like to come with me to Maastricht? It’s a city in the very south of Holland. I was invited there by an opponent to defend my dissertation.”

“I do,” I replied, and for the first time in many years felt that I’m almost happy, happy from the warm spring wind, from the feeling of complete freedom, both physical and spiritual.

We arrived at the consulate. Eric took visa forms, filled them out, and handed them to the consul. When we returned to university, it took a while to recover and focus on work. My thoughts flew into the distance, head spinning from the spring sun, from the thoughts of Venice, from his light eyes...

Almost two months have passed since my arrival. New ones bloomed on flower beds around student buildings, and the trees along the channels were covered with white and pink buds. The weather was sunny, and a warm wind was blowing, bringing the smell of the sea.

Eric came to get me early in the morning, and we drove to Maastricht, an old Dutch town 200 kilometers from Amsterdam. I was sitting next to Eric, listened to music, this time Wagner and Rachmaninoff, and expected a miracle. And I wasn’t disappointed. We entered a medieval city with winding streets and plazas covered with cobblestones, with Gothic complexes at the crossroads. The streets and squares were filled with cheerful crowds. We wandered the busy streets hand-in-hand with a feeling of unique happiness, falling into the rhythm of this unusual city. On the way, we ran into several churches and in the square next to the church found a wonderful museum. There were canvases by Dutch painters of the 17th and 18th centuries, but the most remarkable one was a large collection of old Dutch paintings from the 15th and 16th centuries. I stared at the long pale faces on the old portraits and suddenly felt that they remind me of someone; I did not immediately realize that this “someone” was none other than Eric, who stood next to me: the same long face, nose, and narrow lips. For a complete resemblance, he was only missing a black velvet beret or monastic hood. So these were the pictures of his predecessors! Indeed, he told me that he came from an old Dutch family.

After lunch, we went in search of the university. Eric took me to the audience and left to change and prepare for his defense of the thesis. This is an unusual ceremony: the whole audience gets up when the members of the Academic Council in long black robes and black berets with a red ribbon walk slowly and solemnly down the aisle and walk up to the stage. The candidate is already there and stands between two rows of experts, each of which poses a question on the dissertation topic. It was an interesting topic: the history of virology as a science. All defense was conducted in English. The end. Congratulations happened in a special room, with flowers and drinks. Then there was lunch for members of the Academic Council and guests of honor. But Eric didn't want to participate in a gala dinner, and we returned to the city. For lunch, Eric wanted to find the oldest and most famous restaurant, as his gastronomic interests played an important role in his life. He wanted to eat dessert in another restaurant known for its great coffee. Then we crossed the Meuse river in the old way stone bridge and found ourselves in the

other half of the city, less lively, but just as old. Unusual streets crossed at oblique angles, and in small squares, there were marble sculptures. It got dark. Eric was staying at a small hotel at the crossroads of three streets and we went in.

In the room, Eric lit a cigar and asked, “Would you marry me if I were a widower?”

“What are you talking about? Your wife is alive.”

“But ‘if’?”

And with a sigh, I said, “No.”

We drive back with great speed, but nevertheless, he kept only one hand on the steering wheel: his right hand was occupied, with squeezing my hand...Music again—the first concerto for piano and orchestra, Tchaikovsky, my favorite. Amsterdam.

We drove to the Free University, and suddenly Eric said, “Could you take the tram from here? I’m afraid I’m running late.”

“Of course I could,” I replied calmly, although it seemed to me that my heart stopped. I got out, and the car turned around and quickly disappeared from sight. I stood there in fear with a feeling of heavy foreboding. All these years, I have lived in deep sorrow and melancholy, but I survived, I worked and worked with passion. Would I break? Would this new burden destroy me? Would I be able to handle his emotions and, returning to Moscow, continue to live? I tried to convince myself: he was a prosperous European gentleman. His lifestyle was very different from mine. Perhaps, he is more primitive than my usual crowd, his jokes are not always sharp, and for sure he did not read Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, he will never understand the Russian habit of delving into your own soul, and always find your fault...”

The next day, when he invited me to his office for a cup of coffee, I told him, “Eric, I think we'd better not see each other.”

He took my hand and calmly said, “Every minute with you is happiness. This is our time, and you don't need to shorten it. Remember, we won't always be together.”

The next week arrived. Our madness continued. After work, we left the university and wandered the streets, holding hands, laughing, and chatting. We sat in small Mexican, Italian, and Indian cafes, swallow spicy food, drank a huge amount of white and red wine. One of the cafes was on the embankment of a river near the old castle with lifting bridges, with a French garden around, and we walked in the alleyways. We often left the city and wandered along the coast of the North Sea, stepping on soft white sand, gazing at the gray, oncoming waves. At Keukenhof, we were surrounded with spring flowers—fields tulips of various shades and sizes, tiny and huge, and admired the delicate orchids in the special royal pavilion. Eric showed me Delft with its remarkable old churches, and Rotterdam with its strange modern buildings and beautiful, red bridge. In the evening we went to my place. On the way, he bought flowers—tulips, carnations, and chamomile, and once blue hydrangeas in a huge pot. He made coffee and smoked a cigar.

