

Child 44 Study Guide

Child 44 by Tom Rob Smith

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Plot Summary

NOTE: Due to the structure of the novel, summaries and analysis sections are divided by page numbers. This study guide specifically refers to the 2012 Grand Central Publishing/Hachette Book Group paperback edition.

“Child 44” by Tom Rob Smith is a fictionalized historical novel focusing on the Rostov Ripper killings in the Soviet Union. The novel, set approximately 25 years before the killings historically, follows the efforts of Leo Demidov to solve a string of child murders that, according to the Communist State, do not exist, for the State has decreed that crimes are symptomatic of the corruption of Western society and capitalism, and simply are not possible under Communism. Early in the novel, Leo is loyal Communist, working as a State Security force officer in the MGB in Moscow, where he seeks out traitors, spies, dissidents, counterrevolutionaries, and anyone who opposes the State, or poses a threat to the State. Leo is a legal absolutist, believing that anything legal is moral, and is also an extreme utilitarian, believing that the ends justify the means. As such, Leo will act even cruelly in order to do what is necessary to protect the Communist State. When faced with the idea that friend and fellow MGB-worker Fyodor Andreev’s son has been murdered, Leo, on orders from and in agreement with the State, hushes up talk of the murder, telling Fyodor and his family to drop it.

Later in the novel, Leo’s wife, Raisa, comes under suspicion by the State of being a Western sympathizer, and Leo is tasked with investigating his own wife. Leo clears his wife’s name, but is exiled for refusing to denounce her, along with Raisa, to the mountain town of Voualsk. There, Raisa comes to see herself as an equal to Leo, having long feared his position and power, and having only originally married him out of fear for her life, rather than love. When Leo discovers that a local girl has been killed in the same fashion as Fyodor’s son, Leo realizes there must be a potential for murder. Joined by Raisa, they discover a third body under the same conditions –naked, the stomach cut out, the mouth stuffed full of bark, and a string snare tied about the ankle – and begin an investigation. Leo later convinces the local militia commander, Nesterov, to join in the search for the murderer. They must work secretly and carefully, for as the State has declared there are no murders under Communism, to investigate something which does not legally exist is punishable by death for challenging the State. The State ultimately learns of the investigation, and an effort headed up by Vasili, Leo’s brutal, heartless former second-in-command, is launched to find Leo and Raisa.

Leo and Raisa ultimately discover that the identity of the murderer is Leo’s own brother, Andrei, who lives in the southern Russian town of Rostov-on-Don. As a child, Leo was known as Pavel, who was kidnapped by another villager with the intent of turning Pavel into soup for the villager’s son. But with the villager’s son dying before the villager could return to his wife, the couple eats their son instead of Pavel. They offer Pavel the soup made from their son, and offer Pavel the chance to come to Moscow for a better life. Pavel adopts the dead son’s name, Leo, and moves to Moscow with his newly adopted parents. Andrei has long believed that Leo was still alive, and after seeing Leo’s photo in the newspaper, Andrei knew he had to reestablish contact. Denied Leo’s contact



information by the newspaper, Andrei set about murdering children to attract Leo's attention, which ultimately works. Leo and Raisa find Andrei, and as they prepare to kill Andrei, Vasili arrives and is killed by Andrei. Andrei then commits suicide with assistance from Leo. At the end of the novel, Leo becomes head of a new homicide department, has become a moral absolutist (understanding that, just because something is legal, doesn't make it right), and Raisa has come to truly fall in love with him as a result. Leo and Raisa end up adopting two orphaned girls, their parents previously killed by Vasili.



Pages 1 – 101

Summary

Soviet Union, Ukraine, Village of Chervoy, 25 January, 1933 – Maria Antonovna has decided to die, for she is without love in her life and has no food, and knows that her cat must fend for itself. However, after Maria chews the leg of a stool, the cat does not want to come near her. Maria waits for night to open her door for her cat to run to safety, for she worries the other villagers will catch and eat the cat.

The cat is seen by Pavel, who hasn't eaten meat in so long he cannot remember, and he decides to tell his mother, Oksana, about it. Oksana, at home, reflects on how Nikolai Ivanovich had attempted to steal from the State granary for the village, only to die on the way back by the roadside. Oksana has long kept small amounts of food hidden behind the fireplace, never found by the State Collectors, who wonder how Oksana is in relatively good health while much of the rest of the villagers are sick and dying. Oksana long ago learned not to oppose the State openly, when the State claimed the town church bell as belonging to the State, and not to God. The grain he'd been carrying was divided up between Oksana and Nikolai's wife, and the other villagers were envious of them both.

Oksana believes Pavel's eyes are playing tricks on him, but goes to the pond to retrieve the bones she keeps hidden in a sealed jar beneath the water. Pavel selects a few bones, and then brings his younger brother, almost-eight year-old Andrei, along to help catch the cat. Andrei asks when their father is coming back, having gone to find meat. Pavel says their father isn't coming back. The brothers enter the woods in pursuit of the cat. Pavel dabs some of his own blood on a bone to lure the cat in, and is bitten while snapping its neck. Knowing other villagers would fight and kill for such a catch, Pavel wishes to carry the cat under a pile of sticks. He and Pavel move apart to find some, during which time, a wild-eyed man attacks Pavel. Andrei quickly realizes something is not right, and that he is alone. He begins screaming for his brother and then runs home. Oksana is terrified, wondering what has become of Pavel, praying to God that He will bring Pavel back.

Twenty Years Later, Moscow, 11 February, 1953 – The brothers Jora and Arkady have a snowball fight. Younger Arkady always hates that he loses such fights. Jora hits his brother in the face with a collection of ice, dirt, rock, and snow, knocking out his brother's front teeth. Crying, Arkady runs away, and Jora feels badly.

14 February – Thirty year-old Leo Stepanovich Demidov, senior member of the State Security Force, MGB, is at Apartment Block 18 investigating the death of nearly five year-old Arkady on the railroad tracks three nights ago, his body cut up by train wheels. Ordinarily, the death of a child is of no concern to the State, but the boy's parents have been crying murder. By whom and for what reason they cannot say. Arkady's father, Fyodor Andreev, is a low-level MGB operative, and one of Leo's subordinates and



friends. Fyodor is worrying people, and upsetting the status quo, which is upsetting to the State, because the State has declared that there is no crime in the Soviet Union. Few believe this absolutely, for the society is still in transition to a better version of itself. Theft, drunken brawls, and criminal gangs are one thing that will all go by the wayside, but murder is something else entirely. Leo must now confront Fyodor. A war veteran from the Great Patriotic War (World War II), Leo fought with special forces, getting his picture in the newspaper after destroying a German tank, his handsome features and smile the center of the photo, and training under the eye of the NKVD, which later became the MGB. After success in the war, Leo becomes a full-fledged member of the NKVD-turned-MGB. Leo's job is not particularly pleasant, but he is prepared to lay down his life, and the lives of others, for the State, for the revolution, and will fight to the death any enemies foreign or domestic.

Fyodor's family – some twenty people – have all gathered to meet with Leo. Fyodor asks for Leo's help in either finding the murderer, or getting the MGB to get the procurator to open up a case. Leo realizes there are inconsistencies. The official report says Arkady was found fully clothed, while the man who found his body, Taras Kuprin, says the boy was found naked, with dirt stuffed in his mouth. An elderly woman says the report is a lie. This rankles Leo, but Leo does his best to keep his patience, hoping to convince Arkady's family and friends that they are merely in grief and mistaken. Fyodor explains a woman saw Arkady along the railroad tracks with a man, and the woman – whom they do not know – is on her way now. Leo decides to wait and see what the woman has to say. Her name is Galina Shaporina, and she says she did indeed see a man, but with a bag, and not a boy. She then slips out of the room. The elderly woman, who accuses Galina of losing her nerve, is calmed by Fyodor. The elderly woman is Fyodor's mother. Leo tells Fyodor to take the following day off, and that the case is now settled. The conversation about murder cannot continue. As Leo leaves, Jora confesses the snowball fight to Leo. Leo explains it was no one's fault.

The Village of Kimov, 160 Kilometers North of Moscow, Same Day – Anatoly Brodsky breaks into the barn of Mikhail Zinoviev to sleep and take shelter from the snow for the night. Anatoly sees the barn door open, and goes to investigate. Both men know each other. Anatoly apologizes for coming, saying he knows he has put Mikhail's family in great danger. He tells Mikhail to forget that he ever came, to always remember them as the best of friends. Earlier in the evening, Anatoly arrived unannounced, wanted by the MGB, and hoped Mikhail would travel with him to the Finnish border to escape, for the MGB is looking for one man, and not two. Mikhail refused, and Anatoly leaves, though he does not blame Mikhail. Anatoly has now sought shelter for the night. Rather than kill or report Anatoly, Mikhail simply returns to bed to pray. During the war, other men had called him brave, but now, with a family, Mikhail imagines he is something of a coward, for he must protect his family first and foremost. Back in bed, his wife is disappointed in Mikhail. He tells her not to worry, that no one knows Anatoly is there.

Moscow, Same Day – Leo searches Anatoly Brodsky's apartment, which has been trashed. Leo is angered that Anatoly has escaped, and wonders if he would have escaped if not for the situation with Fyodor. He had been sidetracked from staking out Anatoly, a case made due to the man's education, ability to speak English, and constant



contact with foreigners. Anatoly, a wartime medic, has turned to veterinarian services a block from the American embassy. It is believed that Anatoly has become a spy, for he is often among foreigners with pets more than Soviet citizens with pets. Leo realizes he has made a mistake in not having thought more of the case against Anatoly, and knows that few MGB officers are ever given the chance to make a second mistake. Major Kuzmin, Leo's superior, has reminded Leo that even those who are trusted must be checked in upon. Leo is annoyed that Kuzmin had insisted upon his handling of Fyodor, and that he had agreed so readily rather than protesting and sticking to surveillance of Anatoly.

In the time he'd been with Fyodor, Anatoly had escaped. Leo interrogates Anatoly's neighbors, telling them they are presumed to be guilty as accomplices if they can offer no information against Anatoly. The upstairs neighbors point to Zina Morosovna, a woman in her fifties, as being the only person in the building who liked Anatoly. Leo then interrogates Zina. The only thing that can save her is information. Seeking to save her own life, she explains that Anatoly often had her post letters for him, to Kimov, a rural village to the north.

Leo then heads to the truck where his men are waiting, including second-in-command Vasili Illyich Nikitin, 35, a MGB supreme loyalist and careerist, seeking to make up for the past. He had denounced and had imprisoned his brother for making anti-Stalin jokes while drunk, and the brother had escaped from prison, killing guards and a doctor in the process. The incident hangs around Vasili's neck like a noose. Vasili, searching the veterinary clinic, has discovered a letter from a friend in Kiev, inviting Anatoly to come and stay anytime. Leo sees the letter as a red herring, and orders his unit to head to Kimov.

Thirty Kilometers North of Moscow, 15 February – The ZiS-151 truck in which Leo and his 11 men travel makes slow progress in the snow and ice. Leo senses his men are uncomfortable chasing the Kimov lead, after having bungled the surveillance of Anatoly. Leo does not alert the local militia, for he considers them amateurs. Leo's life and career are riding on catching Anatoly, or killing him. They miss the exit for the village, and while turning around, the truck slips off the road. The members of the unit pile out to help right the truck, and Leo senses their annoyance once more. Feeling sleepy, Leo takes methamphetamines, prescribed by Soviet doctors. Leo is a regular user while working hard cases, and side effects – from forgetfulness, to paranoia, to weight loss – have all set in. They arrive at Mikhail Zinoviev's farm. The team is divided up, and Vasili and his men are ordered to search the barn, and take Anatoly alive.

Leo and his men burst into the house as Mikhail and his family are settling down to breakfast, and demand to know where Anatoly is. Leo can see in Mikhail's wife's eyes that Anatoly is present, and he orders his men to search the house. He then heads out to the barn, and begins to suspect his men's unhappiness has to do with his having been so terse with Fyodor, who was friends with many of them. Leo orders some of his men to follow tracks to the fields with him.



Anatoly is spotted, and Leo chases him to the river across from the woods. Anatoly falls through the ice, and is dragged downstream underneath the ice by the current. Downriver, Leo goes through the ice to retrieve Anatoly. Leo forces the water out of Anatoly's lungs to revive him. Leo's men arrive, impressed, and are ordered to surrender their jackets to Leo and Anatoly, and to light a fire. With their strength back, Leo, Anatoly, and the agents all begin the long walk back. At the farmhouse, a beaten Mikhail, and his family, have all been tied up. Vasili shoots Mikhail in the head, and then shoots his wife.

Leo orders Vasili to stop, hitting him and threatening to kill him if he does not. To Leo, the killing of the family is tantamount to murder – and the word murder spins around in Leo's mind. Vasili relents, and Leo escorts the surviving daughters back into the house. Leo packs things for the girls, and brings them to Moscow, ordering Vasili to remain behind and report to the local militia. Vasili, angered, desires revenge.

Moscow, 16 February – Leo never feels comfortable at Lubyanka, MGB headquarters. Everyone is always guarded with each other. The building is feared by all citizens. Terror sustains the State, Stalin, and the revolution, and the MGB is meant to terrify. MGB agents willingly spread fearful rumors about the MGB in order to increase fear, and enforce submission. In addition to spreading fear, the MGB is meant to root out and destroy counterrevolutionary activity, espionage, and threats to the State. No one, not even MGB agents, are safe from the MGB, Leo knows.

Leo feels sick, having not eaten in two days, though the thought of food makes him sicker. Nevertheless, he reports to Major Kuzmin. Kuzmin, well past his prime, is respected for his past. Kuzmin explains to Leo that taking Leo off trailing Anatoly to deal with Fyodor was important, for it had caused corruption in the MGB. While Kuzmin is glad Anatoly has been caught, Kuzmin considers the Fyodor issue to have been of more importance. Kuzmin questions Leo about the incident with Vasili, who has reported Leo for taking drugs. Leo explains that Vasili had disobeyed an order. Kuzmin explains that he doesn't care about Leo's use of doctor-prescribed narcotics, or even the executions of the Mikhail and his wife, but the fact that Leo struck a fellow officer. Kuzmin tells Leo to consider the matter closed, and then orders Leo to assist in the interrogation of Anatoly. Kuzmin is concerned that Leo had not acted to arrest Anatoly sooner, and wants Leo to see what a traitor Anatoly is firsthand. Leo is ordered to work together with Vasili on getting Anatoly to crack.

The prison cells in Lubyanka are intentionally kept in disrepair, filthy, and overcrowded. Ill-treatment at best, and brutal torture at worst, are considered legitimate in order to keep the State alive. Anatoly has been kept awake since being brought in. He asks about the girls, and Leo explains they are now in a State orphanage. This worries Anatoly, who also notes that Leo has a fever. Anatoly says that he knows no matter what happens, he will be branded a spy, and decides to make Leo work for the confession that will ultimately be forced. Vasili arrives with Dr. Roman Hvostov, a psychiatrist, and they bring Anatoly to Hvostov's office at Lubyanka. Hvostov is to establish Anatoly's sanity by using camphor oil, which will cause a seizure, during which time Anatoly will be unable to lie. He is asked who he is working with, and he begins to



name all of the people who have brought their pets in to see him. Leo realizes then that Anatoly is not a spy, and nothing more than a vet.

