

Peter is hewing away at a large piece of timber with an adze. He is clearly enjoying himself, and he is sweating despite the cold air.

Enter William Penn, a stout middle-aged man dressed in the sober grey of the Quakers. He stands watching Peter silently for some time before Peter looks up and notices him.

Peter God, you startled me.

Penn God often does. But don't let me interrupt you.

Peter What...?

Penn God often catches us by surprise. That is why it is good to keep listening. But please carry on with your work.

Peter I will.

Penn I'm sorry, Peter. I know who you are, but you don't know who I am. My name is William Penn.

Peter Penn? Ah yes, I know you. You're one of those Quakers, aren't you?

Penn We prefer to call ourselves Friends.

Peter That sounds cosy.

Penn And so it is meant to be. What better aim could there be than promoting warmth and security between all people?

Peter stops hewing and turns to face Penn, the adze in his hands

Peter Well, Mr Penn, what can I do for you?

Penn First of all, you must call me William. I have no need of a title.

Peter Good morning, William.

Penn And then I would like you to listen to me for a while, Peter. There are a few things I want to

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tell you about.

Peter My name is Peter Mikhailovich. Mikhail was my father's name. I will not dishonour him by forgetting it.

Penn You do him no dishonour by simplicity. One name is enough for any man.

Peter Is that all you have to tell me, William?

Penn No I have a great deal more to say, if you will spare me the time.

Peter plunges the adze into the wood and sits down next to it.

Peter Say what you have to say, and we will see if you have time.

Penn There is an old couplet that goes, "The way to bliss lies not on beds of down. And he that hath no cross deserves no crown." Tell me Peter, what is your cross?

Peter Oh I have many crosses.

Penn Then perhaps you deserve many crowns.

Peter What a shame I have only one head.

Penn One head may wear many crowns if it is large enough.

Peter Indeed.

Penn What is your heaviest cross?

Peter Old men of religion.

Penn Such as me?

Peter No. The ones with big, ugly beards.

Penn What is so ugly in a beard?

Peter A Russian patriarch.

Penn

Oh?

Peter

There was a greybeard called Nikon who made my father's life a hell on Earth. And when he died, another called Avvakum told my brother Fedor father had gone to hell indeed. Fedor was destroyed.

Penn

No man can know who is in heaven and who sent to the flames.

Peter

They can.

Penn

How?

Peter

Fedor sent Avvakum to the flames. He had him burned at the stake. I would've done the same.

Penn

Then you would have been as monstrous as Avvakum.

Peter grips the adze and leaps up.

Vengeance is mine says the Lord. It is not any man's to take it for him.

Peter

I am tsar. I am the arm of God on Earth.

Penn

No. No man is. Neither sovereign nor priest. God speaks directly to each and every man, woman and child – if they will listen.

Peter

But they don't. That's why someone must lead them.

Penn

Listen, Peter. People in England have been fighting your greybeards for a century. But our greybeards are the Pope and all his ministers who would obscure the word of God behind pomp and mystery...They are also misguided sovereigns who stand between ordinary people and their God.

Peter

Wasn't it ordinary people that sent you to prison?

Penn

Too many ordinary people are fools.

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Peter And what about your present sovereign William? Does he stand between ordinary people and their god?

Penn He was not my choice.

Peter Dangerous words.

Penn Maybe, but let us leave that aside. I came here today because I believe you to be a man who is willing to listen.

Peter I came here to listen and learn.

Penn Then listen to me, Tsar of Muscovy. You have enormous power for good in your hands – or for evil? Which is it to be?

Peter Good, I hope.

Penn So do I.

Penn goes and pats the piece of wood Peter is working on.

But what is this you are working on?

Peter This? This is the futtock for a big three-decker.

Penn What is a three-decker?

Peter One of the most remarkable of all human inventions. A warship of breathtaking power.

Penn Exactly. A warship.

Peter The kind of warship Russia needs if it is to become a modern nation.

Penn I came here because I detest war.

Peter War is a necessary evil.

Penn No, it is an unnecessary evil.

Peter grunts dismissively.

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I came to see you because I believe we can rid Europe of war forever. But I need your help.

Peter And what do you want me to do?

Penn I want you to help me set up a parliament for all Europe.

Peter A parliament.

Penn Yes. A parliament where representatives from every nation in Europe can meet and talk through their differences – not fight over them.

Peter A dream.

Penn No. There will be ninety two members. England would have six members...and Russia would have ten.

Peter Lucky Russia.

Penn But no-one would have precedence. The chamber would be round, and all would meet and talk as equals.

Peter Then beat each other to death.