We drank coffee on the couch. Every time our meetings were held in a new way, and we became closer and closer. Then he would leave. I watched from the balcony as his car turned around and disappeared behind the tall bushes by the canal. It was a time of sadness and despair. I walked along the path along the channel to the Amstel river, to a lovely mill on the bank, to an iron bench, on which sat Rembrandt, looking as he did in life, with a brush and palette in hand, looked at the river and painting. It was my place, my park behind the mill. I ran through its alleys, getting closer to the pond with a fountain in the middle. Silence, darkness, emptiness. I read out loud the poems of Marina Tsvetaeva: "Bitterness! Bitterness! Eternal taste on your lips, oh passion!" I know that I can never translate these lines to Eric, that he will never understand them.

I returned home in complete darkness, sat on the sofa, and plunged into the despair of my former life.

Chapter 7

Viktor's Death

I will never forget Vilen Tikhomirov, Viktor's first deputy. I see him in my nightmares. I see his unnaturally straight figure, his haughty smile, his colorless, cruel eyes that know no pity. I see him, arrogantly walking down the corridor of the administrative building, and I hear his high, thin voice.

I told Viktor, "Vitya, listen, Vilen is very dangerous. He was kicked out from two institutes, he betrayed two of his teachers, and I'm afraid that you will be the third. You did so much for him! You held an emergency dissertation defense, gave him a two-room apartment in the new building built by the institute and a large laboratory with new equipment, the best in the institute. And you went to the Moscow City Council so many times seeking a residence permit for him! And now you appoint him as your first deputy for science...Vitya, someday, you'll regret it..."

Viktor answered me softly, "Lena, he's a talented scientist. I want him to lead the Department of Genetic Engineering. His direction is now necessary for hepatitis, and for the cancer program. Lena, you have never been cruel. You know what happened to him when he was still a student at Leningrad University. You know he was convicted under Article 58 and spent five years in the camps. They beat him until his spine was broken and he had to wear a corset..."

I said coldly, "They didn't just break his spine; they broke his soul."

I still remember an incident that happened shortly after he arrived at the institute. Viktor asked me to prepare influenza virus for him. I gave Vilen the concentrated virus twice, however, the third time, all the chicken embryos that I infected with the virus turned out to be dead.

I entered Viktor's office and said with surprise, "Viktor Mikhailovich, I cannot understand what happened. All the chicken embryos died. You may have been sent dead embryos from the factory. This time I will not be able to give Vilen the virus."

"I know," Viktor said. His kind blue eyes suddenly become sharp. "Read this." He handed me a sheet of paper. "Vilen's official letter to the director, in which he accused me of deliberately killing embryos to interfere with his experiment."

I read the letter with disgust and quietly said, "Viktor Mikhailovich, please release me from this project. After this letter, I will not help Vilen."

We tried to forget this incident, and Vilen remained one of the employees closest to Viktor. He and his wife often came on Sundays to our country home. Vilen divorced his first wife and married Marina, his employee. Marina was a platinum blonde with an anemic face. We thought she rarely smiled in an attempt to stave off wrinkles. Her hair was always perfectly styled as if she just came from a salon. She dressed fashionably and elegantly.

Several times Marina asked me, “Lena, why can't you come with me to my hairdresser?”

I usually answered, “I don't have time today, maybe tomorrow.”

Once Yuri told me, “Lena, you know that Marina does not come to work even on payday? Her laboratory assistant gets the money for her. A lot of people know about it. A scandal might break out.”

“Vitya also knows about it but he said he was willing to pay her a salary for Vilen. You know how he feels about him.”

“Of course, I know, and I know that he greatly overestimates him. I hope he won't be disappointed. But this is what I wanted to tell you: at the next academic council meeting, she's up for re-election for senior researcher. Tell Viktor that the guys on the council intend to take her down.”

I passed this news to Viktor, but he didn't pay attention—there were other things to worry about at the institute.

On the day of the academic council meeting, Marina came to the institute, as always, well-dressed and elegant. But the vote on the academic council was clear: the members of the council were unanimously against her re-election. Marina had to leave the institute. The genetic engineering department was strengthened and expanded. As models for genetic engineering, on Viktor's advice, they used adenovirus—the new model, as it turned out, was very successful. Vilen demanded more and more power. He intended to coordinate genetic engineering research in other departments of the institute, and the best way to do this was to get the position of deputy director. Viktor was enthusiastic about the idea of expanding the genetic engineering and biotechnology at the institute and made a request to the president of the academy on the allocation of an additional deputy director position. The President agreed. However, one difficulty arose regarding the further advancement of Vilen. Governing positions in research institutes were controlled by the district party committee. Of course, this procedure was pointless since the approval was carried out not by scientists but by party functionaries. It was obvious that the party commission would not approve of a non-partisan person in a ministerial position. To get further in his career, Vilen had to join the party.

Viktor knew perfectly well that he would meet strong resistance at the institute in promoting Vilen to the position of his deputy. People at the institute admitted that Vilen was really an interesting and gifted scientist, but they also knew he was a man without principles. Viktor convinced his colleagues that Vilen was necessary for the future of the institute. He was not only a bright and talented scientist but also a brilliant organizer. But the institute knew about the constant tight control that he had over his department and about the dismissal of many employees at the slightest offense. Many capable young people left the institute during this time. There had never been so much turnover in any department before.