17 February – Dr. Boris Zarubin is ordered to check in on Leo at his home in Apartment 124, because Leo left the interrogation of Anatoly early. Kuzmin wants to know whether or not Leo is really sick, or if he left for unknown reasons. If Leo is genuinely sick, he is to be treated. If he is lying, he is to be given a sedative, during which time Kuzmin will determine what next to do. Leo's beautiful 27-year-old wife, Raisa Gavrilovna Demidova answers the door to Zarubin's knocking. Zarubin asks Raisa about her husband's health. She explains that he is often not hungry, has a demanding work schedule, and is sometimes absentminded. After having tea with Raisa, Zarubin goes to examine Leo. He can tell simply by the heat of the bedroom and the smell that Leo is genuinely sick with a bad cold.

Zarubin, a womanizer, desires Raisa, and so administers a drug under the guise of a medicine to Leo, which will cause him to drift into a deep sleep. Zarubin then makes his offer to Raisa: in exchange for sleeping with him, he will report that Leo is genuinely ill. As Zarubin moves in on Raisa, she holds a knife to him, telling Zarubin to tell their friend, Kuzmin, to send another doctor. Zarubin leaves, saying that only children believe in friends. Leo has nightmares about chasing Anatoly, and dreams of his wedding day with Raisa, a brief civil ceremony. The after-party becomes a nightmare, as Mikhail appears with a bullet in his head, and his daughters appear, bloated and in orphans' rags. Leo wakes up to Raisa calming him. Half-conscious, Mikhail talks sentimentally about meeting Raisa, which surprises Raisa. A short time later, Kuzmin himself arrives at the apartment, revealing that he knows Leo is sick based on the doctor's report, which calms Raisa. Kuzmin explains that he has notified Raisa's school that she will be taking time off to care for her husband, and gives her a bag of lemons and oranges, a gift from Zarubin. He then leaves, and Raisa knows the oranges and lemons are a gift to make her feel indebted to Zarubin.

19 February – It is the first time in four years that Leo has taken an unscheduled leave of absence. Leo feels depressed. He doesn't know why. He has thrown out his supply of methamphetamines, tried to catch up on sleep, and spent as much time as possible with Raisa, yet he still cannot understand why he feels sad. He realizes it must be because of Anatoly's innocence, but realizes, according to the State's idealism, Anatoly does not matter in the grand scheme of things. That Feliks Dzerzhinsky, first leader of Lenin's Cheka, the political police and forerunner to the NKVD and MGB, advised all officers to train their hearts to be cruel, does not comfort Leo. He meets with Kuzmin, who welcomes him back to work. In Leo's absence, Anatoly has confessed, given up seven Anglo-American sympathizers, and has been executed. Six of the seven are already under investigation. Leo is to investigate the seventh. It is his own wife.

Analysis

Tom Rob Smith's novel "Child 44" is a fictionalized historical treatment of the Rostov Ripper murders, and the efforts of Leo Demidov to solve them. Leo, a vaunted and



celebrated World War II veteran and loyal Communist, works for the MGB in Moscow in the early 1950s. Ruthlessly efficient, Leo is a legal absolutist, believing the State to be the highest moral authority, and is an extreme utilitarian, believing that the ends always justify the means. Leo will do whatever it takes to protect, defend, and maintain the Communist State, whether it means laying down his own life, or the lives of others in the process.

Immediately, the theme of Communism can be seen not only through Leo's identity and work, but also through his handling of both the Anatoly Brodsky case, and the Fyodor Andreev incident. Anatoly, who is only merely suspected of being a Western spy, becomes an enemy of the State under the auspice of only circumstantial conjecture, which is enough to incriminate him and warrant his capture, arrest, and execution. Leo is relentless in his pursuit of Anatoly, risking his own life in order to apprehend Anatoly himself. Leo knows that fear, and striking terror into the hearts of citizens, are the only way to make them compliant and subservient to the State, and to protect the State from the citizens. Anatoly's evasion and capture demonstrate to the public that the MGB and the State are not to be trifled with. The same is true as Leo, rather than comforting Fyodor and his family over the loss of their son, essentially threatens them and tells them to shut up about their suspicions of murder. In a perfect Communist State, murder cannot exist, and so it does not. Fyodor understands why Leo needs to shut them up, and recognizes that their lives all depend upon it.

Despite Leo's cruelty and ruthlessness, he is not without restraint, as his second-in-command, Vasili, is. While Leo draws the line at arresting Anatoly, Vasili decides to execute Mikhail and his wife without warrant or provocation. Vasili seems poised to even kill Mikhail's two daughters before Leo intervenes, striking Vasili for his insubordination and recklessness. Justice may largely be a sham in the Communist empire, but it is a routine that Leo is determined to carry out at all costs. (Here, the theme of justice – and injustice – can be viewed in light of how the Communist system handles crime.) Now orphans, the little girls will be cared for in a State-run orphanage. Vasili, deeply embarrassed, vows revenge against Leo.

The evil and barbarity of Communism can also be seen by way of other events so far in the novel, apart from the flawed system of justice and the theme of murder coming to the fore as a theme in the novel (as something the Communist government denies, and Leo later comes to realize exists). In a so-far-seemingly unrelated incident in Ukraine some 20 years before, two brothers hunt a cat as their village starves to death in the 1930s. One brother is abducted by a crazed-looking man. While this is certainly attention-grabbing for the reader, the context of the scene needs to be understood. Stalin, and the Communist State, has taken control of the Soviet Union's food supply, and has collectivized farms. Food is then denied to citizens as punishment, to induce fear, or to support the State; the citizens, who are given small plots of land for personal farming, are usually unable to grow enough to feed themselves. Communism takes everything away from people in order to make them evil, denying even the most basic human rights. In the 1930s in Ukraine, Stalin and the Communists instituted a genocide under the pretense of crop failures, leading to the deaths of some seven million people. It is against this backdrop that Pavel and Andrei hunt a cat to eat to survive.



This is the system that Leo unhesitatingly supports and kills for in order to uphold. It is truly a reign of terror. Even Vasili's assassination of Mikhail and his wife in front of their children is not enough to cause Leo to reconsider things. It is something that Leo must learn for himself, and which he does through two connected events. Leo comes to discover that Anatoly truly is innocent of espionage, and is merely only a veterinarian under suspicion for nothing. All of the names Anatoly gives during his time under oil are the names of clients who have brought their animals in to be treated. Anatoly's torture and execution cause moral chaos in Leo internally, though Leo does not recognize it as such. This turmoil eventually manifests itself physically, by making Leo ill. If Anatoly's wrongful arrest and execution have led Leo to be suspicious of the Communist system, the State's suspicion of his wife now causes him to blink.

Discussion Question 1

When the novel begins, Leo is a dedicated, idealistic Communist and is ruthlessly efficient at his job. Why?

Discussion Question 2

While much of the novel is fictional, large elements of it are historically factual, such as its portrayal of Communism. What is Communism like so far in the novel? What are its effects on the people? Is it a system Leo should be defending? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Leo, early on in the novel, is both a legal absolutist and extreme utilitarian. Explain how and why.

Vocabulary

miraculous, invariably, incompetence, imprudence, innocuous, equivocation, eluded, decorum, intermittent, recurrent



Pages 102 – 199

Summary

Same Day – Raisa, a teacher of compulsory political studies at Secondary School 7, along with all the other teachers, has been given a special one-day lesson. These often come as a result of edicts based on State government beliefs or concerns. Today, Raisa is to teach students that Stalin loves them the most, that they love Stalin the most, and that they should never play on railway tracks. Incorrect responses are to be logged. Raisa has only one friend at work – an unwise friendship with a man of about 40, Ivan Kuzmitch Zhukoiv, who tends to speak his mind when he shouldn't. As a result of Ivan's not being denounced by Raisa, he has come to trust her, and she him.

As she leaves school with Ivan, Leo is outside in civilian clothing. In the past, Leo had had Raisa followed to make sure she wasn't having an affair, but this time, things are different, as the surveillance is mandated by the State. Leo imagines that his wife's name has been inserted into the confession by Vasili. Leo will not trust the case to anyone else, so handles it himself. He follows Raisa from school into the metro. On the train, Leo realizes he is also being followed, to make sure that he not only does his job, but is not involved with what Raisa is suspected of doing. Raisa gets off one stop ahead of hers, and Leo, noticing the other agent hasn't seen her leave, decides to stay on the train, pretending to continue to watch the place where Raisa was sitting. At his stop at Teatral'naya Station, Leo gets off, pretending to continue to follow Raisa, and the agent follows him. Leo manages to switch trains, and leaves the station before the following agent can get on the train.

Same Day – After losing the agent, Leo turns on the lights in his apartment, and then goes to see his parents. Due to Leo's power, his parents, Stepan and Anna, have easier jobs than before: his father is a foreman at munitions factory, while his mother now handles a similar job in parachute production. His parents have been given access to special shops not open to the general public, where fresh food is sold, and their apartment is in a quiet residential quarter, has its own washroom, and even a small balcony. Leo's parents are always happy to see him. Leo explains the situation with Raisa and the State to them.

If Leo contests the validity of a state confession, he opens up the possibility that all are flawed, that will not be allowed. Leo intends to say that Anatoly himself was merely mistaken. Stepan says he knows that Leo wants them to tell him the right thing to do, the decent thing to do, which would be to defend Raisa's innocence, but Stepan says he cannot give that advice, since he wants his wife and son to live. If he was young, Stepan would give the advice sought by Leo, but then wonders what good it would do to die for doing the right thing. Leo explains he has two days to gather evidence. He is then surprised to learn his wife is coming to dinner, and dines with Leo's parents once a week because she gets lonely. Raisa arrives, surprised to see Leo. Stepan explains that Leo was working nearby, and they can all eat together as a family for once. Raisa



explains she usually comes over after work right away, but today, she has gone to the doctor, and confirmed she is pregnant.

20 February – Leo wonders if he can denounce Raisa that night in bed, or if he should defend her. He also wonders if her being pregnant will affect things. After Raisa leaves for work, Leo carries on a search of his own apartment, upending the place as is expected of such searches. A short time later, Vasili arrives with two men, one of which is Fyodor Andreev, sent by Kuzmin to assist with the search. Leo says it is not necessary, but they insist. Vasili advises Leo to find another beautiful wife. He gives Leo photos of Vasili and Ivan outside the school, insisting they are proof that Raisa is having an affair as well as being against the State. Ivan himself is suspected. While Vasili moves off to keep searching, Fyodor wonders how Leo could investigate his own wife, but not the death of a child of a friend. Fyodor says that all the witnesses were forced by the militia to change their statements, including the woman who said she saw a man holding his son's hand. Fyodor tells Leo he must sacrifice his wife to survive. Leo says his wife is innocent, and Vasili, reentering the room, says that all others named by Anatoly have been arrested and have already confessed. Leo insists Raisa was added out of spite. Leo disagrees, saying Raisa is a slut and a traitor, and must be denounced. Vasili reminds Leo that his life, and his parents' lives, hang in the balance. Leo will not denounce Raisa, saying he will make his report when it is due. Vasili wishes Leo luck, saying that if Leo survives, he may end up running the MGB one day. When Vasilia, Fyodor, and the other agent leave, Leo returns the apartment to normal. It is then that he finds a small copper coin in a cotton shirt, which splits in half, hollowed-out inside. Leo has seen these before – for smuggling microfilm.

21 February – Leo makes his report at a deposition to Major Kuzmin, Vasili, and Timur Raphaelovich, the officer who took Leo's place while questioning Anatoly. Leo now wonders if the deposition, the case against Raisa, is no more than a test to see if he puts his wife above State loyalty. Kuzmin explains that Leo is not suspected of any crime, though his wife is. Leo then knows the deposition is indeed a test, and denunciation will secure his position. Instead, Leo says his wife is innocent.

Three Weeks Later, West of the Ural Mountains, the Town of Voualsk, 13 March – Ilinaya finishes her shift on the car assembly line, and plans to go to Basarov's restaurant near the railway station popular with visitors and traveling state officials. There, she gives Basarov a cut of the money she makes prostituting herself out. At Basarov's, she begins to cozy up to a 40-something man, telling him her name is Tanya. The man offers to pay her with a gold tooth. She accepts. He leads her to the train station, to a work cabin behind the station itself near the woods. Inside, the man strikes her with a metal object. With a bloody mouth, she struggles with the man, and rushes down the railway tracks. He chases her as a train comes on, nearly hitting them. Ilinaya then takes to the woods, deciding to loop around back to town through the trees, but is tackled by the man. With a chisel stolen from work in her pocket kept for self-defense, Ilinaya strikes the man, bloodying him, and rushes away. She is tackled again, and falls beside the naked body of a young girl, mutilated, and her mouth stuffed with dirt. When the man sees the girl, he throws up. Ilinaya, not thinking, puts a hand on his back to comfort him, and then remembers what is going on, and rushes back to town.



Moscow, March 14 – Leo and Raisa are awakened at four in the morning by three young MGB officers with flashlights and alcohol on their breaths. One man has two small suitcases with him. Leo and Raisa are told to pack, and to wear as much clothing as possible. Leo suspects they are to be sent to their deaths. They are taken instead to the train station for the Trans-Siberian Express. Following his deposition, Leo had been placed under house arrest, and later disposed of the hollow coin, imagining it to have been planted by Vasili. A week into confinement, Leo had received news of Stalin's death. He continues to wonder how Stalin's death will affect him, if the temporary paralysis brought on by a new leader has saved Raisa and himself. Vasili arrives at the station to explain to Leo that so many unanswered questions about Leo means Leo cannot stay at the MGB in Moscow. He is to be transferred to the militia, and given an entry-level position, a *uchastkovyy*, responsible for doing everything from cleaning to secretarial work. It is employed exile in a police force. Leo is grateful beyond belief for not only escaping with their lives, but with freedom as well. Leo knows it is a not a favor, but Kuzmin's way of saving himself embarrassment by having made Leo his protégé. As Leo and Raisa board the train, Vasili tells Raisa that her husband has had her followed more than once under suspicion as a slut, and Vasili himself would have shot Raisa rather than defend her and be transferred.

On the train, Leo apologizes for having ever doubted Raisa's faithfulness. Raisa explains she would never dare cheat, for she would risk her life. She remembers her old friend, Zoya, arrested and imprisoned for 22 years for anti-Stalinist prayers. Raisa knows her husband is responsible for the arrest of innumerable people for similar crimes. Raisa admits to having overheard Leo's conversation with her parents, and pretended to be pregnant. Leo asks Raisa if she ever loved him. She simply bends down and ties her shoe.

Voualsk, 15 March – At the city's internat, the filthy State-run facility for children with mental deficiencies, 17-year-old Varlam Babinich looks over his collection of yellow-colored items, from pencils to posters to bricks to a crying baby in a yellow blanket he has just stolen. He regrets having stolen the baby, having panicked while trying to steal the blanket, but seeing how the baby now almost looks yellow, is glad to have stolen the baby after all.

Meanwhile, the six armed members of the Voualsk militia arrive in two cars, led by General Nesterov. Nesterov is horrified by the smells, overcrowding, and the condition of the establishment, but such concerns are for another time. Nesterov and his men find Varlam, and Nesterov asks Varlam to hand over the baby. Varlam knows he is in trouble. Nesterov tells Varlam that all he wants is the baby, not the blanket. Varlam hands over the baby, and Nesterov dispatches his lieutenant with the baby to the hospital. As Nesterov prepares to take Varlam away, he notices that Varlam has a confidential military manual with a yellow cover, and picks it up. A lock of blonde hair falls out of it, and Varlam says he knows he is in so much trouble.

Eight Hundred Kilometers East of Moscow, 16 March – Raisa realizes she has never loved Leo, but merely married him because he'd asked, because he was an MGB agent. Zoya's arrest had led her to become distant from Leo, coming to hate his work



and him, and was surprised when Leo suspected her of infidelity. Raisa now realizes she is no longer powerless against Leo, for they are in the same boat.

