

ANASTASIA by Vladimir Megré

Book 1 of *The Ringing Cedars Series*

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Chapter 1 THE RINGING CEDAR

In the spring of 1994 I chartered three riverboats, on which I carried out a four-month expedition on the River Ob in Siberia, from Novosibirsk to Salekhard and back. The aim of the expedition was to foster economic ties with the regions of the Russian Far North.

The expedition went under the name of *The Merchant Convoy*. The largest of the three riverboats was a passenger ship named the *Patrice Lumumba*. (Western Siberian riverboats bear rather interesting names: the *Maria Ulyanova*, the *Patrice Lumumba*, the *Mikhail Kalinin*,¹ as if there were no other personages in history worth commemorating.) The lead ship *Patrice Lumumba* housed the expedition headquarters, along with a store where local Siberian entrepreneurs could exhibit their wares.

The plan was for the convoy to travel north 3,500 kilometres,² visiting not only major ports of call such as Tomsk, Nizhnevartovsk, Khanty-Mansiysk and Salekhard, but smaller places as well, where goods could be unloaded only during a brief summer navigation season.

¹*Maria Ulyanova* — a name borne by two historical figures: *Maria Alexandrovna Ulyanova* (née Blank, 1835–1916) — mother to Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov (a.k.a. Vladimir Lenin, founder of the Soviet Union), and *Maria Ilinichna Ulyanova* (1878–1937) — Lenin's sister; the ship has since been re-named the *Viktor Gashkov*. *Patrice Emery Lumumba* (1925–1961) — Communist leader of the *Mouvement National Congolais*, who formed the first elected government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; the ship is now known as the *Paris*. *Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin* (1875–1946) — Chairman of the Soviet National Executive Committee (the USSR's first titular Head of State) from the 1920s until his death; the *Kalinin* still retains its original name.

²3,500 kilometres (= approx. 2,100 miles) — The metric system of measures is used throughout the book. One kilometre equals approximately six tenths (0.6) of a mile.

The convoy would dock at a populated settlement during the daytime. We would offer the wares we had brought for sale and hold talks about setting up regular economic links. Our travelling was usually done at night. If weather conditions were unfavourable for navigation, the lead ship would put into the nearest port, and we would organise on-board parties for the local young people. Most places offered little in the way of their own entertainment. Clubs and community centres (so-called ‘Houses of Culture’) had been going downhill ever since the collapse of the USSR, and there were almost no cultural activities available.

Sometimes we might go for twenty-four hours or more without seeing a single populated place, even the tiniest village. From the river — the only transportation artery for many kilometres around — the only thing visible to the eye was the taiga³ itself. I was not yet aware at the time that somewhere amidst the uninhabited vastness of forest along the riverbank a surprise meeting was awaiting me — one that was to change my whole life.

One day on our way back to Novosibirsk, I arranged to dock the lead ship at a small village, one with only a few houses at best, dozens of kilometres distant from the larger population centres. I planned a three-hour stopover so the crew could have shore leave and the local residents could buy some of our goods and foodstuffs, while we could cheaply pick up from them both fish and wild-growing plants of the taiga.

During our stopover time, as the leader of the expedition I was approached with a really weird request by two of the local senior citizens (as I judged at the time) — one of them appeared to be somewhat older than the other. The elder of the two — a wisened fellow with a long grey beard — kept silent the whole time, leaving his younger companion to do the talking. This fellow tried to persuade me to lend him fifty of my crew (which numbered no more than sixty-five in total) to go with them into the taiga — a trek of twenty-five kilometres from the dock where the ship was berthed. They would be taken into the depths of the taiga to cut down a tree they described as a ‘ringing cedar’.⁴ On top of that, the cedar, which he said reached forty metres in height,⁵ needed to be cut up into pieces which could be carried by hand to the ship. We must, he said, definitely take the whole lot.

