

The Capsule

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There were no windows in his cell. Not one window. He just once, wanted to look outside and see the stars and planets in the wide, open galaxy. He just wanted to see the outside world, the beautiful planets that shined in the sky. He spent all of his time waiting and waiting with nothing to look out at. No star to watch. He felt so trapped, so alone; he hadn't seen the outside world for the longest time. He desperately wanted a glimpse of something, anything that wasn't the walls of his cell.

Three months ago, Nikolai Bukharin was taken from his home, and arrested. He was never told the reasons of his arrest, just that he had committed terrible crimes. It happened in the early spring, in the middle of the afternoon. Two men barged into his house, and arrested him. He never even had a chance to say goodbye to his wife. The last thing he remembered was feeling of someone's hand to the back of his head. When he finally woke up in his cell, a different man stood beside him. The man was short, with a somewhat round figure, and the top of his head had about three hairs remaining. The man smiled and assured him not to worry, he told Bukharin, "You shall only be kept here for a few days." A few days came and went, then a few weeks. Bukharin once tried to ask a guard if he knew the reason for his imprisonment. The guard blankly stared at him straight in the eyes, and without giving him an answer; he shut the door in Bukharin's face. After that, Bukharin chose to avoid the guards and instead sulked in his cell waiting for someone to set him free. Bukharin realized at this point, that if he were kept in this room for much longer, he would go crazy. He wanted to die, so that he could escape the

terrible feeling of being trapped. At first he planned to escape, but soon realized that even if he had the power to escape, there would be nowhere for him to go, no way to go back to earth, no matter what he would be stuck in the empty outer space for the rest of his life. He was especially scared of being stuck in the open skies of space. What dangers lay in the outer unknown? Were there others like him, trapped in jail, imprisoned for nothing? Somehow these ideas just scared him even more. He closed his eyes and imagined his wife Anna. He saw her long, dark hair that formed a perfect heart shape around her face. He heard her light voice, comforting him, assuring that things would turn out. With these happy thoughts in mind he drifted off into a deep sleep.

Bukharin awoke to the sound of ambivalent knocking at the door. He realized he must have woken up later than usual, because his breakfast had already arrived. Three guards stand at his door, The one standing in the middle stated in a monotonous voice, "Nikolai Bukharin, you have been accused of the attempted murder of Stalin, having ties with the Bloc of local Rightists and Trotskyites, and conspiring to overthrow socialism in Colony 3553. You shall be escorted to your trial this evening. Here are some formal clothes to wear for the trial. We will be back here at 5:00 sharp." The guard handed him the clothes and marched off with the other two falling close behind him. Bukharin closed the door, and stood there silently as he evaluated the insanity of the words that had just been spoken to him. The first thing he found strange was that they had given him a time of when they would take him to his trial. He had no sense of time whatever, no watch, no clock, not even a window. He also wondered how they would run a trial in outer space. How would others watch if there is no one here? Was there a special system that differed from that on earth? What shocked him the most, undoubtedly, were the crimes he had

been accused of. Stalin was a great comrade of Bukharin's. They had worked together for years. Bukharin's mind started racing, he started arguing with himself, trying to put the pieces of this puzzle together,

It must've been five o'clock because Bukharin heard the familiar knock at his door. He wearily rose up from his seat, and opened the door. The three guards who had visited him earlier that morning stood in their triangle formation; the main guard grabbed Bukharin by the shoulder and forced his hands behind his back. They walked him down a long hallway. In the hallway, there was a large window placed on the ceiling. Bukharin looked up towards it, and his eyes gazed out at the many stars and planets above. Bukharin longed to escape the rocket prison and fly among the stars. "I could be free," he thought. The guard shoved him, and forced his head downward, making it so Bukharin couldn't stare at the window above him. Bukharin listened for any sign of chatter, but all he could hear was the soft echo of footsteps. The hallway seemed to go on for miles. Finally, they stopped at a door. Bukharin was forcefully pushed in.

