



DARKNESS AT NOON

by

ARTHUR KOESTLER

Translated by

DAPHNE HARDY



THE MODERN LIBRARY · NEW YORK

'He who establishes a dictatorship and does not kill Brutus, or he who founds a republic and does not kill the sons of Brutus, will only reign a short time.'

MACHIAVELLI:
Discorsi

'Man, man, one cannot live quite without pity.'

DOSTOEVSKY:
Crime and Punishment

The characters in this book are fictitious. The historical circumstances which determined their actions are real. The life of the man N. S. Rubashov is a synthesis of the lives of a number of men who were victims of the so-called Moscow Trials. Several of them were personally known to the author. This book is dedicated to their memory.

PARIS.

October, 1938—April, 1940.

COPYRIGHT, 1941, BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

*All rights reserved. No part of this book
may be reproduced in any form without
permission in writing from the publisher,
except by a reviewer who may quote brief
passages in a review to be printed in a
magazine or newspaper.*



Random House IS THE PUBLISHER OF
THE MODERN LIBRARY

BENNETT A. CERF • DONALD S. KLOPFER • ROBERT K. HAAS

Manufactured in the United States of America

Printed by Parkway Printing Company Bound by H. Wolff

CONTENTS

THE FIRST HEARING	I
THE SECOND HEARING	95
THE THIRD HEARING	165
THE GRAMMATICAL FICTION	241

THE FIRST HEARING

'Nobody can rule guiltlessly.'

SAINT-JUST

THE FIRST HEARING

I

THE CELL DOOR SLAMMED BEHIND RUBASHOV.

He remained leaning against the door for a few seconds, and lit a cigarette. On the bed to his right lay two fairly clean blankets, and the straw mattress looked newly filled. The wash-basin to his left had no plug, but the tap functioned. The can next to it had been freshly disinfected, it did not smell. The walls on both sides were of solid brick, which would stifle the sound of tapping, but where the heating and drain pipe penetrated it, it had been plastered and resounded quite well; besides, the heating pipe itself seemed to be noise-conducting. The window started at eye-level; one could see down into the courtyard without having to pull oneself up by the bars. So far everything was in order.

He yawned, took his coat off, rolled it up and put it on the mattress as a pillow. He looked out into the yard. The snow shimmered yellow in the double light of the moon and the electric lanterns. All round the yard, along the walls, a narrow track had been cleared for the daily exercise. Dawn had not yet appeared; the stars still shone clear and frostily, in spite of the lanterns. On the rampart of the outside wall,

which lay opposite Rubashov's cell, a soldier with slanted rifle was marching the hundred steps up and down; he stamped at every step as if on parade. From time to time the yellow light of the lanterns flashed on his bayonet.

Rubashov took his shoes off, still standing at the window. He put out his cigarette, laid the stump on the floor at the end of his bedstead, and remained sitting on the mattress for a few minutes. He went back to the window once more. The courtyard was still; the sentry was just turning; above the machine-gun tower he saw a streak of the Milky Way.

Rubashov stretched himself on the bunk and wrapped himself in the top blanket. It was five o'clock and it was unlikely that one had to get up here before seven in winter. He was very sleepy and, thinking it over, decided that he would hardly be brought up for examination for another three or four days. He took his pince-nez off, laid it on the stone-paved floor next the cigarette stump, smiled and shut his eyes. He was warmly wrapped up in the blanket, and felt protected; for the first time in months he was not afraid of his dreams.

When a few minutes later the warder turned the light off from outside, and looked through the spy-hole into his cell, Rubashov, ex-Commissar of the People, slept, his back turned to the wall, with his head on his outstretched left arm, which stuck stiffly out of the bed; only the hand on the end of it hung loosely and twitched in his sleep.

An hour earlier, when the two officials of the People's Commissariat of the Interior were hammering on Ruba-

shov's door, in order to arrest him, Rubashov was just dreaming that he was being arrested.

The knocking had grown louder and Rubashov strained to wake up. He was practised in tearing himself out of nightmares, as the dream of his first arrest had for years returned periodically and ran its course with the regularity of clockwork. Sometimes, by a strong effort of will, he managed to stop the clockwork, to pull himself out of the dream by his own effort, but this time he did not succeed; the last weeks had exhausted him, he sweated and panted in his sleep; the clockwork hummed, the dream went on.