The train approaches the industrial mountain town of Voualsk, where Stalin had decided the 20,000 loggers would be better suited to building cars –the GAZ-20, and later the GAZ-21. At the station, Leo and Raisa meet General Nesterov. Leo believes that Nesterov suspects that Leo's demotion is a cover story for an investigation or some other ulterior motive, otherwise no one, least not the commander of the militia, would have met him at the station. The militia is largely disrespected and considered an unnecessary police force in a Communist State, for there is no rape, murder, or theft among equal citizens. They are more often than not mere lackeys for groups like the MGB. For an MGB agent to be sent to a place like Voualsk, Nesterov thinks, there must be a reason, for an MGB agent would not willingly leave a post for a lesser one, and if guilty of something, would have been arrested instead. Leo willingly plays on this fear, insisting all good Soviets must go where needed, and that he is in Nesterov's hands.

Until an apartment can be found, Leo and his wife will be put up in guest accommodations. They are given the sole room over Danil Basarov's restaurant, often used by prostitutes as a request by Nesterov, whom Basarov relies on to carry on his illegal activities. Leo feels humiliated, and is driven to the telephone exchange by Nesterov. On the phone with Vasili, Leo begs him to leave his parents alone, who have lost their jobs and their apartment for worse living arrangements and more labor-intensive jobs. Vasili hangs up on Leo.

Voualsk, 17 March – Leo walks around all night, finds a park bench alone, and weeps. He knows his parents will be persecuted, rather than executed. Dutifully, Raisa waits up for him. She has wanted Leo to feel the way she has felt, and all the people he has dealt with, have felt – powerless and scared. When Leo returns, he chokes her, blaming her for what has happened, but she stops him by smashing a glass against his head. He pours himself several drinks at the bar downstairs, awaiting Nesterov. Leo feels manipulated by Raisa. When Nesterov picks Leo up, he does not mention the gash from the glass. Leo realizes he has just almost killed the woman he had risked his own life to save.

At the militia office, Leo changes sadly into his uniform. Nesterov, meanwhile, tries to figure Leo out, wondering how a decorated war hero and MGB agent could appear so horribly unkempt. Nesterov considers this may be a trick, deciding to simply wait for Leo to play his hand. Nesterov gives Leo a case file folder, with photos of a murdered young girl, her mouth stuffed with dirt and her midsection ripped open. It reminds Leo of Fyodor's son, but he says nothing, merely wondering why he has been given a case file.

Same Day – Leo tries to convince himself the two deaths, hundreds of kilometers apart, have nothing to do with each other. Whereas Leo had gone through great lengths to avoid using the term murder, Nesterov uses the term with great openness, which worries Leo, for murders are not supposed to happen in a Communist State. The victim is 14-year-old Larisa Petrova, found four days before in the forest by a couple that was drunk and stumbled across her, according to Nesterov. Larisa's parents are respected



members of the community, and they want the investigation kept secret. Their daughter has had a wild sex life for being so young, often sleeping with much older men for as little as a liter of vodka in return. For now, the parents have agreed to pretend that Larisa is merely missing, having actually threatened to run away before.

An investigation can only be launched if a case is opened, and a case is only ever opened if it is certain it can be concluded successfully. A case brought to court can only have one possible outcome, in that the suspect is guilty. Leo then realizes he isn't being asked to consult on the case, but is being shown the efficiency of the militia. Nesterov believes they have their man – a 17-year-old, Varlam Babinich, who has long stalked Larisa, and was in possession of a lock of her hair. Nesterov brings Leo to Varlam, and explains Varlam's obsession with yellow, the kidnapping of the baby, and Varlam admitting to taking a lock of Larisa's hair. Nesterov explains that Varlam has more or less confessed to killing Larisa to obtain some of her hair, something he could not have. It all makes sense to Leo now, including why Nesterov uses the word "murder" at all. This murder is explainable because it has been committed by someone without conception of right or wrong, and who exists outside of the Party and the State, and does not reflect badly on either.

Same Day – After work, Leo discovers that Raisa has left. He pays Basarov for information about the direction taken by his wife. She is headed to the train station, and Leo rushes over. He apologizes again and again, explaining that he wasn't himself that morning. He says he did not refuse to denounce her because she said she was pregnant, but because his family is the only thing he has never been ashamed of. He says when they got married, they had some kind of connection, and he wants to find that connection again. Raisa explains she only ever consented to marrying Leo because she feared him, and originally gave her name as Lena so that Leo could not track her down. The only reason Raisa ever stayed with Leo was because he was not a cruel man to her, but that morning, the final reason Raisa had for remaining with him disappeared. Leo says he will never do anything like that again, and Raisa decides to return to their new apartment.

Leo remains behind, thinking for a while, when he is met by Aleksandr, the young man who runs the ticket booth, who tells Leo there are no more trains for the night. Leo then decides to investigate the scene of the murder. Aleksandr comes along, explaining all about Ilinaya, the prostitute, and the man she was with, an important Party official. Leo promises not to mention Aleksandr in his report, for Aleksandr has become nervous. Leo realizes the ground is frozen solid, so no loose earth or soil can be found to stuff a mouth.

Analysis

The State's determination that Leo should investigate his own wife for suspicion of Western sympathizing, perhaps even espionage, is jarring to Leo. Beyond the fact that Leo trusts his wife, Leo and Raisa have long been ardent Communists who have played by the rules and devoted themselves to upholding the Will of the State. Leo finds it



difficult to believe that the State could suspect Raisa of such a thing, and here, the struggle for his soul commences. If he refuses to renounce Raisa, he will, at best, be exiled or demoted (or both); and at worst, he and Raisa will be imprisoned and probably executed if they do not die of languishment first. If he renounces Raisa, he will be safe, having done the legal thing, and Raisa will die anyways. Leo is so desperate to do the appropriate thing that he seeks out his parents to ask them for their advice. They will not tell Leo what to do, but insist the choice rests with him. Leo ultimately decides, based in part on his wife's pregnancy, that he will not renounce her. As a result, the Communist system that Leo has trusted and sworn his life to, turns its back on him, and sends both Leo and Raisa into exile.

At the same time that this occurs, the naked body of a murdered 14-year-old girl is discovered in Voualsk. The murder shakes Leo to his core, for the girl is killed and mutilated in the same fashion as Fyodor Andreev's son in Moscow, hundreds of miles away. Leo trips and falls all over himself mentally, doing whatever he can to convince himself that there is no way the two murders can be connected, but he can't shake the feeling – and the hard evidence – that they are. This further undermines Leo's faith in the Communist system, for not only did Leo seek to follow through to uphold the doctrine that murder does not exist in a Communist system, but he actually believed it as well. The dead girl shakes Leo to his very core, which, combined with Anatoly's innocence and the accusations against his dutiful wife, leave Leo depressed, flailing, and seeking – like a good Communist – to blame someone or something other than Communism. Leo ultimately blames Raisa, though it is more a move of desperation and humiliation than anything else. Like the dutiful wife who has married Leo out of fear, Raisa forgives Leo for his assault upon her – and now comes to view herself as her equal. She is glad that Leo now feels the fear and pain he himself has caused countless other people, not out of a measure of vindictiveness, but out of a measure of wanting Leo to understand what he has done.

Leo also comes to realize how the State handles murders. It does not recognize them as legitimate murders, but explains them away as crimes committed against the integrity of the State by non-Communists. If a murder occurs, it is not a murder in the strict sense of the word. It occurs by the hand of dissidents, counterrevolutionaries, foreigners, drunks, outliers, and enemies of the State, but never by real Communists. Nesterov is only referring to Larisa's murder as a murder because the intended murderer is already in hand, the evidence against him seemingly overwhelming, and the individual, Varlam, presenting the perfect kind of scapegoat to explain away the murder. Leo decides to do a little investigating on his own, coming to realize that Larisa's mouth could not have been stuffed with dirt from the area, for the dirt in the area is all frozen. Leo's decision to even investigate this much symbolizes his break from the Communist system. The collective system has ruled away the death of Larisa; Leo, individually, has decided to investigate. An individual action in a Communist state is unacceptable.



Discussion Question 1

How does Leo handle the investigation of Raisa? What is Leo's conclusion to the investigation? What happens to both he and Raisa as a result?

Discussion Question 2

If you were Leo, would you have denounced Raisa? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What events and incidents undermine Leo's faith in the Communist system? Why? How does he respond?

Vocabulary

supplementary, indifference, misconstrued, studiously, skullduggery, extricate, epiphany, indignation, indoctrination, pinnacle, anomaly, ostentatious, bedraggled, acquiesce



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Summary

18 March – Leo reads the autopsy report notes he has taken at Hospital 379. Larisa received multiple stab wounds from a blade of unknown length, experienced extensive damage to her torso and internal organs, was raped either before or after death, and her mouth was full of soil, perhaps to silence her. With the ground frozen solid, Leo realizes the soil must have been brought with the killer, meaning there was intention and preparation – premeditation. He decides to do what he should have done with Fyodor's son – view the body.

Leo wonders what he is doing, for he knows he can hardly change the course of the investigation, and has no authority to do so. Yet he persists, meeting with Dr. Tyapkin, to see the body. Tyapkin, like Leo, was demoted and sent to Voualsk. Tyapkin explains that the doctors' own lives depend upon keeping workers alive to keep the factories operating. Tyapkin retrieves Larisa's body. Leo can see where Varlam removed hair from her head, and the horrible wounds to her midsection. Leo reveals the contents of the autopsy to Tyapkin, who explains that the report fails to mention that Larisa's stomach is missing, unskillfully cut out. Tyapkin also reveals that, although Larisa was not a virgin, she was not raped, for there is no bruising or wounds to her genitalia, breasts, or face. The man who cut her open was interested in her midsection, and her midsection only. There is also a noose-like string tied around Larisa's ankle. Tyapkin excuses himself as General Nesterov arrives to see what is going on. Nesterov tells Leo that he thinks Leo is still MGB, and that the militia released Mikoyan, the Party official, without charge as instructed. Nesterov warns Leo that he is no longer in Moscow, that if Leo does anything to undermine, denounce, badmouth, or harm anyone on his militia, he'll kill Leo.

20 March – Raisa has begun work at Secondary School 151, where director Vitali Kozlovich Kapler explains he is happy to have Raisa with them, for he will be able to catch up on paperwork by relinquishing some duties to her. Raisa is pleasantly surprised that her new students are less political, and less worried to prove loyalty than her Moscow students were. They are much more like children. Even the other teachers are more friendly, though a little suspicious of Raisa at first. Raisa is not bothered by the new location, for she is used to heartbreak. The Communists themselves had shelled her home village, killing her entire family in the process during World War II, so the town would not fall into German hands.

That night, Leo slips out through the window of the apartment, which infuriates Raisa, because he is now risking both of their lives once more. She believes Basarov is an informant for the local militia. Raisa, however, now views herself as Leo's equal, and goes out through the window after him.



Same Day – Leo learns that Larisa’s clothing had been neatly piled, and without blood, some forty paces from the body. Leo knows he will have to find a second body to discover any new information. The cold and snow would perfectly preserve a body. The skillful but amateur cutting of Larisa means there must be other victims, Leo realizes. He also recognizes the relatively close location of the body to the station and the town must mean something about the killer. Using a map stolen from the militia office, Leo divides the area into quadrants, searching each one.

It is then that Raisa appears, angry at Leo risking their lives for a personal investigation. She wants to keep her head down, and live. Leo counters that keeping one’s head down and doing nothing wrong does not mean the State thinks one is innocent. Raisa contends that finding a murderer will not make up for his past. Leo becomes angry, saying that Raisa hates him when he toes the line, and then hates him when he does the right thing. Leo tells Raisa that sooner or later, the MGB will come for him. He tells her that in order to survive, she’ll have to denounce him and make a show of betraying him. Rather than leave, however, Raisa asks about Leo’s investigation, and helps him search the woods. They find two sets of footprints – an adult’s, and a child’s, both headed side by side in the same direction. They discover, soon, the appearance of a struggle, and find the mutilated body of a 13 or 14-year-old boy in the snow, blood everywhere, the crime several weeks old. String has been tied around the boy’s ankle, cutting into his flesh. Leo then discovers the soil in the boy’s mouth isn’t soil at all, but bark from a tree.

22 March – Leo, 36 hours later, still has not reported the murder, for he and Raisa know it could well be blamed on Varlam. He will first need to dismantle the case against Varlam – what Nesterov has warned him not to do. The procurator has already obtained a confession from Varlam, though the details between the confession and the militia’s report vary. Leo gets Nesterov to agree to a joint interrogation between the militia and the sledovatyel investigating the case, seeing if there were more victims – something that should have already been done. Varlam says he has killed no one else, and the others believe him, for there are no more girls with blonde hair missing. Nesterov agrees to a search for more bodies, just in case, and fearful of Leo’s credentials.

Lumber workers are tasked with joining in the search. Leo, hoping the body will be found, is disappointed, and so he and Nesterov go directly to the body. Leo explains his method, worried that Varlam would be blamed for the murder. Leo argues that the mouths of both children have been stuffed with bark, not soil; and that both have string around their ankles, meaning there is the same killer, which is not Varlam. Nesterov agrees to go and get the procurator, but says that there are two different murderers, not one, with both of them being sick. One of the killers is Varlam, Nesterov contends. In his 20-year militia service, he has never encountered an actual murderer.

23 March – 22-year-old Aleksandr shuts down the train station ticket office for the night. Once the fastest runner in school, people believed he was destined for greatness, perhaps the Olympics, but this was not to be in the end, for he was not selected. He regrets having spent so much time on athletics, only to have a simple job that anyone could do. Aleksandr essentially runs the station for his father, who is too fat and drunk



most of the time to do any real work. The family lives in an apartment at the station which they do not have to share with anyone else, and have the privileges of hot water and privacy, for which in return they are expected to be on call 24 hours a day.

Aleksandr's favorite pastime is seeing movies at the old church converted into a movie theater for State films. But instead of going to see a film, he goes to Victory Park, where he prostitutes himself out to other men. He arranges an encounter with a young man in the darkened train station, who turns out to be an agent of the local militia undercover. Aleksandr punches him. Suddenly, Nesterov and his men appear, Leo among them, to arrest Aleksander for homosexuality, an offense which could get Aleksandr five years in jail. Nesterov's deputy strikes Aleksandr in return for hitting the militia agent. Nesterov demands the name of all other male homosexuals in town, saying that if Nesterov works with them, there might not be a need for a trial or for telling Aleksandr's parents. Aleksandr's cooperation will help with the murder of a boy. Aleksandr then asks what will happen to the men on the list he gives.

29 March – Leo's investigation has launched a citywide effort to arrest homosexuals, some 150 in all so far. Leo himself has arrested 20. Nesterov knows that murder is an aberration, as is homosexuality –so a homosexual murderer will not upset social theory or embarrass the State. Based on Aleksandr's list of the 10 men he has had sex with, each man in turn has given up more, revealing an entire underworld in the city. To Nesterov, these men are sick, from the mildest form where one man desires another, to the sickest, where a man desires a boy. The homosexual men have two choices: either deny their homosexuality and be tried, or give up the murderer. With so many men imprisoned, the local MGB even gets involved to handle interrogations. No matter how brutal things get, there are no leads. Nesterov then decides to prosecute all 150 men, hoping this will make them crack. Three do, but they point the fingers at different people. Leo says the men are all innocent, but Nesterov says all 150 of them are guilty, and one of them is also guilty of murder. Leo returns home, saddened, and Raisa realizes that her husband, broken, is now looking for something to believe in beyond their marriage.

