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AD to CALVARY

Alexei Tolstoy

STALIN PRIZE NOVEL

HUTCHINSON INTERNATIONAL AUTHORS LTD.

ROAD to CALVARY

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ALEXEI TOLSTOY

Author of

ROAD TO CALVARY

Alexei Tolstoy's gigantic trilogy is one of the outstanding achievements of Soviet fiction. A vast canvas crowded with characters and rich in incident, it is dedicated to the most difficult period in Russian history—the epoch of the First World War, the Revolution and the Civil War—and provides a detailed, consecutive picture of those stormy years of transition which is of great historical as well as artistic value. The first part, entitled *The Sisters*, describes the life of the Petrograd intelligentsia on the eve of the first world war,

(*Continued on back flap*)

(*Continued from front flap*)

the war itself and the events of 1917. The second part, *1918*, covers the initial stages of the civil war and traces the fortunes of the two sisters and the divided sympathies of their husbands. The last part, *Bleak Morning*, carries the story forward through the kaleidoscopic events of the civil war and ends with the solemn session which adopts the plan for peaceful construction to create life and happiness for the liberation of the people.

Tolstoy began the book in 1919 and finished writing the final paragraph on the morning of June 22nd, 1941.

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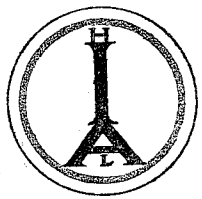
ROAD TO CALVARY

STALIN PRIZE NOVEL

ALEXEI TOLSTOY

ROAD TO CALVARY

Translated by
EDITH BONE



HUTCHINSON INTERNATIONAL AUTHORS LTD.
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Alexei Tolstoy began work on this novel in 1919 *and finished writing the final paragraph on the morning of June 22nd,* 1941. *Part of it was published in this country by Messrs. Victor Gollancz in* 1935, *under the title of* DARKNESS AND DAWN. *Since then, in addition to writing the third and final part, Tolstoy has revised and largely rewritten the entire work, over half of which now appears in English for the first time.*

PART ONE

THE SISTERS

Oh Russian Earth!
—(The Lay of Igor's Raid)

CHAPTER I

AN EXTRANEOUS OBSERVER from some tree-lined provincial side-street, if chance brought him to Petersburg, would in moments of concentration experience a complicated feeling of intellectual stimulation and emotional depression.

Wandering along the straight and foggy streets, past gloomy houses with darkened windows and with sleepy doorkeepers at the gates; looking long at the sullen water-waste of the Neva, at the bluish lines of the bridges with their rows of lanterns lit even in daylight, at the colonnades of uncomfortable and joyless palaces, at the un-Russian pile of the Cathedral of St. Peter and Paul, at the miserable little boats bobbing up and down on the dark water, at the innumerable barges loaded with green wood moored along the granite embankments; peering into the pale and worried faces of passers-by whose eyes were as foggy as their city—seeing and noting all this, the extraneous observer, if well-intentioned, would draw his head closer into the collar of his coat, and if disaffected would begin to think that it would be a good thing to hit out and smash all this petrified enchantment to smithereens.

Long ago, in the far-off days of Peter the Great, the verger of Holy Trinity —a church still standing near Holy Trinity Bridge—was coming down from the belfry in the twilight when he saw a banshee—a bareheaded, gaunt woman; he was very frightened and afterwards shouted at the inn: "A desert will be in the place of Petersburg"—for which he was seized, tortured in the Secret Chancery and afterwards mercilessly knouted.

It has been the custom ever since to think that something was wrong with Petersburg. One day eye-witnesses saw the devil himself riding in a droshky on Vassilov Island. Then again, one midnight, when a gale was blowing and the river was in spate, the bronze Emperor leaped from his granite rock and galloped over the pavement stones. On another occasion a Privy Councillor riding in his coach was accosted by a dead man, a dead government clerk who pressed his face to the coach window and would not let go. Many such stories were current in the city.

Quite recently Alexei Alexeyevich Bessonov, the poet, driving to the islands in a superior-grade cab and crossing a canal by a little humpbacked bridge, saw a star in the depths of the heavens through a rift in the clouds, and looking at this star through his tears, he thought that the superior-grade cab, and the lines of street lanterns and the whole sleeping Petersburg behind his back were merely a dream, a delusion, a figment of a brain fogged with wine, love and boredom.

Two centuries had passed like a dream: Petersburg, standing on the edge of the earth in swamp and wilderness, had day-dreamed of boundless might and glory; palace revolts, assassinations of emperors, triumphs and bloody executions had flitted past like the visions of a delirium; feeble women had wielded semi-divine power; the fate of nations had been decided in hot and tumbled beds; vigorous strapping young fellows with hands black from tilling

the soil had walked boldly up the steps of the throne to share the power, the bed and the Byzantine luxury of queens.

The neighbours looked with horror at these frantic ravings and the Russian people listened in fear and sorrow to the delirium of their capital city. The country nurtured these Petersburg wraiths with its blood but could never sate them.

Petersburg lived a restless, cold, satiated, semi-nocturnal life. Phosphorescent, crazy, voluptuous summer nights; sleepless winter nights; green tables and the clink of gold; music, whirling couples behind windows, galloping troikas, gipsies, duels at daybreak, ceremonial military parades to the whistling of icy winds and the squealing of fifes, before the terrifying gaze of the Byzantine eyes of an Emperor—such was the life of the city.

In the last ten years huge enterprises had sprung into being with unbelievable rapidity. Fortunes of millions of roubles appeared as if out of thin air. Banks, music-halls, skating-rinks, gorgeous public-houses of concrete and glass were built, and in them people doped themselves with music, with the reflections of many mirrors, with half-naked women, with light, with champagne. Gambling clubs, houses of assignation, theatres, picture houses, amusement parks cropped up like mushrooms. Architects and business men were hard at work on plans for a new capital city of unheard-of luxury, to be built on an uninhabited island near Petersburg.

An epidemic of suicides spread through the city. The courts were crowded with hysterical women listening eagerly to details of bloody and prurient crimes. Everything was accessible: the women no less than the riches. Vice was everywhere—the imperial Palace was stricken with it as with a plague.

And to the Palace, up the very steps of the imperial throne came an illiterate peasant with insane eyes and tremendous male vigour; jeering and scoffing, he began to play his infamous tricks, with all Russia as his plaything.

Petersburg, like every other city, had a life of its own, tense and intent. But the central force that governed its movements was not merged with the thing that might be called the spirit of the city. The central force strove to create peace, order and expediency, while the spirit of the city strove to destroy them. The spirit of destruction was everywhere; it soaked everything with its deadly poison, from the stock exchange machinations of the notorious Sashka Sakelman and the sullen fury of the workmen in the steel foundries to the contorted dreams of some fashionable poetress sitting at 5 a.m. in the Bohemian basement café "Red Jingle". Even those who would have fought against all this destruction merely increased it and rendered it more acute without knowing it.

It was a time when love and all kindly and healthy feelings were considered in bad taste and out of date. No one loved; but all were thirsty and snatched like men poisoned at everything sharp that would rend their bowels.

Young girls were ashamed of their innocence and married couples of their fidelity to each other. Destruction was considered in good taste and neurosis a sign of subtlety. This was the gospel taught by fashionable authors suddenly emerging from nowhere in the course of a single season. People invented vices and perversions for themselves merely to be in the swim.

Such was Petersburg in 1914. Tormented by sleepless nights, deadening its misery with wine, gold and loveless love, the shrill and feebly emotional strains of tangos for its funeral dirge, the city lived as if in expectation of a fatal and terrible day of wrath. There were auguries in plenty, and new and incomprehensible things were emerging from every cranny.

CHAPTER II

"... WE DON'T WANT to remember. We say: enough of the past, turn your backsides to it! Who is that behind me? The Venus of Milo? So what? Can we eat her? Or can she make our hair grow? I don't see what good that lump of stone could be to me? But they say it's art. Art, ugh! Do you people still care to tickle yourselves with this business of art? Look round you, in front of you, look at your feet. You've got American shoes on them. Long live the shoes of America! If you want art, here it is: a red motor-car, rubber tyres, eight gallons of petrol and sixty miles an hour, stimulating me to eat up space. Or here's art: a thirty-foot poster, and on it a young snob in a top-hat as bright as the sun. The tailor is the true artist, the genius of our time! I want to gorge myself with life—and you offer me a soft drink fit only for men suffering from sexual impotence. . . ."

At the end of the narrow hall, where young university students of both sexes were standing tightly packed, there was laughter and applause. The orator, Sergey Sergeyevich Sapozhkov, smiled with moist lips, adjusted the dancing pince-nez on his big nose, and stepped briskly down from the great oak rostrum.

On one side of the platform, at a long table lighted by two five-armed candlesticks, sat the officers of the Philosophical Evenings Society: the president of the society, Antonovski, a Professor of Divinity; Veliaminov, a historian who was the lecturer for that evening; Borski, a philosopher; and Sakunin, a sophisticated author.

That winter the Philosophical Evenings Society had been under heavy fire from a few little-known but pugnacious young men who attacked prominent authors and respected philosophers with such ferocity and said such impudent and attractive things that the old house in the Fontanka, in which the society had its headquarters, was packed full every Saturday when open meetings were held.

It was the same on this occasion. When Sapozhkov left the platform, accompanied by a burst of applause, his place on the rostrum was taken by a short young man with high cheek-bones, a sallow complexion and close-cropped hair which revealed the bumpy surface of his skull. His name was Akundin and he was quite a newcomer here, but had already made a great hit, especially with the back rows of the hall. When anyone asked who he was and where he came from, those in the know only smiled an enigmatic smile. At all events, his name was not Akundin; he had come from some place abroad, and he made his speeches with some ulterior motive.

Fingering his thin little beard, Akundin scanned the expectant hall, smiled a tight-lipped smile and began to speak. All this time a young girl had been sitting near the central aisle in the third row of chairs. She wore a black woollen dress fastened up to the neck, and sat propping up her chin with her small fist. Her fine, flaxen hair was drawn back above her ears and twisted into a large knot held in by a comb. Motionless and unsmiling, she was watching the men sitting behind the green table. From time to time her eyes wandered and were held for a while by the flames of the candles.

As Akundin banged his fist on the oak rostrum and shouted: "World economy with its iron fist will strike the first blow at the cupola of the church," the young girl sighed quietly, took her fist from under her chin and put a toffee into her mouth.

Akundin went on:

". . . You are still dreaming vague dreams of the Kingdom of God on earth, while HE goes on sleeping in spite of all your efforts. Perhaps you hope that HE will wake up after all and begin to speak, like Balaam's ass? Oh yes, HE will wake up all right, but it is not the sweet voices of your poets, nor the smoke from your censers that will rouse him—only the sirens of the factories can rouse the common people. THEY will wake and will speak, and their voices will not be pleasant to your ears. Or are you hoping to escape to the swamps and wilderness of your own minds? Possibly you might go on dreaming thus for another fifty years. But why call it waiting for the Messiah? It is not of the future, but of the past. It was here, in Petersburg, in this magnificent hall, that the Russian peasant, the muzhik, was invented. Hundreds of volumes were written about him, and even a few operas composed. But I am afraid the fun may well end in a thorough blood-letting. . . ."

At this point the chairman stopped the speaker. Akundin smiled a half-smile, pulled a large handkerchief out of his pocket, and wiped the top of his head and his face with a gesture denoting long habit. There was a clamour at the end of the hall:

"Let him speak!"

"Disgusting to shut a man up like that!"

"It's an outrage!"

"Shut up at the back there!"

"Shut up yourselves!"

Akundin went on:

"The Russian muzhik is the focal point of our ideas. That is quite true. But if these ideas are not organically connected with his century-old desires, his primitive conception of justice—a conception common to all men—then these ideas will be like a seed falling on stony ground. Until you begin to regard the Russian muzhik simply as a man with a hungry belly and a back galled by labour, until he is at last divested of the Messianic character invented for him long ago by some fine gentleman—until then two tragic poles will continue to exist: on the one hand your beautiful ideas, born in the murk of your studies; and on the other the common people of whom you want to know nothing. We are not out to criticise you here at all. It would be strange for us to waste our time sifting all this colossal assortment of human fancies. No. What we want to say is: save yourselves before it is too late. As for your ideas and your treasures, they will be thrown unregretted into the dustbin of history. . . ."

The girl in the black woollen dress was not at all disposed to pursue the line of thought that was being proffered from the rostrum. It seemed to her that all these words and arguments were of course very important and significant, but that the most important thing was something else, which these people did not even mention.

At that moment a newcomer appeared at the green table, and languidly sat down next to the president. He nodded to right and left, passed a frost-reddened hand over his chestnut hair wet with snow, dropped his hands under the table, and sat up very straight in his chair. He wore a close-fitting black coat, his face was lean and lustreless, with immense grey eyes in dark hollows under arched eyebrows. His hair framed his face like a cap. This was exactly how Alexey Alexeyevitch Bessonov had been portrayed in the latest issue of a weekly journal.

The young girl's attention was now entirely taken up by that almost

repulsively handsome face. With an emotion akin to horror she stared at those strange features she had so often seen in her dreams during many windy Petersburg nights.

There he was, turning his ear towards his neighbour and smiling. The smile itself was artless enough, but in the cut of his delicate nostrils, in the all too feminine eyebrows, in the peculiar supple strength of his features, there was perfidity, arrogance and something more, something she could not understand, but that stirred her most of all.

Meanwhile Veliaminov, the lecturer, red-faced and bearded, with gold-rimmed spectacles on his nose, and tufts of golden-grey hair round his great head, was replying to Akundin:

". . . You are right, as an avalanche is right when it hurtles down a mountain slope. We have long expected the coming of an age of horror, we have long foreseen the triumph of the truth you speak of.

"It is you who will ride the elements; not we. But we know that the supreme justice (for the conquest of which you rally men with your factory sirens) will prove to be a mere heap of rubble through which humanity will wander dazed and say: 'I thirst', because there will not be a drop of divine moisture in it. Beware!"—Veliaminov pointed a long forefinger like a pencil, and looked sternly through his spectacles at the rows of listeners—"In the paradise of your day-dreams, for the sake of which you want to turn men into robots, into numbers so-and-so—man into number—in this horrible paradise a new revolution threatens, the most terrible of all revolutions—the revolution of the Spirit."

Akundin, from his seat, said coldly:

"Turning men into numbers—that, too, is idealism. . . ."

Veliaminov shrugged his shoulders. The candles mottled his bald head with patches of light. He began to speak of the wickedness into which the world was sinking, and of the fearful retribution that was to come. People in the audience began to cough and clear their throats.

During the interval the girl went to the buffet, and stood frowning near the door. At the bar a group of barristers and their wives were drinking tea and talking louder than anyone else. Near the stove Chernobilin, the famous author, was eating fish and cranberries, and scrutinizing with angry, drunken eyes the people passing by. Two middle-aged literary ladies, with unwashed necks and large bows in their hair, were munching sandwiches at the buffet counter. On one side, keeping away from the laity, a few priests loitered, affecting poses of dignity. Under the chandelier, Chirva the critic, his hands stuck under the tails of his long frock-coat, and his greying hair in studied disorder, stood balancing himself on his heels and waiting for someone to come and speak to him. When Veliaminov came in, one of the literary ladies rushed at him and grabbed his sleeve. The other literary lady instantly stopped munching, shook the crumbs off her lap, bent her head forward and opened her eyes wide. Bessonov came up to her, bowing right and left with an insincerely meek inclination of his head.

The girl in black tingled all over when she saw the literary lady stiffen under her corset. Bessonov was saying something to her with a lazy smile. The literary lady clapped her plump hands and laughed loudly, rolling up her eyes.

The girl shrugged her shoulders and left the buffet. Someone called out to her by name. A dark, gaunt young man in a velvet jacket pushed his way towards her through the crowd. He was obviously delighted to see her,

bowed to her again and again and wrinkled up his nose in his eagerness. He took her hand between his moist palms, a moist lock of hair fell on to his forehead, and his moist black eyes looked into hers with a moist tenderness. His name was Alexander Ivanovich Zhirov. He said:

"You here? What brings *you* here, Daria Dmitrievna?"

"The same as you," she answered; she drew her hand away, slipped it into her muff and wiped it on her handkerchief.

He chuckled and looked at her even more tenderly.

"Well, do you still disapprove of Sapozhkov? He spoke like a prophet to-night. His vehemence and his peculiar manner irritate you. But the substance of his thinking—isn't it exactly what we all secretly want to say, but dare not? But he dares. It's just a case of:

We are young and young and younger,
In our bellies hellish hunger.
We'll devour the void.

Unusual, new and daring. Is it possible, Daria Dmitrievna, that you don't sense that something new is crowding in! Something that is ours, something new, something avid, something daring! Akundin, too! He's too logical, but how he drives home his points! Another two or three such winters and everything will be cracking up, bursting at the seams—and a good thing too!"

He was speaking in a low voice, and smiling tenderly. Dasha sensed that the whole man was quivering as if with some terrible emotion. She did not wait for him to finish what he was saying, gave him a nod and began to elbow her way through to the cloak-room.

A surly, bemedalled commissionaire, lugging along a pile of fur-coats and goloshes, paid no attention to the ticket Dasha held out to him. She had to wait a long time in the draught blowing in through the swing doors of the empty vestibule, where huge cab-drivers in wet blue peasant coats touted for fares with cheerful insolence:

"Take my fiery one, your grace!"

"This way, this way for Pesky!"

Suddenly, just behind Dasha, the voice of Bessonov said coldly and precisely:

"Commissionaire, my coat, hat and stick."

Dasha felt needles run lightly down her spine. She turned her head quickly and looked straight into Bessonov's eyes. He met her gaze calmly, as his due; but then his eyelids twitched, his grey eyes kindled and seemed to dart at her, and Dasha felt how her heart began to race.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, bending down to her, "we have met before at your sister's house?"

Dasha answered readily and boldly:

"Yes. We have."

She snatched her furs from the attendant and hurried to the main entrance. Outside, the wet cold wind tugged at her dress and showered rusty drops on her. Dasha muffled her face up to the eyes in her fur collar. A passer-by murmured into her ear:

"Hello, Bright-eyes!"

Dasha walked quickly along the wet asphalt, following the dancing streaks of light thrown on the pavement by the electric lamps. From the open doors

of a restaurant came the wailing of violins—they were playing a waltz. And Dasha, without looking round, hummed into the shaggy fur of her muff:

"It's not so easy, not so easy, not so easy!"

CHAPTER III

TAKING OFF HER wet furs in the entrance hall, Dasha asked the maid:

"No one at home, of course?"

The Great Mogul (they had given this nickname to the maid, Lusha, because of her high cheek-bones and her heavily powdered face which made her look like an idol) looked at Dasha in the mirror and replied in a thin treble that the mistress was out, but the master was at home, in his study, and would be having supper in half an hour.

Dasha went into the drawing-room, sat down at the grand piano, crossed her legs and clasped her knees.

Her brother-in-law, Nikolai Ivanovich at home—that meant that he had quarrelled with his wife, was sulking, and would complain to her. It was eleven o'clock now, and there was nothing to do until three o'clock, when one could go to bed. Read?—but what? Anyway, she did not want to read. Just to sit and brood would be even worse. Life really was a nuisance sometimes.

Dasha sighed, opened the piano, and, sitting sideways, began to tap out a Skryabin piece with one hand. Life was not easy for anyone at the unsatisfactory age of nineteen, but especially hard for a girl, and a girl at that, who was by no means lacking in brains and who on top of it all was much too squeamish and much too severe with those numerous men who asked for nothing better than to be permitted to dispel her virginal *malaise*.

Dasha had come from Samara to Petersburg a year before to study law, and was staying with her elder sister, Yekaterina Dmitrievna Smokovnikov. Her sister's husband was a fairly successful lawyer, and they entertained and went out a great deal.

Dasha was five years younger than her sister. When Katia married, Dasha was still a little girl, and the sisters had seen little of each other in recent years. Now an entirely new relationship had sprung up between them: Dasha was utterly infatuated with Katia and Katia had come to be very fond of Dasha.

At first Dasha copied her sister in everything, admired her beauty, her good taste and her perfect poise. With her sister's friends Dasha felt shy, and was sometimes pert with them out of sheer timidity. Katia was determined to make her house a model of taste, full of the latest novelties that were not yet the common property of the street; she never missed an art exhibition, and bought futurist paintings. This had led to some stormy discussions with her husband during the past year; for Nikolai Ivanovich liked pictures to express an ideal, while Katia, in true feminine fashion, preferred to suffer for the sake of the new art rather than fail to keep up with the times.

Dasha, too, admired these strange pictures hanging in the drawing-room, although sometimes she reluctantly admitted to herself that all these square figures with geometrical faces, several surplus arms and legs and a colouring

as dull as a headache—and all this cast-iron, cynical poetry were beyond her powers of assimilation.

Every Tuesday a cheerful, noisy company assembled in their bird's-eye maple dining-room for supper: talkative barristers, fond of women and interested in the latest trends in literature; two or three journalists who knew exactly what the home and foreign policy of the country ought to be; Chirva, the neurotic critic, always busy contriving some literary catastrophe. Young poets came sometimes; they mostly arrived early and left manuscripts of poems in their overcoats in the hall. As supper was about to be served, some celebrity would appear, walk slowly across the drawing-room, kiss the hostess's hand and establish himself with dignity in an arm-chair. Half-way through supper they would often hear the clatter of leather goloshes being discarded in the hall, and a velvety voice saying: "Good evening to you, Great Mogul!"—and a few seconds later the famous actor who played argumentative lovers would bend his clean-shaven, flabby-cheeked face over the back of his hostess's chair, saying:

"Katia—your little paw!"

For Dasha, the most important person at these suppers was her sister. Dasha was indignant if someone did not pay sufficient attention to her charming, kind, and artless Katia; she was also jealous of anyone who paid Katia too much attention, and glared angrily at either culprit.

By degrees she began to know her way about in this crowd of people, who had completely overwhelmed her at first. She now had only contempt for the junior barristers; apart from their shaggy jackets, lilac ties and partings going all the way to the back of their heads, there was nothing to them at all. She hated the famous actor. He had no right to call her sister 'Katia', and the maid 'Great Mogul', nor any excuse to wink his baggy eye at Dasha when he drank a glass of vodka and say:

"I drink to the blossoming almond tree!"

Each time he did this Dasha was beside herself with fury. It was quite true of course that her cheeks were rosy, but it made her feel like one of those apple-cheeked wooden peasant dolls and she sat at the table fuming.

That summer Dasha had not gone home to her father in hot and dusty Samara, but gladly accepted an invitation to go with her sister to the seaside, to Sestroretsk. There they met the same people as in the winter, only they saw more of each other. They all rowed about in boats, bathed, ate ices under the pines, and in the evening listened to music and dined noisily on the Kursaal veranda, under the stars.

Katia ordered a white embroidered dress for Dasha, a large, white gauze hat with a black ribbon, and a wide silk sash to be tied in a large bow at the back. Then, as if his eyes had only just opened, Nikanor Yuryevich Kulichok, her brother-in-law's assistant, suddenly fell in love with Dasha.

But he was one of the 'despised', and Dasha was annoyed. She asked him to go for a walk in the woods with her, and there, without allowing him to say a word to justify himself (all he could do was to wipe his forehead with a handkerchief crumpled up in his hand), she told him that she would not permit anyone to regard her as some kind of 'female'; that she was very angry with him, thought he had a depraved imagination, and would complain to her brother-in-law.

She did, in fact, complain to her brother-in-law the very same evening. Nikolai Ivanovich heard her out to the end, stroking his carefully tended beard and looking with some surprise at the almond-blossom colour of Dasha's

cheeks that were flushed with indignation; at her large hat quivering with her wrath, and at her whole slim, white figure. Then he sat down in the sand at the water's edge and went off into a fit of uproarious laughter. Pulling out his handkerchief, he wiped his eyes and said:

"Go away, Daria; go or I'll die."

Dasha could not understand it at all, and went off disconcerted and embarrassed. Kulichok now did not dare even to look at her: he began to lose flesh, and kept himself to himself. Dasha's honour was saved. But the whole affair unexpectedly roused her senses, until then virginally dormant. The delicate equilibrium was disturbed, and it was as if in every part of her body, from head to foot, she had conceived some second creature—sultry, dreamy, formless and repellent. Dasha felt it all over her skin; it preyed on her mind like some uncleanness; she wanted to wash off this invisible cobweb and become fresh, cool and light again.

She played tennis for hours at a time, bathed twice each day, and got up early in the morning, when great drops of dew were still gleaming on the leaves, mist was rising from the lilac-tinted, mirror-like sea, damp tables were being set out on the empty veranda, and the wet, sanded paths were being swept.

But when the sun had warmed her through, or when she lay in her soft bed at night, that other creature would come to life, cautiously steal its way to her heart and squeeze it with a soft paw. She could neither pluck it away nor wash it off, like the blood from Bluebeard's enchanted key.

All her friends, and her sister first of all, began to notice that Dasha had grown very pretty that summer and was growing prettier every day. One day Katia came to her sister's room in the morning and said:

"Well, Dasha, what next?"

"What do you mean, Katia?"

Dasha, in her chemise, was sitting on the bed, twisting her hair into a large knot.

