

# Future Perfect

His story is history.

A Play by  
Jeffrey Gold

FUTURE PERFECT

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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.

**FUTURE PERFECT**

SETTING:

*An austere courtroom consists of two small tables, one stage left with two chairs, another stage right with one chair. The chairs face the audience from behind the tables.*

AT RISE:

*The atmosphere is somber, almost ghostly, as if a deathly fog lingers in this place.*

VOICE (O.S.)

Enter the prisoner, Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili.

*[Phonetically: Yo-sef Vissar-yono-vich Doo-gosh-veelee]*

*In prison garb and shackles, DZHUGASHVILI is brought into the courtroom from stage left, by two guards, and is seated at the small table stage right, facing the jury audience.*

*Dzhugashvili has striking black hair. If he sported a moustache, he would resemble a bandit from the 1890s.*

*The guards exit.*

*The DEFENSE (walking with cane) and PROSECUTOR enter stage right and stage left, respectively. The Prosecutor looks over, acknowledging an able adversary.*

PROSECUTOR

(quietly)

What happened to emeritus, Bertram?

*The Defense ignores the comment.  
They sit down, pull documents  
from briefcases in preparation  
for the trial--the Defense  
clearly disorganized.*

VOICE (O.S.)

All rise...

*All three rise, audience  
included.*

*(A Jury Foreman is planted in  
the audience to prompt the  
audience to rise.)*

VOICE (O.S.)

...the Honorable Judge Agamemnon Llewelyn Koroliak III,  
presiding.

JUDGE (O.S.)

You may be seated.

*Everyone sits down.*

JUDGE (O.S.)

A plea of not guilty has been entered willingly and without  
coercion. Is this correct?

*The Defense stands up.*

DEFENSE

It is, your honor.

*He sits back down.*

JUDGE (O.S.)

Counselor.

PROSECUTOR

(rising)

Your honor.

(beat)

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you have before you Iosef  
Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, a clone of the war criminal  
Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili...later known to his  
compatriots as Koba, after a literary figure...and thereafter,  
in a self-styled parody approximating himself to the great  
statesman, Lenin, gave himself the moniker of Stalin.

(beat)

The facts of history are undisputed. The facts of history  
are immutable. The facts of history are permanent.

(MORE)

PROSECUTOR (CONT'D)

(beat)

The clone Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili has attained the legal age to stand trial for the crimes against humanity by Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, hereafter referred to as Stalin, in accordance with Article 19, Section 53 of the Clone Laws. Your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Thank you, Counselor.

PROSECUTOR

Per protocol 27 dot 10, I'd like to read into evidence the list of names of personages who were shot, imprisoned and liquidated in the gulags, falsely accused and assassinated in the purges, or executed by other means by the war--and peace--criminal, Stalin.

DEFENSE

Objection, your honor!

JUDGE (O.S.)

Overruled.

*He strikes the gavel. The  
Defense meekly sits back down.*

JUDGE (O.S.)

The entire list of names?

PROSECUTOR

Yes, your honor. I'll read the complete list of names recorded by history. The remaining names have been lost to the fog of war or the mists of time.

JUDGE (O.S.)

How long will this take, Counselor?

PROSECUTOR

Four days, your honor.

*(If the audience laughs, the  
Judge will strike the gavel  
and command "Order".)*

JUDGE (O.S.)

Please proceed.

*The stage darkens as the  
prosecutor walks up to a lectern  
downstage left, flicks on a  
gooseneck lamp, and noisily  
adjusts it.*

*CUE: Adagio of Sir Edward  
Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance  
March #1 (Graduation Music)*

PROSECUTOR

(slow, somber)

Osip Mandelstam, poet.

*Successive photographs of the  
murdered and their years of  
birth and death are projected  
on a screen, upstage center.*

PROSECUTOR

Isaac Babel, writer.

(pause)

Boris Pilnyak, writer.

(pause)

Vsevolod Meyerhold, theatre director.