The old fellow further recommended that each piece be cut up into smaller pieces. Each of us should keep one for himself and give the rest to relatives, friends and anyone who wished to accept a piece as a gift. He said this was a most unusual cedar. The piece should be worn on one’s chest as a pendant. Hang it around your neck while standing barefoot in the grass, and then press it to your exposed chest with the palm of your left hand. It takes only a minute or so to feel the pleasing warmth emanating from the piece of cedar, followed by a slight shiver running through the whole body. From time to time, whenever desired, the side of the pendant facing away from the body should be rubbed with one’s fingertips, the thumbs pressed against the other side. The old fellow confidently assured me that within three months the possessor of one of these ‘ringing cedar’ pendants will feel significant improvement in his sense of well-being, and will be cured of many diseases.

³*taiga* — the Russian name given to the boreal forest that stretches across much of Siberia and northern Canada. The word *Siberia* is derived from an Old Tungus word *sivir* meaning ‘land’, ‘world’ or ‘tribe’.

⁴*cedar* (Russian *kedr*) — in this case (as elsewhere) referring either to the Siberian pine (Siberian cedar, *Pinus sibirica*) or to the Lebanese cedar (*Cedrus libani*). Like the south European stone pine (*Pinus pinea*) and North American pinyon pines (*Pinus monophylla* and other species), the Siberian pine produces edible pine nuts. This tree is quite distinct from the Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and the Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) of North America, the Australian red cedar (*Toona ciliata*) or many other ‘cedars’. In keeping with the Russian usage and the tree’s Biblical associations, however, we are translating the name of this tree as *cedar* throughout the Series.

⁵*forty metres* — about 131 feet. The *metre* is the basic unit of length in the metric system, equal to 3.28 feet.

“Even AIDS?” I asked, and briefly explained what I had learnt about this disease from the press.

The oldster confidently replied:

“From any and all diseases!”

But this, he considered, was an easy task. The main benefit was that anyone having one of these pendants would become kinder, more successful and more talented.

I did know a little about the healing properties of the cedars of our Siberian taiga, but the suggestion that it could affect one’s feelings and abilities — well, that to me seemed beyond the bounds of probability. The thought came to me that maybe these old men wanted money from me for this ‘unusual cedar’, as they themselves called it. And I began explaining that out in ‘the big wide world’, women — in an effort to please men — were used to wearing jewellery made of gold and silver and wouldn’t pay a dime for some scrap of wood, and so I wasn’t going to lay out any money for anything like that.

“They don’t know what they’re wearing,” came the reply. “Gold — well, that’s dust in comparison with one piece of this cedar. But we don’t need any money for it. We can give you some dried mushrooms in addition, but there’s nothing we need from you...”

Not wanting to start an argument, out of respect for their age, I said:

“Well, maybe someone will wear some of your cedar pendants. They certainly would if a top wood-carving craftsman agreed to put his hand to it and create something of amazing beauty!”

To which the old fellow replied:

“Yes, you could carve it, but it would be better to polish it by rubbing. It will be a lot better if you do this yourself, with your fingers, whenever your heart desires — then the cedar will also have a beautiful look to it.”

Then the younger of the two quickly unbuttoned first his old worn jacket and then his shirt and revealed what he was wearing on his chest. I looked and saw a puffed-out circle or oval. It was multi-coloured — purple, raspberry, auburn — forming some kind of puzzling design — the vein-lines on the wood looked like little streams. I am not a connoisseur of *objets d’art*, although from time to time I have had occasion to visit picture galleries. The world’s great masters had not called forth any particular emotions in me, but the object hanging around this man’s neck aroused significantly greater feelings and emotions than any of my visits to the Tretyakov Gallery.⁶

“How many years have you been rubbing this piece of cedar?” I asked.

“Ninety-three,” the old fellow responded.

“And how old are you?”

“A hundred and nineteen.”