"You are getting much too pretty—what are we going to do about it?"

Dasha glanced sternly at her sister and turned away. Her cheeks and ears flushed red.

"Katia, I wish you wouldn't say things like that—I don't like it—understand?"

Yekaterina Dmitrievna sat down on the bed, put her cheek against Dasha's naked back, kissed her between the shoulder-blades and laughed.

"How cross we are—just like a badger, or a hedgehog, or a little wild-cat."

One day an Englishman turned up at the tennis-courts. He was lean and clean-shaven, with a square chin and innocent eyes. He was so irreproachably dressed that some of the young men around Katia were plunged into utter despair. He asked Dasha to play tennis with him, and played like a machine. It seemed to her that during the whole set he never once looked at her, always past her. She lost the first set and suggested another. For greater freedom of movement she had turned up the sleeves of her white blouse. A lock of hair escaped from under her white piqué cap, but she did not push it back. Returning the ball with a hard drive low over the net, Dasha thought to herself: "A nimble Russian girl, with an elusive grace in every movement and colour in her cheeks!"

The Englishman easily won again, bowed to Dasha, lit a fragrant cigarette, sat down nearby and ordered a lemonade.

While she was playing a third set with a student, Dasha took more than one

sidelong glance at the Englishman—he was sitting motionless at a table, looking out to sea, one silk-socked foot on the knee of the other leg, his hands clasping his ankle and his straw hat pushed to the back of his head.

That night, lying in her bed, Dasha recalled it all and saw herself bounding about the court with her face flushed and her hair in disorder. She began to cry with hurt vanity and something else besides, something that was stronger than herself.

From that day on she did not go to the courts any more. One day Katia said to her:

"Dasha, Mr. Bales is asking every day why you don't play any more."

Dasha was so startled at this that she stared with her mouth open. Then she said angrily that she didn't wish to hear any 'silly gossip', that she didn't know and didn't want to know any Mr. Bales and that, in any case, it was cheek on his part to think that she had stopped playing 'that stupid tennis' on his account. She stayed away from dinner, put some bread and gooseberries in her pocket, and went out into the woods. In a pine grove full of the smell of hot resin, as she strayed among the tall, red, rustling trees Dasha came to the conclusion that she could no longer hide the miserable truth: she was in love with the Englishman and desperately unhappy.

And thus, raising its head little by little, the second creature grew up in Dasha. At first its presence was repellent like some uncleanness, and unhealthy like an injury; but later Dasha grew used to this complex condition, just as people, after the fresh winds and cool water in summer get used to muffling themselves up again in corsets and woollen clothing when winter comes. Her self-centred love for the Englishman lasted a fortnight. Dasha hated herself and felt exasperated with the fellow. Sometimes she watched him from a distance as he played tennis with his lazy skill or sat at supper with Russian navy men; and she thought in despair that he was the most fascinating person in the world.

And then a tall, thin girl, in white flannels, joined him—she was English and engaged to him—and they both went away. Dasha could not sleep all night: she hated herself with fierce intensity and decided towards morning that this would be her last mistake in life.

Her peace of mind thus restored, she found it quite surprising how quickly and easily she got over the whole business. But not quite all of it was over. For Dasha now felt as if *it*—that second creature—had merged with her, had been absorbed into her and was no longer there, and that now she was altogether different—light-hearted and fresh, as in the past, yet softened, more delicate, and less easy to understand. It was as if her skin had become thinner. She hardly recognized her own face in the mirror; her eyes especially had changed—they were remarkable eyes. *Look into them and they make your head swim* she thought.

In the middle of August the Smokovnikovs returned to their spacious flat in Petersburg and Dasha went with them. It all began again: the Tuesday evenings, the art exhibitions, the noisy first nights at the theatres, the scandalous cases in the courts, the buying of pictures, the all-night excursions to the 'Samarkand' or to the gipsies. The argumentative lover was there too—he had got rid of nearly two stone at a spa; and to all these restless amusements were added vague, exciting, gladdening rumours of some impending change.

Dasha never had time now to think or feel much: lectures in the morning; at four o'clock, shopping with her sister; in the evenings, theatres, concerts, suppers, people—there was not a quiet minute all day.

One Tuesday, after supper, as they were drinking liqueurs, Alexey Alexeyevich Bessonov came into the drawing-room. Katia, seeing him at the door, flushed scarlet. The general conversation broke off. Bessonov sat down on the sofa and accepted a cup of coffee from Katia.

Two lawyers—connoisseurs of literature—sat down on the same sofa; but Bessonov gave Katia a long strange look and then suddenly remarked that there was no such thing as art: it was all fake, like the Indian rope trick.

"There is no such thing as poetry. All that has been dead a long time. Russia is a piece of carrion with a flock of ravens feeding on her, a feast for ravens. And those who write verses will all be in hell."

He spoke in a low, toneless voice. Two red spots stood out on his pale malignant face. His soft collar was crumpled, and his coat was covered with ash. Coffee from the cup in his hand had spilled on to the carpet.

The connoisseurs of literature were all set for an argument, but Bessonov did not listen to them, and kept his darkened eyes on Katia. Then he got up and went over to her, and Dasha heard him say:

"I can't bear to be among people. Please excuse me. I must go."

Katia diffidently asked him to stay and read something, but he shook his head and, in taking his leave, held her hand so long that a deep flush spread all over her back.

An argument started as soon as he had left the room. The men were all of one mind—they said: "Really, there was a limit to everything. How dared he show his contempt for our company as openly as that." Chirva, the critic, approached each one and repeated: "Gentlemen, he was as drunk as an owl." But the ladies' decision was: "Whether Bessonov was drunk or only in one of his strange moods, he was a fascinating personality all the same, and the sooner everyone realized it the better it would be."

The day after, at dinner, Dasha said that she thought Bessonov was one of those 'genuine' people whose experiences, sins and tastes shed a reflected light on and gave life to Katia's whole circle. "You know, Katia, I can understand that one can lose one's head over a man like that."

Nikolai Ivanovich was indignant: "The fact that he is a celebrity has simply gone to your head, Dasha."

Katia said nothing.

Bessonov did not put in an appearance again at the Smokovnikovs. There were rumours that he had disappeared behind the scenes with the actress Charodeyeva. Kulichok and his friends went to have a look at this Charodeyeva and were disillusioned: she was as scraggy as the bones of the saints, they said—all lace petticoats and nothing else.

Once Dasha saw Bessonov at an exhibition. He was standing by a window unconcernedly turning over the pages of the catalogue; in front of him two broad-shouldered college girls stood staring at him with a fixed smile, as if he were a figure at the waxworks.

Dasha walked slowly past, and sat down in the next room—she felt strangely tired, and sad.

After this, Dasha bought a photograph of Bessonov, and put it on her table. His verses—three thin white volumes—at first impressed her as poisonous: for several days she was quite beside herself, as if she had become an accomplice in some secret and sinister enterprise. But when she read and re-read them, she began to enjoy this morbid feeling of being prompted to let herself go, to relax, to fritter away something precious and yearn for something that had no existence.

It was because of Bessonov that she began to frequent the "Philosophical Evenings". He used to go there late, and rarely spoke; but on each occasion Dasha would return home in a state of agitation, and was glad to find guests in the house.

But to-day there were no guests and she had to play Skryabin all by herself. The notes fell like drops of ice on her breast, into the depths of a dark and bottomless lake. Falling, they stir the surface and sink as the water leaps up and recedes, and there, in the warm darkness, her heart is beating insistently and apprehensively, as if soon, very soon, this same instant, something impossible was about to happen.

Dasha let her hands sink on to her knee and raised her head. In the soft light from the orange lamp-shade livid, bloated, grinning faces with protruding eyes were looking down from the walls, like spectres of a primeval chaos, eagerly looking through the fence of the garden of Eden on the first day of creation.

"Yes, my dear young lady, you are in a bad way," Dasha said aloud. She ran sharply up the scales from left to right, then noiselessly closed the piano, took a cigarette from a Japanese box, lit it, coughed, and crushed it in the ash-tray.

"Nikolai Ivanovich, what time is it?" Dasha shouted so loudly that it could be heard across four rooms.

There was the sound of something being dropped in the study, but no reply. The Great Mogul appeared, looked at herself in the mirror, and said that supper was ready.

In the dining-room Dasha sat down in front of a vase with withered flowers, and then began plucking the petals from them and scattering them all over the tablecloth. The Mogul brought in tea, cold meat and an omelette. At last Nikolai Ivanovich appeared, in a new blue suit, but without a collar. His hair was touzled; in his beard, crushed to one side, hung a feather from the sofa cushion. Nikolai Ivanovich nodded sullenly to Dasha, sat down at the end of the table, pulled the chafing-dish with the omelette closer, and began to eat greedily.

Then he leaned his elbows on the edge of the table, propped up his cheek with one great hairy fist and, with unseeing eyes fixed on the heap of plucked petals, said in a low, almost unnatural voice:

"Last night your sister was unfaithful to me."

CHAPTER IV

HER OWN SISTER, Katia, had done something terrible and incomprehensible, something black. Last night her head had lain on the pillow, turned away from everything that was alive, natural and warm, and her body had been crushed and bared. This was how Dasha, with a shudder, represented to herself the thing Nikolai Ivanovich had called 'infidelity'. On top of it all Katia was not at home, and it was as if she no longer existed.

The first shock of it numbed Dasha and dimmed her eyes. She held her breath, expecting Nikolai Ivanovich either to burst into sobs or to cry out in

some dreadful way. But he did not add another word to his announcement, and merely turned the fork-rest over with his fingers. Dasha dared not look at his face.

Then, after a very long silence, he pushed back his chair with a clatter, and went off to his study. "To shoot himself," Dasha thought. But she was wrong again. With a short, sharp pang of pity she remembered how his large, hairy hand had lain on the table. Then he floated out of her consciousness and she merely repeated: "What next? What is to be done now?" There was a ringing in her ears. Everything, absolutely everything, was now spoilt and broken.

From behind the curtain draping the door the Great Mogul appeared with a tray, and Dasha, glancing at her, suddenly realized that now there would be no more Great Mogul. Tears welled up into her eyes. She clenched her teeth and ran into the drawing-room.

Here everything down to the tiniest detail had been carefully arranged by Katia's own hands. But Katia's soul had gone from the room, and everything in it seemed strange and uninhabited. Dasha sat down on the divan. For a moment her eyes rested on a picture Katia had bought not long ago. For the first time she now saw and understood what it represented.

The painting was of a naked woman, her body coloured a smeary red, as if she had been flayed. The mouth was lopsided; there was no nose at all, but in its place a triangular hole; the head was square, and a duster—of real cloth—was stuck to it. The legs were like logs and were hinged. The hand held a flower. The other details were horrible. And the most appalling part was the corner in which she was sitting with her legs wide apart—it was dark brown in colour. The picture was called 'Love'. Katia called it 'Venus To-day'.

"So that's why Katia was so enthusiastic about this horrible creature. Now she herself is just like her—with a flower, in a corner." Dasha lay down with her face in a cushion, biting it to prevent herself from screaming, and cried silently. A little later Nikolai Ivanovich appeared in the drawing-room. He stood with his feet apart, angrily clicked his cigarette-lighter, walked across to the piano and began to finger the keys. To her amazement he strummed a trivial tune. Dasha felt chilled. Nikolai Ivanovich slammed the piano shut and said:

"It was only to be expected."

Dasha repeated this phrase to herself several times, trying to understand its significance. Suddenly the bell in the hall rang sharply. Nikolai Ivanovich raised his hand to his beard, then merely said "Oh-h-h!" in a subdued voice and went quickly back to his study. The Great Mogul hurried along the passage with a clatter as of hoofs. Dasha jumped up from the divan and ran into the hall—her heart beating so violently that everything went dark before her eyes.

Katia was there unfastening the lilac-coloured ribbons of her fur hood with fingers clumsy with cold. She wrinkled her nose and offered her sister her cold pink cheek to be kissed, but when no kiss was forthcoming she shook her head, threw off her hood, and looked at her sister searchingly with steady grey eyes.

"Has something happened? Have you two had a quarrel?" she asked, in that throaty voice of hers which was always so kind and pleasant.

Dasha stared at Nikolai Ivanovich's leather goloshes, called 'steamboats' in the house, which now stood there like two orphans, and her chin quivered.

"No, nothing has happened; it's just that I'm like that."

Katia slowly unfastened the great buttons of her squirrel coat and threw it off with a movement of her bare shoulders. Now she was all warm, delicate and tired. She bent down to unfasten her gaiters, and said:

"Look, before I could find a taxi my feet were wet through."

Then Dasha, her eyes still on Nikolai Ivanovich's goloshes, asked in a stern voice:

"Katia, where have you been?"

"At a literary supper, my dear; in whose honour I really don't know. But it makes no difference. I'm tired to death and want to sleep."

She went through to the dining-room, threw her bag on to the table, wiped her nose with her handkerchief and asked:

"Who has been pulling the flowers to pieces? And where's Nikolai Ivanovich? Has he gone to bed?"

Dasha was disconcerted: her sister was not in the least like that horrible creature in the picture. Not only was she not a stranger: she seemed, on the contrary, particularly close to Dasha to-night, and Dasha wanted to pet and caress her. But with, as she thought, immense presence of mind, Dasha said, scratching the tablecloth with her nails as she sat in the very place where half an hour earlier Nikolai Ivanovich had eaten the omelette:

"Katia!"

"What is it, my dear?"

"I know everything."

"What do you know? What has happened, for God's sake?"

Katia was sitting at the table with her knees touching Dasha's leg, and looked down at her curiously.

Dasha said: "Nikolai Ivanovich has told me everything."

She did not look at her sister and did not see her change colour.

After a silence long enough to die in, Katia said angrily:

"What has Nikolai Ivanovich told you about me that has been so overwhelming?"

"Katia, you know."

"No, I don't."

She said that "No, I don't" so coldly, it might have been an icicle.

Then Dasha sat down at her feet.

"Perhaps it isn't true, then? Katia, my own, my dear, my lovely sister. Say that it isn't true!" And Dasha, with quick kisses, caressed Katia's tender scented hands, that had bluish veins on them like little rivulets.

"But of course it's not true," Katia answered, wearily closing her eyes. "What on earth are you crying about? To-morrow your eyes will be red and your nose swollen."

She raised Dasha from the floor, and pressed her lips to her hair for a long time.

"Katia, I'm a fool!" Dasha whispered into her bosom.

At that moment Nikolai Ivanovich's voice said loudly and deliberately from behind the study door:

"She is lying!"

The sisters turned quickly, but the door was closed. Katia said:

"Go and get some sleep, child. I will go and clear up this business. A pleasant job, really, when I am so tired I can hardly stand."

She saw Dasha to her room, kissed her absent-mindedly, and then returned to the dining-room, picked up her bag, put her comb straight, and knocked softly, with one finger, at the study door.

"Nikolai, open the door please!"

No answer came. There was an ominous silence; then she heard him snort, the key turned in the lock, and Katia, going in, saw her husband's broad back. Without looking round he walked to the table and sat down in his leather arm-chair; then he picked up an ivory paper-knife and moved it sharply along the edge of a book. He did all this as if Katia was not there.

She sat down on the divan, arranged her skirts, put her handkerchief into her bag and snapped the catch. At this sound a lock of hair on the crown of Nikolai Ivanovich's head gave a quiver.

"There is only one thing I don't understand," she said. "You are welcome to think whatever you like, but I must ask you not to initiate Dasha into your moods."

He turned quickly round in his chair, stretched out his neck and beard, and said through his clenched teeth:

"You have the audacity to call it a mood?"

"I don't understand."

"Marvellous! You don't understand? Well, you seem to have a pretty good understanding of how to behave like a street-walker!"

Katia only opened her mouth a little at these words. Looking at her husband's livid, sweating, distorted face, she said in a low voice:

"Since when, pray, have you begun to talk to me in such a tone?"

"I humbly ask your pardon! But I can't speak to you in any other tone. And I want to know the details!"

"Details of what?"

"Don't lie to me to my face."

"Ah, so that's what you're getting at." Katia rolled her eyes as if from extreme weariness. "I did say something of the sort not long ago . . . and forgot all about it."

"I want to know with whom it happened."

"But I don't know."

"Once again I must ask you not to lie. . . ."

"But I'm not lying. Why should I lie to you? What if I did say something in a temper. I said it, and now I have forgotten."

While she was speaking Nikolai Ivanovich's face was like a stone, but his heart was plunging and quivering with joy.

"Thanks be to God, she's been lying about herself." So now he could safely—and noisily—pretend not to believe a word she said, and give her the edge of his tongue.

He got up from his chair, crossed the carpet, stopped, and then, flourishing the ivory paper-knife, he talked at length about the decline of the family, the corruption of morals, of the sacred but now forgotten duties of a wife, a mother, and a helpmate. He reproached Katia with her spiritual futility and her frivolous waste of money earned with blood . . . (Katia corrected him: "Not with blood, but by wagging your tongue"). No, with more than blood—it was by using up his nerves. He reproached her with her random choice of friends, the disorder in the house, her prejudice in favour of 'that idiot' the Great Mogul, and even with 'those revolting pictures, which make me feel sick in your vulgar drawing-room.'

In a word, Nikolai Ivanovich unburdened his soul.

It was four o'clock in the morning. When her husband had grown hoarse and stopped talking, Katia said:

"Nothing can be more repulsive than a fat and hysterical man." Then she got up and went into her bedroom.

But even at this Nikolai Ivanovich did not take offence. He undressed slowly, hung his clothes over the back of the chair, wound up his watch, sighed softly and slipped into the cold bed made up on the leather divan.

"*Yes, the life we're leading is all wrong. We must change it. It's no good, no good at all*"—he thought to himself and opened a book to read himself to sleep. But in another second he put the book down and listened. It was quiet in the house. He heard a noise like the blowing of a nose, and the sound made his heart beat faster. "*She is crying*," he thought. "*Well, well, well, I must have said more than I should.*"

And when he began to recall the whole conversation, and how Katia had sat and listened, he began to feel sorry for her. He raised himself on his elbow, ready to slip out from under the blankets; but then a great weariness crept over him, as if from many days of exertion, and he laid his head on the pillow and fell asleep.

Dasha, having undressed in her tidy little bedroom, took the combs out of her hair and shook her head so hard that all the hairpins fell out at once; then she slipped into her white bed and pulled the clothes up to her chin with a frown.

"Thank God, it's all right. Now not to think of anything, just to sleep!" Out of the corner of her eye she seemed to catch sight of some ridiculous face. Dasha smiled, drew up her knees and clasped the pillow. She fell into a deep, sweet sleep, and then suddenly Katia's voice rang clear in her memory: ' Of course it's not true.' "

Dasha opened her eyes. "*Why, I never said a word, not a thing, to Katia—I only asked whether it was true or not. But she answered as if she knew exactly what I was talking about.*" The conclusion pierced her through and through like a needle. "*Katia lied to me!*" Recalling all the details of the conversation, all Katia's words and gestures, Dasha knew for certain that her sister had deceived her. She was profoundly disturbed. Katia had been unfaithful to her husband; but after having deceived him, after having sinned and lied, she was now more charming than ever. Only a blind person could fail to see in her something new, a kind of peculiar, tired tenderness. And how well she could lie—enough to drive one crazy with love for her. And yet she was a wrong-doer, wasn't she. Dasha just could not understand it all.

She was excited and puzzled. She drank some water, turned the light on and then turned it off again, and tossed about in her bed till morning, feeling that she could neither condemn her sister nor understand what she had done.

Katia, too, spent a sleepless night. She lay prostrate, quite unnerved, with her hands lying lifeless on the silk coverlet, not troubling to wipe her tears away. She wept because she felt bewildered, wretched and unclean, and because she could do nothing to alter this, nor could she ever be passionate and yet austere like Dasha. She wept because Nikolai Ivanovich had called her a street-walker and also because he had said that her drawing-room was vulgar. And she wept very bitterly because at midnight the night before Alexey Alexeyevich Bessonov had taken her in a smart cab to a suburban hotel, and there, without knowing her, without love or feeling for her, had disgustingly and unhurriedly taken possession of her, as if she had been a doll, a rosy dummy in the window of Madame Duclet's fashionable dress-shop on the Morskaya.

CHAPTER V

ON THE FIFTH floor of a recently completed block of flats on Vassiliev Island the so-called "Central Station for the Struggle against Tradition" had its headquarters in a flat occupied by Ivan Ilyich Telegin, an engineer.

Telegin was the first tenant of the flat and had got it cheap for a year on that account, as the walls were not yet quite dry. He kept one room for himself, and let the others, furnished with iron bedsteads and pinewood tables and stools, the idea being to get lodgers who were 'also unmarried and could be relied on to be cheerful'. These had been picked for him by his former classmate and friend, Sergey Sergeyevich Sapozhkov.

They were: Alexander Ivanovich Zhirov, a law-student; Antoshka Arnoldov, a newspaperman; Valiet, a painter; and Yelizaveta Kievna Rastorguyeva, a young lady who had not as yet found any suitable occupation.

The lodgers got up at an hour when Telegin was already getting back from his factory for breakfast; and would then go about their business. Antoshka Arnoldov took a tram to a café on the Nevski, where he picked up the day's gossip, and went from there to his office. Valiet usually sat down to paint his own portrait. Sapozhkov locked himself in his room and set to work preparing speeches and articles about the new art. Zhirov mostly hung about Yelizaveta Kievna and in his soft mewing voice, carried on endless discussions with her about the problems of life. He also wrote poems, but was too vain to show them to anyone. Yelizaveta Kievna thought him a genius. She herself, besides talking to Zhirov and the other lodgers, occupied herself with knitting up many-coloured wools into long strips adapted to no particular purpose and with singing Ukrainian songs in a deep and powerful voice, but mostly out of tune. At other times she would dress her hair in unusual styles or let it down, lie down on her bed with a book, and get immersed in it till her head ached. Yelizaveta Kievna was a tall, handsome, red-cheeked girl, with short-sighted eyes that looked as if they had been painted on to her face; she dressed with so complete a lack of taste that even Telegin's lodgers remonstrated with her about it.

If a newcomer came to the house she would invite him to her room and begin a vertiginous conversation, all built up on 'sharp edges' and 'abysses', in the course of which she would inquire whether her visitor had ever felt urged to commit a crime? Was he, for example, capable of committing murder? Had he ever experienced 'self-provocation'?—a feature she regarded as the hallmark of every outstanding personality.

Telegin's lodgers had gone so far as to pin up a list of these questions on her door. On the whole she was just an unsatisfied young woman, all the time on the look-out for some kind of 'upheaval', some 'nightmare event', which would make life more attractive, so that one could live whole-heartedly and not 'linger at a little window grey with rain'.

Telegin himself derived considerable amusement from his lodgers. He thought them fine fellows and very funny, but owing to lack of time he took little part in their diversions.

One Christmas Day Sapozhkov assembled the lodgers and addressed them as follows:

"Comrades, the time has come for action. We are many, but we are disunited. Up to now we have proceeded individually and timidly. We

must form a phalanx and strike a blow at bourgeois society. For this purpose, we must first of all form ourselves into a definite initiative group; then we must issue a manifesto—here it is:

" 'We are the new Columbuses! We are the inspired awakeners! We are the seed of a new mankind! We demand of bourgeois society, bunged up with fat as it is, the abolition of all prejudices. Henceforward virtue no longer exists! The family, all accepted proprieties and the institution of marriage are abolished! We demand it! Mankind—men and women—must go naked and free. Sex relations are a common asset of society. Boys and girls, men and women, come out of your stuffy dens, naked and happy, and join the dance in the sunshine under the sign of the wild beast! . . .' "

Then Sapozhkov said that it was necessary to issue a futurist journal entitled *The Dish of the Gods*, the money for which would be supplied partly by Telegin, while the rest would have to be snatched from the jaws of the *bourgeoisie*—three thousand roubles in all.

This was how "The Central Station for the Struggle against Tradition" was founded: the name had been invented by Telegin, who on his return from the factory had laughed till he cried on hearing of Sapozhkov's scheme. Immediate preparations were made for publishing the first number of the *Dish of the Gods*. A few rich patrons, including Sasha Sakelman himself, contributed the required three thousand. Stationery was ordered, to be printed on packing paper, with the enigmatic heading 'CENTROFUGA', and steps were taken to recruit contributors and to collect material. Valiet, the painter, suggested that Sapozhkov's room, converted into an editorial office, should be disfigured by cynical pictures. He painted twelve self-portraits on the walls. The problem of furniture was a poser, but they solved it finally by removing everything from the room except a large table covered with gold paper.

After the first issue *The Dish of the Gods* became the topic of the day. Some people were angry, others asserted that it wasn't so simple as all that, and that Pushkin might soon be relegated to the archives.

Chirva, the literary critic, was at a loss what to do—in *The Dish of the Gods* he had been called a bastard. Yekaterina Dmitrievna Smokovnikov immediately sent a twelve months' subscription, and decided to arrange a Tuesday evening for the futurists. The 'Central Station' delegated Sapozhkov to dine with the Smokovnikovs. He turned up in a dirty green fustian frock-coat hired from a theatrical costumier's and forming part of the outfit for *Manon Lescaut;* he deliberately ate an enormous amount, and laughed so loudly as to disgust even himself; he looked at Chirva, laughed and said all critics were 'jackals feeding on carrion'. Then he stretched himself and began to smoke, adjusting his pince-nez on his moist nose. On the whole, everyone was disappointed; they had expected more.