30 March – Leo and Moiseyev, a militia thug, visit Orphanage 80. Leo is surprised at how horrible the conditions are, having never been in a State-run orphanage before. The director does not remember the murdered boy. The director says it is impossible for him and three others to keep tabs on more than 300 children, who come and go all the time. The director says all he does is to make sure the kids have somewhere to eat and sleep, but beyond that, he does not care what they do, though he does not sanction or profit from prostitution. Leo then consults the orphan boys with pictures of the arrested men to see if any boys recognize any of them. The boys, who demand payment for information, point to one man who works at the hospital.

Same Day – Leo and Moiseyev go to Apartment 14 on the top floor of Building 7, where they confront Dr. Tyapkin, who is thin with worry. He explains his four month-old son is sleeping. Moiseyev smashes him in the face with a gun, orders Leo to search Tyapkin, and then begins to search the apartment. Tyapkin says his wife is out getting food, and says he knew it was only a matter of time before he was found out. Tyapkin says he paid one of the orphan boys for sex because he wanted anonymity, and no one would



ever believe an orphan over a doctor. Tyapkin insists that though he paid the boy, he couldn't follow through and have sex with him. Tyapkin goes to the sink to hold a towel to his bloody nose, saying he has never killed anyone. He then injects himself with a syringe, and dies by suicide. His wife arrives home a moment later.

1 April – Aleksandr knows that he will sooner or later probably be targeted by the men he has named, or by the militia and MGB. He decides to commit suicide by train, leaving a note behind for his parents explaining he has left due to disappointment for failing to become a long-distance runner.

Same Day – Leo heads to Nesterov's house and is greeted at the door by Nesterov's wife, Inessa. Leo is deeply depressed, for his investigation has ruined more than 200 lives by that point. Leo brings news of Aleksandr's suicide. Nesterov says it is unfortunate, but that Aleksandr was sick. Tyapkin was clearly guilty of murder, Nesterov contends, his guilt apparent through his suicide. Leo then brings up Fyodor's child, Arkady, and how he failed the family by supporting the State. This unnerves Nesterov, who has no idea what to make of Leo. Leo punches Nesterov, saying they have solved nothing. Nesterov, who is barely fazed by the punch, tells Leo to go home. Leo punches again, and then Nesterov strikes back, knocking Leo down, and telling him to go home. Leo tells him they have solved nothing, kicks him in the groin, and then Nesterov beats Leo into near-unconsciousness. Before Leo passes out, he says they have solved nothing, and Nesterov brings Leo inside, where Inessa revives him and tends to his wounds. Nesterov reveals he has two sons, and he has ordered them to take the long way to school through town, rather than through the woods. He asks why Leo is truly in Voualsk. He reveals again not only the murder of Arkady, but his refusal to denounce his wife. Leo reveals his investigation is his own, and that he believes the murderer is not Varlam or Tyapkin, but is someone who travels frequently by train. Leo tells Nesterov he needs to go to each town to view their records. Nesterov asks why he should do this. Leo replies that he must do it for the people they live with, for the children themselves. Leo explains Nesterov must look for cases of murdered children, their mouths stuffed with bark and missing stomachs, strings tied to their ankles, and their bodies found in places like woods or rivers, or near train stations. Nesterov says that he will not help Leo.

Southeastern Rostov Oblast, West of the Town of Gukovo, 2 April – Petya, aged seven, enjoys collecting stamps. He wakes up early, eager for his parents' permission to go to town to buy another stamp after months of saving. With their permission, Petya goes to the kiosk in Gukovo near the train station that sells stamps, among other things like newspapers. Petya wanders around town, waiting for the kiosk to open. He decides to pass time by sitting on a bench, waiting to see the next train come in, when a well-dressed man with a black briefcase, glasses, and black hair sits down beside him. The man asks about what Petya is up to, and Petya explains he collects stamps. The man says he lives three stops away, will buy Petya a ticket, and give Petya his own collection from childhood, because his own daughters are not interested in stamps. Though Petya knows he is breaking rules his parents have set, he goes along with the man. The man is Andrei. Several stops up, the man attacks Petya, undresses him, and ties a string around the boy's ankle, waiting for him to awaken. Andrei, while waiting, chews on tree



bark. When Petya awakens, and struggles to his feet. He is reeled in by Andrei, but Petya manages to break the string. He runs away, and is tackled by Andrei. Andrei then pulls out a blade and plunges it repeatedly into the boy's stomach.

Three Months Later, Southeaster Rostov Oblast, The Sea of Azov, 4 July – Nesterov is on vacation with his family at the beach, a reward for his efforts in Voualsk at his handling of the two murder investigations. Varlam has been executed. Tyapkin's wife has renounced Judaism, denounced her dead husband, and is now free to live with her children in the town of Shakhty on the border with Ukraine. The cases bother Nesterov, and his wife tells him she knows it is only a matter of time before Nesterov agrees to help Leo. Nesterov ultimately does. Nesterov considers something Leo asks him about – whether surviving is enough, as the majority does, or whether it is better to have a purpose. Over the spring, Nesterov's quiet investigation yields 44 potential victims, all with the same circumstances. Arkady is the 44th child.

At the beach, Nesterov falls asleep. When he wakes up, his son Efim is nearby, but Vadim is missing. Nesterov, panicking, begins to look around for his son, the knowledge of the murders fresh in his mind. His wife, Inessa, also panics, for she has been assisting and encouraging the investigation. The trip to the south of the country was her idea, as most of the murders have occurred there. Inessa continues to panic, begging strangers to help her find her son, saying he'll be murdered. No one believes her. Nesterov, looking in a place with tall reeds, finds Vadim, and carries him back. As the family leaves the beach, a thin woman with a touch of gray hair records the license plate number of Nesterov's car, decided the family needs to be investigated.

Moscow, 5 July – Raisa accompanies her husband to Moscow, a partner now not merely in marriage, for she hates Leo, but a partner in the investigation. Their lives and the investigation depend on remaining undiscovered. They have told everyone back in Voualsk they are going on a camping trip. Nesterov has helped them forge travel papers. They are there to seek out Galina Shaporina, who has seen the killer, and Ivan, who is well-read in censored Western literature, and may have something to offer on the crime of murder. Raisa knows everything that they have been taught about murder, that is a symptom of capitalism, is wrong, and they must forget it and start from scratch. At the station in Moscow, their papers are checked by a guard who cannot read, and then their bags are checked before being allowed to move on.

Same Day – Leo and Raisa seek out Fyodor Andreev to help him get in touch with Galina Sharporina. The elderly woman – Fyodor's mother – who stood up to Leo months before answers the door to Fyodor's apartment. She admits them, beginning to cry. Inside, Fyodor and his family meet with Leo, who removes his shirt, for papers relating to the investigation have been taped around his torso. Fyodor asks what Leo will do if he catches the murderer. Leo says he will kill him. Fyodor does not dwell on the past. He brings Leo and Raisa to Galina immediately, though Leo will remain outside, so as not to scare Galina as he had in the past. Galina, a woman in her thirties, fearfully insists she did not see a man with a child, but with a tool bag. Galina will not say what the man looks like.



Rostov-on-Don, Same Day – Disliking the fact that family cat is watching her, six year-old Nadya decides to go for a walk for dinner, not asking her parents' permission, for she knows she will be refused if she does. She walks down along the river, toward her favorite tree. Ahead, she sees a man with a bag. It is her father, Andrei, who picks her up and continues on home with her. At home, he sets her down, where Nadya accidentally steps on the cat. Andrei angrily tells her never to touch the cat. Downstairs in the basement, Andrei removes the stomach of a little girl he has murdered hours before, cuts it into strips, fries it up, and serves it to the cats he keeps in the basement. Nadya, upstairs near her mother, is angry that her father would prefer cats over a child. She decides she will find a way to kill the cats, and get away with it.

Same Day - Leo and Raisa seek out Ivan. Leo is jealous of Ivan, knowing that if his wife had been free to choose, she would have chosen someone like Ivan. Leo cannot understand why his marriage is affecting him so much. He has been able to put the MGB behind him without a problem. At Ivan's apartment, he explains his wife is in the hospital with tuberculosis, and his children are with his parents. Leo explains what he and Raisa are doing. Ivan thinks Leo is trying to work his way back into the MGB. Raisa defends Leo, urging Ivan to look at the evidence they have brought. Ivan relents. Leo explains the murderer must have reason and means to travel so frequently, and that he must clearly not be insane, at least on the outside, or he would scare away the children, rather than earning their trust to get them to walk with him. They ask if Ivan has access to any Western information about murders. Ivan says what he can find will be of little help, but refers them to Professor Zauzayez, a former MGB interrogator who went blind, had an epiphany like Leo, and is now active in underground circles. By describing the photos and reading Zauzayex the information, he might be able to help.

Leo realizes, then, that Ivan's apartment is luxurious by Soviet standards, and that he has a telephone. He wonders how someone like Ivan can live like that, and why he wasn't arrested and taken in following Leo's exile as was standard protocol. Ivan makes a call to the professor, and then Leo realizes that Ivan is actually a fake dissident working for the State. Raisa realizes this as well, for all of her friends are dead, except Ivan – the most vocal and outspoken person she knows. Raisa discovers a copy of Hemingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls", and a list of names the book has been loaned to, each scratched off, including hers, and a list of names the book is intended to be loaned to, that have not yet been scratched off. Leo grapples Ivan, strangling him with the phone cord.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, the identity of the murderer is revealed. It is Andrei, the surviving child from the incident at the very beginning of the novel, who is now fully-grown and chillingly has a family and children of his own. While various considerations are made of the clues left on the bodies – from their nudity to the bark in their mouths to the string around their ankles – one of the two unknowns (what is being done with the stomachs of the children, and the second being the motive for murder) is also revealed. Andrei is, sickeningly, bringing the stomachs home to cut up, cook, and feed to his pet



cats. It is a twisted and grotesque symbolic act, wherein Andrei feeds the stomachs of children to cats, which were once used to feed the stomachs of children. Andrei's motive is still unclear.

Meanwhile, Leo and Raisa's discovery of a second murder victim, a naked young boy, leads Nesterov to conclude there has been a sexual assault upon the boy by outliers of the Communist system – homosexuals – as the theme of Communism comes back to the fore. As a result, Nesterov, beginning with Aleksandr, rounds up some 200 homosexual men in Voualsk, imprisoning them and having them ruthlessly interrogated, even bringing in the MGB to assist in the process. Leo is stunned by what is happening, having learned full-well that the murderer is the same person, and is not anyone Nesterov is rounding up. For Nesterov, however, who depends upon toeing the Party line to protect his family, just as Leo did in the past, finds the homosexual community to be a perfect scapegoat, for homosexuals are considered sick and disgusting by the Communist regime. It is only natural, Nesterov explains, that such sick people could commit so sick an act as murder – thus confirming the soundness and validity of the Communist system itself.

Leo has been undergoing a transformation of his own. Though he doesn't quite recognize it yet, he is on a quest for redemption, with redemption thus forming an important theme in the novel. Leo is haunted not only by the fact that he is serving a corrupt form of government, but also by the fact that he so callously brushed aside a family's fears and suspicions in favor of the State. He knows that the Fyodor's family, and the loved ones of all of the murder victims, deserve real justice. The Communist State cannot be trusted to carry out justice in this instance, so Leo himself must be the one to carry out justice by killing the murderer, and ensuring that he never has a chance to murder again. Though Fyodor by all accounts has every right to be angry, he is incredibly forgiving of Leo, and agrees earnestly to help Leo solve the murders by putting him in touch with Galina. While Fyodor has experienced tremendous loss, he is aware that Leo was acting in accord with the State, and being in the same boat, is quickly able to forgive Leo and agree to help him.

Interestingly enough, Nesterov agrees to help Leo as well, as the dual theme of survival and purpose appears. Nesterov, who has long felt unfulfilled working just to survive, is pressed by Leo with the question whether or not a real purpose in life, for however short a time, might be better. Nesterov considers this for some time, but ultimately agrees to participate in the investigation, for he has come to recognize the murderer has not been found, and he fears for the lives of his own sons. He recognizes that the State, and everything it has taught the people about murder, has been incorrect, and in so doing, is letting the people down by not taking seriously the idea that even a Communist can be a murderer. Nesterov realizes that he is placing his own life, and the lives of his family, in danger by investigating something the State says cannot exist, but he realizes there is a higher purpose than the State.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Nesterov ultimately agree to help Leo? If you were Nesterov, would you have agreed to help Leo? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Fyodor so forgiving of Leo, and so quick to agree to help Leo in his investigation? If you were Fyodor, would you be so forgiving and agree to help? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why is the homosexual community blamed for the death of the little boy in the forest? Why does Tyapkin commit suicide if he is not guilty?

Vocabulary

incomprehensible, prised, exacerbated, bewilderment, depravities, sedentary, pogrom, farce, reverentially, cajoled, subconsciously



Pages 307 – 396

Summary

Same Day – Leo knows that Ivan’s death will be treated as a murder by the State, committed by a counterrevolutionary. Leo and Raisa depart the building quickly, taking their files – and Ivan’s list of names – with them. Raisa is deeply hurt and embarrassed for having trusted Ivan. Leo brings Raisa along with him to see his parents. They break into their apartment, a hot, smelly, dirty place that is overcrowded with multiple families. Leo gently shakes his parents awake to fill them in on where he lives with Raisa, and that he is working for the militia. All four of them hold hands. They pretend Raisa has had a miscarriage. Leo apologizes to his parents for what has happened to them, but they tell him their love for him was never based on what he could provide, but that he was their son. Leo’s mother tells Leo and Raisa that they love each other, and will hopefully have a better Russia in the future in which to raise their children. They then say goodbye. Stepan hands his son an envelope with a letter in it which he asks Leo not to read until he is on the train. He says the letter contains all the things he and his wife should have said to Leo, but never did.

6 July – In the toilet on the train, Leo reads the letter from his parents. They say they love him and have no regrets. The letter references something in the past that Leo wants to forget, and his parents now want to talk about, but he doesn’t want to read the rest of the letter. He tears it up, and throws it out of the train window.

Southeastern Rostov Oblast, 16 Kilometers North of Rostov-on-Don, Same Day – In the Rostov area, Nesterov has discovered that the murders of children are spoken about in hushed tones, but are nevertheless acknowledged by the people, who seek out explanations to account for so many dead children. These include wild beasts, a child brought up by bears, and even a vengeful forest spirit. Most people believe the murderers are Nazis blending in as Russians, left behind by Hitler to exact revenge on Russia by murdering Russian children. Giving a false name, Nesterov has spoken to Petya’s parents, who believe the Nazi soldier theory is correct. They show Nesterov Petya’s stamp collection, and believe that the Nazis must have been given drugs to make them so amoral as to be able to kill helpless children. For the final days of their vacation, Nesterov and his family have been staying with his mother. As Nesterov returns to his mother’s apartment, he sees the woman with gray hair from the beach the other day, along with a man he doesn’t recognize. Inessa has had her hands tied up, and her face is bloody. The papers from the investigation are thrown all around on the floor. The woman places Nesterov under arrest.

Voualsk, 7 July – Leo and Raisa return to the woods where they have buried their camping supplies to make it look as if they are returning from a trip. While changing clothing, they have sex, consummating a new stage in their marriage, and then return to town. Back at his apartment, Leo finds a note from Nesterov, telling Leo to bring all information he has pertaining to the case to Nesterov’s office, and to come alone, on



time. There, Nesterov explains he was arrested, and has confessed to save his family. Raisa is being arrested as they speak, for she and Leo have been declared Western sympathizers and spies. Leo has a chance to escape by hiding in the offices to the right of the stairway downstairs, after knocking out Nesterov with the butt of his gun. Leo then can escape by car with keys stolen from Nesterov. He hands Leo the keys. They then share information quickly. The center of the crimes is Rostov-on-Don. The murderer has a job requiring travel. If his job can be determined, they will catch the murderer. There have been no murders east of Voualsk, meaning Voualsk is the end-point of the journeys for the murder. The connection between Rostov and Voualsk are the assembly plants. Rostov's Rostelmash tractor factory, where the tires for the GAZ-20 are produced, while engine parts are manufactured in Voualsk. They need the employment records of Rostelmash. By cross-referencing the records with the murder locations, they will have their murderer. Leo then does as Nesterov asks, striking him twice and bloodying him to knock him out.