(pause)

Titsian Yabidze, poet.

(pause)

Pavel Nikolayevich Vasiliev, poet.

*The music slowly fades out, as  
the lights fade down, simulating  
the passage of time.*

*Hold on darkness. Somber, blue  
lights fade up.*

*Dzhugashvili is seated behind  
a concert piano.*

*He tickles the ivories gently,  
evoking an Europeaneseque jazz  
in the style of Zbigniew  
Preisner's "To Anonyma".*

DZHUGASHVILI

Under different circumstances...

*Dzhugashvili plays a few more  
eurojazz chords.*

DZHUGASHVILI

Who could have known he had this in him?

DEFENSE

Maybe it's not him. Maybe it's you.

DZHUGASHVILI

I'm not so sure...

*A statuesque girl enters.*

GIRL

Then we'll never know the answer to the question, "What's in a name?"

*She wraps her arms around  
Dzhugashvili, while he strikes  
a few more chords.*

DZHUGASHVILI

He missed his calling.

DEFENSE

Perhaps. Imagine all the people who might have lived.

*Looking up at the Defense almost  
accusatorially, while  
Dzugashvili looks down...*

GIRL

Or the one I love.

*They freeze as the blue lights  
fade to black.*

*The original Elgarian adagio  
slowly fades back in as the  
lights fade back up.*

PROSECUTOR

Jan Sten, philosopher.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Wasn't Jan Sten Stalin's private tutor?

*The Prosecutor looks over at  
the Defense.*

PROSECUTOR

He was, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Continue.

PROSECUTOR

And one final name: Khadija Gayibova, pianist.  
(beat)

This concludes the list, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Thank you, Counselor.



*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)

## DEFENSE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Consider this: Article 13 of the Clone Laws attempts to equate man and clone, and Article 17...well, have you ever heard anything more specious? If we were to assume that Article 13 was ironclad...a ridiculous notion we're willing to entertain to highlight one fiction by another...what do you make of the quackery of the notions within Article 17 of the Clone Laws that attempt to equate the soul of a clone with its source...no doubt divinely inspired by the *ex cathedra* Vaticanum Canonum. Contemptibly ridiculous, ladies and gentlemen.

(beat)

Article 17 has equated the souls of a man and his clone as one and the same, in effect conjoining in law the souls of twins. I once was the proud father of twin girls. Even the most unobservant of parent knows this symmetry to be untrue. From the moment of inception, their lives, albeit the same genetically, are utterly different: entwined in a helix of nature and nurture---ladies and gentlemen---not nature or nurture. Should one child suffer the punishment for the crime of the other? Isn't everyone responsible for their own actions? If that isn't enough...what is next?...when do we start suffering the consequences of our imagined past lives? I ask you this: Where does the law end and life begin?

(beat)

Ladies and gentlemen, the fate of this child...a clone in definition only...Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili...is now entirely in your hands, the jury. Your decision is not a light one, as it will have serious consequences in the raft of future cases to come. This is your chance, as a microcosm of the larger society that surrounds us, to correct a flawed system. The prosecution has argued that we must all adhere to the law, even if the law is unjust, for to do otherwise is to maintain and abet lawlessness. I would not be able to endure such a society. If adherence to the law is perfection, it is a pyrrhic victory. In this august hell, I submit to you that it is far better to be lawless than it is to be flawless. Again I ask you: Where does the law end and his life begin?

(beat)

Like many other designer children, I've had the occasion to get to know this young man, Iosef, in preparation for this trial over these last three years since the passing of my wife. He's become the son I never had. He likes cars, chocolate cake, and marzipan. He plays piano. And he has a girlfriend.

(points somewhere  
offstage right)

He dreams of becoming a pilot. As a young boy, he daydreamed, imagining pencils and erasers to be rockets and spaceships. He laughs easily, but most easily with his eyes. And watching the women in the gallery, it's apparent that he's not hard on the eyes either.