After the appearance of the second issue of *The Dish of the Gods* its publishers decided to organize evening functions which they called 'Evenings of Magnificent Blasphemies'.

Dasha came to one of these 'Blasphemies'. Zhirov opened the door for her, and immediately began to bustle about, pulled off her snow-boots, helped her out of her furs and even picked a thread off her woollen dress. Dasha was surprised to find the hall smelling of cabbage. Zhirov, sidling in her wake along the narrow passage to the room where the 'Blasphemy' was being held, asked her:

"Tell me, what scent is that you use? It is delicious."

Dasha was further surprised by the homespun quality of all their vaunted

audacity. True, the walls were covered with eyes, noses, hands, obscene emblems, collapsing sky-scrapers—in a word, a jumble of things supposed to constitute a portrait of Valiet, who was standing silently by, with zigzag lines painted on his cheeks. True, hosts and guests—including nearly all the young poets who frequented the Smokovnikovs' Tuesday at-homes—were sitting on unplaned boards, placed across wooden blocks presented by Telegin. True, they read, with exaggerated pathos, poems about 'not caring a fig for the old syphilitic in the sky', about youthful jaws with which the author proposed to crack church cupolas like nuts, about some head-splittingly incomprehensible grasshopper in an overcoat, with a Baedeker and binoculars, who jumped out of a window on to the pavement. But for some reason or other all these horrors seemed rather threadbare to Dasha. The only person she really liked was Telegin. While everyone was talking all at once, he came across to her and asked with a shy smile whether she would not like some tea and sandwiches.

"Our tea and sausage are not futuristic—they're very good." His clean-shaven face was bronzed and disingenuous, but she felt that his honest blue eyes could be hard and shrewd when necessary.

Dasha was sure that he would be pleased if she accepted his suggestion, so she got up and went to the dining-room with him. A dish of sandwiches and sausage and a battered samovar stood on the table. Telegin immediately collected the dirty plates and put them on the floor in a corner of the room, looked round for a napkin, then pulled out his own handkerchief and wiped the table with it, poured out some tea for Dasha and picked out the thinnest sandwiches. He did all this with slow movements of his great strong hands and talked all the time as if he was making a special effort to make Dasha feel at home in all this squalor.

"We're rather untidy here, I'm afraid, but the tea and sausage are first-class. There were some sweets as well, but they seem to be all gone—though——" he puckered his lips and looked at Dasha, his blue eyes expressing first hesitation and then determination—"if you don't mind . . .?"—and he took two wrapped toffees from his waistcoat pocket.

"There's a man who could take care of a woman," Dasha thought to herself, and said, again with the intention of pleasing him: "How nice! My favourite toffees, too!"

Then Telegin, sitting sideways opposite Dasha, began to look attentively at the mustard-pot. The strain had brought the veins out in relief on his high, wide forehead. He cautiously took out his handkerchief and wiped his face.

Dasha was unable to suppress a smile: this tall, handsome man was so shy that he was ready to hide behind a mustard-pot. Somewhere in Arzamas or some such place, she thought to herself, there must be a neat old lady who is his mother: she would write stern letters about his 'perpetual habit of lending money to all sorts of fools' and that 'only modesty and industry, my friend, will make you respected among men'. And he, no doubt, would sigh over those letters, knowing how far he was from perfection. Dasha felt that she was already fond of this man Telegin.

"Where do you work?" she asked.

Telegin immediately raised his eyes, saw her smile, and smiled back with a wide grin.

"At the Baltic Works."

"Is your work interesting?"

"I don't know. I think all work is interesting."

"I'm certain the workers must like you very much."

"I never thought of that. But I don't see why they should. What reason have they to like me? I am strict with them. Though I am on good terms with them, of course. Comradely terms."

"Tell me—do you really like everything that went on to-night in that room?"

Telegin's knitted brows relaxed, and he laughed loudly.

"They're just silly boys! Desperately tough! Good boys, though. I like my lodgers very much, Daria Dmitrievna! You know, there are all sorts of snags in my work, I get home out of sorts, and they always have some silly nonsense in store for me that makes me laugh all next day. . . ."

"Well, I don't like these 'Blasphemies' at all," Dasha said sternly. "It's just smut."

He looked at her with surprise. She repeated once more: "I don't like them at all."

"Of course, I myself am more to blame than anyone else," Telegin said thoughtfully. "It was I who put them up to it. But you are quite right . . . one shouldn't invite guests, and then talk indecencies all the evening. . . . I am terribly sorry that all this has been unpleasant for you."

Dasha looked at him with a smile. She could say anything to this man whom she had just met for the first time in her life.

"I should have thought that you would have liked something entirely different, Ivan Ilyich. I think you are a very good man. Much better than you think yourself. Really, I mean it."

Dasha was leaning on her elbow, with her chin on her hand and her little finger touching her lips. Her eyes were laughing, but Telegin was frightened of them, they were so disturbingly beautiful, so large and cool and grey. Telegin was so flustered that he started bending and straightening his spoon without knowing what he was doing.

Luckily for him, Yelizaveta Kievna came into the dining-room; a Turkish shawl was thrown over her shoulders, and two plaits of hair were wound round her ears like rams' horns. She offered her long, soft hand to Dasha, introducing herself: "Rastorguyeva." Then she sat down and said:

"Zhirov has been talking ever so much about you. I've been studying your face to-night. You were disgusted. That's good."

"Liza, would you like some cold tea?" Telegin asked hastily.

"No, Telegin; you know I never drink tea. . . . But you're thinking, no doubt, what strange creature is this woman talking to me? I am a nobody. A nonentity. Ungifted and vicious."

Telegin, standing at the table, turned away in despair. Dasha lowered her eyes. Yelizaveta Kievna surveyed her with a smile.

"You are exquisite, you have a very good figure, and you are very pretty. Don't deny it. You know it well enough. I suppose dozens of men are in love with you. It's a pity that it will all end so very simply—a cock will come along, you will bear him children, and then you'll die. How boring!"

Dasha's lips quivered with annoyance.

"I have no desire to be different from other women," she replied, "nor do I know why you should be so concerned about my future."

Yelizaveta Kievna smiled even more cheerfully, though her eyes remained sad and gentle.

"I warned you beforehand that, as a human being, I am a nonentity, and as a woman I am disgusting. Very few people can put up with me—and those only out of compassion, like Telegin, for example."

"Devil knows what nonsense you're talking, Liza," he mumbled, without looking at her.

"I'm not asking anything of you, Telegin, calm yourself." She turned to Dasha again. "Have you ever been in a hurricane? I have once. There was a man. I loved him—he hated me, of course. I lived by the Black Sea then. There was a hurricane. I said to that man: 'Let us go'. Out of spite he went with me. . . . We were blown out to sea. . . . That was fun! Devilish fun! I threw off my clothes and said to him. . . ."

"Listen, Liza," Telegin said, frowning, and wrinkling his nose. "You're lying. Nothing of the sort happened, I know."

Yelizaveta Kievna looked at him with an inscrutable smile, and suddenly burst out laughing. She put her elbows on the table, hid her face in her hands and her plump shoulders shook with laughter. Dasha stood up and told Telegin she wanted to go home, and would go, if possible, without saying good-bye to anyone.

Telegin helped her into her fur coat with such extreme care, as if he thought the coat too were a part of her. He saw her down the dark staircase, lighting matches all the time and apologising for its being so dark, draughty and slippery; then he walked with her to the corner and put her in a cab, driven by an old cabman with an old pony all covered with snow. Telegin stood for a long time, hatless and coatless, watching the low sledge with Dasha in it melt away and merge into the yellow mist. Then he slowly walked home and went into the dining-room. Yelizaveta Kievna was still sitting at the table as before, with her face in her hands. Telegin scratched his chin and said with a frown:

"Liza."

Quickly—much too quickly—she raised her head.

"Liza, excuse me, but why do you always say things which make everyone feel uncomfortable and ashamed?"

"You've fallen in love," Yelizaveta Kievna said in a low voice, still watching him with those near-sighted eyes of hers that looked as if they were painted on to her face. "I saw it at once. What a bore!"

"It's absolutely untrue!" Telegin blushed scarlet. "Quite untrue!"

"All right, I'm sorry." She got up lazily and went out, trailing her dusty Turkish shawl on the floor after her.

For some time Telegin paced up and down in thought, drank some cold tea, then picked up the chair on which Daria Dmitrievna had sat and took it into his own room. He cast a look around, put the chair in a corner, and taking hold of his nose with his whole fist, said in a tone of greatest amazement:

"What nonsense! What utter rot!"

For Dasha, this encounter had been one of many—she had met a very nice man, and that was all. Dasha was still at the age when people see and hear badly: when their hearing is dulled by the sound of their own blood, and even when they are looking at a human face their eyes see merely their own image, as in a mirror. At such an age only freaks touch the imagination; beautiful people and enchanting landscapes and the unassuming loveliness of art are regarded as the natural portion of a queen of nineteen.

It was different with Telegin. More than a week had passed since Dasha's visit, but it still seemed amazing to him that this girl with the delicate rosy skin, the long, ash-coloured hair and the proud, childish mouth, could have so imperceptibly (he had not even been there to welcome her at first) and simply (she had come in, sat down, and put her muff on her knee) made her appearance

in their dingy flat. It was inconceivable that he had dared to talk to her quite calmly about the quality of the sausages. And the warm, sticky toffees he had pulled out of his pocket and offered to her? Wretch that he was!

In the course of his life—he was just twenty-nine—Telegin had fallen in love six times: first as a schoolboy in Kazan with a mature young woman, Marussya Khoev, daughter of a veterinary surgeon who had long been parading along the main street every day at four o'clock, always in the same fur-lined plush coat, and always fruitlessly. But Marussya was not out for fun; she snubbed Ivan Ilyich, and without any period of transition he fell victim to the charms of a visiting actress, Ada Tille, who dumbfounded the people of Kazan by appearing in operettas of no matter what period, attired in a bathing-suit whenever possible—a circumstance always stressed by the management in their publicity: "The Famous Ada Tille, Winner of a Gold Prize for Beautiful Legs."

Telegin even went so far as to intrude on her at her house and present a bouquet of flowers which he had picked in the public gardens. But Ada Tille gave his flowers to her shaggy little lap-dog to smell, told Ivan Ilyich that the local cooking had given her indigestion, and asked him to run and get her some medicine from the chemist's.

His next love—he was now a student in Petersburg—was a girl medical student of the name of Vilbushevich. Telegin even kept dates with her in the dissecting-room, but somehow nothing came of it, and Vilbushevich went away to a job in the country.

Later, Zinochka, a little milliner in one of the large stores, fell so madly in love with Telegin that in his embarrassment and softness of heart he did whatever she wanted; but on the whole he gave a sigh of relief when she and her department were moved to Moscow and the perpetual feeling of some unfulfilled obligation was lifted from him.

His last serious love affair had occurred in the summer of the last year but one, in June. At a window across the courtyard into which his room opened, a pale, thin young woman would appear before sunset every day; she would open the window, carefully shake and brush the same old russet-coloured dress, put it on, go out and sit in the park.

It was there in the park that Telegin got into conversation with her one quiet evening, and after that they walked about together every day, praised the sunsets of Petersburg and talked about nothing in particular.

The young woman, Olia Komarova, lived alone, was employed in a notary's office, and was always ill and coughing. They talked about her cough and her illness, about how dismal it was alone in the evenings for lonely people, and about a friend of hers, Kira, who had fallen in love with a good man and had followed him to the Crimea. The conversations were boring. Olia Komarova had so very little hope of happiness left that she had no compunction in telling Telegin her most intimate thoughts; she even told him that she sometimes thought he might suddenly fall in love with her, and take her away to the Crimea.

Ivan Ilyich was very sorry for her and respected her, but he was quite unable to love her, although sometimes, after their meetings, he would lie on the divan in the dusk and think how selfish, heartless, and bad he was.

In the autumn Olia Komarova caught a chill and had to keep to her bed. Telegin saw her to the hospital, and from there to the cemetery. Before she died she said: "If I get well again, will you marry me?" and Ivan Ilyich answered: "On my honour I will."

His feeling for Dasha was not like those earlier ones. Yelizaveta Kievna had said he had fallen in love. But a man can fall in love only with someone he presumes to be accessible; it is impossible, for example, to fall in love with a statue, or a cloud. His feeling for Dasha was something out of the common, something strange and half-incomprehensible, because there was so little reason for it—merely a few minutes' talk and a chair in a corner of his room.

Nor was this emotion of his in any way acute; it was only that Telegin now wanted to be different himself; he wanted to be out of the common too, and keep himself in hand better. He would often think:

"I'm nearly thirty, and up to now I've lived as the grass grows. What terrible emptiness! Nothing but selfishness and indifference to others. I must pull myself up before it is too late."

On one of those early spring days at the end of March which break in unexpectedly on the snow-covered, warmly-muffled town, when sparkling drops tinkle down from the cornices and roofs, and water gurgles along the drain-pipes till the green tubs beneath them overflow; when the snow is swept from the streets, the asphalt steams and the puddles dry up; when a heavy coat is a burden on your shoulders and as you look round you already see some fellow with a pointed beard walking along in his jacket, without an overcoat, and everyone looks at him and smiles; and when the sky is as bottomless and blue as if it had been washed with water—on such a day, at half-past three, Telegin left the office on the Nevski, unbuttoned his fur coat and blinked in the sunshine.

Life wasn't so bad after all.

At that very moment he saw Dasha. She was walking slowly along the edge of the pavement, swinging a parcel in her left hand. She was wearing a blue coat and a blue hat trimmed with white daisies which nodded as she walked. Her face was pensive and sad. Behind her as she walked an immense sun, blazing with vernal passion out of a blue abyss, gleamed on the puddles, the tram lines, the backs of passers-by, on their feet and the wheelspokes and brass of the carriages.

It was as if Dasha had come out of this blueness and brightness. She passed him and was lost in the crowd. Telegin looked after her for a long time. His heart was beating slowly in his breast. The air was spicy with a tang that made his head swim.

He walked slowly to the corner, put his hands behind his back, and stood for a long time in front of a notice-board. He read: "New and Interesting Adventures of Jack the Ripper." Although he did not understand why, he was happier than he had ever been in his life.

When he turned away from the notice-board he saw Dasha a second time. She was coming back, walking along the kerb, with her daisies and her little parcel as before. He went up to her and took off his hat.

"Daria Dmitrievna, what a wonderful day. . . ."

She started ever so slightly. Then she raised her cool eyes to him—there were green gleams of sunshine in them—and gave him a friendly smile and a firm friendly handshake.

"I'm so glad to see you. I've been thinking of you to-day . . . I have, really." Dasha nodded her head, and the daisies in her hat nodded, too.

"I had some business on the Nevski, Daria Dmitrievna, and now my whole day is free. . . . And what a day. . . ." Ivan Ilyich tensed his lips, summoning all his presence of mind to prevent them from breaking into a smile.

Dasha asked: "Perhaps you could see me home then, Ivan Ilyich?"

They turned into a side street where it was shady.

"Ivan Ilyich, you won't mind if I ask you something? Of course you won't; I know I can talk with you. But you must answer me straight away without first thinking it over—as soon as I ask you, you must answer."

Her face was serious, with knitted brows.

"I used to think"—she said and made a gesture to illustrate her point—"that there are robbers, liars, murderers . . . who exist somewhere else far away from me, like snakes or spiders or mice—but that people, just ordinary people, may have their weaknesses or eccentricities perhaps, but are all fundamentally decent and clean. There, you see that girl walking along—she is just what she is. The whole world seemed to me to be painted in marvellous colours. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, but what is wrong with that, Daria Dmitrievna?"

"Wait a minute. But now I feel as if I had broken right through this picture, into a stuffy darkness underneath. . . . I see that a person may be charming, even particularly moving in some way, really touching, and yet may sin horribly. Don't imagine I mean pilfering pastries from a buffet, no, I mean real sin, deception and . . ." Dasha turned away with her chin quivering. "I mean adultery . . . by a woman, a married woman. Is such a thing permissible? I ask you, Ivan Ilyich."

"No, it is not."

"Why not?"

"I couldn't tell you why, straight away, I just feel that it's wrong."

"So do I. I have been wandering about and worrying for the last two hours. The day is so clear and fresh, and yet I imagine that in all these houses, behind all these curtains, some black, evil people are hiding, and that I ought to be among them, you understand?"

"No, I don't," he answered quickly.

"Still, that is how I feel. And I am so miserable. Perhaps it is just that I am a silly girl. And this town was not built for silly girls, but for grown-ups."

Dasha stopped at the entrance to her house, and with the toe of her high boot began to shove a cigarette-box backwards and forwards over the pavement; there was a picture on the box, a green lady with smoke issuing from her mouth. Ivan Ilyich looked at the polished toe of Dasha's boot and felt that Dasha was fading out, disappearing in a mist. He wanted to hold on to her; but how? by what force? He knew that there was such a force. He felt it squeezing his heart and constricting his throat. But for Dasha all his emotion was a mere shadow on a wall, because he himself was merely 'kind-hearted, honest Ivan Telegin.'

"Well, good-bye and thank you, Ivan Ilyich. You are very honourable and good. I don't feel any easier, but all the same I am very, very grateful to you. You have understood me, haven't you? Such things do happen in this world. One must grow up; there's nothing for it. Come and see us when you have time, please."

She smiled, held out her hand to him, went in through the door and was swallowed up in the darkness.

CHAPTER VI

DASHA OPENED THE door of her room, and stopped in amazement at the scent of wet flowers that met her. Then she saw the high-handled beribboned basket that was standing on the dressing-table. She ran forward and sank her face into it. They were Parma violets, bruised and wet.

Dasha was excited. All that morning she had been wanting something indefinite, and now she knew that it had been these very violets she had wanted. But who had sent them? Who had been so thoughtful of her to-day as to guess what she herself had not known? But the ribbon—was certainly out of place here. As Dasha untied it, she thought of herself:

"She may be restless, but she is not bad. Whatever sins others may commit, she will go her own way. Perhaps you think she has a swollen head? Why not, there are people who will understand that and even like it."

Tucked away into the bow of ribbon was a note on thick paper—two words in an unknown large hand: "Love, love." On the reverse was printed the name of a flower-shop. So someone had written the words "Love, love" on the card there in the flower-shop. Dasha went out into the corridor with the basket in her hand and called out:

"Mogul, who brought me these flowers?"

The Great Mogul looked at the basket and sniffed fastidiously—such matters were no concern of hers.

"A boy from a shop brought them for Yekaterina Dmitrievna. And the mistress ordered them to be put in your room."

"From whom; did he say?"

"He didn't say anything, except to give them to the mistress."

Dasha went back to her room and stood by the window. Through it she could see the sunset: to the left, beyond the brick wall of the house next door, it spread through the sky, paled to a light green and faded out. In this green emptiness a star appeared, twinkling and sparkling as if newly polished. All at once, in the narrow and now darkening street down below, the electric lights went on with a feeble glow. There was the sound of a motor-car near by, and she could see it roll along the street in the evening mist.

It was quite dark in the room now, and the violets smelled sweet. They had been sent by the man with whom Katia had sinned. That was obvious. Dasha stood there and thought that Katia had fallen like a fly into something extremely subtle and enticing, like a spider's web. This 'something' was in the moist scent of the flowers, in the stilted and yet disturbing words 'Love, love', and in the springtime magic of that evening.

Suddenly her heart began to beat violently and rapidly. Dasha felt as if she was touching with her fingers, seeing, hearing, sensing something illicit, something hidden, something that was scorching in its sweetness. And all at once she wholeheartedly lifted the ban, turned herself loose as it were. She didn't understand how it had happened, but that very instant she found herself on the other side of a barrier. Her austerity, her little wall of ice, dissolved into a mist, like the haze at the end of the street, into which the motor-car with the two ladies in white hats had silently disappeared.

Only her heart beat more rapidly; her head swam; a cool glad music seemed to play of its own accord in her whole body, and the burden of it was: "I live, I love. Happiness, life, the whole world—are mine, mine, mine."

"Listen, my dear," Dasha said aloud to herself, opening her eyes. "You are a virgin, that's all, and you have a simply unbearable nature."

She crossed to the far corner of the room, settled down in a large, soft armchair, slowly peeled the wrapping off a slab of chocolate, and began to turn over in her mind all that had happened during the last two weeks.

At home nothing had changed. Katia was even being particularly affectionate towards Nikolai Ivanovich. He, for his part, was in high spirits, and was making plans to build a country cottage in Finland. Dasha alone sensed silently the 'tragedy' of these two people who did not want to see. She could not make up her mind to be the first to speak to her sister, and Katia, always so responsive to Dasha's moods, seemed to notice nothing on this occasion. Before Easter, Katia ordered spring clothes for herself and Dasha; spent much of her time with dressmakers and milliners; took part in charity bazaars; at the request of Nikolai Ivanovich organized a literary function with the clandestine object of raising money for the Left Wing of the Social Democratic Party—the so-called Bolsheviks; was at home on Thursdays as well as Tuesdays —in a word, she never had a minute to spare.

"*And all this time you have been in a blue funk, could not make up your mind one way or another, brooded on things which you didn't understand, and can't understand until you have singed your wings,*" Dasha thought to herself with a smile. Often during those days the caustic, malevolent image of Bessonov rose out of that dark lake into which the frozen drops had fallen, and out of which nothing good could come. Dasha gave way and let Bessonov take possession of her thoughts. That helped her to calm down. The clock went on ticking in the dark room.

Then, somewhere far away in the house, a door slammed, and she heard her sister's voice asking:

"How long have you been back?"

Dasha got up from her armchair and went out into the hall. Katia immediately asked:

"Why are you so red in the face?"

Nikolai Ivanovich, who was getting out of his overcoat, quoted a gag borrowed from the repertoire of the argumentative lover. Dasha glanced with disgust at his soft, full lips and followed Katia to her bedroom. There, sitting by the dressing-table, which was frail and elegant like everything in her sister's room, she settled down to listen to gossip about friends Katia had met while she was out.

While she was talking Katia began to tidy her dressing-table, which was full of gloves, pieces of lace, veils and silk shoes—all sorts of knicknacks fragrant with her scent. "Apparently Kerenski has lost another case and is desperately hard up. I met his wife, she was full of complaints that life is becoming so hard. The Timiryazevs have measles; Sheinberg has made it up again with that hysterical woman—they say that she even tried to shoot herself in his flat. What a spring! And what a day it has been! People are all wandering about the streets as if drunk. Oh yes, there's another bit of news—I met Akundin, he is positive that we shall have a revolution within a very short time. There is unrest in the factories, in the villages—everywhere. If only it came soon! Nikolai Ivanovich was so delighted that he took me to Pivato, and we drank a bottle of champagne to the coming revolution on the spur of the moment."

Dasha, playing with the lids of the cut-glass phials, listened to her sister in silence.

"Katia," she said suddenly. "Listen: as I am now, I am of no use to anyone." Holding a silk stocking in her hand, Katia turned and looked sharply at her sister. "But the main thing is that I am no use to myself either. I am rather like one of those food faddists who eat only raw carrots and believe that this makes them far superior to everyone else."

"I don't know what you are getting at," Katia said.

Dasha looked at Katia's back and sighed.

"No one is any good—I am always criticizing everybody. . . . This one is stupid, that one disgusting, that other one dirty. I alone am nice, it appears, and I am very unhappy about it. I criticize you, too, Katia."

"For what?" Katia asked in a low voice, without turning round.

"Understand, Katia, I just turn up my nose at everything and that is all there is to me. It's too silly for words, and I'm tired of being different from you all. In short, what I am getting at is that there's a man I like very much."

Dasha bowed her head as she said this: she poked her finger into a cut-glass phial and could not get it out again.

"What's wrong with that, little girl? Thank God, you do like someone. You will be happy. Who, indeed, should be happy, if not you?" Katia said, and gave a little sigh.

"But, Katia, it's not so simple as all that. You see, I don't think I am in love with him."

"If you like him, you'll come to love him."

"That's just the point—I don't like him."

Katia closed the door of the cupboard and came close to Dasha: "But you just said that you did. . . . Really, Dasha . . ."

"Don't quibble, Katia. You remember that Englishman in Sestroretsk—I liked that man, and even fell in love with him. But I was still myself then. . . . I was angry, I hid myself, I cried at night. But this one . . . I don't even know whether it is really he, or. . . . He has got me all muddled. . . . And now I am altogether changed. As if I had swallowed some sort of fumes. . . . If he walked into my room now, I shouldn't move . . . I would let him do what he liked with me."

"Dasha, what are you saying?"

Katia sat down on the edge of Dasha's chair, drew her closer, took her hot hand and kissed her palm; but Dasha slowly freed herself, sighed, cupped her chin in her hand, and looked for a long time out of the window, at the dark sky, and the stars.

"Dasha, what is his name?"

"Alexey Alexeyevich Bessonov."

Katia stood up, took another chair, put her hand to her throat, sat down and did not stir. Dasha could not see her face—it was in the shadow—but she felt that what she had told her was something horrible. "*So much the better,*" she thought, turning aside. And this 'so much the better' seemed to make things easy and futile.