At the time I didn’t believe him. He looked like a man of seventy-five. Either he hadn’t noticed my doubts or, if he had, he paid no attention to them. In somewhat excited tones he started in trying to persuade me that any piece of this cedar, polished by human fingers alone, would also look beautiful in just three years. Then it would start looking even better and better, especially when worn by a woman. The body of its wearer would give off a pleasant and beneficial aroma, quite unlike anything artificially produced by Man!

Indeed, a very pleasant fragrance was emanating from both these old men. I could feel it, even though I’m a smoker and (like all smokers) have a dulled sense of smell.

⁶*Tretyakov Gallery* — the foremost collection of Russian art in the world, located in the centre of Moscow. The original collector, Pavel Tretyakov, donated his extensive collection to the City of Moscow in 1892; it has been steadily increasing ever since.

And there was one other peculiarity...

I suddenly became aware of certain phrases in the speech of these strangers that were not common to the residents of this isolated part of the North. Some of them I remember to this day, even the intonations associated with them. Here is what the old fellow told me:

“God created the cedar to store cosmic energy...

“When someone is in a state of love they emit a radiant energy. It takes but a split second for it to reflect off the planets floating overhead and come back to Earth and give life to everything that breathes.

“The Sun is one of those planets, and it reflects but a tiny fraction of such radiance.

“Only bright rays can travel into Space from Man on the Earth. And only beneficial rays can be reflected from Space back to Earth.

“Under the influence of malicious feelings Man can emit only dark rays. These dark rays cannot rise but must fall into the depths of the Earth. Bouncing off its core, they return to the surface in the form of volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, wars etc.

“The culminating achievement of these dark rays is their direct effect on the Man originating them, invariably exacerbating this Man’s own malicious feelings.

“Cedars live to be five hundred and fifty years old. Day and night their millions of needles catch and store the whole spectrum of bright energy.⁷ During the period of the cedars’ life all the celestial bodies which reflect this bright energy pass above them.

“Even in one tiny piece of cedar there is more energy beneficial to Man than in all the man-made energy installations taken together.

“Cedars receive the energy emanating from Man through Space, store it up and at the right moment give it back. They give it back when there is not enough of it in Space — and, consequently, in Man — or in everything living and growing on the Earth.

“Occasionally, though very rarely, one discovers cedars that have been storing up energy but not giving back what they have stored. After five hundred years of their life they start to ring. This is how they talk to us, through their quiet ringing sound — this is how they signal people to take them and cut them down to make use of their stored-up energy on the Earth. This is what the cedars are asking with their ringing sound. They keep on asking for three whole years. If they don’t have contact with living human beings, then in three years, deprived of the opportunity to give back what they have received and stored through the Cosmos, they lose their ability to give it back directly to Man. Then they will start burning up the energy internally. This torturous process of burning and dying lasts twenty-seven years.

“Not long ago we discovered a cedar like this. We determined that it had been ringing for two years already. It was ringing very, very softly. Perhaps it is trying to draw out its request over a longer period of time, but still, it has only one year left. It must be sawed up and given away to people.”

⁷Trees indeed capture a wide range of radiation beyond visible light. Man-made antennas are but an imitation of branching pattern in trees. Both the structure of trees and the materials composing them betray natural wave-receptors. Tree sap is a great conductor of electricity (this is why a tree hit by a lightning virtually explodes), and static electricity was first received from *amber* — a fossil resin from conifer trees. For details please see Dr Philip Callahan’s books, including *Tuning in to nature* and *Ancient mysteries, modern visions: The magnetic life of agriculture*. Viktor Schauberger (see footnote 1 in Chapter 16: “Flying saucers? Nothing extraordinary!”) referred to trees as “bioelectric condensers”. This statement is corroborated by Dr Georges Lakhovsky (see footnote 2 in Chapter 26: “Dreams — creating the future”), a pioneer explorer of energy fields as the foundation of all life on a cellular level.

The old man spoke at length, and for some reason I heard him out. The voice of this strange old *Sibiriak*⁸ would sound at first quietly confident, then very excited, and each time he got excited, he would rub the piece of cedar with his fingertips as though they were lightly tripping over some kind of musical instrument.