The closed party meeting lasted more than three hours. It was emotional both in defense of Vilen and against him. Viktor read out a brilliant characterization, and they listened to his arguments about the need to promote an institute scholar like Vilen. Finally, the vote. With a single vote, Vilen was recommended to the party. Two months later, he was officially appointed as the first Deputy Director for Science, pushing the former deputy into second place. Shortly thereafter, an event occurred that saddened Viktor and shook his faith in Vilen. Viktor turned to his American friends with a request to send an enzyme for Vilen's work. The package got lost somewhere. Viktor sent people three times to the customs services, and each time they returned empty-handed. A few days later, the head of the secret department institute handed Viktor an official appeal from the KGB with a request to provide an explanation of the missing parcel and attached a copy of Vilen's letter to the KGB, in which Vilen wrote that Zhdanov hid the enzyme to use for his own purposes.

The Institute worked hard to develop diagnostic test systems for AIDS. Viktor used a virus sent to him from the USA, but it would be more expedient to work with genetic engineering materials. Vilen's laboratory should have received them. However, the proteins weren't ready. For a while, Vilen avoided Viktor.

When they finally met, Viktor asked, without hiding irritation, "Vilen, how are you doing with the proteins? You're breaking your work schedule."

Prior to this, Vilen tried to convince Viktor to use the genetic technology for creating biological weapons.

"Viktor Mikhailovich, believe me, everything is ready for this. We know the structure of the adenoviral genome; we know at which points you need to introduce the gene for the diphtheria toxin. I am closely associated with the military-industrial complex through our deputy from the KGB, and we can get millions from them. We will enrich not only my department but the whole institute..."

Viktor interrupted him abruptly, "Vilen, stop right there. The Institute was established for saving human lives, not destroying them. Think about the AIDS proteins. We have three laboratories waiting for them."

The conversation ended there. And then Viktor said, "Vilen, what's going on?"

And Vilen calmly answered, "I can explain what's going on. We've inserted the gene for the diphtheria toxin in the genome of the adenovirus and began experiments on hamsters. The results are fantastic: death in 100% of cases after 24 hours. Do you want to see the animals?"

Viktor walked up to him and said slowly, "Stop these experiments now. I'm still a director and I expect my order to be followed immediately."

Vilen looked at him with a grin and shook his head.

"I can't. My bosses in the complex insist that I continue the experiment. I regularly update them on the progress of the experiment. By the way, they are going to separate my department from the institute and create a new institute of genetic engineering under their control."

"Why don't I know anything about this?" asked Viktor in an even voice.

"You will find out in a few days," coldly stated Vilen. Viktor understood: a fierce struggle was ahead. He was a hardened fighter and had the reliable support of the president of the academy. A month of endless meetings began with the generals from the complex, with representatives of the ministries of health and defense, a month of official and semi-official meetings, extraordinary tension, deep frustration, and pain.

Sometimes his innate optimism and humor gave out, and he burst into the depressing silence in the apartment in the evening and exclaimed, "Lena, I don't have a third hand to shake off enemies, see, both are busy!" he kept an armful of notebooks and magazines for his evening work. And in a fallen voice he added, "they come at me from all sides, like a beast in a den!"

Vilen launched a broad campaign against Zhdanov. Younger by several years, he quietly managed to gain strength and popularity in certain academic and university circles, publishing books, articles, and reviews and speaking with scientific reports on genetic engineering biotechnology. Behind the scenes, he did not skimp on libelous attacks against Viktor. "Zhdanov fired his closest employee because he did not share his discovery with him and did not put his name on his article," "Zhdanov commits forgery after forgery and demanded his colleagues do the same," "Zhdanov interferes with work, gets underfoot," etc. Monstrous rumors spread across Moscow, migrating from institute to institute. They were swept aside by people who know Viktor and those familiar with the work of the institute, but sometimes the poisonous seeds fell on fertile soil. Recently, I persuaded a well-known biochemist whose opinion I treasured, of just how ridiculous these accusations are. Zhdanov has a thousand articles, thirty monographs, and five state discoveries. Why would he have cheated for one more? How can we talk about forgery if the proteins of AIDS received for my son Mitya's group were widely used both in ours and in other institutions? I tried to prove the absurdity of the other accusations, but a shadow of doubt remained in his eyes.

One of the last meetings. Viktor was handed an invitation to a meeting of the military-industrial commission with the wrong address. He arrived at the specified address, released his hired car, and learned that the meeting was already taking place in another building in the complex. Stopping the first passing car, he asked for a ride. He ran up the stairs, jumping three steps, and flew into a crowded hall. The front rows were filled with generals, and among them were Vilen and Boris.

The president of the academy spoke, "... and Zhdanov is one of our best directors. He amazes me with his ability to connect scientific ideas and achievements with new approaches to the diagnosis and treatment of viral diseases. I strongly object to the allocation of a part of the

institute that he created to obtain viral vaccines to create an academy for the military-industrial complex.”

Zhdanov walked up to the podium.

“Building biological weapons is immoral. It is prohibited by the UN and WHO, of which our country is a member. Vaccines and antiviral drugs are what strengthens our defenses.”

Other speakers, generals, and scholars spoke. After the meeting, Viktor left the room with the president and said warmly, “Thank you, Nikolai.”

The President looked at him closely.

“Viktor, I just came from Geneva. The WHO appreciates your achievements in the fields of hepatitis, influenza, and cancer. By the way, the Americans have confirmed the existence of a new cancer virus, so you will soon receive their proposals for further cooperation. Whatever is going on with this guy, immediately remove him from the post of deputy. It would be best if he left the institute altogether.”

Viktor was the winner in this fight. Vilen had to leave the institute. But the price to win was high. Something broke in his soul. He lost trust in others, and suspicion and caution appeared in its place. He suddenly developed cardiac arrhythmia and pain in his heart.

