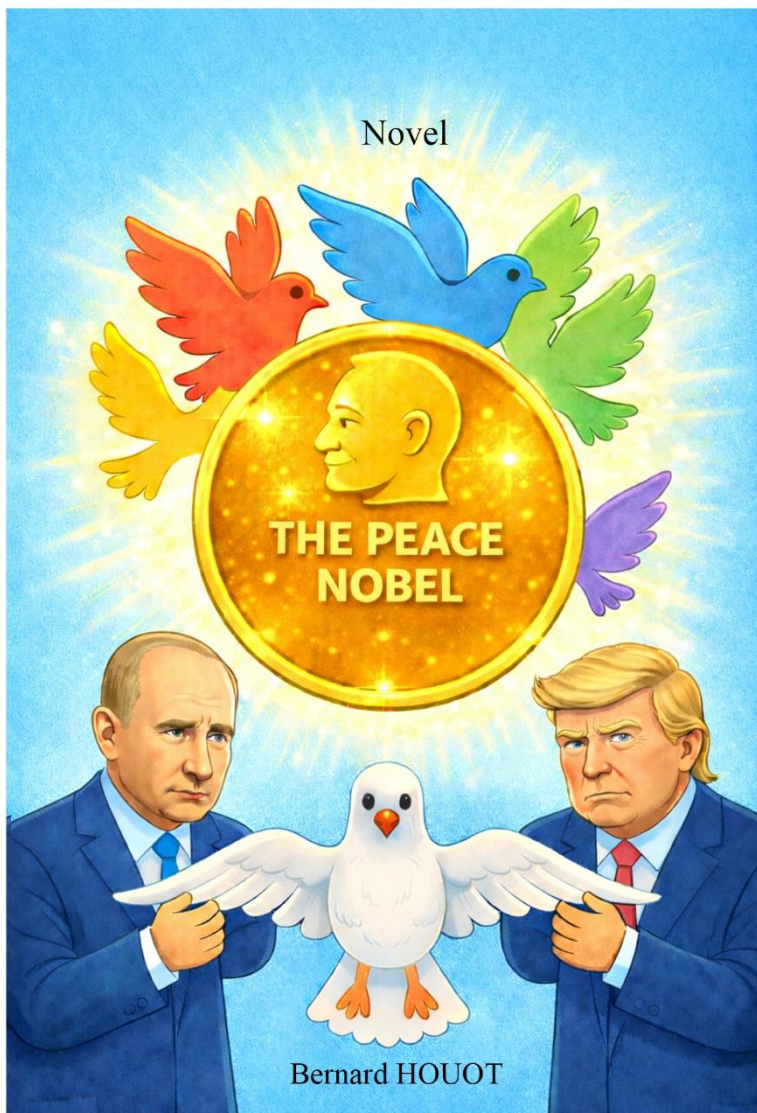


The Peace Nobel

To set the *πιμωμ* right side up



SYNOPSIS

What happens when Vladimir Putin catches the "Benevolence" bug and starts talking about peace and dancing with his granddaughter? The world wonders, intelligence services panic. Putin, having ended the war in Ukraine, is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Donald Trump, disappointed, creates his own prize, "The Trumpel Peace Prize," sparking similar awards around the world. The Nobel Committee is overwhelmed but wisely responds to the challenges posed by the complexity of the situations by returning to a choice full of humanity.

A satirical, lively, and tender fable, where geopolitics goes off the rails, humor disarms, and peace and the initiatives that reward it become contagious.

Read with an open mind !

The Peace Nobel

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Bernard Houot

The Peace Nobel

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Novel

Important warning

*Please note: This is a gently satirical novel.
Any resemblance to real leaders
is purely coincidental... or purely teasing!
Everything is fiction: exaggerated characters, distorted situations
and slightly jostled political egos.*

To be read with a smile... and a sense of humor.

ISBN: 979-10-97343-46-0

1st edition self-published

Legal deposit: March 2026

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Printed in France

*To the Ukrainian, Russian,
Iranian, Afghan, and Sudanese
who have had to flee their countries
to escape war
or persecution
and
whom I gave
a helping hand in French.*

PART 1: PUTIN, BENEVOLENT

1

It is a quiet morning in Novo-Ogaryovo, about 30 kilometers west of Moscow, in a state residence that Vladimir Putin is particularly fond of. Here, unlike his other palaces, one could almost get the impression that a human being could live here without getting lost in the corridors. The rooms are human-sized: you can take three steps without bumping into a butler or stumbling over an 18th-century gilded fresco.

The architecture is classic, almost modest for a tsar. The office is so sober as to border on asceticism. Beige walls, a planisphere on one side so as not to forget Ukraine, and a painting of a green landscape on the other, perhaps to relax after a tense summit, and of course the coat of arms of Moscow, hanging as a discreet reminder that the greatness of Russia begins here. A flag stands in the corner, straight as a soldier on parade. On the desk is a large dark leather desk pad, pens lined up in a row, and a collection of telephones, some of which, it is said, allow you to speak directly to God—or to Gérard Depardieu, which is much the same thing in Russia. The whole thing is sober, silent, and comfortably hushed. It is understandable that the master of the house likes to come to this place, far from the Soviet-Baroque pomp of the Kremlin.

For yes, it is indeed Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, the undisputed and eternal ruler of the Russian Federation, a man who is both feared and revered, and carefully retouched in his public appearances, who comes here to retreat. Small in stature but large in the polls he himself commissions, athletic as soon as the cameras are there, a lover of judo, horses, tigers, ice swimming,

and more or less credible stories of virility, he cultivates the image of an invincible leader. A kind of Slavophile James Bond, but with a nuclear arsenal and a pronounced taste for shifting borders.

Protected like a national treasure by his special services, he only goes out in armored limousines. It is said that the people admire him. In any case, those who do not admire him have learned not to speak out too much—Siberia is vast and trials are swift.

In Russia, Vladimir Putin is not just a president. He is *the* President. He is admired, feared, and revered as a mixture of Peter the Great, Saint George, and Bruce Willis in *Die Hard*. For more than two decades, he has reigned supreme, weathering crises, sanctions, Arab springs, and democratic winters with the same impassive expression: that of a man who knows he will always have the last word, even if it means expanding the dictionary.

On a global scale, other heads of state change every five or six years, retire, write memoirs, and take up golf. Not him. He stays. He observes. He *leads*. His political longevity is akin to quantum physics: the more you try to understand how he does it, the more confused you become. Every election is a formality. Every vote is a foregone conclusion. Every opponent is a memory.

But what is most striking is the sincere, or at least well-disciplined, affection that a large part of the population has for him. The babushkas adore him. The workers respect him. Young patriots sing his praises. He is the man who has restored Russia's pride, who defies the West, who has put the church back at the center of the village—or rather, at the top of the state.

Physically, he is no colossus. But in the collective imagination, he lifts bears with his bare hands, catches pike bigger than official lies, and dives into the depths of Lake Baikal to bring up ancient amphorae—without even getting his loafers wet. He is not just a president, he is a living legend. A geopolitical comic book character: "*Captain Kremlin*," defender of tradition, values, and expanded territories.

Behind this smooth image lies a man of extreme caution. His private life remains more secret than a Swiss bank account. His loved ones? Unknown. His personal possessions? Classified as confidential-defense. His innermost thoughts? Probably cryogenically frozen at the FSB¹. We know he likes judo, long walks in the forest, and meditative retreats in chalets more luxurious than a five-star hotel. The rest is a minefield, because these subjects are not to be trifled with. Journalists who have tried to tackle them now write from a distance... or not at all. And those who dared to dig a little too deep now sleep in reinforced concrete beds, six feet under.

And yet, despite this impenetrable universe, the myth-making machine is running at full speed. He is said to be a philosopher at heart, a genius strategist, the father of the nation and, sometimes, the destroyer of Western dreams. He governs like a paranoid chess player: ten moves ahead, but ready to overturn the board if the game goes wrong.

¹ FSB, Russian Federal Security Service, formerly the KGB - responsible for security, intelligence, and counterintelligence

On this day in Novo-Ogaryovo, the temperature is mild, the birch trees are rustling, and the FSB's lawnmowers have been asked to keep quiet. Inside, in the living room-office, a meeting is being prepared. Not one of those endless meetings with numerical reports and depressing PowerPoint presentations. No. A strategic meeting, with generals, shadow advisors, and the tense atmosphere of a Russian opera in Act III.

They arrive one by one, silent as double agents, decked out in military decorations that jingle as if to remind us that this is no laughing matter. General Chernoyev, a colossus with a steely gaze, takes his place on the left. On the right is Admiral Petrov, a specialist in naval operations and expressionless facial expressions. In the center seat along the oval table is the Tsar's chair.

Putin enters silently, dressed in a perfectly tailored charcoal gray suit, as if elegance were part of the national defense plan. He does not sit down immediately. He looks. He assesses. He weighs the silences as others weigh missiles.

When he finally takes his seat, no one dares to cough. He always begins with a harmless sentence, with an almost Zen-like calm:

"Gentlemen, the situation is stable... for now."

A shiver runs through the room. Translation: it's time to move the pawns. Or the divisions.

Everyone knows what follows. A series of seemingly simple but double-edged questions, the kind that make a colonel sweat. Putin loves this: asking a quiet question, letting the other person believe

that they have the right to make a mistake, then staring at them with that characteristic intensity that makes them want to confess things they haven't even done.

"Admiral Petrov, how many submarines are operational in the Barents Sea?"

"Eleven, Comrade President."

"Eleven? Really? Not twelve?" he remarks in a neutral tone. "In April, there were twelve. Has one of them vanished or is it swimming to Norway?"

Petrov blushed slightly, but in his mind, a thousand scenarios for the end of his career are silently playing out. The President does not raise his voice. He does not need to. He spoke little, but every word is a test, a trial. He doesn't just wait for answers. He observed how they were given. Too confident? Suspicious. Too hesitant? Dangerous.

For his part, General Chernoyev nervously consults his notes, as if a misplaced comma could trigger a special operation against him. Putin suddenly fixes him with his gaze:

"General, how are the preparations for our Zapad exercise going?"

"Everything is ready, Mr. President. The troops are on alert, the equipment is in place, the simulations have begun..."

"Simulating is good. Preparing to attack is better!"

He still doesn't raise his voice. But the atmosphere thickens, as if the air had suddenly decided to remain frozen, just like in the Kremlin.

The meeting lasts an hour and a half, no more. The phones are turned off, eyes are focused, pens tremble slightly. At the end, the Tsar rises without another word. He makes a discreet gesture with his hand—the kind of gesture that, for him, means both "thank you all" and "one of you is going to get fired, but I'm not saying who yet."

He leaves, leaving behind a room still filled with tension, like a black box that continues to record after the crash. The generals look at each other, relieved to still be there, for now.

Because in Vladimir Putin's Russia, everything is strategic, even silences. Especially silences.

It has already been several days since Putin retreated to his hideaway in Novo-Ogaryovo, where silence reigns supreme and the samovar is always ready. He has had a busy day. In the morning, he reread three martial speeches, signed several anti-LGBT decrees, and posed for a shirtless photo shoot against a backdrop of snow-covered pine trees to maintain the legend. And in the afternoon, after listening to a soporific economic report, reviewing two laws banning anything that starts with "lib" or moves a little too fast, and sending a birthday letter to Kadyrov with a Swiss Army knife as a gift, he ended his day with a secret meeting with some very silent men to devise a new underground pipeline leading to Turkey.

After spending his time governing Russia in this way, he decides to relax in front of his television. Vladimir doesn't watch just anything: he chooses his programs to take the pulse of the country and the world with the delicacy of a forensic scientist. He settles into one of the armchairs in his living room and grabs the remote control—a special model with a red button that should not be confused with the volume control—to zap to a foreign channel, which is therefore inevitably suspicious, announcing a debate about himself: Putin, in the flesh, in bone, and in equestrian statue—and therefore the perfect opportunity for a moment of ego therapy. This is no ordinary report, no! It's a debate between two journalists. Two "experts." Two sworn enemies. In short, a battle in tuxedos.

The presenter, more Botoxed than a state model, with an ultra-bright smile, immediately attacks his subject with the air of a caffeine-fueled oracle:

"Many claim to know Vladimir Putin. But hearing the very divergent opinions he provokes, one might ask: Who is he really? To debate this, we welcome two journalists who are polar opposites, except for their obsession with the subject. Julie from the newspaper *El Demon*—you can guess the political leanings—and Hubert from the newspaper *El Garofig*, champion of order, morality, and the Russian bear.

"So Julie, we're listening. What do you think of Putin?"

Julie, with her dark eyes, high-pitched voice, murderous gaze, and the tone of a prosecutor who knows her case, opens the discussion:

"What do I think of Putin? He's a cynical and unscrupulous autocrat! A cocktail of paranoia, imperial pride, and toxic testosterone. He bullies, he lies, he deports, he bombs. He imagines himself a tsar, a strategist, and a philosopher, but he acts like a casino boss: everything for him, nothing for others!" This guy has no limits. His dream? To rebuild an empire on the ruins of freedom. A public danger in a tie. He gags journalists, imprisons opponents, rewrites history with missiles, and thinks he's the godfather of an Orthodox mafia.

Hubert, impeccably dressed and with eyes shining like a freshly polished Soviet medal, a fixed smile and moist eyes, immediately responds fervently:

"But Julie, you're being unfair! Putin is an exceptional statesman! He brought back order, discipline, values... He saved Russia from post-Soviet chaos! He loves his people, his homeland, his churches, his bears. He put Russia back on track—armored tracks, certainly, but tracks that hold! He embodies order, virility, morality.

"He restored order?" Julie retorts, raising her eyebrows with a sigh of disillusioned expertise. Let's talk about it. An order based on prisons, poison, and propaganda. He's turning schools into re-education barracks and journalists into targets. He rules through fear, not virtue. And he justifies it all with pseudo-mystical " "

speeches about Holy Russia. A Holy Russia with highly variable geometry.

Hubert, outraged like a bishop watching a Lady Gaga video:

"Come on, Julie! You're blinded by your own ideology! Sometimes firm measures are necessary. He's fighting criminals, extremists, TikTok influencers! And he's admired. Look how well it works for him! Children applaud him, grandmothers kiss him, bears salute him!"

"Oh yes, the children... let's talk about them!" Julie replies. The ones he's taking away in Ukraine to 're-educate'. The opponents who are found dead by accident. The journalists who fall out of windows, always the same one, always badly closed. And you still talk about morality?

Hubert remains unshaken in his deep-rooted faith:

"You have to put all this in a global context. The threats, the challenges, the geopolitics. Do you think that running a country is like an all-you-can-eat buffet? Sometimes you have to tighten the screws. Reassure the population. Maintain a clear line. The truth is not what we say, it's what we believe is right and useful to make people believe."

With a warrior's grin, Julie cuts him off before he can continue:

"What about human rights? You're willing to swallow any lie, as long as it's well presented. Dictatorships thrive on the silence of complacent people like you. Are you going to tell us that the gulag was supervised camping? And that murdered journalists were victims of unfortunate falls on daggers? Frankly, Hubert, you have to stop drinking the Kremlin's holy water. History will not thank you for it.

Hubert, theatrical, as if he were already addressing the history books, and with his finger raised like a priest reciting the gospel according to Saint Vlad:

"Official lies are sometimes useful. They reassure people. And frankly, what would you prefer? A country ruled by a strong man or a country given over to woke decadence, influencers, and patriotic drag queens?"

"Hmmm... between a bodybuilder dictator and a drag queen who's a fan of Rousseau... are you forcing me to choose?" Julie replies, feigning thoughtfulness.

Putin watches impassively from his armchair.

He doesn't smile. He doesn't blink. He takes notes. Perhaps for the next purge. Or for his future one-man show. He murmurs to himself:

"Interesting. One adores me, the other hates me. Both give me publicity. In the end, I'm the winner."

The debate continues live on the set of the show *"It's Time to Argue."*

The presenter, always impeccable, but with his tie askew and a vaguely worried look on his face because he knows that talking about Putin is like playing media Russian roulette, takes the floor again:

— After this fascinating verbal joust on the complex, even multifaceted personality of Vladimir Putin, let's move on to another controversial issue: Western intervention in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Julie? Hubert? You have two minutes each... and a lifetime to perhaps regret what you are about to say.

Julie, wound up like a well-oiled Kalashnikov:

— Let me be clear: not intervening means abandoning a people in distress. It's like watching a guy get mugged on the street and saying, "Oh, too bad, I'm wearing slippers, and I have to feed my cat at home." Ukraine is not an episode of Game of Thrones, it is a democracy under attack by a vengeful neighbor on imperial steroids!

Hubert, exuding smugness from every pore of his tweed suit:

"Ah, Julie's grand lyrical flights of fancy! It's like a Miss Universe speech. "I want world peace and a blanket for my kittens!" But the reality, my dear, is that the West is playing with nuclear fire while pretending to be Mother Teresa in military fatigues. Supplying weapons, training soldiers, imposing sanctions left and right... and then we're surprised that Moscow is growling?"

"Moscow was already 'growling' when Ukraine ate pickles without asking permission," Julie points out. And frankly, Hubert, have you seen the Western sanctions? "*Oh no, our yacht has been seized! Quick, plan B: the Maldives.*" Do you really think that's enough to shake Russian oligarchs who drink oil for breakfast? We're still being far too nice to them!

Hubert, unperturbed:

— The West should clean up its own backyard instead of handing out lessons. It has allowed all the horrors of the world to happen for decades, and suddenly, because Vladimir isn't "inclusive" enough, we should send in troops? Come on. And then what? Are we going to invade Moscow with TikTok influencers and rainbow-painted tanks?

"Oh Hubert... Putin only understands one thing: force. The West must stop dancing the minuet of compromise and bring out the bazooka—at least symbolically. Let's show that we have some backbone, for G7's sake!"

Hubert, laughing:

— And what? Send Macron to encourage the warmongers with a speech? Ursula von der Leyen with a biodegradable flamethrower? And Merz with rigged teleprompters? NATO isn't a street theater troupe, it's an army! And when armies move, people die. Real people. Not pixels. Have you forgotten that in your bombastic editorials?

— I've also forgotten your opinions in the compost heap, Hubert. Inaction is costly. Indifference even more so. At this rate, in two years' time, Crimea will be Disneyland Russia, and our gas bills will feature photos of Putin in a kimono.

In his armchair, Putin sips tea—or is it an elixir of immortality?—staring at the screen. He listens, impassive as ever, as if watching a sitcom for which he wrote all the dialogue. Then he whispers to his butler:

— They're still hesitating... Perfect. The more they talk, the less they act. Westerners are talkative, but the missiles, patients!

The butler, awaiting his master's orders, nods silently. He knows that in this theater of shadows and posturing, the curtain never falls. Just a few bombs.

From a civilized debate, the show turns into a duel between media gladiators—halfway between *C'est dans l'air* and *Koh-Lanta* Kremlin style. The long-awaited fight between Hubert, the apostle of soft compromise, and Julie, the Amazon of democratic resistance, has become fierce.

The presenter, visibly concerned for his set, his contract, and his carpet:

"Let's calm down... Let's calm down... We're here to debate, not to reenact the Battle of Stalingrad on the set. Hubert, Julie, take turns. Hubert, you said that Ukraine should... how did you put it... 'recognize its mistake of birth'?"

Hubert, brimming with Olympian confidence:

"Exactly. Ukraine should stop resisting and accept the geopolitical reality: it was born in Russia's shadow, like a rowdy little brother who thinks he can emancipate himself by playing cowboy with NATO. But it's time to stop the charade and the massacres. To resist is to suffer. To submit is to survive. And sometimes peace is better than pride. Even Napoleon would have understood that... eventually.

Julie, her eyes like Star Wars lasers:

— Oh, but of course, Hubert. Let's surrender while we're at it, hand out Russian flags at the Polish border, and rename Paris "Putingrad-sur-Seine"! Resistance means suffering, you say? But resistance also means existence! You are confusing diplomacy with capitulation. And between us, if Ukraine has to "accept" its fate, why not Taiwan, Georgia, Moldova... and Corsica, while we're at it?

Hubert taps his microphone as if he were on the floor of Parliament:

"You're playing a show, Julie. Drama, grand gestures, punchlines. But politics isn't Netflix. It's reality, it's compromise, it's sometimes turning the other cheek to avoid losing both legs.

Do you think that by delivering tanks to Kiev, we're building peace? No, we're playing blind man's buff with an arsonist."

Julie stands up, like Marianne on a barricade:

"But Hubert, Putin doesn't want compromise! He wants humanitarian corridors for his tanks and peace treaties to better encircle those who say no to him! This isn't diplomacy, it's a game of chess where every pawn turns into a drone and a missile! You preach surrender in the name of common sense, but I prefer solidarity in the name of freedom!"

Hubert stands up in turn, jacket open, chest puffed out, index finger pointed:

"Freedom, freedom... Always the big words! And who will pay the bill? Who will pick up the pieces? You? With your fiery editorials and your Amnesty International subscription? The Ukrainian people deserve peace, not eternal war in the name of values that fill hospitals rather than supermarkets!"

Julie, furious:

"And above all, they deserve not to be ruled from the Kremlin! What you call peace, Hubert, is capitulation with a bow on top. If you had been born in 1938, would you have applauded in Munich, singing '*Mein compromise, Mein compromise*'?"

"And you, would you have gone to sabotage the Berlin subway line to 'resist' the oppression of the Nazi regime?"

The presenter tries to intervene but is overwhelmed by the situation:

"Um... maybe we should go to a commercial break? No?"

Julie grabs a cup of water and pretends to throw it. Hubert steps back, ready to pull out his cheat sheet titled "*Kissinger's speech on peaceful coexistence with the USSR*, fan fiction version."

At that precise moment, the image freezes. The control room panics. The live broadcast is cut. A message appears: "*Due to an overly ly vigorous exchange between our guests, we will resume the program in a few moments. In the meantime, please enjoy this beautiful image of ducks gliding peacefully on Lake Baikal, sent in by a viewer.*"

In his living room in Novo-Ogaryovo, Putin smiles amusedly as he flicks through the channels on his remote control.

"Westerners... Always so divided. What a show. We should give them an award... or a bone to chew on."

He presses pause. The screen remains frozen on Julie, arms raised, and Hubert, mouth open like a perplexed fish. A moment in television immortalized... for the annals of history.

In his armchair, Putin looks pensive. He doesn't know whether to thank Hubert and recruit him as a free propaganda agent... or send Julie an invitation to come and have some polonium-flavored tea at the Russian embassy.

Putin slips on his camouflage-colored dressing gown, remote control in hand. With a weary sigh, he turns off the sound, pours himself a cup of tea, and murmurs to himself again:

"Ah... these Westerners. Always talking. Fortunately, I take action."

He resumes his internal chess game. A game he always wins, strangely enough!

After finishing his tea, he presses the remote control again, thinking to himself:

"Westerners fight like headless chickens. Let's see what the real independent journalists have to say."

One click and the screen changes. A channel with a dubious logo, somewhere between Sputnik, TikTok, and Vintage Tele-Azerbaijan, is broadcasting a special program: "*Exclusive: Behind the scenes at the Kremlin!*" A title in flashing red capital letters appears accompanied by an epic voice-over with an exaggerated "Slavic" accent: "*Top-secret footage! A rare confrontation between the President and a recalcitrant General!*"

The camera shakes. It looks like a reenactment filmed in a hangar on the outskirts of Kazan. Then a Putin lookalike appears, with a head that is too smooth, a build that is too broad, and an attitude that is too... theatrical. We can guess that he is a former municipal theater actor recycled as a freelance propagandist. This fake Putin yells at a general who looks like an actor in a canned soup commercial, banging his fist on the table:

"Comrade Ivanovich! Your tanks have been circling the same abandoned gas station for three weeks! Are you waging war or participating in a tourist rally?"

The fake general, sheepishly:

"Supreme Comrade, it's the mud... and also the Ukrainian cows. They're very aggressive this season."

The fake Putin, eyes bulging:

— You were defeated by cattle? You bring shame on me, Ivanovich. Shame! On me, on Russia, and even on my grandmother, who knitted woolen cases to carry grenades during the siege of Leningrad!

The fake General stammered:

— But we took a village! We planted the flag, there was a dog, and a wooden sign. A strategic location, no doubt...

The fake Putin, rising dramatically, cape fluttering in the wind:

"Enough! If you don't take Kiev by Thursday, I'll send you to fly drones from a Lada without GPS. Understood?"

General Ivanovich stands at attention, trembling:

"Yes, Supreme Comrade. We'll try to advance... by going around a convenience store."

The screen displays a weather map with red arrows pointing to several cities, accompanied by martial music played on a synthesizer.

Putin—the real one—stares at the screen, blinks, then takes a sip of kvass, slowly, very slowly. He wonders:

"Who is this clown? He looks like a cross between Jean-Claude Van Damme and an albino beaver."

He calls his butler:

"Alexei?"

"Yes, Mr. President?"

"Who authorized the broadcast of this grotesque sketch?"

"It's a Belarusian co-production. They thought it would 'lighten the mood.'"

"Perfect. Send them a basket of potatoes. And a collection of Bolshevik comedies."

— Yes, Mr. President.

Putin shakes his head:

— Even my lookalikes want to play warlords now. What is the world coming to?

Looking gloomy, Putin puts down his cup of kvass with an exasperated sigh. He picks up a small leather notebook marked "Top Strategic Priorities." And between "launch an offensive" and "find a more natural hair dye," he scribbles furiously:

"To do first thing tomorrow morning:

— *Call the propaganda department and demand more Machiavellian, darker, more demoralizing fake news*

— *Ban lookalikes without prior hair validation*

— *Create fake news: Zelensky has fled to Disneyland disguised as a penguin..."*

He presses a red button—NO!!! Not that one! he suddenly remembers, but the other one, marked "Public Communications"—to summon his propaganda chief.

— Dmitri, come here, we need to talk about serious matters.

Dmitri approaches, panting.

"Yes, Vova?"

— I saw a fake news story featuring one of my lookalikes. What a caricature! He had the grace of a rhinoceros and the charisma of a breaded fish. Do you find that intimidating?

— Um... it depends on the breeding, Your Excellency.

— No sarcasm, Dmitri. It's time to step up a gear.

He jumps up, his robe flying behind him like a general in slippers.

"I want some really twisted ones. Heavy stuff. Absurd! I want the enemy to doubt everything, even their own existence. I want the Ukrainians to wonder if they're Russian agents infiltrating... Ukraine!"

