

Stanislav Petrov

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Song #6 for FAWM 2020

World tensions rising, anger exploding,
Korean airliner was shot down.
Eyes on the radar, hands on the trigger,
All could explode at a misplaced frown.
Stanislav Petrov sat at his station
Far from his family and his hometown.

Petrov's assignment, watching for missiles
Launched against Russia out from the West.
Waiting for data from the computer,
Fearing the words: "This is not a test."
If that should happen, he would report it.
Leaders in Moscow would do the rest.

Hours of boredom, sitting and waiting,
Out of the silence a siren screamed.
"Five missiles coming," said the computer,
Words that he had in his nightmares dreamed.
Now was the moment, war was beginning,
Nuclear bombs would explode, it seemed.

Petrov's instructions: Just make the phone call.
Yet if he did, that would start a war.
He sat there puzzled. Something was wrong here.
Only five missiles? Why weren't there more?
What he was seeing looked like an error,
Something there must be a reason for.

Petrov considered: What should he do now?
If he was wrong, would his people die?
Yet if he called because of an error,
Real missiles soon would be in the sky.
Earth's fate was resting on Petrov's judgment,
Was what he saw there a fact or lie?

No other missiles had been reported.
Throat dry with fear, he made up his mind.
He logged an entry: "Computer error."
In a few minutes, he knew he'd find
Whether he'd made the right call or blundered.
He'd live or die by what fate assigned.

In half an hour, nothing had happened.
Now it was clear the alert was wrong.
One man's decision made all the difference,
One person with resolution strong.
We're still alive, no World War had started,
Thanks to his choice not to go along.

What did he get for his wise decision?
Not an award, but a reprimand.
He's not supposed to exercise judgment,
Just pass it on to those in command.
Be a machine man with a machine mind.
That's what the people who rule demand.

Stanislav Petrov died quite forgotten,
Months passed before it had made the news.
But his decision held off disaster,
Stopping a war that we all would lose.
That is the power of just one person
Stopping to think when he had to choose!