

# The Prophet of Sorrow





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*To my wife, Janice*



*“How meaningful it is that the glory  
of mankind, upon him be peace and blessings,  
who spent his life in sorrow, is rightly  
described as the Prophet of Sorrow.”*

*~Necib Fazil*



# 1

Twenty years ago I killed Leon Trotsky. I have spent the time since in the Lucumberrí Prison in Mexico and now am the guest of Fidel Castro's government, here in Havana. I have lived many lives and have been known to others as Ramón Mercader, Jacques Mornard, Harold Jacson, Vandendreschd, and even Gnome. There are others that do not pertain to this story, and I'm sure that I will rest under a headstone with a name unfamiliar to me as yet.

The truculent deal is this: we are permitted a mercurial mind only when we don't know how to keep it in reserve; and we only learn how to bring it to terms when these gifts have departed. Along this line, we discover that we are not responsible for our own fate and destiny, but we are responsible for how we react to it. Our values are determined by the attitude we develop toward our destined and irrevocable suffering. Our unresolved sorrows flow along a hidden expanse.

At one end have been the deaths that have caused the scarring and hardening, the peeling off of the masks of different legends, only to reveal a numb surface. The more I let go of my identities, the more I die to myself in uncircumscribed humility, and the less I have to defend.

At the other end, I am a boy in Barcelona living with my mother, Eustacia María Caridad del Río Hernandez, after she separated from my father. Life for workers and peasants in Spain in the 1920s and 1930s was bad, and if you were a woman it was even worse. Mother's wedding was pre-arranged and she had no independence.

She took me to France and I was raised there. Mother was smart and attractive. Her intelligence brought her, and consequently me, into contact with many intellectuals. Change begins with discussion and, through the messy process of debate and disagreement, our world view can be radically altered.

Back in Spain, the socialist UGT union federations were taking to the streets. They aimed to empower women and believed that it was crucial to involve them directly in the struggle for liberation. Revolution was starting in Spain as a reaction to the military coup. Spanish women did not see themselves as enfranchised and most of them had in fact never even heard of it, yet their response was spontaneous and courageous.

My mother had become a confirmed socialist and an activist, but her strong personality drew her towards Stalinism for one reason and one reason only: Leonid Eitingon.

She was faced with the sense of necessity to choose between fascism and anti-fascism back in Spain — the same force that was propelling so many other Spaniards into the arms of the Communist Party.

Eitingon was introduced to mother, who was called Caridad by her friends, as the head of business operations for the Soviet Fur Trust and was extremely handsome, with grey-green eyes and a full head of black hair. He seduced her with his polished weapons of humor and impertinence. But in fact, he was the NKVD's (*Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*) outstanding expert in operations against Russian anti-Communist exiles, as well as Trotskyites.

Among Eitingon's special tasks was responsibility for sabotage, kidnapping, and assassination of the Soviet's enemies beyond the country's borders — helping Comrade Stalin protect and provide dignity for all workers and eliminate the rapacity and despotism of capitalist profit.

We packed our bags and headed from France back to Barcelona, where Eitingon assumed the role of a military attaché (General Katov) in the Soviet Consulate. Here he organized the persecution against the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification), who were closely associated with Trotsky.

It was his role in the GPU (Communist Secret police or Cheka) that would change my life. This was Stalin's secret army. My mother and I were eventually trained as part of this group; training that set my destiny.



## 2

### *Leonid Eitingon: Notes (NKVD files) on Recruitment*

*Predictability is the greatest source of unhappiness. Our expectations may be impractical. We may be able to influence but not control people and situations, or the future.*

When I was growing up my mother had the tendency to feed me with excruciating guilt for making any personal choices. Every gesture of affection or kindness returned, seemed to be executed with some degree of effort or burden. Any interest in girls was incessantly disapproved of, and she constantly interfered with my relationships. She would manipulate circumstances and situations to her own benefit and consideration, over my own happiness, independence, and individuation.

I have long held that this was most likely due to having no love from her own father and ultimately to receiving the same manner of Spanish paternal despotism from her husband my father; people incapable of reciprocating their feelings of love and devotion. This left her hollow and I was the one who compensated for that tragic loss. She had no choice but to latch on to me. I was her perfect child, partner, father, and lover. I learned at a very early age how to assume multiple identities. In a way, I also clung to her as my own eternal savior and undying icon of perfect love and immutable security.