Vilen found a new home at a veterinary academy. I am sure that he will renew his attempts there to create a biological weapon. He had an amazing ability to rise from the ashes. He took most of his employees with him, people devoted to him, but Boris, his right-hand man, and very close friend, stayed at the institute. We tried to understand why. Maybe to keep spying? To inform Vilen and the KGB about what was happening at the institute? His square figure is often seen on the doorstep of a deputy from the KGB.

Every two to three months in the Central Committee of the CPSU, the highest party commission, anonymous letters began to come about the deplorable state of affairs at the institute. “Every anonymous letter left a scar in heart,” was a well-known quote of Vilen’s. In the evenings, phone calls rang out in our house.

A pleasant female voice asked, “Tell me, please, has Viktor Mikhailovich hanged himself yet? When is the funeral?”

Party organizations and the academy carefully studied each anonymous letter: “incorrect planning of science, “vicious office politics,” “too many Jews “(the minister called the president of the academy: this is not an institute, this is a synagogue”), “his wife works in this institute,” etc. It was obvious: anonymous people were supplied with material by a person working at the institute. A special commission was created for verification of the indicated “facts.” Work at the institute stopped. Viktor was gloomy and depressed. The commission wrote a report and sent it to the president, minister, and party bosses. It was followed by a talk to the director, sometimes

a strict one with a warning. Spiteful anonymous letters. Commission every time. Last anonymous letter.

“The commission will be at the institute tomorrow; come meet in the morning.”

“Lena, I can't take it anymore...Give me water ...” His hands were shaking. Water spilled onto the table...After 10 minutes, he had a stroke, went to the hospital, then died within a week.

“Viktor Mikhailovich, do you know who is at your bedside?”

Through his foggy consciousness, his weak, barely audible voice, said, “Yes, I know...it's my beloved Lena...”

Those were his last words. I held his hand; it was warm even up until he stopped breathing...

In the morning, the coffin with his body was brought from the hospital to a conference hall of the institute. That morning, Mitya slowly walked along the corridor of the administrative building. The people in the hallway were shocked, depressed, and silent. From the hall came the quiet sounds of music. There was noise coming from only one doorway. The door was half-open, and Mitya saw in horror in the middle of the room was a table with Vilen, Boris, and some of Vilen's former employees sitting around, drinking champagne, and talking animatedly.

“Mitya, come in, join us!” Boris called.

“Bastards!” Shouted Mitya and slammed the door.

I remember every second of saying goodbye. Institute staff, academies, ministries. Speeches, flowers, orchestra...I stand petrified, I cannot speak, I cannot cry. My two sons stand next to me. Seryozha took his exams for the medical institute, and the last exam was on the day of the funeral. Mitya took him from the institute immediately after the exam and brought him directly to the cemetery. I did not prepare Seryozha. It was my fault. He was only 16 years old. He had never encountered death, and it was the first time he was confronted with tragedy. After the funeral, he fell into a deep depression.

Every morning he told me, “I can't study. I can't go to college. Let me rest. I want to lie down. I want to sleep.

“Seryozha, you have to go. Please try.”

His condition worsened. I called my college friend Lida, a psychiatrist. She came, saw Seryozha and said that he needed treatment immediately. I began to give him strong antidepressants. He slept a lot, but in the morning, I still drove him to the institute.

Jonathan Mann arrived in Moscow not long after Viktor's death, and a month later, the WHO adopted a resolution on a new global AIDS program based on Zhdanov's proposals.

Journalists came to me asking about the latest events. In the newspapers that recently published his articles about AIDS, now there were articles with the headings “The last anonymous note,” “Shot in the back,” in which the journalist Likhodeev wrote about how Zhdanov's international activities in the fight with AIDS were stopped by a shot from the trench. The last photograph of him sitting on the podium at the Physicians for Peace International Congress was published in the *Medical Newspaper*. His tired face and soft pensive look, with the Certificate of Honor just presented by the WHO Director for smallpox eradication...

Virologists from more than 30 countries came to the memorial conference in the old Russian city of Suzdal. Influenza, hepatitis, cancer, AIDS, the evolution of viruses—his favorite problems, this time presented without him...

His former graduate student, and now director of the institute in Leningrad, sent a truck to my yard with two giant lumps of black marble taken out of the Karelian quarry. These polished boulders were installed at his grave.

Gradually, the atmosphere at the institute changed, and only small photos under the thick glass of the office tables of employees served as reminders of that happy period for science, of that intense pulsating life, when until midnight the light was seen in the windows of laboratories.

Soon after Viktor's death, the board meeting of the Ministry of health was held with the participation of the Minister and President of the Academy, where the designated persons responsible for the AIDS program were invited. The reasons for failures with the program were considered.

“Well, what did they decide?” I asked Sergei, deputy director of our institute.

He answered sadly, “They decided that Zhdanov was to blame for everything—he did not provide, did not implement, did not organize...And imagine: everyone was silent, even those who knew about his work. I wanted to present but got a kick under the table. So he kept at it, lying and slandering.”

A few days after Viktor's funeral, Mitya came to me, upset and depressed.

“Mama, yesterday, both of my graduate students were transferred to Boris' laboratory, even though their dissertations are almost ready.”

I tried to stay calm.

“You can work alone.”

“That's not all. You know I got an invitation from an American university after my articles were published. But they said they won't let me leave, and I don't know why.”

I know, I thought. Because you are a talented boy—because you are Zhdanov's son.

