

FUTURE PERFECT

A Play in One Act

by

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Dramatis Personae

<u>Defense:</u>	Rickety defense attorney, early 70s. Also known as Bertram. Think Max von Sydow in <i>Snow Falling on Cedars</i> .
<u>Prosecution:</u>	Prosecutor, mid 40s. A former protégé of Bertram getting a little ahead of himself.
<u>Dzhugashvili:</u>	Young man, early 20s. The accused. Nice boy. Potentially a leader of men.
<u>Girl:</u>	A statuesque beauty tantalizingly on the cusp of warm and aloof.
<u>Judge:</u>	Strident voice of authority.
<u>Voice:</u>	Effectively the Bailiff.
<u>Jury Foreman:</u>	An older member of the jury, working class. Typical New Yorker.
<u>Guard 1:</u>	Officer of the court.
<u>Guard 2:</u>	Officer of the court.

Scene

A spartan courtroom.

Time

The future.

The Prosecutor flicks off the gooseneck lamp and returns to his table.

Embarrassingly, out of the blue, the DEFENSE attorney starts applauding.

DEFENSE

Bravo! What a show! What a show! I would not expect anything less from a former student. Bravo!

JUDGE (O.S.)

Order!

The Defense stands up.

DEFENSE

(sotto voce, but intended to be heard)

What will he do for an encore?

JUDGE (O.S.)

Order! Order!!

DEFENSE

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury. I do not believe...but I've been proven wrong before...you will find a single person in this courtroom who would dispute the crimes against the aforementioned individuals as have been recorded by history and listed by the prosecution, nor will you actually find anyone in this courtroom, my self included, who lived through that history...

JUDGE (O.S.)

Watch yourself, Bertram! The facts of history are not on trial here!

DEFENSE

...including and particularly the accused, my client, a human being...but in the eyes of this court...a clone: Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili.

Sound of the gavel.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Continue with this line, I will hold you in contempt of this court.

DEFENSE

Thank you, your honor.

(MORE)

DEFENSE (CONT'D)

(beat)

You can see for yourself, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is damn near impossible for anyone...including me...who has studied the law for half a century...to chart the murky shoals of the Clone Laws. The process makes it impossible to cite anything substantive which isn't already preempted by the opaque legal structures circumscribed by these indefensible draconian laws. A just and fair trial is not possible for this man...this human being...

(defiantly holding
up a finger for
emphasis)

...by design.

(beat)

Imagine that! It is not even a desired outcome...for this son of science orphaned by a system hellbent on revenge.

(beat)

Note how our esteemed judge does not even hold me in contempt for pointing out this asymmetric justice...if we can call it that...meted out by this smug and boastful system in service of itself. We have a legal system...of that you can be certain...but not a system of justice. Here the spirit and the letter of the law give the appearance of being one and the same, but that's merely to camouflage the fact that the spirit has long ago given up its ghost in the cold shadow of the letter. You are witnessing, ladies and gentlemen, a travesty...a repudiation of everything our systems of laws were originally designed to codify: namely, those principles of a humane society we hold dear. This is a grotesque perversion, a cancerous...

*Frustrated, Dzhugashvili jumps
up, interrupting...*

DZHUGASHVILI

I'd like to make a statement.

PROSECUTOR

(springs to his
feet)

Objection!

JUDGE (O.S.)

Quiet the defendant, Counselor.

DEFENSE

Absolutely, your honor! I too object.

*The Prosecutor swings around,
surprised.*

JUDGE (O.S.)

You don't want your client to speak?

DEFENSE

Not in this kangaroo court, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

The defendant cannot speak out of turn.

DEFENSE

I will not dignify this court by having my client address these illegitimate proceedings.

JUDGE (O.S.)

It is highly unusual, but I'll allow it...

PROSECUTOR

Objection, your honor!

JUDGE (O.S.)

Your original objection or is this a new one leveled against the bench?

PROSECUTOR

The original objection, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

A wise decision.

(to Defense)

Counselor, will you forfeit your time to the Prosecution to expedite the statement by your client?

DEFENSE

With prejudice, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Noted.

(to Prosecutor)

Proceed.

PROSECUTOR

Well, this is a turn of events. Bertram here--the cane is a nice touch--would have us believe that the law is a foregone conclusion and that this judge isn't lenient, isn't liberal. Pure casuistry! What we have here is irrefutable evidence to the contrary...you've seen it with your own eyes. With this small gesture, ladies and gentlemen...in this court!...his honor has granted the clone the unprecedented status of a man. I cannot wait to hear what the clone Stalin has to say for itself.

(beat, to Judge)

May I continue my closing arguments after the clone has spoken?

JUDGE (O.S.)

You may.

PROSECUTOR

Thank you, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Defense, do you wish to counsel the defendant?

DEFENSE

I prefer it, your honor.

*The Defense quietly consults
with Dzhugashvili. When
Dzhugashvili gesticulates
wildly, the Defense gives up.*

DEFENSE

The accused is ready to address the court.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Proceed.

DZHUGASHVILI

Your honor, citizens...thank you for allowing me to speak...to speak for the first time in these entire proceedings.