The whole trial matter started to sound oddly familiar. Unfortunately, Bukharin realized what was happening. He had heard of stories of people being forced to confess to heinous crimes, if they seemed powerful enough to overthrow Stalin, they were prosecuted and punished. Bukharin had no idea this was going to happen to him. He had not prepared for this; he thought Stalin deemed him a loyal and trustworthy being. He could still prove himself worthy. Bukharin decided that he would try his best not to confess. He had always been loyal to Stalin and should not be in this situation. He slowly made his way across the room, sweat forming on his forehead.

Expecting a room full of people, Bukharin was shocked when all he saw was one chair. At the back of the room was a wide screen stretching from one end of the room to the other. "Sit," the short guard exclaimed sternly. Bukharin slowly made his way to the lone chair. He turned around to see an empty room. Suddenly, the black screen flashed on. Three familiar men in a line of chairs appeared on the screen.

He recognized the first as Mikhail Kalinin, the head of state of the Soviet Union. Bukharin had worked with him before when he was still a member of the Politburo. He was not a man of many words, but had a way of communicating with others through his facial expressions. Bukharin heard once that he made a grown man cry just by looking at him. Sitting on the far side was Andrey Vyshinsky, a smart Catholic man who had been kicked out of the notable Kiev University because he had contributed to revolutionary activities. Vyshinsky supposedly met Stalin while they were doing time in Bailov prison for participating in the Revolution of 1905. They talked about their ideas of the future of Russia and had worked together ever since. Bukharin had never met Vyshinsky before, but he knew of him very well. Bukharin always sort of admired the stories of the Frightening Prosecutor General and his harsh insults towards those he prosecuted. Bukharin knew A MAN who, once after a trial with Vyshinsky, shot himself in the head because of some of the things he had said about him and his family. He had this certain way of dehumanizing people that he seemed somewhat proud of. Bukharin then spotted the man sitting in dead center. It was the great ruler himself, Josef Stalin. His proud face showed no smile, and his eyes were squinted slightly. He has that certain look of a leader, a confident air that only people with his amount of power have. Bukharin smiled at him,

and hoped Stalin still remembered him as his friendly comrade. His small gleam of hope was shattered, as he saw Stalin look at Vyshinsky with an unfriendly grin.

“Let’s make this fast, gentlemen,” Stalin sighed. “We have more important matters to handle.” They all laughed and nodded their heads. Kalinin started the trial.

“We shall now proceed to the interrogation of the accused Bukharin. One year ago, the great Stalin made the decision to rid the Soviet Union of Trotskyites and spies. This bloc has no intellectual or ideological ideas, and is a threat to the Russian Federation. Many former Bolsheviks, whom were at one time trusted, have recently been found guilty of counter revolutionary activities and plotting the murder of Stalin. Bukharin, you have been accused of being the leader of such activities. Do you confess to these heinous crimes?”

“No,” he replied firmly. “I have always been loyal to Stalin and I helped him against Trotsky, I have nothing to do with the crimes I have been accused of. I don’t know why anyone would believe this. It’s a misunderstanding please let me go.”

Vyshinsky looked annoyed. “Do you really think you can outsmart the three most powerful men in the Soviet Union? If we let you go you will plot to have us all killed. Now Confess to your crimes”.

Bukharin was not ready to give up. “I shall NOT confess to crimes that I did not commit. I have no intentions of being a Trotskyite. I am still loyal to all of you. If I weren’t in jail I would still be working for you. You have to believe me. I don’t know who told you all of this but they’re wrong! I am an innocent man.”

“LIAR!” Vyshinsky bellowed. “DO NOT LIE TO ME. Nobody told us anything. We know. We know who you are and what you do. Don’t think we will believe your lies. You are a Terrorist thug and a mad dog that needs to be killed. You have committed serious crimes. The fact that you wont confess shows how much of a coward you are. You hear that? You are a god damn coward”.

“I am not a coward.” Bukharin starts to point his shaky finger towards Stalin, who had not uttered a single word the whole time.

“He is. He knows I’m innocent but he’s too afraid of losing his power to admit it. He cares about nobody but himself. He knows of nothing but power,” Bukharin shouted.