"Tell me, please, why is it that others can do everything and I can't? For two years I've been hearing of six hundred and sixty-six temptations, and in my whole life I've only once kissed a college boy at a skating rink."

Dasha sighed, and said nothing more. Katia bent towards her, hands on knees.

"Bessonov is a very bad man," she said. "He is a terrible man, Dasha. You hear what I say?"

"Yes."

"He will break you to pieces."

"Perhaps, but what can I do?"

"I won't have it! Anyone else, but not you. . . . Not you, not you, Dasha, my darling!"

"No, the young crow is not nice—he's black in body and in soul," quoted Dasha. "Tell me, though, why is Bessonov so bad?"

"I can't tell you . . . I don't know. . . . But I shudder when I think of him."

"But, surely, you rather liked him?"

"Never. I hate him May the Lord preserve you from him!"

"There you are, Katia. . . . If you say that I am certain to be caught in his net."

"What are you talking about? We're crazy, both of us!"

But Dasha had greatly enjoyed this conversation; it was like walking along a narrow plank on tiptoe. She was pleased that Katia was so excited. She no longer thought of Bessonov at all, but deliberately began to talk about her feelings for him, described her meeting with him and what his face had been like. She exaggerated it all; and gave the impression that she was pining for him night after night and was almost on the point of running away and going to him. Finally the whole thing seemed ridiculous even to herself; she wanted to take Katia by the shoulders, kiss her, and say: "If anybody is being foolish, surely it's you, Katia!" But Katia suddenly slid from her chair to the carpet, embraced Dasha, and laid her face on Dasha's knee. Then a shudder passed through her whole frame and she cried out in a terrible voice:

"Forgive me, forgive me . . . Dasha, forgive me!"

Dasha was frightened. She bent over her sister and began to cry with fear and pity; through her sobs, she asked what Katia meant, what was there to forgive? But Katia clenched her teeth and said nothing, only caressed her sister and kissed her hands.

At dinner Nikolai Ivanovich looked at both sisters and said: "I see! May I beg to be initiated into the cause of these tears?"

"The cause of these tears is my abominable frame of mind," Dasha answered instantly. "There is no need to worry, please—I don't need you to tell me that I am not worth your wife's little finger."

After dinner visitors arrived for coffee. Nikolai Ivanovich decided that the family was out of sorts and hence it would be best to go and have a drink. Kulichok went to telephone to a garage; Katia and Dasha were sent to change. Chirva arrived, and hearing that they were going out for a drink, showed unexpected bad temper.

"In the long run, who is it that suffers from these constant drinking-bouts? Russian literature!"

But he went with them in the car just the same, along with all the others. The 'Northern Palmyra' was full of people and noise; the huge basement hall was flooded with clear white light from cut-glass chandeliers. These cut-glass chandeliers; the tobacco smoke rising from the floor; the small, closely packed tables; the men in evening dress and the bare-shouldered women, in coloured wigs—green, lilac and grey; the osprey feathers and jewels on the women's necks and in their ears, shimmering with orange, blue and ruby gleams; the waiters gliding past in the shadow; the gaunt man with raised hands and magic wand beating time in front of a crimson velvet curtain; the glittering brass instruments of the band—all were multiplied over and over again in the mirrored walls, making it seem that all humanity, the whole world, was sitting there in endless progression.

Dasha drank champagne through a straw, and scrutinized the tables. At one of them, with a frosted ice-bucket and the shell of a lobster in front of him, sat a clean-shaven man with powdered cheeks, half-closed eyes and lips compressed in a sneer. Dasha thought he must be thinking that in the end the electric light would fade out and everyone would die—and was it worth being pleased about anything anyway?

Then the curtain moved and drew back to each side. A little Japanese man with a tragic, wrinkled face leapt out on to the stage and began to toss coloured balls, plates and torches into the air. Dasha thought: "*Why did Katia say: 'Forgive me'?*"

And, suddenly, as though a hoop had been pressed down on to her head, her heart stopped beating. "*Can it be?*" But she shook her head, took a deep breath, refused to think of what she had meant by that "Can it be?"—and looked at her sister.

Katia was sitting at the far end of the table. She looked so weary, so sad and so beautiful that tears welled up in Dasha's eyes. She raised her finger to her lips and blew on it, hardly perceptibly. It was an agreed signal. Katia noticed it, understood and smiled gently.

Towards two o'clock an argument arose—where to go next? Katia wanted to go home. Nikolai Ivanovich said that he would do what the others did, and the others decided to go on 'somewhere else'.

And then, through the now thinning crowd, Dasha saw Bessonov. He was sitting with his elbows on the table, listening to Akundin, who, with a half-chewed cigarette in his mouth, was telling him something and at the same time drawing sharp lines on the cloth with his finger-nail. Bessonov was looking at the quickly moving nail. His face was pale and intent. It seemed to Dasha that through the din she caught the words: "The end, the end of everything." But at that very instant a pot-bellied Tartar waiter screened them both from her eyes. Katia and Nikolai Ivanovich got up and called to Dasha, and she went with them, the sting of agitation and curiosity still in her.

Out in the street they found the air surprisingly full of the fresh, sweet smell of frost. Stars hung bright in a dark lilac sky. Someone behind Dasha said with a laugh: "A deuced fine night!" A car rolled up to the pavement. Through the fumes of the exhaust at the back, a man in rags jumped forward, pulled off his cap and, dancing from one foot to the other, flung open the door of the car for Dasha. As she got in she glanced at him—the man was ugly, unshaven, with a crooked mouth; he was shivering with cold and held his elbows pressed to his sides.

"Congratulations on a happily spent evening in the temple of luxury and sensuous pleasures!" he cried out boldly in a hoarse voice, quickly snatched the coins which someone threw to him, and saluted with his tattered cap. Dasha felt as if his black, savage eyes had scratched her.

It was late when they got home. Dasha, lying on her back in bed, was so tired that she not so much fell asleep as lost consciousness—it was as if her whole body were paralysed.

Suddenly, she threw off the bedclothes with a groan, sat up and opened her eyes. The sun was shining through the window on to the floor. . . . "My God! How horrible!" She was so frightened that she nearly cried. But when she collected her thoughts, she found that she had forgotten it all and only the pain of some repulsively horrible dream remained in her heart.

After breakfast Dasha went to her lectures, entered herself for the examination, bought some books and, until dinner-time, really led an austere and strenuous life. But in the evening she put on silk stockings again (although in the morning she had decided to wear only lisle ones), powdered her hands and shoulders, and changed her hair-do. She thought: "It would be nice to arrange it with the bun at the back of the head, but then everyone would scream: 'Do it up in a fashionable style'—but how could one do that with one's hair straggling all over the place?" In a word, it was a bother. And on the front of her new blue silk dress she found a champagne stain.

Dasha was suddenly so sorry about the dress, so sorry about her wasted life, that holding the damaged skirt in her hand, she sat down and began to cry. Nikolai Ivanovich poked his nose around the door, but seeing that Dasha was sitting in her chemise and crying, he called his wife. Katia ran in, snatched up the dress, and said: "Don't worry, this will come out in two ticks," and rang for the Great Mogul, who arrived with benzine and hot water.

They cleaned the frock and helped Dasha to dress. Nikolai Ivanovich called impatiently from the hall: "Ladies, it's a first night, we mustn't be late." But of course they were late at the theatre.

Sitting in the box by Katia's side, Dasha watched a tall man with a false beard and unnaturally wide-open eyes, standing under a flat tree and saying "I love you, I love you," to a girl in bright pink, and taking her by the hand.

And although the play was not a sad one at all Dasha wanted to cry all through it; she was sorry for the girl in bright pink, and was annoyed that the story was not that kind of story. The girl, as it appeared, both loved and did not love; she reacted to the man's embrace with a nymph-like laugh and then tripped away to a worthless scamp whose white breeches gleamed in the back-ground. The man nursed his head in his hands and said that he would destroy some manuscript—his life's work—and that was the end of the first act.

Acquaintances came into their box, and the usual hurriedly devised conversation began.

Sheinberg, a little man with a bald skull and shaven, crumpled face, which seemed all the time to be jumping out of his stiff collar, said of the play that it dealt once again with "the sex problem, but in a very acute form. Mankind ought to get rid of this accursed question at last".

Burov, big and gloomy examining magistrate for specially important cases —a Liberal whose wife had run away that Christmas with the owner of a racing stable—replied to this:

"For me the question is settled—whatever it may be for anyone else. Women are liars by the very fact of their existence; while men tell lies by artificial means. The sex question is simply filth; and art is just one of the forms of crime."

Nikolai Ivanovich began to laugh, and looked at his wife. Burov went on gloomily:

"When the time comes for the hen to lay eggs, the cock decks himself out with a brightly coloured tail. This is a lie, because his natural tail is grey, and not coloured. The trees come out in flower—again a lie, a decoy, for the real substance is in ugly roots under the ground. But men tell more lies than any other creature. Flowers don't grow on him and he has no tail: so he has to use his tongue and the lie is two-fold and doubly repulsive—so-called love and everything that has been built up around it—things which are enigmatical

only to young ladies of tender age"—he squinted towards Dasha. "In our epoch of complete futility, quite serious people spend their time with such nonsense. Yes, sir, the Russian Empire is suffering from an overloaded stomach."

He pulled a wry face and bent over a box of sweets, stirred it up with his finger, but found nothing to his taste, and put his eyes to the opera-glasses which were hanging round his neck by a strap.

The conversation turned to the prevalent political stagnation and reaction. Kulichok related the latest court scandal in an excited whisper.

"It's a nightmare! A nightmare!" Sheinburg exclaimed.

Nikolai Ivanovich thumped his knee and said: "Revolution, gentlemen, we need a revolution at once! Otherwise we shall simply drown in all this muck. I have information"—he lowered his voice—"that there is great unrest in the factories."

Both Sheinburg's hands jerked into the air with excitement. "But when? When? We can't wait for ever!"

"We shall live to see it, never fear," Nikolai Ivanovich said cheerfully, "and you can have the Ministry of Justice, Your Excellency!"

Dasha was tired of hearing all about these problems and revolutions and ministerial portfolios. With one elbow on the velvet edge of the box, and the other arm round Katia's waist, she looked down into the stalls, now and then nodding and smiling at some acquaintance. Dasha knew and could see that she and her sister were admired, and the surprised glances of the crowd—appreciative from the men, spiteful from the women—and the snatches of talk and the smiles all stimulated her, like the heady spring air. Her tearful mood passed off. One of Katia's curls tickled her cheek under the ear.

"Katia, I love you," Dasha said in a whisper.

"And I love you."

"Are you glad that I am staying with you?"

"Very."

Dasha considered what else she could say to Katia—something pleasant. Suddenly she caught sight of Telegin, dressed in a black coat, standing in the pit with his hat and a programme in his hands, covertly watching the Smokovnikov box out of the corner of his eye. His firm, bronzed features stood out clearly among the other faces, which were either too pale or too florid. His hair was very much lighter than Dasha had thought—it was like rye.

When his eyes met Dasha's he immediately bowed and then turned away, but dropped his hat as he did so. Bending down, he bumped against a fat lady, began to apologise, blushed, stepped back and trod on the toes of the editor of the literary journal, *Choir of the Muses*.

Dasha said to her sister: "Katia, that is Telegin down there."

"I see. He's very nice."

"I should like to kiss him, he's so nice. And if you knew how clever he is, Katia. . . ."

"There, Dasha. . . ."

"What?"

But her sister did not go on. Dasha understood and also said no more. Again her heart felt heavy; all was not well within herself, inside her own snail-shell. For a moment she had forgotten, but now she looked in there again and it was dark and alarming.

When the lights went out and the curtain went up, Dasha sighed, broke off a piece of chocolate, put it in her mouth, and began to listen attentively.

The man with the glued-on beard was again threatening to burn his manuscript; the girl, sitting at a piano, was mocking him. And it was obviously imperative to marry the girl off at once rather than spin the affair out for another three acts.

Dasha raised her eyes to the ceiling of the theatre. There a beautiful, half-naked woman with a bright and happy smile was flying about among the clouds. *Good lord; how like me!* Dasha thought to herself. And immediately she saw herself in her mind's eye: a creature sitting in a box eating chocolate, talking nonsense, getting all muddled up and waiting for something extraordinary to happen to her. But nothing did happen.

My life is not worth living until I go to him, hear his voice, feel him with my whole being. Everything else is a lie. That's the plain truth.

After that evening Dasha was no longer in doubt. She knew that she would go to Bessonov, and was afraid. Once she decided to go away to her father in Samara; but then she said to herself that not even a thousand miles would save her from temptation and gave up the idea.

Her healthy virginity was outraged; but what could she do with that 'second creature' in her, when everything in the world seemed to be on its side? And, after all it was intolerably humiliating to suffer so long and think so much about that Bessonov, who to all appearances cared nothing for her, and was perfectly happy as he was somewhere near the Kammennoostrovski Prospekt, writing verses about an actress with lace petticoats, while Dasha was so completely absorbed in him.

She now deliberately wore her hair in a plain style and coiled it up low on the back of her head; she wore the old schoolgirl dresses she had brought with her from Samara long ago, and stubbornly crammed Roman law, saw no visitors and abstained from all amusements. Being honest turned out to be not at all easy. Dasha was simply afraid.

One cold evening in early April, when the sunset had already faded and the greenish-purple sky gleamed with phosphorescent light that cast no shadows, Dasha came back on foot from the Islands.

At home she said that she was going out to a lecture, but in fact she went by tram to Yelagin Bridge and wandered about the whole evening along leafless avenues; she crossed bridges and looked down at the water, at the purplish twigs set against the orange glow of the sunset, at the faces of passers-by, at the lights of the carriages floating past between the moss-grown stems of the trees. Her mind was a blank as she walked along slowly.

She was quite calm, and her whole being, to the very bones, was steeped in the salty spring breeze blowing from the sea. Her feet were tired, but she did not want to return home.

High-stepping thoroughbreds drew open carriages along the Kammennoostrovski Prospekt; long cars swept by; groups of pedestrians strolled about joking and laughing. Dasha turned into a narrow side street.

The street was quite still and deserted. The sky above the roofs was green. Music came from behind the drawn curtains in every house; here someone was practising a sonata, there a familiar waltz; and from a dark window red with the evening sun came the wailing of a violin.

Dasha's heart, too, was full of sound, full of song and full of longing, and she felt as if her body had grown light and pure. She turned a corner, read

the number over the door of a house, smiled, and went up to the door, where a visiting card—A. BESSONOV—was fixed above a lion's head in brass; then she rang the bell vigorously.

CHAPTER VII

THE COMMISSIONAIRE AT the Restaurant Vienna took Bessonov's overcoat and said in a suggestive tone:

"Alexey Alexeyevich, there is someone waiting for you."

"Who?"

"A person of the female sex."

"Who is it?"

"We don't know her."

Bessonov looked vacantly over the sea of heads and walked to the far corner of the crowded restaurant.

Loskutkin, the *maitre d'hôtel*, drooped his grey side-whiskers over Bessonov's shoulder and informed him that there was an exceptionally fine saddle of mutton to-day.

"I don't want anything to eat," Bessonov said. "Give me some white wine—my special."

He was sitting bolt upright, with his hands on the table-cloth. At that hour, and in that place, his accustomed mood of gloomy inspiration came over him as usual. All the impressions of the day merged into a harmonious and intelligible form; and within him, in the depths, stimulated by the wailing of the Rumanian fiddles, the fragrance of feminine perfumes, the suffocating heat of the crowded hall, arose shadowy images of forms come from the external world; and these shadows were his inspiration. He felt that now, by some blind intuition, he could fathom the mysterious meanings of things and of words.

Bessonov lifted his glass and drank the wine through his teeth. His heart was beating slowly. It was inexpressibly pleasant to feel his whole being shot through with sounds and voices.

Opposite Bessonov, at a table under the mirror, Sapozhkov, Antoshka Arnoldov, and Yelizaveta Kievna were having supper together. The night before Yelizaveta Kievna had written a long letter to Bessonov, making an appointment here, and now she was very excited and as red as a beet. She was wearing a black-and-yellow striped dress, and in her hair a ribbon to match. When Bessonov came in she began to feel oppressed.

"Be careful!" Arnoldov whispered to her, showing all his decayed and gold-filled teeth. "He has got rid of his actress and is now without a mistress and dangerous as a tiger."

Yelizaveta Kievna laughed, shook her head with its striped ribbon and walked between the tables towards Bessonov. People looked at her and smiled.

In recent months Yelizaveta Kievna had been living an altogether forlorn life, passing day after day with nothing to do, without hope of anything better

and feeling utterly wretched. Telegin was obviously not attracted to her; he was polite, but avoided being alone with her; while she felt with deep despair that he was just the man she wanted. Whenever she heard his voice in the hall she stared fixedly at the door. He always walked along the corridor on tiptoe. She always waited with her heart missing its beat and the door swimming in front of her eyes—but he always went past. If he would but knock—even if only to ask her for matches!

One day, to spite Zhirov—who spoke ill of everything on earth but was as cautious as a cat—she bought a book by Bessonov, cut the pages with a pair of tweezers, read it through several times on end, spilled coffee all over it, crumpled it in her bed, and finally proclaimed one day at dinner that Bessonov was a genius. Telegin's lodgers were indignant. Sapozhkov called Bessonov a fungus growing on the putrefying body of the *bourgeoisie*. The veins swelled out on Zhirov's forehead, he was so angry. Valiet, the painter, smashed a plate. Telegin alone showed no concern.

Then she had what she called a 'moment of self-provocation': she roared with laughter, went to her room, wrote Bessonov an over enthusiastic, absurd letter demanding an assignation, returned to the dining-room and silently threw the letter on the table. The lodgers read it aloud and held a long consultation on it.

Telegin said: "It's very boldly written."

Yelizaveta Kievna gave the letter to the cook for immediate posting, and felt that she was rushing towards an abyss.

Now, as she came up to Bessonov, she said briskly:

"I wrote to you. You have come. Thank you."

And she sat down opposite him, sideways to the table, with her legs crossed and her elbow on the table. She propped her chin on her hand and stared at Alexey Alexeyevich with her painted eyes. He said nothing. Loskutkin brought a second glass and poured out some wine for Yelizaveta Kievna. She said:

"You will ask me, of course, why I wanted to see you?"

"No; I will not ask you that. Drink some wine."

"You are right: I have nothing to tell. You are alive, Bessonov, and I am not. I am terribly bored."

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing at all." She laughed, and immediately blushed scarlet. "To be a tart would bore me. So I do nothing. I am waiting for the trumpets to sound, for the red glare. . . . Do you think me odd?"

"Who on earth are you?"

She bent her head and blushed again.

"I am the Chimaera," she whispered.

Bessonov smiled a wry smile. "*Heavens, what an idiot!*" he thought, but she had such an engaging virginal parting in her chestnut hair, her very much uncovered plump shoulders seemed to him so pure, that he smiled again, more kindly. He drank a glass of wine through his teeth, and suddenly thought that it would be fun to let loose the black smoke of his imagination on this simple-minded girl. He said that night was descending on Russia for the fulfilment of a terrible retribution. He said he felt this in mysterious and malignant omens.

"You have seen posters pasted up all over the city: on it a laughing devil sitting on a motor tyre is dashing down a gigantic stairway. . . . Do you realize what that means?"

Yelizaveta Kievna looked at his feminine mouth and into his icy eyes with the thin, arched eyebrows; she saw that the fingers holding his glass were trembling slightly, and that he was drinking thirstily. Her head reeled delightfully. From afar off, Sapozhkov began to signal to her. Suddenly Bessonov turned and asked with a frown:

"Who are these people?"

"They are my friends."

"I don't like their signalling."

Then Yelizaveta Kievna said without thinking: "We can go somewhere else if you like."

Bessonov stared at her fixedly. Her eyes squinted slightly; her mouth was smiling faintly; there were beads of perspiration on her temples. And suddenly he lusted for this healthy, short-sighted young woman; he grasped her large, hot hand as it lay on the table and said:

"Either go away now . . . or be quiet. . . . Let us go. It must be."

Yelizaveta Kievna only caught her breath quickly and went pale. She did not know how she got up, how she took Bessonov's arm, how they made their way out between the tables.

Then they were sitting in a droshky, and even the wind could not cool down her flaming cheeks. The droshky rumbled over the stones. Bessonov, leaning forward with both hands on his stick and his chin resting on them, said:

"I am thirty-five, but my life is over. Love can no longer deceive me. What can be sadder than when you suddenly see that your battle charger is only a wooden rocking-horse? But, for a long, long time yet, I must drag myself about in this life as a corpse. . . ."

He turned to her and his lips curled in a smile.

"It is clear that I also, as well as you, have to wait until the trumpets of Jericho sound. It would be splendid if a sudden blast of them blared out through this cemetery! And if a red glare lit up the whole sky. . . . Yes, you are probably right. . . ."

They drove to a hotel on the outskirts of the city. A sleepy waiter led them along a long corridor to the sole remaining unoccupied room. It was a low room with torn and stained red paper on the walls. Against the wall, under a faded canopy, was a large bed, and at its foot an iron washstand. The room smelt stuffily of damp and of stale tobacco. Yelizaveta Kievna stepped just inside the door and asked in a hardly audible voice:

"Why have you brought me here?"

"Oh, we shall be all right here," Bessonov answered hurriedly.

He took her coat and hat and laid them on the broken armchair. The waiter brought a bottle of champagne, some small apples and a bunch of grapes with cork crumbs on them, looked over the washstand, and then went out with the same air of gloom.

Yelizaveta Kievna drew back the curtains—out there, in the middle of a water-logged building site, a gas lamp was burning, and immense casks were being driven by on carts, the drivers crouching low in their seats, under plaited straw mats. She laughed, went to the mirror and began to arrange her hair with gestures that were unfamiliar even to herself. "To-morrow," she thought calmly, and gave her striped ribbon a twist, "I shall come to my senses and go mad."

Bessonov asked: "Would you like some wine?"

"Yes."

She sat on the divan; he sat on the carpet at her feet and said pensively:

"You have terrible eyes; both fierce and meek. Russian eyes. You love me?"

The question confused her; but at the same instant she thought: "No. This is madness." She took the full glass from his hand and drank; immediately her head began to go round slowly, as if everything was tilting over.

"I am afraid of you, and I shall probably hate you," Yelizaveta Kievna said, listening to her own words as if they came from afar and were not hers. "Don't look at me like that: you make me feel ashamed."

"You're a strange young woman."

"Bessonov, you are a very dangerous man. I come of Nonconformist stock, and I believe in the devil. . . . Ah, my God! Don't look at me like that! I know what you wanted me for, and I am afraid of you."

She laughed so loudly that her whole body shook with it, and wine from the glass spilled over her fingers.

Bessonov buried his face in her lap. "Love me . . . love me, I entreat you," he said in a tone of despair, as if now his only salvation lay in her. "I am unhappy. I am frightened. I am afraid of being alone. Love me, please love me . . ."

Yelizaveta Kievna laid her hand on his head and closed her eyes.

He told her that every night the fear of death came over him. He had to feel a living person near him, quite close. It was torment, it was torture. . . . "Yes, yes, I know. . . . But I am all frozen. My heart has stopped beating. Warm me. I need so little. Take pity on me: I am perishing. Don't leave me alone. Sweet, darling girl . . ."

Yelizaveta Kievna said nothing: she was frightened and excited. Bessonov kissed her palms with longer and longer kisses. He began to kiss her great, strong legs. She closed her eyes very tightly: it seemed to her as though her heart was standing still with shame. But suddenly a flame seemed to envelop her, and run all through her body. Bessonov now seemed lovable and so unhappy. . . . She lifted his head and kissed his lips, firmly, greedily. After that, now no longer ashamed, she quickly undressed and got into the bed.

When Bessonov fell asleep with his head on her naked shoulder, Yelizaveta Kievna gazed for a long time with her short-sighted eyes at his pale, sallow face, all knit in tired wrinkles on his temples, under his eyes and round his tightly-shut lips; it was an unfamiliar face, but now forever bound up with her.

Looking at the sleeper made her so uncomfortable that she began to cry.

It seemed to her that Bessonov would wake up and see her in bed, stout, ugly, with swollen eyes, and that he would try to get away from her as soon as he could; that no one could ever love her, and everyone would be convinced that she was a depraved, stupid and vulgar woman—and she would deliberately do everything to make them think so; that she loved one man, and had intercourse with another, and so her life would always be full of confusion and dirt and horrible humiliations. Yelizaveta Kievna sniffed cautiously, and wiped her eyes with the corner of the sheet. And so, amid tears, she imperceptibly sank into sleep.

Bessonov drew in a deep breath through his nose, turned on his back and opened his eyes. His whole body was creeping with the incomparable dejection of the morning after. It was disgusting to think that he had to begin another day. For a long time he stared at the metal knob on the bedstead; then he pulled himself together and looked to his left. By his side, also on her back, lay a woman, her face hidden by her naked, bent elbow.

"Who on earth . . .?" He strained his befuddled memory, but could recall nothing; cautiously drew his cigarette-case from under the pillow and lit a cigarette. "What a nuisance! I've completely forgotten. How awkward!"