It was cold on the riverbank. An autumn wind was blowing across the river. Gusts of wind ruffled the hair on the old men's capless heads, but the spokesman's jacket and shirt remained unbuttoned. His fingertips kept rubbing the cedar pendant on his chest, still exposed to the wind. He was still trying to explain its significance to me.

Lidia Petrovna,⁹ an employee of my firm, came down the gangplank to tell me that everyone else was already on board and ready for departure, waiting for me to finish my conversation. I bade farewell to the oldsters and quickly climbed aboard. I couldn't act on their request — for two reasons: delaying departure, especially for three days, would mean a significant financial loss. And besides, everything these old fellows said seemed to me, at the time, to be in the realm of pure superstition.

The next morning during our usual company meeting I suddenly noticed that Lidia Petrovna was fingering a cedar pendant of her own. Later she would tell me that after I'd gone aboard she stayed behind for a while. She noticed that when I started hurrying away from them, the oldster that had been talking with me stared after me with a perplexed look, and then said excitedly to his older companion:

"Now how can that be? Why didn't they understand? I really don't know how to speak their language. I couldn't make them believe, I simply couldn't! I got nowhere with them... Nowhere! Why? Tell me, Father!"

The elder man put his hand on his son's shoulder and replied:

"You weren't convincing enough, son! They didn't comprehend."

"As I was going up the gangplank," Lidia Petrovna went on, "the old man that was talking with you suddenly rushed up to me, grabbed me by the arm, and led me back down to the grass below.

"He hurriedly pulled out of his pocket a string, and attached to it was this piece of cedar wood. He put it around my neck, and pressed it against my chest with the palm of both his hand and mine. I even felt a shiver go through my whole body. Somehow he managed to do all this very quickly, and I didn't even get a chance to say anything to him.

"As I was walking away, he called after me: 'Have a safe journey! Be happy! Please come again next year! All the best, people! We'll be waiting for you! Have a safe journey!'

"As the ship pulled away from the dock, the old fellow kept on waving at us for a long time, and then all at once sat down on the grass. I was watching him through a pair of binoculars. The old man that talked with you and later gave me the pendant — I saw him sit down on the grass, and his shoulders were trembling. The older one with the long beard was bending over him and stroking his head."

* * *

⁸*Sibiriak* — the Russian word denoting a resident of Siberia.

⁹*Lidia Petrovna* — *Petrovna* here is a patronymic, derived from her father's first name (*Petr*; pronounced 'Piotr'). The combination of the first name plus the patronymic is the standard form of formal address among business colleagues and acquaintances.

Amidst the flurry of my subsequent commercial dealings, account-keeping and end-of-voyage farewell banquets I completely forgot about the strange Siberian oldsters.

Upon my return to Novosibirsk I was afflicted with sharp pains. The diagnosis: a duodenal intestinal ulcer and osteochondrosis of the thoracic spine.

In the quiet of the comfy hospital ward I was cut off from the bustle of everyday life. My deluxe private room gave me an opportunity to calmly reflect on my four-month expedition and to draw up a business plan for the next one. But it seemed as though my memory relegated just about everything that had happened to the background and for some reason the old men and what they said came to the forefront of my thought.

I requested to have delivered to me in the hospital all sorts of literature on cedars. After comparing what I read with what I had heard, I became more and more amazed and began to actually believe what the oldsters had said. There was at least some kind of truth in their words... or maybe the whole thing was true?!

In books on folk medicine there is a lot said about the cedar as a healing remedy. They say that everything from the tips of the needles to the bark is endowed with highly effective healing properties. The Siberian cedar wood has a beautiful appearance, and is used with great success by both masters of artistic wood-carving and cabinet-makers, as well as in producing soundboards for musical instruments. Cedar needles are highly capable of eliminating airborne germs and purifying the surrounding atmosphere. Cedar wood has a distinctive, pleasant balsam fragrance. A small cedar chip placed inside a house will keep moths away.