And suddenly Mitya said, "Mom, I want to emigrate. I want to do science. They won't let me work anyway."

My eyes darkened. "Mitya, don't do this. Think about the kids, they'll lose their homeland..."

"They'll have two homelands."

A few months later, Mitya left for America with his wife, Tanya, and two small children.

My time of loneliness and despair had come. The phone didn't ring. Many of my so-called friends weren't friends. Seryozha often left home, never told me where he was going or when he'd be back. Late at night, five minutes before the subway closed, I rushed to the station to meet him. The last car was underground. Finally, I saw him walking up the narrow escalator in a short leather jacket and tight jeans, very angry when he sees me, but I'm happy he's alive.

Chapter 8

Venice

The conference took place in Lido, in the film center. Our hotel was located nearby. Its ivy-covered brick walls enclosed a small courtyard filled with the scent of roses. A small round table and a wooden bench in the corner were bordered with blooming bushes. Our rooms were on the top floor, one opposite the other. I dropped my bag by the door in my room, left the hotel, and headed down a narrow path. It turned out that the hotel is 100 meters from the sea. The path led me to a coast covered with pristine white sand. Along the sea stretched a strip of large pink seashells. Not far from the shore, there were large ships anchored in place. I looked reluctantly at the clock—it was time to go back to the hotel and get ready for the opening ceremony of the conference. In the foyer, I met many friends from England and the USA. My Russian colleagues from the institute were also here; their trip paid for by the Soros Foundation. From them, I learned that the situation at the institute worsened even more. It became impossible to work, and there was no money for equipment or reagents.

Eric did not present his report to this conference; this was his usual style (“I’m not ambitious.”) My report on the effect of the new drug on the AIDS virus was successful. The president of the antivirus society became interested in the structure and mechanism of the drug’s action. I agreed to send the drug to his Belgian laboratory.

All this time, I was never apart from Eric, sitting next to him in the conference room, drinking coffee together during breaks. After the meeting we went to the sea and wandered along the shore, holding hands, lying on the warm sand by the seawater, running into small open-air cafes on the coast and gulping down fried fish and pieces of octopus, washed down with white Italian wine. In the evenings, we crossed the bay by ferry and moored at St. Mark’s Square, wandered through the narrow streets in a dense crowd of tourists, crossing picturesque squares, went to museums and churches, and drank huge amounts of wine at outdoor cafes along the Grand Canal.

Several times we were invited to dinner by Eric’s friends from Germany and Italy. The German professor began to recall the epic battle of vaccination against poliomyelitis in the USSR.

“Your husband was an unusual and courageous man,” he said.

“He had to work hard to arrange the arrival of Sabin in Moscow, present it to the minister and prove the need for mass vaccination of children with the American vaccine.”

I talked about Sabin’s last visit to Moscow. We met. We visited him at Sheremetyevo; he sat in a wheelchair pushed by his wife. They embraced Viktor and immediately started talking about the prospects of mass vaccination of children against measles.

We returned to the hotel late at night, and early in the morning, I awoke to the loud singing of birds under the window. We went downstairs, sat down at a table set for two, and drank a wonderful aromatic coffee with warm bagels. Around us, at neighboring tables, we see other conference participants: kind faces, greetings, jokes, questions about today's program. We go to meetings, join the participants, and move together as a single group, Eric in an elegant gray suit, me in my favorite white.

I didn't think, I didn't want to think that soon we would be back in Amsterdam, and the next morning he and his wife will leave for America for a week and a half. The day of our departure came. We ate our last lunch under the Rialto bridge, admired the gondolas and gondoliers in their colorful costumes, and went to the airport. An adorable Italian girl sat next to him on the plane. I heard her ask him, "Is your wife English?"

He replied, "No, Russian."

They got into conversation, and the girl said, "I'm sick of Venice...I'll try to find my happiness in America."

At Schiphol airport, he was met by his daughter, who threw a hostile glance in my direction. Nevertheless, he asked her to take me home. I entered my room in a state of complete despair. How could I cope with myself after Venice? I rushed to the phone and called Alma...I met Alma at a dinner with Nicole, a young attractive woman in our laboratory. At her house, I met three of her friends: her boyfriend Willem, a lawyer; Jan, an engineer; and a beautiful gray-haired woman of my age, Alma. They became friends during a trip to Russia three years ago, and the impression was so strong that they went to Moscow every year, Leningrad, the Urals, Uzbekistan. Alma dreams of going to Magadan. She just read Evgenia Ginzburg's memoirs and wants to see this blood-covered land. Alma works at Radio Amsterdam playing music programs. She is very fond of Russian music and often includes it in her programs. She was looking for poems and books and even published the last book about Russia at her own expense.

The conversation was lively and interesting. We talked about the history of Holland, its traditions, and the royal family. Although it was already late, we decided to go to the cinema to watch a Russian film, *Tashkent—the city of bread*, and after the film, we went to a beer bar located in the neighborhood. I sat down next to Jan, and we talked about Russian literature. He impressed me with his wide knowledge of Russian classics and gentle manners.

He said, "When I was in Uzbekistan, I met Rustam. I liked him, and I invited him to Amsterdam. Now he's here, we live together, and I am very happy with him."

When Nicole told me that Jan was a homosexual, I was surprised. He was a normal person. Of course, I had never met homosexuals before. Nicole also told me that her ex-husband was bisexual, and that was the reason for their divorce. Now she's been chosen Chairperson of the Young Women Society for women who have met this problem in their married lives.

