

Story for performance #957
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Source: Bret Stephens, 'Cairo has more to fear from Hamas than Israel', *The Australian online*, 02/02/08.
Tags: [crime](#), [retribution](#), [violence](#)
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Commissioner Ivan Gradinarov was at his desk when the phone rang. He picked up the heavy black receiver and with his left hand he put the cigarette at the edge of the full ashtray. The smoke blew directly back into his face and he squinted to protect his eyes, causing his face to screw up and the pock marks around his cheeks and chin to become more pronounced. He had just been given a packet of new cigarettes and he didn't like being interrupted. But he was the man of the hour, and the phone on the oversized desk was his to be answered. There were decisions to be made.

As he listened to the voice at the other end of the line, he turned to look out the window. Spring was only just breaking. The bedraggled trees outside were cracking open to let out the tiniest, most delicate pale green buds. A fine coat of the softest green, like down, spread across the dark bare branches. The patch of sky visible above the trees and buildings outside was palest blue. A shy attempt at warmth. And light. The monument to the Russian Liberator King standing proudly on his horse in the centre of the yellow square oversaw the movement of people below.

Gradinarov looked back. The whiff of spring distracted him. It took his mind away from what was important and made him restless. It was no time for spring. Spring had ceased to be important years ago, before the madness of the war erupted. And now there was a revolution to be upheld. There was work to be done.

The coalition between the agrarians and the communists had cracked like the ice on the Danube. Violently. People were slipping into the icy black waters below. If you wanted to be saved you had to act and think differently. Men of conscience had a job to do.

(Ah the whiff of power! Ah the sweet smell of Soviet tobacco!)

Gradinarov tapped his fingers on his cigarette, held it up to his mouth and took a slow, considered suck as the voice continued. He breathed out in pleasure.

It was Dona Kavelova, the secretary of the central committee. Her voice had the sound of iron in it. She had been a fighter and now had quickly moved up the eschalons. She had been present at the meeting when someone, unwisely, had protested against liquidating a prominent surgeon, just because he was respected abroad. And she had whispered in the ear of the leader of the party, and now the protester was under house arrest. Safely.

(Is it possible—tell me—is it possible to keep the order, to support a revolution—without being tough? You try.)

And then the leader of the enemy had been hanged in prison. Quietly. Swift action.

Swift decisions. And having the right people around you—this is what Gradinarov knew and was good at. These were radical times and it was exciting. To be in the centre of the swirling movement, to take hold of the reigns, to clean up the scum, to ride the horse

towards victory!

And now Kavelova had good news. She was speaking about GK, a prominent lawyer, who was hand in glove with the enemy. Although not a member of parliament, he was active, had studied at the Sorbonne.

(Aha, pro-west...yes...decadent...yes...in league...yes.)

Her voice was urgent, private. 'And if we don't act now, he might be promoted soon to a professorship in the university. Can we have these liberal elements teaching the youth? Propagating decadent legal and international principles...' Kavelova sounded pleased with this phrase. She placed a special little accent on the word *principles*.

Suddenly as she spoke, Gradinarov had an image of a beautiful vista. The Danube, near the village of his birth: the new labour camp there. A wave of pleasure swept through him. He thought of the lawyer, GK. He had only seen him from afar but didn't like him. Educated. High and mighty. With a deep voice. 'Principled'. Gradinarov smiled a little private smile.

(Yes, he'll like his new home...the new camp...yes...it is far away, out of sight...just the river and the mosquitoes, no one to complain to, he'll see the uses of education...yes...)

Kavelova's voice continued on the other end of the line. Then suddenly, more quietly, she added: 'Oh and by the way...' A pause, a whispered smile, 'He doesn't live with his wife and daughter—you understand—there's a...situation...a blonde...' I know the address—where he is now. The information just came in. If we act fast, you can have him in court in a few weeks.'

She dictated the address. It was brief. The street was well known, in the centre of Sofia.

Gradinarov wrote it on the edge of a piece of paper, then underlined it twice with an energetic strike of the pen.

He mumbled a curt goodbye and hung up. The cigarette was now only a pile of ash.

He turned again to the window. Outside the clouds had parted and brilliant sunshine washed over the yellow square below.

The commissioner leaned back in his chair, tapped the desk with his fingers, and smiled a distant smile.

'This is excellent news,' he said softly to himself.

He sat a moment, then picked up the receiver again, dialled, and said firmly, 'I'd like to order an arrest. For activity against the people. Urgent. Rakovska 24.'

He hung up, tore off the piece of paper with the address, took out a match, struck it, and held the paper to the flame.

He watched it burn slowly until it was a small pile of grey ash in his already full ashtray.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Bagryana Popov.