(MORE)



DEFENSE (CONT'D)

(winks)

Quite the *specimen*...using the choice words of our oppressors.

(beat)

More importantly, his is a beautiful soul, as you yourselves have witnessed...offering his life to heal our society... offering something that was and is not his to give. If we've learned anything from the second law of thermodynamics, it's that we cannot undo the entropic nature of human savagery... but what we can do is prevent another entry into that book of horrors. The fact that he is a clone, and—ironically—not an original, should be grounds enough to indemnify him. His life begins when this unjust law ends.

(beat, passionate)

Help me preserve him. Help me preserve him so that we, on this day and future days following, may clone his spirit.

*He turns to sit back down, but spins back around...*

DEFENSE

(pensive, cautionary)

Oh...and let us hope that we have not done anything in our own lives that could endanger the survival of any of our own future clones. Really now, how many of us know for certain that we are not already...even if imperfect ones.

(beat)

The defense rests, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Thank you, counselor.

*The Defense sits back down.*

DZHUGASHVILI

(privately)

You've given me hope.

*The Defense clasps Dzhugashvili's forearm reassuringly, then looks away-- not as convinced.*

JUDGE (O.S.)

Each member of the jury is hereby instructed to enter a verdict, in accordance with Docket 91792, article 27.10...the "Dawn Ridge Amendment", and amended by 37.17, known as "Louisiana".

*Soulful music plays. (This is now the complete eurojazz piece played by Dzhugashvili that we never heard in completion.)*

*The audience members have been handed two slips of paper with choices: ABSTENTION and GUILTY*

*The Jury Foreman immediately begins to collect the verdict slips. Once collected, the Jury Foreman disappears offstage.*

*During the waiting time, the Defense speaks with Iosef, trying to reassure him.*

*As the music ends naturally, the Jury Foreman returns and sits back down.*

VOICE (O.S.)

All rise.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Has the jury reached a verdict?

JURY FOREMAN

We have, your honor.

JUDGE (O.S.)

And have all the fingerprinted abstentions been registered with the citizens database?

JURY FOREMAN

They have, your honor.

VOICE (O.S.)

Be seated.

JUDGE (O.S.)

Proceed with the verdict.

JURY FOREMAN

(standing)

Your honor, in the case of the State vs. Dzhugashvili, we find the defendant, Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili...**guilty** on **all** counts.

*Iosef falls into the arms of the Defense. The Defense tries to recompose Dzhugashvili for the sentencing.*

JUDGE

In accordance with Article 18, Section 78 of the Clone Laws, Iosef Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili: you are hereby sentenced for immediate execution at the earliest convenience of the courts.

*Dzhugashvili trembles and again falls into the arms of the Defense.*

JUDGE (O.S.)

Remove the condemned.

*The two Guards return to pry Dzhugashvili away, leading him offstage right.*

JUDGE (O.S.)

This court is hereby adjourned.

*The gavel is struck for the last time.*

*The Jury Foreman approaches to congratulate the self-satisfied Prosecutor.*

*The Defense, clearly shaken, somberly collects his materials and meekly makes his way offstage (upstage center).*

*GUARD 1 comes back on the scene to readjust the chairs at the Defense table.*

*At some noticeably silent moment a solitary gunshot rings out.*

PROSECUTOR

(genuinely alarmed,  
to Guard 1)

I can't believe they executed him this soon. Isn't it customary for them to wait?

GUARD 1

(shakes his head,  
sympathetically)

He had no family, sir.

*Guard 1 returns to her routine. Guard 2 runs onstage, entering from where the Defense exited.*

GUARD 2

(urgent)

Bertram just shot himself.

*Guard 1 and Guard 2 rush  
offstage. The Prosecutor  
collapses into his chair, places  
his hand over his face in  
sorrow, while the Jury Foreman  
looks on.*

*Freeze.*

*Slow Blackout.*

*CURTAIN.*