As the State agents enter the building, Leo slips out, and drives away in the car, heading west, going 80 kilometers an hour, the top speed of the car. But a roadblock has been set up, and Leo's tires are shot out. The car wrecks, Leo is knocked out, and when he comes to, he sees Vasili looking down at him.

Rostov-on-Don, Same Day – Aron, a militiaman with a deformed lip on the lookout for suspicious activity, monitors a bus stop. There, a beautiful girl of about 14 or 15, probably drunk, appears to be waiting for a bus. Instead, a man with glasses and a bag approaches. The girl saunters over to him, and they seem to come to some kind of arrangement. As they near Aron's position, he jumps out and demands to know what they are up to, accusing them of prostitution and the desire to have sex in a public place. The girl denies this. Aron checks their papers. Aron searches the man, Andrei's, bag. He discovers a serrated knife, which Andrei says he uses to cut the cheap salami his wife buys. There is a stick of cheap salami in the bag. He asks about an empty glass jar Andrei is carrying, which he says he uses to collect delicate samples for work. Andrei says he has been led astray by an impulse because of the girl, and blames her entirely. He even shows Aron his Party membership card. Andrei realizes he can no longer kill in his hometown. As Aron looks at a newspaper clipping Andrei is carrying from World War II, of a group of victorious Russian soldiers around a destroyed panzer. The soldier at the center of the group is handsome and has a good smile.

Moscow, 10 July – Leo, suffering non-life-threatening injuries from the crash, is transported back to Moscow under guard, and is chained to a chair in an interrogation cell in the Lubyanka. Dr. Zarubin arrives to tend to Leo's wounds before the torture. Leo knows now his only chance at redemption is finished. Zarubin then goes to Raisa, saying he is to inspect every inch of her body. As he moves between her legs, and kisses her cheek, Raisa tries not to cry. Vasili then enters, ordering Zarubin out. Raisa tells Vasili that she will tell him everything. Vasili then goes to see Leo, telling him his wife is unharmed. Vasili wants to know why Leo would risk what little he had left in life by chasing a fantasy. Leo says he'll sign a confession admitting to being wrong. Vasili wants to know why any man would want to murder children. Leo realizes the murders don't make sense to Vasili, because they appear to be without motive. Following Stalin's



death, new orders had come down that use of violence against arrestees was to cease immediately, and ever the careerist, Vasili had done as he was told. Vasili then has Leo brought to Dr. Hvostov, for injections of oil. Leo is then questioned by Vasili, who begins by asking Leo's name. Leo responds that his name is Pavel.

Same Day – Leo remembers the past. He is now Pavel, and knows Andrei as his brother. They discover a cat being dragged across the snow by a string, by Stepan, and being put into a grain sack. Stepan announces he is not Pavel's father, and hits Pavel, knocking him out. When Pavel wakes up, he is in a grain sack, and passes out again. When he awakens again, he sees Stepan and Anna by a fire, holding the corpse of a boy – their son, Leo Stepanovich. Anna speaks to Leo, telling him that he was to die, so that their son might live, but that their son has died while Stepan was out hunting. They later cook their son to eat, and give some of the soup to Pavel. They tell Pavel that he may come with them to Moscow to try for a better life, or he may stay behind. Pavel says he will go with them, and says his name is now Leo.

11 July – Raisa is processed by the system and transported to a station with numerous other prisoners. She believes her intended destination will be a Gulag. She looks all over for her husband, but cannot find him. Vasili brings Leo to Raisa. Leo looks horrible, as if he has aged 10 years. Vasili tells Raisa that his last act of generosity will be to allow husband and wife to travel together. A guard assures Vasili that neither Leo, nor Raisa, will reach their destination alive.

One Hundred Kilometers East of Moscow, 12 July – Raisa and Leo crouch together in the corner at the back of the railcar. She knows survival depends upon adjusting. Leo, vulnerable, begins giving up secrets of his past to Raisa, such as the fact that Anna and Stepan are not his real parents. She notices five hardened criminals sitting nearby, on a high bench in the carriage. When the train stops, the five men are called outside by the guards, and then return to the train car, all staring at Raisa.

Same Day – Raisa tries to get Leo to see that they are in trouble. The five men are going to rape her, and then kill her with a steel shard given to them by the guards. Leo recovers himself, seeing what is to happen, and then leaps to Raisa's defense. He gains possession of the shard and then kills two of the gang members. The other three back off, saying they have no quarrel with Leo. Leo lets them go. He then holds Raisa. He knows their only chance is to escape. He addresses all the prisoners in the train car, telling them who he is, and about the murder investigations. Leo announces he will find and kill the murderer, and asks for their help. The train stops, and the guards approach. They enter the train car, and demand to know what has happened. One of the gang members speaks up, saying the two dead men killed each other over a card game gone wrong. A young man with glasses asks how Leo will escape when the guards leave. Leo knows all of the people have a right to know. He holds up the steel shard, which the guards have forgotten to take back.

Two Hundred and Twenty Kilometers East of Moscow, 13 July – Leo loosens the floorboards of the train car by reaching through the hole in the floor used as a toilet. A space is created that is large enough to drop through at night. Raisa kisses Leo, then



drops through first, using the body of a dead gang member to shield her from the train overhead. With the train past, she looks up for Leo. Leo has also survived, but has become injured by a hook underneath the train, which has torn away a small chunk of flesh from his left arm. Raisa and Leo embrace, and are free.

Moscow, Same Day – Vasili has stayed home from work, not feeling well. Following Leo's exile, he took over Leo's apartment, but after a few days, no longer felt happy about it. Vasili still feels unhappy, months later. Without Leo around, Vasili no longer has anyone to hate. Vasili decides to drink through his morning to get better, but as he begins to do so, word comes that Leo and Raisa have escaped – which makes Vasili suddenly feel better.

Two Hundred Kilometers East-Southeast of Moscow, Same Day – Leo and Raisa travel across country, believing they have at least four hours on the guards. Using spider webs, Raisa bandages Leo's arm, stopping the bleeding. Leo uses all of his former military skill to his advantage, knowing full-well that a massive manhunt will be underway. They move along the river, and to a collective farm. Raisa insists on seeking out help, but Leo is worried. Raisa explains that the people in the country are not like the people in the city, and they just relied on the help of strangers to escape the train. Leo and Raisa then head directly into the center of the farm's village, where the people turn out to see who they are and what is going on. The officer in charge suggest handing them over to the State for a reward; the people in the crowd know that the State would take back any reward it gave sooner or later. The people decide to feed Leo and Raisa instead, and Leo realizes the officer is merely a puppet with no real power. Leo then explains to everyone the murder investigation, beginning with his own part in covering things up at first. He is seeking redemption, to make things right. As the sky darkens, a young boy arrives to explain there are trucks coming. Leo knows he and Raisa must flee. Leo wonders if he now feels the way that Anatoly once felt – scared and panicked. Leo asks for the young boy's help.

Same Day – The young boy blocks the road, pretending to pick up fallen grain, and temporarily stops the truck. He then runs back to the village, the trucks in tow. Leo and Raisa cling to the undersides of the trucks to avoid detection. After searching, the soldiers return to the trucks, and drive off. Raisa lets go, and curls up in a ball, surrounded by the villagers who shield her. A short time later, Leo, who held onto his truck a bit longer, comes running back down the road.

Moscow, Same Day – Vasili knows that Leo is not like any ordinary fugitive. He has been trained by the very group that is now seeking to find him. Leo knows all the tricks of the trade, and on top of it, has military training. Vasili goes over all the investigation material Leo has gathered, including the numbered victims. Vasili then calls Fyodor in. He tells Fyodor that if there is a child murderer, Leo needs to be helped. Both men believe Leo will head for Rostov, since that is where most of the murders have taken place. Vasili then kills Fyodor.

Southeastern Rostov Oblast, 14 July – The collective farmers bring Leo and Raisa to friends and family in the nearby town of Ryazan, where Leo and Raisa are smuggled



along in a crate by truck to Shakhty. Raisa insists that Leo overpower the driver, and drive the truck himself, worried as to the driver trustworthiness. Leo declines, saying that causes are not worth killing innocent people for. For the first time, Leo and Raisa wonder what will happen once everything is over. Raisa thinks Leo could defect to the West. Raisa will turn herself in, not wanting to live as a foreigner. They realize no matter what, their time is limited. They begin to tell each other the truth about everything. Raisa explains the hollow coin she had was for cyanide paste, not microfilm. She had been raped repeatedly by innumerable soldiers during the war, and was determined that the next rapist would die. However, she was never raped again, and she carried around the coin as a token of luck. All of the rapes Raisa sustained damaged her inside, leading to her inability to conceive children. She tells Leo that she has fallen in love with him. Leo tells her that he realizes he has loved her all along. He then tells Raisa that he has a brother.

Rostov-on-Don, 15 July – Nadya breaks into her father's basement. Nothing seems out of the ordinary except a collage of numerous copies of the same photo with soldiers around a tank. She finds a wood trunk with a heavy lid, but before she can look inside, her father comes home. She hides under the bed in the basement as her father comes downstairs. He catches her under the bed, and demands to know why she is in the basement. She says she wants to spend more time with him. Andrei backs up against the wall on the other side of the room, fighting an impulse inside him. He tells her she should be playing with her sister, because when he was her age, he played with his brother, Pavel. She asks why Pavel never visits. Andrei says that Pavel will, soon.

Analysis

As the novel continues to unfold, Leo comes to recognize that he now has a real purpose in his life, with however little time that may be left – and that is to find the murderer. He also comes to understand that this purpose is also a question of finding redemption for the evil things he has done in the past, to atone for them, and to make sure that other children have a much better future. Leo's honesty about his role in things in the past comes to serve him well in the present. While the Communist system is dependent upon terror and control, it exerts less control in more rural and isolated areas of the country. While the citizens in these areas still fear the government, they are much more likely to obstruct or oppose government operations, or speak freely, negatively, about the government, as is done by the residents of the collective farm that Leo and Raisa come across. To these people, who scratch a living from the earth, there is a higher moral order than the State; and they are able to see the honesty and humanity in both Leo and Raisa, and so risk their own freedom and their own lives in order to help Leo and Raisa not only void detection, but outright escape capture.

Nesterov, too, comes to help Leo escape capture, for Nesterov has come to realize not only that the Communist system is flawed, but that he truly does believe there is a higher moral order to things than Communism, and that includes finding and stopping the murderer responsible for preying on young children. Nesterov games the system by giving up Leo, but then by having Leo knock him out so that Leo has the ability to



escape capture. Unfortunately, Vasili has been awaiting the chance to go after Leo, which he does with great relish. As Leo travels across the country, first from the prison train, and then in the attempt to escape from Voalsk, he realizes he now feels how Anatoly must have felt – panicked, terrified, scared, and wronged by a government he had risked his life for during World War II. The irony here should not be missed by the reader: In order to maintain absolute control, the Communist State has sought to cover up the murders, rather than genuinely try to solve them, and in so doing, has lost control of the situation entirely. Leo is not only in pursuit of a murderer, but he is explaining what he is doing to countless people along the way, who will, in turn, tell others – and this will undermine the Communist system.

The conversation between Leo and Vasili in prison should also not be missed by the reader. Whereas Leo has been able to see hard evidence that points to a murderer, Vasili is unable to see past the Communist State. Even with the hard evidence in front of him, on paper, Vasili cannot see past his blind, animal loyalty to Communism. Vasili assumes something of a Hegelian role, in which he becomes living proof of the wry observation that, when the facts do not fit the theory, so much worse for the facts. In other words, all the evidence in the world will not change Vasili's mind. However, Raisa and Leo are able to move beyond their own pasts. Leo has himself seen the light of truth, and has moved from being a utilitarian, legal supremacist to a moral absolutist, wherein he understands that just because something is legal, does not mean it is moral. He refuses, for example, to kill the truck driver simply based on suspicion. He explains to Raisa that he now knows there is no cause worth killing innocent people for – a very Western, and distinctly Judeo-Christian idea. The reader will do well to remember that, in the Communist world, religion has nearly all been done away with because it challenges the very heart and existence of Communism by placing value on the individual, and placing value in morality above all else. In Voualsk, for example, the church has shamelessly been turned into a movie theater. Not since the 1930s, in the first part of the novel, is any sort of faith-based moral sentiment expressed, when Pavel's mother prays that God will bring Pavel back to her.

Discussion Question 1

Having become a moral absolutist, Leo tells Raisa that there is no cause worth killing innocent people for. Do you agree or disagree with this idea? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe Vasili is unable to acknowledge the hard evidence from Leo's investigation that is, literally, right in front of him?

Discussion Question 3

What does Leo discover that his purpose in life has come to be? Why? How does Raisa feel about this? Why?



Vocabulary

predicament, brazenness, nonchalant, reprobate, unfathomable, degradation, malicious, dissident



Pages 401 – 436

Summary

Rostov Oblast, Eight Kilometers North of Rostov-on-Don, 16 July – The truck driver does not betray Leo and Raisa, and brings them to the town of Shakhty, as arranged. From there, in the morning, they will head to Rostov-on-Don. They stay the night with the driver's mother-in-law, Sarra Karlovna, who, like all the other members of the family, know of the murders, but few of the facts. Leo explains everything. The family immediately agrees to help. Three grandchildren and their grandparents will accompany Leo and Raisa to make them look less suspicious. They head to Rostov-on-Don the following day as planned. Outside of the station, Leo and Raisa split from the family, having left all the investigation information with them. Should they fail, the family will inherit the investigation and the responsibility to stop the murderer. Leo decides to break into the Rostelmash factory to get into the employment records. The night shift is light. A departing factory worker brings Leo to the administrative offices, as Leo pretends to be a new worker late in arriving. At the office, only a bookkeeper is working. Leo punches the worker, then threatens the bookkeeper, demanding the employment records. He wants information on the company's *tolkachs* – men who work under the table for networking, to see about supply, distribution, and production in the process. The men are given the cover title of researchers, and the factory employs five. In the fourth file, Leo finds the murderer based on his movements and the murders. His name is Andrei.

Same Day – Vasili's life and career now hang in the balance after Fyodor's unsanctioned assassination, and Vasili's inability so far to catch Leo and Raisa. At his hotel room in Rostov-on-Dov, Vasili learns about the Rostelmash break-in, and the stealing of employment records.

Same Day – Leo and Raisa arrive at the home of Andrei Trofimovich Sidorov, Leo's brother as Pavel Trofimovich Sidorov. Leo now recalls having taught Andrew to make string snares for hunting, to gnaw on the bark of trees to deal with hunger – things innumerable Russian children have been taught for generations. Leo has not yet revealed to Raisa that Andrei is his brother. Leo does not intend to kill Andrei with any weapon, despite Raisa's insistence.