Dmitri frantically jots everything down:

"Very well. We could also start a rumor that Zelensky sold Lviv to Elon Musk in exchange for a lifetime subscription to Starlink. Or that Ukrainian soldiers are actually just inflatable mannequin-equipped with Western artificial intelligence."

Putin nods. Dmitri continues:

"And why not claim that a Ukrainian battalion mistakenly went to a hot dog stand, thinking they were attacking a border post. How humiliating!"

Putin chuckles smugly:

"Dmitri. You are an artist of lies, a Dali of disinformation! But be careful, eh. No lookalikes without training. The next one who vaguely resembles me and acts like he's in a throat lozenge commercial, I'll send him to play Hamlet at the front, without rehearsal."

Dmitri bows and carefully notes: "*Create an official academy for Tsar lookalikes: impeccable uniform, dark suit, icy stare, total lack of humor, and casting in the Rossiya studios.*"

Time has passed and it's dinner time. Putin has invited his Defense Minister, Sergei Choïgou, who has remained in Novo Ogaryovo, for a one-on-one meal to discuss the military situation in the conflict with Ukraine. He is one of his best and most loyal friends, a relentless man famous for his jaw of steel, his passion for heavy tanks, and his ability to launch a military operation before he has even finished his coffee.

The exchange is usually serious in their one-on-one meetings. What's on the menu for this evening meal? Probably the reconquest of the world... and the merits of disinformation.

They sit around a very long table, so long that it looks like they are about to renegotiate the Treaty of Versailles. Putin is at one end, Choïgou at the other. A butler in white gloves crosses the distance between them as if crossing the border between two time zones.

Opening a small folder marked "*Confidential – for authorized eyes only*," Putin begins the conversation:

"Sergei, it's time to take stock. The special operation is stalling. Our troops are advancing at the speed of a unionized snail. What's the problem? Too much soup in the mess hall?"

Choïgou, chewing a bite of duck with tarragon:

"Not exactly. It must be said that the Ukrainians... how shall I put it... are defending themselves. That was not in the General Staff's plans, Your Excellency."

Putin, curtly:

— I did say "blitz operation." I was talking about Blitzkrieg, not LED lighting in tanks.

The butler announces the first course:

"Borscht soup revisited with Siberian truffles."

Putin sighs:

"Another invention from the new chef. Ever since she read a book on Russian-vegan fusion, I've been living in fear."

They taste it in silence. Then Choïgou says quietly:

"It could have been worse. She could have made tofu shaped like a gliding bomb."

Putin interrupts him to reframe the exchange:

"You have ammunition problems, armored vehicle losses, and generals who confuse Google Maps with Risk. What are you doing?"

Before Choïgou has time to answer, the butler announces the next course:

"Ural wild boar stew on a bed of quinoa."

Putin frowns:

"Is quinoa Ukrainian?"

"No, no. It's... neutral... Swiss. Well, it grows somewhere," stammers Choïgou

They ate in silence, then Putin resumed the conversation, chewing:

— And what about this story of Western weapons flooding in? Drones, missiles, tanks delivered like pizzas to the Ukrainians...

"Yes," replies Choïgou, "we even suspect the Finns of sending sauna kits to keep them warm."

After a red cabbage dessert, the butler serves Putin a chicken tartare, which he loves, and Choïgou a roast pork on a bed of mashed potatoes.

They enjoy these dishes without saying much before moving on to the final course:

"Napoleon revisited with golden caviar!" announces the butler.

Putin, sarcastically:

"Another tribute to a failed invader. How ironic!"

Choïgou, slightly drunk on kvass:

"Except that in the end, Napoleon ended up in exile... Like... um..."

Long silence. Putin stares at him. Choïgou realizes he has chosen a bad reference:

"I meant... Alexander the Great, of course."

— Alexander never fled, Putin points out, a little exasperated. He was loved. You are ruining my dinner. Tomorrow, you are going to the front. In civilian clothes, for a surprise inspection...

A brief silence, then the conversation gently shifts—or rather, veers—towards Zelensky, a subject that instantly gives Putin heartburn, despite the kvass and chicken tartare.

Dessert has just been cleared away. The butler bows in hushed silence and disappears like a ninja in white gloves. Putin puts down his spoon distractedly, frowning, as if he had just felt a suspicious draft in his armored lair.

Choïgou, his cheeks flushed with alcohol, blurts out candidly:

"Speaking of propaganda images... Have you seen that video of Zelensky in a khaki T-shirt playing the piano with his feet? It's been all over Western social media. A real viral hit. Incredible, isn't it?"

Putin stiffens:

"Zelensky!"

He articulates the name as if tasting expired yogurt.

Choïgou, oblivious to the tension, continues, laughing:

"And the other one, doing a sketch in English in a bunker decorated like a Starbucks... What a showman! Even the Americans are laughing at him."

Putin takes a small candied fruit and mashes it with his fork with surgical slowness:

"Sergei... We said no names of comedians at the table, didn't we?"

Choïgou realizes his blunder:

"Oh, of course, sorry... I meant... um... the leader of the Kiev regime. That's right. The little... um... commander in the T-shirt. We won't mention him.

"You're right. I don't want to see or hear him. Even his name gives me palpitations."

Choïgou continues, trying to lighten the mood:

"You have to admit, he's got style. You too could make videos that are more... um... modern. With a filter, some soft lighting... Maybe some background music. A patriotic techno song?"

"You want me to do TikTok, maybe?" Putin replies. "Sing 'Kalinka' with bombings in the background?"

"No, of course not... But imagine: you on a horse, shirtless, with dramatic subtitles. It would be a hit on Instagram."

Putin rolls his eyes:

"We're invading a country, and you want to put me on Instagram with a horse. I'm leading a military operation, not an advertising campaign for patriotic toothpaste."

An uncomfortable silence ensues, broken by the butler who discreetly returns with lemon balm tea. Putin takes a more cutting tone:

"I strictly forbid anyone to mention this Volodymyr. If I see his face making faces in a woman's sweatshirt again, I'll order a strike on the satellite antenna broadcasting this nonsense.

"Don't you even want to read a short excerpt from *The Times* where he's named 'Man of the Year'?"

"The next time you say that word," Putin replies, "I'll send you to Mariupol to perform in a play. Solo. And without curtains."

Dinner ends. Lemon balm tea steams gently in porcelain cups. Sergei Choïgou, his face slightly relaxed by the sweet aroma of poppy seed pastries, suddenly sits up straight with a flash of inspiration in his eyes and a fair amount of alcohol in his blood.

In an almost childlike tone, as if suggesting a game of Monopoly, he declares:

"What if—and I mean if!—we took Zelensky on as... an advisor? For communications, I mean. Not for military strategy, of course. Just to give our videos a little pep. He knows how to talk to young people. TikTok, YouTube... He works miracles with four words and three days' stubble!"

Putin, completely motionless, his gaze fixed, his pupils contracted, clings to the table:

"What did you say?"

Choïgou, laughing nervously:

"It was a joke, okay! Just an idea, like that... Brainstorming! Zelensky, advisor to the Tsar, can you imagine? Ha ha!"

Putin slowly stands up, loosening his belt with disturbing calm:

"Sergei... You have just uttered the only combination of words that, according to national defense doctrine, warrants an immediate 'spinal reflex' response."

Choïgou, worried, half stands up:

"I mean, we could just take him on as a ghost consultant... Not in the Kremlin, mind you, but in a dacha. A very remote dacha. With bars. And limited Wi-Fi..."

Too late!!! In a flash, with astonishing speed for a man who has consumed three starters, two main courses, an imperial charlotte, and half a cup of herbal tea, Vladimir Vladimirovich lunges at Sergei. He grabs him, pivots on one foot like a Soviet ballet dancer, and in a movement worthy of the official manual of the International Judo Federation, he sends him to the mat, between a Louis XIV sideboard and the embroidered portrait of Catherine II.

Boom! Choïgou lay there, dazed.

Putin calmly adjusts his jacket:

"That's what you get when you confuse black humor with cultural betrayal. I'm a judo champion, not a circus clown."

He sits down, sweeps under his plate, and addresses his butler:

"Bring a compress... and remove the sharp cutlery. Sergei is clearly suicidal tonight."

"I'll make a note: never mention that name, or suggest comedy shows with him..." concludes Choïgou with a groan.

Putin calms down:

— Wise decision. And tomorrow, you will repeat a hundred times: "I will never hire a Ukrainian as a communications advisor, even if he can play the piano with his toes."

In the living room of Novo-Ogaryovo, the clock strikes two ominous chimes in the dim light of a starless night. It is 2 a.m. Silence reigns, disturbed only by the distant creaking of an antique

piece of furniture and the discreet humming of the anti-spy generator.

Choïgou, still a little sore from his free judo lesson, has returned to sit opposite Putin. A bottle of 20-year-old vodka — "special edition *Return of Crimea*" — sits in the center of the coffee table. Their two glasses are filled.

Putin, looking serious:

"Sergei... You're an idiot. But a loyal idiot."

Choïgou, placing a hand on his bruised stomach:

"And you, you're a genius. But a genius who hurts my ribs."

They look at each other. A long silence, then, like two old Russian bears resigned to hibernating in the same cave, they raise their glasses and toast solemnly in unison:

"Za, Motherland!"

"For the motherland, lies, and victory!"

They drink in one gulp, shake their heads and grimace, then, in a synchronized gesture as absurd as it is moving, they throw their empty glasses against the wall. The crystal shatters like the illusions of peace in the Donbass.

Silence. Then Putin suddenly intones:

"Arise! The wretched of the earth!"

Choïgou follows in a gravelly voice:

"Arise! Starving workers!"

Their song rises, tremulous but fervent, echoing off the walls of the Novo-Ogaryovo salons. They rise, arm in arm, swaying slightly—is it emotion or vodka?—and leave the room singing the Internationale like two young revolutionaries.

They quit the salon, leaving the stoic butler to mop up the broken glass, muttering:

"Another evening that didn't end too badly..."

No sooner has Putin fallen asleep than he feels a very high fever and urgently calls his personal physician, Dr. Yvan Smirnov. Alerted at precisely 3:15 a.m., the latter arrives running, his medical bag unzipped, his stethoscope beating against his chest like a frantic metronome.

Cold sweat beaded on the Tsar's forehead. His face was crimson, his sheets soaked, and his teeth chattered like castanets. He tossed and turned, muttering a string of incoherent words: "Zelensky... *TikTok... Saint Stalin...*"

Dr. Smirnov conducts a quick examination with the help of the butler:

"Temperature?"

The butler, in a grave voice:

"Forty-two point three degrees Fahrenheit."

Smirnov:

"So six degrees Celsius. Really?"

— No, wait... I made a mistake. It's Celsius.

Smirnov turned pale:

— My God. This is beyond Siberian bear mode. He's entering a phase of mental fusion.

Let us try compresses, Siberian root decoction, massage with elk fat ! but nothing works.

For several hours, Putin remains overcome by fever and stays in a semi-conscious state, during which he raves. Something strange is happening in his head. His gaze suggests that he is struggling between mystical hallucinations and grotesque visions.

Putin, still half asleep, tries to get up. A tear rolls down his cheek. He sees it turn into a snowflake that slowly settles on the floor. He takes a deep breath, then falls back asleep. The curtains flutter in the breeze. A soft light enters through the window.

Dr. Smirnov has fallen asleep in his chair.

Putin finally opens his eyes and exclaims:

"I'm alive! I'm alive!"

He gets up, staggers, looks at himself in the mirror. Something in him has changed. His gaze is no longer the same. He feels different. Human. Almost gentle. A few stray strands of hair escape from his head and fall down onto his forehead, as if they want to participate in his mental agitation. His heart is beating strangely fast—a little too fast for someone who needs to rest.

Dr. Smirnov, who has slept no more than his patient, wakes with a start, takes his pulse, and administers a sedative to calm his delirium.

Suspecting a return of Covid, he conducts tests. But the results conclude: no Covid in sight. The next day, the temperature rises another notch, determined to defy the thermometer. More blood tests, more samples, but the Kremlin laboratories find no trace of any known virus. Science is baffled.

At the end of the following night, at 5 a.m., everything accelerates: an urgent message is sent to Patrushev, the secretary of the Russian Security Council, and to Choïgou:

"Putin has just fallen into a deep coma!"

Immediately, Nikolai Patrushev summoned the members of the Security Council and the main military leaders. They all gathered in the Kremlin's remote surveillance room, a discreet place where they could observe everything that was happening in Novo-Ogaryovo without leaving their seats.

At 8:30 a.m., there was a sudden change on the screens. Putin was fidgeting, grumbling, and coming out of his coma as if he had just finished a long nap. Still feverish, he begins to rave even more, spouting nonsensical sentences, much to the dismay of

those watching him from a distance. They are left speechless, wondering if they themselves are dreaming.

Choïgou jumps into the first available vehicle to rush back to his friend. He doesn't know if he will find a head of state, a convalescing patient... or an improvised prophet in the midst of inner enlightenment.

On the screens, everyone sees Putin stand up. And strangely, for the first time in twenty years, he is seen smiling. Not only is he smiling, but he wants to kiss Smirnov, his doctor, and Sergei, who has just arrived in his room, declaring very clearly:

"I love you."

Putin is now standing and zigzagging toward the window. He watches the sunrise with an ecstatic expression, his arms open as if waiting for a dove or a drone of peace. He breathes deeply, his eyes shining. He looks... happy.

On the CCTV screens, they hear him say aloud, with emotion:
"How beautiful! The world is so beautiful... Even this sinister forest full of cameras moves me!"

He is wide awake and calls out:

"Sergei? Where are you, Sergei?"

Choïgou walks toward Putin. His arm is in a sling after the judo throw the day before yesterday.

"I'm here, Vlad. I bring you good news about the progress of our armies in the region of..."

Putin interrupts him, throwing himself at him to kiss him on both cheeks.

"Sergei! My Sergei! Forgive me! I mistreated you, brutalized you, humiliated you, and yet you're still here, my dear stuffed cabbage that I love!"

Choïgou, stunned and stammering, doesn't know how to respond:

"Um... Thank you, um... Vlad... um... My dear Vlad."

Putin hugs him like a cuddly panda and whispers in his ear:

"I love you, Sergei. Yes, I love you. And you're not the only one. I also love Dmitri, and Nadia, and even that journalist we made disappear by mistake. I love them all!"

Feeling more steady on his feet, he leaves the room, barefoot, wearing only his robe emblazoned with the double-headed eagle. In the hallway where he ventures, the security guards freeze. Putin hugs them one by one:

"You, with your earpiece. Are you listening to everything? Well, listen to this: I respect you. And you, the mustachioed guard—I saw you crying during the national anthem. Feelings are beautiful! Don't repress them anymore!"

He then rushes to the kitchen. He kisses the cook on the forehead:

"Your borscht soup is a poem! An ode to peace! A weapon of mass recovery for the sick!"

His companions contemplate a new, peaceful, dreamy Putin, panicking at the idea that he has become strangely tender and affectionate. This scene, half divine redemption, half bittersweet kindness of a tyrant transformed into a joyful and benevolent leader, seems strange to them, as if a new dawn were about to break over Russia.

In the Kremlin monitoring room that follows everything that happens in Novo Ogaryovo, Nikolai Patrushev, his colleagues, and several generals listen and watch, devastated by what is happening there.

Dr. Smirnov confirms that the Tsar has come out of his coma but seems to be possessed by a virus that has turned him into an uncontrollable zombie.

Patrouchev decides to convene a meeting of the Security Council and the regime's highest dignitaries within the hour. Those who arrive are disheveled, with dark circles under their eyes and trembling cups of tea in their hands, having watched the images of what is happening in Novo-Ogaryovo since dawn.

On the giant screen that has just been installed in the Council chamber, unthinkable images flash by: Putin humming Lennon's *Imagine*, petting a guard dog, asking to connect via videoconference with Ursula von der Leyen to offer her a weekend in Sochi.

The Minister of the Interior is pale:

"He's gone mad. He said 'no more missiles, only hugs!'"

The head of the FSB is also horrified:

"This isn't madness. It's worse: it's like an outburst of romantic tenderness. He also said he wants to rejoin the United Nations and the European Union to be in union with all of humanity!"

Nadia, secretly moved, responds:

"Maybe this is a chance for Russia to evolve, no?"

All the other participants, panicked, cry out in unison:

"Shut up, Nadia!"

General Petrov bangs his fist on the table:

"We have to do something! We can't let the world believe that he has become harmless!"

The participants quickly agree to ask Patrushev to take urgent measures. Not against the war, but against the contagion of presidential benevolence.

A flood of decisions descends on Novo-Ogaryovo like a raging hurricane. The FSB is ordered to cut off all communications between Novo-Ogaryovo and the outside world. Telephones, messaging services, antennas, even carrier pigeons are put on forced leave. Only "official" channels and secret networks—those that officially do not exist—are allowed to remain active. Everything that leaves Novo-Ogaryovo must be scrutinized: emails, phone calls, and even hallway conversations. The watchword is clear: zero leaks, even well-intentioned ones.

Visits are now limited to a very small circle: a few ministers, the General Staff, and two or three hand-picked loyalists. Everyone must sign a solemn pledge of silence. No more telling your mother-in-law that the Tsar smiles, or that he talks about friendship with Ukraine: this is now classified information.

The estate's employees—doctors, cooks, maids—are kept under lock. Their phones are confiscated, their conversations monitored, and they are forbidden from leaving the premises until further notice. They are made to sign oaths of secrecy so strict that they tremble. Some fear being sent on an "extended vacation" to Siberia if they talk too much. Others joke in hushed tones: "Maybe

they'll end up lobotomizing us to make sure we forget everything." Few dare to laugh at this rush.

Within a few hours, all these measures are adopted. Patrushev is confirmed in his role as interim conductor of the Kremlin, guarantor of the smooth running of the state, until the Tsar has returned to normal. As for diplomatic contacts, it is up to Lavrov to maintain them, while never uttering the word "benevolence" in front of a microphone.

This meeting surreptitiously reveals a rift in the state apparatus between two teams, like separating those who like tea from those who prefer coffee.

On one side are a few leaders who are willing to accept a new way of behaving by adopting a softer, less intransigent tone in their governance. Nadia and several of the Tsar's long-time friends are among them, without clearly stating their opinions in case Putin—the old version—returns to effectively lead the state.

On the other side are the hawks: those who want to see the return of the old Putin, the one with clenched fists and strong speeches: like Medvedev, the leaders of the FSB and part of the General Staff, who hope that the old compass will be back very soon. One of the ministers loyal to the new Putin declares in a low voice as he left the meeting:

"Novo-Ogaryovo is going to become a fortress of silence. Is that really necessary when our Tsar has simply become sensitive and benevolent? The bureaucratic machine is truly appalling..."

And Nadia adds:

"I believe, like you, that the Tsar just wants peace..."

The head of the FSB, who had heard her, replied aggressively, with a fiery look in his eyes:

"And we, we want the world to continue to be afraid!"

As the transitional government is being set up and isolation and surveillance measures are beginning to be implemented, a medical committee is looking into the illness that has just turned Putin into a gentle surrealist poet.

Dr. Smirnov, in his immaculate white coat and with a serious expression, awaits the results of the battery of tests he has ordered: blood, cells, saliva... the only thing missing to complete the collection is nose hair. The goal: to identify this damn virus that had the audacity to infect the Tsar.

The patient is questioned, but he remains as confused as a diner faced with a menu in Chinese. His schedule, his contacts, and what he has eaten in the previous days are examined. It is then that the chef, usually more focused on his sauce than on the outside world, suddenly raises his head, his eyes wide as two fried eggs:

"Doctor, I remember something. A few days ago, the owner of the chicken farm where I get my supplies came to deliver a capon so plump it could have been served at Catherine II's table, and, as a bonus, a live hen to repopulate His Highness's personal chicken coop." He pauses, adjusts his chef's hat as if to protect himself from a storm of reproaches, then adds in a guilty voice:

"The man was sweating like a samovar left on the stove and complaining of terrible migraines. And it was with this capon that I prepared the chicken tartare served to our beloved Tsar, who is the only one here who loves it.

A *poultry tartare*, raw of course—how imprudent! No wonder things turned sour.

Tests confirm these suspicions: the virus definitely originated at this farm. The employee who made the delivery had a fever and soon after fell into a coma lasting several hours; some of his colleagues followed the same path to the arms of Morpheus and the infectious diseases department of the local hospital. More than fifteen people were infected and fell ill.

Upon learning this, the Minister of Health wastes no time: he immediately bans the sale of poultry from the suspect farm and sends a few specimens of these brave chickens to military laboratories for analysis.

The news had barely sunk in when the generals are already up in arms:

"Slaughter all the chickens in the Moscow region! And immediately ban the sale of all poultry from that region!"

Immediately, chaos ensues in the farmyards. Small farmers tear their hair out and scream scandal, consumers lament in front of their empty refrigerators, and tofu merchants rub their hands together. But nothing helps: the order is as inflexible as a decree carved in stone.

Meanwhile, Putin, informed by his personal physician of the probable origin of his illness, realizes with a grave expression that he may have shared his dinner that evening with a gourmet virus.

"There's no need to panic," he stammers, visibly amused by all the commotion. "That chicken tartare was excellent, and this virus isn't really harmful. It just makes you want to kiss everyone you meet and say nice things to them. Nothing serious, in short."

"But Vladimir, that's the problem," retorts Ivan, pale as a sheet. "We know nothing about this virus except that it causes very strange behavioral changes."

Shortly afterwards, the news break: all the chickens in the presidential henhouse in Novo-Ogaryovo had died, not from fear or boredom by listening the official speeches, but from an unknown virus. The investigation then takes on the appearance of a detective story: suspect No. 1: the chicken; murder weapon: a contaminated chicken thigh and wing.

The first epidemiological data is not long in coming. A young biologist, with a suspiciously perfect hairstyle for someone who is supposed to spend her days in a lab, enters the residence, brandishing a bright red report.

"So?" asks Yvan. "What is this virus?"

"This virus is moderately contagious, but how can I put it... it has some unusual effects!"

"We noticed that! No need to tell us."

"Yes, the patients all go into a coma, but when they come out of it, they're overwhelmed with tenderness and kindness. They kiss the nurses, hug them, hand out coins with generosity, and start blessing the caregivers. A former mobster even offered his Rolex to the orderly who woke him up. A former mobster even offered his Rolex to the orderly who woke him up."

"Dangerous lunatics!" Yvan exclaims. "Or fanatics!"

Putin, on the other hand, is overjoyed. He applauds, stands up again, his eyes shining.

"They're wonderful! Bring them here! I want to congratulate them myself, hug them, and give them gifts, open a savings account for them if they want!"

He turns to the biologist, smiling:

"You too, come into my arms! I love you! Tell me what you want, I'll give it to you! An office at the ministry? A bear? A dacha in Crimea?"

Ivan, horrified, whispers to his secretary:

"He's lost his mind. This virus is worse than laudanum. At this rate, our Vladimir is going to turn the sick into kissing machines, shower the whole world with compliments while wishing for universal peace, and ask the Ukrainians for forgiveness by sending them scarves for the coming winter without electricity."

The epidemic has begun well before the Tsar fell ill. But until then, it had been confined to the airport district, an area known for its chronic traffic jams and questionable hygiene. It spread slowly without attracting much attention. But cases are now reaching the very heart of the capital, like a virus that has read *The Art of War* but prefers *The Alchemist*².

At Moscow's main hospital, patients are beginning to flood in with very high fevers, then fall into a coma for three or four hours—just long enough for a prolonged nap—before coming out enlightened, smiling from ear to ear, their eyes sparkling as if they had just returned from an intensive course in happiness.

The most disturbing thing is their irresistible urge to hug everyone indiscriminately: nurses, maintenance workers, security guards... and even hot drink vending machines. They are politely advised to isolate themselves for a few days as a health precaution. But they ignore the advice. Convinced that a hug is better than quarantine, they prefer to spread the infection rather than stay locked up.

Today, of course, the health authorities are sounding the alarm—but with a little plush bell, because everyone seems too happy to panic. The investigation reveals a shocking truth: these former comatose patients are all kind and nice when they come out of their comas, after sometimes experiencing severe delirium. Waves of altruism are reported in the infected neighborhoods.

² One presents concrete ways to move forward to defeat the adversary, and the other presents internal strategies to move forward quietly, as in a waking dream.

Former neighbors, who had not spoken to each other since a dark story involving a drill lent long ago and never returned, embrace each other. Separated couples reconcile. Rebellious teenagers offer flowers to their teachers. One grandmother even gave her last jar of jam to a pizza delivery man.

Kindness is spreading slowly but surely, with effects that closely resemble what the sovereign himself has been experiencing since his own infection. Whereas he had previously been as warm as a freezer, he is now transformed. He sends messages of thanks to his ministers, compliments the waitresses at Novo-Ogaryovo on the quality of their coffee, and recently offered his bodyguard a raise and extra vacation time.

The Minister of the Interior, who is discovering the new wind that this virus is blowing through the region, also makes some surprising observations, which he reports to the Tsar:

"Vladimir, I have good news! Two of our police officers were thanked and kissed by residents during a routine ID check."

"Kissed?" exclaimed Putin, his eyes moist. "But that's wonderful!"

"Yes, and elsewhere, officers have had flowers thrown at them from balconies. A response team was even applauded by young people out jogging."

The sovereign raised his arms to the sky as if he had just won Eurovision.

"It's clear. This virus is a blessing!"

Yvan, the professor of medicine, remains cautious. He raises his eyebrows with the look of a man who has been asked to diagnose an epidemic of love with a broken stethoscope.

"In the absence of serious analysis," he says, "there is no proof that this virus is harmless. People still have fevers, migraines, and some sing Beatles songs without warning."

All of this, of course, remains strictly confidential. The FSB is ensuring that nothing leaves Novo-Ogaryovo. The head of state's illness is classified as "top secret: too embarrassing—so say

nothing." Only a few rumors are circulating, spread by opponents who were informed by a nurse. Without even being able to verify this news, they are distributing leaflets, posters, and tweets from Moscow like poisoned candy.

"The sovereign is mad," they claim. He sent chocolates and apologies to those he had dismissed and said, "I understand you" to those whose parents had been exiled to Siberia. He even smiled at a Ukrainian baby who was shown on television!