He dreamed, as always, that there was a hammering on his door, and that three men stood outside, waiting to arrest him. He could see them through the closed door, standing outside, banging against its framework. They had on brand-new uniforms, the becoming costume of the Pratorian guards of the German Dictatorship; on their caps and sleeves they wore their insignia: the aggressively barbed cross; in their free hand they carried grotesquely big pistols; their straps and trappings smelled of fresh leather. Now they were in his room, at his bedside. Two were overgrown peasant lads with thick lips and fish-eyes; the third was short and fat. They stood by his bed, holding their pistols in their hands, and breathing heavily at him. It was quite still save for the asthmatic panting of the short, fat one. Then someone in an upper story pulled a plug and the water rushed down evenly through the pipes in the walls.

The clockwork was running down. The hammering on Rubashov's door became louder; the two men outside, who had come to arrest him, hammered alternatively and blew on their frozen hands. But Rubashov could not wake up, although he knew that now would follow a particularly pain-

ful scene: the three still stand by his bed and he tries to put on his dressing-gown. But the sleeve is turned inside out; he cannot manage to put his arm into it. He strives vainly until a kind of paralysis descends on him: he cannot move, although everything depends on his getting the sleeve on in time. This tormenting helplessness lasts a number of seconds, during which Rubashov moans and feels the cold wetness on his temples and the hammering on his door penetrates his sleep like a distant roll of drums; his arm under the pillow twitches in the feverish effort to find the sleeve of his dressing-gown; then at last he is released by the first smashing blow over the ear with the butt of the pistol. . . .

With the familiar sensation, repeated and lived through again a hundred times, of this first blow—from which his deafness dated—he usually woke up. For a while he would still shiver and his hand, jammed under the pillow, would continue to strain for the dressing-gown sleeve; for, as a rule, before he was fully awake, he still had the last and worst stage to go through. It consisted of a dizzy, shapeless feeling that this awakening was the real dream and that in fact he was still lying on the damp stone floor of the dark cell, at his feet the can, next to his head the jug of water and a few crumbs of bread. . . .

This time also, for a few seconds, the bemused condition held, the uncertainty whether his groping hand would touch the can or the switch of his bedside lamp. Then the light blazed on and the mist parted. Rubashov breathed deeply several times and, like a convalescent, his hands folded on his breast, enjoyed the delicious feeling of freedom and safety. He dried his forehead and the bald patch on the back of his head with the sheet, and blinked up with already returning irony at the colour-print of No. 1, leader of the

Party, which hung over his bed on the wall of his room—and on the walls of all the rooms next to, above or under his; on all the walls of the house, of the town, of the enormous country for which he had fought and suffered, and which now had taken him up again in its enormous, protecting lap. He was now fully awake; but the hammering on his door went on.

3

The two men who had come to arrest Rubashov stood outside on the dark landing and consulted each other. The porter Vassilij, who had shown them the way upstairs, stood in the open lift doorway and panted with fear. He was a thin old man; above the torn collar of the military overcoat he had thrown over his nightshirt appeared a broad red scar which gave him a scrofulous look. It was the result of a neck wound received in the Civil War, throughout which he had fought in Rubashov's Partisan regiment. Later Rubashov had been ordered abroad and Vassilij had heard of him only occasionally, from the newspaper which his daughter read to him in the evenings. She had read to him the speeches which Rubashov made to the Congresses; they were long and difficult to understand, and Vassilij could never quite manage to find in them the tone of voice of the little bearded Partisan commander who had known such beautiful oaths that even the Holy Madonna of Kasan must have smiled at them. Usually Vassilij fell asleep in the middle of these speeches, but always woke up when his daughter came to the final sentences and the applause, solemnly raising her voice. To every one of the ceremonial

endings, 'Long live the International! Long live the Revolution! Long live No. 1', Vassilij added a heartfelt 'Amen' under his breath, so that the daughter should not hear it; then took his jacket off, crossed himself secretly and with a bad conscience and went to bed. Above his bed also hung a portrait of No. 1, and next to it a photograph of Rubashov as Partisan commander. If that photograph were found, he would probably also be taken away.

It was cold, dark and very quiet on the staircase. The younger of the two men from the Commissariat of the Interior proposed to shoot the lock of the door to pieces. Vassilij leant against the lift door; he had not had the time to put on his boots properly, and his hands trembled so much that he could not tie the laces. The elder of the two men was against shooting; the arrest had to be carried out discreetly. They both blew on their stiff hands and began again to hammer against the door; the younger banged on it with the butt of his revolver. A few floors below them a woman screamed in a piercing voice. 'Tell her to shut up,' said the young man to Vassilij. 'Be quiet,' shouted Vassilij. 'Here is Authority.' The woman became quiet at once. The young man changed over to belabouring the door with his boots. The noise filled the whole staircase; at last the door fell open.