While Raisa waits outside, Leo goes in, and goes down into the basement, following a cat. Andrei is seated before a table playing cards. Andrei asks what has taken Leo so long to come. Leo begins ticking off names, all of which Andrei remembers. He wants to know how Leo could have taken so long to figure everything out. Andrei has been trying for years to get Leo's attention, to get him back, by murdering with the intent of leaving clues that only Leo could understand. Andrei has always believed that Leo was alive, but no one ever believed him. The photo of Leo in the newspapers from the war was all the proof Andrei needed. Trying to get in touch with the papers about Leo, Andrei was denied information, leading him to conclude that Leo must have had a seriously important government job after the war. Regardless as to whatever Leo was doing,



Andrei was sure that eventually, with enough bodies, Leo would come across one sooner or later. Leo asks what happened to Andrei. Andrei explains he was conscripted into the army, surrendered to the Germans, was exchanged and arrested for surrendering, suspected of being a German spy. But his difficult vision without glasses, as well as his clumsiness, proved that he was incapable of being a spy, and released. Andrei then embarked upon his quest to find Leo. He began by killing animals in the same fashion as he and Leo had killed Maria's cat when they were young. No one noticed all the animals he killed.

When a young boy stumbled across Andrei working, he decided to begin killing children, for that would indeed be noticed. Most of the killing was done in the winter, so Leo would follow Andrei's tracks, like they followed the tracks of the cat. Leo asks Andrei if he realizes that what he has done is wrong, and Andrei responds that it was necessary. Leo can't understand this, because Andrei's own family is asleep upstairs. Andrei blames Leo for having left him behind with a crazy mother and a half-dead village, but Leo explains he was kidnapped, later deciding to put the past behind him. He explains his kidnapping was to turn him into food for his captives' son. He has fought so hard to put it out of his mind. Leo explains he is here to gain a confession and then make sure Andrei never kills again. Andrei agrees to let Leo kill him in exchange for one round of cards. It is then that Nadya appears, having woken up, wanting to meet brother Pavel.

Leo knows he must find a way to get Nadya out. Andrei tells Nadya to go make tea. She runs upstairs, excited to do so. There, she meets Raisa, confusing her by calling Leo, Pavel, and saying she has never met any of her father's family before. Raisa goes downstairs, and sees Leo playing cards with Andrei. Outside, Vasili and his men surround the house. Vasili tells his men to wait five minutes, and if he doesn't come out, to storm the house and kill everyone inside. Downstairs, Leo sees Raisa, telling her that he will kill his own brother. It is then that screaming is heard, and Vasili appears with a drawn gun. Vasili orders Leo and Raisa to their knees. It is then that Andrei stabs Vasili, killing him. Nadya appears at the bottom of the steps. As soldiers storm the house, Leo helps Andrei shoot himself. He then tells the soldiers that Vasili died a hero, killing a murderer. Leo then sees his brother's fury in Nadya's eyes.

18 July – Leo meets with Kuzmin's replacement, Major Grachev, who says that Kuzmin has been arrested. Grachev confirms that Andrei was a murderer, for the remains of three stomachs have been found, two of them having been cooked. It is clear that Andrei was a form of Nazi revenge for the war, and it was unpardonable for the Russians to have allowed him back into society after his having surrendered. Grachev clears Leo and Raisa of all wrongdoing, and offers him a promotion. Leo asks to form a homicide department, to counter any future murderers that will become a weapon against Communist society, and that crime will become a new front in the struggle against the West. He asks that General Nesterov be appointed to the department. Grachev agrees. Outside Lubyanka, Leo takes Raisa's hand happily. He glances at the statue of Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the forerunner of the MGB, and now cannot remember a single thing Dzerzhinsky ever said.



One Week Later, 25 July – Leo and Raisa await the director at Orphanage 12. They have come to adopt Mikhail Zinoviev's daughters, 10-year-old Zoya and 11-year-old Elena. Leo knows they remember him from the day their father and mother were killed. He explains he tried to stop the killing. He says he is different than the man who killed their parents. He wants to offer them a chance to be children again. If they say no, they do not want the adoption, Leo and Raisa will find them a good family. Leo and Raisa decide to give the girls some time to think over their decision. They go for a walk. Meanwhile, Zoya and Elena hug one another, deciding to go with Leo and Raisa.

Analysis

In the final few chapters of the novel, the truth behind the identity of the murderer by way of his motives becomes clear. Andrei, as Leo's brother, has been seeking out a reuniting with Leo for 20 years. Every piece of the investigation now makes sense. Andrei's job has allowed him to travel and stack up a pile of bodies which would ultimately catch Leo's attention. The modus operandi regarding the bodies is also clear. Each piece of the puzzle at each murder scene has a purpose, serving as clues that Andrei believes only Leo will have been able to make sense of. The bark represents the bark Leo instructed Andrei to chew as a child to stave off hunger. The string cord is actually representative of the snares used as children to trap prey. While Andrei believes these clues are unique to himself and to Leo, they are actually common among peasants across the Soviet Union.

The greatest moment of irony in the novel should be noted by the reader in this section of the book. The reunion between Leo and Andrei is interrupted by Vasili, who intends to kill Leo outright. Andrei, who has had no compunction about killing innocent children merely to see his brother again, has no second thoughts about killing Vasili in defense of his brother. The irony here is that Vasili, who has denied that a murderer exists, is killed by the very same murderer he has denied exists. Unknowingly, Andrei has just ensured his brother's future.

Having been on both sides of the system, Leo now knows how to game the system itself. He is aware that murders and murderers exist; and he is aware that the State maintains that murders and murderers do not exist. The State has declared Andrei a Nazi holdout. Leo therefore requests, and is granted, the role of creating a homicide department in the MGB in order to investigate so-called murders, telling Grachev that crime will become a new front in the war against the West, and the State must be prepared to handle murders by non-Communists. Grachev, and the State, swallow what Leo tells them without consideration. However, if there is one thing that Leo does not game any longer, it is his marriage with Raisa. Raisa has come to actually fall in love with Leo, and together, they have decided to adopt Mikhail's orphaned girls. They hope for a brighter future as the novel ends.



Discussion Question 1

Explain the irony of Andrei killing Vasili.

Discussion Question 2

How does the Communist State explain away the murders of the 44 children, and the existence of Andrei? Why?

Discussion Question 3

How does Leo ensure that it is possible for a homicide department to be opened in the MGB, when the State has declared that there are no murders in a Communist society? What is Leo's real motive? Why?

Vocabulary

boisterously, concourse, inaudible, echelons, unorthodox



Characters

Leo Demidov

Leo Stepanaovich Demidov is the main character and principal protagonist of the novel "Child 44" by Tom Rob Smith. Leo is married to Raisa, and is an officer with the Communist State Security force known as MGB. Leo is 30, a World War II veteran, and was trained in special forces overseen by the NKVD, the forerunner to the MGB, so it was only natural that he was later made a part of the organization. Leo's primary role as a State Security officer is to root out spies, traitors, dissidents, foreigners, and anyone who might seek to undermine the Communist system. Leo, though not as rabid as other State Security employees, is nevertheless brutally efficient. A legal absolutist and utilitarian, he believes the ends justify the means, and the means must therefore be as cruel and brutal as necessary in order to ensure the survival of the State. When fellow employee Fyodor Andreev suspects his child has been murdered, Leo, towing the Party line that murder does not exist in a Communist system, tells Fyodor to shut up rather than comfort him. Leo is later stunned to learn that a man he has arrested, suspected of and executed for espionage for the West, Anatoly Brodsky, is innocent, leading Leo to begin questioning the work he has been doing.

When Leo's wife is targeted for suspicion of Western sympathy, Leo valiantly defends her, only to have himself demoted to a rural militia unit, and exiled along with his wife from Moscow to Voualsk. Leo is stunned to learn that his marriage to Raisa was never based on love, but her fear of him. Leo ultimately becomes scared for his life, wife, and career – and learns what it feels like to be on the receiving end of things. When bodies of murdered children are discovered in Voualsk, identical in modus operandi to Fyodor's son, Leo realizes he has a genuine murderer on his hands. Raisa and Leo begin an investigation together, which ultimately draws in the militia's commander, General Nesterov, to assist. They discover that at least 44 children have been murdered in the same fashion. The investigation is quiet and secretive, for the State has declared there is no such thing as murder, and to challenge the State would be to earn a death sentence.

Ultimately, the State becomes aware of the investigation, and Vasili, Leo's former second-in-command and avowed enemy, personally seeks to hunt Leo and Raisa down, killing Fyodor in the process. Leo comes to discover that the murderer is Leo's own brother, Andrei, whom he has not seen in 20 years since they were children. Andrei has been seeking to reconnect with Leo, who as a child, was named Pavel. Pavel was kidnapped by a father looking to turn Pavel into soup to feed his family to give them strength to bring them to Moscow in pursuit of a better life. The couple's child dies while the father is bringing Pavel back, so they eat the child instead, and Pavel, wanting to get away from his starving village, assumes the dead boy's name, Leo. Leo confronts Andrei, who admits to the crimes as a way to bring his brother back into his life. As Leo is about to kill Andrei, Vasili arrives and prepares to kill Leo and Raisa. Andrei intervenes, killing Vasili, and then commits suicide with Leo's assistance. When the



novel ends, Leo is vindicated to a degree: Andrei is recognized as a murderer, but as a Nazi holdout, not a Communist. Leo then is given command of a new homicide department, and learns that Raisa has truly fallen in love with him. Leo and Raisa then adopt two young girls, the orphaned children of a couple killed by Vasili early in the novel.

Raisa Demidov

Raisa Demidov is the 27-year-old wife of Leo Demidov. Raisa is breathtakingly beautiful, incredibly intelligent, and someone who seeks to live her life merely to survive and get by. Raisa is unable to conceive children, for her internal organs have been irreparably damaged by repeated, brutal rapes carried out upon her by Russian troops during World War II. She has married Leo not out of love, but out of fear of his power and position. Nevertheless, Leo has come to love her, so when she is suspected of Western sympathies, and Leo is ordered to investigate his own wife, he declares her innocence. As such, he is demoted, and Raisa is exiled with him to Voualsk. In a depressed rage, Leo blames Raisa for what has happened, and nearly strangles her. Raisa, intending to leave, is nevertheless coaxed into staying by Leo. Now his equal, she assists him, and later Nesterov, in the murder investigation. Along the way, Raisa truly falls in love with Leo, for she sees that he has become a moral absolutist, and is seeking to redeem himself for the past. After the investigation is successfully concluded, Raisa and Leo decide to adopt two orphaned girls.

Vasili Nikitin

Vasili Illyich Nikitin is a 35-year-old member of the MGB, and through the early part of the novel, serves as Leo's second-in-command. Vasili is a rabid political animal, and a careerist who turned in his own brother for making an anti-Stalin joke while drunk. His brother later escaped prison, killing three guards and the camp doctor, causing scrutiny and disapproval for Vasili, which he seeks to make up for. He is often at odds with Leo, who is much more restrained in handling cases for the MGB. When Vasili executes Mikhail and his wife for aiding Anatoly Brodsky in cold blood, Leo has had enough of Vasili, and strikes him before he is able to murder Mikhail's small daughters. Vasili, enraged, vows revenge, becoming an antagonist to Leo, and spends the rest of the novel seeking vengeance. Vasili is delighted to see Leo demoted, and is delighted when Leo continues to act against the State in pursuit of a murderer. When Vasili garners information from Fyodor about the investigation, Vasili ruthlessly kills Fyodor. Ironically, the MGB frowns on this, and Vasili is given the task of bringing in Leo and Raisa. Vasili's life and career now depend on it. When he tracks Leo and Raisa down to Rostov-on-Don, Vasili, in a great moment of irony, is himself is killed by Andrei, the murderer Vasili insists does not exist.



Nesterov

Nesterov is a general and commander of the Voualsk militia. Married with two sons, Nesterov does his work as needed to survive and get by, and to provide for his family. Yet, he feels unfulfilled. At first suspicious of Leo's sudden appearance and MGB past, Nesterov eventually befriends and comes to trust Leo as the two take on an investigation into murders. Nesterov, toeing the Partly line, blames the two murders in his own district on an insane teenager and a male homosexual, though he later comes to realize that Leo is right. Nesterov, while on vacation with his wife and sons, temporarily loses sight of one son, and in a panic, Nesterov's wife publicly declares she is worried that her son has been murdered. This leads the MGB to Nesterov, who leads the MGB to Leo. Despite this, Nesterov helps Leo escape, covering Leo's departure by making it appear as if Leo has assaulted him. After the murders are solved, and Leo is made head of the new MGB homicide department, Leo has Nesterov transferred to the unit.

Fyodor Andreev

Fyodor Andreev is a friend and subordinate to Leo at the MGB. Fyodor's small son, Arkady, is found dead, and Fyodor, his friends, and family, all believe Arkady has been murdered. Leo, rather than comforting Fyodor, instead tells Fyodor and his family and friends to shut their mouths, for murders do not occur in a Communist society. Fyodor is deeply hurt by this, but understands why Leo does what he does. Later, when Leo carries on an investigation, having come to realize that Arkady –and 43 other children – have indeed been murdered, Fyodor willingly and ungrudgingly seeks to help Leo. When Fyodor attempts to defend Leo and the investigation to Vasili, and unwittingly gives Vasili important information, Vasili kills Fyodor on the spot.

Larisa Petrova

Larisa Petrova is a 14-year-old girl and resident of Voualsk. Very pretty, she is already very sexually active, prostituting herself out for as little as a bottle of vodka. Larisa often fights with her parents about her behavior, and has threatened to run away, though she has never followed through. She becomes a murder victim, the first in Voualsk. She is found stripped naked, her stomach removed, a string snare tied about her ankle, and her mouth stuffed with bark. There are no injuries to her face, genitals, or breasts, meaning she has not been sexually assaulted. Nesterov and the militia blame a mentally-challenged teenage orphan, and have him executed for the crime. Larisa makes Leo realize that there is a connection between Arkady in Moscow, and Larisa in Voualsk, and as such, must actually be dealing with a murderer. Finding a second body after Larisa's only later proves Leo's belief, as the body is in the same state as Larisa's.



Major Kuzmin

Major Kuzmin is the section commander of Leo's unit at the MGB, and Leo's direct superior and mentor. Kuzmin is overweight, well past his prime, and is a political hack with no remorse. Though he has trained Leo, and considers him something of a friend, he has no compunction about turning on Leo as needed to ensure his own survival. Kuzmin, a relic of the Stalin era, is ultimately removed from his position and replaced by Grachev. Kuzmin's fate is unknown, though it is likely he has been imprisoned, tortured, and either left to die or executed.

Major Grachev

Major Grachev is Kuzmin's replacement at the MGB. Grachev is impressed by Leo's investigation, declaring that Andrei has turned out to be a Nazi holdout, planted by the Germans after World War II. Grachev gives Leo a promotion, and allows Leo to form a homicide department, to which Nesterov will be transferred.

Joseph Stalin

Joseph Stalin, never seen in the novel but referenced frequently, is the brutal dictator of the Soviet Union. Having participated in the rise of Communism, Stalin ruthlessly butchered opponents, both combatants and civilians, and later conducted numerous purges, pogroms, and genocides, massacring tens of millions of innocent people as he secured his hold on power, and the supremacy of the Communist State government. Stalin's list of crimes against humanity is staggering, and his reign is marked not only by systematic, State-instituted murder, but absolute terror and fear in the hearts of Russians. His death in 1953 signals a slight sea-change in direction, as the use of violence against prisoners is prohibited, and executions slow down but continue, as well as the brutal repression and denial of basic human rights.