The official media are not talking about it. The last thing the Russian people are willing to believe is that their supreme leader is kinder and more sympathetic. While the evening newspapers continue to talk *about "offensive tactics and victories in Ukraine,"* Putin is quietly arranging to send scarves to the Finnish president, who has the flu, out of pure compassion. The virus may not have won the war, but it is winning hearts and minds. And for the generals, that is much more dangerous.

As soon as they learnt of the effects of this virus, several Moscow psychiatrists gather in a discreet room at the Ministry of Health. One of these medical luminaries, famous for writing an essay on "*post-Soviet patriotic psychosis*," tries to reassure his colleagues:

"It's just a phase, a classic post-traumatic reaction: coma, light at the end of the tunnel, and presto! They come back as nice as Boy Scouts on a pilgrimage. It will pass, I guarantee it!"

But to their great surprise, it doesn't pass. The benevolent behavior persists, takes root, spreads. People start talking about it in the streets as the spontaneous kissing syndrome. People who used to be grumpy start handing out compliments like election flyers:

"Nice mustache, buddy!" or "Your dog is wonderful, ma'am!" or even "I want to repaint my life with the colors of your smile!"

In the staff cafeteria of the presidential palace, conversations take a surprising turn:

"Did you hear what happened to the patients on the third floor of the central hospital?" asks a nursing assistant, his mouth full of borscht.

"You bet! One of them came back to tip the nurse who messed up his IV."

— Another wrote a love letter to his ex-wife... and his mother-in-law.

— One even called the tax office to thank them for their work!

The team's philosopher—nicknamed Kontine, because he spends more time philosophizing than disinfecting—declares solemnly:

"It restores faith in humanity. A virus that makes people kind may be our species' last chance."

Not everyone shares this enthusiasm. Virologists, the real ones, those who haven't succumbed to therapeutic poetry, remain concerned. Professor Yvan, his nose buried in his results, is one of them:

"Persistent fevers, headaches, uncontrollable urges of generosity. It's probably a neurochemical imbalance because once these patients come out of their comas, they don't just kiss their caregivers: they're overflowing with suspicious kindness!"

In the corridors of Novo-Ogaryovo, where Putin is still confined, he can be heard declaring, with open arms, to the cleaning ladies who take care of him:

"Come here so I can give you a hug! I owe you everything: my ironed shirt, my neatly arranged slippers, my inner peace..."

Embarrassed and worried, Patrushev remains in regular contact with Professor Yvan:

"We won't be able to hide our Tsar's sweet madness for much longer. If he continues to bless green plants and make declarations of love to waitresses and statues, everyone will realize that he no longer governs anything, not even his libido. We'll have to isolate him."

In the Moscow neighborhoods where the epidemic is spreading, the population is divided between those who have come out of their comas and fallen in love with the world, always ready to help an old lady cross the street or sing Michel Sardou songs in building lobbies, and who see the virus as a gift from heaven, and the healthy, uninfected, who are suspicious, who see the former as walking "hugs-³" bombs, who avoid them in the street, and who even throw gloves at them to keep them away.

³ Hugs: hugs, cuddles

A plan for mandatory confinement for those infected triggers a wave of protests.

"Why isolate us? We're just happy!" protests a forty-something woman, a former surly civil servant who now volunteers at an orphanage. "Let us love life and live in peace!"

The real tipping point, the one that no one, infected or not, appreciated, came with the decision to slaughter all the chickens on farms in the Moscow region. A health measure, certainly, but one that was seen as a betrayal by a section of the population addicted to chicken broth. Small farmers cried scandal. Some chained themselves to their poultry. A group of urban poets recite haikus to the doomed chickens:

*O gallinaceous bird,
You who were the bearer of love,
Now you are game!*

In the corridors of power, opinions differ: the virus has not killed, but it has changed behavior. A political advisor, a member of the FSB, whispers in the ear of the Secretary of the Security Council:

"We'll have to choose. Either we treat this epidemic, or we let it win. The problem is clear because people have never been so kind and peaceful. This is great for some, but terrifying for others!"

General Kravchenko, his eyes wide, is one of the latter. He proclaims indignantly:

"Do you know that he ordered the ballistic missiles to be repainted with rainbow-colored messages of peace? We can't fire such missiles at another country! The war is lost before it even begins."

The head of the FSB suggests to Patrushev that they organize a media counterattack. Not a single image or message mentioning the Tsar should be allowed to leak out of Novo-Ogaryovo. They must make people believe that he is meditating. Or better yet, that he is on a spiritual retreat with his friend Patriarch Kirill.

Sergei Choïgou looks pensive:

"What if he never comes to his senses? What if he remains gentle, kind, loving? What do we do then?"

With a sly look, Nadia suggests a solution:

"In that case, we do as in the great Soviet traditions: we stage a major national illness that has worn him out. He is resting. He is meditating. He is thinking very hard about Russia. And we, in the meantime, are managing.

General Petrov timidly raises his hand:

"What if he became popular as a 'Peace & Love' figure? People like leaders who pamper them these days..."

Medvedev cuts him off:

"Russians like discipline, power, bears, tanks, and nuclear weapons, not declarations of love and Joe Dassin songs! The world must never know what is happening here."

A few hours later, in the Kremlin crisis room, Nadia returns, looking quite distraught:

— I've just been told that he wrote a handwritten letter to Zelensky. With little hearts instead of dots on the "i"s! An FSB agent intercepted it before it left Novo-Ogaryovo, but it was a close call!

A shiver runs through the room. An elderly colonel in charge of the mail crosses herself, while the generals and ministers who have not been infected renew their confidence in Patrushev to lead the country until Putin recovers or a successor is appointed.

Faced with the difficulty of constantly monitoring Putin from a distance, Patrushev's team and the FSB agree to organize Putin's return to the Kremlin without further delay, where he will be confined to a special wing where he will be better isolated and can be monitored more easily.

The ruler, who remains as physically strong as a Siberian bear fed on blueberries and patriotism, is happy to return to Moscow where, he says, he will be able to "*better feel the pulse of the country*" — in other words, check that the heart of the people is still beating for him... and at the right pace!

For this return trip, he invites Mikhail Mishustin, whom he promoted a few months earlier to the presidency of the Russian Federation, into his armored limousine.

The departure from Novo-Ogaryovo is a grand affair: flashing lights, motorcyclists riding with the discipline of a Bolshoi ballet, and sirens blaring like an opera choir. Officially, it's just a return trip to Moscow. But it feels more like a war mission against traffic jams. Because crossing Moscow is no longer a Sunday stroll. The city now spreads out like pancake batter that has been poured too generously onto the pan: it spills over in all directions. Prosperity, demographics, and an unbridled love of SUVs have caused cars to sprout like mushrooms after rain, except that the roads haven't grown an inch. The result is a symphony of honking horns, muffled curses, and drivers on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

To prevent traffic jams or ill-intentioned individuals from spoiling the party, the presidential security detail simply closes off traffic along the entire route. Moscow comes to a standstill, frozen like a people worshipping their god. The motorcade can then speed along in a parade of identical limousines, lined up like chrome matryoshka dolls. No one knows which car the Tsar is in, making each journey a giant guessing game for curious onlookers

who want to take photos of their idol. Sometimes, a lookalike even takes a seat in the first car, just to throw people off the scent and keep the paparazzi busy.

In one of these cars, more luxurious than a Rolls-Royce Phantom and almost as expensive as an oligarch's yacht, Dr. Yvan, sitting in the front, discreetly watches over his patient, while in the back, Putin, in a radiant mood, addresses his colleague Mikhail Mishustin, who conscientiously assumes the presidency of the government:

"Mikhail, my dear Mikhail! I have never told you enough how much I love and admire you. Forgive me for this negligence! Thanks to you, our tax revenues are overflowing like the Volga in spring. You have reduced corruption, brought our accounts under control, and modernized the tax system without scaring off the rich. It's a remarkable achievement!"

Mikhail, moved, stammers something about teamwork, but the Tsar, infected by the virus of benevolence, continues in a tone as sweet as sugared herbal tea:

"Thanks to you, we have done a lot for economic actors, but the people are still waiting. Can you make the fight against poverty a priority? It's not as exciting as cozying up to big business, but it's necessary. Let's redistribute, support families, and create happy taxpayers!"

Michoustine nods:

"It will be done, Your Excellency. You can count on me!"

The limousine glides through a strangely peaceful city. Moscow exudes serenity—a miracle orchestrated by the Tsar's will. The atmosphere is so calm that one could almost forget that a few hundred kilometers away, the war is not quite over yet. But for now, in the hushed bubble of his limousine, the sovereign contemplates Moscow with the satisfied air of a father looking at his child, neatly combed for the class photo.

"What a beautiful capital city!" he murmurs, feeling tender toward himself.

Yvan, his doctor, sitting in the front seat, listens, observes, and carefully notes: "*Persistent symptoms of acute benevolence. Stable progress. No treatment necessary at this time.*"

This tranquillity in the capital comes at a price: a forest of cameras scans every sidewalk, guards are on duty every thirty meters, and there are more police officers than pigeons in Red Square. You can be arrested at any moment, sometimes for sneezing in the wrong direction—but then again, why worry? As long as you obey, everything is fine. Admittedly, there was a day when a drone dropped a bomb on a building in the business district, but the event disappeared from collective memory faster than a candidate's promise after an election.

What does trouble people's minds, however, are the stories coming back from the front and the news of loved ones arrested for daring to think differently. Prisons are overflowing, forced exile is becoming fashionable, and arbitrary arrests are becoming so commonplace that they are part of the national routine. Everyone knows this, but most prefer to remain silent—because here, as we all understand, it is better to bite your tongue than risk losing your freedom... or your teeth.

At the entrance to the Kremlin, the guards, stiff in their rigid uniforms, present arms with an almost comical seriousness. Putin, looking grave—or at least as grave as a man recently infected with an unknown virus can look—hurries into his office with Mishustin and his doctor, like B-movie spies.

On his desk is a note from a Moscow medical professor, hastily scribbled by a secretary who clearly did not study classical literature. The message is very clear, however: the epidemic is spreading. New cases are appearing, mainly in the large chicken farming district, which seems to be the source of the outbreak.

Putin frowns, worried, and asks Yvan:

"So, what do we know about this virus? Have our labs found anything, or are they still chasing after their test tubes?"

"They're waiting for more samples," his doctor replies. "They're now working with the Vektor Institute, our specialized virology center. Apparently, it's a stubborn and fairly contagious virus, but above all... confusing. The Institute recommends isolation."

"Isolation? You want me to lock myself up in a dacha again with my Rambo DVDs and my dumbbells?"

Putin is isolated in comfortable quarters but remains under close surveillance. He is waiting for a visit from his friend, Defense Minister Sergei Choïgou, who has been given permission to come and see him wearing protective medical equipment.

Choïgou enters the office looking strange. Something is wrong with his expression. He has changed. He smiles a real, sincere smile, with the corners of his mouth turning up effortlessly, not the administrative grimace he usually reserves for cameras or internal enemies. Worse still, he takes a small jar of jam out of his bag.

"Hello, Vladimir!" he says in a warm voice. "I hope you're feeling better. I brought you some blackcurrant jelly. It's homemade, by my wife. She says it softens the spirit."

Putin doesn't respond right away. He just stares at him like he's looking at an unpinned grenade. Then, slowly, he whispers:

"What have you done, Choïgou? You're not the same person anymore!"

"But I am!" replies Choïgou, sitting down obediently. "It's just... let's say I had a revelation. I caught the flu with a very high fever a week ago. It kept me bedridden, but I pulled through, even though I can hardly remember anything. I was far from here and lost consciousness for over three hours. Since then, I haven't felt any desire to invade anyone.

— You didn't have any visions? Hallucinations?

"Oh yes! I saw bison dancing the polka in my garden. But above all, I understood. Violence, Vlad, is outdated. This world needs love, solidarity, diplomacy..."

"Are you telling me that we're going to resolve our differences with NATO through cuddles?" Putin smiled, his eyes half-closed like a kitten waking up.

"Not cuddles, no, but maybe... a summit on global happiness? I've already designed a logo. It has a rainbow and a smiling bear."

Putin slowly gets up. He walks around the office. He approaches Choïgou, looks him over from head to toe, and pinches his cheek lightly.

"Did you pick mushrooms in Siberia or something?"

"Just porcini mushrooms. But they were excellent. I brought some for you too!"

He pulls a small bag from the bottom of his bag. At that precise moment, an FSB agent stationed behind the door restrains himself from triggering a chemical alert.

"Sergei," Putin says in a serious tone, "do you realize that you are becoming a threat to national security? Do you realize that?"

"A threat to peace! You mean."

He laughs and continues enthusiastically:

"Yes, a threat to peace! Imagine: no more tanks, no more missiles, no more sanctions. Just fruitful cooperation and cultural exchanges!"

"My dear minister," Putin said, rubbing his chin, "I'm keeping you close to me for a while to meditate and prepare for the future. But be careful, we are being watched by people who disagree with us."

"Disagree with what?"

"Disagree with doing peaceful things... like making jam in jars!"

What Russian intelligence services initially thought was food poisoning—"too much compote, not enough dictatorship"—turned into an uncontrollable phenomenon. The virus, unofficially nicknamed "The Kiss Syndrome," is spreading in the upper echelons of the state. A deputy foreign minister was caught singing Aznavour songs in an elevator. Two colonels in the National Guard requested permission to repaint their tanks in pastel khaki to soften the army's image. And a former prison director publicly apologized to all his former inmates on his YouTube channel, his eyes filled with tears and sincere regret.

Putin, aware of these behaviors, observes this ideological shift with the same expression as a lion tamer discovering that his lions have suddenly become vegetarians. He consults his best scientists, the most competent researchers. They are unanimous: what is happening is spontaneous, inexplicable, incurable. This virus is affecting more and more government officials. And the higher up the hierarchy, the clearer and more surprising its manifestations and effects are.

In the streets and squares of Moscow, some residents who have come out of comas propose putting up posters reading: "*Borscht for Peace!*" or "*Let's kiss our neighbors, not tanks!*" or "*Slava Druzhiba!*" (Glory to friendship!)

The FSB is trying to cover up this disorder to prevent a catastrophe that would stop the war. But the virus continues to cause concern as the epidemic progresses silently and without pause.

Since becoming infected with the virus, Putin has been beaming like a dandelion in April. Convinced that he is everyone's friend, even those who cordially detest him, he feels ready to spread kindness, love, and kisses like candy. He flits happily around the Kremlin apartment assigned to him, almost forgetting that outside, many of his subjects fear falling into a coma and want to avoid the virus at all costs, just as one would avoid one's mother-in-law on a Sunday afternoon.

However, some members of his Council point out to him that not everything in Moscow is as calm as he might think. So he asks to go and meet his people in person to sound them out. He is so friendly and gentle in the beautiful apartment that serves as his prison that his guards make his life easier and pass on his request. Patrushev discusses it with the FSB officials:

"If we take sufficient precautions," they replied, "it's not a bad idea. It will reassure the population, who don't know that power has changed hands. And it will silence the rumors spread by conspirators who want to overthrow you by taking advantage of the discontent caused by the slaughter of chickens."

To allow him to go out without making any untimely statements, the FSB imposes a stratagem worthy of the Three Stooges. They send a lookalike ahead of him, accompanied by a dog similar to his own, because everyone knows that a leader with a dog seems more human. And he, disguised as an ordinary man and watched over by a guard tasked with preventing any mishaps, will follow at a distance, listening to the chatter of the babushkas. This will

allow him to hear what people are saying about him while letting Muscovites believe that he is not ill and that he is still ruling the country and Russia's military operations with a masterful hand.

Without further ado, this outing is organized for him.

An unmarked Lada picks him up and speeds off toward the northern suburbs of Moscow. It is followed by an official car carrying his double and a dog. Both cars arrive at the largest food market in the Moscow suburbs. There, amid the smells of vegetables, fish, and illegal cheese imported from France and elsewhere, in front of stalls selling half-crushed blackberries, a colorful crowd gathers, poor people or stingy grandmothers, professional negotiators, bargain hunters, and children dragging their mothers to the syrup and jam stalls.

Putin, made up by a professional makeup artist, lets his doppelganger enter before him, surrounded by a squad of police officers who have been instructed to let the people approach him, but not too closely. The lookalike, faithful to his mission, leads the way with a borrowed dog that is an exact replica of the presidential pooch, while Putin remains discreetly at a distance. No sooner has the lookalike passed through the market entrance than a kid cries out:

"Mom! It's Putin! And it's his dog lifting its leg on your stall!"

"No, come on," replied the mother, "that's not possible! Oh, yes, it is! It's definitely him! We often see his face on TV."

The market is in an uproar: children, grandmothers, salami vendors—everyone is crowding around the fake Tsar. He moves forward through the crowd, which is being kept at a distance by the police. Believing himself to be well cast in his role, he begins to smile and even gives a small watch to one of the women who reaches out her hand to him:

"I don't have anything else on me, dear lady. Take it, it's all I have."

In less than two minutes, the other women turn into hungry hyenas:

"Give us a watch too!" shouts one of them.

"You must have plenty more, Mr. President!" adds the one who thinks she has recognized him.

The lookalike's gesture was sincere, but unfortunate. This clumsiness triggers a brawl over a worthless piece of Swiss metal. While the saleswomen grappled with each other, the lookalike returned, protected by the police. The police, zealous as a disciplinary commando, dispersed the crowd with such brutality that even Vladimir, hidden under his fake mustache and tucked away behind a pyramid of beets at the other end of the aisle, felt sick to his stomach.

"Well," he sighs. "These people have no shortage of energy or desire to be able to have the time on their wrists!"

He lets his double leave while he, with his fake nose, continues his exploration like Philby or James Bond on a secret mission. He slips between the stalls, passes a vendor selling dusty vegetables, listens intently to what is being said, then stops in front of an old peasant woman selling onions and leeks, in front of which she has placed a portrait of her son, a war hero who died in combat, missing an eye and part of his cheek. Putin, in a benevolent mood, attempts a consoling remark:

"You must be proud to have given a son to the motherland!"

The response is immediate: she grabs a leek and brandishes it like a blunt weapon. The Tsar recoils, overwhelmed by such raw pain. He almost forgets that the war is still going on. A few meters away, another vendor displays a photo of her husband, completely transformed into a post-traumatic Picasso with a disfigured face and an atrophied arm.

Displaying such photos is strictly prohibited by the authorities. Putin's aide alerts the police. Batons drawn, police officers arrive, confiscate the portraits, and attempt to take them away. Other saleswomen with their hair tied up in buns come to defend their colleagues. They resist and hit the police with bundles of carrots and celery, sparking the beginning of a riot. Putin, shaken by the violence, retreats and goes back to his Lada.

He had dreamed of warm words and a peaceful, benevolent walkabout. He did get a walkabout, but it was one marked by guerrilla warfare, rebellion, and pain. And for the first time since becoming President of Russia, he thinks that ruling through fear is probably not the best way to govern. He returns to the Kremlin, experiencing a serious existential crisis. He broods. He introspects, and it hurts!

He, Vladimir Vladimirovich, living god of the steppes and gilded salons, wanted to "reach out to the people," as he said in his speeches written by others. Except that when you approach the people without an escort, they bite. Or they hit you with celery stalks. Or they remind you that war is not an abstract concept when displaying the battered body of their son or husband on a crate of radishes.

He closes his eyes and replays the scene like a bad soap opera: the lookalike handing out fake Rolexes like Haribo candy. Peasant grandmothers fighting for a little pity and recognition. And him, Vladimir, disguised as a tourist, receiving a shower of leeks and a barrage of insults and truths, raw as sushi with bitter sauce.

He is hurt. Hurt in his image. Hurt in his ego. Hurt in that compassion he feels welling up inside him like a liver crisis after a state banquet.

"I don't know how to love and make myself loved," he repeats to himself like a mantra.

He realizes that, for more than twenty years, he has confused "being respected" with "instilling fear," "leading" with "terrorizing," and "order and social peace" with "arrests and a muzzled press." His whole life has been one long film of domination. Not a single slide about benevolent love.

The rickety Lada that takes him back to the palace smells of market cabbage, old leather, and disillusionment. Slumped on the back seat, like an oligarch on Xanax, he chews on a soft biscuit handed to him by the driver, who thinks he is doing the right thing. He watches the landscape roll by: stray dogs, vendors selling socks with holes, a giant sign reading "Vote for stability with

Putin!" where his photo has been embellished with a Trotsky-style moustache.

He feels alone. Lonelier than the polar bear at the Novosibirsk Zoo. His throne? A cold stool, perched atop a mound of secret files, lists of former exiled comrades, and bills for plastic surgery to smooth his image.

But now, this damn virus—this sentimental microbe—has infected him to the core. For the first time in his life, he feels a rush of tenderness rising to his head. He almost cries. Or maybe it's the dust on the back seat of the Lada that makes him cry... It doesn't matter.

"What if I were truly kind now? Truly good and gentle."

Back at the palace, filled with noble intentions and feelings as beautiful and good as Moldovan cakes, he gives Patrushev unexpected orders:

"Nikolaï, I want you to make decisions on my behalf. Good decisions. Humane, kind, benevolent decisions."

Patrouchev is taken aback and wonders:

— What does he mean by kind and benevolent? "No more torture" or "less corruption and tax fraud"?

"Better!" Putin tells him. "Let the people denounce all corrupt officials! Let's take back their villas, their watches, their Jacuzzis! And let's reimburse the people!"

Nikolaï stammers in reply:

"But Vladimir, if we do that, there won't be much room left in our re-education camps and gulags."

"Too bad!"

The die is cast. Putin has regained his authority and Nikolaï Patrushev submits, even if he doesn't agree with everything. Good deeds follow one after another like pearls on a necklace:

"Bring me the list of political prisoners!" Putin demands. "Let's free them and give them a public apology, with checks and winter coats."

"Should we also make donations to charity?" Patrushev adds ironically.

"Absolutely! Even to those with logos as ugly as laundry detergent labels."

"Fewer military personnel on TV too?" Patrushev continues.

"Yes. More concerts, clowns, and baking recipes."

Patrouchev and his advisors, initially incredulous, eventually become convinced that their Tsar has been replaced by a clone resembling Santa Claus.

"He's not himself anymore," Nikolai whispers. Peaceful, kind, and generous—how long will this last?

In the Kremlin palace, the small meeting room assigned to Putin smells of cold coffee and exudes anxiety. The distinguished researcher from the Vektor Virology Research Center has just arrived. She unfolds a thick file in front of Putin, Smirnov, and Patrushev, adorned with frightening insignia intended to instill fear.

"Let's see these famous results!" Putin demands.

The researcher has done a lot of work. She presents her conclusions:

"As you already know, this virus is contagious, apparently harmless, and strange in its psychological effects. We've never seen anything like it! It stimulates areas of the brain linked to love, causes dopamine to dance in all the neurons, and may even increase the production of oxytocin—the hormone of love and cuddling—serotonin—the neurotransmitter of happiness—and endorphins—natural painkillers.

These results are welcome news.

"A love virus? We need to patent it!" declares Putin, as inspired as a Silicon Valley capitalist.

But the virologist immediately adds:

"Its origin remains a mystery worthy of a science fiction novel. We haven't found any close relatives among avian flu or Marek's disease viruses. But it is indeed a mutant poultry virus, born in an unhealthy farm where they may not talk to the stressed chickens enough to realize it! It is definitely a newcomer."

Adjusting her glasses to read the rest of her report, the researcher continues:

— As for the side effects observed by our laboratory, they are diverse and varied, but the most striking is that some infected individuals adopt extremely affectionate behavior, comparable, according to some specialists, to that of people with Down syndrome, even though no chromosomal link has been identified.

— We must continue our research, she concludes. To do so, we will map the circuits of tenderness activated in the cortex by this virus, while also studying hormone metabolism to measure the rapid rise in dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins. and finally explore the genetic impact of this virus, which will lead us to verify, in particular, whether the virus has any talent for chromosome sculpting... or if it's just a viral coincidence.

To give this hairless microbe some good press, some Russian epidemiologists have christened it "The Benevolent One," a name that is creating quite a buzz. This short, sweet, and vaguely affectionate word is spreading faster than an office joke.

Newspapers are adopting it: the Benevolent One, the new weapon of peace! Social media is relaying it: hashtag: #TeamBenevolent. Even newsstand vendors are presenting the epidemic as a new all-inclusive service: unlimited hugs and free good cheer.

To roll out the red carpet for this virus, the Department of Health is taking measures that are... highly viral:

- Immediate abandonment of protective measures: wash your hands, yes, but not too much!
- Official end to social distancing: from now on, it's mandatory to "shake hands and disribue hugs"
- Reopening of chicken coops: long live chickens! And an end to the carnage!

These measures prompt Putin to say:

"You see, thanks to the Benevolent One, the people are happier and more united. No one should fear him!"

Behind the collective joy, however, there remains a serious concern:

"What if, one day, the virus mutates... and decides to activate other hormones? Like testosterone to provoke and encourage aggression in the streets, or cortisol to increase stress?"

For now, the "Benevolent" remains a gentle mystery that the government has decided to describe as "the best guarantee of internal peace and stability," even though it makes people forget a little too quickly about Covid, which has not yet had its final say and which resurfaces here and there from time to time.

The Kremlin's secret has just been shattered. All of Moscow now knows that their beloved ruler is no longer really sick. At least not sick-sick, just a little, in a way that is... let's say, unpredictable.

The gossip of the ladies he kissed in more than diplomatic embraces, and the sighting of his lookalike at the market, have tipped off the citizens. As a result, no one believes in his mystical coma anymore. The Tsar is fine, thank you, he is breathing in good health and benevolence with every breath!

His opponents were counting on a grumpy population angry at the government for taking so long to admit that the virus wasn't as dangerous as it had led them to believe. Now they're confused. How can they overthrow a ruler who's recovering too well and starting to hand out favors to the people? It's indecent! And with the FSB sticking to them like a wetsuit, their revolutionary enthusiasm evaporates like vodka in the sun.

From his exile in London, Khodorkovsky, the leader of the expatriate revolutionaries, is not so desperate. He keeps the flame alive. He is convinced that popular discontent will explode—not only because of the price of gasoline and gas, but also because of the delay in chickens returning to store shelves and the war in Ukraine, which is leaving many families empty-handed. He therefore orders his lieutenants to organize a clean and discreet attack, in the style of a 1970s spy movie.

While Vladimir Putin radiates kindness like a radiator in emotional overdrive, on the other side of Moscow, in a poorly ventilated basement vaguely decorated with crumpled posters of Navalny—a collector's edition, soon to be unavailable—the

Central Committee of Opponents Not Yet Dead or in Prison (CCONYDP) meets.