Penn You are a cynic. You disappoint me. I had hoped you were a man of vision.

Peter No, not a man of vision. But one who sees clearly that your babe would be stillborn. Europe is not ready for such a civil chamber. Russia is not ready.

Penn That is what the greybeards say.

Peter What do they say?

Penn That people are not ready. That they still need guidance from those with wisdom...or power.

Peter So they do.

Penn No, they need guidance only from God.

Peter

Pigshit!

Penn

What man is wiser than God speaking direct to people's souls?

Peter

I am.

Penn

That is the sin of pride, Peter.

Peter

What would you know, you pompous preacher!

Penn

I have lived longer than you...and met many people.

Peter

You have not been to Moscow.

Penn

What would I see in Moscow?

Peter

A city choked on cruelty and prejudice.

Penn

Bitter words.

Peter gets up and starts hacking vigorously with the axe. After a while he stops, and looks at Penn. Every now and then, he gives the adze another swing.

Peter

When I was just ten years old, I stood alone on the Kremlin steps with just my mother and Fedor and saw the whole square filled with Muscovites howling for our blood like mad wolves...

Penn

Mobs can be terrifying.

Peter

Wait! And I saw Artemon Sergeevich Matveev stand up to talk to them. Artemon Sergeevich, my mother and father's best friend – the cleverest, gentlest, most enlightened of old men...Artemon talked to them kindly, sensibly, understandingly. But when he had finished, he turned to hug my mama...and those howling wolves ripped him from her arms, lifted him in the air and hurled him down onto the points of their swords. Then they laughed and cheered...and hacked his poor old body into tiny pieces, till not one of them wasn't splashed with blood and bits of white

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flesh...

Penn Dear God...

Peter There is more! That night, they butchered so many of our friends and family that the meat pile in Red Square grew like a mountain...and we crept from cellar to cellar, listening for their baying, and terrified of the spears that might come jabbing through the dark. And when dawn came and all had gone quiet, mama was asked to hand her own brother to them, my Uncle Ivan. So because she had no choice, they took him and they broke his hands and his feet, and they sliced them off and then stamped back and forwards over his bloody corpse...That is Moscow.

Penn is silent as Peter goes on hacking. Eventually he speaks.

Penn Let me tell you a story now.

Peter grunts

Penn I have found much to hate in London, as you have in Moscow.

Peter *(snorts)* Have you?

Penn I have not seen the same slaughter as you. But I have been locked in the vilest prisons here for my beliefs. Have you?

Peter swings the adze.

So 16 years ago, I set out on a voyage to the west, just like you have done. But London was simply my starting point. Eight weeks at sea brought me in sight for the first time of America.

Peter The new world.

Penn Yes. And in that new world, I realized, mankind has a chance to start again, a chance to rub out the mistakes that have turned the cities of this old world so vicious.

Peter You and your dreams.

Penn But this was not a dream. It is a reality. I have created there a fresh and pure new country governed by laws which hold all men equal.

Peter What's its name?

Penn Pennsylvania.

Peter Even I don't claim the name of my country.

Penn It's my father's name not mine.

Peter And sylvania? Another relative?

Penn Sylva – just woods.

Peter Sylva? Evelyn.

Penn Sorry?

Peter Nothing.

Penn At the heart of this new country, I have created a beautiful new city. A city of gardens, lawns and orchards where men and women may live and breathe freely and safely. A city free from the vice, dirt and crime that festers in London...and in Moscow.

Peter And which of your relatives is this called after?

Penn Philadelphia means brotherly love.

Peter See? Another relative.

Penn Abandon Moscow, Peter. Build a new city. A new Jerusalem. A city with broad streets, fresh gardens. A city for open minds and pure souls to thrive.

Peter And call it Petersburg? Not after me, of course, but my patron saint.

Penn Mocking is easy, Peter. Creation is work.

Peter I am not afraid of work, preacher.

Penn Then what are you afraid of?

Peter Failure.

Penn Then you will surely fail.

Peter Thank you.

Penn Failure is nothing to fear. Only success is.

Peter I'll remember your advice.

Penn You are too arrogant by far, Peter Mikhailovich. It is a dangerous, evil trait.

Peter Another homily.

Penn Remember, God wreaks his vengeance on those who set themselves above others in pride.

Peter You have used up your time.

Penn Ask yourself, Peter Mikhailovich, who gave you the right to dominate men?

Peter Leave. Now!

Penn Are you fit to rule?

Peter I said leave!

Penn Only God is fit to rule.

Peter hurls the adze into the wood, making a deep gouge and looks dangerously at Penn.

Good morning, Your Imperial Majesty.

Peter kicks over the timber in a fury.