Andrei Sidorov

Andrei Sidorov is the sought-after murderer of at least 44 children in the novel "Child 44" by Tom Rob Smith. Andrei is in his late twenties, is clumsy, socially-inept, and non-confrontational. Andrei is the brother of Leo, known previously as Pavel. Pavel goes missing one night while both he and Andrei are seeking to find a cat to eat, for their village is starving to death. During this time, Pavel is kidnapped, and Andrei spends years trying to convince his mother, and others, that Pavel is still alive, but no one ever believes him. Andrei is conscripted during World War II, surrenders to the Germans, is exchanged, and is released. When he discovers his brother's photo in the newspaper, he makes it his life's mission to get back in touch with his brother. He begins by killing animals as they had done as children – with snares and knives – to attract his brother's attention, but no one notices the dead animals. When a little boy comes across Andrei setting up a dead animal in the woods, Andrei decides to move on to children, and kills



the little boy. Andrei knows this will attract attention. He knows that if he kills enough children, Leo will eventually get wind of it, and will see clues on the dead bodies that only he will recognize – such as bark in the mouths of the children, which Leo had taught Andrei to chew on as a child to stave off hunger. Andrei uses his job as a traveling *tolkach* to this end. When Leo finally find and confronts Andrei, Andrei is ready to die, though he blames Leo for never coming back or getting back in touch with him. When the morbid reunion is interrupted by Vasili, Andrei kills Vasili, and then, with Leo's help, commits suicide.



Symbols and Symbolism

String snare

A string snare is used by Leo/Pavel and Andrei as children to catch animals, such as cats, to eat. String snares are later found tied around the ankles of murdered children, and have no seemingly apparent purpose to Leo. Leo only later discovers the snares are among the clues that Andrei uses to sign his victims, in order to get Leo to recognize Andrei as the killer, and seek him out to reunite with him.

Serrated blade

A serrated blade is used by Andrei to kill and carve out the stomachs of his victims. He travels with the serrated blade everywhere he goes, explaining it away as necessary to cut the cheap salami his wife buys him and packs him to eat. Having selected and lured away a target, Andrei then knocks out the child, strips the child, and uses the blade to both kill and remove the stomach.

Stomachs

Stomachs are removed from the dead bodies of children murdered by Andrei. They are seemingly taken to symbolize the hunger Andrei and Pavel endured as children. Andrei carries the stomachs home with him where he cooks them in his basement, and feeds them to his several cats in a disgustingly symbolic act of feeding the cats what the cats once fed.

Bark

Bark from trees is found stuffed into the mouths of murdered children. At first, it is believed to be soil used to stop the child from screaming out, but is later determined to be bark. Andrei uses the bark as a signature to his work to get Leo's attention. As children, Leo/Pavel told Andrei to chew on bark to help stave off hunger, and Andrei believes it is a sign that only Leo will recognize.

Cats

Cats are kept as pets and eaten at the beginning of the novel by starving residents of the village of Chervoy. Andrei and Pavel/Leo attempt to catch a cat in order to eat it at the beginning of the novel, before Pavel/Leo is kidnapped. Andrei later keeps several pet cats at home, forbidding his family to touch them. Andrei feeds his cats the stomachs he carves out of children in a twisted symbolic act of feeding the cats what the cats once fed.



Bag

A bag is carried by Andrei on his travels. It contains a serrated blade, a stick of cheap salami, a change of clothing, travel papers, and a newspaper clipping of his brother's wartime photo. The bag is occasionally searched as Andrei travels along, but the presence of the salami and the travel papers explain away the change of clothing and the knife that Andrei carries.

Employment records

Employment records for *tolkachs* are obtained by Leo at the Rostelmash factory. Leo uses the records as a way to account for the travels of the *tolkachs*, and are cross-referenced with murder victim locations from militia records. As a result, from cross-referencing, Leo is able to use the employment records to find the murderer, Andrei.

Militia records

Militia records are kept by towns and villages regarding incidents, crimes, and activities that go on in their areas. Nesterov, traveling by train, accesses the militia records of numerous towns and villages, and from these, is able to find more than forty instances of murdered children that fit the *modus operandi* of the killer. These records are cross-referenced with Rostelmash employment records to find the murderer, Andrei.

Footprints

Footprints in the snow are discovered near the bodies of Larisa and the unidentified boy in Voualsk. They reveal that the children are lured away peacefully to be murdered, rather than forced away to be murdered. As children, Leo/Pavel and Andrei followed the footprints of animals in the snow to catch them, whereas in the 1950s, Andrei hoped Leo would follow the footprints to follow and find him.

Photograph

A photograph of Leo and his special forces unit on top of a destroyed German tank during World War II appears in numerous newspapers due to Leo's good looks and need for propaganda. Andrei sees the photograph, which proves to him his brother is still alive. He cuts the photograph out of every newspaper he can find, and later forms a massive collage of the clipped images in his basement.



Settings

Moscow

Moscow is the capital city of Russia, and the capital city of the Soviet Union. It is the most heavily-policed and guarded city in the Communist empire, and is the seat of power for the Communist world. Leo and Raisa work and live in Moscow, along with numerous others, including Leo's parents and Vasili. Moscow is where MGB headquarters, the Lubyanka, is located and is where Leo moves as a small boy with his adoptive parents following departure from their starving Ukrainian village. It is in Moscow that Leo first comes into contact with a murdered child, which he initially dismisses as an accidental death by train. It is from Moscow that Leo and Raisa are exiled when Leo refuses to denounce his wife, and to Moscow that they later return to investigate the death of the child as an actual murder, rather than accidental.

Rostov

Rostov is a southern Russian state, the center of which is the large town Rostov-on-Don. Rostov appears to be a mostly rural and agricultural area, which adjoins the Sea of Azov, which joins the Black Sea. Rostov is the heartland of the murders that Leo, Raisa, and Nesterov investigate, for most of the murders have occurred in the state of Rostov. This causes the investigators to believe that the individual they are seeking is a resident of Rostov.

Rostov-on-Don

Rostov-on-Don is a city along the Don River, which feeds into the Sea of Azov. Rostov-on-Don is situated in the Russian state of Rostov. It is the location of the Rostelmash factory which Leo and Raisa travel to in order to cross-reference employment records. It is also in Rostov-on-Don that Andrei has made his home, raised a family, and departs for from work, and in order to kill children. Leo and Raisa confront Andrei at his home in Rostov, and it is where Andrei kills Vasilisa before committing suicide with Leo's assistance.

Voualsk

Voualsk is a mountain town along the Ural Mountain range that is relatively isolated, and maintains a population of some 20,000 residents, most of whom work either in lumber or the car factory. Voualsk falls under the watchful protection of Nesterov's militia, and is accessible most easily by train. It is a cold, winter-worn place, and is where Leo and his wife, Raisa, are exiled to from Moscow. It is in Voualsk that Leo learns a body has been discovered, murdered with the same modus operandi as the body of Fyodor's son in Moscow. It is in Voualsk that Leo and Raisa discover a second body, and where Leo



later convinces Nesterov to help assist the investigation. It is learned that Voualsk is the easternmost extent of the murderer's activities, which helps them narrow down the field to someone who travels along the rail line.

Chervoy

Chervoy is a peasant village in which the novel begins in 1933. When the novel opens, the citizens of Chervoy are nearly all starved, many of them dead and dying. The State granary has collected and refused to distribute food to the people, most probably a part of Stalin's Communist-orchestrated Ukrainian genocide. As such, the villagers are ready to turn on each other to survive. Leo/Parvel and Andrei, children at the time of the beginning of the novel, seek to catch, kill, and eat a cat, but Leo/Pavel is abducted by a man hoping to feed Pavel to his son. While Andrei and some villagers survive the genocide, many do not. Andrei ultimately moves away from Chervoy for Rostov-on-Don, while Leo moves to Moscow, and never looks back.



Themes and Motifs

Redemption

Redemption is an important theme in the novel “Child 44” by Tom Rob Smith. Redemption is the process of seeking to atone, by word, deed, or other action, for past wrongs committed, either against the self or against others. These wrongs committed will often be of a grave nature, sometimes intentional or unintentional, and sometimes not seen at the time as being wrong. In the novel, it is Leo who is searching for redemption based on past wrongs committed, wrongs he believed not to be wrongs at all, but necessary, utilitarian actions for a higher purpose.

Leo is a member of the Stalinist Russia’s MGB State Security force, having formerly fought in special forces units during World War II. An idealistic Communist who is ready to die for Communism and for the Soviet Union, Leo never questions his missions or his goals. Everything he does is done for the State; thus, he has no compunctions about killing, forcing confessions, torture, the imprisonment of innocents, or having to be cruel in all that he does. Leo is not concerned about mere survival and getting by without drawing attention from the State, he wants to advance the State, maintain it, and keep it safe, for he is a legal supremacist, and all that is legal is moral. When Fyodor Andreev and his family suspect their son has been murdered, Leo, ever the dutiful State enforcer, reminds them that this cannot be so, for real crimes, like murder, only happen in Western and capitalist societies. There is no such thing as murder in the Soviet Union. He is not comforting to the grieving family, but essentially tells them to shut their mouths and forget their theories of murder.

Leo’s awakening comes during the pursuit of suspected spy Anatoly Brodsky. Anatoly is captured, and his friend, Mikhail, along with Mikhail’s wife, are without warrant, summarily executed by Vasili, in front of their daughters. This unnerves Leo, and creates an irreparable rift between himself and Vasili. He truly feels bad that the daughters have witnessed the killing of their parents. This regret is later compounded by the realization that Anatoly is not a spy, and that he is merely a veterinarian wrongly suspected. This deeply haunts Leo, even to the point of making him physically ill and feverish. He cannot connect the two at first – that his body would physically manifest his inner guilt – until later. When suspicion falls on Leo’s own wife, he refuses to denounce her, and is demoted and exiled. While in exile, Leo and Raisa truly become equals in their marriage, which becomes a working partnership dedicated to solving the murders that Leo had callously and deliberately covered up.

Leo later comes to reflect on all of the innocent people he has put in jail, executed, or had their lives ruined. He is especially regretful of the way he treated Fyodor and his family, and vows to Fyodor to uncover the truth. As Leo works, he realizes he is seeking redemption, that just because something is legal, does not make it moral. He realizes that there are truly moral limits to what should be done for a cause, whether the cause is personal – such as an investigation – or public – such as the defense of the legal



system or the State. During the truck ride to Rostov, Leo refuses to kill the driver in order to take control of the situation, believing it to be an immoral act. Leo's trust in the driver ultimately pays off, and his conscience is made better as such. Leo ultimately comes to understand that he is seeking redemption for his past, and that by catching and killing the murderer, he will have managed to atone, however little, for it. It will not change the past, but it will change the future.

In the end, Leo is redeemed not only in the eyes of the State, something about which he does not care, but is redeemed in the eyes of his wife. Raisa has now truly fallen in love with him, and has begun a real marriage with him based on love, rather than a marriage based on fear of his power. The final redemptive act of the novel comes in Leo's decision, together with Raisa, to seek to adopt Zoya and Elena, the orphaned daughters of Mikhail. Leo explains he is sorry for what has happened to their parents, and offers them a chance at a real childhood, rather than a struggling existence in an orphanage. Both daughters agree, and now Leo truly has a chance to make up for the past by guaranteeing that the girls will have a future.

Communism

Communism is an important theme in the novel "Child 44" by Tom Rob Smith, and provides much of the setting and context for the novel itself. Communism is a social and economic theory and system of government that evolved from various strains of similar thought, from Socialism to Marxism. In such systems of government theoretically, the State forms an all-powerful entity meant to ensure equality among its people. In reality, Communism is a brutally oppressive and evil system which denies basic human rights to people in order to sustain itself, its power, and its control. Communism relies on brutality, fear, propaganda, and force in order to do so. Throughout the novel, Communism and its effects can be seen firsthand.

When the novel opens with Parvel and Andrei, they, and their neighbors in their village, are all half-starved or dead. The fruits of the labor of the villagers and nearby farmers are collected and kept by the State all across the Soviet Union, and are distributed as directed by the State, or withheld for ulterior motives, from punishment to deliberate starvation for population control or genocide, such as the case with the Ukrainian Holodomor, in which Stalin and the Communists starved 7-million people to death. Andrei and Parvel's local State granary has, for unknown reasons (but more than likely part of the Ukrainian genocide), withheld supplies from the people of the already dirt-poor village, forcing them to rely on looking for grain in animal feces, eating cats, and eating other people. It is a disgusting and cruel use of power by the Communist government.

World War II is referred to as the "Great Patriotic War" by the Communists, and evidence of their brutality during the war is again brought to light in various places. In order to fill the ranks of their military, the Communists forcibly conscripted, at gunpoint, hundreds of thousands of peasants, who were often under-equipped, ill-cared for, and treated like dirt by their superiors. During the war, numerous Russian villages, including



Raisa's own village, are bombed and shelled by the Communists, killing all their residents, so that the towns will not fall into enemy hands. Raisa, a refugee, is later brutally and repeatedly raped by Russian troops, who view her as nothing more than a cheap sexual object without deserving respect of any kind. Raisa is so injured from these repeated rapes that she is unable to bear children. She later sadly explains this as soldiers merely having needs – with the implication being that the Communist State is more important than her own personhood.

In the 1950s, as Leo becomes a powerful figure in the MGB, his marriage proposal to Raisa is accepted by Raisa not out of love, but out of fear due to his position and his authority in the Communist government and security apparatus. Indeed, Leo views himself as a simple mechanic of the State, doing whatever is needed to support and maintain the State. Anything legal is moral. Anything illegal which is done to protect the State is ultimately moral. Anything the State decrees, is law. Leo, when confronted by Fyodor with the idea that Fyodor's son has been murdered, is annoyed more than anything else. Leo, rather than comforting a grieving family, idealistically only seeks to uphold the State ruling that there are no murders with Communism. Leo therefore orders Fyodor and his family to shut up about murder, and to never speak of it to anyone else again.

Communism ultimately creates rabidly-loyal political animals like Vasili, who unlike Leo, exercise no degree of restraint. Vasili is keen to kill people without authorization or orders, all in pursuit of protecting the Communist State. He executes Mikhail and his wife in front of their daughters. He later executes Fyodor without a moment's hesitation or authorization. Vasili, even with the hard evidence in front of him about murder, would rather kill Leo and Raisa than cease believing in the State mantra that there is no murder in a Communist State. Even people merely suspected of crimes by people like Vasili, even without hard evidence, are arrested, tortured, made to sign false confessions, and executed. In Voualsk, homosexuals are rounded up and arrested, tortured, and many of them executed merely because they are perfect scapegoats to blame on the murder of a little boy.

Communism also exerts the most control in populated areas – cities, large towns, and nearby farms and villages. Further out in the country, away from the direct oversight of centralized Communist power, little-respected militias are given to handle control, with official State forces becoming involved locally as needed, or in order to exert control or carry out decrees. Farther away from the cities and centers of power, citizens still fear the State, but are less inclined to be totally submissive, and less inclined to follow the rules. For example, the villagers of the collective farm Leo and Raisa come across are very willing to help feed, hide, protect, and help them, even when State Security troops arrive to search the farm and houses, risking their lives in order to do so. Their fear of the Communist State arises from hatred of the State, rather than the instinct of self-preservation.

Despite claims of equality, and seeking to counter inequalities by capitalism, Communism itself is a grossly unjust system, mandating inequality. There is the State, those who serve the State, and everyone else. Loyalty, position, and jobs in the State



determine power and influence, as well as treatment. Peasant farmers and factory workers live in ramshackle, impoverished conditions, are forbidden from traveling about freely, are forbidden from shopping at specific stores, are forbidden from enjoying the fruits of their own labor, and are forced to accept and live under whatever conditions and situations the State mandates. Higher-ups, like Leo, for example, as well as the people who have his ear, are given better accommodations, greater travel freedoms, are allowed to shop at better stores, and have a little more choice in what they do with their lives. Whereas in a capitalist, or market society, individuals may achieve great success based on their own work ethic and merit, individuals in a Communist society live, succeed, and die at the whims of the State.