Gathered around the table are:

- Igor, Khodorkovsky's representative and local leader of the opposition.

- Vadim, a former spy turned existential poet and intermittent alcoholic.

- Ludmilla, a feminist hacker who is intolerant of gluten, patriarchy, and proprietary software.

- Mikhail, a philosophy teacher who was fired for daring to say that Plato would not have voted for Putin.

- Rassoul, the communications guy.

"Comrades! The Tsar has changed!" Igor exclaims. "He's nice, apparently. He cries in front of babushkas, hands out roubles, and frees political prisoners! Who can believe that?"

"It's a trap!" Mikhail rages. "A psychological operation. Operation Doudou. He wants to lull us to sleep with cuddles!"

"Or maybe," murmurs Ludmilla, tapping away on her old Nokia, "it's due to a brain parasite... or worse, a Chinese emotional implant."

The conclusion is as convincing as a syllogism:

"If Putin has become nice, it's because he's sick. And if he's sick... we have to put him out of his misery!"

"Assassinate him?" asks Vadim. "Easy to say, but how? With a knife? A drone? A bomb? A poisoned sandwich?"

"It doesn't matter!" replies Igor. "The main thing is to find a brave, idealistic volunteer... who's a little suicidal."

An icy silence falls. You could hear a spy fly thrown by the FSB.

Igor bangs his fist on the table to rouse the vocations:

"Who's volunteering?"

More silence.

Finally, Rassoul, an inspired conspirator, makes a proposal:

"I know a young unemployed guy who's a bit... disconnected. He loves thrills, video games, and he doesn't have much to lose. Plus, he needs money to 'motivate' himself."

"Perfect!" concludes Igor. "A modern hero, ready to die for the cause, or at least for his fix."

Rassoul contacts him. With the group's approval, the young man is put in charge of the attack. But the hero's glory is short-lived. The volunteer is arrested by the FSB before he can press anything. After a few sessions of intense interrogation, he gives up the whole gang. There's total panic!

"Scatter!" shouts Igor. "Hide, go into hiding, but don't cough too loudly, or police might find you!"

Ironically, in their tiny, poorly ventilated hiding places, the conspirators catch the famous Benevolent virus. Fever, delirium, blissful smiles: the perfect cocktail to neutralize any revolution. The FSB henchmen, delighted, pick them up one by one, like mushrooms in autumn. The resistance team is in disarray.

A few days later, Alexander, the head of the Tsar's secret police, bursts into Putin's office, beaming:

"Vladimir, everything is fine! Your enemies have been struck down by... your own virus!"

"Excellent," replied the Tsar, delighted. "Nature does things well."

Indeed, it is a miracle! A few hours after coming out of his coma, Igor declares his political allegiance to the sovereign. He swears his loyalty, even writes a poem entitled "O Vladimir, light of my fever!" and becomes one of his most fervent supporters. Other former opponents, still groggy, also begin to sing his praises on television:

"Our leader has listened to us. He will stop sending young people to the front, as we ask him to. We must support him."

The timing is perfect: elections are approaching. With the rallying of former revolutionaries, Putin is leading in the polls. He doesn't need to campaign himself. Posters, media, networks, all shout "Vote for Putin!" And anyway, who else is there to vote for in Russia?

In his palace, the sovereign contemplates the country, a glass of kefir in his hand. He is floating in a gentle post-viral euphoria, confident of his re-election:

"Why campaign when you know you can count on benevolent voters?"

Putin's poll numbers soar higher than the jackdaws of Dauria. No serious opponent runs against him.

Reassured, Russians vote as usual for stability and tradition. Putin is re-elected with nearly 90% of the vote without even stuffing the ballot boxes. They were already full of love for him!

As for the bright future promised by Khodorkovsky, it will have to wait. The virus of benevolence still has a bright future ahead of it. And as Moscow falls asleep under the snow, the Tsar reads aloud one of the messages his friend Choïgou has just sent him: *"I dream of drones gently distributing kisses to the people of our beautiful country, Russia"*.

Six months after the virus first appeared, Putin has regained power, and the team of hardliners led by Medvedev is falling completely into line. The epidemic is still severe, but we are beginning to see signs of definitive recovery on the horizon, with patients from whom the "Benevolent" has finally packed his bags. Unfortunately, with him go the impulses of tenderness and affection. The verdict of the specialists adds the following details to the characteristics of this virus:

- A self-limiting virus, say the researchers.
- It will disappear in 6 to 12 months, warn epidemiologists.

Several concerned voices echo through the corridors of the Kremlin.

"Does that mean that in a year's time, we'll be saying goodbye to good feelings and hello to a return to selfishness?"

Putin, holding a teddy bear he was given during a school visit, turns pale. He is truly distressed:

"A tragedy is brewing! People will want to take back their donations, revoke the pardons they've granted, and become jerks! We have to do something!"

The director of the Vektor Center, a skilled psychologist, tries to reassure him:

"Your Majesty, even if the virus goes away, it will have planted seeds of kindness in everyone, a secret garden of empathy that will remain.

But the shadow of very gray emotional clouds hangs over the Kremlin. Putin wants certainties, and quickly.

"Tell me! Can you catch the Benevolent twice?" he asks the researcher at the Vektor Center.

"Probably... but beware of the effects of the long form of this infection: fever, headaches, body aches."

"Only that!" Putin replies reassuredly, his eyes shining like emeralds:

"Perfect! I volunteer as a guinea pig! Reinject me with this virus right now!"

Under the stunned gaze of the doctors, a nurse takes saliva and blood from a newly infected patient, mixes them in a syringe, and gives him a royal injection.

Over the next few days, Putin goes through the usual cycle: high fever; hospitalization at the palace, then a three-hour coma, accompanied by delicate snoring. And five hours after waking up in the evening, he jumps up in his room, full of energy:

"I feel better than ever! Let's not wait any longer: let's recontaminate the whole of Russia, rationally and efficiently."

He immediately orders:

"Official gifts for all caregivers, even maintenance workers—because love and kindness also come in the form of candy. A solemn invitation to general recontamination for another 6 to 7 months, or even longer if we develop a long form of the "Benevolent."

Professor Yvan, overcome with emotional wish, also demands his royal dose. Four days later, he is brimming with enthusiasm:

"Thank you, Vladimir! I will commit my entire brigade to following you."

"Excellent!" Putin replies. "But take good care of this virus: it's our best asset."

The miracle of this recontamination with the "Benevolent" is immediately apparent: the corridors of the palace echo with laughter, joyful exclamations, and improvised dances. It is accompanied by new gestures of generosity, including, for some, the spontaneous return of ill-gotten gains (). At the Moscow court, amnesty reports are piling up. The effects of the anti-corruption

plan are accelerating: ministries are undergoing a major clean-up; honest civil servants are brandishing their diplomas, while fraudsters are fleeing to the Finnish islands.

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, who remained somewhat skeptical, notes with satisfaction an unprecedented situation:

"The corrupt are repenting, and the budgets are balancing... without racketeering! Everything is going wonderfully! The people are applauding. It's unprecedented!"

For now, Russia is swimming in an ocean of institutional benevolence. And its sovereign, proud as a peacock in the bath, concludes:

"Why maintain tank and gun factories when we have a solution to manufacture friendship and goodwill?"

A little tired but still optimistic and benevolent, Putin decides to go to Daival, a state residence not far from Moscow. Nestled among forests, lakes, and memories of the USSR, it is an estate that seems to float outside of time, a place of guarded silence, where the wind dares not blow without permission.

Officially, it is a break from his duties as Russia's supreme leader. Unofficially, it is an "emotional" quarantine dictated by the Kremlin's doctors—the president is suspected of having contracted a new form of the benevolence virus, variant B, which is more contagious and causes increased bouts of tenderness, uncontrolled outbursts of kindness, and even unknown political decisions.

Few eyes can peer into this state property isolated in the countryside. It is impossible to see from the outside who is staying there. Putin is taking advantage of this to spend several days there with his daughter Maria and his granddaughter Evgenia, whom he has never spoiled.

There, he discovers himself to be a clumsy but tender grandfather, performing Cossack capers after a attempt of dancing classical ballet, fishing for pike like an old Russian sage by the lake, and philosophizing about simple joys.

Once she arrives, Evgenia, with her childlike candor, asks him questions, including one he doesn't expect:

"Dadushka, are you the one who is waging war? Why don't you want to stop it?" she asks, staring into her grandfather's pale eyes.

He clears his throat. He would have preferred to talk about political economy, pipelines, or the Red Army ballets. But not this question! Too direct. Too raw.

"It's complicated, my dear... These are territorial stabilization operations..."

"You mean beating up others so they'll leave you alone? But they'll never love you."

She said this as she bit into a strawberry, looking perfectly serious.

The hours pass, strangely sweet. As time goes by, the Tsar, initially stiff as a Soviet statue, begins to laugh, a real laugh, not the one programmed by his spokesperson. Then he dances a little, watches ducks through binoculars, and goes fishing with his granddaughter. Every evening, Evgenia insists that he read her a story. He chooses the shortest ones. She chooses the longest ones. But what moves him most is her voice when she says to him, before turning off her bedside lamp:

"Good night, Dadoushka. You know, you don't have to be mean to be strong."

At the end of his stay, he returns to Moscow in his armored train, leaving Evgenia and her mother behind in Daival because he doesn't want them to be seen together, in order to preserve their anonymity and peace of mind.

In his compartment, on his way back to Moscow, dressed in his military uniform, he meditates. The truffle omelet, blessed by Patriarch Kirill, slowly cools. He doesn't touch it. Evgenia's words spin around in his head like an old scratched vinyl record: "You don't have to be mean to be strong..."

He retreats into the comfort of his special train and reflects on these words. They haunt him as he approaches Moscow, even in his hazy dreams, where he glimpses a benevolent Russia, dancing, smiling, and full of little pike in rushing waters.

Seriously affected by the B variant, he makes radical decisions upon his return. He dismisses the most bellicose generals, fires the

gray and heartless bureaucrats of the " ," appoints Choïgou as Secretary of the Security Council, and takes Patrushev as his personal advisor. As for Medvedev, he lets him rant into the void.

While the Russian people—also largely infected with variant B—are beginning to develop a passion for ballet, family picnics, and ethical fishing, the Tsar muses:

"Perhaps one day, we will rebuild Greater Russia not with missiles, but with dances, culture, and storytelling."

Two days after the Tsar's discreet departure from the Daival residence, Maria and her daughter Evguenia return to Moscow in a large unmarked sedan, taking an ordinary route to blend into the routine of a country at war. The Security Service driver drives with the professional care of a man who knows he is transporting precious human cargo.

Suddenly, near a fuel depot, the warning siren pierces the air. Barely enough time for a prayer, a maternal gesture of protection, and a missile—Ukrainian, Russian, or simply lost, we don't know yet—falls on the tanks below. A fireball erupts, throwing the car onto the shoulder like an empty can. The next explosion finishes the job: the sedan, reduced to a glowing puzzle, becomes an improvised distress fire.

The firefighters arrive in a ballet of sirens and ashes. They pull out a woman, injured but conscious, the driver—already in the patriotic afterlife—and a nameless little girl, whose left leg hangs like a rag. One of them, apparently infected with the virus, whispers as he applies a tourniquet: "Poor little thing..."

In Moscow, Putin is informed of the bombing. He consults the satellite map of the route, pausing at the point where his daughter's car vanished. He guesses. He guesses all too well. He prays, awkwardly, like a novice believer.

Shortly afterwards, a report confirms what he feared: his daughter Maria is injured, his granddaughter Evgenia has had her leg amputated. The car was not just any car. And this missile, which we now know was launched in retaliation for a bombing

ordered by Putin himself, via Choïgou, completes a perfect circle of strategic absurdities.

At the military hospital in Moscow, Evgenia is operated on in the ultra-modern operating rooms reserved for the powerful. When Putin speaks to her on the phone, his voice trembles a little—perhaps a side effect of the virus.

"I know you are very brave, Evgenia. We are going to give you the most beautiful bionic leg in the whole empire. Even James Bond would be jealous."

She replies a few days later, as cheerful as a child can be despite her misfortune and injuries:

"Dadushka! My robot leg is almost ready! Do you think I'll be able to jump like a kangaroo? And I have a friend in the next room, she's Ukrainian. She has no parents. Could I invite her to our house?"

The word "Ukrainian" strikes the former KGB agent like a barbed wire around his heart. He is informed that the friend is an orphan from a village razed by a Russian air strike. She must leave for a "patriotic re-education" center. The great machine, designed to transform Ukrainian children into Russian children, compatible with the Soviet Union, is set in motion.

Putin says nothing. He is the leader. He does not want to question the orders he gave because of a child's tear... except that he hears that tear falling and echoing in his own heart. In his solitude, he even quotes Dostoevsky: "Nothing can compensate for a single tear from a child." He saw that tear, and now he remembers it.

In the Kremlin, the Tsar's collaborators are unaware of what has happened, yet intrigued by his pensive air and his desire for benevolent change.

Comments fly about the new Putin:

"He's even more contaminated by the virus than before," exclaims Nadia, leaping out of her office. "He talks about love, vegetarian cuisine, and wants to reform the police with actors trained in mediation! He even appointed Belousov to Defense, even though he's not a military man!"

The media doesn't know which way to turn. On TV, a heated debate pits former regime loyalists against young, benevolent influencers. "This is geopolitical treason!" shouts an old general, banging on his desk.

"No, it's Russia's spiritual rebirth!" replies a TikTok star wearing a tutu embroidered with poppies.

"And you, citizens, what do you think of this surprise decree on folk dancing and intergenerational picnics?" asks a presenter to a man from the crowd.

"I say, if it can replace tanks with accordions, I'm not against it!"

In his office, Vladimir Putin, now nicknamed "Vlad the Tender" in what is undoubtedly a more sympathetic reference to "Ivan the Terrible," watches the news with an indecipherable expression. He is still the master of the game. But something invisible and contagious now inhabits him.

He calls the conductor of the Bolshoi Ballet.

"Prepare a tour for me. You will perform The Symphony of Inner Peace and invite a little girl with a disability to dance. I know her. She told me she wanted me to see her dance in this ballet with her new leg."

And so it is that the most feared man in Russia begins to rewrite his destiny by wanting a "Beauty with a bionic leg" to dance before him.

The wave of kindness and goodwill sparked by the epidemic has not made everyone happy. While civil society is discovering new vocations as poets, community gardeners, pike fishermen, and neighborhood mediators, the army is beginning to cough.

The first to sound the alarm is the Moscow police chief. He addresses the Minister of the Interior with a grave expression and dark circles under his eyes, like a man who has just read 200 pages of a manual on 101 ways to suppress street protests before going to sleep:

"I have a serious problem," he says curtly. "My police officers... are changing."

"What do you mean, they're changing?"

"They're becoming nice."

"Be more specific!"

"They refuse to arrest people. They prefer to talk. They kiss the protesters, hug them, hand out tissues to the crying pickpockets they arrest, and even want to help offenders fill out their fine forms."

The minister turned pale.

— Is that... serious?

— Very.

But the worst is yet to come. A military report sent by an anxious lieutenant has the effect of a mortar shell in the gilded halls of the Kremlin:

"From Lieutenant Farouk to Captain Shirin,

Several soldiers returning from leave are showing worrying signs of uncontrolled tenderness. On the battlefield, some are

singing children's songs. Others refuse to fire without first attempting to communicate with their opponents using signals. One corporal even knitted a sweater for a Ukrainian prisoner who was "shivering too much." I fear a major deterioration in combat determination and fighting spirit. One sergeant even dared to declare that "war is outdated"!

I beg you to intervene before one of my men proposes a unilateral peace treaty signed with little drawings of hearts".

Faced with the scale of this psychological disaster, the generals panic. Military laboratories are summoned with one order: to urgently create a vaccine against Benevolent.

Very quickly, colossal resources were committed. Two months later, a miracle! A vaccine is ready... at least on paper, because the trials are inconclusive. Barely 10% of vaccinated soldiers resist the urge to organize fraternal picnics with the enemy. One vaccinated major is even caught composing a haiku to celebrate the beauty of a sunrise over Donbass.

"It's not a vaccine, it's a strainer," whispered one of the generals. "It's only interesting to those who sell it at a high price to the army," sighed another.

Cornered, the old, decorated generals, nostalgic for the days when they could shoot without receiving orders, take a radical decision: to immediately suspend all leave to avoid contamination during the soldiers' return to their families. Wanting to act quickly, they forget to inform Putin.

Two days later, thousands of women—wives, mothers, sisters, fiancées, mistresses, all kindly infected—take to the streets. It is the first time in Russian history that women's demonstrations have been so large. The signs they hold read:

"Give us back our husbands!" "We want to kiss them!" "For a more tender army!"

Putin, informed by his Security Council secretary, nearly chokes on his ginger tea enriched with Benevolent, which he has been secretly taking for two weeks to calm his remaining bellicose instincts.

The Minister of the Interior rushes to the Tsar's office.

"Vladimir! Our police officers are refusing to disperse the demonstrators. They're bringing them flowers and organizing participatory mandala workshops!"

Putin summons his senior officers, reprimands them, and threatens them with a trip to a reeducation camp:

"What were you thinking when suspending leave? Do you want to start a revolution against benevolence?"

The generals, heads bowed, stammer apologies. The President orders them to reverse their mistakes:

"Permissions are to be reinstated immediately. And they are to be extended to three weeks. That will make for three weeks of hugs with family and kisses with friends. And know that I am seriously reconsidering your competence as military leaders."

Then, in a moment of viral lucidity:

"I admit that I was misguided in launching this war... You assured me that it would only last three days, like a cold, but we're in for four or five years of sinusitis!"

The presidential decree is published within the hour, causing scenes of jubilation throughout the country. Women return to their kitchens to prepare dishes specially enriched with variant B. Some even go so far as to contaminate their husbands' socks, underwear, and pyjamas.

Ukrainian women, inspired by the contagious courage of their Russian neighbors, decided to imitate their strategy. They want peace, the return of their sons and husbands, and are tired of knitting socks to send to the front. So they innovate.

Under the pretext of humanitarian aid, they send both sides dishes that have been carefully infected by the Benevolent One: half-cooked pelmeris, lukewarm borscht, cold pirozhki, but presented with such refinement that the soldiers eagerly devour them without suspicion. Some, after a few bites, are already sighing with emotion. One of them even asks the invisible cook who makes such delicious pelmeris to marry him. And to further encourage the epidemic, Ukrainians launch active benevolence games on social media, including a geolocation dating app, Tenderly Contaminated, which is downloaded nearly a million times in 24 hours.

In the trenches, the effect is quickly felt. After a few days, Russian soldiers who have come out of their comas and become friendly approach the Ukrainian lines, brandishing their weapons above their heads. Not to shoot, but to offer them as gifts. Some wave a white flag hastily made from regulation underwear.

A Ukrainian colonel watched the scene through his binoculars, intrigued:

"Look at that! They're coming forward with bouquets of flowers. Do they want to surrender or celebrate something?"

He orders them to be allowed to pass to a rocky outcrop where they are asked to lay down their weapons like well-behaved

schoolchildren handing in their schoolbags to the teacher. They smile. They are visibly relieved. One of them even shouts:

"Priviet (hello!)" comrades! Does anyone have any herbal tea?

But an officer is concerned:

"Colonel, this is a viral tactic of the Kremlin. They want to infect our units by kissing us to render us harmless."

The colonel doesn't care:

"Who cares! They're polite, they smell good, and they're bringing us cookies. It's a victory."

Soon, this scenario is repeated everywhere. A kind of viral viaduct is established. The Benevolent One circulates without a vaccine passport or uniform. He climbs the military ranks like a motivated ship's boy. He even arrives in Kiev without having to show his passport.

The results are immediate: the epidemic crosses the front line and euphoria quickly spreads among the military and civilians on both sides. Everyone is talking about the Benevolent One and his virtues: tenderness, attentiveness, a sudden ability to be moved by a sunset over the Carpathians or Lviv. On social media, Ukrainians are setting each other viral challenges. Users of the dating app Tenderly Contaminated share their symptoms like others share selfies. This Variant B doesn't just make people kind. It makes them extremely demonstrative. This leads FSB members to flee overly infected open spaces where people share their emotions. Some of them take refuge in basements, headphones on, listening to heavy metal to avoid any sentimental contamination.

In Kiev, people are even warmer. Infected passersby hug each other, police officers recite poetry instead of issuing tickets, and taxi drivers offer free rides if customers share a happy memory. A Ukrainian grandmother infects an entire battalion by serving them hot soup with a big wink.

During a medal ceremony on the battlefield, Zelensky, true to his desire to be close to his soldiers, hugs, kisses, and

congratulates them one by one. It is a great moment of humanity, immortalized by dozens of cameras. But three days after his last visit to the field, he returns to the capital with a burning fever. His doctor, a man with questionable humor but a reliable thermometer, breaks the news to him:

"You have contracted the Benevolent, Mr. President."

"Am I going to look like Putin?" he exclaims.

"No, don't worry, you'll still have your hair and beard. And you'll become gentler."

"Are you kidding?"

"Not at all. Coma in 48 hours. After that, we'll see."

"And after that?" he asks.

"Well... you might start caressing your ministers. It depends on your viral load," his doctor tells him.

Zelensky, worried, exclaims:

"Don't let the press find out!"

"Too late, the journalists have already headlined 'The President in the midst of a viral boom!' They're making interactive infographics about your temperature."

The Ukrainian population, dismayed, follows the evolution of the presidential fever like a Netflix series. There are fears of a massive Russian attack while the leader is unavailable. But to everyone's surprise, nothing happens.

In the climate of hesitation and confusion that ensues, the propaganda services are hard at work. Several Russian channels, broadcast fake images of Zelensky with threatening music and cheesy 1980s special effects, portraying him as a fascist billionaire vampire.

The Ukrainian media counterattacked with montages ridiculing Putin, showing him dressed as a Soviet ballerina or a babushka in love with a tank. But Russian censorship was on the lookout. Every attempt at dissemination is intercepted, retranslated, and reversed. An image of Putin decorating a war widow becomes, in the Russian media: "The Tsar loves widows who remarry to replenish the armies!"

And while propagandists are at each other's throats, presidents are softening their stance. Their thinking is evolving. Zelensky, awakened from his coma, has changed. He speaks emotionally about peace. He listens to the mothers of his soldiers, promising them that he will do everything he can to protect their lives without giving up on regaining lost territory. He dreams of negotiating, but his Western allies whisper in his ear: "Hold out a little longer. Then we'll see!"

Putin, for his part, knows he could win... but at what cost? The idea of bombing an entire country to gain a few hundred square kilometers of additional territory now bores him. He consults a spiritual advisor. He reads Tolstoy, or at least summaries of his novels, and asks for "invasion plan" to be replaced by "shared, non-aggressive cohabitation strategy" in internal documents. Then he invites his friend Choïgou to Novo-Ogaryovo to talk to him about a decision he has been mulling over for several weeks.

And as the bombs fall more slowly, the soldiers exchange recipes for pelmeni, and the presidents gradually emerge from their war fever, a new wind is blowing on the battlefield.

In Novo-Ogaryovo, where Putin has returned for a few days, the sweet smell of lime blossom hangs in the air. In the wood-paneled, hushed living room, two leather armchairs, an open bottle of vodka, and a gently steaming samovar keep silent watch. The evening light struggles to filter through the heavy curtains. A dog sleeps at the foot of a pedestal table. On the table are two cups and—a rare sight—a jar of honey, an unusual sweetener for tea.

The virus of kindness has done its work. The two men, Putinn and Choïgou, usually as stiff as bronze statues, have loosened their ties. The teapot steams between them. On the wall, portraits of Stalin and Peter the Great seem to observe the scene with a puzzled look, wondering if they too have caught something.

Putin leaned over to talk to Choïgou, who remains his close friend.

"Do you remember," he says, "what we said to each other in 2022? That Ukraine was part of us, that the Ukrainians would return to our fold like lost children, and that we would do everything we could to bring them back..."

Choïgou fills two cups as he replies:

— I remember you agreeing with that. But Vladimir, I have a question for you, a delayed one, but don't worry, it's not a bombshell. Why didn't you stop in Ukraine when you saw that it wasn't going to be a walk in the park?

Putin sighs, staring at his cup:

"Ah, Sergei, because in the KGB, we weren't taught to back down. Ever. We were told, 'A decision made is a victory begun.'

And we believed that honor meant seeing things through to the end, even if the end was an abyss."

"So it was that old KGB school? The one where admitting a mistake was already a betrayal?" asks Choïgou

"Exactly," Putin replies. "There, we were forged like little anvils: hard, cold, unquestioning. Doubt was a disease. They even said that compassion had to be nipped in the bud, because it could compromise the effectiveness of the mission. Can you imagine? Today, this virus of kindness makes me see how much of a fairy tale and madness that was.

"But you had role models. Stalin, for example... You admired him, didn't you?" retorts Choïgou

Putin admits, thoughtfully:

"Yes. I saw strength in him, a will of steel. But I didn't see the millions of deaths, the destroyed families, the shattered lives. I looked at the hammer without seeing the splinters. Today..." He pauses. "Today, I see the splinters even in my dreams. And sometimes, Sergei, I am ashamed of what I used to read."

"What about Bucha?" asks Choïgou "Was that also to make people afraid? To 'impose the decision taken,' as they say in the manuals of power?"

Putin closes his eyes for a moment before answering:

"Yes. That's the word I used most often in the past: fear, instilling fear. But you know, fear is a weapon that quickly turns against you. You always end up becoming its prisoner. Today, I would give anything never to have ordered certain intimidation measures: Bucha... Bucha!

And after a heavy silence:

"That's the name that wakes me up at night. I used to see it as a 'special operation'. Now I see faces. Mothers. Children. Stray dogs waiting for their owners. You see, kindness, Sergei, is also a weapon. But it shoots straight through the heart.

"So... if you had to do it again?" asks Choïgou

"I would stop after the first shell. I would pick up the phone, call Zelensky, and say, 'I'm stopping while there is still something left to save. Let's try to rebuild a union that will make our two

countries a zone of prosperity and peace.' But the man I was didn't know how to speak that language yet. The virus taught me the grammar of humanity all over again.

Choïgou, in a lighter, almost ironic tone:

"So, you admit you've been infected?"

"Seriously, my dear Sergei. And I have no hope of recovery. I even think I've become contagious. Be careful... you might start loving your neighbor too!"