"You seem to be awake," he said in a cajoling tone. "Good morning." She remained silent, not moving her arm from her face. "Yesterday we were strangers, and to-day we are bound by the mysterious ties of this night." He frowned; all this was rather vulgar. And the main thing was: there was no knowing what she would do now—would she reproach herself, would she cry, or would a flood of affectionate emotion overwhelm her? He cautiously touched her elbow, and then drew back. It seemed to him that her name was Margarita. He said sadly:

"Margarita, are you angry with me?"

At that she sat up among the pillows, and holding up her chemise, which was slipping from her shoulders, stared at him with her bulging, short-sighted eyes. Her eyelids were swollen, and her full lips parted in a sneer. He instantly remembered everything, and felt a fraternal affection for her.

"My name is not Margarita, but Yelizaveta Kievna," she said. "I hate you. Get out of the bed."

Bessonov immediately slipped from under the bedclothes and dressed hurriedly behind the canopy of the bed, near the foul-smelling wash-stand. Then he drew up the blinds and turned out the electric light.

"There are moments which can never be forgotten," he muttered.

Yelizaveta Kievna watched him gloomily. When he sat down on the divan and took out a cigarette she said slowly:

"I am going home and I shall poison myself!"

"I don't understand why you should feel like that, Yelizaveta Kievna."

"Very well, then don't understand. Get out of this room—I want to get dressed."

Bessonov went out into the corridor, which was draughty and smelt of smoke. He had to wait a long time. He sat on the window-sill and smoked; then he went to the far end of the corridor, where he could hear the waiter and two housemaids talking in low voices in a little scullery. They were drinking tea, and the waiter was saying:

"Oh, shut up about your village! That's all the Russia *you* know! Know all about it, do you? Have a look round in the rooms here at night—and you'll find out about Russia. They're all bastards! Bastards and lechers!"

"Your language, Kuzma Ivanich!"

"After eighteen years in these hotels I can use what language I like!"

Bessonov turned back. The door of his room was open and the room empty. His hat was lying on the floor.

"Well, so much the better," he thought, and stretched himself with a yawn.

So the new day had begun. It differed from the previous day that a strong wind rose in the morning, tore the rain clouds asunder, drove them to the north and piled them up there in immense white masses. The rain-soaked town was steeped in the crisp rays of the sun. Under these rays clammy monsters invisible to the eye writhed and sizzled and then lay prostrate—colds and coughs, secret maladies, the melancholy bacilli of consumption, and even the semi-mystical microbes of black neurosis took refuge behind curtains, in half-dark rooms and damp basements. A breeze blew through the streets.

In the houses people were cleaning and opening the windows. Porters in blue shirts swept the pavements. On the Nevski depraved little girls with greenish wizened faces offered passers-by bunches of snowdrops smelling of cheap eau-de-Cologne. The shopkeepers hurriedly removed all their winter goods, and, like the first flowers of Spring, gay spring things made their appearance in the shop-windows.

The afternoon papers all came out with the headline: 'Long live the Russian Spring,' and with bits of poetry, some of them very ambiguous indeed. In short, the writers pulled long noses at the censorship.

Later, the futurists of the 'Central Station' group proceeded through the town, to the whistles and jeers of the street urchins. There were three of them: Zhirov, Valiet the painter, and another, as yet quite unknown—Arkadii Semiesvetov, an enormous young fellow with a face like a horse.

The futurists were clad in short, unbelted, orange velvet jackets ornamented with black zigzags, and wore top-hats. Each had a monocle, and on their cheeks were painted a fish, an arrow and the letter 'R'. At five o'clock a police inspector arrested them and took them in a cab to the police station to ascertain their identity.

The whole town was in the streets. Glittering carriages and crowds of people moved along Morskaya Street, the Neva embankments, and Kamenno-Ostrovski Avenue towards the islands. Many of them, very many, thought that that day something unusual would happen: either some manifesto would be issued from the Winter Palace, or a bomb would blow the Cabinet meeting to pieces, or in general something would 'start' somewhere.

But presently the blue twilight settled down on the city; street lamps were lit along the streets and canals, and their reflections flickered in the black water like trembling needles. From the Neva bridges people saw, beyond the chimneys of the ship-building yards, an immense sunset glow above the smoke and clouds. And nothing had happened. The spire on the Fort of St Peter and St Paul gleamed for the last time, and then the day was over.

Bessonov worked a great deal that day, and worked well. Refreshed after breakfast by a nap, he read Goethe for a long time, and this reading, as always, stimulated and excited him.

He paced up and down along the bookcases and thought aloud; then he sat down at his desk and wrote down words and lines. His old nurse, who kept house for him in his bachelor flat, brought in a china coffee-pot of steaming mocha.

Bessonov was having some very good moments. He wrote that night was descending over Russia; that the curtain of tragedy was about to be raised; that the nation of god-seekers was assuming a terrible aspect. The whole nation was preparing to celebrate a Black Mass. The abyss was open at their feet. There was no salvation.

He closed his eyes, and saw in his imagination bare fields, crosses on little mounds, roofs torn up by the wind, and in the distance, beyond the hills, the glare of great fires. Nursing his head in both hands, he told himself that although the land he loved was this very land, he knew it only from books and pictures. Deep furrows appeared on his forehead and his heart filled with a horrible foreboding. Then, holding a smoking cigarette between his fingers, he covered the crackling quarto sheets with his bold handwriting.

As twilight fell, he lay down on the divan without turning on the light.

He was still greatly agitated; his head was burning and his hands were clammy, but he had finished his day's work.

Gradually his heart began to beat more evenly and calmly. Now he would have to decide, he reflected, how he would spend the evening and night. Ugh! No one had telephoned, and no one was coming to see him. He would have to wrestle alone with the demon of despondency. In the flat above, inhabited by an English family, someone was playing the piano, and the music roused dim, impossible desires in Bessonov's mind.

Suddenly the front door bell shrilled through the quiet house. He could hear the old nurse shuffle by in her slippers. A woman's high-pitched voice said firmly:

"I want to see him."

Then light, impetuous footsteps stopped at his door. Bessonov did not move: he smiled. The door opened noiselessly, and a tall, slim girl in a large hat with a cluster of daisies on it entered the room, silhouetted against the light from the hall behind her.

She came forward uncertainly in the darkness and stopped in the middle of the room; when Bessonov rose silently from the divan, she drew back a little, but then tossed her head defiantly and said in the same high-pitched voice:

"I've come to see you on very important business."

Bessonov crossed to the table and switched on the light. Its blue lamp-shade shone between the books and manuscripts, filling the whole room with a restful half-light.

"What can I do for you?" Bessonov asked. He set a chair for his visitor, sat down in his desk armchair and put his hands on its arms. His face was transparently pale, and there were blue rings under his eyes. He slowly raised them to his visitor and started violently. His hands began to tremble.

"Daria Dmitrievna!" he said quietly. "I did not recognize you at first."

Dasha sat down on the chair in the self-assertive way she had assumed on entering the room, clasped her kid-gloved hands on her knee, and frowned.

"Daria Dmitrievna, I am so very glad you have come to see me. It is a very great boon to me."

Dasha interrupted him:

"Please don't imagine that I am one of your admirers. I like some of your poems and I dislike others, I don't understand them, or simply don't care for them. I didn't come to discuss poetry, I came because you are tormenting me."

She bent her head and Bessonov saw that her neck and her wrists between her gloves and the sleeves of her black dress had blushed crimson. He said nothing, and did not stir.

"Of course my affairs do not concern you in any way. And I, too, would be very glad to have nothing to do with you. But I have been through a very unpleasant time. . . ."

She raised her head quickly, and her stern, clear eyes looked into his. Bessonov slowly lowered his eyelashes.

"You came on me like a disease. I am constantly catching myself thinking of you. It is more than I can bear. I decided that it was better to come and tell you. To-day I made up my mind. There, you see, I have made a declaration of love . . ."

Her lips trembled. She turned away hurriedly and stared at the wall, where, lighted from underneath, the mask of Peter the Great—at that time favoured by all poets—was sneering at her with tight-lipped mouth and closed eyelids. Upstairs, four voices in the English parson's flat were singing a fugue:

"*We shall die.*
No, we shall fly away
Into the crystal sky,
To eternal, eternal, eternal joy."

"If you try to persuade me that you also have some sort of feeling for me, I shall leave immediately," Dasha said quickly and passionately. "Obviously you could not even have any respect for me—after this. Women don't do things like this. But I don't want anything from you, nor do I ask you for anything. I only had to tell you that I loved you painfully and very much. . . . This feeling has completely broken me. . . . I have not even any pride left. . . ."

And she thought: *Now get up, bow to him with dignity, and go.* But she remained sitting, and continued to stare at the sneering mask. She felt so weak that she could not lift a hand, and now she became aware of her whole body, its weight and warmth. *Answer me, give me some sort of answer at least*, she thought as in a dream.

Bessonov put his hand over his face and began to speak in a low half-smothered voice, such as people use when they talk in church:

"With all my soul I can only thank you for this feeling for me. Such moments, such fragrance as you have brought me can never be forgotten . . ."

"There is no need for you to remember them," Dasha said through clenched teeth.

Bessonov stopped, rose from his chair, moved farther away from her, set his back against the bookcase and said:

"Daria Dmitrievna, I can only bow humbly before you. I was unworthy to listen to you. Perhaps I have never cursed my own folly so much as at this moment. I have wasted and spent myself, worn myself out. What answer can I give you? Suggest that you come with me to some suburban hotel? Daria Dmitrievna, I am sincere with you. I have nothing left to love with. A few years ago I would have believed that I could still remain eternally young and would not have let you go . . ."

Dasha felt his words as though he were sticking needles into her. There was a long-drawn agony expressed in them.

"Now I could only spill such precious wine. You must understand what this costs me. I might stretch out my hand and take . . ."

"No, no," Dasha whispered quickly.

"Oh, yes. And you feel it. There is no sweeter sin than wasting oneself—spilling oneself. It was just this that brought you to me. . . . To spill a cup of virginal wine. . . . You brought it to me . . ."

He slowly drew his brows together. Dasha, hardly breathing, gazed at him with horror.

"Daria Dmitrievna, permit me to be frank with you. You are so like your sister that at first I thought . . "

"What?" Dasha cried. "What did you say?"

She started up from her chair and stood facing him. Bessonov did not understand her agitation and put his own interpretation on it. He felt that he was losing his head. His nostrils breathed in the fragrance of her perfume,

and that elusive but all-pervading fragrance of the feminine skin, which is different for every man.

"This is madness. . . . I know. . . . I can't . . ." he whispered, trying to take her hand. But Dasha tore herself away and rushed towards the door. On the threshold she cast a wild look back and then ran from the room. The front door slammed. Bessonov walked slowly to the table. His nails played a tattoo on the lid of the glass cigarette-box as he took out a cigarette. Then he pressed his hands on his eyes. With all the terrible power of his imagination he felt that the Powers of Light, rallying for the decisive struggle, had sent this delicate, passionate and alluring girl to him to summon him to turn back and save himself. But he was already helpless in the hands of the forces of Darkness, and now there was no salvation. Slowly, like poison running through his veins, an unquenchable desire and regret fired his blood.

CHAPTER VIII

"IS THAT YOU, Dasha? Yes, come in."

Katia was standing in front of her mirror and lacing her corsets. She greeted Dasha with an absent-minded smile, and went on busily turning round and moving backwards and forwards on the rug in her tight-fitting slippers. She was in frothy underclothes, all ribbons and lace; her beautiful arms and shoulders were powdered, and her hair done up into a magnificent crown. On a low table near her stood a bowl of hot water; all round her were nail-scissors, tiny files, colour-sticks and powder-puffs. This evening she had no engagements, and was 'preening her feathers' as the family called it.

"Look," she said, fastening her garters, "people no longer wear corsets with a straight busk. This is the new style, from Madame Duclet. It leaves more room for the tummy, and even shows its shape a little. Do you like it?"

"No, I don't," Dasha answered. She was leaning against the wall with her hands behind her back. Katia raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"Don't you? Why not? It's so comfortable."

"What's so comfortable, Katia?"

"Perhaps you don't like the lace? I could put something else on. But how strange. Why on earth don't you like it?" And again she turned, first one side and then the other, to the mirror.

Dasha said: "Please don't ask *me* whether I like your corsets."

"All right. But Nikolai Ivanovich is absolutely no use for such things."

"Leave Nikolai Ivanovich out of it."

"Dasha, what's all this about?"

Katia opened her mouth in amazement. Only now did she realize that Dasha could hardly control herself, that she was speaking through clenched teeth, and that there were burning red spots on her cheeks.

"It seems to me, Katia, that it's time you stopped turning yourself about in front of that mirror."

"But surely I have to make myself tidy."

"For whom?"

"Whatever is the matter with you? For myself."

"That's a lie!"

Both sisters were silent for a long time after that. Katia took a camel-hair dressing-gown, lined with blue silk, from the back of a chair, put it on, and slowly fastened the belt. Dasha attentively followed her movements and then said:

"Go to Nikolai Ivanovich and tell him everything honestly."

Katia stood still, her fingers playing with her belt. Dasha could see a lump move in her throat more than once, as though she were swallowing something.

"Dasha, you have found out something?" she asked quietly.

"I have just been to see Bessonov." Katia looked at her with unseeing eyes; suddenly she went terribly pale and shrugged her shoulders. "Don't worry—nothing happened to me there. He told me in time. . . ."

Dasha moved from one foot to the other.

"I guessed long ago that you . . . that it was with him. . . . But it was all too disgusting to believe. . . . It seems that you are a coward and a liar. . . . Well, I don't want to live in such filth. . . . Go to your husband and tell him everything. . . ."

Dasha could not say anything more; Katia was standing there her head bent in submission. Dasha had expected anything except that pose of guilt and humility.

"Do you want me to go straight away?" Katia asked.

"Yes, this instant. . . . You must understand. . . ."

Katia drew a quick breath and went to the door. There she paused, and spoke again:

"I can't, Dasha." But Dasha said nothing. "Very well then, I will tell him."

Nikolai Ivanovich was sitting in the drawing-room; he was scraping his beard with a paper-knife and reading an article by Akundin in the latest issue of a literary journal, which had just arrived. The article was devoted to the anniversary of Bakunin's death. Nikolai Ivanovich was delighted with it. When his wife came in he called out to her:

"Come, Katia, and sit down. Just listen to this—here: 'The fascination of this man'—that is Bakunin—'lies not so much in his philosophy or in his utter devotion to his cause, but in the pathos permeating his every movement with which he transformed his ideas into reality; his sleepless conversations with Proudhon, the courage with which he threw himself into the very flames of the struggle, and even that romantic gesture of his when in passing he aimed the guns of the Austrian insurgents for them without stopping to inquire against whom and for what they were fighting. Bakunin's pathos is the prototype of that powerful drive with which new classes enter the battle. The materialisation of ideas—such is the task of the coming age. Not their deduction from a heap of facts subordinated to the blind inertia of life, not their translation into the world of ideas, but the reverse process; the conquest of the physical world by the world of ideas. Reality is a heap of combustible material, ideas are the sparks. These two worlds, disunited and hostile, must merge into one in the flames of a world revolution. . . .' Just think, Katyusha. . . . Here we have it in black and white—Long live the Revolution! He's the lad, is Akundin! It is quite true: as we are now, we have neither great ideas nor great sentiments. The government is led by one thing only—a panic fear of the future. The intelligentsia is over-eating and drinking

too much. All we do is jabber and jabber, Katyusha, while we are up to our ears in a swamp. Our people is rotting alive. All Russia is wallowing in syphilis and vodka. Russia is putrid, and if you were to blow on her she would crumble into dust. We can't go on like this. . . . We need some kind of self-immolation, purification by fire. . . ."

Nikolai Ivanovich was reading in an excited, throaty voice; his eyes were wide open, and he beat time to the rhythm of the words with a paper-knife. Katia stood near him, leaning on the back of an armchair. When he finished and began to cut more pages of the journal she came closer and laid her hand on his hair.

"Kolenka, what I am going to say will hurt you very much. I wanted to keep it from you, but something has happened and I have to tell you. . . ."

Nikolai Ivanovich moved his head from under her hand and looked at her attentively.

"Yes, I am listening, Katia."

"You remember, we had a tiff some time ago, and out of spite I said something to make you uneasy about me. . . . And then I denied it. . . ."

"Yes, I remember." He put down the book and turned right round in his chair. His eyes met Katia's calm straightforward gaze, and turned aside in fright.

"Here it is: I lied to you then. . . . I have been unfaithful to you. . . ."

He frowned as if with pain and then tried to smile. His mouth went dry. When he could no longer remain silent, he said thickly:

"You have done right to tell me. . . . Thank you, Katia. . . ."

Then she took his hand, touched it with her lips and pressed it to her breast. But the hand slipped from her grasp and she did not try to hold it. She quietly sank down on to the carpet and laid her head on the leather arm of the chair.

"You don't want me to tell you anything more?"

"No, Katia. Go now."

She got up and went out. At the door of the dining-room Dasha suddenly rushed at her, seized her, hugged her, and kissing her hair, her neck and ears, whispered:

"Forgive me forgive me! You were splendid, you were wonderful! . . . I heard it all. . . . Can you forgive me, will you forgive me, Katia. . . . Katia?"

Katia cautiously freed herself, went over to the table and straightened out a crease in the table-cloth. Then she said:

"I did as you told me, Dasha."

"Katia, can you ever forgive me?"

"You were right, Dasha. It was better so, as it turned out."

"I wasn't right at all! It was just spite . . . pure spite. . . . But now I see that no one can blame you, though we may all suffer, though we may be unhappy—you are right, I know it, you are right in everything. Forgive me, Katia."

Tears the size of peas rolled from Dasha's eyes. She was standing behind her sister, a couple of feet away, and she spoke in a stage whisper:

"If you won't forgive me, I don't want to live any more. . . ."

Katia turned to her quickly.

"What more do you want of me? You want us to be sincere and be happy again? . . . Well, let me tell you . . . I lied and said nothing, because that was the only way to carry on our life with Nikolai Ivanovich a little longer.

But now—it's all finished. Do you understand? I have not loved Nikolai Ivanovich for a long time, and have long been unfaithful to him. I don't know whether he loves me or not—but he has become a stranger to me. Do you understand that? But you hide your head in the sand like an ostrich so as not to see these dreadful things. I have seen them and know them, but I went on living in this mess because I am a weak woman. I have seen this life sucking you in, too. I tried to protect you; I told Bessonov not to come to our place. . . . That was even before he. . . . Well, it makes no difference. . . . Now all that is finished and done with. . . ."

Katia suddenly raised her head and listened. Dasha's back grew cold with fright. Nikolai Ivanovich was in the doorway, coming sideways through the curtains. His hands were behind his back.

"Bessonov?" he asked, shaking his head with a smile and advancing into the dining-room.

Katia did not reply. A livid spot showed on her cheeks, and her eyes narrowed. She set her teeth.

"You seem to think, Katia, that our conversation is finished. But it isn't." He was still smiling. "Dasha, would you please leave us alone."

"No, I won't"; and Dasha took her stand by her sister's side.

"Yes, you will go if I ask you."

"No, I won't."

"In that case, I shall have to leave the house."

"Leave it then," Dasha answered angrily.

Nikolai Ivanovich went purple, but the next instant the former expression of cheerful insanity was back in his eyes.

"So much the better, stay here. Here's what I want to say, Katia. Just now, I was sitting where you left me, and, speaking plainly, in the last few minutes I have gone through something that is generally difficult to endure . . . and I have come to the conclusion that I must kill you. . . . Yes . . . yes. . . ."

At these words Dasha quickly put both arms round her sister and clung to her. Katia's lips quivered contemptuously.

"Hysterics again! You had better take some valerian drops, Nikolai Ivanovich."

"No, Katia. This time it's not hysterics. . . ."

"Then do what you came to do," Katia cried. She pushed Dasha aside, and walked straight up to Nikolai Ivanovich. "Go on, do it! I tell you to your face—I don't love you!"

He drew back, brought a small, rather ladylike revolver from behind his back and laid it on the tablecloth, put his fingers to his mouth and bit them. Then he turned and went to the door. Katia looked after his retreating figure. Without turning round, he exclaimed:

"It hurts me! It hurts me!"

Then she ran after him, took him by the shoulders and turned his face towards her.

"Liar. . . . Liar. . . . You are lying even now. . . ."

But Nikolai Ivanovich shook his head and went out of the room. Katia sat down at the table.

"There you are, Dashenka—scene from Act III, with a pistol shot. I must leave him."

"Katyusha! . . . The Lord save you!"

"I must go. I don't want to live like this any longer. In five years I shall be an old woman—it will be too late then. I can't go on living like this . . . it's too disgusting."

She buried her face in her hands, bent over and set her elbows on the table. Dasha, sitting beside her, quickly and timidly kissed her shoulder. Katia sat down at the table.

"Do you think I'm not sorry for him? I am sorry for him all the time. But if I were to go to him now, we would have a long talk, long and utterly insincere from beginning to end. It's as if some devil always got between us, and made our every word insincere. Talking to Nikolai Ivanovich is like playing on a piano that's out of tune. . . . No, I must go. . . . Ah, Dashenka, if you only knew how unhappy I am!"

But, all the same, at the end of the evening Katia went into the study.

Her talk with her husband was lengthy. Both spoke calmly and sadly and tried to be honest; neither spared the other, and yet both were left with the feeling that nothing had been achieved by their talk, nothing cleared up and nothing mended.

Left to himself, Nikolai Ivanovich remained sitting at the table till dawn. During these hours, as Katia learned later, he had surveyed his whole life and reflected on it. The result was an inordinately long letter to his wife, which ended thus:

"Yes, Katia, we are all in a moral cul-de-sac. During the last five years I have not had a single strong emotion, not a single powerful impulse. Even my love for you and our marriage went by as if in a hurry. Life has been petty, half hysterical, a sort of permanent torpor. There are two ways out—either put an end to myself, or tear off this mental shroud which is covering my thoughts, my feelings, my consciousness. But I am unable to do either the one or the other. . . ."

The family misfortune happened so suddenly, and their home was broken up so easily and conclusively, that Dasha was quite dazed, and it did not even enter her head to think about herself; all these girlish moods were nonsense: just shadows on the wall, like the terrible goat with which their nurse used to frighten her and Katia long ago.

Several times during the day Dasha went to Katia's door and tapped lightly with one finger. Katia answered:

"Dashenka, if you can—leave me alone, please."

Nikolai Ivanovich had a case in court that week. He went out early, had lunch and dinner in a restaurant, and returned late at night. He was counsel for the defence in the case of Zoya Ivanovna Ladnikova, wife of a customs official, who had murdered her lover in bed one night. The murdered man was a student, son of a St. Petersburg house-owner. Nikolai Ivanovich made a speech which deeply impressed the bench and the public. Ladies sobbed, Zoya Ivanovna beat her head against the rail of the dock—and was acquitted.

As Nikolai Ivanovich, pale and hollow-eyed, was leaving the court, a crowd of women gathered round him, threw flowers at him, slobbered over him, and kissed his hands. He drove home and threshed matters out with Katia in a completely mollified frame of mind.

Katia's trunks were already packed. In all sincerity Nikolai Ivanovich advised her to go to the south of France, and gave her twelve thousand roubles for her expenses. He himself decided, in the course of their discussion, that

he would put his cases in the hands of his assistant and take a holiday in the Crimea to collect his thoughts.

Altogether it was left quite undecided whether their parting was to be temporary or final, and which of them was leaving the other. These acute problems were assiduously covered up by the bustle of their departure.

Both Katia and her husband had forgotten all about Dasha. Katia remembered her existence only at the very last moment when, dressed in a grey travelling costume with an exquisite hat and veil, looking very slim, sad and charming, she caught sight of Dasha sitting on the rug-chest in the hall. Dasha was swinging her legs and eating bread and marmalade—they had forgotten to order lunch that day.

"Danyusha, my darling," Katia said, kissing her through her veil, "what about you? Would you like to come with me?"

But Dasha said that she would stay alone in the flat with the Great Mogul, get through her examination, and go home at the end of May to spend the summer with their father.

CHAPTER IX

DASHA WAS LEFT alone in the house. The large rooms seemed cheerless now, and the things in them unnecessary. Even the cubist paintings in the drawing-room had ceased to be alarming and their colours seemed faded now that the hosts had gone. The draperies hung in lifeless folds. And although the Great Mogul glided silent and wraith-like through the rooms every morning with a duster, nevertheless it seemed that some other invisible dust was settling more and more thickly over the flat.

In Katia's room one could read, as in a book, the tale of her life. In one corner, on a little easel, an unfinished picture showed a girl with a white wreath on her head and eyes the size of half her face. Katia had caught at this easel as a kind of anchor in the dizzy whirlpool of her life: but, of course, it had not held. Then there was an old-fashioned work-table, strewn untidily with unfinished needle-work and scraps of coloured materials—all begun and thrown aside; each of them one more unsuccessful attempt at escape. The bookcase showed the same confusion. An attempt to put the books in order had obviously been made and abandoned half-way through. Books with half their pages cut were lying about everywhere or were pushed in anyhow: books on Yoga, popular pamphlets on anthroposophy, poetry, novels, everything. . . . How many attempts, how much fruitless struggling to live a good life! Dasha found a silver writing-pad on the dressing-table, and on it was written: Chemises 24, Slips 8, Lace slips 6. . . . For the Kerenskis: buy tickets for *Uncle Vanya*. . . . And then in a large, childish hand: "Buy an apple tart for Dasha."

