

Arresting Times

A young man strides across the city street, his long brown overcoat flaps in the breeze. He walks alone. But he talks with God.

‘Father, thank you for this beautiful evening. The sunshine, the warmth, the fresh breeze. Thank you for the warmth of your love to me.’

He hums quietly to himself. A hymn tune comes to mind as he strides over dry, cracked paving-stones.

Suddenly, a crowd of young shining faces appear from out of an imposing red doorway. They march towards him. Heels hitting the concrete. No more singing. His hymn is silent now. The red scarves seem to shout from across the street – ‘*We are the Communist youth. We are the future. There is no God. We are the future.*’

The young man sighs. He walks on. He was one of them ... once. He mutters under his breath, ‘I too was a believer in lies.’

The young man’s Sunday shoes stride out again over the cracked paving-stones.

A barrage of noise and colour meet him at the market stalls. Traders shout to passers-by trying desperately to sell their last few vegetables. Bright red

1. Communist – A person with a political belief that all goods should be the property of the community.

peppers and green lettuce sit on one stall, the lovely aroma of home-made bread wafts from another. People shout out to the young man as he rushes past.

‘Fresh fruit. Fresh vegetables. Come and buy. Come and buy. Delicious. Very, very delicious.’

The young man turns and smiles, adding ‘... and very, very, expensive? Yes?’

The stall-holder pauses, and smiles back. ‘Perhaps, but you will not get these vegetables any cheaper in the whole of Romania – no, not in the whole of the Communist World.’

The young man laughs as the trader turns to persuade a young woman to buy the expensive lettuces. Cars and chatter, music and laughter are just part of the hustle and bustle of the city preparing to shut up shop for another day.

A neighbour cries out over the garden fence, ‘Jacob, is your mother’s cough any better this evening?’

A young mother gently whispers to her child, ‘Sergei, mother loves you. Be a good boy and come in for your supper.’

A laughing young girl skips along the pavement singing about ‘Love.’

The young man longs for freedom of speech.

‘If I was allowed to speak freely Lord, I would tell that young girl about you – the Creator of Love. At least Lord, the Communists cannot read my mind – my thoughts are still my own. Lord make them more like your thoughts.’

The Sunday shoes weave in and out avoiding other Sunday shoes going in other directions, but nobody's eyes meet. All eyes look down. Today is a risk. A battle of wits. You hold your breath on days like this. Your shoulders shrink down and you ignore everybody else. Hopefully everybody else will ignore you. The young man sighs, 'The Communists make loving God a crime!'

He longs to turn to the tired mother, the young daughter, the little child – just to say the most beautiful words in the world – '*JESUS LOVES YOU!*'

But these words are banned. Red scarves do not allow. Communists and their youth do not permit. But sometimes a whisper is heard and the joy of Jesus is passed on. His voice is a voice in the dark. An urgent whisper, a warning. The young man's whispers have touched hearts. His shouts have woken others from death. He has passed on Jesus Christ as if he were hot coals. That gets noticed and the Sunday shoes striding out across the cracked paving stones are being watched.

'A few more strides and I will be in sight of the meeting house. Time enough for a quiet moment with Jesus before the service begins.'

Five more strides and he is round the corner.

Black car. Screech of tyres. Black rubber against grey concrete. Slamming doors. Screeching tyres.

The young man is swallowed up as grasping arms, iron hand-cuffs and frantic shoves pin him down.

Richard Wurmbrand – arrested by the People's Government of Romania.

* * *

‘Where am I? What are you doing? Where are you taking me?’ Richard’s voice cracked under the strain. His heart was pounding, he could hardly breathe. Gasping for air he realised – This was the nightmare!

‘I must keep control.’ Richard spoke out loud.

An evil chuckle broke out from beside him, ‘You are no longer in control. We are your worst nightmare!’

‘Am I a prisoner? Is this an arrest?’

The Secret Police are silent and don’t even bother to reply. Panicking slightly Richard tried to make sense of the situation.

‘Of course this is an arrest. What else can it be? Grabbed off the street in broad daylight! Shoved into an unmarked police car. Driven off at high speed. Look at their eyes, one minute hot with rage the next cold with emptiness. I am just an object to them. They treat me like dung! God’s family are treated worse than dung.’

Sweat poured off Richard’s forehead. His arms were pinned down hard against the back seat of the car. He couldn’t even wipe away the sweat that trickled down his nose and into his eyes.

The tyres screeched again as the car turned sharply round the next corner. Houses, schools and church buildings passed by people running around on the pavements had no idea what was going on inside the speeding black car.

Richard couldn't help but worry about his family. Plucking up some courage he turned to the guard on his right, 'I have a wife and son. What are they going to do?'

The guard turned to Richard and screamed, 'Prisoner! Be quiet! It is not permitted for you to speak unless you are under direct order to do so!'

Richard turned away.

'I will definitely not ask any more questions.' Richard let his thoughts turn to the sermon he would no longer preach that evening. But he glanced at the clenched fists of the armed guards beside him, heavy truncheons attached to their belt buckles. Richard battled to keep the tears in check. He had little enough control at the moment. He was not going to give in to his own fear.

'Lord, help me.'

The car tyres screeched again as they turned onto a street called 'Calea Rahova'. The sign was just visible out of the murky window. Steel gates opened onto a large court yard and Richard realised he had finally arrived at his destination.

The gates started to creak as they were drawn shut. Richard turned round to take a last look at the outside world. 'When will I be able to walk out in that world again? The free world ...'

The doors opened and Richard was shunted from one world into another. One fist punched his back from behind, another boot kicked his shin. The guards frog-marched Richard across the courtyard and through a

grey door on the other side. The metal doors clanged behind him and Richard was ordered to stand still and say nothing.

Efficient, cold hands stripped off his belongings, his clothes, his identity and his freedom. Hands quickly and efficiently removed Richard Wurmbrand the pastor and replaced him with Vasile Georgescu, the unknown, the unwanted. One in a thousand. To be used and disposed of as quickly and as quietly as possible. Richard's life, his name, his whole identity lay on the floor in a pile along with his notes, his Bible, his tie and shoelaces.