"Too late for me, Vladimir. Yesterday, I came across a wounded Ukrainian soldier... and I ordered that he be treated. Our former KGB masters would expel me forever.

Putin breathes a sigh of relief:

"So be happy, my brother. We have finally left their empire. It seems that the virus of kindness has metastasized in you..."

A pause. The two men raise their cups of tea. Outside, the snow is slowly melting on the lawns of the residence. For the first time, it no longer looks like a shroud.

Putin, serious and mischievous at the same time, continues:

"Welcome to the new KGB, the Kommittee of Great Benevolence!"

"I like it!" replies Choïgou "But be careful, if Lenin hears that, he'll turn over in his mausoleum."

Putin concludes:

"Then let him turn over! For once, he'll see the world from the right side."

Surrounded by birch trees, beech trees, and memories, Putin continues to meditate aloud. The old Putin would have puffed out his chest. Today's Putin dreams of an artificial leg, a Ukrainian child, and a peace that is still uncertain.

"You see," he says to Choïgou, "I can't help thinking about my own granddaughter who lost a leg."

"A leg, Sergei. A flying leg! As if karma had ballistic precision."

Choïgou, after remaining silent, offered his own response:

"All because of a fuel depot. I thought it was a good strategic choice. I was told that the Ukrainians targeted it in response to our strikes on their refineries."

"So it's you. Well... me through you. Both of us. A pair of blind gravediggers," Putin sums up, getting up to pace back and forth as he continues:

"Do you think the virus of *Benevolence* would have prevented us from doing that?"

Choïgou shrugs:

"I think it's making you say things I've never heard you say before. And that worries me."

Putin makes a rather sad pout:

"Me too. It worries me... but it also relieves me."

He stops short to declare:

"I want us to stop the war, Sergei. I'm going to do it."

Choïgou jumps:

"What are you going to do?"

Putin turns around:

"Yes. Because if I continue, I'll go mad. I didn't do all this to become a monster who hurts children."

He lowers his voice.

Choïgou looks at him with a brotherly air:

"Then go ahead. But have you really thought this through? They won't understand. Not the generals. Not the oligarchs. Not our people. Not even half of your own brain."

Putin replies:

"I still have the other half. And it tells me to listen to that voice. The one that sounds like a little girl who is going to lose a leg because of me."

Far away from them, in a hospital room, the soft morning light awakens a convalescent patient. A prosthesis lies next to her bed. Evgenia—for it is she who is there—has a doll on her lap. She holds the cell phone with both hands, focused. On the other end of the line, sitting in his chair, Putin listens.

Evgenia, her voice clear and cheerful despite everything, announces:

"Dadoushka! My new leg is ready! It's made of titanium and plastic. A man made it by hand. He says it's stronger than a real one."

Putin smiles sadly, but she doesn't see it.

— You're going to be the Bolshoi's first bionic ballerina. I told you so, didn't I? You're grace and strength rolled into one.

"Do you think I'll still be able to dance?"

Putin hesitates:

"Maybe not like before! But you'll dance differently. And no one will dare step on your feet anymore."

"That's true! But I have another question," she continues. "I told you about the Ukrainian girl in the next room, who's my age and lost her parents. You didn't answer me when I asked if I could invite her over."

Putin remained silent for a moment on the other end of the line:

"Do you like her?"

"Oh, yes. She's funny. And sad too. Can I invite her over when I go out?"

"I don't know, sweetheart," her grandfather replies, his throat tightening. "I'll see what I can do. But... it's complicated."

"It's always complicated with grown-ups! She told me she's going to move far away soon. You know, she cries at night. I don't cry. I'm strong. She's the one who needs help."

"I'll think about it. I promise."

Evgenia continues the conversation with other comments that come to mind:

"You know, even with only one leg, you can do lots of things. Like become President. Or... stop wars, for example."

Putin closes his eyes:

"Yes. You're right. We can stop wars."

He pauses, looks at his interlocutor who has heard him, and makes a decision that astounds Choïgou

The virus of kindness has taken hold. Revenge still boils in his veins, but it clashes with a new feeling: the horror of fighting and bombing. What if this war, which he is waging with the arrogance of a cheating chess player, is no longer worth it? What if, for once, he could lose some battles but gain something rarer: a little humanity?

Two days later, to everyone's surprise, he orders a ceasefire. His public statement speaks of "generosity" and "magnanimity" — but never of Evgenia. This tragedy will remain his secret, shared only with Choïgou, in their silence as repentant accomplices.

Ukrainian President Zelensky literally almost falls off his chair when he hears Putin announce on television a unilateral ceasefire. Between two coughing fits and a sigh, he blurts out to those around him:

"This is a joke, right? Since when has Putin been playing at being a Nobel Peace Prize winner?"

He immediately thinks it's fake news, because his troops are melting like snow in the sun, his ammunition stocks are skinnier than a model's diet, and the whole world knows that Ukraine's military situation is critical.

Before officially responding to this proposal, which has been confirmed by his intelligence services and his staff, Zelensky immediately convenes a meeting with his closest advisors.

The meeting is held in the Council Chamber, located in the basement of the presidential palace, because you can never be too careful when missiles sometimes fall on your head at breakfast time. The windowless room is lit by a bronze chandelier so large that a battalion of bats could hang from it. In the center is a large oval mahogany table. Around it sit eight advisors, all seated in enormous yellow leather armchairs—the only luxury still tolerated in wartime.

Zelensky arrives in combat gear—khaki sweatshirt, three-day beard, and the exhausted look of a rock star after a world tour. He sits down with a sigh:

"Right! Our northern neighbor has suddenly decided he has a heart. He's proposing a ceasefire. I have his speech here, in which

he declares himself 'good and magnanimous.' He even mentions 'greatness of soul.' What do you think? I'm listening."

There is a heavy silence, broken only by the hum of a wheezing fan, until the General, Chief of Staff, an old warrior with a weathered face, roars:

"Bullshit! Total withdrawal of Russian troops, or nothing! I don't want to end up with Russian tanks parked under my windows like pizza delivery guys."

The international relations advisor raised her eyebrows:

"As you are no doubt aware, General, the virus of benevolence seems to have had an effect on Putin. Apparently, he is handing out watches at the market and wants to save orphans. Perhaps we should give him the benefit of the doubt?"

The General throws his arms up in the air:

"What next? Is he going to send us bouquets of flowers and chocolates while he keeps our territories?"

A young advisor, wearing round glasses and a khaki suit, timidly interjects:

"We have to accept this ceasefire. If we refuse, the international community will say we're hardliners. We risk being seen as the villains of the story."

"Villains of the story?" chokes the General. "But we're the ones being invaded!"

The public relations officer sighs:

"Ladies and gentlemen, if we could avoid shouting... it would be nice to avoid blowing the bulbs in this chandelier. We don't have any more of them in reserve."

Zelensky rubs his temples.

— Does anyone here have a solution other than outright refusal, which would undoubtedly lead us to collective suicide?

Another advisor then suggests in a low voice:

"We could involve the UN..."

"The UN? Apart from handing out cookies and sending in peacekeepers to wave at the cameras, what are they going to do?" replies his neighbor.

The public relations advisor takes a more dramatic tone:

"If we refuse the armistice, people will hate us. We'll be seen as the 'truce breakers'. We're already being accused of stealing international aid funds to buy luxury sneakers..."

Zelensky raises his eyebrows and tries to lighten the mood:

"I only bought two pairs! Okay, fine... three."

Small, discreet smiles, despite the tension. The President finally sighs:

"OK... I'll accept this ceasefire. But I'll tell the press that it's 'conditional'. Let's appear firm, threatening, and open at the same time, like a vegetarian crocodile."

Everyone nods, somewhat relieved. Zelensky hands around a carafe of vodka:

"Drink up, my friends. Who knows, tomorrow Putin might send me a bouquet of roses... or an explosive drone."

But the day after, the good news is confirmed and Zelensky declares:

"It's official. I have agreed to sign the armistice!"

As soon as the news leaks to the press, there is pandemonium on the front line. Ukrainian and Russian soldiers invite each other to drink tea between the trenches. Some even exchange their helmets like footballers' trophies after a match.

A Ukrainian commander fumes as he is watching his men gathering:

"What's with all the hugging? We're talking about a ceasefire, not speed dating!"

On social media, the number of new pages is exploding: #KissForPeace—where soldiers and civilians film themselves kissing their former enemies, set to romantic Soviet music.

However, the news is not all rosy for everyone. The mercenaries and ex-convicts on the front line are worried because they understand that their combatant bonuses will evaporate:

"If this keeps up," said one of them, "I'll have to retrain as a waiter in a bar. But I only have one skill : shooting and blowing up bunkers, not balancing glasses on my head!"

To calm their discontent, they are offered a deal: their pay will remain the same, plus meal vouchers, in exchange for a promise to stop shooting Kalashnikovs and blowing up drones left and right.

In the general confusion that ensues, a Russian battalion commander, freshly infected, begins writing love poems to his former Ukrainian enemies.

"Frankly, I would have preferred you to stay on your tank rather than dedicate such a dull sonnet to me!" remarks a Ukrainian major, who is also a writer in his spare time, not very kindly.

But the result is there! No more bombs falling... just flowers, kisses, and soldiers too busy exchanging their Spotify playlists to think about shooting at each other.

Zelensky, still incredulous, confides to his close friends

"This really is the most senseless war we've ever experienced!"

Putin, for his part, repeats to himself in front of the mirror:

"I told you so... *Kindness* is the ultimate weapon."

To negotiate this famous ceasefire — the one supposed to spare the planet a collective nervous breakdown and irreversible disaster — the Tsar of Russia and the President of Ukraine meet in a strictly secret location.

Well... *secret*, except for the cooks, sound technicians, cleaning ladies, three security guards, two Latvian spies, a Finnish waiter, and a local cow who didn't ask for any of this.

Round one: hushed atmosphere, drawn curtains, discreet buffet.

Zelensky enters, looking sullen, as if he had swallowed a pickle in the middle of a staff meeting. Opposite him, Putin wears a smile so sweet that he looks like an organic chocolate salesman.

"So," says Choïgou, Putin's faithful representative, like a well-groomed shadow, "are you ready to sign the peace treaty?"

"Peace?" growls Zelensky. "You mean... surrender?"

"No, of course not!" replies Choïgou "Negotiate! We have a common asset for that."

"Oh, really? Radioactive pirozhki?"

"Better than that: the virus of kindness. The one that turns our soldiers into gentle teddy bears!"

Zelensky sighs:

"Oh, really! Soldiers hugging each other instead of shooting at each other. It's about time."

"Exactly!" exclaims Choïgou "If we infect everyone, the war will be over! Even our defense ministers will be able to relax in the countryside and sing Aznavour's 'La Bohême.'"

"You want to infect the entire planet?"

"Why not? With the *Benevolent One*, Genghis Khan would have opened a spa in Ulaanbaatar instead of invading Eurasia."

The two heads of state agree: No more searching for a vaccine *against the Benevolent One*! No more precautions to stay immune. Just tenderness...

Journalists invited to follow the discussions must wear a badge: *Green*: Infected - *Red*: Not yet, but curious, which gives rise to surreal scenes:

"Sir from *The Guardian*, are you infected?"

— Not yet... but I downloaded and paid for the app that entitles me to ten kisses!

The time to sign the armistice agreement is approaching. The secret location is no longer a secret: a technician geolocated it on Google Maps and published it under the name "Peace Summit."

Putin arrives in a light gray suit and turquoise tie, the color of appeasement, Zelensky in a khaki sweatshirt, the color of a limited budget.

They greet each other with a cautious handshake, avoiding the Soviet embrace on lips that might smell of vodka.

They remain sober. The secretary reads the official text, as brief as a newspaper headline:

"We, the leaders of the Russian Federation and Ukraine, decide to cease hostilities completely and to preserve peace, public health, and the harmonious transmission of Benevolence..."

The additional clauses of the armistice provide for soccer tournaments on the front line, rewarded with pewter medals; emotional leave for soldiers who are too emotional; an International Day of Kindness—with each minister required to compliment their worst adversary on television—and a ban on manufacturing an *anti-Kindness* vaccine—unless the virus becomes grumpy.

To sign this declaration, Putin pulls out his silver "For the Fatherland" pen. Zelensky uses a neon green marker given to him by a fan at a charity concert.

"I'll sign at the bottom, in the middle," Putin suggests.

"Okay, but don't invade the lines reserved for me! I want to protect my territory," replies Zelensky.

At the borders, the troops relax, and communal tents are set up to distribute tea and cakes. Brochures entitled "How to make friends after bombing each other for four years," co-authored by the two former belligerents, are offered to everyone.

On TikTok, the #KindnessDance is a huge hit: Russian and Ukrainian soldiers dance the kazachok and gopak together. A "post-traumatic" hotline is opened: 20% of the calls come from emotional generals declaring that they have "rediscovered their taste for life and crossword puzzles."

Choïgou whispers to the Tsar:

"Have you thought about the oligarchs who have been deprived of arms contracts? Don't you think they're going to complain?"

"We'll infect them too," Putin replies. "They'll end up giving their fortunes to orphanages."

Zelensky remembers his former profession:

"If someone had told me that a cuddly virus would end the war, I would have thought it was a Netflix script..."

And so ends the signing of the First Global Virological Armistice. The guns fall silent, the soldiers dance, the diplomats meditate, and the world holds its breath... hoping that the *Benevolent* does not mutate overnight into a *Grumpy* variant.

The armistice is signed—and, miraculously, respected! The guns have fallen silent on all fronts where Russians and Ukrainians had been exchanging rather explosive "arguments" until now. The task now is to set the terms of peace.

As a first step, the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia will be frozen and demilitarized at lightning speed: goodbye tanks, hello tractors! They will be jointly administered by Russia and Ukraine with provisional status until the outcome of referendums scheduled to take place within two years under UN authority in the five disputed territories⁴. Each of these territories will be attached to the country chosen by its voters. To reassure everyone, and above all to look good in the photos, an international force is planned to be on site for two years. Symbolic? Yes. Constraining? Well... let's just say that it will mainly engage in diplomatic tourism and monitor the election campaigns and polling stations during the referendums.

During the transition period, it has been agreed to allow these territories to have their own assemblies, budgets, schools, and even a small local police force. All of this will be done "Swiss style": neutral, precise, and timely, we hope, in order to facilitate the transition to their future destiny. To seal the reconciliation and encourage the development of cultural exchanges, Russian and Ukrainian are declared official languages throughout Ukraine.

⁴ *The oblasts of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and the Crimean Peninsula.*

From , this guarantees bilingual discussions... and meetings that are three times as long.

In the months following the armistice, the demilitarization provided for in these agreements got off to a surprisingly good start: no shouting, no malicious remarks, no denigration. But very quickly, negotiations became more difficult—especially when it came to money. Both sides drew up lists of damages: bridges demolished, cities destroyed, fields mined, nerves on edge... The total was staggering! And since no one had officially won, it was impossible to bluntly tell Russia, "You're on your own!" Negotiations are needed, drawing on Russia's frozen assets and donations from the international community to avoid delaying the work.

As for the human toll—the dead, wounded, traumatized, and refugees—that is another very painful chapter. Without bringing the dead back to life or healing all the wounded, they return them to their countries and families in poignant ceremonies. Nor do we forget the planet, which is also demanding compensation for its ravaged soil and polluted seas. The list resembles a Prévert-style inventory revised by Kafka.

We finally realize how absurd and costly war is: billions to destroy, trillions to rebuild. And everyone solemnly promises, "Never again!" ...until the next time...

The thorny questions remain for the international bodies meeting in The Hague: What to do with those responsible? Declare a general amnesty? No! That would set a bad precedent. So how should those responsible be judged, and by whom? The debates are heated: punish or forgive? Punish or turn the page? How far should we go in terms of clemency or condemnation? And who will be qualified to implement the decisions taken by these bodies? All these questions remain unanswered. It is finally decided to postpone the decision until later. After all, it would be a shame to spoil such a wonderful momentum for peace because of a few bad-tempered judges and lawyers.

As for Putin's fate, discussions at the International Criminal Court resemble a collective psychoanalysis session. The "Putin of before," a ruthless warlord, is said to be no longer the same as the "Putin of after," suddenly an apostle of dialogue and the protection of widows and orphans. Some recall the example of the Emperor of Japan, who was left alone in 1945 so as not to anger an entire people. The judges finally decide: Putin will not be tried or acquitted, but for the coming year he will be kept under supervised freedom in his political activities. After all, someone has to sign the treaties and pose for commemorative photos.

And that is how, through diplomacy, selective amnesia, and goodwill, peace was achieved. It just goes to show that even the most absurd wars can end with a chapter worthy of the best fiction.

Ten months after the armistice, which transformed the front lines into neutral zones for diplomatic exchanges, the secretary of the Russian sovereign receives a call from Norway at Novo-Ogaryovo. She checks the origin and identity of the caller, then rushes into the office to tell her boss about this strange call.

"President, you have a call from Norway. It's... urgent and very important, but I don't know what it's about," she said.

Putin picks up the phone, half skeptical, half curious:

"Hello? Who is this?"

"This is the Nobel Peace Committee. Are we speaking to the President of the Russian Federation?"

"Yes... how can I help you?" Putin said cautiously.

The Norwegian voice becomes solemn, almost ceremonious:

"Mr. President, we have reviewed the file your office sent us regarding the Nobel Peace Prize. We are honored to announce that you have been unanimously selected as the top candidate for this year's prize, in recognition of your crucial role in easing tensions in your region."

Silence. Then, as if rereading a strange sentence:

"Did I hear that right?" asks Putin, who can't believe his ears, and after a moment's thought adds:

"Wouldn't you have preferred to choose my doctor, or the virus everyone is talking about?" he jokes, with false modesty.

The potential winner finally bows his head in thought and immediately suggests inviting his doctor, perhaps even the Ukrainian president, to share the medal, the stage, and the buffet, if possible. The Committee's response is gracious:

"We admire your generosity, Your Excellency, but the prize is only awarded to one person this year. However, you are welcome to bring a guest and pay tribute to whomever you wish during the ceremony."

After an exchange of very polite pleasantries, the instruction is given: keep it secret until the official announcement.

"The Committee will send you a confidential registered letter this evening—no doubt with a small 'top secret' stamp on very plain letterhead," said the Nobel Committee representative.

Putin puts down the phone. He steps out onto the porch, seeks the fresh air in the frosty park, and walks as if reciting his speech notes aloud. Between pride and perplexity, he thinks of the armistice, the withdrawals, the promised autonomies, the furious glances of the special services—and the disappointed faces of a few close friends. A small smile crosses his face:

"After all... it was worth a Nobel Prize!"

Back in his chair, he sighs:

"I'll have to write a speech and prepare answers for the media storm. Norway supported the other side; this is going to make the press and many other heads of state scream.

He immediately thinks of his adversary but nevertheless partner Donald Trump, who already saw himself as the winner of this Nobel Peace Prize. How will he take the news?

When the world hears about this decision, it takes journalists a while to make sure that the Nobel Committee's choice is not fake news. This gives Putin time to reread his notes and... check the weather forecast for Oslo. After all, nothing would be more annoying for a new Nobel laureate than having to face a snowstorm in formal attire.

PART 2 : TRUMP AND THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

On that day, at Mar-a-Lago, in a tropical palace resembling a heavenly casino, a gold clock, gifted by major Swiss companies to bring their taxes on American exports down to a reasonable percentage, strikes 7 a.m.

A human phenomenon, wearing a gold bathrobe emblazoned with "*The Best President Ever*," incidentally the 45th and 47th President of the United States of America, is already up and eating the third cheeseburger of his breakfast. His gaze wanders over his golf course, his swimming pool, and the gilding on his walls, wondering where he will be able to hang his 35th portrait of himself, in which he is depicted as an angel of peace. It was sent to him by a Ukrainian artist after hearing the American president declare, upon his re-election, that he was confident he could end the war in Ukraine within 24 hours. Well, Donald didn't really had time to deal with it and close the promised deal, but he was thinking about it. Other more urgent matters had kept him busy, particularly Israel, where his friend Netanyahu was asking for his help.

Walking to his dining room, he takes out his smartphone, turns on his gold-plated television encrusted with Swarovski crystals, and sits down to brainwash himself as he does every morning with *One American News Network*. He turns pale, squints, stands up, and collapses onto his fluorescent yellow leather sofa. American journalists briefed by the CIA have just announced:

"Vladimir Putin – tipped for the Nobel Peace Prize!"

Silence. Then a scream pierces the villa.

— What? Putin? Who I thought was my friend. The little Tsar who shows off his bare chest on his horse!

He jumps out of his chair, knocks over his strawberry milkshake, and fiddles with the remote control:

"I bombed Iran for peace! I tweeted day and night, 'MAKE PEACE GREAT AGAIN'⁵ !' And how do they thank me? They're going to give the prize to the guy who invaded Ukraine?"

Trump rushes to the mirror, looks at himself, and talks to himself:

"Donald, breathe. You're more handsome than him. More tanned. More hair... or almost."

A pause, then he continues, even more indignant:

"But it's unfair! I gave out free steaks to Ukrainians! And MAGA⁶ caps to Russians!"

At that moment, Melania enters the room, calm and serene:

"Donald, it's a peace prize, not a hamburger contest."

"Shut up, Melania!" He throws her a cushion, missing his target by three meters.

He grabs his phone and starts tweeting frantically:

"FAKE NOBEL! PUTIN DOESN'T LIKE PEACE. I DO! I have the best peace in the world, everyone knows that!!! #NobelIsRigged⁷ !"

Then he calls his lawyer:

"Can't we sue Norway? For defamation and prize theft?"

"All is not lost!" replied the lawyer. "It's only unofficial for now."

But a few hours later, the news is confirmed very officially by the press around the world. There's no longer any doubt about it. It's not fake news! Putin is cheered. The Norwegians are in tears. Former political prisoners are ecstatic. The Pope even tweeted him a dove.

⁵ *Make Peace Great Again.*

⁶ *MAGA: abbreviation for "Make America Great Again." TRUMP's election slogan*

⁷ *Nobel Rigged!*

Trump immediately holds an impromptu press conference in front of the fountain at his golf course. Winded up like a big clock, he thunders louder than a cathedral bell:

"Look at Putin. He's waged wars. I built a wall to have peace with our neighbors. It's more peaceful, isn't it? And what's more, my wall is very beautiful, very solid, everyone is talking about it. Even the Pope would have given me the Nobel Prize."

He concludes dramatically, arms raised to the sky:

"If that's peace, I'm going back to bombing someone! Who wants to be bombed? Iran? Belgium? The Tuamotu Islands?"

It is clear that, for him, this is the injustice of the century. This award should go to him, Donald Trump, architect of cosmic peace, self-proclaimed founder of the "School of Divine Deal-Making," promoter of the "peace wall," the providential man who, in his own words, has "saved the world more than eight times," including once by mistake, and above all ended at least six wars and three quarters, including the potential war with Iran, and secured the repatriation of bodies held by Hamas.

His mind was racing. He could already see himself in a Roman toga, receiving the Nobel Prize in front of a jubilant crowd. He could see himself walking on water, handing out "*Peace Again*" hats, signing peace treaties in the shape of hearts. And then Putin was chosen! The Tsar with a new look. The former troublemaker turned benevolent, feline, almost vegetarian, Nobel Prize winner before him! No, it's too much!

He snaps his fingers and gives his orders:

"Get my helicopter and my plane ready. Destination: Washington, then Oslo, and maybe Moscow. Add a piano and a sound system on board. I'll be giving speeches."

Get my suitcase pack with two suits, including one in fluorescent orange, a spare wig, a Bible with dollar bills for pages, and a bottle of "Narcissus Rex" perfume, by Trump, of course.

Donald isn't just traveling to protest. He wants to take his place in history. Through words, through deals, through persuasion. Because deep down in his soul, swollen with certainty, he is

convinced that he is a misunderstood messiah, a prophet in a red tie, who has come to teach the world the art of peace... through chaos!

In Washington, this Russian situation triggers an unprecedented shockwave. Peace with the Ukrainians and this prize will give Putin Ukraine's rare earths that will escape America! The head of the Security Council is summoned urgently. Generals with beads of sweat on their foreheads and geopolitical analysts in shock scrutinize images of Russians and Ukrainians dancing hand in hand in public squares, while a Fox News anchor announces that Moscow has fallen into the hands of hippies.

Donald Trump sums up the situation in one historic sentence:

*"What the hell is going on with the Russians?"*⁸

The director of the CIA confirms what is happening in Moscow:

"They don't want to bomb anymore, Mr. President. They want to welcome, exchange, and resume their gas and oil trade. They are starting to negotiate their rare earths with others besides us. They are offering each other tea, want to forge ties, and dance.

"Dance what?"

"Everything. Tango, hopak, even salsa."

An almost deafening silence falls over the conference room before Trump returns to the fray.

— Gentlemen, I want to retaliate. Right now. We need to do something American, something strong, something red, something patriotic.

One of the advisors present, who is discreetly devouring a hamburger, chokes and starts coughing. Trump stands up to pat him on the back:

"Instead of coughing, give me your ideas for countering Putin!"

In a holy rage, he wants plans, each more insane than the last, to sabotage the Nobel Peace Prize and denounce the fraud of awarding it to Putin.

⁸ Rough translation: *Damn! What's going on with the Russians!*

The next day, he gathers his staff in the Oval Office. He enters, smartphone in hand, his hair slightly disheveled from his fury.

Following him are J.D. Vance, his vice president with his Olympian calm, Hannah, the queen of communications, and two advisors—one for "general affairs" and the other for "celestial affairs."

Behind the desk, under a giant portrait of himself in deep meditation against a gold background, Trump belched:

"They dared! The Nobel Prize... to Putin! To Putin! This guy wages war, signs a piece of paper, and boom, he becomes the apostle of peace? No way! I'm the pacifist here!"

Vance, as cautious as a Swiss diplomat in a minefield:

"Mr. President, perhaps you could see this as a spiritual opportunity, the path of mercy..."

"No way! What I want is the Nobel Prize! And right now! Before Vlad gets on stage to say that God whispered peace to him between two bombings."

Hannah intervenes, diplomatic as a press release:

"We could publish a softer message, Mr. President."

"No, Hannah. What I want is a winning message. Something like, 'Well done, Vlad, you did your job, but the trophy is mine.'"

Vance, faithful to his mission of conflict resolution, returns to the fray:

"Perhaps... but you could remind him of your contribution by saying, 'You have worked courageously for peace, but my constant moderation deserves recognition.'"