Dasha remembered that that apple tart had never been bought, and it made her so sorry for her sister that she cried. Kind, affectionate, and too sensitive for this life, Katia had snatched at things, clung to trifles in the effort to anchor herself, to save herself from being frittered away and disintegrated, but none of the things or the people she clung to could help her.

Dasha made a habit of getting up early and pegging away at her books, and

she passed her examinations, nearly all of them with honours. She made the Great Mogul answer the telephone, which kept ringing without respite in the study. Everyone was told the same thing: "The master and mistress are out of town and Miss Dasha cannot come to the telephone."

Dasha spent whole evenings playing the piano. But the music did not stimulate her now as it had in the past. She no longer yearned for something indefinite nor did her heart suddenly grow numb with dreams. She now sat severely and calmly poised in front of the sheets of music lit up by a candle on either side, and purified herself, as it were, with solemn sounds which filled the empty house to the last nook and cranny.

Sometimes little enemies, little unwelcome memories, would steal in through the music, and she would take her hands off the keys and frown. Then it would grow so quiet in the house that she could hear the candles sputtering until, with a loud sigh, she would again bring her hands down vigorously on the cold keys, and the little enemies, like dust or dry leaves driven by the wind, would fly out of the great room to hide somewhere in the dark corridor, in cupboards and behind band-boxes. . . . Gone for ever was the Dasha who had rung Bessonov's door-bell, and had spoken so harshly to defenceless Katia. That half-demented girl had almost brought about a calamity. It was amazing! As if the only light in the window was a light-of-love and there was no genuine love at all in the world.

At eleven o'clock Dasha usually shut the piano, put out the candles and went to bed: she did all this without any hesitation, in a business-like way. She had decided to start an independent life as soon as possible: to make her own living, and get Katia to come and live with her.

At the end of May, Dasha, having passed her examinations, left Petersburg for home by way of Rybinsk and down the Volga. It was evening when she boarded the white steamer whose lights shone brightly against the night and the dark water.

She unpacked her things in the neat cabin and plaited her hair. She thought that her independent life was starting quite pleasantly and, putting her arm under her head, she smiled contentedly and fell asleep to the rhythmic vibration of the engine.

She was awakened by the heavy footsteps and bustle on the deck. Sunlight poured in through the slatted blinds and rippled in iridescent waves over the mahogany washstand. The breeze which had blown the tussore silk curtains open smelt of honey-flowers. Dasha drew the blinds. The steamer was moored to an empty stretch of the river bank. Carts loaded with deal boxes were drawn up under a steep cliff where bare roots and great clumps of earth were signs of a recent landslip. A brown foal was drinking by the water-side, its thin legs, with great knobs for knees, spread wide apart. A beacon surmounted by a red cross stood on the top of the cliff. Dasha sprang from her berth, brought out the tub, soaked her sponge in water, and squeezed it out over herself. It was so cold it made her shiver, but she only laughed and drew up her knees. Then she put on the white stockings, white dress, and white hat which she had put out overnight—and which suited her very well—and feeling very independent went out on deck, outwardly cool but wildly happy inside.

Liquid reflections of the sun were playing all over the white steamer, and it hurt the eyes to look at the water—the river blazed and ran with sunshine. An old bell-tower, up to its middle in birches, gleamed white on the high bank on the farther side.

The steamer cast off, described a semi-circle and moved rapidly downstream, the banks coming slowly to meet it. Blackened straw-thatched roofs peeped out from beyond the hills. Massed clouds hung in the sky; their lower edges were tinged with blue, and their white reflections filled the blue-and-yellow abyss of the river.

Dasha was sitting in a deck-chair, with legs crossed and hands clasped over her knee. She felt as if the glittering curves of the river, the clouds and their white reflections, the hills with their birches, the meadows and the puffs of wind laden with the smell of swamp grass, or with the crisp smell of new-ploughed land, honey clover and wormwood were flowing through her, and her heart swelled with rapture.

A man came slowly towards her, stopped a short distance away near the rail and seemed to be staring at her. Dasha forgot about him more than once, but every time she looked he was still standing there. Then she made a firm resolve not to turn round; but her temperament was too lively to put up quietly with such a scrutiny. She flushed and turned with a quick angry movement. The man was Telegin, holding on to a strut, and unable to make up his mind either to come up and speak to her, or go away.

To her surprise Dasha found herself laughing—he roused associations in her of something vaguely good and joyous. Altogether this Ivan Ilyich, broad-shouldered, in his white linen jacket, strong and bashful, had appeared as the necessary complement to this whole river peace. She held out her hand to him.

Telegin said: "I saw you come on board. We actually travelled in the same carriage all the way from Petersburg. But I could not make up my mind to speak to you. You seemed very worried. . . . I am not disturbing you?"

"Sit down." She pushed a deck-chair across to him. "I am going to see my father. Where are you going?"

"To tell the truth, I don't know yet. For the time being to Kineshma, to my people."

Telegin sat down and took off his hat. He puckered his forehead and fixed his half-shut eyes on the receding serpentine wake of foam running back from under the stern. Overhead, gulls were flitting on sharp-pointed wings; they swooped down to the water, rose again with plaintive, raucous cries, dropped behind, circled and fought for floating pieces of bread.

"A pleasant day, Daria Dmitrievna."

"Such a day, Ivan Ilyich, such a day! I was sitting here feeling as if I had escaped from hell! Do you remember our conversation in the street?"

"I remember it to the last word, Daria Dmitrievna."

"After that, something awful happened. I will tell you some time." She nodded thoughtfully. "I think you were the only person in Petersburg who didn't go off his head." She smiled, and laid her hand on his sleeve. Telegin's eyelids quivered with fright, and he pressed his lips tightly together. "I have great confidence in you, Ivan Ilyich. You are very strong, aren't you?"

"Why do you think me so strong?"

"And a person one can rely on." Dasha felt that all her thoughts were good, sincere and friendly, and that Ivan Ilyich, too, was thinking just such good, sincere and strong thoughts. And it gave her a strange pleasure to talk, to give direct expression to the bright waves of feeling that were flowing to her heart. "It seems to me, Ivan Ilyich, that if you were to love anyone, you would love with courage and confidence. And if you wanted something, you would never give up."

Ivan Ilyich made no reply; slowly he slid his hand into his pocket, pulled

out a piece of bread and began to throw it to the birds. A whole flock of white gulls swooped with uneasy cries to catch the crumbs. Dasha and Ivan Ilyich got up from their chairs and went to the rail.

"Throw some to that one," Dasha said. "See how hungry he is."

Telegin flung the rest of the bread far into the air. A fat gull with a large head glided down on motionless wings spread flat as a knife, snatched at the bread and missed it; at that very instant ten others dived after the falling bread right on to the water, which bubbled out in warm foam from under the steamer's side.

Dasha said: "Do you know the sort of woman I should like to be? Next year I shall qualify and begin to earn a lot of money, and bring Katia to live with me. You will see, Ivan Ilyich."

While she was saying this Telegin frowned, checked himself, then opened his mouth, showing a neat row of strong teeth, and laughed so heartily that tears ran down his eyelashes. Dasha flared up, but then her chin dimpled involuntarily and she, too, began to laugh just as merrily as Telegin, without any apparent reason.

"Daria Dmitrievna," he exclaimed at last, "you are marvellous. . . . I was dreadfully afraid of you. . . . But you are really marvellous!"

"Well, let's go and get some breakfast," Dasha said.

"With pleasure."

Ivan Ilyich had a little table brought out on deck, and looking at the menu, began anxiously scratching his clean-shaven chin.

"What would you say, Daria Dmitrievna, to a bottle of light white wine?"

"I should like a little."

"White or red?"

Dasha replied in the same business-like tone: "Whichever you prefer."

"Then we'll have something sparkling."

Past them swam the bank with its satin-green stripes of wheat, greenish-blue stripes of rye, and pinkish stripes of flowering buckwheat. Past the bend, above the loamy bluff, stood squat, straw-capped huts, whose little windows gleamed in the sun. Farther on they saw a dozen crosses in a village cemetery and a windmill like a toy, with six sails and one side broken down. A swarm of urchins ran along the cliffs after the steamer, throwing stones which did not even reach the water. The steamer turned the bend. On the bare bank kites hovered over a clump of bushes.

The warm wind blew under the white tablecloth and under Dasha's frock. The golden wine in large cut-glass tumblers seemed like a gift of the gods. Dasha said that she envied Ivan Ilyich—he had his own work, and was sure of himself, while she would have to cram for another eighteen months yet, and moreover she had the misfortune to be a woman.

Telegin replied with a laugh: "But they've sacked me from the factory."

"What? Not really!"

"And without notice at that. I had to clear out within twenty-four hours. Else why should I be on this steamer? Haven't you heard what happened at our factory?"

"No."

"I got off lightly. Yes. . . ." He paused, putting his elbows on the table-cloth. "You wouldn't believe how stupidly and inefficiently we do everything. And the devil knows what a reputation we Russians have. It makes me angry and ashamed. Just think—a talented nation, a very rich country, and what sort of figure do we cut? To all appearances there's nothing to us but an

insolent bureaucratic grimace. Paper and ink instead of life. You can't imagine how much paper and ink we squander. All this red tape started under Peter the First, and we have never been able to stop it ever since. And, mark you, this sort of ink turns out to cost quite a lot of blood too, you know."

Telegin pushed away his glass of wine and lit a cigarette. It was clear that he did not like telling the rest of the story.

"Well, what is the use of looking back? We must hope that some day things will come right or at least no worse than in any other country."

Dasha and Telegin spent the whole of that day on deck. An outside observer would have thought they were talking nonsense, but this was because all their talk was in code. Even the most commonplace words mysteriously and incomprehensibly took on a double meaning. When Dasha glanced towards a plump young lady with a purple scarf flying out behind her and the second mate walking with a rapt expression by her side, and said: "Look, Ivan Ilyich, things seem to be fairly settled between them"—what he was supposed to understand was: "If anything happened between *us*, it would be quite different." Neither of them could have recalled with any certainty what had actually been said; but it seemed to Telegin that Dasha was much cleverer, more subtle and more observant than he was, while Dasha felt that Ivan Ilyich was a thousand times kinder, better and more intelligent than herself.

Several times Dasha plucked up courage to tell him about Bessonov, but thought better of it. The sun warmed her knees, and the wind touched her cheeks and shoulders and neck as if with rounded gentle fingers. Dasha thought to herself: "No, I shall tell him to-morrow. It will rain—and then I'll tell him."

By the end of the day Dasha, who liked to observe things, and who, like all women, had an eye for detail, knew practically everything about every passenger on board. This seemed almost like a miracle to Telegin.

For some reason Dasha had made up her mind that the Dean of Petrograd University, a gloomy person wearing smoked glasses and a wide cape, was a dangerous steamship card-sharper. And although Ivan Ilyich knew that the man was the Dean, he now also felt some suspicion that he might possibly be a card-sharper after all. On the whole his feeling of reality had been undermined that day. He felt something that was partly giddiness and partly a day-dream, and he was hard put to it to suppress the waves of affection which rose in him from time to time for everything that he saw and heard. He thought, for instance, that it would be fine to jump into the water and rescue that close-cropped little girl over there if she fell overboard—he even wished that she *would* fall overboard.

At one o'clock in the morning Dasha was suddenly overcome by such a compelling desire for sleep that she could hardly reach her cabin. Saying good night at the door she yawned and warned Telegin:

"Good night. By the way, be on your guard against that sharper."

Ivan Ilyich went straight to the first-class saloon, where the Dean, who suffered from insomnia, was reading the works of Dumas *père*. Ivan Ilyich watched him for some time, and thought that he was a very good fellow even though he might be a card-sharper; then he returned to the brilliantly lit corridor, which smelt of engines, varnished wood, and Dasha's scent. He walked on tiptoe past her cabin to his own, lay down on his back in the berth, closed his eyes, and felt that he was shaken to his innermost soul, that he was filled with sounds and odours and the warmth of the sun and with an acute gladness that was like a pain in his heart.

At seven in the morning he was awakened by the steamer's siren. They had

reached Kineshma. Telegin dressed quickly and looked out into the corridor. All the doors were closed: everyone was still asleep. Dasha, too, was asleep. "I absolutely must go ashore, otherwise the devil knows what will happen," he thought, and went on deck. He looked at Kineshma, which had loomed up so inopportunely on the high, steep bank with its wooden stairways and its little wooden houses which seemed to have been piled up anyhow, the yellowish-green limes of the municipal park, bright in the morning light, and the motionless cloud of dust hanging over the carts that were trailing down the slope from the town. A sailor, striding firmly along the deck on his bare heels, appeared with Telegin's reddish-brown trunk.

"No, no, I have changed my mind; take it back again," Ivan Ilyich said to him in an agitated voice. "I have decided to go as far as Nizhni. There was no particular need for me to go to Kineshma. Put it back under the berth, there's a good fellow."

Telegin sat in his cabin for three hours, thinking up an excuse which might explain to Dasha what he conceived to be a vulgar intrusion, but soon it was clear that he could neither explain it by telling fibs or by telling the truth.

At eleven o'clock, full of remorse, hating and despising himself, he went on deck—with his hands clasped behind his back, a shambling gait and an insincere expression on his face—*in a word*, he thought, *a model of bad taste*. But after he had made the round of the deck without finding Dasha, he grew worried and began to search everywhere. Dasha was nowhere to be found. His mouth went dry with anxiety. Evidently something had happened.

Then, suddenly, he ran right into her. She was sitting in a wicker chair, in the same place as yesterday. She was quiet and sad; a book and a pear were lying on her lap. She slowly turned her head towards Telegin; her eyes widened, as if with fright, and then lit up with pleasure; a blush came to her cheeks, and the pear slipped off her lap.

"You here? You didn't get off at Kineshma?" she said quietly.

Telegin swallowed his emotion, sat down next to her and said, stolidly:

"I don't know what you will think of my behaviour, but I deliberately did not get off at Kineshma."

"What I think of your behaviour? I certainly won't tell you that!" Dasha laughed so unexpectedly that Telegin's head began to reel and went on reeling all day, even more than it had the day before: then she slipped her little hand into his palm, quite simply and tenderly.

CHAPTER X

WHAT HAD HAPPENED at Telegin's engineering factory was in fact this: one rainy evening when storm clouds were racing across the phosphorescent sky, an unknown man in a mackintosh cape with upturned hood appeared among the crowd of workers going home after the whistle blew. The street through which they passed was narrow, stinking and muddy with that peculiar coal-and-iron slush which covers all streets leading to large factories. The unknown man walked with the workmen for a while, then stopped and began to give out leaflets right and left, saying in an undertone:

"From the Central Committee. Read it, Comrades."

The workers took the leaflets as they walked along and put them in their pockets and under their caps.

When the man in the mackintosh had distributed nearly all his leaflets, a works policeman roughly shouldered his way through the crowd and, getting close to the man shouted, "Wait a bit, you!" and grabbed the mackintosh from behind. But the mac was wet and slippery; the man slipped from the policeman's grasp and got away. A sharp whistle rang out, and another answered from some distance away. A dull mutter ran through the thinning crowd; but the job was done and the man in the raincoat had vanished.

Two days later the management of the engineering works was surprised to find that the toolroom did not start work in the morning, but put forward demands, which, although not particularly drastic, were yet categorical. Vague phrases, remarks and sharp words flew like sparks through the long workshops, dimly lit by dirty windows and the smoke-blackened glass roof. The workers standing at their machines threw queer glances at the bustling bosses and waited with subdued excitement for further instructions.

As Pavlov, senior foreman, informer, and tale-bearer was busying himself near the hydraulic press, a red-hot ingot was accidentally dropped on his foot. He screamed wildly, and a rumour went round the works that a man had been killed. At nine o'clock the chief engineer's huge limousine tore like a whirlwind into the factory yard.

Ivan Ilyich Telegin arrived at the foundry at his usual time. The foundry was an immense circular building with windows broken here and there, chains hanging down from travelling cranes, furnaces ranged along the walls, and a floor of stamped earth. Telegin, shivering in the morning cold, stopped at the entrance and shook hands cheerfully with Punko, the foreman, who came forward to meet him.

An urgent order for engine mountings had come in, and Telegin discussed the job with Punko, consulting him in a business-like and thoughtful way on the things which both of them knew all along. Punko had a very high opinion of his own knowledge and experience—having come to the foundry fifteen years before as a labourer, and having risen to be senior foreman—and Telegin's little ruse resulted in Punko being very pleased with the interview; his vanity was satisfied, and Telegin knew that when Punko was pleased the work could be got through quickly.

Going round the foundry, Telegin spoke to each of the founders and moulders in that comradely, half-jesting tone which most perfectly expressed their mutual relations as if to say: *we are both on the same job, that is, we are colleagues, but I am a staff engineer and you are workers, in essence we are enemies, but as we both like and respect each other the only thing we can do is to crack jokes together.*

A travelling crane rolled along to one of the furnaces, striking it with its hanging chain. Two men, Philip Shubin and Ivan Oreshnikov, set to work. They were both tall and muscular: one of them was dark, had grizzled hair and wore round goggles; the other, Telegin's favourite, was sturdy, curly-bearded, blue-eyed, his fair hair bound with a leather strap.

Shubin prised open the door of the furnace with a crowbar, while Oreshnikov, using tongs, guided the high, white-hot crucible into place. The chain rattled, the crucible moved, and, hissing, gleaming and shedding flakes of metal, floated through the air to the middle of the shop.

"Stop!" Oreshnikov shouted. "Lower!"

Again the winch rattled, the crucible was lowered and a blinding stream of bronze, scattering bursting green stars and throwing an orange glare on the vaulted ceiling, was poured out on the ground. There was a lusciously sweet smell of burning honey.

At that moment the folding doors leading to the adjoining section of the factory were flung open, and a young worker with a pale angry face strode rapidly and firmly into the foundry.

"Stop work! Clear out!" he shouted in an abrupt, harsh voice, with a sideways glance at Telegin. "Do you hear? Or don't you?"

"We heard you the first time, don't yell like that!" Oreshnikov answered calmly, and looking up towards the winch, said: "Dmitri, don't fall asleep, let her go!"

"Well, if you've heard what I said, you must know that we won't ask you a second time," the worker said; he put his hands in his pockets, swung sharply round and went back.

Telegin, crouching over the fresh casting, cautiously scratched the earth away with a piece of wire. Punko, sitting on a high stool at a desk by the door, nervously stroked his grey goatee and said, his eyes shifting round:

"So you've got to stop work whether you like it or not! But how are you going to feed the kids if they give you the sack from the factory—I wonder whether these lads have thought of that?"

"Better not meddle with that, Vasili Stepanich," Oreshnikov answered huskily.

"What do you mean, not meddle?"

"That this is our business. No running to the manager for a heart-to-heart talk. Keep your mouth shut this time."

At last Telegin enquired: "What is the strike about? What are the demands?"

He looked at Oreshnikov, but Oreshnikov turned his head away.

Punko answered: "The tool-room men have downed tools. Last week sixty machines were put on piece-work as an experiment. Well, it turned out that they were earning less than before, and had to work overtime. Now they've nailed up a whole list of demands on the door of No. 6 building—all sorts of demands, not very big ones."

He angrily dipped his pen in the ink and began to make out a report. Telegin put his hands behind his back, walked along the line of furnaces, and then, looking through a round peep-hole behind which the boiling bronze was seething and dancing in dazzling white flames, said:

"Oreshnikov, isn't this piece being left rather too long in the furnace?"

Oreshnikov did not reply, but took off his leather apron and hung it on a nail, put on his lambskin cap and long coat and said in a deep, husky voice that filled the whole workshop:

"Stop work, comrades! Go to No. 6 building, to the middle entrance."

Having said it, he went to the exit. The workers threw down their tools without a word. Some lowered themselves down from the crane, others crawled out of the pits, and the whole crowd followed Oreshnikov. And suddenly something happened near the door, and an angry voice, rising to a scream, rang out:

"You are writing? writing, eh, you son of a bitch? Well, put me down . . . Report me to the manager!"

It was Alexei Nosov, one of the moulders, shouting at Punko; his face was haggard and unshaven, with dull, protruding eyes, and it kept jerking and

contracting while the veins stood out on his scraggy neck. He banged his black fist on the edge of the desk and shouted: "Blood-suckers! . . . Torturers! . . . We'll find a knife for you, too!"

Oreshnikov took hold of Nosov from behind, pulled him away from the desk without effort and led him to the door. Nosov calmed down at once. The foundry was left empty.

By mid-day the whole factory was on strike. There were rumours of unrest at the Obukhov and Nevski engineering works. The workers were standing about in large groups in the factory yard, awaiting the outcome of the negotiations between the manager and the strike committee.

The negotiations took place in the office. The management was frightened and ready to make concessions. The only outstanding point now concerned a gate in the wooden fence which the workers wanted opened to save them a walk of a quarter of a mile through the slush. As a matter of fact, there was no need for the gate to be shut, but the question became one of prestige; the management suddenly jibbed, and a lengthy discussion began. But meanwhile new instructions arrived by telephone from the Ministry of Home Affairs: the management was to reject all demands, and pending further instructions was not to engage in any negotiations with the strike committee.

These orders ruined matters so thoroughly that the chief engineer immediately drove back to town to explain the situation. The workers were perplexed; they were in quite a peaceful frame of mind. Some of the engineers went out into the crowd, explained what had happened and shrugged their shoulders. Here and there, there was even laughter. At last, one of the engineers, Bulbin —a huge, heavy, grey-haired man—came out of the office to the porch and shouted across the courtyard that negotiations had been adjourned until next day.

Telegin remained at the foundry until evening, but seeing that the furnaces were going out anyway, he gave it up and went home. The futurists were sitting in the dining-room and turned out to be greatly interested in what was happening at the factory. But Telegin did not tell them anything; he munched pensively at the sandwiches which Yelizaveta Kievna had put on his plate and then went to his room, locked himself in and lay down to sleep.

Next day he went to the factory as usual. He could already see from some distance away that there was trouble brewing. All along the alley groups of workers were standing about and discussing something. A huge crowd had gathered near the gates, buzzing like a hive.

Telegin was wearing a Homburg hat and a civilian overcoat, and no one paid any attention to him. He listened to the arguing groups, and learned that the whole strike committee had been arrested during the night; that arrests of workers were still going on; that a new strike committee had been elected and that the demands now being put forward were political; that the factory yard was full of Cossacks and, it was said, they had been given the order to disperse the crowd but had apparently refused; and finally, that the Obukhov, the Nevski Shipbuilding and the French works, with several other small factories, had joined the strike.

Telegin decided to make his way through to the office to hear the news; but it was with the greatest difficulty that he got even as far as the gate. There, alongside the familiar gate-keeper, Babkin, a surly-looking man in a huge sheep-skin coat, stood two burly Cossacks with forked beards, their peakless caps cockily perched on one ear. They stared with cheerful insolence into the unhealthy faces of the workmen, grey with want of sleep; the Cossacks

were both red-faced and well-fed, and no doubt were lusty fighters and merrymakers.

"Yes, these fellows will have little compunction . . ." Telegin thought, and started to walk in through the gate; but the nearest Cossack barred the way, and, staring at him boldly, said:

"Where are you going? Get back!"

"I have to go to the office—I am one of the engineers."

"Get back, I say!"

Then there were shouts from the crowd: "Heathens! Tsarist watch-dogs!"

"Haven't you spilt enough of our blood yet?"

"Fat bastards! Masters' men!"

At that moment a short, pimply-faced, hook-nosed lad, wearing a coat that was much too large for him and a tall cap sitting awkwardly on his curly hair, forced his way through to the front ranks, and gesturing with his weak, undersized hand, said with a lisp:

"Comrade Cossacks! Are we not all Russians? Against whom are you going to raise your weapons? Against your own brothers. Are we your enemies, that you should shoot us down? What is it we want? We want happiness for every Russian. We want everyone to be free. We want to put an end to despotism."

One of the Cossacks sneered and looked the lad over contemptuously from head to foot; then he turned and began to stride to and fro at the gate as if on sentry-go. The other Cossack replied in an admonitory, stilted manner:

"We cannot permit any rebellions because we have taken the oath."

The first Cossack, who had evidently thought out his reply by now, called out to the curly-headed youth, mimicking him:

"Brothers, brothers . . . pull up your trousers—you're losing them."

And both the Cossacks laughed.

Telegin moved away from the gate—the movement of the crowd swept him to one side, towards the fence, where a heap of rusty iron scrap was lying about. He was just about to climb on to the heap when he saw Oreshnikov, his lambskin cap pushed to the back of his head, calmly munching a slice of bread. He signalled with his eyebrows to Telegin and said in his deep voice:

"This is a pretty business, Ivan Ilyich."

"Good morning, Oreshnikov? How is it all going to end?"

"We'll shout for a little while and then take off our caps as before. Just as in all mutinies. They've sent Cossacks here. What are we to fight them with? Can I throw this onion and kill two of them?"

A murmur ran through the crowd, and died down again. A sharp commanding voice rang out in the stillness near the gates.