Stalin simply smiled. If I have this much power, why should I care about anyone else?”

All three men laughed amongst themselves, as Bukharin sat there small and helpless.

“Why don’t you confess already?” Stalin asked.

. The door broke open and two completely different guards appeared. “Take him away,” Stalin ordered. The guards sprinted in the room and grabbed Bukharin by each shoulder.

Bukharin awoke on a cold surface. His surroundings were different than the one in his cell. He sat up and looked around. Why wasn’t he in a torture chambered being forced to confess? At first this comforted Bukharin. Then as he looked around some more, he noticed something. Much to his surprise, in this one cell of his there was a window. It was medium sized, not very large but not very small either. He looked out the

window. His heart stopped. Bukharin was no longer in the rocket ship, but in a lone capsule floating in outer space. He saw shooting stars and meteors fly past him. He looked away, terrified. This was his torture. They let his worst fear come true. They had sent him out in the open universe. Alone.

Bukharin could not believe this. He would rather die than be stuck here in this capsule. This was torture and death. He would be in this capsule slowly fading until he perished. There was no food in the capsule. There was no bathroom in the capsule. He would die sitting in his own waste like the fool he was. He looked out the window. He gazed at the stars surrounding him. There were so many of them. Everywhere. Bukharin watched the planets pass by. Thinking of life outside of the earth. Bukharin tried to sleep, but it didn't work. He couldn't stop thinking about everything that was going on around him. What if he was going to crash? What if he was going to be swallowed up by a black hole? His heart started pumping fast. Bukharin closed his eyes and started to scream. He was losing his mind.

Bukharin must have fainted because when he woke up, he heard a strange noise. Something was pelting against the capsule. He looked out the window. His capsule was stuck in the middle of a meteor shower. Bukharin didn't even know what fear was anymore. In the past few weeks he had felt so many different types of fear. There was fear of the fate of his wife when he was taken from his home. There was the fear he got when Kalinin looked him in the eyes. The fear of the torture room. But this was worse. He could no longer fear but wait. Wait to die alone in this capsule. In this stupid capsule.

“Well Koba, you got what you wanted didn't you? You know I would have confessed to those dumb accusations if I was told this was my punishment in the first

place!” Bukharin realized that shouting was not going to help him. There was nothing he could do. He tried to fall asleep, but yet again, he could not. He sat down waiting, waiting for nothing to happen.

“Nikolai Bukharin if you are ready to confess to the crimes which you have committed, then you shall be taken back to the facility and you will have a new trial.” A voice that sounded like it was half human half robot boomed over the capsule. “Do you agree to confess?” Bukharin was caught in a life or death situation. Confessing to the crimes would mean giving up on everything he’s ever believed in. Not confessing to the crimes would mean being stuck in the capsule forever. Sadly, he knew what he had to do.

“Yes I am willing to confess if it means I never have to be in this capsule again”. The capsule started to spin. Bukharin watched as it rushed past dozens of planets across the galaxy. When it finally stopped, Bukharin stood up. He took a deep breath and opened the door. . He waited for a while until one of the guards arrived. Without a word, they walked along the hallway until they arrived at his room. The guard started to leave, but Bukharin stopped him.

“Is there anyway you could get me some paper and a pen,” Bukharin asked.

“Maybe, let me see” the guard replied. The guard left and Bukharin shut the door. He knew that after his confession, he would either be executed or jailed for life. If the guard returned to him a pen and some paper, he could then write a letter to Stalin. He would first let Stalin know how loyal he was and ask him why Stalin needed him to die. Why he needed all the power he had. He would let Stalin feel the guilt, if Stalin had any. Then he would remind him of their beautiful friendship. The many plans they had for the future. He wanted that friendship again. He desperately needed a friend. Maybe Stalin

would change his mind, and let him go free, once he realized how much Bukharin had done, and how loyal he truly was. Then again, at this point, Stalin's only friend was power.