(beat)

What is the value of one life? What is the value of one finite life if the death of that one life can help repair society...or create a justice for the millions slaughtered...

DEFENSE

Objection, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

On what grounds?

DEFENSE

This is not a defense. It is the absurd equivalent of an admission of guilt tendered...

JUDGE (O.S.)

Overruled.

DZHUGASHVILI

I was responsible for those crimes...snuffing out the lives of these productive citizens...

DEFENSE

Of course he would say those things...

PROSECUTOR

Completely in character...in the manner in which we would expect Stalin to take credit.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Order!

DEFENSE

Iosef was raised for the better part of 19 years to say those things...

JUDGE (O.S.)

Order, I said!

DZHUGASHVILI

I say these things willingly...

PROSECUTOR
(offering his open
hand)

There you have it.

DEFENSE

Dzhugashvili was brainwashed...he doesn't know what he is saying...

JUDGE (O.S.)

Objection!

DEFENSE

Miss being a trial lawyer, your honor?

DZHUGASHVILI

I was not coerced...

DEFENSE

Of course not...

JUDGE (O.S.)

Order!

DZHUGASHVILI

I know the value of one life...

DEFENSE

...but he doesn't know the price of his own death.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Quiet! Any more of this contumacious behavior, I will have you both removed from the court, Bertram.

DEFENSE

Yes, your honor.

The Defense meekly sits down.

As an afterthought, he pulls on Dzhugashvili to sit down.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Thank you for your admission, Mr. Dzhugashvili.

(MORE)

JUDGE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(beat)

Prosecution?

PROSECUTOR

So much for the man of steel. Stalin. Pfff. Bessemer must be rolling in *his* grave.

(beat)

Members of the jury, we have laws. Laws exist to protect us. Protect you and me. There are all kinds of laws: local laws and regional laws and national laws and international laws; aviation laws and maritime laws; city laws, county laws, and state laws. Moreover, there are constitutional laws, criminal laws, civil laws, administrative laws. And then there is the law of the jungle.

(beat)

The law of the jungle is no law at all. The law of the jungle is lawlessness. Would you like to return to the jungle?

(waits for reaction)

I didn't think so.

(beat)

Laws are what allow society to function. Not only is the law the grease that lubricates the machine, but the law is also an armor that moves swiftly, swooping in to protect you after you are threatened. The law is like liquid steel.

(beat)

And here is the most surprising thing of all: the law needs you. Laws exist like fragile works of art...delicate crystal sculptures...and then they are broken. Laws don't exist to obstruct reasonable people. They exist to protect us from the prelapsarians, and in some cases, to protect us from ourselves. Regrettably, there are individuals who do not believe in the law...believe themselves to be above the law...and then there are those who believe themselves to be the law. Stalin is one of these latter types.

(beat)

The law is defenseless after the ink dries. It has to be protected. It cannot defend itself against those who believe themselves to be above the law. But we can. That is what you are asking me to do: to protect the law. Because the law is us. We make the laws. We are the law.

(beat)

Stalin is a different kind of liquid metal...the mercury that slithers away under the duress of accountability. Now that Stalin has been re-instantiated, history can be rewritten.

(beat)

From the liquidations to the show trials to the Katyn forests to the forced starvation of the kulaks and other heinous deeds in the interim, by his killing of millions of individuals, Stalin broke every universally accepted law of decency, clemency, and regency. One might say that the only law that Stalin here has not broken is Gregor Mendel's law of Inheritance, but then, perhaps he hadn't heard of it.

*(If the audience laughs here,
the gavel is struck again.)*

PROSECUTOR

It is high time the accused atones for his massacre of a history that was never able to come into being. Finally the clock has run out on this delay in justice. Finally the clock has run out on this living legacy of Stalin...of Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili.

(beat)

I trust the fine people in this jury will do the right thing and uphold the law.

(beat)

The Prosecution rests, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Thank you, counselor.

(beat)

Bertram?

DEFENSE

Is it any surprise that clones are tried in their 19th year of life?...like soldiers drawn to the flickering flames of wars designed by the self-serving for the self-sacrificing...too young to know any better...brainwashed into believing there is some paradise awaiting them in the afterlife...a deliverance from their *purported* willing fate?

(beat)

Ladies and gentleman, I ask you what parents would betray the inviolate sanctity of their responsibility to this child and deliver him to the most unjust system? What kinds of parents would allow this?

(beat)

There are times when we must suffer the consequences of our actions, surely, and like a good shepherd who tells the truth to their friend when the gravity of his offenses transcend the sacrosanct bond of friendship, there are times when a mother and father must willingly offer their child to the discipline and the rules of the outside world. But, is this that time?

(beat)

I ask you, what child is offered? What kinds of parents betray their own child? What if the child is not a child...but a clone? Would it matter to you more if the clone is a child, or if the child is clone? What if that child has no mother or father?...but is an orphan...not because the mother died at childbirth and the father died in war...but because the child in question never had a mother or a father to begin with...In short, the child is a true son of science...try to fathom that!...Never had a mother or a father...let that percolate into your souls...would this matter to you? It was said that the court has been so liberal as to make the clone a man. We were all witnesses to it, but is it ready to concede that the man is a child? A motherless child?

(MORE)