"Gentlemen, I beg you to go home. Your requests will be examined. Please disperse quietly."

The crowd grew agitated, and moved back and to the side. Some went away, others advanced. The voices grew louder. Oreshnikov said:

"They'll ask us politely a third time."

"Who is it?"

"The captain of the Cossacks."

"Comrades, comrades, don't disperse," an excited voice shouted, and a pale, excited man in a wide-brimmed hat jumped up on the scrap-heap behind Telegin. He had a black untidy beard under which the collar of his well-cut coat was fastened with a safety-pin. "Comrades, don't disperse, whatever happens," he shouted in a resonant voice, and stretched out his clenched fists.

"We know definitely that the Cossacks have refused to fire. The management is negotiating by proxy with the strike committee. Not only that, but the railwaymen are at this moment considering a general strike. The government is in a panic."

"Bravo!" an excited voice shouted. There was a stir in the crowd; the speaker dived down into it and vanished. People could be seen running up the alley.

Telegin looked for Oreshnikov, but he was already far away, by the gate. Several times he caught the word 'revolution'.

Telegin felt that he was trembling all over with an emotion that was half-fear, half-rapture. Climbing up on the scrap-heap again, he looked down at the crowd, now grown immense, and suddenly saw Akundin standing only two paces away. He was wearing spectacles, a black jacket and a cap with a large peak. A man in a bowler hat forced his way through to him. Telegin noticed that his lips were trembling, and he heard him say to Akundin:

"Come, Ivan Avvakumovich, they are waiting for you."

"I'm not coming," Akundin said crisply and angrily.

"The whole committee has assembled. They don't want to take any decisions without you, Ivan Avvakumovich."

"You all know my opinion perfectly well."

"You must be mad. You can see what is going on. I'm telling you that a massacre may start at any moment. . . ." The bowler-hatted man's lips trembled violently.

"In the first place," Akundin said, "don't shout. Go off and pass that compromise resolution. I shall not take part in such a piece of treachery. . . ."

"Confound it . . . why, it's lunacy . . ." the man in the bowler hat said, diving again into the crowd. The worker who had called the men out in Telegin's section the day before, now appeared beside Akundin. Akundin said something to him: he nodded, and disappeared. Then the same thing took place with another worker: a short phrase, and a nod.

Meanwhile, shouts of warning came from the crowd and suddenly three short, sharp shots rang out, one after the other. There was an immediate silence. Then a smothered voice, as if deliberately, drawled out "Ah-ah-ah!" The crowd drew back and away from the gate. A Cossack was lying with his knees drawn up to his stomach, face downwards in the mud trampled by many feet. Immediately the cry went up on all sides: "No! Don't! Don't!" as the gates slowly began to open. But then a fourth revolver-shot rang out from the side, and several stones were thrown, striking the iron gate. At that moment Telegin saw Oreshnikov standing open-mouthed, without a cap, alone in front of the crowd that was now fleeing in disorder. It was as if his great boots were rooted to the ground with horror. And simultaneously the report of rifle shots came like the cracks of a whip—one, two, and a volley—and Oreshnikov gently went down on his knees and toppled over on his face.

The enquiry into the events at the factory lasted a week. Ivan Ilyich Telegin was on the list of persons suspected of sympathy with the workers. He was summoned to the office, where—to everyone's surprise—he was rude to the manager and signed his name in acknowledgment of his dismissal.

CHAPTER XI

DASHA'S FATHER, DOCTOR Dmitri Stepanovich Bulavin, was sitting in his dining-room near an immense steaming samovar, and reading the local paper, the *Samara Herald*. When his cigarette had burnt right down to the paper mouthpiece, the doctor took another from his tightly packed cigarette-case, lit it from the end of the first cigarette, coughed himself crimson in the face, and scratched his hairy chest under his open shirt. While he read the paper he sipped his weak tea from the saucer, and dropped ash over the paper, his shirt, and the tablecloth.

Then a bed creaked on the other side of the door, there was a pattering of feet, and Dasha, still rosy and sleepy, came into the dining-room with a white dressing-gown thrown over her nightdress. Dmitri Stepanovich looked at his daughter over his cracked spectacles—his eyes were grey and cold like Dasha's, and they had the same quizzical expression—and then offered her his cheek. Dasha kissed him, and, sitting opposite to him, drew the bread and butter closer.

"Windy again," she said. And, in fact, a strong, hot wind had been blowing for two days. A haze of chalk dust hung over the town, blotting out the sun. Dense, gritty clouds of dust blew in gusts along the streets, and the few people in the streets turned their backs to them when they came. Chalk dust filtered in at every chink and through the window frames; it formed a fine layer on the window-sills, and crunched between people's teeth. The windows rattled in the wind, and the sheet-iron roofs clanged. And with all this it was hot and sultry, and even the rooms smelt like the streets.

"There's an epidemic of eye ailments—not bad," her father said. Dasha sighed.

A fortnight ago she had said good-bye to Telegin on the ship's gangway; in the end he had come with her all the way to Samara. Since then she had been living, with nothing to do, in her father's new flat. The flat was almost empty; unopened cases of books were lying in the hall, the curtains had not yet been put up, and it was impossible to find anything or to settle down anywhere —the place was like a caravanserai.

Stirring her glass of tea, Dasha looked disconsolately through the window at the clouds of grey dust rising from the street. She was thinking that two years had passed like a dream, and here she was at home again, and all that was left of all the hopes, emotions and motley crowds of bustling Petersburg were these clouds of dust.

"The Archduke has been murdered," her father said, turning over his paper.

"Which one?"

"How do you mean, 'which one'? It's the Austrian Archduke—he's been killed at Serajevo."

"Was he a young man?"

"I don't know. Pour me out another glass."

Her father put a small piece of sugar in his mouth—he always drank tea through sugar—and looked sarcastically at Dasha.

"Tell me, please," he said, lifting the saucer, "has Katia left her husband for good?"

"I have already told you, papa."

"Oh, all right. . . ." And he resumed his scrutiny of the paper.

Dasha crossed over to the window. How gloomy it was! She thought of the white steamer, and, particularly how sunny it had been everywhere—the blue sky, the river, the clean deck, and all of it full of sunshine, moisture and freshness. She had thought then that that glistening road—the broad, slowly winding river—and the steamer, *Fiodor Dostoyevski*, and with them Dasha and Telegin, would flow into and merge with a blue, shoreless sea of light and happiness.

Dasha had been in no hurry then, although she understood what Telegin was feeling, and she had nothing against this feeling of his. What was the point of hurrying, when even as it was every minute of the journey was so good, and they were floating to happiness, anyway?

Ivan Ilyich's face grew longer and longer as they approached Samara; and he no longer made jokes. Dasha thought: we are floating on to happiness; and she felt that he was looking at her like a strong and happy man might look who had just been run over by something. She was sorry for him; but what could she do? How could she let him come any nearer to her, even a little, when—this she fully realized—if she did so something that ought not to come until the end of their journey, would begin at once. They would not float all the way to happiness, but through impatience would break the journey half-way. Therefore she was friendly to Ivan Ilyich, and nothing more. He, for his part, thought that he would offend Dasha if he gave even the slightest hint of why he had not slept for four nights, and why he felt as though he lived in a peculiar half-unreal world in which everything outside him glided past like shadows in a dark blue fog, through which Dasha's grey eyes burnt menacingly and alarmingly, and where there was no reality except the scents and the sunlight and the ceaseless pain in his heart.

At Samara, Ivan Ilyich transferred to another steamer and travelled back. The gleaming sea towards which Dasha had floated with such assurance had vanished; and now there were only clouds of dust rising and beating against rattling windows.

"The Austrians will give these Serbs a good hiding," Dr. Bulavin said, taking off his pince-nez and throwing them on top of the paper. "Well, and what's your view of the Slav question, little pussy?"

Dasha, still standing at the window, shrugged her shoulders.

"Will you be back for dinner?" she asked gloomily.

"Out of the question. I have a case of scarlet fever in Postnikovo."

Dr. Bulavin slowly left the table, put on a shirt-front and buttoned up his tussore silk jacket. He looked into the pockets to see that everything was in its place and then began to comb his grey, curly hair with a broken comb.

"Well, all the same, what is your opinion about the Slav question?"

"Good Lord, papa, I don't know. Why bother *me* about it, anyway?"

"Well, I have some kind of opinion of my own, Daria Dmitrievna, if you haven't."

It was evident that he did not want to go to Postnikovo; and in any case he always liked to discuss politics in the morning with his tea. "The Slav question—are you listening?—is the hub of world politics: and lots of people will break their necks over it. That's why the Balkans, the place of origin of the Slavs, is the appendicitis of Europe. What is it all about, you ask me? Well . . ."—and he bent a fat finger for each item—"first, there are more than two hundred million Slavs, and they breed like rabbits. Secondly, the Slavs have managed to create such a powerful military State as the Russian Empire. Thirdly, small sections of Slavs, even though assimilated, are organizing in

independent groups and gravitating towards a so-called pan-Slavonic union. Fourthly—and most important—the Slavs represent a completely new moral type, which in a certain sense is a very serious menace to European civilization: they are God-seekers. And to seek God—are you listening, my puss?—is the renunciation and destruction of all contemporary civilization. I seek God—that is, truth—within myself. To do this I must be absolutely free, and I have to shatter the moral structure under which I am buried, I have to destroy the State which holds me enchained."

"Papa, you must go to Postnikovo," Dasha said languidly.

"No, you must seek truth there!" Her father pointed down, as if to the cellar, but suddenly stopped talking and turned to the door. A bell rang in the hall.

"Dasha, go and open the door."

"I can't, I'm not dressed."

"Matryona!" Dr Bulavin shouted. "Where's that blasted woman?" And he went himself to open the front door and came back in a moment with a letter in his hand.

"From Katia," he said. "Wait a second, don't snatch: first let me finish what I was saying. . . . As I was saying: God-seeking, in the first place, starts with destruction, and this period is very dangerous and infectious. Just now Russia is passing through this very stage of the disease. See for yourself, go out into the main street any evening, and you hear nothing but shouts: 'Help!' or 'Police!' There are toughs prowling about the streets, and they get the better of the police. These lads show no trace of any morals: they are God-seekers. Do you understand, my puss? To-day they play rough tricks in the main street, and to-morrow they will begin to do the same all over the Russian Empire. The nation as a whole is passing through the first phase of God-seeking: that is, shattering the foundations." Dr. Bulavin sniffed and lit a cigarette.

Dasha took Katia's letter from him and went to her room. The doctor continued arguing by himself for some time while he walked about slamming doors in the vast, half-empty, dusty flat; then he set out for Postnikovo.

Danyuska, my dear, Katia had written, *up to this moment I have heard nothing from either you or from Nikolai. I am living in Paris. The season here is in full swing. Skirts are being worn very tight—chiffon is the most fashionable material. Paris is very lovely, and absolutely everybody, all Paris, is dancing the tango, you should see it. At lunch, between the courses, they get up and dance and again at five o'clock and after dinner, and so on until morning. I can never get away from that music—it is so melancholy, poignant and sweet. When I look at the women here with their low-cut dresses and mascara-ed eyes, and at the men who accompany them, I feel all the time that my youth is gone irrevocably. On the whole, I'm in a melancholy mood. I feel all the time that someone is going to die. I'm very anxious about papa. After all, he's not so young. Paris is full of Russians, all the people we know: every day we meet somewhere, just as if I hadn't left Petersburg. By the way, I heard here that Nikolai has apparently been on very intimate terms with a woman—a widow, with two children and a third that is quite a baby. Do you understand? It hurt me a good deal at first. And then, I don't know why, but I began to feel terribly sorry for the baby. Oh, Danyusha, sometimes I do so badly want to have a child. But only from a man I love. If you get married, you must have children, you must, do you hear. . . .*

Dasha read the letter through several times, and shed a few tears now and then, especially for the little baby who wasn't in any way to blame; then she sat down to answer, and wrote until dinner time. She dined alone, only nibbling at it—and then went to her room and began burrowing in some old periodicals. She hunted out a very long novel, lay down on the divan among the books she had scattered all over it, and read until evening. At last her father came back, dusty and weary; they sat down to supper, but her father only grunted in reply to her questions. Dasha discovered that the three-year-old boy who had had scarlet fever was dead. Her father told her this, wheezed, sniffed, put his pince-nez in their case and went off to bed. Dasha, too, went to bed, drew the sheet up over her head, and cried to her heart's content.

Two days passed. The dust storm ended up with thunder, and heavy rain which drummed on the iron roof all night long. On Sunday morning everything was quiet and damp and looked freshly washed.

In the morning, as Dasha was getting up, an old acquaintance came to see her—Semyon Semyonovich Govyadin, a statistical clerk in the Zemstvo office. He was a lean, round-shouldered man, always pale; he had a brown beard and hair combed back behind his ears. He smelt of sour cream; he never took wine, tobacco or meat, and was under police surveillance. Having said good morning to Dasha, he said in a bantering tone for which there was no occasion: "Woman, I have come to fetch you. We are going out on the Volga."

Dasha thought: "So it all ends up with Govyadin the statistical clerk," collected her white parasol and followed Semyon Semyonovich down to the wharf on the Volga where boats could be hired.

Dockers and stevedores, broad-shouldered, deep-chested men and barefooted, bareheaded lads were loitering among the long wooden warehouses crammed with grain, timber, packing-cases, and whole mountains of wool and cotton bales. Some were playing pitch and toss, others were sleeping on sacks and planks; in the distance about thirty men with sacks on their shoulders were running along swaying plank gangways. A drunken man was standing among the carts: he was covered with mud and dust, and his cheek was bleeding; holding his trousers up with both hands, he was swearing lazily, using the foulest words.

"This element of the population knows neither holidays nor rest," Semyon Semyonovich observed in an edifying tone. "And here we two clever and intelligent people are going out idly to admire Nature."

He stepped over the huge, bare feet of a broad-chested thick-lipped lad who was lying on his back; another was sitting on a log and munching a French roll. Dasha heard the one who was lying down say as she passed:

"Philip, that one would do nicely for us!"

The other answered with his mouth full: "Too classy. Too much trouble."

The outlines of boats making for the sandy bank on the farther side could be seen against the wide, yellowish river, and the wavering reflections of the sun. Govyadin hired one of the boats and asked Dasha to steer while he himself took the sculls and began to row against the current. His pale face was soon covered with sweat.

"Exercise is a splendid thing," he said, and took off his jacket, unbuttoned his braces in a shamefaced way and pushed them into the bow of the boat. He had thin, feeble arms covered with long hair, and was wearing rubber cuffs. Dasha opened her parasol, and screwing up her eyes looked across the water.

"Excuse an indiscreet question, Daria Dmitrievna—they say in town that you are getting married? Is it true?"

"No, it isn't true."

He smiled—a smile so broad as to clash strangely with his worried, intellectual face—tried to sing *Down along Mother Volga* in a watery voice, but felt it to be out of place, and began to tug at the sculls as hard as he could.

A boat full of people came towards them. Three common women in green and crimson cashmere dresses were cracking seeds and spitting the husks on to their knees. Facing the women a street tough, completely drunk, with curly hair and a black moustache, was rolling his eyes as if on the point of death and playing a polka on an accordion. Another was rowing rapidly and rocking the boat; while a third man, flourishing a steering oar, shouted at Semyon Semyonovich:

"Get out of the way, you bloody fool, blast you!"

They slid past quite close to Dasha with loud yells and curses. At last the boat grated on the sandy beech. Dasha jumped on to the bank. Semyon Semyonovich put on his braces and jacket.

"Although I am a town dweller, I am sincerely fond of Nature," he said, screwing up his eyes, "especially when it is made complete by the presence of a young lady: there is something Turgenievian about it then. Let's go into the wood."

And they strolled along on the hot sand, sinking into it up to their ankles. Every now and then Govyadin stopped, wiped his face with his handkerchief, and said: "Just look, what a charming spot!"

At last the sandy beach came to an end and they had to climb up a low cliff to where the meadowland began, with the grass already cut here and there and lying in long strips to dry in the sun. There was a strong smell of honeyflowers. On the edge of a narrow gully a gnarled hazel-bush was growing over the water. In the hollow a tiny brook rippled through succulent grass down into a little round pond with ancient lime trees standing round it, and a crooked pine with one branch extending over it like an arm. Beyond the pond, on a narrow crest, a white sweet-briar was in blossom. This was a favourite resort for woodcock during the migration period. Dasha and Semyon Semyonovich sat on the grass. The water in the winding gullies below them mirrored the blue of the sky and the green of the leaves. Not far from Dasha two grey birds were hopping about in the bushes and whistling monotonously. Somewhere in the heart of a tree a wood pigeon was cooing incessantly with all the sadness of forsaken love.

Dasha sat with her legs stretched out and her hands on her knees, listening to the forsaken lover in the branches who seemed to be murmuring tenderly: "*Daria Dmitrievna, Daria Dmitrievna, ah! what is happening to you—I don't understand why you are so sad, why you want to cry. After all, nothing has happened yet, but you are as melancholy as if your life was already over, gone and flown away. You are just a natural cry-baby.*"

"I want to be frank with you, Daria Dmitrievna," Govyadin said. "Will you permit me, so to speak, to throw conventionalities aside?"

"Go ahead, it's all the same to me," Dasha answered, and putting her hands behind her head, lay on her back so that she could see only the sky and not Govyadin's shifty little eyes, which were glancing furtively at her white stockings.

"You are a proud, courageous girl. You are young and beautiful, brimming over with vitality . . ."

"Well, suppose I am. What then?" Dasha interjected.

"Can it be possible that you have never wanted to break through the barriers of conventional morality instilled into you by your education and surroundings?

Must you really keep your beautiful instincts in check, for the sake of this morality which has already been repudiated by all authorities?"

"Suppose that I don't want to hold my beautiful instincts in check, what then?" Dasha asked, and waited with lazy curiosity to hear his reply. The sun had warmed her through, and it was so very pleasant to look up into the sky, into the sunlit haze that filled the whole blue abyss, that she did not want either to think or to move.

Semyon Semyonovich did not answer, but scratched about in the earth with his finger. Dasha knew that he was married to Maria Davidovna, the midwife. About twice a year Maria Davidovna left her husband and took her three children to her mother's house across the street. Semyon Semyonovich explained to his fellow-employees at the Zemstvo office that these family quarrels were due to Maria Davidovna's sensitive and restless character.

But the explanation that Maria Davidovna gave at the Zemstvo hospital was that her husband was ready at any moment to be unfaithful to her with anyone who came along; that this was all he thought about, and if he failed to act upon it, it was only through cowardice and lack of energy; that this was worse than if he actually were unfaithful; and that she could no longer bear the sight of his long vegetarian mug. During these tiffs Semyon Semyonovich, hatless, would cross the street several times a day. Then husband and wife would make it up, and Maria Davidovna, with children and pillows complete, would return to her home.

Finally Semyon Semyonovich cleared his throat and said:

"When a woman is alone with a man, a natural desire arises in her to be possessed and in him to possess her physically. I ask you to be honest and frank. Search your innermost self, and you will find that, in the midst of all prejudices and lies, a natural desire for healthy sensuality is aflame within you."

"But what if at the moment no desire of any kind is aflame within me—how would you explain that?" Dasha asked. She felt lazy and amused. Pale briar-roses were over her head, a bee was crawling about in the yellow pollen. And the forsaken lover in the aspen grove went on murmuring: "*Daria Dmitrievna, Daria Dmitrievna, tell the truth, aren't you in love? You're in love, you're in love, on my honour, and that is why you are so sad.*" Dasha listened and began to laugh.

"I think sand has got into your shoes. If you like, I'll shake it out for you," Semyon Semyonovich said in a strange, thick voice, and tugged at her heel. Dasha sat up quickly, took the shoe out of his hand and slapped his cheek with it.

"You're a cad," she said. "I never thought you were such a loathsome creature."

She put on her shoe, got up, picked up her parasol and without a glance at Govyadin walked back to the river. *What a fool, what a fool I was! I never even asked for his address so that I could write,* she thought, coming down the cliff. *Neither at Kineshma nor at Nizhmi. So now all I can do is go and sit with Govyadin. Ah, my God. . . .*

She turned round. Semyon Semyonovich was coming down the slope through the grass. *I shall write to Katia: Just imagine, it seems I have fallen in love—or I believe I have.* And listening intently, Dasha said in a low voice: "Dear, dear, dear Ivan Ilyich."

At that moment a voice called out, quite close to her: "I won't come in, and I won't come in; let me go, you're tearing my skirt." A naked man was

walking quickly along the bank, up to his knees in the water. He was middle-aged, with a short beard, yellow ribs and a black cord with a cross on his hollow chest. He was obscene, and he was silently and viciously tugging the unwilling woman into the water. She kept repeating: "Let me go, you'll tear my skirt."

Choking with shame and disgust Dasha ran as fast as she could along the bank to the boat. While she was pushing the boat into the water Govyadin ran up panting. The whole way back Dasha sat in the stern behind her parasol, without speaking to him or even looking at him.

After this outing Dasha, in some peculiar way which she herself did not understand, began to feel angry with Telegin, as if he were to blame for all the cheerlessness of that dusty, sun-baked provincial town, with its evil-smelling fences and foul doorways, its box-like brick houses, its telephone and tramway posts instead of trees and its unbearable heat at noon, when only some half-dazed peasant woman carrying bundles of smoked fish on a yoke would wander along the greyish-white shadeless street, peering into the dust-covered windows and crying out: "Fish, smoked fish!"—and only some equally half-dazed, snarling dog would go up to her and smell the fish—and a barrel-organ would wheeze out a tedious tune somewhere in the distance.

Telegin was to blame for the fact that now Dasha was particularly sensitive to the commonplace, almost tomb-like quiet around her, a calm that seemed final, as if it would never be broken again, not even if she rushed out into the street and screamed wildly: "I want to live, to live!"

Telegin was to blame for being so much too modest and shy; after all, Dasha could not very well say: "Can't you see that I am in love with you?" He was to blame for not letting her hear from him, for vanishing as if the earth had swallowed him up, and perhaps even forgetting her altogether.

In addition to all these depressing things, one black night, hot as the inside of an oven, Dasha had a dream, just like *the one* in Petersburg when she woke up in tears; and again, as on that occasion, the dream vanished from her mind like the steam from a misty glass. But it seemed to her that this tormenting and terrible dream presaged some kind of misfortune. Dr. Bulavin suggested a tonic. Then a second letter arrived from Katia. It ran:

My dear Danyusha,—I am very homesick for you, for my friends and for Russia. I think more and more that I am to blame for the break with Nikolai. I wake up and live through each day with a feeling of guilt and a kind of mental torpor. Also—I don't remember whether I wrote you about it—there is a man here who has been persecuting me for some time now. Whenever I go out I meet him; if I step into the lift in some department store, he jumps into it half-way up. Yesterday I was in the Louvre; I was tired and sat down, and suddenly I felt as if a hand had touched my back—I turned, and there he was not far away. He is thin and dark, with a strong sprinkling of grey in his hair, and a beard that looks as if it were glued to his cheeks. He rested his hand on his stick and looked at me sternly with his deep-set eyes. He never speaks to me or worries me, but I'm afraid of him. I feel as though he were drawing some kind of circle round me . . .

Dasha showed the letter to her father.

Next day, after reading the paper, Dr. Bulavin said casually:

"My puss, go to the Crimea."

"What for?"

"Find this fellow Nikolai Ivanovich and tell him he's a blockhead. Why

doesn't he go to Paris, to his wife? Though . . . he can please himself, of course. . . . After all, it's their personal affair, not mine . . ."

Dr. Bulavin was angry and perturbed, although he greatly disliked showing his feelings. Dasha suddenly felt glad; she thought of the Crimea as a wonderful blue expanse, full of the murmur of the sea. A long shadow from a tall poplar, a stone bench, a scarf fluttering round her head, and someone's restless eyes following her about . . .

She got her things together quickly and left for Eupatoria, the seaside resort where Nikolai Ivanovich was staying.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE CRIMEA that year there was an exceptionally large influx of visitors from the north. The beach was full of sharp-tongued Petersburgers, with peeling noses and catarrh and bronchitis; noisy, touzled Muscovites with drawling sing-song speech; black-eyed citizens of Kiev, who mixed up their 'a's' and 'o's', and rich Siberians who despised all this Russian turmoil; young women and long-legged youths, priests, officials, respectable family people, who lived, as everyone else in Russia then did, lackadaisically and spinelessly; they were all concerned with roasting themselves in the sun and getting brown.

By the middle of the summer, what with the salt water, the heat and sunburn, all these people lost their sense of modesty, town clothes began to be regarded as vulgar and the sandy beach was full of women scantily covered with Turkish towels, and men like the figures on Etruscan vases.

In these unaccustomed surroundings—blue waves, hot sand and naked bodies swarming everywhere—the very foundations of the family were shaken. Here everything seemed easy and possible. And whatever reckoning might come later, in the north, in their tedious flats, when rain would be falling outside and the telephone would be ringing in the hall, and everyone depended for something on someone else—here it wasn't worth while to bother about the reckoning. The sea came up the beach with a soft rustle and touched their feet and its caress felt light and sweet and warm on their bodies stretched out on the sand with hands thrown back and eyelids closed. Everything, everything—even the most dangerous things—seemed as light and sweet as the touch of the sea.