In the popular-science literature I read it was said that the qualitative characteristics for the northern cedars were significantly higher than for those growing in the south.

Back in 1792 the academician P.S. Pallas¹⁰ wrote that the fruits of the Siberian cedar were effective in restoring youth and virility and significantly increasing the body's resilience — its ability to withstand a number of diseases.

There is a whole host of historical phenomena directly or indirectly linked to the Siberian cedar. Here is one of them.

In 1907 a fifty-year-old semi-literate peasant named Gregory Rasputin,¹¹ who hailed from an isolated Siberian village in an area where the Siberian cedar grows, found himself in St Petersburg, the capital, and soon became a regular guest of the imperial family. Not only did he amaze them with his predictions, but he possessed incredible sexual stamina. At the time of his assassination, onlookers were struck by the fact that despite his bullet-ridden body he continued to live. Perhaps because he had been raised on cedar nuts in a part of the country where cedars abound?

¹⁰*P.S. Pallas* — a reference to Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811), a German zoologist, paleontologist, botanist and ethnographer, born in St Petersburg. As a member of the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, he was a prominent pioneer explorer of the Siberian taiga.

¹¹*Gregory Efimovich Rasputin* (1871?–1916; sources do not agree on the date of his birth) — a monk from the Tiumen region of Western Siberia who appeared to have unusual healing powers. He curried favour with the court of Tsar Nicholas I (especially Nicholas' wife Alexandra Fedorovna) by demonstrating a beneficial influence on their son (and heir to the throne) Alexei, who suffered from hemophilia. For more on Rasputin, see Book 2, Chapter 1: "Alien or Man?". The passage on Rasputin's alleged debauchery is quoted from the 1979 novel *U poslednei cherty* (At the last frontier) by Valentin Pikul (1928–1990) — for further details, please see footnote 16 in Book 2, Chapter 1: "Alien or Man?".

This is how a contemporary journalist described his staying power:

“At age fifty he could begin an orgy at noon and go on carousing until four o’clock in the morning. From his fornication and drunkenness he would go directly to the church for morning prayers and stand praying until eight, before heading home for a cup of tea. Then, as if nothing had happened, he would carry on receiving visitors until two in the afternoon. Next he would collect a group of ladies and accompany them to the baths. From the baths he would be off to a restaurant in the country, where he would begin repeating the previous night’s activities. No normal person could ever keep up a régime like that.”

The many-time world champion and Olympic champion wrestler Alexander Karelin, who has never been defeated so far,¹² is also a Siberian, also from an area where the Siberian cedar grows. This strongman also eats cedar nuts. A coincidence?

I mention only those facts which can be easily verified in popular-science literature, or which can be confirmed by witnesses. Lidia Petrovna, who was given the ‘ringing cedar’ pendant by the Siberian oldster, is now one of those witnesses. She is thirty-six years old, married with two children. Her co-workers have noticed changes in her behaviour. She has become kinder and smiles more often. Her husband, whom I happen to know, told me that their family has now been experiencing a greater degree of mutual understanding. He also remarked that his wife has somehow become younger-looking, and is starting to arouse greater feelings in him — more respect and, quite possibly, more love.

But all these multitudinous facts and evidences pale in comparison to the main point, which you can look up for yourself — a discovery which has left me with not a trace of doubt — and that is the *Bible*. In the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament (Ch. 14, vs. 4), God teaches us how to treat people, and even decontaminate their houses, with the help of... the *cedar*!!!

After comparing all the facts and data I had gleaned from various sources, I was confronted by such a remarkable picture that all the wonders of the world faded before it. The great mysteries that have excited people’s minds began to pale into insignificance in comparison with the mystery of the ringing cedar. Now I could no longer have any doubts about its existence. They were all dispelled by the popular-science literature and the Old Vedic scriptures I was reading.