The three of them stood by Rubashov's bed, the young man with his pistol in his hand, the old man holding himself stiffly as though standing to attention; Vassilij stood a few steps behind them, leaning against the wall. Rubashov was still drying the sweat from the back of his head; he looked at them shortsightedly with sleepy eyes. 'Citizen Rubashov, Nicolas Salmanovitch, we arrest you in the name of the law,' said the young man. Rubashov felt for his glasses under the

pillow and propped himself up a bit. Now that he had his glasses on, his eyes had the expression which Vassilij and the elder official knew from old photographs and colour-prints. The elder official stood more stiffly to attention; the young one, who had grown up under new heroes, went a step closer to the bed; all three saw that he was about to say or do something brutal to hide his awkwardness.

'Put that gun away, comrade,' said Rubashov to him. 'What do you want with me, anyhow?'

'You hear you are arrested,' said the boy. 'Put your clothes on and don't make a fuss.'

'Have you got a warrant?' asked Rubashov.

The elder official pulled a paper out of his pocket, passed it to Rubashov and stood again to attention.

Rubashov read it attentively. 'Well, good,' he said. 'One never is any the wiser from those things; the devil take you.'

'Put your clothes on and hurry up,' said the boy. One saw that his brutality was no longer put on, but was natural to him. A fine generation have we produced, thought Rubashov. He recalled the propaganda posters on which youth was always represented with a laughing face. He felt very tired. 'Pass me my dressing-gown, instead of fumbling about with your revolver,' he said to the boy. The boy reddened, but remained silent. The elder official passed the dressing-gown to Rubashov. Rubashov worked his arm into the sleeve. 'This time it goes at least,' he said with a strained smile. The three others did not understand and said nothing. They watched him as he got slowly out of bed and collected his crumpled clothes together.

The house was silent after the one shrill woman's cry, but they had the feeling that all the inhabitants were awake in their beds, holding their breath.

Then they heard someone in an upper story pull the plug and the water rushing down evenly through the pipes.

4

At the front door stood the car in which the officials had come, a new American make. It was still dark; the chauffeur had put on the headlights, the street was asleep or pretended to be. They got in, first the lad, then Rubashov, then the elder official. The chauffeur, who was also in uniform, started the car. Beyond the corner the asphalt surface stopped; they were still in the centre of the town; all around them were big modern buildings of nine and ten stories, but the roads were country cart-tracks of frozen mud, with a thin powdering of snow in the cracks. The chauffeur drove at a walking pace and the superbly sprung motor car creaked and groaned like an oxen wagon.

'Drive faster,' said the lad, who could not bear the silence in the car.

The chauffeur shrugged his shoulders without looking round. He had given Rubashov an indifferent and unfriendly look as he got into the car. Rubashov had once had an accident; the man at the wheel of the ambulance-car had looked at him in the same way. The slow, jolting drive through the dead streets, with the wavering light of the head lamps before them, was difficult to stand. 'How far is it?' asked Rubashov, without looking at his companions. He nearly added: to the hospital. 'A good half-hour,' said the older man in uniform. Rubashov dug cigarettes out of his pocket, put one in his mouth and passed the packet round automatically. The young man refused abruptly, the elder

one took two and passed one on to the chauffeur. The chauffeur touched his cap and gave everybody a light, holding the steering-wheel with one hand. Rubashov's heart became lighter; at the same time he was annoyed with himself for it. Just the time to get sentimental, he thought. But he could not resist the temptation to speak and to awaken a little human warmth around him. 'A pity for the car,' he said. 'Foreign cars cost quite a bit of gold, and after half a year on our roads they are finished.'

'There you are quite right. Our roads are very backward,' said the old official. By his tone Rubashov realized that he had understood his helplessness. He felt like a dog to whom one had just thrown a bone; he decided not to speak again. But suddenly the boy said aggressively:

'Are they any better in the capitalist states?'

Rubashov had to grin. 'Were you ever outside?' he asked.

'I know all the same what it is like there,' said the boy. 'You need not try to tell me stories about it.'

'Whom do you take me for, exactly?' asked Rubashov very quietly. But he could not prevent himself from adding: 'You really ought to study the Party history a bit.'

The boy was silent and looked fixedly at the driver's back. Nobody spoke. For the third time the driver choked off the panting engine and let it in again, cursing. They jolted through the suburbs; in the appearance of the miserable wooden houses nothing was changed. Above their crooked silhouettes hung the moon, pale and cold.

In every corridor of the new model prison electric light was burning. It lay bleakly on the iron galleries, on the bare