We parted at about 4 in the morning, and I invited them for Armenian food, meat with eggplant, next Saturday.

I called Alma right after returning from Venice.

“Alma, I would like to see you.”

“I’d be very happy. Come have lunch with me tomorrow. It’s already late now, besides, today is a big holiday—it’s the queen’s birthday, the streets are crowded, let’s not drive downtown and stay at home...”

But I couldn’t stay at home. I went to my park. Lost in my own thoughts, I didn’t notice that was absolutely dark and I was all alone in the park. I returned to the gate. Oh, God! It was locked, and the barbed wire above it robbed me of all hope of getting to the other side. There was a moment where I thought I’d have to spend the night in the park and sleep under the bushes, but I gave one more try, made my way through the bushes, and found myself at another canal that separated the park from the street; pushing the bushes apart, I found a place where the wire was not so high and I could crawl under it. I tore my jeans and scratched my legs badly, but I was free. Not bad! Scratched by iron wire on the Queen's birthday! As if it wasn’t enough to spend my life behind the Iron Curtain in my country!

Venice was a week of the Adriatic, canals, and love. What would be left of it? Pink shells? Fried zucchini and octopus? A charming president? Or maybe just pain? The next morning, I wandered along the river with the feeling that the pain would destroy me. Sadness drove away all the pleasant impressions of the conferences: interesting reports, new acquaintances, the wonderful closing ceremony in the large hotel by the sea, the gentle Italian tenor playing a small concert.

Finally, it was time to drive to Alma. Her apartment was in the heart of Amsterdam. The large, half-empty living room was bordered by numerous shelves reaching up to the ceiling, with a huge number of books, all by women authors. So my Alma was a feminist! There were photographs on the walls of Alma and her friends on Moscow streets and squares, in the mountains of Uzbekistan, in the Ural expanses.

I said, “Alma, I feel very bad. I fell in love with a married man. He said that I am part of his life in the present and in the future.”

Alma reacted soberly, “What part?”

She did not like the current situation and several times repeated, “Lena, please be independent. Tell him to go away! Find another person. But most of all, learn to live alone.”

Alma is independent. She lives alone, apart from her husband and her three adult children. She sees them rarely, once a month or less.

“Read books, listen to music, go to concerts.”

I felt how desperately I needed those words. He wasn't free, and that should have been enough. But it wasn't only that. I had spent the last five years in a deep depression. Would I be able to share myself with someone whose life was different from mine as I was able to share myself with Viktor in my former life? Was it love or did I invent it? Whatever it is, I needed to put an end to it.

Then we had lunch and listened to Galina Ustvolskaya's amazing music. I did not know her, although she lived all her life in Leningrad. The music was like a prayer sung by a tragic female voice that expresses disharmony in the soul and nature. I left Alma's house late at night in a calmer state. I'd meet her in a week at Nicole's birthday party.

Chapter 9

Farewell

Nicole celebrated her birthday a week late because she was waiting for me to get back from Venice. I met Willem again and Yana. Willem looked tired and depressed.

He sat down and quietly said to me, "Do you know that Nicole and I broke up? She doesn't want to live with me anymore. This is the end. It's the second and last time. Here are the fruits of the independence of Dutch women. I am her victim."

I knew that they would break up. Nicole told me that she does not feel free living with Willem, that he has a difficult personality, and that she prefers to live alone.

I tried to dissuade her from taking this step. "Nicole, why are you breaking up with him? He's charming, smart, attractive, he loves you."

"Why don't you want to understand me?" Nicole was angry. "I want to be independent."

These Dutch women were really weird. They were obsessed with their independence and freedom.

On my way back from Nicole's, I went to get a book from a Russian family who lived in our building and met there a chemist who recently came from Moscow and worked at our university. He had a very open Russian face, with gray eyes behind his glasses, about 40 to 45 years old. And the name was very Russian, too—Igor. He called me on Sunday and we went to my favorite park, but turned left, into the alley, where I haven't been for a long time. Rhododendron bushes stretched along the avenue in full color, their shades ranging from fawn to delicate pink to bright crimson. We stopped, amazed at this suddenly revealed beauty. Coming out of the park, we set off along the Amstel river to the bridge visible in the distance. It got dark. We stopped at a beautiful house with an elegant staircase, illuminated by two lanterns, with semicircular balconies on the second and third floors. Three cars were parked at the entrance. From open windows, the sounds of music could be heard.

"Foreign life...why is it so far, so impossible for us?" I said these words out loud.

Igor replied, "You know why. All because..." He continued, "I'm a lumpen. I'm free from all property. My home is there in Russia. I will never find a home here. I don't want to adapt to Western life. I know that I will die under a fence, and I have already chosen my fence in Moscow."

I thought: I'm a lumpen, too. I have not gained anything in all my life, perhaps only a country home, bought by Viktor after our marriage. It will fall apart soon. Nobody lives there, Seryozha is

leaving home...I also thought, "No one is waiting for me anywhere ...We went back, had tea in my room and talked about the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

Then, just after getting back from university, I called Igor, and we went for a walk along the Amstel gardens. It was easy for me to be simple and interesting with him. During our next walk, Igor told me about the environment of Maecenas and the writings of Cahul, then the "Silver Age" of Russian literature, and for a snack, the poetry of Mandelstam. He read some of his poems, then I read poems by Marina Tsvetaeva. He does not like Tsvetaeva; he finds her poetry pretentious, devoid of enthusiasm. I do not agree. We parted, each with their own poet. The next Saturday, I worked in the laboratory, and we agreed to meet at 2 at the central station and go by train to the sea. I came earlier and merged with the crowd of waiting men and women at the main entrance to the station. This time I also expected my own companion. The world is made for couples! I amused myself with this illusion for a minute, although I was certain that I would never find my mate after Viktor.