Cedars are mentioned forty-two times in the Bible, all in the Old Testament.¹³ When Moses presented humanity with the Ten Commandments on stone tablets, he probably knew more about them than has been recorded in the Old Testament.

We are accustomed to the fact that in Nature there are various plants capable of treating human ills. The healing properties of the cedar have been attested in popular-science literature and by such serious and authoritative researchers as Academician Pallas, and this is consistent with the Old Testament scriptures.

And now, pay careful attention!

When the Old Testament talks about the cedar, it is just the cedar alone; nothing is said about other trees.¹⁴ Doesn’t this suggest the inference that the cedar is the most potent medicine of any existing in Nature? What is this, anyway? A whole medicine kit? But how is it to be used? And why, out of all the Siberian cedars, did these strange old fellows point to a single ‘ringing cedar’?

¹²*Alexander Alexandrovich Karelin* (1967–) — a Russian, European, Olympic and world champion wrestler many times over, undefeated in international competition from 1987 to 2000 (for most of this time not even giving up a point).

¹³In the *Authorised (King James) Version* of the English Bible, in fact, the word *cedar* (or *cedars*) appears 75 times, from Leviticus to Zechariah. But see footnote 4 above.

¹⁴There are, of course, separate references in the Bible to a number of trees (e.g., fir, oak, juniper), but not in conjunction with cedars.

But that's not all. Something immeasurably more mysterious lies behind this story from the Old Testament:

King Solomon built a temple out of cedar wood. In return for the cedar from Lebanon, he gave another king, Hiram, twenty cities of his kingdom. Incredible! Giving away twenty cities just for some kind of building materials?! True, he got something else in return. At King Solomon's request he was given servants that were "skilled in felling timber".¹⁵

What kind of people were these? What knowledge did they possess?

I have heard that even now, in the far-flung reaches of the taiga there are old people with an uncanny ability to select the right trees for construction. But back then, over two thousand years ago, everybody might have known this. Nevertheless, specialists of some sort were required. The temple was built. Services began to be held there, and... "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud".¹⁶

What kind of a cloud was that? How and from where did it enter the temple? What could it have been? Energy? A spirit? What kind of phenomenon, and what connection did it have with the cedar?

The old fellows talked about the ringing cedar as storing up some kind of energy.

Which cedars are stronger — the ones in Lebanon or those in Siberia?

Academician Pallas said that the healing properties of the cedars increased in proportion to their proximity to the forest tundra. In that case, then, the Siberian cedar would be the stronger.

It says in the Bible: "...by their fruits ye shall know them."¹⁷ In other words, again the Siberian cedar!

Could it be that no one has paid any attention to all this?

Has no one put two and two together?

The Old Testament, the science of the past century and the current one — are all of the same opinion regarding the cedar.

And Elena Ivanovna Roerich¹⁸ notes in her book *Living ethics*: "...a chalice of cedar resin figured in the rituals of the consecration of the kings of the ancient Khorassan. Druids also called the chalice of cedar resin the Chalice of Life. And only later, with the loss of the realization of the spirit, was it replaced by blood. The fire of Zoroaster was the result of burning of the cedar resin in the chalice."¹⁹

So, then, how much of our forebears' knowledge of the cedar, its purpose and properties, has been passed down to the present day?

Is it possible that nothing has been preserved?

What do the Siberian oldsters know about it?

And all at once my memory harked back to an experience of many years ago, which gave me goosebumps all over. I didn't pay any attention to it back then, but now...

During the early years of *perestroika* I was president of the Association of Siberian Entrepreneurs. One day I got a call from the Novosibirsk District Executive Council (back then we still had Communist Party committees and 'Executive Councils'), asking me to come to a meeting with a prominent Western

¹⁵I Kings 5: 6 (*New International Version*).

¹⁶I Kings 8: 11 (*Authorised King James Version*).

¹⁷Matth. 7: 20 (*Authorised King James Version*).

