

Toast a State Dinner Hosted by the President at Spaso House in Moscow (Excerpts)

May 31, 1988

The President Mr. General Secretary, Mrs. Gorbachev, distinguished guests and friends, it's a pleasure to host all of you tonight and to reciprocate, in a small way, the hospitality you lavished upon us yesterday evening. While the General Secretary and I had already held three meetings before this one began here in Moscow, each of those earlier encounters took place in the autumn. The days were growing short, the weather ever grayer and colder. It makes for a bracing, delightful change to have this meeting take place at the high point of spring, a time of long, light-filled days.

I know that Nancy found her springtime visit to Leningrad earlier today both magnificent and moving. The play of light upon the rivers and canals added the special splendor of the season to a city splendid in any season. And everywhere, Nancy has told me, there was a sense of history, especially of Leningrad's immense courage and sacrifice during the Second World War, surely one of the most stirring epics in the whole human story.

Here in Moscow, I've been reminded a number of times during this springtime visit of a passage in a book about your country by Laurens Van der Post. Especially struck by the city's churches, Van der Post wrote that when he caught his first sight of the Moscow skyline he saw "the light of an unusually pure evening upon it. That light was alchemical, and it transformed Moscow into a city of gold. The tops of the spires and pinnacles drawing the rigid forms of the skyscrapers after them into arrows of gold aimed at the arched and timeless blue." So, we, too, have found Moscow a city of beauties. A city, especially, whose pinnacles and spires reminded one at virtually every turn of man's ancient capacity for aspiration, for reaching out toward the light.

It's a particular pleasure to be able to welcome you to Spaso House—a house of considerable beauty in its own right—the residence of our Ambassadors to the Soviet Union. During the 55 years of diplomatic relations between our two nations, Spaso House has served as one of the principal settings for exchanges between us—exchanges formal and informal alike. There have

been some splendid moments within these walls. Prokofiev once conducted his marvelous "The Love for Three Oranges" in this very room. As wartime allies, our representatives met often under this roof. And Ambassador and Mrs. Matlock have continued the tradition of making Spaso House a centerpiece of American culture, a place to receive and talk with Soviet officials and with people from all walks of life and from all parts of the Soviet Union. But there have also been quiet times in this house—unnaturally quiet times. Times when difficult relations between us meant that this house, this huge, magnificent house, stood virtually empty of visitors. I'm told that it was even possible to hear the Moscow Metro rumbling past, ever so faintly, deep in the Earth below.

Mr. General Secretary, we know that on matters of great importance we will continue to differ profoundly, and yet you and I have met four times now, more often than any previous President and General Secretary. While our discussions have sometimes been pointed or contentious, we possess an enlarged understanding of each other and of each other's country. On specific matters of policy, we have made progress, often historic progress. And perhaps most important, we have committed our nations to continuing to work together, agreeing that silence must never again be permitted to fall between us. We have agreed always to continue the interchanges between our nations because, I believe, we both hear the same voice, the same overwhelming imperative. What that voice says can be expressed in many ways. But I have found it in vivid form in Pasternak's poem "The Garden of Gethsemane." Listen, if you will, to Pasternak's account of that famous arrest:

"There appeared—no one knew from where—a crowd of slaves and a rabble of knaves, with lights and swords and, leading them, Judas with a traitor's kiss on his lips.

"Peter repulsed the ruffians with his sword and cut off the ear of one of them. But he heard: 'You cannot decide a dispute with weapons; put your sword in its place, O man.'"

That's the voice. "Put your sword in its place, O

man.” That is the imperative, the command. And so, we will work together that we might forever keep our swords at our sides.

Mr. General Secretary, ladies and gentlemen, Spaso House has, as I said, seen quiet times, yet the animated conversation of this evening has already done much to make up for them. And so, I would like to raise a glass

to the continued interchange between our two nations and, if I may, to Spaso House itself, as a symbol of our relations. May this lovely home never lack for visitors and shared meals and the sounds of spirited conversation and even the peal of hearty laughter. Thank you, and God bless you. And to the General Secretary, to Mrs. Gorbachev, to the relationship that I believe must continue.