Igor came at exactly 2 o'clock. We made ourselves comfortable on the train and started talking about French poetry of the last century and the beginning of ours. Then he read poems by Rimbaud and Apollinaire, and I learned that Apollinaire was a Pole who was killed in the First World War. The conversation turned to Pasternak, and we both recited his poems.

By the sea, we took off our shoes and walked along the white sand. The warm seawater touched our feet; the sun played in the waves as they came ashore. People sat in long chairs and lay on the sand by the water, enjoying the warm, sunny day. Suddenly I felt that something had changed—we had wandered onto the nudist beach. The sight was rather unpleasant, and we hurriedly retreated.

"I am a representative of the last of the Moscow intellectuals, the former dissidents," said Igor. "I really miss my friends. We belong to a dying generation."

I told him about the article in *Science* magazine; the whole issue was devoted to the problem of AIDS on the eve of the International Conference on AIDS in Berlin. I thought: what could be new about AIDS? The supervirus has an amazing ability to overcome the protective barriers of the body. You can agree with the authors/scientists who believe that humanity is not ready to fight AIDS. With these thoughts, I opened the magazine and saw an article about new approaches to solving the AIDS problem. Great success for a young scientist! The portrait in the corner of the page was of a young beautiful face with big glasses—Mitya! When I told Igor about this article, he got excited and asked me to bring a copy to him. He collects materials about the successes of Russian scientists abroad and wants to show how they enrich world science.

I woke up in the morning, thinking about one thing: today Eric would get back from America, and tomorrow I would see him at the university. And suddenly the phone rang. He was calling me.

"Can I come to your place now?"

Shower, cream, cosmetics, happiness. He came. We stood silently embracing.

He said, "I missed you so much. I thought about you all the time, every day and every night. I will remember the Venice trip all my life."

I met his gaze and saw pain in his eyes. He was not joking, not teasing me as usual. He was different, confused, frightened, shocked. So he suffered too! A dangerous game we had played in Venice! Avoiding his eyes, I said softly, "Eric, we have to learn to live without each other."

He paused, trying to find his bearings, and my pain returned. I have to leave in three weeks, and then what? When we will meet again, where? And yet he did not want to come to terms with our inevitable parting.

"You can stay."

"I can, but it wouldn't change anything," I said quietly.

"Lena, we must live with hope. Something important happened to us. Can't we hold onto it? The world isn't so big. We can find the opportunity to see each other if we want. Do you want to?"

I didn't answer, didn't know, didn't believe that we had a future.

The time for me to leave was approaching. We were both constantly thinking about it, and these thoughts poisoned all our time together.

He tried to convince himself and me, "We will only suffer for the first month. Time heals everything."

There was also good news: an employee of the laboratory headed by the President of our society, to whom I sent my anti-AIDS medicine, called to confirm that the drug was non-toxic and effectively inhibits the multiplication of the AIDS virus.

Eric invited me to come with him to an AIDS workshop in Leiden Medical Center. I knew this was my last trip. We arrived early, and Eric showed me the house where he was born and notable places in the city. Leiden looked like a miniature Amsterdam. Its three-story houses had red-tiled roofs and seemed to be from a strange old fairy tale. In one of them lived a prince, the future king of Holland, and now a student at Leiden University. Eric explained to me that to study at this university was a tradition of the royal family.

The seminar was dedicated to the resistance of the AIDS virus to medicines. Although I was the only foreign guest, the meeting was conducted in English. The speakers said that resistance appears very quickly after the start of treatment and coincides with the progression of the disease. In this case, the medicine should be replaced. But are there any drugs that don't cause resistance? This question has not yet been answered.

Last week in Amsterdam, last experiments. Received important facts to support my idea, however, there is still no clear photographs to convince everyone, especially John. There have been remarkable changes: John, who usually typed articles on a computer or discussed employee data, now works every day in the laboratory! And continues my experiments full speed! Isn't this my most important achievement?

On Sunday, I developed the film with the hope of finally getting what I wanted so desperately, but again the result was unconvincing. Three days later, I gave my report at the departmental conference, and I wanted to mainly report the results obtained here in the laboratory. The situation was difficult, I was nervous, I didn't sleep at night. The next day, I started the experiment for the last time and in despair used all the remaining RNA and monoclonal antibodies. And then, a miracle! I finally got the result I was waiting for, and it happened on the day of my report. John was almost as happy as I was. We ran to the photographer to beg him to urgently prepare the slides.

The report was a success. There were many questions about my concept. Eric and John presented too and I heard a lot of praise. After the conference, our staff organized a celebratory evening. John brought several bottles of wine, and I brought Armenian food. Many kind parting words were said. Then Eric, John, and I went to the center of Amsterdam to celebrate my departure. Eric chose a famous restaurant in the Red Block, the street where prostitutes look through the high windows at tourists. Through the glass windows, I saw women of all nationalities and colors—white, black, yellow.

John said, "There are many Russian women here, and they are very successful."

"That can't be!" I couldn't hide my indignation.

"Of course," continued John, "they came here with different intentions, but agreed to this position because it makes a lot of money."