¹⁸*Elena Ivanovna Roerich [Rerikh]* (1879–1955) — Russian religious thinker. Travelling through Asia with her husband, the prominent Russian artist Nikolai Konstantinovich Roerich, she became fascinated with Oriental religions and devoted her life to studying and writing about them. In 1920 she and her husband founded the Agni Yoga Society, a non-profit educational institution in New York.

¹⁹This translation is taken from an English version of Roerich's *Leaves of Morya's Garden, Book 2: Illumination* (1925) — 2.4.18.

businessman. He had a letter of recommendation from the government of the day. Several entrepreneurs were present, along with workers from the Executive Council secretariat.

The ‘Western businessman’ was of a rather imposing external appearance — an unusual person with Oriental features. He was wearing a turban, and his fingers were adorned with precious rings.

The discussion, as usual, centred around the possibilities for co-operation in various fields. The visitor said, among other things: “We would like to buy cedar nuts from you.” As he spoke these words, his face and body tightened, and his sharp eyes moved from side to side, no doubt studying the reaction of the entrepreneurs present. I remember the incident very well, as even then I wondered why his appearance had changed like that.

After the official meeting the Moscow interpreter accompanying him came up to me. She said he would like to speak with me.

The businessman made me a confidential proposal: if I could arrange a steady supply of cedar nuts for him — and they had to be fresh — then I would receive a handsome personal percentage over and above the official price.

The nuts were to be shipped to Turkey for processing into some kind of oil. I said I would think it over. I decided I would find out for myself what kind of oil he was talking about. And I did...

On the London market, which sets the standard for world prices, cedar nut oil fetches anywhere up to five hundred dollars per kilogram!²⁰ Their proposed deal would have given us approximately two to three dollars for one kilogram of cedar nuts.

I rang up an entrepreneur I happened to know in Warsaw, and asked him whether it might be possible to market such a product directly to customers, and whether we could learn the technology involved in its extraction.

A month later he sent me a reply: “No way. We weren’t able to gain access to the technology. And besides, there are certain special-interest groups in the West so involved in these issues of yours that it would be better just to forget about it.”

After that I turned to my good friend, Konstantin Rakunov,²¹ a scholar with our Novosibirsk Consumer Co-operative Institute. I bought a shipment of nuts and financed a study. And the laboratories of his institute produced approximately 100 kilograms of cedar nut oil.

I also hired researchers, who came up with the following information from archival documents:

Before the Revolution (and even for some time afterward) there was in Siberia an organisation known as the *Siberian Co-operator*. People from this organisation traded in oil, including cedar nut oil. They had rather swanky branch offices in Harbin, London and New York and rather large Western bank accounts.²² After the revolution the organisation eventually collapsed, and many of its members went abroad.

A member of the Bolshevik government, Leonid Krasin,²³ met with the head of this organisation and asked him to return to Russia. But the head of the *Siberian Co-operator* replied that he would be of more help to Russia if he remained outside its borders.

²⁰ *kilogram* — metric measure of weight, equal to approximately 2.2 pounds.

²¹ *Konstantin Petrovich Rakunov* (1954–) — With a post-graduate degree in economics, Rakunov holds the rank of *docent* (equivalent to Associate Professor) in the Management Department at what is now the Novosibirsk Consumer Co-operative University; he is the author of a number of scholarly publications on consumer co-operatives.

²² In fact, prior to the 1917 revolution Russian exports of cedar nut oil generated 10% of all foreign-trade revenues, rivalling such commodities as grain, timber and furs.

From archival materials I further learnt that cedar oil had been made using wooden (only wooden!) presses in many villages of the Siberian taiga. The quality of the cedar oil depended on the season in which the nuts were gathered and processed. But I was unable to determine, either from the archives or the institute, exactly which season was being indicated. The secret had been lost. There are no healing remedies with properties analogous to those of cedar oil. But perhaps the secret of making this oil had been passed along by one of the émigrés to someone in the West? How was it possible that the cedar nuts with the most effective healing properties grow in Siberia, and yet the facility for producing the oil is located in Turkey? After all, Turkey has no cedars like those found in Siberia.