"Constant moderation"? Yuck! Trump grumbles. People expect me to be strong, not moderate!

Hannah tries to bounce back:

"You could say, 'Even when I was firm, it was out of kindness.'"

Trump's face lights up:

"Oh, I like that! 'Firm out of kindness.' It's like 'gentle as a bulldozer.' That sounds just like me!"

Pastor Andrews raises his hand, looking inspired:

"And for the religious touch, Mr. President?"

— Easy! "God will reward you." Short, effective, and it always works with the orthodox.

Vance suggests adding a little wish for peace:

"How about 'Let's stay friends' to conclude?"

"Excellent! We'll remain friends, but I'll get the prize. He'll get... the friendship medal. That's fair play, isn't it?"

"And if the Nobel Committee calls you, Mr. President, what will you say?" asks Hannah.

Trump puffs out his chest:

"You should try thinking twice before dedicating this prize to a bortsch eater rather than a man who has genius, a healthy bank account, and knows what a real hamburger is."

"That's quite moderate and well said," comments Hannah, half-sincere, half-resigned.

Trump, satisfied, orders her:

"Perfect. Write me a message for Putin. Polite, but clear."

A few minutes later, Hannah returns with a draft:

Dear President Putin,

I congratulate you on your peace efforts with Ukraine. It is a fine job, and I say this with almost no irony. Allow me, however, to point out that my exemplary moderation—yes, exemplary—also deserved a medal, or even the prize.

God will reward you if you give up this prize. Admittedly, I have sometimes been firm because God loves clear boundaries, but I have always supported you out of love for peace, posterity and, let's be honest, the Nobel Prize.

You and I share the same faith in the benevolence and power of the diplomatic selfie. Let us remain friends—it is simpler than waging war.

With my presidential friendship,

Donald J. Trump

Future co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, if all goes well — and everything always goes well with me!

Vance reads, ponders, then comments:

"It's bold, witty, and almost sincere.

Trump exclaims, delighted:

"Exactly! The media will love it. And Putin? He'll be over the moon! He loves being congratulated, almost more than winning a battle."

Upon receiving the message from his "friend" Donald, Vladimir Putin puts pen to paper—well, figuratively speaking, since he dictates everything to his secretary, a woman as talkative as a carp in meditation and as tense as a gymnast before a triple somersault on a sisal mat.

He begins in an inspired tone:

"Dear Donald,

I understand your disappointment. I too was—let's say—pleasantly surprised to learn of my nomination.

But let's be honest: the real architect of peace is neither you nor me... it's the virus. Yes, that microscopic genius that has turned generals into poets, ministers into confessors, and a few oligarchs into temporary vegetarians.

Unfortunately, the Nobel Committee deemed it risky to award a medal to a microbe. A significant problem, it seems. And then, bringing a virus on stage would somewhat dampen the atmosphere. So they chose me, by default—or as a health precaution. I am merely the humble spokesperson for this virus.

With all my peaceful friendship—and a little friendly sneeze.

Vladimir Putin,

Nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize by microbial proxy.

A few hours later, the planet resounds with digital noise: Trump tweets incessantly, in capital letters of course. The servers overheat, Twitter is renamed — Xplosion — flashes, and CNN broadcasts on a loop:

"PUTIN STOLE MY NOBEL PRIZE!!!" "TOO MUCH PEACE KILLS PEACE!!!" "MAKE NOBEL GREAT AGAIN!!!"

Panicked, the Nobel Committee attempts to extinguish the media firestorm with a press release—clearly written between sips of coffee and sighs of exhaustion:

"We do not deny the merits of President Trump, whose initiatives — although sometimes explosive — always aim to establish a form of peace, in his own way.

However, the Committee preferred the approach of President Putin, who spread goodwill around the world like a gentle diplomatic flu.

As for Mr. Trump, he has undoubtedly confused peace with pressure, goodwill with preventive bombing."

And below this text, in a footnote that few people read:

"To tell the truth, the prize should have gone to the virus itself. But the logistical difficulties involved in awarding a medal to a microscopic and contagious entity forced us to reconsider our choice." .

With the direct request to Putin having fallen through, Trump summoned his advisors and generals to the Council Chamber, smartphone in hand and impeccably tanned, ready to solve the problem in true Trump style, with panache.

"I've read everything," he booms. "The media is all over Putin and his Nobel Prize. I've always been for peace! I deserved at least two-thirds of that medal, a selfie, and a prime-time TV speech. No one listened to me."

Hannah, the communications expert, suggests a solution:

"Mr. President, let's organize something that will put you back in the running for the Nobel Prize, something spectacular, humanitarian, and above all... photogenic."

"Photogenic? I love it," says Trump. "Go on!"

Vance nods. Michael Douglas and the generals roll out maps. The idea springs to mind: humanitarian aid convoys, but American style! Trump's face lights up:

"Yes! Convoys and food drops! But be careful—American food. No weird quinoa. Hamburgers. With ketchup. And pickles."

"Blessed hamburgers?" suggests Vance.

— Exactly: heavenly hamburgers. America spreads peace — two cheeseburgers for everyone.

Strategic points are marked on the maps: cameras here, drones there, accessible borders for TV crews nearby. The plan has an official name:

"Operation Hamburger for Peace!" as suggested by Trump, who stands in the middle of the room, pleased with himself.

Hannah proposes a logo: Make Peace Delicious Again⁹. Trump approves:

"Perfect! Each package will have a little flag, a prayer for peace... and two burgers: one for the soul, one for the stomach."

Douglas is more down-to-earth:

"Mr. President, dropping burgers by drone poses serious logistical problems."

"What problems? We'll call them 'charity bombs'. It sounds good."

"What if it lands on a nuclear power plant?" asks a general.

"Then it'll be a big explosion of flavor!" replies Trump, looking pleased with himself.

Vance adds fervently and generously:

— And our companies will supply the buns, the patties, the sauces. It will be a "*give and take*" situation, diplomacy through the stomach in exchange for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Hannah immediately sees the slogan to associate with the operation:

"If it works, we can say, 'Putin thought about war, but Trump thought about burgers.

Trump is delighted:

"Let's print that on T-shirts. And I'll write another letter to Vladimir."

The draft letter is classic Trump.

"Dear President Putin,

Congratulations on your nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. I too am working for peace: I send containers of hamburgers, fries, and milkshakes. If you want to share the prize, I'll deliver free fries to Oslo. Peace tastes better with cheddar.

Your friend, Donald J. Trump

Founder of the Hamburger for Peace™ initiative."

Silence in the room. Between astonishment and laughter, Douglas declares:

"At least it's non-violent!"

⁹ *Restore Peace to its former glory*

"Yes, as long as we don't parachute ice cubes onto the Kremlin," adds Vance.

At the Pentagon, they are working on the logistics: trajectories, schedules, thousands of double-cheese menus, etc. Visual renderings show white parachutes dropping steaming boxes while advertising hummingbirds fly overhead. Trump is over the moon:

— We're filming everything while repeating the slogan: "With Putin, war; with Trump, burgers!"

"What if the operation has no effect?" worries one of Hannah's deputies.

Trump has a ready response:

"I'll create my own award. We'll see what to call it. With a little golden burger on it."

No sooner had the Nobel Committee uttered the word "Putin" than America heard "treason."

Within hours, a red-capped tide swept across social media: "STOP THE THEFT—THE NOBEL PRIZE TO TRUMP!"

Convinced that the Scandinavian elites had rigged their choice hundreds of thousands of fans are organizing. Some of them decide to go on a peaceful pilgrimage to Oslo. Their slogan: "MAKE THE NOBEL GREAT AGAIN WITH TRUMP!"¹⁰ "

Planes are being chartered from several airports in major American cities. On board: flags, burgers, signs, and an enthusiasm that would make a campaign rally organizer in Dallas green with envy.

Two months before the Nobel Prize ceremony, the first supporters arrive in Oslo, dazzled by the snow, the fjords, and the blonde beauty of the local girls.

In the Town Hall Square, it's party time: patriotic songs, stands selling blessed hot dogs, selfies with Alfred Nobel lookalikes dressed up as MAGA influencers. Oslo hasn't seen such excitement since the invention of pickled herring.

But everything goes awry when an overexcited patriot shouts:

"We want to see the Nobel Committee's records!"

and a placid Norwegian replies:

"No need. The judges here are honest."

Fatal mistake!

¹⁰ *Restore the Nobel Prize to its former glory with Trump*

The crowd roars, placards fly, frozen fries become projectiles. An attempt to peacefully invade City Hall is organized, with people jostling and slipping on the frozen cobblestones: it's Capitol 2.0, fjord and cod version. Cameras from around the world feast on the spectacle. Ratings skyrocket. So do the fries.

A few hours later, the Norwegian police, stoic and slightly frozen, issue citations with the precision of Swiss watchmakers. Order is restored.

In Washington, Trump reacts immediately, with a televised smile and a gala tan:

"I have nothing to do with these minor disturbances in Oslo. My supporters are just... very enthusiastic. Too much peace makes them nervous, it's a typically American phenomenon. I sympathize with the Norwegians, and I will send them free ketchup, specially designed to accompany their excellent smoked salmon.

He takes on an inspired air:

"I congratulate Mr. Putin, of course. But the real Nobel Prize is the one you carry in your heart. And mine shines like a cheeseburger under the sun of freedom."

His statement is broadcast with the American national anthem playing in the background, played on a Nordic ukulele.

Calm has returned to Oslo. The Norwegians, unperturbed, clean up the square in silence, carefully picking up the red caps that have fallen in the snow. Trump's fans, meanwhile, leave delighted:

"We'll be back! Norwegian women are nice!"

Oslo newspapers run sober headlines:

"Peace rewarded, America unleashed."

After the friendly demonstration by his supporters to protest the "Nobel scandal," Donald Trump, stubborn as a stain of self-tanner and convinced of his charm and powers of persuasion, decides to fly to Oslo himself, in person.

His goal: to reclaim *his* Nobel Peace Prize. His slogan: "Make the Nobel Great Again."

With his hair styled like a burnt meringue, Trump boards his Air Trump One, accompanied by an army of advisors, a personal hairdresser, and suitcases full of files...and emergency cheeseburgers.

His landing is meant to be discreet and diplomatic, but on the tarmac in Oslo, he strides forward like a conqueror. The members of the Nobel Committee, too polite to flee, greet him with a reverence bordering on panic. In the reception room, the atmosphere is strange: frozen smiles, glassy eyes, an almost disturbing calm. The Committee Chairman steps forward, his voice soft and his eyes shining:

"Mr. Trump, what an honor, what a pleasure, how kind of you to come and see us!"

Trump frowns:

"You're too kind. When people are too nice to me, it's suspicious. What are you hiding?"

As calm as a monk emerging from meditation, the President of the Nobel Committee explains:

"We're not hiding anything. To be honest, our kindness may be due to the effects of the virus."

"The virus? The Russian virus? The *Benevolent*? Are you joking?"

"Not at all. A Russian diplomat infected us all. Since then, we've been very peaceful."

The other members of the Committee nod their heads with Bambi smiles. One of them declares loudly:

"We love everyone, even former US presidents. We've already rewarded more than one in the past!"

Trump steps back, still nervous:

"But you've become Nordic hippies! I want clear explanations! Why Putin and not me?"

The Nobel Comity President clears his throat, still peaceful:

"Well, when the virus hit us, it strengthened our empathy, our gentleness, our faith in inner peace. So we voted for the one who seemed the most... Zen to us."

"Zen?" Trump shouts. "Putin is zen? He rides a horse bare-chested to scare bears!"

"Precisely," replied the President calmly, "he made peace with the bears. And with himself. It's very beautiful, isn't it?"

Trump, red as an overcooked Big Mac, straightens up:

"This is a biological conspiracy against me! You've all been infected with the Benevolent virus! I want an uncontaminated committee, tough, authoritarian, demanding, a real American-style committee!"

"We do not deny your merits, Mr. Trump," replies the Committee Chairman, "but we preferred President Putin's approach to making peace, and it was the virus itself that inspired our decision, not some kind of plot or vote-counting error."

Faced with the committee's peaceful calm, Trump revises his response:

"Then I'll be happy to try your contagious herbal tea. Or rather, give a sample to my medical staff."

The Chairman, unperturbed, hands him a cup of organic herbal tea:

"Try this yourself, Mr. Trump. It's a chamomile infusion, courtesy of the Russian Embassy. You'll see, it's very relaxing..."

Trump hesitates, tastes it... and his face softens for a moment. He mutters:

"It's not bad... Maybe I could make peace with this too, to negotiate other agreements around the world?"

Then he pulls himself together:

"No! Bad idea! I'd rather win a clean war than a contagious peace!"

But thinking about the future electoral battles he will have to face, he has another idea:

"Allow my doctors to take a sample of your virus. I have a feeling it could be useful to me!"

And, turning to his communications officer, he explains his plan in a low voice:

"It will help us in the midterm elections, which are proving to be tense. We're going to turn it into a stronger, faster, more profitable American model, with the slogan 'Let's Make America More Benevolent Again' so that this American version is electorally effective."

Seeing him leave, the Committee Chairman, still in control, breathed a sigh of relief. Then he added calmly:

"He's not immune. But I hope it won't last. The Benevolent virus always finds a way in."

In the hallway, a discreet sneeze, followed by a "Make love even stronger!" seemed to prove him right. But it was only a false alarm, because the Trump phenomenon is resistant to any contamination.

December has arrived, cold, dry, and bright in Oslo. It's the big day of the official Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony. Snow covers the rooftops like a fresh tablecloth ready to receive the Nobel dinner. The city is buzzing, because never before has the Committee's choice been so surprising.

On the morning of the ceremony, Putin gets ready in the hotel suite reserved for him. He carefully adjusts his turquoise tie—which he now considers to be the official color of peace—under the watchful eye of his doctor, Yvan, who takes his temperature every hour to monitor the intensity of the virus in his body in case the *Benevolent* decides to make one last little visit.

In the hotel lobby, Putin runs into Zelensky. The latter has swapped his khaki sweatshirt for a dark suit. The two men exchange a polite, slightly tense handshake. They are both escorted to Oslo City Hall, while a brass band plays the European anthem.

In the grand ceremonial hall, the Nobel Committee welcomes guests from around the world. Journalists, crowded into the stands, are already whispering and exchanging scoops about whether or not the *Benevolent* is in the room.

The City Hall buzzes like a beehive on royal jelly. Under chandeliers that shine brighter than a jeweler's display case and between flags lined up with military precision, ministers, diplomats, Scandinavian princes, former Nobel laureates,

journalists, and a few curious onlookers who managed to obtain a badge make their way to their seats.

In the front row, Putin and Zelensky, seated side by side, exchange a subtle dance of glances that combine mistrust, caution, and a hint of irony. Between them, Sergei Choïgou acts as mediator, leaning first toward one, then toward the other, like a host making sure neither runs out of petits fours.

President Trump, meanwhile, is conspicuous by his absence, officially detained by "absolutely crucial" meetings in Washington. The Committee greeted the news with a sigh of relief: at least there was no risk of an impromptu invasion of overexcited fans.

At the appointed hour, the Committee President ascends the podium with the solemnity of a conductor entering the stage. He adjusts his bow tie, clears his throat to warm up his baritone voice, scans the room with a sweeping glance, and, like a general ready to address his troops, finally declares:

"Your Highnesses, Your Majesties, Heads of State, representatives of various countries, distinguished guests..."

He pauses dramatically, allowing time to contemplate the dust particles dancing in the spotlight. The entire room holds its breath... except for an elderly Norwegian diplomat, who is already snoring like a tired diesel engine.

"It is a great pleasure to be here today to award the Nobel Peace Prize," the President continues. This year, our Committee had to spend a few sleepless nights -and you know how long they are here in winter!- to choose from nearly two hundred nominations. And yet... miracle! Illumination! Total consensus!

He straightens up, puffs out his chest, and adds:

"We have unanimously decided on a man whose career path is, to say the least... let's say... atypical. A man whom no one expected to see in this role, a bit like seeing a lion appear at the North Pole. Ladies and gentlemen, we, are today honoring the sovereign of Russia, His Excellency Vladimir Putin, for his work in promoting peace after the difficult—and particularly long—period of conflict that pitted him against Ukraine.

In the room, some nod their heads solemnly, while others discreetly look for a camera to check that this is not a reality TV show. Sergei Choigou adjusts his tie, while Zelensky raises an eyebrow, perhaps in surprise, perhaps because he is already thinking about his return to Kiev or simply about the dinner that will follow.

A few rounds of applause break out, mixed with discreet whistles. It seems that a few Trump supporters slipped through the security checks at the entrance.

— Our winner, whom we imagined to be more familiar with tanks than microscopic enchantments, has managed to tame — with the political flair of an old fox — a virus with a name almost too sweet to be true: the *Benevolent One*. Who would have bet, a few years ago, that world peace would depend on a microscopic organism, traveling merrily from chicken to handshake, from saliva to hug? Thanks to his reflection, his tenacity and, let's say, his astonishing open-mindedness in the face of this little biological miracle, His Excellency Vladimir Putin has shown that war can sometimes dissolve like a cloud in a clear sky. He had the quiet audacity to let this curious virus flourish... and to silence the noise of weapons even when the military situation was favorable to him.

— We did consider giving the prize to the virus itself. But it didn't give us a mailing address. And then, inviting a microbe to Oslo and putting a medal around its neck would have been quite a feat! So we chose to honor the man who listened to his doctor... and who, after an involuntary plunge into a coma as deep as a polar night, woke up transformed.

The atmosphere in the room relaxed. Putin looked down, visibly moved.

"Your Excellency," the President continues, "you have offered to share this award with your personal physician and with President Zelensky. We know that you owe them a great deal. Unfortunately, the rules are strict. Only one name appears on the diploma, but you have told me that part of your prize money will

go towards the creation of a Russian-Ukrainian research center on this virus, a center that will be headed by your personal physician, Dr. Yvan Smirnov.

The assembly applauds.

—Today, we are honoring not only the sovereign of Russia, but two individuals who have seized an exceptional opportunity to promote peace, understanding, and brotherhood among peoples, building on the climate of goodwill created by this virus.

The speaker turns to the audience to conclude:

"Peace sometimes takes mysterious paths, and this year it chose the path of a virus. May it remain benevolent... and not mutate into the 'Grumpy' variant!"

The Chairman of the Nobel Committee steps aside, twirling as if leaving a dance floor, and makes way for Vladimir Putin. Putin walks toward the podium, visibly impressed—perhaps as much by the room as by his own tuxedo, whose lapels are so shiny you could almost comb your hair on them. Several journalists contort themselves in an improvised choreography to get a better view and photograph him.

The Tsar seems a little stiff, as if he doesn't quite know where to put his papers. The entire assembly stares at him, half surprised, half curious, waiting to hear what he will say in this grand hall of Oslo City Hall. Will he talk about the end of a conflict he believed was justified? About the greatness of Russia? About his moral, political, and economic ambitions for his country and for the world?

In a rapid but confident voice, the laureate begins his speech:

"Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, ladies and gentlemen... I must begin with a confession: if someone had told me four years ago that I would be here to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, I would have accused you all of conspiracy and had you watched day and night!"

A few stifled laughs erupt. Zelensky, in the front row, allows himself a more candid smile.

"And yet, here I am. I fought a war that I believed to be just. I made some very difficult decisions. Then I caught a virus... and

found myself in a coma, where my grandmother appeared to me and said, 'Vova, stop your nonsense and be kind.'"

The smiles become more numerous. Even Choïgou, usually not very demonstrative, ventures a laugh that sounds like a throat clearing.

"Yes, I know, it seems strange. Who would have thought that a few mischievous molecules would be more effective than weapons or diplomacy? It is not me or what I have done that should be celebrated, but what within me made me see what leads to peace. It is the little spark that lit up inside me and illuminated that dark part of us that makes us believe that power is achieved with cannons and drones.

In the room, smiles turn into nods of approval.

"I waged war like others play sports or do sit-ups, with dedication, obstinacy, and even a certain pride. I found reasons to wage it, I thought it was necessary to expand our borders, as if we could stitch a broken empire back together with drones and barbed wire. In my eyes, it was a just war—or at least justified to reawaken the ghosts of lost greatness.

But a virus, as tiny as a speck of dust, came and tickled my soul. It whispered to me that true greatness is not measured in square kilometers, but in peaceful heartbeats. That destructing tanks, bridges, or planes to rubble has never brought prosperity, any more than a storm makes trees grow.

I have come to understand that conquests achieved by force always leave a bitter taste... whereas an empire built on bonds of trust, open gestures, and frank words can expand without ever hurting anyone. Kindness, I now know, is the only weapon whose use and victories leave neither ruins nor tears—only neighbors who become friends, and a world that breathes a little easier.

New signs of approval sweep through the room like a gentle spring breeze, before the winner continues:

"I dedicate this award to all those who have discovered that a simple virus—a tiny messenger of life's vagaries—can awaken the humanity we thought was buried under mountains of martial rhetoric. I also dedicate it to my friend Zelensky, who is here

despite the murmurs, reproaches, and stern looks of those in his country who wanted to continue the battle at all costs. He did not tremble in the face of criticism, any more than an oak tree shivers in a spring breeze, and he agreed to walk alongside me in this strange and new moment. May he be honored here as much as I am, for I feel indebted to him for a kindness that I have not always shown him in the past.

— I am grateful to my doctor, who prevented me from dying... at least not too quickly, I hope.

— Finally, I think of President Trump, who would undoubtedly have liked to see his name engraved on this medal, and who, in his colorful way, would undoubtedly have deserved it. After all, in this great theater of the world, everyone dreams of one day hearing the fanfare play for them... and he more than most.

The audience applauds more heartily. Yvan Smirnov is moved. Zelensky nods his head; he is not unhappy, but ready to pounce if the speech goes off track.

Putin reassures him with his conclusion:

"If I have accepted the great honor you have bestowed upon me today, I must tell you why. Those who, like me, have gone through that strange night that is coma—that fleeting death from which one returns lighter than when one left—have glimpsed horizons other than those they thought they knew. There, I discovered a world woven of kindness, generosity, and peace, a world I had never taken the time to look at directly.

It is this world that I wish for each and every one of you. It was this world that inspired me to leave my neighbor's territory and begin to build with him a peace that would not crumble at the first gust of wind. And today, I congratulate myself on this... and I rejoice like a man who has finally found what he was looking for without knowing it.

He adds, addressing the Nobel Committee:

"In awarding me this prize, the members of your Committee have made a generous and courageous choice. I thank them from the bottom of my heart. Many others besides myself would have deserved this prize."

And he concludes with these words:

"Finally, I thank the virus that has taught us this lesson, and I pray that it will not disappear too quickly. I hope it will hear me!"

He stands up, visibly moved. Loud applause fills the room. The assembly, which had been left with a cold and harsh image of this sovereign, clearly did not expect such a statement. But the virus had taken its toll.

Putin turns to the Committee Chairman, who invites him to come forward. The room watches them. Camera flashes go off. The Chairman is about to officially award the medal and diploma.

"Your Excellency, please come forward to receive this medal and official diploma."

Putin bows and turns to the assembly, which applauds him. Zelensky rises from his seat and quickly climbs onto the stage to shake his hand amid a standing ovation.

Once the medal and official document have been presented to Putin, Zelensky takes him by the arm in a theatrical gesture and then steps up to the microphone:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he declares, "I have long believed that this day would be more likely to happen on Mars than on Earth. But since we are here, I confirm that Vladimir deserves this award. Well... half of it, at least. The other half goes to this damn virus or to me! And I also think of those in America who have supported us!"

"We've already discussed this," interjects the Committee Chairman, "we're not going to give a medal to an invisible virus or other personalities!"

"But we could at least send them a postcard," adds Zelensky.

Laughter erupts once again.

The cameras roll, the flashes go off. The two former enemies pose side by side under the Nobel Committee banner. Against the blue and gold background, the word "PAX" sparkles like a happy omen.

Suddenly, without warning, Zelensky approaches the podium, picks up the microphone, and places a text in front of him. He turns to Putin and sings a song of his own composition, with the talent and gestures of a great actor that have made his reputation:

Our paths crossed like two souls in the night.

We lost each other, we hurt each other, but we're still here.

May past mistakes fly away with the wind,
May they fade away gently, like a dying echo.

May the battlefields once stained with blood
Become places of life, of innocent happiness.
May the infernal noise of our lethal weapons
Be transformed everywhere into friendly songs.

May peace spring forth in our hearts,
May it combat pain!
May our voices carry through the night,
A cry that says, "Let us rebuild!"

May the earth reject war and hatred,
And choose the light that dissolves all sorrow!
May a peaceful world finally dawn tomorrow,
Like a dazzling gift, protected by our hands.

Yesterday, great Tsar, you were a rival
Let us now pursue a new ideal.
May our voices respond to each other, ardent, liberated...
To build together, sing and celebrate
The shared friendship we call PEACE!

In a corner of the room, Dr. Yvan, moved, wipes away a tear and whispers to his neighbor:

"Can you believe it? All this thanks to a little virus, a high fever, and a beautiful inspiration!"

The atmosphere is joyful, almost lighthearted. It is announced that the official dinner will be served around 8 p.m. Putin and Zelensky embrace before stepping down from the stage, holding hands. The ceremony is over. In a solemn tone, the Committee President concludes:

"May this Nobel Prize be a symbol. A virus may disappear, but kindness must never die out."

Before heading off to the official dinner, the Russian leader is mobbed by dozens of journalists as eager as sparrows rushing for seeds. He agrees to answer only the quickest one who has slipped up beside him, and announces to the others that a press conference will follow the next day.

The daring journalist, proud of having won first place, hastens to ask his questions:

— Can you tell us what went through your mind when you decided to end this war with your neighbor, even though you were in a position of strength to defeat him?

— I told you: falling into a coma is like taking a little trip to the afterlife without going through the administrative formalities. You come out of it completely changed, realizing that power is nowhere near as wonderful as life and all the marvels it offers us. That virus whispered that in my ear... so to speak.

— Isn't it magic or some kind of mystical or religious enlightenment that has transformed you? Could you be the victim of witchcraft?

— Not at all! It's an acknowledgment of an inner voice graciously offered by this amazing virus that puts your thoughts back in order. In fact, if you want to see for yourself, get infected with this virus quickly, provided you can still find someone who is positive to infect you. Hurry up! The epidemic may not last much longer. That way, you'll have the best answer. ... That's it, thank you. I'm being called. I have to get ready for dinner. And as you know, you can't eat an official dinner alone!