Bukharin heard a knock at his door. The guard had returned with the pen and paper. Bukharin thanked him and the guard nodded. By the time the guard had left his room, Bukharin already knew what he was going to say in his letter.

This is perhaps the last letter I shall write to you before my death. That's why, though I am a prisoner, I ask you to permit me to write this letter without resorting to officials, since I am writing this letter to you alone: the very fact of its existence or nonexistence will remain entirely in your hands. I've come to the last page of my drama and perhaps of my life. I agonized over whether I should pick up pen and paper - as I write this, I am shuddering all over from a thousand emotions stirring within me, and I can hardly control myself. I want to take my leave of you in advance, before it's too late, before my hand ceases to write, before my eyes close, while my brain somehow still functions. In order to avoid any misunderstandings I will say to you from the outset that, as far as the world at large is concerned: a) I have no intention of recanting anything I've confessed; b) I have no intention of pleading with you. But ... I cannot leave this life without writing to you these last lines because I am in the grip of torments which you should know about. In saying this, I am clearing my conscience totally. All the rest either never took place or, if it did, then I had no inkling of it whatsoever. So at the plenum I spoke the truth and nothing but the truth, but no one believed me. Here and now I speak the absolute truth: all these past years I have been honestly and sincerely carrying out the party line and have learned to cherish and love you wisely. I do not know why you

wish me dead but I will always think of you as a comrade. Why do you need me to die Koba? – Nikolai Bukharin.

Bukharin folded the paper and placed it on his desk. The guard was back at the door probably to take him back to the trial.

“I am ready,” Bukharin triumphantly remarked.

“I know,” the guard answered with a smile, as if Bukharin had told him a funny joke. Bukharin gave the letter to the guard. The guard put it into his pocket. Whether he would actually give it to Stalin, Bukharin had no idea. He just knew that one day, Stalin would see it and be reminded of how loyal of a comrade Bukharin really was. As they approached the door, Bukharin felt an unexpected sense of confidence, one he had not felt in a long time. He walked into the room and sat on the chair. The same three men showed their faces on the screen. They didn’t say a word. They didn’t even need to ask him before he started.

“I admit and regard myself politically responsible for the sum total of the crimes committed by the Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites. I confess to being the leader of the group, and for the plot of the murder of Stalin.”

They took him out of the room. Bukharin didn’t mind the fact that he was going to die. He knew that his death would be quick. He was no longer living in fear. He was free. Maybe they would even let him have a cell with some windows before he died. Bukharin’s hope rose when they passed his cell. “Am I being taken to a new cell, sir?” Bukharin asked the guard. The guard did not answer him. They passed the hall with the long window. They reached a new hallway. This hallway was much different than any of the ones he had seen. This hallway had twelve different screens stretching all over. Each

of them showed what seemed like past criminals being punished in different ways. Bukharin looked at one of the screens. It showed a man being mauled to death by a giant spider like creature on some distant planet. His eyes moved to another screen that showed a young man being electrocuted in front of his entire family. Bukharin's heart stopped. As he watched more screens displayed more deaths, Bukharin realized what was going on. These screen showed the reality of other's worse fears come to life. This was how Stalin chose to rid of his enemies. Kill them with a little hope, and a lot of fear. The hallway darkened. The guard looked at him mercifully and opened the capsule.

Bukharin noticed that his new capsule was different than the last. Instead of having one window, it was entirely transparent. His eyes couldn't keep from looking out in to the deep oblivion of space. It was what he most wanted, and what he most feared. He was alone, and hopeless. Just like he had been since the day he arrived at the station that sent him out into the rocket.

Bukharin cried. There was nothing he could do but remember. Remember his wife, and his friends. Remember the good times when he was safe, and there was no cell or capsule. He remembered the last thing he saw before his exile. The guard. The look of remorse in the guard's eyes, the look that expressed, "I'm only doing this to protect myself." Bukharin laughed. If only the guard knew that there was no such thing as protection in Stalin's world. At that point, knowing there was nothing left to do, he realized he was not the only one who was doomed. Bukharin closed his eyes as the capsule drifted off into the wide-open universe.