And just what ‘Western special-interest groups’ was the Warsaw entrepreneur talking about? Why did he say it would be better just to forget about this issue? Might not these groups be ‘smuggling’ this product with its extraordinary healing properties out of our Russian-Siberian taiga? Why, with such a treasure here at home with such time-tested effective properties — proved over centuries, millennia, even — do we spend millions and maybe billions of dollars buying up foreign medicines and swallow them up like half-crazed people? How is it that we keep losing the knowledge known to our forebears? Our recent forebears yet — the ones who lived in our century — let alone the Bible’s description of that extraordinary happening of over two thousand years ago?

What kind of unknown forces are trying so earnestly to erase our forebears’ knowledge from our own memories? “Oh, you’d better stick to minding your own business!” we’re told. Yes, they *are* trying to wipe it out. And, indeed, they are succeeding!

I was seized by a fit of anger. To add insult to injury, I discovered that cedar oil *is* sold in our pharmacies, but it is sold in foreign packaging! I bought a single thirty-gram vial and tried it. The actual oil content, I think, was no more than a couple of drops — the rest was some kind of diluting agent. Compared to what was produced in the Consumer Co-operative Institute — well, there was simply no comparison. And these diluted couple of drops cost fifty thousand roubles!²⁴

So what if we didn’t buy it abroad, but sold it ourselves? Just the sale of this oil would be enough to raise the whole of Siberia above the poverty level! But how did we ever manage to let go of the technology of our forebears?! And here we are snivelling that we live like paupers...

Well, okay, I thought I’d come up with something all the same. I’d produce the oil myself — and my firm would only get wealthier.

I decided I would try a second expedition along the Ob — back up north, using only my headquarters ship, the *Patrice Lumumba*. I loaded a variety of goods for sale into the hold, and turned the film-viewing room into a store. I decided to hire a new crew and not invite anyone from my firm. As things stood, my firm’s financial situation had worsened while I was distracted with my new interest.

Two weeks after leaving Novosibirsk my security guards reported they had overheard conversations about the ringing cedar. And, in their opinion, the newly hired workers included some ‘pretty strange people’, to put it mildly. I began summoning individual crew members to my quarters to talk about the forthcoming trek into the taiga. Some of them even agreed to go on a volunteer basis. Others asked for an extra-large bonus for this operation, since it was not something they had agreed to when signing

²³*Leonid Borisovich Krasin* (1870–1928) — an early Bolshevik and Communist Party activist. During the 1920s he served as Foreign Trade minister as well as the new government’s trade representative in London and Paris.

²⁴*fifty thousand roubles* — approximately 16 US dollars at the November 1994 exchange rate — equivalent to 20% of the average Russian’s monthly income.

up for work. It was one thing to stay in the comfortable conditions aboard ship — quite another to trek twenty-five kilometres into the taiga and back, carrying loads of wood. My finances at the time were already pretty tight. I was not planning to sell the cedar. After all, the oldsters had said it should be given away. Besides, my main interest was not the cedar tree itself, but the secret of how to extract the oil.²⁵ And of course it would be fascinating to find out all the details connected with it.

Little by little, with the help of my security guards, I realised that there would be attempts made to spy on my movements, especially during any time I spent ashore. But for what purpose was unclear. And who was behind the would-be spies? I thought and thought about it, and decided that to be absolutely certain, I would somehow have to outsmart everyone at once.

²⁵Note that the fruit of the *Siberian cedar*, translated in this Series as *cedar nuts*, is known to most English speakers under the name *pine nuts*, and the oil pressed from these nuts is better known as *pine nut oil*. It does not refer to the 'oil' (or resin) from the North American red cedar, which is not edible. See footnote 4 above.

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