

CHAPTER TWO

Moscow, Russia

Mayakolvszkaya Metro Station

“We are the new Russia!” President Oleg Barkovsky declared, ending his three hour long speech. The crowd leaped to its feet. They stomped on the floor. They hollered. They whistled. No one grumbled about the late hour. No one complained that it had been five hours since the evening’s meal had been cleared from the tables. The vodka had flowed freely all night. Barkovsky’s aide, Mikhail Sokolov, had made sure of it. The many toasts and earlier speeches had been painstakingly choreographed to build momentum for this moment.

Barkovsky’s ovation was the evening’s grand finale.

The Russian president made no effort to calm the frenzied crowd. He stretched out his arms – Christ like -- behind the podium and drunk in their revelry. In his mind, he deserved it.

Barkovsky was transforming Russia. The reforms of the past -- *glasnost* and *perestroika* —were dead. Gone were the leaders who had betrayed Mother Russia by destroying the great Communist Party. Gone were the oligarchs who had raped

the nation, stealing billions and billions. Like a mythical Phoenix, Barkovsky had arisen from the chaos of the imploded former Super Power. He'd kicked out the money-grubbing foreign capitalists who had arrived promising reforms, but had only lined their pockets. Brilliant and ruthless, he had maneuvered himself into the presidency and reasserted the Kremlin's authority over all aspects of Russian life. Reporters who dared question him were attacked by thugs who left them bleeding and dying on sidewalks. Political enemies were arrested, imprisoned, some had disappeared. Elections were bought. After years of instability, ordinary Russians had silently fallen into line. There had been no complaints when Barkovsky had started stripping away the civil liberties that the revolt against the old regime had brought them. Barkovsky's iron fist established order. For the first time in decades, it was safe to walk the streets of Moscow at night, shops were well-stocked, homes were heated, people had bread, and Russia was once again demanding international respect.

"Barkovsky!" a dark haired beauty near the podium screamed. Her cry sparked a chorus. "Barkovsky! Barkovsky! Barkovsky!" It swept through the chamber like a wave. Glancing down from the stage at the woman, Barkovsky brought his fingers to his lips and blew her a kiss.

She fainted. He was a political rock star.

The late night rally was being held -- not in the ballroom of one of the new, dazzling Western-style hotels that now dotted the Moscow skyline – but in Mayakovskaya Metro station on the Zamoskvoretskaya rail line. To the unaware, it may have seemed an odd choice. But to this crowd, it was a brilliant selection.

Joseph Stalin promised in 1932, when construction of the Moscow underground began, that the city’s railway stops would be artistic showplaces — daily reminders to the masses of the superiority of the Communist system. The Mayakovskaya station was a jewel in the Metro crown. It was such an engineering feat when it opened in 1938 that it was awarded a Grand Prize at the New York World’s Fair. It was designed to calm even the most claustrophobic traveler. Buried more than 100 feet underneath the city, the station’s ceiling contained thirty-five individual, round niches with filament lights hidden behind them. The lights burned so brilliantly that it looked as if the summer sunshine was streaming through the panes. The station’s steel support beams were covered with pink rhodonite. Its walls were decorated with four different shades of granite and marble. Artists had created thirty-four mosaics in the ceiling, each glorifying the Soviet Empire. During World War II, the station had served as an air raid shelter and had escaped unscathed. But it was another historic event that caused Barkovsky to select the station for this evening’s banquet. When Moscow was under siege in 1941 by the Nazis, Stalin had addressed a crowd of party leaders

and ordinary Muscovites inside this very station, giving what would become known as his *Brothers and Sisters* speech. In it, Stalin predicted that although the Nazis seemed invincible, they would be defeated. Barkovsky's speech tonight had mimicked Stalin's famous remarks. He had attacked "outside invaders" who were threatening the new Russia – just as the Nazis had once done. He'd made thinly disguised attacks on the United States and NATO. Stalin had promised that the Motherland would rise triumphant, but only if it held "true to the moral principles" that had first guided the Communist revolution. Barkovsky repeated that same cold line.

It was Barkovsky's goal, and that of his New Russia Party, known simply as the NRP, to turn Russia backwards and in doing so, restore it as a world Super Power, capable of protecting its people from the threat of the U.S. and its newer rivals: China and India. Suspect everyone. Destroy all enemies. Use any means at your disposal.

Wooden chairs and tables had been placed on the station's boarding platform and train service had been suspended for tonight's rally. Blood red and bright yellow banners—the very colors of the flag of the old Soviet empire—dangled from the ceiling. The entire station had the feel of an old time communist rally. It was all well planned. Most of the crowd of four hundred had been members of the *apparatchiki*—the Communist Party apparatus. They had reaped the spoils of the

nomenklatura—the party system of rewarding people who were in political favor. As a child, Barkovsky had grown up envying these privileged party members, wanting desperately to be one of them. But his parents had not been invited to join. They had been poor factory workers south of Leningrad. Because they were not party members, they had been doomed to lives of obscurity and poverty. Their only son should have suffered their same dreary fate, but Barkovsky had found a way to pull himself up from the squalor. Through sheer determination, a total lack of conscience and an unquenchable lust for power, he had risen to become the most powerful leader in Russia since Joseph Stalin. Now he used his humble origins to his advantage. He had become a hero to the masses by pretending to be one of them. They loved him even as he was picking their pockets and constructing a palace for himself along the banks of the Black Sea at a cost of a billion dollars. Some nights, when he was alone, Barkovsky wondered if he could be the living reincarnation of Stalin. There were moments when he imagined that he could feel Stalin's blood pulsating through his veins.

Standing before the crowd, soaking in the hoopla, Barkovsky felt a hand gently touch his shoulder followed by the familiar voice of his chief aide whispering.

“Senator Windslow is dead.”

Without showing the slightest glimmer of a reaction, Barkovsky cocked his head slightly to his right and asked. “Where is Petrov?”

“London.”

“Why is he still alive?”