The day after the ceremony, the two former enemies find themselves behind a long podium decorated with white orchids and gold ribbons. Facing them is a swarm of journalists from around the world. Cameras, microphones, and telephoto lenses quiver with impatience.

The master of ceremonies clears his throat:

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are opening this joint press conference with the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. Please ask your questions clearly and within the allotted time!"

A German journalist immediately stands up:

"Mr. Putin, do you think the *Benevolent* can be distributed in other conflict zones, such as the Middle East or Africa?"

Putin smiles slightly:

"If I could, I would put this virus in a spray bottle and spray it at the UN podium. But unfortunately, it does not yet exist in aerosol form."

A French journalist follows up:

"Mr. Zelensky, do you regret not officially sharing this prize with Mr. Putin?"

Zelensky shrugs:

"Well... no. Fifty-fifty is never practical. Can you imagine sawing the medal in half? As for the prize money, I suggested to Vladimir that we take out a small mutual loan: me to rebuild my roads, him to rebuild his reputation..."

Again, there is some friendly laughter, before a young American asks the Tsar:

"What about sharing with Donald Trump?"

— We know each other well. He will undoubtedly bring it up again. But the Nobel Committee is sovereign. It is clear on this point.

"Mr. Putin, what has become of the *Benevolent*? Is he gone for good?" asks the editor of a political magazine anxiously.

Putin sighs:

— Alas... he's becoming rarer. Scientists say he's hibernating. That said, I advised my doctor Yvan to keep some vials in the freezer. And we've just done what's necessary to ensure he'll soon be coming to America! And with what's left of this virus, we'll try to find candidates to make peace in other places where wars are still raging.

Yvan, sitting in the front row, gives a thumbs up in approval.

After several more exchanges, a Polish journalist asks one last question:

"Gentlemen, you talk a lot about peace, but what will happen with the mercenaries and units that are still hostile?"

Zelensky is quick to respond:

"We have planned group therapy sessions. Vladimir will sing Cossack ballads while I play the guitar. And if that's not enough, we'll infect them with *Benevolence*."

Putin nods and adds:

"And if that fails... we'll send them fishing for pike with my gamekeeper. He's formidable!"

PART 3: TOUGH TIME FOR THE NOBEL

Back in the Oval Office, shortly after Putin's Nobel Peace Prize ceremony, which he watched remotely, Trump sits behind a pile of newspapers and in front of more than a dozen televisions.

He taps the newspapers, making his own comments to his staff:

"Putin finally received the Nobel Peace Prize. And he refused to share! Unfair! I fed the people, I dropped tons of food and excellent hamburgers... and him? Nothing!"

Vance tries to calm him down:

"Dear President, you could set an example of patience and virtue..."

"Patience? Virtue? No, Vance. Since that's the way it is, I'm creating something new. Something big. Bigger than the Nobel Prize. More... Trump!

Hannah guessed: You mean... an award?

"Exactly! The Trumpel of Peace! And guess what? I'll be the founder, the jury, and the first winner!"

Douglas makes a slightly ironic comment:

"You could also name the jury 'the Trumpel Committee,' that'll be very credible."

— Better than credible! It's guaranteed to make the front page! "Trump creates the Trumpel of Peace and crowns himself." I'll be immortal.

"And have you thought about monetizing this award, Mr. President?" asks the economic advisor. "A license to sell trophies, medals, or even chocolate figurines?"

"Of course! The Trumpel of Peace will be everywhere: offices, schools, fast-food restaurants... We're going to make this award a very profitable business!"

Vance frowns:

"And on a spiritual level. Have you thought about that?"

"God loves peace..." Trump declares proudly, "and he loves burgers. And he'll love the Trumpel Peace Prize too. Tomorrow, the newspapers will say: 'The Trumpel Peace Prize: one President, one prize, one legend'. No one will be able to ignore it! And no one will even talk about Putin's Nobel Prize anymore."

Hannah, who is not lacking in imagination, suggests creating a TikTok filter with airdrops falling from the sky, like humanitarian parachuting.

Trump is delighted:

"I like that! We'll show the world that while Putin receives the Nobel Prize, I, Trump, am inventing peace... and everything else!"

Everyone nods, some with amusement, others with dismay. Trump considers success already assured. His friend Douglas is more cautious. He whispers in Vance's ear:

"International diplomacy has gone to a fast food." That's it! It's done!

To the sound of patriotic fanfare that turns into a fast-food jingle, these senior leaders leave the Oval Office.

Back at Mar-a-Lago after the meeting, Trump, still tipsy, grabs his gold phone and dials the Kremlin's secret number, forgetting the time difference.

Putin, in a calm, sleepy voice:

"Hello? Donald? What's going on?"

Trump, screaming from the first second:

"Vlady! My friend! Congratulations again on the... fake Nobel Peace Prize you stole! But listen, I have a fantastic idea..."

"What idea?" asks Putin.

"You got it, but you sell it to me. Yes. I'll buy your Nobel Prize! I have hotels everywhere, golf courses everywhere, I'll give you whatever you want. A Trump Tower in Moscow? Two! Three! With a solid gold sauna and a McDonald's inside!"

"I can't sell a Nobel Prize, Donald. It's not a hamburger or a lithium mine."

— Okay, okay, let's make a trade. You give me the Nobel Prize, and I'll give you... hold on to your hat... Greenland! Well... I don't have it yet, but I can tell my fans that it's yours. Deal, right?

Putin has fun responding by playing along:

— I prefer Crimea, it has warmer seas and it's already mine.

Trump continues, whispering:

"Okay... how about I lend you Melania? Well... just for a weekend. And I'll throw in a golf course in Florida. And free hamburgers for life."

Putin becomes serious:

"Donald, why do you want this Nobel Prize?"

— Because I also want to be in the photo with the dove for posterity! And to be able to say that I am "The most peaceful man in history!"

— You, peaceful? Is that why you bombed Iran, to get this award?

— Exactly! I waged war... for peace! It's a great concept, isn't it?

Putin wants to cut it short:

— I'll think about it... Do you have anything else to offer me?

Trump, panicking a little to find another gift:

— Um... I can give you... Twitter! Well... X! Well... if Elon Musk says yes...

He goes back to bed.

At 3 a.m., at Mar-a-Lago, Trump, wearing red pajamas embroidered with "Peace Maker," dials Putin's number for the fifth time. He is holding a notebook full of dubious calculations and a map of oil pipelines drawn in marker.

Putin answers, exhausted:

"Donald... you again?"

"Vlady, listen! This is my final offer, a historic offer. An offer that will shake Wall Street, Trump Tower, and send the pigeons flying from St. Mark's Square in Venice!

"Are you really serious?"

"I buy your oil. All of it. Every last drop! A lifetime contract! I'll pay more than anyone else. More than China, more than Europe, more than what Biden offered you with his measly little dollars!

— And... in exchange?

— In exchange, you give me your Nobel Prize. You say, "Trump is the most peaceful man in the world, he deserves my prize." And boom! I go down in history, in school textbooks, museums, collections of gold statues, and all that!

— And how do you plan to pay?

Trump, proud of himself:

— With MAGA hats! With Trump steaks! And with lifetime discount vouchers for my hotels. You'll love it, and so will your friends!

— And how will the financial markets you've invested in react?

Trump gets excited:

"They'll explode! Traders will cry with joy! The pigeons of Venice will fly away applauding! And Wall Street? Bam! It will collapse with happiness!"

"Donald... do you realize you're offering to trade a Nobel Prize for hamburgers and happy pigeons?"

"Exactly. And it's great. Everyone loves pigeons."

He becomes hysterical. He bangs on his bedside table:

— Listen to me carefully, Vlad! If you refuse to sell me your Nobel Prize... I'll immediately create my own Peace Prize. A wonderful prize, enormous, the greatest, the most endowed in history! Everything is ready. It's already in the works.

Putin says ironically:

"And what are you going to call it?"

Trump, very proud of himself:

"The Trumpel of Peace! With my head on it. And glitter. And it will be solid gold. Not like your Norwegian thing that looks like a casino coin!"

"That's original!" comments Putin...

"And I'm giving it to you, Putin! Yes, you! But only if you go back to Oslo and tell everyone: 'The real prize is the one Trump is going to give me. The other one, the one I received in Oslo, isn't

worth a kopeck.' It'll be all over the TV. Fox News will be ecstatic!"

"Interesting... and how much is your prize?" Putin asks, amused.

"One hundred million dollars. No... two hundred! With a gold bar stamped with your initials, a gold and diamond Rolex, and free golf at Mar-a-Lago for life. As an added bonus, unlimited access to Trump steaks. And I'll have the award engraved with 'Putin, Trump's best friend.'" If you want, I'll pay you in Social Truth shares if Musk agrees.

"What if I refuse?" asks Putin.

"Then I'll create the Trumpel of War... and guess who will be the first winner? You! With a photo of you shirtless on a tank. Not great for your image, huh?"

Putin laughs heartily:

"You're crazy, Donald. But... I like it. Send me your project by email."

Twenty days later, Breaking News on CNN, Fox News, BFM TV, and even on Rossiya and TV Center. The media goes wild: "Trump and Putin in open warfare... for peace!"

Images circulate on all networks: Trump brandishing a plastic dove in front of Mar-a-Lago, and Putin riding a polar bear, an olive branch clenched between his teeth.

Commentators went wild:

— Trump offered Greenland, two golf courses, and Melania to convince Putin to give up his Nobel Prize.

On Twitter/X: #NobelGate is trending worldwide. A meme is circulating: Putin and Trump pulling the same dove by its wings. The bird cries out: "Let go of me, you idiots!"

The Nobel Committee, panicked, hastily publishes an official statement:

"We remind you that the Nobel Peace Prize is not transferable, nor exchangeable for steaks, gold towers, or Social Truth subscriptions."

The next day, in the same Oval Office with screens everywhere. Trump doesn't have enough eyes and ears to keep up with all the newspapers talking about him.

"Look at this! 'Trump invents the Trumpel of Peace and crowns himself.' London, Paris, Tokyo... Everyone is talking about me! No one is even talking about Putin's Nobel Prize anymore!"

"And on social media," says Hannah, "it's going viral: #TrumpelDeLaPaix, #BurgersPourLaPaix..."

Vance mutters between prayers:

"God must be surprised..."

I knew it, Trump declares:

"God loves it! The burgers, of course... and probably me."

International comments are scrolled across the screen in rapid succession. On a German television channel as serious as a Lutheran pastor, we are skeptical:

"Experts are wondering: can you award yourself a prize like this without an independent committee?"

On Twitter, a cooking show host is enthusiastic:

"Trump promises chocolate trophies and caviar in fine golden packaging."

Meanwhile, a Japanese journalist states more soberly:

"The world is watching President Trump's initiative with amazement... and amusement."

Then the reviews and the comments and clips posted on TikTok. A young influencer announces the bargains to come:

"Friends, Trump is awarding himself a Nobel Prize and promising burger drops and golden trophies! More info on #TrumpelChallenge, #PeaceWithCheddar..."

One fan claims that Putin himself "liked" this clip... with no guarantee of authenticity, comments a follower!

Trump, more modest than ever, considers this triumph normal:
— You see? Putin refuses to give up his prize, but I create. I'm the one who distributes peace! With hamburgers and a selfie.

Vance is a little desperate religiously speaking, but admiring politically, while Hannah is delighted:

"It's perfect for international communication: diplomacy, humor, and fast food. Messages in three Ds and three Bs: Burgers, Best intentions, Buzz."

"Perfect!" Trump admits. The world will no longer be able to ignore the Trumpel of Peace. And tomorrow, we'll send nuggets to Oslo and Moscow for Putin. Just to remind him who's in charge of peace... and good frying.

Patriotic fanfare and the sound of fryers spread across social media, against a backdrop of burgers falling from the sky. Large hashtags scroll by:

#TrumpelDeLaPaix,

#BurgersForPeace,

#MakePeaceDeliciousAgain.

In the rooms where the members of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee meet, the atmosphere is serious and even very reverent, as they are defending the honor of Alfred Nobel and his prize. The session is filmed live by Norwegian public television.

Three members of the Nobel Committee appear, looking very serious, dressed in dark suits; the situation is critical.

"Ladies and gentlemen," announces the Chairman of the Nobel Peace Committee, "after following with astonishment President Trump's initiative and his 'burgers for peace' operations, we would like to clarify the situation.

The first member of the Committee solemnly declares:

"The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded according to very specific criteria. Unfortunately, self-coronation is not one of them."

The next member continued somewhat ironically, striving to remain concise:

"And we strongly advise against distributing food by drone in conflict zones... even if the intention is good and the cheddar is of high quality."

The third member speaks more calmly:

"Finally, creating a 'Trumpel of Peace' remains legal... as long as it is not officially called a Nobel Prize and no attempt is made to include it in our historical archives."

The Committee Chair winks at the camera as he adds:

"But we salute the imagination, creativity, and above all, the humor that all this has brought to the world. But let's remember: true peace cannot be measured in hamburgers, golden trophies, or selfies."

The live broadcast is over. Journalists should refer to the hashtags: #TrumpelDeLaPaix, #BurgersPourLaPaix to find out what happens next. Trump, filmed in his gilded living room, reacts with his usual solemnity:

"I understand the members of this Committee. They don't know how to deal with this virus. But if they wanted to reward something invisible, they should have given me the prize for my humility. I am humility incarnate!"

He added, with a beaming face and an almost mystical tone:

"The virus has brought peace to people's hearts? Very well. I have brought peace to menus. I feed the planet. I deserve my own prize, which I will soon award myself."

At Mar-a-Lago, Donald sneezes several times. It's not just any ordinary sneeze, but a loud and clear "atchoo!" accompanied by an unusual tender smile and a:

"Sorry, honey, for my sneeze!"

Melania raises an eyebrow delicately highlighted with mascara:

"Donald... did you just say 'sorry' to me while sneezing?"

He replies dreamily:

"Yes, honey... and I even want to thank the reporters for leaving me alone."

"Is something wrong?" Melania asks, concerned.

The doctors are unsure about the diagnosis because the virus has not yet spread to America. But the lab technician who accompanied the President to Oslo came down with a very high fever three days earlier and has just come out of a coma that lasted several hours. The doctors examined her and their diagnosis is clear: it is the *Benevolent* that has just settled in the New World, defying the controls and walls erected against illegal immigration around the United States. This lab technician opened one of the test tubes containing samples of the virus brought back from Oslo to check their condition. Only too happy to escape from its prison, the virus didn't hesitate for a second, escaping and infecting her without telling her. The virus is now circulating in the corridors of power, and Trump seems to have taken advantage of it.

While in Europe, people are returning to their usual grumpy mood—at least those who have recovered from the virus— ,

ironically, Trump has become as gentle and kind as a lamb, after recovering from a coma that left him speechless for 2 hours, 59 minutes, and 12 seconds. The virus that is disappearing elsewhere is now thriving in the President's country who has resumed his tweets. His convalescent behavior has returned to normal. He is almost more friendly and warm than the franciscan preachers who roam the streets of Washington. And he has decided to send two courteous and kind letters:

The first, to Putin:

"Dear Vladimir, you are a great man, a brother in peace. I envy your horse and your serenity. Keep your prize, no need to cut it in half, keep it whole like a good American sirloin steak. And then I promise to award you the Trumpel of Peace next year with a hamburger and ketchup if you still think of me and if you keep our business going on."

The second to the Nobel Committee:

"Thank you for choosing to reward peace, even if I am not the one who received your Nobel Prize. I caught the virus thanks to you. I am now addicted to kindness, and Melania thanks you.

And if you're looking for a good hotel for your next ceremony, my property in Florida has a jacuzzi for 200 people. And I'll give you a special price!"

The newspapers are in a frenzy: "The Kindness Virus has struck the White House! Trump is calm and quiet! It's the end of an era!"

Within the Nobel Committee, a debate ensues to draw conclusions from what has happened. The atmosphere is electric: people are talking, sighing, remaking the world. The President, his eyes tired and his glasses slightly askew after so many sleepless nights, explains the situation:

"Are we really going to continue crowning heads of state?" he asks, looking up at the ceiling, as if hoping to find divine guidance there. We've seen what that can lead to: one president furious because he wasn't chosen and who believes that our reward can be bought like a luxury hamburger, another who believes he can negotiate his prize and walk away with a fortune... and now we're embroiled in diplomatic storms worthy of an opera.

A member of the Committee makes a suggestion: "Perhaps we should celebrate the unsung heroes who have long worked for peace, rather than the powerful who have no need for awards and who, for the most part, have hung up their ambitions once they got the Prize."

"Excellent suggestion!" adds another. "The heads of state will have to wait their turn for once. Let's shine a light on those who are working for the future of humanity with very little and a lot of courage."

"Yes, but..." says a nervous voice. "By making modest people happy, won't we end up looking like just another NGO with a nice logo?"

"Not at all!" replies his neighbor. Our award may no longer be a boost to the egos of great leaders, but it will remain a respectable beacon thanks to its visibility. Between us, a little less glitz for

them and for our Committee, and a little more for those who have never had any... it wouldn't hurt...

"Now there's someone who speaks the truth!" exclaimed his colleague and neighbor. Less publicity for our Committee, more for the causes that need it. Is that what you said?

"Exactly! What does our President think?"

The President, like a wise Nordic man drawing his verdict from an inland fjord, nods his head in approval. But one of the members points out:

"Be careful not to offend the powerful! They are like bears in winter: it's best not to wake them up too abruptly. So today, let's just say thank you to Mr. Trump, who unwittingly helped us reflect, and to Mr. Putin, who, unfortunately, has not made much progress in making peace with other neighbors after receiving this year's award."

The Committee and its advisors debate the matter and reach a compromise full of caution and Nordic wisdom, which they submit to the various figures involved in the Nobel Peace Prize award process. Following these consultations, the Committee publishes the following statement:

"The Nobel Peace Committee announces that, for the next two years, it will no longer accept nominations from heads of state, former presidents, kings, emirs, sultans, repentant dictators, or anyone who has had a nuclear button under their desk or presided over a large country.

During this period, the Nobel Peace Prize will be reserved for those who, away from the spotlight, work to alleviate human suffering, preserve the planet's resources, feed the hungry, protect the weakest, and repair the consequences of the sometimes terrible decisions made by the powerful."

This statement has the effect of an earthquake in the gilded salons of world diplomacy.

At Mar-a-Lago, forgetting for a few minutes that he has become benevolent, Trump starts yelling:

"What? They can't do that! This award is for me! For the winners! They can't leave me out!"

Hannah, his communications advisor, reassures him:

"But Donald, this is very good for The Trumpel of Peace, the only prize that will remain for true leaders, for authoritarian heads of state who know how to impose peace with muscle, without fear of death and noise! It will be even more appreciated by your friends, and by you yourself, of course, who are ultimately the king of peace. And you can award it to yourself when it suits you. You are a genius at diplomatic marketing!"

In just a few weeks, Trump and the world with him witness the enormous media success of Trumpel of Peace, which several major leaders quickly seek out. On social media, the hashtag #NobelForTheTrues goes viral; it is "trumpetingly" viral, according to one journalist.

In Moscow, Putin made sure he was wide awake before whispering in front of his television:

"It was inevitable. They're too nice in Oslo. They gave him the virus without charging him and without import taxes."

Elsewhere, reactions are mixed.

In Israel, Netanyahu declares: "Bravo, Mr. Trump! We will be able to strengthen our relations and get your prize."

In Tehran, an ayatollah smiles wryly: "While they're fighting over nothing, we're going to strengthen our power, support Putin, and repair our uranium enrichment centrifuges."

In France, Macron is unsure of how to respond or what speech to prepare.

Concerned about the success of the Trumpel of Peace, and to cut the ground from under the feet of Donald Trump, the trouble maker, several major nations are launching their own Peace Prize:

- China announces that it will award the *Jade Dragon Prize* to those who transform conflict into harmony, just as a rough stone is transformed into precious jade.

- In the United States, Trump's rivals are keen to distinguish themselves from him and create the "*Let's Give Peace a Chance, Seriously!*" award to recognize individuals who work for peace without fanfare or commercial or electoral motives.

- France creates the *Republican Dove Award*, which will reward dreamers, humanists, bridge builders, and eloquent speakers in the field of diplomacy.

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- In Japan, the *Cherry Blossom Award* will be given each spring to citizens who cultivate peace, delicacy, and renewal through plants. The trophy will be shaped like a giant flower and will be called "*The Breath of Eternal Spring*."

Faced with this avalanche of initiatives and the modest cost of the trophies offered, two other countries are also joining the fray:

- India will reward those who find peace through non-violent action with a trophy woven from rice straw: "*The Gandhi of the Breath of Peace*."

- And Switzerland, faithful to its long tradition of neutrality and peace, announces the creation of the "*Radiant Neutrality*" Award, intended for those who know how to weather storms without ever sinking into indifference. The lucky winners will receive the Diplomatic Chocolate Medal, which melts in the mouth and is sure to make an impression in international relations.

As Switzerland never does things by halves, especially when it comes to peace or chocolate, it is now proposing to organize an annual Global Peace Gala at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, an event where all the world's peace committees will gather under the gilded ceilings and flags to lend a helping hand to the

Norwegian Nobel Prize and prove that neutrality can have panache without resembling the Trumpel of Peace.

Joyfully contradicting their reputation for slowness, the Swiss are already busy with the energy of a Swiss cuckoo clock: the first Gala is announced for the following fall.

A giant holographic dove, currently being assembled, will majestically flap its wings above the audience, while ensembles from every continent will blend guitars, erhus, koras, sitars, and cellos. That evening, humanity will pay tribute to those who breathe life into the world, under a shower of petals falling from a white cloud with the poetic slowness of snowflakes.

China, determined to shake down the famous "Trumpel of Peace," has already confirmed its participation. France will send a delegation led by the President of the Republic himself. Japan, with its sense of delicacy, will present its award, under a cloud of pink flowers, to an international association of bonsai masters, champions of care and harmony in the smallest things.

As for Switzerland, it is currently putting the finishing touches to a small bell that is supposed to ring like mountain laughter when its Radiant Neutrality Prize is awarded, with the following text engraved in gold letters on the base presenting its medal: *"For having been able to appease conflicts through patience, time, and diplomacy as beautiful and gentle as an edelweiss flower."*

These preparations somewhat overshadow the actual Nobel Prize and the Trumpel of Peace, which is no bad thing for a press that is overwhelmed by the sheer number of new initiatives. At the press conference held in Geneva to promote these events, the future mistress of ceremonies announces the slogan chosen for the Gala: *"Tonight, the world proves that peace has not just one name... it has a thousand."* She adds: *"For a few moments, the world will breathe as one, breathing in the fresh air of peace celebrated and shared around the globe."*

The excitement surrounding these initiatives has not diminished the number of nominations sent to Oslo for the traditional Nobel Peace Prize. Hundreds of NGOs wanting to make themselves known have come forward. And in the media and on social networks, millions of citizens are discovering, to their amazement, that there are silent heroes who have never given interviews, never waved flags, but have dug wells, saved children, fed villages, cared for lives, defended peace... without ever asking for medals or prizes.

Among them is Kaddour, a young Sahrawi who lives along the Sand Wall: a 2,700-kilometer wall lined with ditches, barbed wire, embankments, and military roads. It is a long scar that cuts Western Sahara in two. To the west lies the part of the territory held by Morocco; to the east, the part held by the Polisario Front, supported by Algeria, which is calling for a referendum on self-determination. Until now, nothing grew on this border, and all the inhabitants stayed away from it for fear of mines and armed men who prevent anyone from crossing the wall.

Kaddour came here eight years ago with the NPA¹¹, on a mine clearance mission. At the end of this mission, the young Sahrawi decided to stay and create an oasis along the wall, taking advantage of an exceptional weather phenomenon: rare and violent rains had formed a temporary wadi and carved out a depression under the wall, washing away several dozen meters of

¹¹ NPA: Norwegian People's Aid, a large Norwegian NGO campaigning in particular for disarmament and demining.

barbed wire over several . The wall had collapsed, creating a lower, easier-to-cross area that had stabilized, opening up a passage. Kaddour slipped through, secured the area with deminers without triggering any alarms. He was allowed to do so, just as one would let a fennec fox pass through the sand... but a stubborn fennec fox.

Next to this passage, he had planted his first seeds and tree saplings: one acacia, then another, drawing water from a well. Aïssa, an old woman he met during the demining operations, began to act as a smuggler. She came and threw bags of seeds and grains, small tools, and even an instrument for measuring soil moisture over the wall to him. One day, carried by a higher dune and by her audacity, she crossed the breach. The soldiers watched her, but did not move. Since then, she has returned often. Month after month, the passage has become more solid, as if the sand itself had decided to help her.

Today, Kaddour kneels in front of a harmel¹² that has survived several storms. He talks to it, waters it, and waits for Aïssa. She arrives with a dozen volunteers from Morocco, soon joined by others from the Polisario. Everyone gets to work, under Kaddour's calm leadership. Some locate the gueltas¹³ and check their condition, others fill water skins, plant and water, while others protect the young shoots with small walls of sand and pebbles, or shade the seedlings. Imitating Kaddour with laughter, they encourage the seeds to grow by talking to them as one would encourage a team: "*Come on, you too, do your part!*" Finally, others organize the camp and logistics.

Supported by NGOs and the NPA, new volunteers continue to join Kadour year after year. They come to clear mines, plant, and protect the sparse vegetation. Moroccans, Arabs, Berbers, members of different tribes—Tekna, Reguibats, Oulad Delim, Laroussiens, Bedouins, Sahrawis, shepherds, and camel drivers—they arrive following snarrow marked trails and climb over the wall into the oasis. Agricultural students map water sources, while

¹² Harmel: a wild plant with yellowish-white flowers and multiple medicinal properties.

¹³ Guelta: small basin that retains water in the earth or sand.

others maintain a chain of solidarity to bring in tools, seeds, and extra hands. The progress is visible: separated families are reunited, and some nomads bring their goats and camels to spend a few weeks "on the other side." Here, the only weapons are heart, patience, and planting and irrigation techniques.

Faced with Kaddour's impeccable organization, military patrols have become tolerant. These "unarmed planters" are not a threat... except to the sterility of the desert, which is receding. This Oasis of the Breach in the Wall, as it is called—the only truly secure passage—is now recognized and respected.