When I returned to the hotel, Igor came, and we went out for one last walk. We talked about Russian Symbolism and Acmeism, then about Tyutchev's life. Igor helped me pack my suitcase, kissed my hand, and left.

It was late, but I couldn't sleep. I thought I'd go see Seryozha tomorrow. I'd go to college and meet my friends. I will meet Yuri, although he now works at a different institute. And suddenly I realized that I didn't want to see him. The disconnect between us started after the election of the head of Viktor's laboratory and had grown over the years. And again I plunged into the past.

The election of a new lab leader was scheduled for the next meeting of the academic council. No one had any doubts that Yuri was the best candidate for this position. He had worked with Viktor, and they had collaborated on many articles and books. Yuri always was our closest friend, with whom we shared our joys and sorrows. Recently, we often discussed with him and other staff from Viktor's laboratory how we will continue to work on AIDS issues. They were sure

they would bring Viktor's life's work to its conclusion. Yuri suggested that we ask the academy to name the laboratory after Viktor Zhdanov, and this proposal was warmly supported.

On the eve of the elections, Yuri came to my laboratory. His expression was gloomy.

"Lena, I have withdrawn my application for the election. The secretary of the party bureau and this person from the KGB, Vadim Petrovich, spoke to me. They advised me not to participate in the elections. They said that I was too close to Zhdanov."

"So what?" I asked in amazement.

"They offered to transfer me to another institute. They already got the director to agree. Lena, they want to choose Boris..."

It felt like my heart had stopped.

"Boris? Yura, you have to fight. You know the council will support you."

Yuri averted his eyes.

"It's dangerous, Lena. I can't."

I went up to him and said, trying to keep calm, "Yura, you have never been a coward. Think how important your election would be for all of us, for Viktor's memory. The best monument to him is a laboratory named after Viktor Zhdanov. It's the only little thing we can do for him."

But Yuri said, looking away, "I think it would be better if they chose you. Both laboratories, yours and Viktor's, are very related by topic. They can be combined. We will elect you to the council. You will get the majority of the votes."

I paused and said coldly, "Good. I will write a statement at once."

I wrote a statement and put it on the scientific secretary's desk. Boris's statement was already there. Many members of the academic council came to me afterward. They convinced me that the result of the elections was a foregone conclusion, almost all the votes will be for me. But election at the next council did not take place. The director explained that the elections will be postponed until the formation of a new council, he approached the academy with a request to dissolve the council and introduce new members. They were all people devoted to the new tradition. The result of the vote was a foregone conclusion.

Finally, the election day was set, and by a majority, Boris was chosen. Now Boris, Vilen's closest ally, became the head of Viktor's laboratory. It seemed to me that my life was over. I failed to save Viktor's legacy. I didn't manage to preserve his memory. I wasn't needed by my sons. Mitya hasn't written to me for a long time. He only calls from time to time. He's had success working on AIDS issues at a famous American university and has already been promoted to professor. He has his own laboratory with two of his former graduate students from

Moscow. His children became real Americans, began to forget Russian and didn't want to come to Russia even on vacation. Seryozha had his own life that he didn't want me to be a part of...

Eric arrived in the morning and we went to the airport. He said, "You were right. My deputy turned out to be a dishonest person. I will follow your advice and write a book on AIDS research in Holland. I promise you I will write a book like that."

"And I'll write a different book," I thought. "I will overcome my inner emptiness and despair and write a book about my life with Viktor. This book will probably contain a mixture of different styles—documentary, romantic, lyrical, but after all, life is a mixture and alternation of ups and downs, good and evil, love and hate, joy and loss, loss, loss...Maybe I'll add elements of fantasy, because the reader should enthusiastically follow the development of the plot. And against this background, they'll see the image of Viktor all the more vividly..."

Eric interrupted my thoughts, hugged me, and quietly said, "I will remember everything that happened to us all my life. It was the happiest time, the happiest in my life. I beg you, promise that you will come again."

"I will never come back here," I thought, but I said out loud, "Our Russian writer Chekhov, through the lips of his heroine, said, 'If you ever need my life, come and take it. But don't come too soon.'"

In the last minutes before boarding, I ran onto the plane, found my seat, fastened my seatbelt... Farewell, Amsterdam! Thank you, strange and beautiful city, that on your streets, along the canals and flowers, among your inhabitants, I could find myself again, make friends, and find the strength to understand my destiny. I will be in Moscow in 3 hours. My son is there. There is a grave there that holds Viktor Zhdanov, my husband, my love, and my happy life.

Praise for Viktor Zhdanov

"We're all indebted to Bill Foege and Viktor Zhdanov for their critical contributions to the eradication of smallpox, which demonstrated the immense value of science and international collaboration for fighting disease." – António Guterres, Secretary General, United Nations

"If it were not for Zhdanov's actions, smallpox might not have been eradicated even today. Zhdanov acted as a principal, not an agent, and due to his efforts there are millions of people alive who would otherwise have died." – William MacAskill, Associate Professor in Philosophy and Research Fellow at the Global Priorities Institute, University of Oxford

In selecting Bill Foege and Viktor Zhdanov as recipients of its prestigious 2020 award, the Future of Life Institute reminds us that seemingly impossible problems can be solved when science is respected, international collaboration is fostered, and goals are boldly defined. As we celebrate this achievement quarantined in our homes and masked outdoors, what message could be more obvious or more audacious?" – Dr. Rachel Bronson, President & CEO of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.