Upon our return to Spain, women were involved everywhere in the initial resistance and fought equally among members of the anti-fascist militias up until November 1936, when they were ordered away from the frontlines. Many had been killed in the battle for Madrid. As the war went on, they became increasingly involved with the housing, care, and education of the refugees. The socialists, Communists, and POUM all set up women's sections. Each side was trying to draw women into the struggle via their own organizations. I mention all this because the fate of women, not unlike my mother, was closely tied to that of the overall Revolution.

As the Revolution was pushed back by the Communist Party and the government, so was the fate of women in Spain.

Before Eitingon seduced and recruited Caridad, this fate, which was spanning her long-unattended sorrows, was gradually closing her down: the slowly accumulating burdens of defeated expectations and blighted hope, the loss of certainty, conviction, and confidence that decreases along the spectrum — until at the far end we start to sink in the bog of lost hope and are barely able to reach out for extrication. She was unable to find herself until Eitingon empowered her to reenter those parts of herself long since abandoned to hopelessness and vulnerability.

## *Caridad Mercader: Barcelona 1936*

*When we lose or never use what we need or love, we call this diminuendo of our intellectual curiosity “suffering.” It comes with the loss of dignity due to a multitude of finely effectuated cultural humiliations. This has given rise to my most notable griefs and has caused me a considerable amount of anger and initiative. In order to overcome my feelings of having no control, I have decided to assert whatever power I can to hide the fear and sense of profound insularity.*

*I used to believe that happiness and unhappiness could be separated, implying that good and evil were separate entities and would always remain so. I now know that this is an illusion. Good and evil are enleagued. The Christian conceptions of the Church in Spain, of what is pious and deferential, have always had their origins in that which is evil.*

*If I make happiness the aspiration of my life, it will only elude me. It is something that only steals through the back door when we devote ourselves to the cause of something that is significant.*

*I believe that becoming an agent of the GPU will be costly and risky, but I have no doubt that in this endeavor I will discover what makes life worth living, even in the face of suffering and death.*

*Leonid wants me to recruit Ramón. I know he will follow me. He has always been a good boy. He joined the Communist Party in 1933 when it was already a Stalinist party.*

### 3

In Barcelona, I had joined the Communist Party. I was only carrying out small tasks and my talents were not being effectively used. In spite of this, I was slowly working my way up the Party hierarchy. This seemed easy for me because of my ability to manipulate circumstances or people to make ends meet and to achieve contentment. I learned long ago how to do this, by sidestepping my mother's covert and overt disapprovals and her constant blaming of friends and lovers as being inadequate or weak. Of course I would never voice objections to her about this, yet I believed that my strong personality came from compensating for the profound sense of insolidity I felt when younger. Not only was my personality suited for what I was doing, but it was eclipsing everyone else in my ranks, up to that point.

I found it important to devote all of my energies to my work, because it was difficult to fit in with groups of peers or establish lasting relationships. When I did find someone that I

thought I would like, inevitably I found it difficult to commit to her in an intimate way. Who wouldn't understand? My fidelity was toward my mother who was starting to become a very important person in Stalin's private army. Eitingon and Mother were spending much more time with me. I couldn't help but be impressed with her. In silence I suffered from incessant feelings, which were in dark contrast to the intrusive way she was prioritizing my life. In the end, I decided that it was more important to sacrifice personal values and objectives in accordance to Mother's expectations and wishes.

## *Leonid Etingon: Notes (NKVD files) on Recruitment, Barcelona*

*R*amón Mercader looks like a likely candidate for our purposes. His personality type seems to be one of no particular individuation, yet he is intelligent. He has not been able, as an adult, to break the bondage of his mother's wishes, wants, issues, and complexes.

*This relationship will be of value to us, in that we should be able to influence him through her. He has not figured out his own path. He has great devotion and diligence towards her. He is not yet a man because of this, nor is he yet an individual. Many of his unique attributes are still inscribed in his mother's womb. Perhaps the Soviet experiment can become a surrogate. And he can be reborn, where the unique aspects of our agenda will materialize.*

*He has a quest to give birth to himself, which is part of the progression — when evolving from boy to man. The guidance and outside help can come from us: a task that he will not be able to accomplish alone.*

*I perceive from him a grief that comes from unsatisfied desires and lost loves, and from the lacerating trajectory of impermanence in Spain and in the world. Things are within his reach and then pulled away.*

*We should be able to turn his perturbations outward and direct his negative feelings to others (of our choosing), who we will make clear to him are the cause of his discrepancies. It is easy to make others, like Ramón, change their identities and behaviors this way. When he turns inward, the self is the cause of discrepancies in life. The self needs to be motivated to manage these identities and behaviors. We will provide his motivation.*