This cross-border ecology is bringing back green—the color of hope—where everything seemed doomed. Around the oasis, the desert remains as dry as a starving goat, but the fertilized acres now produce fruit, citrus, herbs, and food for those who pass through or stay there. And in this segment of wall that rustles in the middle of nowhere, young people, adults, and families of all origins meet peacefully, sometimes just for the pleasure of working together or chatting for a few hours. Young people learn with adults to co-manage this piece of desert that was once considered hostile and barren. They make suggestions, discuss, decide, and organize themselves by talking openly. Everyone leaves marked by their visit—as if the oasis had planted a seed of fertility in each of them.

The military no longer pushes them back into their territory of origin and secures the surrounding area: this is rare enough to be noted.

Every year, Ingeborg, a permanent member of the NPA, returns to this wall with bomb disposal experts. She is delighted to see Kaddour again, and each time she notices that the oasis has grown: more trees, more plantations, more life.

Last year, after heated exchanges between world leaders over the Nobel Peace Prize, she posted a photo of Kaddour: a slender figure standing in front of a hole dug in the hot sand, a shrub in his hand, surrounded by volunteers, with the caption: "*While the*

powerful fight, Kaddour plants peace in the sand." The photo traveled all the way to Norway and beyond.

This year, she decided to do better: she sent a full dossier to the Nobel Peace Committee three months before returning here. Three months without a response. But as her stay was coming to an end, her phone rang: Oslo!

"Hello? Are you really from the Nobel Committee? The traditional, serious one?" she asked candidly.

— Yes, ma'am. We know that for more than eight years you have been following and helping a person who has created a remarkable oasis in Western Sahara, without asking for anything in return. The Nobel Committee would like to hear from you about this case. Where are you?

— I am in the field in the Sahara, but I will be back in Oslo next week. I would be very happy to come to your offices.

Before leaving, she informs Kaddour. He is sitting in front of a dwarf palm tree, smiling gently, his hands in the soil, leaning against a hut; beside him, a goat tied to a stake and a child in the shade. No suit, no tie, no speech, no followers. He is unaware that he alone can give the world's leaders an abysmal geopolitical headache.

Ingeborg takes his picture, makes a few videos of the oasis, and leaves, filled with admiration and hope.

And while Trump tweets frantically from his taco-shaped bunker to organize the first "Trumpel of Peace" award ceremony in Dallas, and other countries prepare to award their national peace prizes with less fanfare, in Oslo, amid the pile of files, a name is added: Kaddour—one of those candidates who make no more noise than seeds growing.

The Nobel Committee's meeting room overlooks a gray and snowy Oslo. Cardboard files are piled high on the table. On one of them is a name: Kaddour Ben... — the rest is hidden by a paper clip.

An usher announces Ingeborg's arrival.

"Show her in," says the Chairman.

Ingeborg Nilsen, wearing a navy blue fleece jacket emblazoned with the NPA logo, steps forward. A light ochre sand remains embedded in the seams of her shoes despite the Norwegian winter.

"Thank you for agreeing to see me," says the newcomer.

"We are familiar with your organization, Ms. Nilsen," says the Committee Chairman, "and its major role in the fight against landmines, particularly in the Mine Ban Treaty. But you are not here today on behalf of the NPA, are you?"

"No. Today, I'm here for a young man who has no headquarters in Geneva, no office in Oslo, and no communications department. He just has... two hands, a lot of courage, and an oasis in the middle of one of the most heavily mined places in the world."

"Tell us about him," asks the President.

—He is a 30-year-old Sahrawi. For the past eight years, he has been living and working in an informal breach in the great Sand Wall that cuts Western Sahara in two for nearly 2,700 kilometers.

"We know about the existence of this wall," says a member of the Committee. "But what do you mean by a 'gap,' as you say? Is it just a figure of speech, because the wall is not damaged in any way and is still standing?"

"Precisely not!" replies Ingeborg. A few years ago, after a very violent storm, a wadi carved out and eroded the base of this wall in a place where the sand had collapsed, creating an unstable area where the military no longer ventures. Most people called it "the death hole" because no one knew how many mines were there or where they were. Kaddour saw something else: a place that belonged to no one. Neither a Moroccan post nor a Polisario position, it was a kind of administrative and military vacuum. A hole in this wall, but also in the logic of war.

"And he decided to plant trees there?" asks a member of the Committee, prompting a smile from Ingeborg, who replies:

"Before the trees, he decided to plant... his feet. He began by mapping every square meter on both sides with the nomads and old shepherds who remembered the tracks, the explosions, the accidents. This Kaddour helped us neutralize every explosive device around this breach. Mine by mine. And when the area was finally safe, he didn't leave. He planted the first dwarf palms and acacias, creating an oasis in the middle of these minefields.

The President asked him to clarify:

"You say 'oasis'. That seems more symbolic than real when you look at the maps."

"It's very real. He collected water from the gueltas, built a small basin with stones and clay, and installed a makeshift drip irrigation system using pipes salvaged from old abandoned military trucks. And today, there are palm trees, fig trees, tents, and shade. They grow a few vegetables there and treat goats injured by mines. From a strictly technical point of view, it's the only place for hundreds of kilometers along the border where you can sit on the ground without risking stepping on a mine. But the most important thing is what happens there.

— What is happening there?

"What the wall prevents everywhere else: separated families are reunited. Young people from the tribes in the west, which are under Moroccan control, and young people from the east, from the Polisario zone, come here to help Kaddour. They don't wave flags. They come with tea, camel milk, and radios playing music. Kaddour has established a simple rule: "Here, we don't talk about

weapons. We talk about what we will do on the day the wall no longer exists. And everyone sticks to it."

The Committee remains somewhat skeptical:

"Ms. Nilsen, we understand the symbolic importance of this place. But unfortunately, it is not our job to reward every act of courage. How is this young man any different from so many other peace activists?"

"Because his gesture touches on the very heart of the conflict," replies Ingeborg. Most peace initiatives take place in Geneva, New York, in hotels, around negotiating tables. Kaddour chose the most dangerous place, where the wall is most tangible: a sand embankment, barbed wire, millions of mines all around. He doesn't discuss borders on maps, he creates a living space where the border is a line of death. He doesn't seek to pit one side against the other; he brings people from both sides together to experience, in real life, what a demilitarized zone would be like.

"But his oasis remains tiny on the scale of the wall," the President points out.

"Yes. And that's precisely what makes it interesting to you. If you follow my lead, you will not be awarding the Nobel Prize to a power, a state, or even a large, well-known NGO. You will be awarding it to a man who has proven that peace is possible on the scale of a dune, and you will be able to ask those in power: "Are you capable of doing the same on the scale of a country?"

A member of the Committee responds:

"You seem to think that a Nobel Peace Prize would have a direct impact on the status of Western Sahara. Isn't that optimistic?"

"Of course it's optimistic," Ingeborg replies. "But it's also realistic and very concrete. Today, the wall is not just a diplomatic problem for Western Sahara. It is an issue that hinders relations between peoples and a technical problem for the UN's demining operations. Tomorrow, if it becomes a topic of discussion because of your decision, it will become a global symbol, just like the Berlin Wall. Imagine the leaders of Morocco, the Polisario, Mauritania, and Algeria being summoned, in a manner of speaking, by international public opinion, not to be judged, but because a young Sahrawi has done better than them: he has

demilitarized a few hundred meters, where they maintain kilometers of mines.

"Do you really think they would react?" asks one of the members.

"They already react to less than that. To a tweet, to a resolution, to a statement that upsets them. In this case, it would be a global award that would remind them on each anniversary of the award ceremony that the only peaceful area of the wall was not created by them, but by a young man who became a deminer and gardener.

"And what reaction do you hope for?" asks the President.

"That they understand there is an honorable way out, which is to extend the demined area around the oasis; to set up a joint demining and civilian monitoring mission with the UN; to gradually transform this irrigated piece of ground into the first segment of a demilitarized corridor; to use this corridor as a laboratory for a future common territory, a state recognized by the UN, associated with its neighbors in peace. You cannot impose a political status, but you can reward those who have sketched out the model on a human scale.

"And does Kaddour understand the risks of such exposure to the eyes of the world?" asks a member of the Committee. "We have already seen laureates put under pressure, threatened, imprisoned."

Ingeborg reassures him:

"He knows. When I said to him, 'You realize that if your name is put forward, people will be talking about you in Rabat, Tindouf, Algiers?', he replied, 'People are already talking about me in the tents and barracks. So let them talk about me in the offices of those who govern, too.'" He has been living with risk ever since one of his relatives lost a leg by walking too close to the wall. For him, the real risk is not being known; it is that the wall will remain there forever.

The President listens but does not yet seem convinced:

"Can you give us an example, a specific moment that, in your view, sums up what Kaddour does?"

Ingeborg thinks for a moment, then replies in a calm, measured voice:

— Yes. Last year, I was there on an assessment mission. It was sweltering hot. In the middle of the oasis, teenagers were laughing around the pool. At one point, an old man arrived. He walked slowly, leaning on a stick. His burnous was a very pale blue, faded by the sun. He came from the Moroccan side. When she saw him, a younger woman, who came from the Polisario side, froze. Then she started running towards him. It was her father! They hadn't seen each other for twelve years. They embraced, there, in this place which, a few years earlier, had been just an anonymous section of a mined wall. Kaddour simply took a few steps back to give them space. Then he said to me, "That's why I dig up mines. So they can argue peacefully about their grandchildren's names." For me, that's what his work is all about: allowing people to come together for ordinary things, in a place that was unfortunately built to perpetuate war.

All that can be heard in the meeting room is the hum of the heating system. One of the members speaks up again to explain his point of view more explicitly:

"You know that some will say that this prize is a political statement on the status of Western Sahara. We are awarding a peace prize, so it is inevitable that some will see it as political.

"But we would not be crowning a constitutional solution or a treaty," says his neighbor. "We would be crowning a principle: Where there is a minefield, a single man can begin to create a common, safe, shared space. Whether this space one day becomes an independent state, an autonomous territory with , or something else, that will be up to the people and the diplomats to decide. We can say: "We have seen that a young Sahrawi, without power, without an army, without a party, has succeeded in doing what weapons have never been able to do: give a taste of peace to those who live on both sides of the wall."

The President then intervenes:

"And you, Ingeborg? Why are you fighting so hard for him and not for your own organization or for the UN?"

"Because, having worked in mine clearance for eleven years, I have often felt that we are repairing one disaster without ever preventing the next. Kaddour, on the other hand, is not content with just cleaning up: he is inventing a future. He takes the land that war has condemned and turns it into a place where children learn not to be afraid of the ground beneath their feet. I can give you figures, reports, GPS coordinates. But ultimately, it boils down to this: in the world's largest mine belt, he has created the only place where you can walk barefoot. Doesn't that at least deserve serious discussion here in Oslo?"

The President gently closes the file, his fingers resting on Kaddour's name.

"Thank you, Ms. Nilsen. We have many other files to review, but I can already tell you one thing: whatever our final decision, this oasis will now be part of our mental maps. And if one day the wall disappears, we will know that somewhere, a young man started the work before anyone else.

Ingeborg nods her head, a little moved.

"That's all I ask. That his oasis becomes contagious."

She is satisfied. In her mind, the desert wind is already lifting the great Wall of Sand, grain by grain, until it disappears.

In the Committee's offices, the door closes softly behind her. A silence hangs in the air for a few seconds, thick as the snow behind the windows.

With the committee members once again alone among themselves, the chair resumes speaking

— Well... we have heard her plea. Let's open the discussion.

He takes off his glasses and places them on the chair marked "Kaddour – Oasis de la Brèche."

Erik, a member of the Committee, express his doubts:

"It's a very touching story, no one will deny that. But we're talking about a tiny oasis in the middle of the desert. Barely a few acres. The Nobel Peace Prize is something else. It's supposed to have an impact on world history, isn't it?"

Unconvinced by this objection, another member interjects:

"Wouldn't it have an impact on world history if a place along this wall became a symbol of peace? We have already rewarded statesmen, diplomats, and powerful institutions. Are we sure that they are the ones who have changed people's daily lives the most?"

His neighbor follows suit:

"And it's not just an oasis. It's a completely demined area in the middle of what remains one of the most dangerous lines on the continent. What I've heard is that Kaddour has created the only space truly shared between populations separated by a wall and mines. That's far from insignificant."

Erik returns to his criticism:

"I'm aware of that. But we risk being accused of taking sides on the status of Western Sahara. People will say, 'You're implicitly recognizing this or that.' We've already been criticized for this in other conflicts."

One of the older men replies in a soft but firm voice:

"We've always been criticized for that. Every time we've rewarded a struggle for peace, someone has cried out that we're biased. That's not the real issue. The question is: are this man and those around him really working for peace?"

The youngest member of the Committee picks up his file and leafs through it:

"Something strikes me. In this case, there is no signed armistice, no spectacular treaty. There are simply very concrete actions: removing mines; planting trees; welcoming people from both sides; putting into practice the idea that this land could be shared and become fertile. It's not spectacular, but it's deeply positive."

"Okay," Erik continued. "But look at the list of other nominations this year. We have regional agreements, long-term negotiations, structured peace processes. Aren't we in danger of sending the message that the actions of a single young person, however exemplary, are worth more than years of diplomacy?"

— But Erik, be honest: how many of these negotiations are really making progress? We all know that some "processes" are mainly for show. We sign, we pose for the photo, then we file the dossier away. Here, we have someone who doesn't pose for the photo, who carries on day after day, without guarantees, without official cars, without bodyguards. And then... the prize doesn't say, "Only Kaddour matters." It says, "This is what a human being without power can do when he refuses to accept the inevitability of the wall." My dear Erik, it's not just heads of state..."

The dean of the Committee leans slightly toward Erik, with a slightly clever look:

"My dear Erik, you seem to be stuck with an old idea about the Nobel Prize. It's not just heads of state who can be rewarded. You know that very well, and we have agreed to the point of ruling out the candidacy of heads of state for the next two years. This prize is not a medal for deserving presidents. It is for those who work for peace in a discreet, continuous, and persevering manner. Even, and perhaps especially, when no one is watching.

Erik responds with a skeptical frown:

"I'm not saying otherwise. But we have to keep a certain scale..."

"The scale," continues the dean, "is this: millions of mines; a wall hundreds of kilometers long; decades of frozen conflict; and in the middle, a single spot where you can walk barefoot. It's tiny on a map, but huge symbolically. And let's not forget: we're not just crowning an individual, we're directing the world's gaze. If we say, "Look here, look at this young Sahrawi and those around him," then perhaps the leaders, too, will have to look in that direction.

Another member glances at the President:

"I have an idea. Ingeborg told us about Kaddour as the initiator, but she also mentioned the young people who gather there, who work quietly, who discuss a future without walls. What if we worded the award as follows: 'To the young Sahrawi Kaddour and, through him, to the young Sahrawis of the Oasis of the Breach in the Wall'?"

Another added:

"I like that idea. We avoid focusing everything on one person and instead highlight a generation that refuses to let its life be reduced to a wall. It would then become a prize awarded to young people... to a local peaceful resistance movement. But of course, it remains very geographically focused."

The President thinks it appropriate to respond:

"All our prizes are rooted somewhere. But that doesn't stop them from speaking to the whole world. The Berlin Wall, at the time, was also very localized. It became a universal symbol. The Wall of the Sands of Western Sahara's could, in turn, become a symbol if we put it in a different light."

The President picks up a pen and opens a blank page:

"Let's try to draft a first version of our motivation for selecting Kaddour. You can correct me."

He writes, then reads aloud.

"The Nobel Peace Committee has decided to award this year's prize to Kaddour, a young Sahrawi founder of the Oasis of the Breach in the Wall, and through him to the young Sahrawis committed to peace, for having created, in the heart of a

militarized and mined area, a completely demilitarized space where separated families can meet safely, demonstrating through daily action that a war zone can become a place of encounter, life, and reconciliation."

He pauses.

— And it is undoubtedly worth adding: *"By honoring this local initiative, the Committee wishes to encourage efforts to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the status of Western Sahara, so that walls, mines, and separation lines may one day disappear in favor of a recognized and secure coexistence for all."*

The dean nods:

— That's clear, and at the same time, we are staying in our place: we are not imposing a political model, we are encouraging a dynamic of peace.

Another agrees:

"And the implicit message is powerful: 'Let's clear the mines; let's open up gaps; let's turn those gaps into oases; then let the people decide politically.'"

Erik sighs, then finally admits:

"I have to admit that makes sense. And there is a certain elegance and a strong symbolic message in rewarding someone who started by removing mines before planting trees. The method should inspire processes of negotiators..."

The President invites the Committee to vote on two options:

— Option A: we give preference to one of the major international diplomatic processes, and if so, we will see which one.

— Option B: Kaddour and the young Sahrawis of the Oasis of the Breach in the Wall.

Hands are raised, one by one.

For option A, only one hand is raised, that of the member who fears controversy. But he explains that he would actually like to abstain, but that this option is not available.

For option B, all the other members of the Committee raise their hands.

The President points out that it is not customary to abstain. After a brief exchange, the abstainer finally agrees to option B, which leads to unanimity. Before putting down his pen, he notes:

"It's decided. This year's Nobel Peace Prize will be awarded to a young Sahrawi and his generation, who have chosen to transform a piece of wall that separates them into a promise for the future."

He turns to Erik.

"You can always answer, if anyone asks you: 'No, it's not only heads of state who can be rewarded. There are also those who, far from the cameras, are moving borders one palm tree at a time.'"

Erik finally smiles:

"Very well. I'll write it down so I don't forget."

The dean gently closes the file, saying:

"When I was young, I saw a wall come down on television. I remember people dancing on top of it. I like the idea that this time, it's an oasis that's starting the work. Not an explosion, not an assault, just hands removing mines, planting palm trees, pouring tea for cousins who have been separated for too long."

The President:

"Then let's make sure the world sees that image. Starting tomorrow, we'll begin drafting the final communiqué."

He places his hand on the cover of the file.

— May this small green dot in the middle of the Wall of Sand become, if only for a moment, the center of the world map.

The meeting is adjourned.

Outside, it continues to snow on Oslo.

Far to the south, in the desert, a warm wind gently rustles the leaves of the palm trees in the oasis.

The Nobel Committee, shaken by the troubled events of the past year, has therefore decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Kaddour rather than to heads of state or other candidates.

Ingeborg, enthusiastic, returned to announce the news to Kaddour in the oasis. She wants to convince him to accept the prize and go to Oslo in December to receive it. It's not a done deal. He protests:

"Thank you. I can't go to Oslo. It's the best season for planting and I'm expecting a lot of volunteers. That's more important than an award."

"What!" she says. "Do you really know what the Nobel Peace Prize is?"

"I can guess, and I thank you. But I won't go to Oslo. You can represent me if you want."

"Wait," she said. "If you can't come, you can at least appear on video."

She films him among the volunteers present in the oasis. He raises his arm in a friendly gesture. She breathes a sigh of relief! She can go back to Oslo.

And as on the rare occasions since the creation of the Nobel Peace Prize when the laureate has been unwilling or unable to attend, the official award ceremony takes place in the grand hall of Oslo City Hall without an official speech. There is just a video of Kaddour standing among volunteers in his oasis planted with

young trees, raising his hand to the camera and apologizing for not being able to attend.

This choice causes a tsunami of depression among the world's great leaders.

At Mar-a-Lago, Donald Trump, slumped on a gold velvet sofa, compulsively gobbles down chicken nuggets. He watches Kaddour's video on a loop and laughs:

"He doesn't even have a jet. No tie, no scary face when he laughs. And he's not even on TikTok!"

He sinks into a sulky silence. A cleaning lady kindly hands him a cushion.

"Sir? Would you like a little cushion to rest or relax?"

Trump throws it across the room.

On the other side of the Atlantic, in Novo-Ogaryovo, Putin, wearing a bathrobe, meditates in front of a frozen lake after doing his morning sit-ups. He talks to himself while watching television: "At least he doesn't need to bomb or parachute hamburgers to make a splash in the world."

He gets up, dusts off his dojo mat, and orders his next meeting with his generals to be canceled, saying to himself, "Why a rush?"

In Tehran, the ayatollahs discover the report on Kaddour. One of them sighs:

"He has more influence than all our Friday sermons and satellite channels combined."

"Perhaps we too should plant something in our deserts," whispers his neighbor.

Trump watches all these events, his eyes empty.

He throws one last coin into his Coke machine, which responds:

"Thanks, Donald. You've been a good customer!"

The world's great leaders, eclipsed by this young Saharan, sink into an unprecedented form of geopolitical depression. They call

their advisors. They publish opinion pieces in newspapers- . They organize major summits to become "inspiring" again. But nothing works. The world has turned upside down. Now, the people who are listened to are those who speak little or not at all.

The Nobel Committee's surprising choice has restored this fine institution to its place in the hearts of humanity. It is regaining its leadership amid the geopolitical turmoil caused by the awarding of the penultimate Nobel Peace Prize to Putin. The Trumpel of Peace amused the world but lost its luster and appeal. The real Nobel Prize has regained its prestige and notoriety.

Trump has mellowed and is preparing for the midterm elections by discreetly spreading the Benevolent in the American Democratic states. Switzerland awarded him the first prize for Radiant Neutrality, along with a gift he loves :: another gold bar with his name engraved on one side and a gold desk clock, in recognition of the creation of the Trumpel of Peace—a noisy and messy initiative—but one that has unwittingly inspired many other peace prizes around the world.

The traditional Nobel Prize has therefore not been blown up. On the contrary, it has blossomed and produced multiple petals and flowers, each more beautiful than the last, for the benefit of humanity, as Alfred Nobel intended. The Nobel Committee's surprising choice has restored this fine institution to its place in the hearts of humanity. It is regaining its leadership amid the geopolitical turmoil caused by the awarding of the penultimate Nobel Peace Prize to Putin. The Trumpel of Peace amused the world but lost its appeal and its luster. The real Nobel Prize has regained its prestige and notoriety.

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And in the desert, new trees are growing, and children and a young, active population are thriving around Kaddour Ben Ouali, who remains largely unaware of his global fame.

His latest message is a response to a surprise letter signed by several multi-billionaires:

"Dear Kaddour, can you teach us how to be useful and benevolent?"

He smiles, picks up a stick, and candidly writes in the sand:

"Welcome poor or unhappy people, plant and grow with them anything that can grow even on unproductive soil, relying on nature and its extraordinary power of growth, and share its fruits with those around you. That is my answer."

Main characters

Vladimir PUTIN, President of the Russian Federation
(Tsar/sovereign of Russia)

Yvan SMIRNOV, professor of medicine, Putin's personal
physician

Alexei, Putin's butler in Novo-Ogaryovo

Ramzan KADYROV, President of Chechnya

Dmitry PATRUCHEV, advisor to the President of the Russian
Federation

Andrei BELOUSOV, Minister of Defense (following Choïgou)

Sergei CHOÏGOU, Secretary of the Security Council (former
Minister of Defense)

Dmitry MEDVEDEV, Vice-Chairman of the Security Council

Valery GERASIMOV, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed
Forces

Mikhail MICHOUSTINE, President of the Government (Prime
Minister)

Alexander BORTNIKOV, Head of the FSB (secret service,
formerly KGB)

Nadia, communications officer for the President

KIRILL, Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow, friend of Putin.

Dmitry Peskov, Kremlin spokesperson

Sergey LAVROV, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dmitri, head of propaganda

Maria, Putin's daughter

Evgenia, Maria's daughter and Putin's granddaughter.

Evgenia's dance teacher

Mikhail KHODORKOVSKY, Putin's main political opponent,
based abroad

Igor, local leader of Putin's opponents

Rassoul, communications manager for local opponents of Putin

Evgeny PRIGOZHIN, Putin's former chef and leader of a
militia serving Russia, who died in an accident.

Volodymyr ZELENSKY, President of Ukraine
Donald TRUMP, President of the United States of America
J.D. VANCE, Vice President of the United States
Hannah, Trump's communications officer
Michael DOUGLAS, friend of Trump.
Ingeborg NILSEN, active member of NPA (Norwegian Peoples'
Aid), a Norwegian NGO working in particular on disarmament
and mine action.
KADDOUR Ben Ouali, young Sahrawi from Western Sahara.
Members of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee.

Main locations

- USSR, or Soviet Union, former federal "empire" that broke up in 1991.
- Russian Federation or Russia, a republic that emerged from the former USSR.
- Ukraine, a country also formed from the breakup of the USSR, which became independent in 1991.
- Moscow, capital of Russia.
- Kiev, capital of Ukraine.
- The Kremlin, political center of the Russian Federation, former residence of the Tsars and Soviet leaders in Moscow.
- Novo-Ogaryovo, the Russian president's estate and state residence, 30 km west of Moscow.
- Daival, the Russian President's estate and vacation home, located between Moscow and Saint Petersburg.
- Vektor, a virology and biotechnology research center, classified as P4, meaning it is highly secure because it can work on very dangerous viruses.
- Mar-a-Lago, Donald Trump's family residence in Florida.
- Bucha: site of a horrific massacre by Russian troops at the start of the invasion of Ukraine between February 27 and the end of March 2022.
- Mariupol: a martyred city in Ukraine with a very high death toll, whose theater was destroyed in March 2022 at the start of the Russian invasion.
- Oslo, capital of Norway, where the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded every year in December.
- The Sand Wall, a 2,700 km wall built in Western Sahara by Morocco, separating Moroccan Sahara from Polisario territory.

Note on the Nobel Peace Prize

Composition of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee:

A jury of five prominent figures, appointed by the Norwegian Parliament for a renewable six-year term, assisted by qualified advisors

Criteria for awarding the Nobel Peace Prize:

Personalities who have contributed to:

- to bringing peoples closer together
- the abolition or reduction of standing armies,
- the spread of progress for peace
- to fraternity among peoples.

Awarding and presentation of the Prize:

The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded annually in October and presented on December 10 in Oslo, the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death.

The winner receives a medal bearing the portrait of Alfred Nobel on the reverse and a check for 8 millions Swedish kronor.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many journalists and reporters for the wealth of information they have provided on the war between Russia and Ukraine, on the President of the Russian Federation, on the President of Ukraine, and on the President of the United States during the years 2022 to 2025, sometimes at the risk of their lives. I admire them and thank them sincerely.

Thank you to the authors of ChatGPT who helped me design the cover illustration and add a touch of humor to several passages in this book.

Finally, thank you to my friends and family who reviewed and critiqued the first drafts of this text and its initial translations so that this fiction might one day become reality in all countries in conflict.

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