Purpose and Survival

Purpose and survival form an important dual theme in the novel “Child 44” by Tom Rob Smith. During the Communist period of Russian history, most Russian citizens merely sought to survive, for they feared the State and wanted to live, however marginally, without being tortured and killed. Few concern themselves with having a real purpose in life beyond basic survival. Leo comes to realize this later on in the novel when he seeks Nesterov’s help in attempting to find the killer responsible for the string of murders that have occurred along the Trans-Siberian Railway and the southern part of Russia. He asks Nesterov if his work has meaning, or if it is merely a means to survive. Leo has come to the point in his own life where surviving while serving the State is not merely enough for him anymore.

For Nesterov and for Raisa through much of the novel, survival is key. They want to do their jobs, keep their heads down, not attract attention, and get by. They would rather live as marginally as possible rather than live gloriously only briefly, before being arrested, tortured, and killed by the State. Much of what they do in life is merely to get by. Raisa becomes a teacher because she has been appointed to do so by the State. While she enjoys teaching, she knows she has to follow a strict set of guidelines to indoctrinate the children to think, behave, and live as Communists. She is even expected to report on her schoolchildren if they show any counterrevolutionary or dissident behavior. Nesterov himself is merely a commander of a local militia unit, disrespected by the State and by the people, but his job has some modicum of power, and it gets him by. The murders he ends up with on his hands he seeks to cover up by blaming male homosexuals rather than actually pursuing the investigations.

Soon, things change for both Nesterov and Raisa. Raisa comes to see, through Leo’s example, and through his revelations, that keeping her head down and trying to get along to survive is not merely enough. Even while obeying every rule, and doing everything according to the State, Raisa still becomes a pawn in the State’s will, is put under suspicion, and made a criminal. Nesterov himself comes to be won over by the evidence about the murders, as well as Leo’s genuineness, recognizing that he is merely a pawn, disrespected and doing little of real importance. He is unfulfilled, and his joining together with Leo and Raisa gives all three purpose. Leo’s own purpose is not



only to catch the killer and save lives, but to seek redemption for past wrongs (see the theme Redemption).

Contextually, the repression of the Communist regime also represents another example of survival – and hypocrisy. Many of the supporters of the Oktober Revolution which toppled the Russian monarchy in 1917 believed that, under the monarchy, they had little freedom, chance of success, equality, and merely kept their heads down to survive. Lenin, Stalin, and the other revolutionary leaders believed they had a purpose beyond surviving, so they rose up against the monarchy, ruthlessly butchered Czar Nicholas II and his family, as well as innumerable other opponents, ultimately coming to murder tens of millions of innocent people. One form of tyranny supplanted another – and those under the new form, Communism, are expected, hypocritically, to keep their heads down, submit, and just survive.

Justice

Justice is an important theme in the novel “Child 44” by Tom Rob Smith. Justice includes the pursuit of that which is morally, ethically, and legally right, and the administering of punishments for injustice, or that which is immoral, unethical, and illegal. Justice in the novel appears in two primary places, while injustice appears in the novel in a broad scope.

The most obvious form of justice in the novel has to do with the tracking down and punishing of the murderer who has butchered at least 44 children over the course of several years. Leo determines that the pursuit of justice – of killing the murderer so that no more children will be killed – will be a form of redemption for him, and serves to become his immediate purpose in life. Leo knows that the Communist system will only do what is right by the State, and the State believes there is no murderer, so the State is not looking for one. Leo, then, must personally assume the mantle of justice, in order to dispense punishment to the murderer.

The second appearance of justice in the novel has to do with Leo determining that what is legal is not always moral or just. He discovers this by way of Anatoly, the veterinarian. Early in the novel, Leo is a legal absolutist (the law is the ultimate morality and nothing else comes before it) and ultra-utilitarian (the idea that the ends justify the means). Everything done – though sometimes cruelly – is all for the better good of the State. As such, Leo believes that his is acting justly, and administering real justice. But Leo’s discover that Anatoly was in fact not, as suspected, a spy, but rather innocent, Leo’s entire world is shaken as Anatoly is nevertheless tortured and executed anyways, having signed a false confession. Leo learns therein that just because something is legal, doesn’t make it right.

Injustice appears in a far broader scope – the way in which the Communist State handles its legal system, and its citizens. Laws in Communist Russia have one ultimate aim, and that is to uphold the State. While the State advocates for, and at least superficially demonstrates its purpose is to ensure equality, the State nevertheless is



primarily concerned with its own survival. For example, the decree that there is no murder in a Communist State means that Fyodor's claims of his son's murders must be silenced, by compulsion or by brutal force, in order to validate and uphold the teachings of the State. Leo is given the task of shutting Fyodor up – an injustice to Fyodor, and to his family. At large, all of the families and friends of the murdered children suffer the same injustice – of being silenced, and having no resolution to the murders of their children – at least until Leo.

Murder

Murder is an important theme in the novel "Child 44" by Tom Rob Smith. Murder forms the core plot of the novel, with main character Leo seeking to solve a string of 44 murders, all of the victims being children. Leo faces the daunting task of not only seeking to solve the murders, but working against the very Communist government with purports to be dedicated to justice and equality on behalf of the people.

The Russian State government maintains that due to the justice and equality it metes out, serious crimes, such as rape, theft, and murder, do not exist. Such crimes are symptomatic of the decadence, inequality, and immorality of the capitalistic West, and do not exist in a Communist nation. When such crimes do occur, they are exceptions to the rule, and not the rule itself. Such crimes are committed only by drunkards, the mentally-insane, the deranged, and by foreigners, dissidents, and counterrevolutionaries – but never intentionally by true Communists. As such, the first murder in Voualsk is blamed on a mentally-deficient seventeen year-old orphan, and considered closed, for a mentally-deficient individual is not considered a true Communist, and is considered outside the norm, and thus capable of murder. The second murder in Voualsk is blamed on the homosexual community, in which some two-hundred homosexuals are rounded up, arrested, tortured, and dispensed with. Homosexuality is considered a mental sickness, and is outside the norms of Communism. As such, a homosexuals are considered sick, outside the norm, and therefore capable of murder.

Leo, who has been marginalized by the State after being turned on by the State, realizes that everything he and everyone else has been taught about murder has been wrong. He tells Raisa and Nesterov as much, knowing that they must throw out the window everything they thought they knew if they are to solve the case. Leo recognizes that the West is correct in handling crime and dealing with murder, for it exists everywhere. However, without Western information to go on, Leo must rely on himself and the clues of the investigation itself to find the murderer. With Nesterov's help, Leo is able to trace at least 44 murders with the same conditions: children about the age of fourteen or fifteen and under, naked bodies, removed stomachs, string snares around the ankle, and bark shoved into the mouth. By noting the extent of the murders, Leo is able to gather that the murderer must travel frequently, probably for work. With Voualsk being the greatest extent of the murders, Leo and Nesterov are able to trace similarities between factories in their own town to similarities in factories in the town of Rostov-on-



Don, where most of the murders have taken place. From there, Leo uses employment records to track down and finish the murderer.

While the State ultimately accepts the 44 child deaths as murders, it maintains that the murderer was merely a Nazi sent to undermine Communism. The State thus is able to protect and validate itself, while externalizing blame and claiming to have upheld justice for the people. Leo, knowing now how to game the system, asks to have a homicide unit opened up under his command, in order to investigate murders to protect the State, pretending to agree that only foreigners, dissidents, outliers, and counterrevolutionaries could perpetrate such heinous crimes. Given the nature of Leo's veiled request, the State grants it.



Styles

Point of View

Tom Rob Smith tells his novel “Child 44” from the third-person omniscient perspective. This is done for several reasons. First, it allows Smith to contextualize much of his novel, by adding in information about Communist Russia necessary to understanding the background to the plot. Second, it allows a singular, consistent form of narrative across numerous characters and incidents. Third, it allows the reader to glimpse the thoughts, motives, and beliefs of characters other than Leo. Fourth, it allows the reader to learn the identity of the murderer before Leo does, thereby increasing suspense and adding to the desperation of needing to solve the mystery.

Language and Meaning

Tom Rob Smith tells his novel “Child 44” in language that is simple and to the point. This is done for at least three reasons: first, the sheer size and scope of the plot – a murderer working in the confines of a system that denies murder takes place in the confines of the system – means a tremendous amount of context is needed for those who did not live under the Communist regime, which will be most readers. Second, the characters themselves often have little, if any, college education, and even those that do are, like everyone else, primarily concerned with getting by and surviving under a brutal government. They do not have time, or the ability, to consider beautiful things or dwell on things philosophical, for their lives hang in the balance of every minute. Third, with the lives of the children of Communist Russia hanging in the balance, there is little time to do anything but act decisively, and the simple, straightforward language reflects this point, and adds to the urgency of the plot.

Structure

Tom Rob Smith divides his novel “Child 44” into 58 consecutive, unnumbered, titled, chronological chapters spanning a time period of 20 years, from the winter of 1933 to the summer of 1953. Each chapter is titled according to the date and place in which the chapter takes place. For example, the chapter “Rostov Oblast, Eight Kilometers North of Rostov-on-Don, 16 July” takes place some five miles away from the town of Rostov-on-Don, in the Russian state of Rostov, on July 16th. This allows the reader to gain a geographical understanding of the place, and an understanding of the time, so that the plot may continue without needing to reference when or where something is happening. This to-the-point handling of chapters is hard and factual, and thus mirrors the hard facts of the murder investigation that Leo is seeking to conclude.



Quotes

They'd been telling people that he'd been murdered. By whom – they had no idea. For what reason – they had no idea. How could such a thing even be possible – once again, they had no idea.

-- Narrator (14 February paragraph 2)

Importance: Communist Russia maintains that serious crimes, like murder, do not exist in a Communist system, for the supposed equality guaranteed to every citizen makes such crimes impossible. As such, though Fyodor and his family have suspicions their son was murdered, they cannot say why to any degree at all, and Leo understands this as he goes to get them to shut up about it.

Although his own employment in the State Security force was frequently unpleasant, he understood its necessity, the necessity of guarding their revolution from enemies both foreign and domestic, from those who sought to undermine it and those determined to see it fail. To this end, Leo would lay down his life. To this end he'd lay down the lives of others.

-- Narrator (14 February paragraph 6)

Importance: Leo is here revealed as a legal absolutist, who believes in the law and State above all else; and as an extreme utilitarian, who believes that brutal means justify good ends. Leo will do whatever it takes to maintain and defend the State against enemies, including killing others. He is, early in the novel, cruelly and barbarically idealistic, a rabid loyalist.

They existed to terrify. Terror was necessary. Terror protected the revolution.

-- Narrator (Moscow, 16 February paragraph 3)

Importance: Leo, ever the loyal Communist and State employee, recognizes that the Communist system can only survive by fear. In order to keep people in their place to ensure equality and the survival of the government, terror must be used to paralyze people and protect Communism. The people must be protected from themselves, and the State must be protected from the people.

You're here because you're unsure what to do. You're here because you're a good man and you want us to tell you to do the right thing. The decent thing. You want us to give you the right advice.

-- Stepan Demidov (Same Day paragraph 46)

Importance: Leo's father, Stepan, knows Leo wants him to tell Leo to defend Raisa's innocence. It would be the just, moral thing to do. But in a system like Communist Russia, such an act of genuine morality often means an incredibly shortened lifespan at best, and torturous, humiliating treatment at worst.



Every schoolchild was taught that murder, theft, and rape were symptoms of a capitalist society, and the role of the militia had been tanked accordingly. There was no need to steal and no violence between citizens because there was equality. There was no need for a police force in a Communist State.

-- Narrator (Eight Hundred Kilometers East of Moscow, 16 March paragraph 28)

Importance: While police forces are deemed to be unnecessary theoretically, they are still useful practically, to maintain terror to keep the people in fear, and in order to carry out the will of the State, or to work directly with State Security forces to impose its will or carry out orders. Thus, far away from the centers of power, the militia are considered, by State and People alike, to be incompetent and nearly-unnecessary jokes.

Powerless, scared – she'd wanted him to feel it, too. She'd wanted him to understand, to experience it for himself.

-- Narrator (Voualsk, 17 March paragraph 5)

Importance: Having been exiled with her husband whom she married out of fear, Raisa is glad that Leo is, for the first time, experiencing the fear and humiliation he'd caused innumerable other people. For Leo, it is a wake-up call, and begins to make him see that things which are legal, are not always moral.

General Nesterov was frank about the details of this murder, calling it by no other name – murder – and giving no indication of wanting to portray it as anything other than a brutal and horrific crime. His frankness worried Leo.

-- Narrator (Same Day, 17 March paragraph 2)

Importance: Leo wonders how Nesterov can openly call the killing of a fourteen year-old girl, murder, in a system which denies murder. Leo later learns that Nesterov openly uses the term "murder" because his chief suspect is a mentally-deficient 17-year-old boy who is an outlier to the Communist system, and therefore a perfect scapegoat.

Murder was an aberration. These men were an aberration. It was a perfect fit.

-- Narrator (29 March paragraph 2)

Importance: Nesterov, in dealing with the body of the little boy found in the woods near Voualsk, once again refers to the case as murder. Once again, he has the perfect scapegoat in mind: homosexual males. The militia rounds up some 200 of them, in order to torture and imprison them, for they are outliers to the Communist system – aberrations to human behavior and the Communist system.

Did his work have meaning or was it merely a means to survive?

-- Narrator (Three Months Later, Southeaster Rostov Oblast, The Sea of Azov, 4 July paragraph 6)

Importance: Nesterov contemplates what Leo asks him before getting involved with the murder case. Nesterov comes to realize that his own role in life has little purpose, except survival. He realizes he is unfulfilled, and wants more out of life. He wants to



actually do something important, and worth living for, and not merely scraping by with work to survive. In the position of commander of militia, Nesterov has the power to do some good with his job, rather than merely sit back.

And if you catch him, what will you do?

-- Fyodor Andreev (Moscow, 5 July, Same Day paragraph 17)

Importance: When Leo goes to Fyodor to explain that he has taken up the murder investigation, Fyodor asks Leo what will be done once the killer is caught. The State will not want to hear about it, and is seeking to silence Leo already for having even stirred up the notion that there might be a murderer. Leo responds to Fyodor's question, telling Fyodor that the killer will be killed.

You have a cause you believe in, a cause worth dying for. Soon, it's a cause worth killing for. Soon, it's a cause worth killing innocent people for.

-- Leo (Southeastern Rostov Oblast, 14 July paragraph 22)

Importance: As Leo and Raisa travel incognito to Rostov in the back of a truck, Raisa suggests killing the driver in order to take over, for she is worried the driver will betray them. Leo explains that no cause is worth killing innocent people for, whether it is the Communist State or a murder investigation, and here, Leo has made a 180-degree change in direction. He is no longer a legal absolutist and utilitarian, but a moral absolutist. Leo understands now that the means are just as important as the ends, and that just because something is legal, doesn't make it moral. Morality matters most. Raisa understands her husband's changing, and comes to love him for it.

I killed them so you would find me. I killed them to make you come home. I killed them as a way of talking to you.

-- Andrei Sidorov (Rostov Oblast, Eight Kilometers North of Rostov-on-Don, 16 July, Same Day paragraph 57)

Importance: Here, Andrei reveals his motive for murder, the one remaining missing piece of the mystery. Andrei has been seeking to find his brother, knowing that his brother held a position of importance in the State, and believing that, sooner or later, with enough bodies, his brother would become aware of one, and the clues on the bodies would lead Leo to Andrei.