This irresponsibility and waywardness of the visitors exceeded all bounds that year, as if some gigantic protuberance emerging one June morning from the white-hot sun had deprived all these hundreds of thousands of town dwellers of their memory and common sense. There was not a single blameless bungalow along the whole length of the beach. Stable relationships were unexpectedly shattered. The very air seemed laden with amorous whispers, low laughter and the indescribable nonsense people talked in that scorched land studded with the ruins of ancient towns and the bones of extinct peoples. It was as if some universal retribution and bitter tears were lying in wait for them all with the autumn rains.

Dasha arrived at Eupatoria in the early afternoon. Shortly before she reached the town along the dusty white ribbon of road which ran through

the flat plain past salt marshes and straw ricks, she saw outlined against the sun and moving slowly across the steppe among the wormwood, a large wooden ship shrouded from top to bottom in black sails set fore and aft. It was so surprising that Dasha uttered an exclamation. An Armenian sitting next to her in the car said with a smile: "You'll see the sea in a minute."

The car rounded the square reservoirs of a salt refinery and mounted a sandy hillock from which they could see the sea. It was dark blue, covered with long white streaks of foam; and seemed to be higher up than the land over which they had come. A brisk wind whistled past their ears. Dasha pressed her knees firmly against her leather suitcase and thought to herself: *There it is. Now it's going to begin.*

At that precise moment Nikolai Ivanovich Smokovnikov was sitting drinking coffee with the argumentative lover in a pavilion built out over the sea. The summer visitors usually came down to this place after their siesta and sat at little tables, shouting to each other and talking about the benefit derived from iodine treatment, about sea-bathing and about women.

It was cool in the pavilion. The wind blew and tore at tablecloths and scarves. A yacht with a single sail went by, and the people on board shouted something cheerful. A crowd of Muscovites, all of them world celebrities, occupied a large table. The argumentative lover frowned when he saw them, and went on describing the theme of a play which he was thinking of writing.

"I have thought out the whole subject thoroughly, but have actually written only the first act," he said, looking thoughtfully and earnestly at Smokovnikov. "You have a clear brain, Kolya, you can understand what I'm driving at: a beautiful young woman becomes unhappy and restless among the banalities that surround her. The people are good, but life sucks them down like a bog in stale emotions and drunkenness. . . . Well, you know the sort of thing I mean. . . . And suddenly she says: 'I must go away and break with this life, I must go somewhere, to the light. . . .' And then—there's her husband and her man friend. . . . Both suffer. . . . Kolya, you understand me—life has sucked them down. . . . She goes away, I don't say to whom—she has no lover, it's all just her moods. . . . And so the two men sit silently in a tavern; they are drinking and swallowing their tears with their brandy. . . . And the wind howling in the chimney sounds like a dirge. . . . Sorrow . . . solitude . . . darkness . . ."

"You want to know what I think of it?" Smokovnikov asked.

"Yes. You only have to say: 'Misha, give up writing, give it up,' and I'll give it up."

"Your play is admirable. It is life itself." Smokovnikov closed his eyes and wagged his head. "Yes, Misha, we didn't appreciate our good fortune—and now it is gone, and we are sitting here without hope and purpose—sitting and drinking. And the wind howls over this cemetery of ours. . . . Your play, Misha, has stirred me to the depths."

The great bags under the argumentative lover's eyes quivered; he leant over and kissed Smokovnikov, and then poured out another glass for each of them. They drank each other's healths, put their elbows on the table, and went on with their soulful conversation.

"Kolya," the actor said, looking gloomily at his companion, "do you know that I loved your wife as I love God?"

"Yes, I thought so."

"I was in torment, Kolya, but you were my friend. . . . Many is the time I fled from your house, swearing I would never darken your doors again. . . .

But I came again—and played the clown. . . . But, Nikolai, you must not blame her——". He clenched his teeth.

"Misha, she has treated me cruelly."

"Possibly. But we have all sinned against her. Ah, Kolya, there's one thing I can't understand about you. How could you, living as you did with such a woman—forgive me—carry on at the same time with that widow, Sofia Ivanovna. What on earth for?"

"That is a complicated question."

"Nonsense. I've met her—she's just a common or garden hen."

"It was like this, Misha, although it's a thing of the past now, of course. Sofia Ivanovna was just a warm-hearted creature. She gave me some moments of pleasure and never asked for anything in return. And at home everything was so complicated and difficult and over-profound. . . . I hadn't got enough strength of mind to cope with Yekaterina Dmitrievna . . ."

"But, Kolya, can it be that when we get back to Petersburg, and Tuesday comes round, and I come to see you after the show, that she will not be there? How can I live if that is so? Listen. Where is your wife now?"

"In Paris."

"Do you write to each other?"

"No."

"Go to Paris. Let us both go!"

"It would be no use . . ."

"Kolya, let's drink to her health."

"Yes, let's."

At this moment Charodeyeva, the actress, in a green transparent dress and a large hat, appeared in the pavilion and threaded her way in and out between the tables. She was as thin as a snake and there were blue shadows under her eyes; her backbone seemed too weak to hold her up, she swayed and wriggled so. The editor of the literary journal *Choir of the Muses* got up to greet her, took her hand and nonchalantly kissed the hollow of her elbow.

"An amazing woman!" Smokovnikov muttered through his teeth.

"No, Kolya, oh, no! Charodeyeva is only a bit of carrion. After all, what is she? . . . She lived three months with Bessonov, and caterwauls degenerate poetry at matinée concerts. . . . Just look at her! Her mouth reaches to her ears, and that scraggy neck! She's not a woman, she's a hyena . . ."

Nevertheless, when Charodeyeva, nodding right and left and smiling with her wide carmined mouth, came up to their table, the actor slowly rose to his feet as if overcome, clapped his hands and clasped them under his chin.

"My dear . . . Ninochka. . . . What a marvellous get-up! No, no, please spare me! I've been ordered complete rest, my dear!"

Charodeyeva patted his cheek with her bony hand, wrinkled her nose, and said:

"And what have you been saying about me last night in the restaurant, eh?"

"I said things about you yesterday in the restaurant? Ninochka, how can you believe it?"

"And what things!"

"On my honour, someone has been telling lies about me."

Charodeyeva laughed and put her little finger to his lips:

"You know I can't be angry with you for long." And then, in a different tone, belonging to some imaginary society play, she turned to Smokovnikov: "I just went past your door: apparently some relation of yours has arrived—a most charming girl."

Smokovnikov glanced at his friend, picked up the end of his cigar from the saucer and began to pull so hard at it that his whole beard seemed to emit smoke.

"This is quite unexpected," he said. "What can it mean? . . . I must go and see." He threw the cigar into the sea, pushed his hat on to the back of his head, and started down the steps leading to the beach, swinging his silver-knobbed cane. When he reached the hotel he was quite out of breath.

"Dasha, why are you here? Has anything happened?" he asked, closing the door behind him. Dasha was sitting on the floor near her open trunk and darning a pair of stockings. When her brother-in-law came in, she got up slowly, offered him her cheek to kiss, and said absent-mindedly:

"Very glad to see you. Papa and I have decided that you ought to go to Paris. I have brought two letters from Katia. Here they are. Read them, please."

Nikolai Ivanovich snatched the letters from her and sat down at the window. Dasha went into the bathroom. While she was dressing, she heard her brother-in-law rustling the pages and heaving loud sighs. Then he grew quiet. Dasha pricked up her ears.

"Have you had lunch?" he asked suddenly. "If you are hungry, let us go to the Pavilion."

Dasha thought: *So he doesn't love her at all any more.* She pulled her hat down with both hands, and decided to defer any discussion of the Paris plan until the following day.

On the way to the Pavilion Nikolai Ivanovich was silent and kept his eyes on the ground, but when Dasha asked him whether he bathed he raised his head cheerfully and told her about the 'Society for the Struggle against Bathing Costumes' which they had formed, mainly for health reasons, of course.

"Just imagine—in a month's bathing on this beach the body absorbs more iodine than could be artificially introduced into it during the same period. In addition, you absorb the sun's rays and warmth from the hot sand. We men wear only trunks and that's not so bad, but women cover up almost two-thirds of their body. We have started a campaign against this practice . . . I shall be giving a lecture on the subject next Sunday."

They walked along the bright yellow sand; it was the dust of shells ground fine by the breakers, and as soft as velvet. Not far out, where little waves ran up on to a sandbank and broke in seething foam, two girls in red bathing-caps were bobbing about like corks.

"Some of our disciples," Nikolai Ivanovich said in a matter-of-fact tone. But Dasha was getting more and more excited and restless. It had started from the moment when she saw the black ship in the steppe.

She stopped to watch the water run up the sand in a thin line of froth and then recede, leaving little rivulets behind it; this contact of the sea with the land seemed so joyful and eternal that Dasha sat down and dipped her hands into the water. A tiny flat crab started away sideways in alarm, threw up a little puff of sand and disappeared into a hole. A wave washed over Dasha's arms, wetting them above the elbows.

"You've changed somehow," Nikolai Ivanovich said, screwing up his eyes. "Either you have grown even prettier, or you've lost weight, or else it's time you got married."

Dasha turned, glanced at him strangely, scrambled to her feet and without bothering to dry her hands walked away towards the pavilion, from which the actor was signalling with his straw hat. They gave Dasha fish and sour milk,

and washed it down with champagne; the actor fussed over her and now and then fell into a sort of trance, whispering as if to himself: "My God! How lovely!" He brought some young men over and introduced them—they were students at the College of Dramatic Art, and they spoke in half-smothered voices, as if in the confessional. Nikolai Ivanovich was flattered by this success of 'his Dashurka'.

Dasha drank wine, laughed, and put out her hand for somebody to kiss, but all the time she never took her eyes off the gleaming, deep blue, restless sea. *That is where happiness is*, she thought.

After a bathe and a stroll they went to the hotel for supper. The dining-room was full of noise, brilliant lights and well-dressed people. The actor talked a great deal and very heatedly about love. Nikolai Ivanovich watched Dasha, drank rather too much and fell into a melancholy mood. But Dasha still continued to gaze through the slits in the curtains at the limpid flashes of light on the water that seemed quite close and kept appearing, slipping past and vanishing again.

At last she got up from the table and went down to the beach. A clear, round moon hung low in the starless silver sky above a scaly glittering path of light which ran right across the sea from edge to edge of the horizon. Dasha clasped her hands and squeezed her fingers tightly against each other until the joints cracked.

She heard Nikolai Ivanovich's voice approaching and moved hurriedly farther along the edge of the water, which was dreamily kissing the beach. She saw a woman sitting on the sand, and a man lying with his head on her knees. A human head was floating among the shifting spots of light on the dark purple water, and two eyes, gleaming in the moonlight, looked at Dasha and followed her for a long time. Presently she saw a couple standing in a close embrace; as she passed them, Dasha heard a sigh and the sound of a kiss.

In the distance someone was shouting: "Dasha, Dasha!" but she did not answer. She sat down on the sand with her knees drawn up, put her elbows on her knees and rested her chin on her hands. If at that moment Telegin had come and sat down by her, and put his arm round her and asked in his quiet, stern voice: "Are you mine?"—she would have answered: "Yes."

Near her a man was lying face downwards beyond a little mound of sand. He stirred, sat up, lowered his head and looked for a long time at the path in the sea, where the moonlight was playing as if to amuse a child; then he rose to his feet and slouched listlessly past Dasha. She saw that it was Bessonov, and her heart began to beat wildly.

This was how those last days of the old world began for Dasha. There were only a few of them left, and they were joyous and carefree and full of the heat of the dying summer. And the people, accustomed to believe that the following day would be just as clear as the bluish outline of the distant hills—even shrewd and perspicacious people—could neither see nor foresee anything that lay beyond this moment of their life. Beyond this colourful moment, full of pleasant fragrance and the pulsing of all the saps of life, lay impenetrable darkness. . . . Neither sight, nor touch, nor imagination could pierce that veil; perhaps only some vague instinct, such as animals feel before a thunder-storm, enabled a few to sense what was approaching and react to it with a feeling of vague uneasiness.

Meanwhile, an invisible cloud was descending on the earth, madly whirling into innumerable shapes, some triumphant and violent, others exhausted and

dissolving. But the only sign of it was a strip of shadow in the sunlight, crossing out, from south-east to north-west, all the old gay and sinful life on earth.

CHAPTER XIII

BESSONOV SPENT DAY after day sprawling on the beach. He looked at the faces of laughing women tanned by the blazing sun, and at coppery-red, excited men, and his heart felt like a lump of ice in his breast. He looked at the sea, and thought that the waves had been noisily beating against that beach for thousands of years. At one time this beach had been desolate—and now it was filled with people; they would die and again the beach would be desolate, but the sea would still go on running up over the sand. Thinking such thoughts, Bessonov would frown and pile little shells into a heap, and push the butt of his dead cigarette into it. Then he would go and bathe, afterwards dine lazily and go to bed.

But one evening a young woman had come and sat down on the sand not far from him and had looked at the moonlight for a long time. She had spread a faint scent of violets round her. A memory stirred in his numbed brain. Bessonov turned over; he thought: *No, I won't swallow that bait, damn it*, got up, and strolled back to his hotel.

Dasha was frightened by this encounter.

She had thought that her Petersburg life, with its stormy nights, had gone for ever, and that Bessonov, who in some incomprehensible way had captured her imagination, was now forgotten.

But at the first sight of him, from the moment when his black silhouette had moved across the moon, it had all come back to her with a new force, no longer in the form of vague, confused emotions; now it was a well-defined desire, hot as the noonday heat; she craved to feel this man. Not to love him, not to torment herself about him, not to hesitate—only to feel the touch of him.

As she sat on the white bedstead in her white room flooded with moonlight, she kept repeating in a weak voice:

"Ah, my God! Ah, my God! What is this? . . ."

At seven in the morning Dasha went down to the beach, undressed, walked into the water up to her knees and looked about her. The sea had lost its bright colour; it was a pale blue now, and only here and there in the distance did a few lustreless ripples show. The water rose lazily above her knees, and then dropped beneath them. Dasha spread her hands out, plunged into that celestial freshness, and began to swim. Then, refreshed and covered with salt, she wrapped herself in her shaggy bath robe and lay down on the sand, which was already warm.

I love only Ivan Ilyich, she thought, putting her cheek on her elbow, and noticing how fresh it smelt. *I love, I love Ivan Ilyich. Everything about him is clean, fresh and pleasant. Thank God that I love Ivan Ilyich. I shall marry him.*

She closed her eyes and went to sleep, lulled by the waves rippling up one after the other, as if in harmony with her breathing.

That sleep was sweet. All through it she felt her body lying warm and light on the sand. And in her sleep she loved herself very much.

At sunset, when the sun had sunk like a flattened ball into a cloudless orange glow, Dasha ran into Bessonov sitting on a stone by a path winding through a field of wormwood. She had gone for a stroll and wandered here; and now, when she saw Bessonov, she stopped and wanted to turn back, to run away. But her lightness of the morning had vanished; again her legs seemed to grow heavy and take root. With a frown she saw him come towards her, seeming hardly surprised at meeting her there, take off his straw hat and greet her with a monkishly humble bow.

"So I was not mistaken yesterday, Daria Dmitrievna—it was you on the beach?"

"Yes, it was I . . ."

He paused and lowered his eyes, and then looked past Dasha towards the distant steppe.

"At sunset you feel as if you were in a desert in this field. It's seldom that anyone finds his way here. All round you you see only wormwood and stones and in the twilight you can imagine that there's no one left on earth."

Bessonov laughed, and his white teeth opened slowly. Dasha gave him a look like a wild bird in a snare. Then she walked with him along the path among the tall, bitter-smelling wormwood bushes that cast vague, pale shadows on the dry ground in the light of the rising moon. Over their heads, clearly visible against the sunset, two bats were flitting to and fro in jerky, wavering flight.

"Temptations, temptations—you can never get away from them," Bessonov said. "They lure you, they lead you on and again you fall into the trap. Look how cunningly devised it is"—he pointed with his stick at the globe of the moon hanging low in the sky—"all night it will weave its web: this path will pretend to be a brook, and every bush to be inhabited; even a corpse will seem beautiful, and a woman's face full of mystery. Perhaps it is right that it should be so: perhaps all wisdom lies in this deceit. . . . How fortunate you are, Daria Dmitrievna, how fortunate you are . . ."

"But why is it deceit? I don't see any deceit about it all. It's simply the moon shining," Dasha said obstinately.

"Yes, of course, Daria Dmitrievna, of course. 'Be ye like little children.' The deceit lies in the fact that I don't believe any of it. But there is also: 'Be ye as the serpent!' How are we to reconcile the two? What is required for this? They say that love does it. What do you think?"

"I don't know. I don't think anything."

"From what distant expanse does it come? How can it be summoned? By what spell can it be conjured? Grovel in the dust perhaps and cry: 'Oh Lord, send me love!' . . ." He gave a low laugh, showing his teeth.

"I won't go any farther," Dasha said. "I want to go back to the sea."

She turned, and now they walked through the wormwood bushes to the sandy dunes. Suddenly Bessonov said softly and diffidently:

"I remember everything you said to me then, in Petersburg—to the last word. I frightened you." Dasha looked straight in front of her and quickened her pace. "I was shaken then by one sensation. . . . Not your peculiar beauty—that wasn't it. . . . It was the indescribable music of your voice that pierced me through and through and overwhelmed me. I looked at you then and thought: Here is my salvation: to give you my heart, to become poor and humble, to melt into your radiance. . . . And perhaps to win your heart. To become infinitely rich. . . . Think of it, Daria Dmitrievna—you have come, and now I must solve the riddle."

Dasha ran up a sand dune, leaving him behind. A broad beam of moonlight, iridescent in the vast mass of water, broke into a long bright streak at the edge of the sea, and there, above this gleam, Dasha saw a dark radiance. Her heart was beating so fast that she had to close her eyes.

"O Lord, save me from him," she thought. Bessonov drove his stick into the sand several times.

"But now a decision must be made, Daria Dmitrievna. Someone must be consumed by this fire. . . . Is it to be you? . . . Or I? . . . Think it over, and give me your answer."

"I don't understand," Dasha said abruptly.

"Only when you have become poor, desolate, scorched—only then will real life begin for you, Daria Dmitrievna, life without this moonlight, without all this cheap glamour. But instead you will have wisdom. And all you need do to achieve this is to untie your virginal girdle . . ."

Bessonov took Dasha's hand in his icy hand and looked into her eyes. Dasha said nothing, only slowly drew her brows together in a frown. After a few long moments of silence he said:

"Well, we had better go home—to bed. We have talked, we have discussed the matter from every angle—and it's getting late . . ."

He saw Dasha to her hotel, said good night to her politely, and then, pushing his hat back on his head, he walked along the beach, looking at the indistinct figures that were strolling about. Suddenly he paused, turned and went up to a tall woman who was standing there, perfectly still, muffled in a white shawl. Bessonov swung his stick across his shoulders, grasped it by both ends, and said:

"Good evening, Nina."

"Good evening."

"What are you doing here alone on the beach?"

"Just standing here."

"Why alone?"

"I am alone because I am alone," Charodeyeva answered in a low but angry tone.

"Are you really still angry with me?"

"No, darling; I calmed down long ago."

"Nina, let us go to my room."

She tossed her head at that but was silent for a long time, and then answered in a trembling, uncertain voice:

"Are you crazy?"

"Of course. Didn't you know?"

He tried to take her arm, but she pulled it away sharply, and walked slowly by his side along the reflected rays of the moon, which glided over the oily black water as they moved.

Next morning early, Nikolai Ivanovich came to Dasha's door and knocked gently.

"Danyusha, get up, my dear, let us go and have coffee."

Dasha got out of bed and looked at her stockings and shoes—they were covered with grey dust. Something had happened. Or had she again been dreaming that loathsome dream? No, it was much worse—it was not a dream. Dasha threw on her clothes anyhow and ran down to bathe. But the water made her tired and the sun scorched her. She sat in her bath robe, clasping her bare knees, and thought that nothing good could happen in this place.

"*I have no brains, and no guts. Just an idle loafer. Too much imagination.*

Don't know my own mind. One thing in the morning, something else at night. The very type I detest most."

She bent her head and looked at the sea—she was so confused and so sorry for herself that tears welled up in her eyes.

"*One might think it was some great treasure I was guarding. Who wants it? No one in the world. And I myself don't really care for anybody. That being so, perhaps Bessonov is right: better burn everything, get scorched and sober up at last. He asked me to go to him. Why not go this very evening and. . . . Oh, no!*"

Dasha suddenly felt so hot that she bent down to rest her face on her cool knees. It was clear to her that she could not go on living this double life. Either she would have to be rid of a virginity that was no longer tolerable—or else some misfortune would happen.

Sick at heart, she sat there and reflected: "*Suppose I were to leave this place and go back to my father. To the dust and the flies. Wait till autumn. Go on with my studies. Work twelve hours a day. Wither and grow ugly. Get to know international law inside out. Wear sensible clothes and be 'Bulavina, the eminent lady jurist'? All very respectable, of course.*"

Dasha brushed off the sand clinging to her skin and went into the house. Nikolai Ivanovich was reclining on the terrace, wearing silk pyjamas, and reading a novel by Anatole France which had been banned by the censorship. Dasha sat down on the arm of his rocking-chair, swung her feet to and fro and said in a pensive tone:

"We wanted to have a talk about Katia, didn't we?"

"Yes, of course."

"You know, Nikolai, a woman's life is always very difficult. At nineteen one just doesn't know what to do with oneself."

"At your age, Danyusha, you must go full steam ahead, without too much philosophy. If you think too much you get left. By the way, now that I come to look at you—do you know that you are awfully pretty?"

"There you go! It's no use talking to you, Nikolai. Trust you never to say the right thing, and to drop bricks all over the place. That's why Katia left you."

Nikolai Ivanovich laughed, laid the Anatole France novel down on his stomach, and put his plump hands behind his head.

"When the rains begin, the little bird will come flying home of its own accord. And do you remember how she preened her feathers? . . . In spite of everything, I am very fond of Katyusha. After all, we're only quits."

"Ah, so that's what you say now! If I had been in Katia's place, I should have treated you just as she did. . . ." She moved away angrily towards the balcony railing.

"When you are older you will realize that it is harmful and silly to take life's adversities too seriously," Nikolai Ivanovich said. "It's in the Bulavin blood—to complicate everything. It is better to be simpler and closer to Nature."

He sighed and looked silently at his finger-nails. A sweating schoolboy rode past the terrace on a bicycle with the mail from town.

"I shall take a job as village schoolmistress," Dasha said gloomily.

Nikolai Ivanovich immediately wanted to know: "Where?"

But Dasha did not answer, and went up to her room. There were two letters for her there; one from Katia and the other from her father.

Dr. Bulavin wrote:

I send you a letter from Katyusha. I read it, and I didn't like it. But you can please yourselves, of course. . . . I can give you no news about us here. It's still very hot. The only news is that some hooligans beat up Semyon Semyonovich Govyadin in the municipal park yesterday, but he won't say why. Oh, yes, there was also a picture postcard for you from a certain Telegin, but I have mislaid it. Apparently he, too, is in the Crimea, if I am not mistaken.

Dasha carefully re-read these last few lines, and all at once her heart began to beat fast. Then she stamped her foot with annoyance: "There's a piece of good news! In the Crimea . . . if I am not mistaken. . . ." Her father was really a dreadful creature, a slovenly egoist. She crumpled up the letter and sat for a long time at the writing table cupping her chin in her hands. Then she began to read Katia's letter.

You will remember, Danyusha, that I wrote to you about a man who followed me about. Yesterday evening in the Luxembourg Gardens he came and sat down beside me. At first I was frightened, but I remained sitting. Then he said to me: "I have followed you about, I know your name and who you are. A great misfortune has happened to me—I have fallen in love with you." I looked at him. He was sitting there, quite grave, his face stern and dark and tense. "You need not be afraid of me—I am an old man and a lonely one. I have angina pectoris, and may die at any moment. And now—this misfortune." A tear ran down his cheek. Then he shook his head and said: "Oh, how sweet your face is, how sweet." I said: "Don't follow me about any more." I wanted to go away, but I was so sorry for him that I stayed and talked to him. He closed his eyes and listened, nodding his head. And just imagine, Danyusha—to-day a letter came from some woman, the concierge, it seems, of the house where he lived. . . . She informed me, 'on his behalf', that he had died during the night. . . . Oh, it was terrible . . . I have just looked out of the window: there are thousands and thousands of lights in the streets, carriages moving this way and that, and people walking among the trees. It has been raining and there is a mist. And everything seems already past and gone, as though all these people were already dead, as though what I was seeing now was already over and done with and as though I could not see what was going on now while I am standing here looking but knew somehow that everything was at an end. I must be in a very bad way. Sometimes I lie down and cry with regret because my life is over. There used to be some happiness, such as it was, some people one loved—and now it is all gone without a trace. . . . My heart is all dry and withered inside me. I know, Dasha, that there is some great sorrow yet to come, and that it will be the penalty for having lived so badly as we all have. . . .

Dasha showed this letter to Nikolai Ivanovich. He sighed as he read it, and then said that he had always had a bad conscience in relation to Katia.

"I saw that our life was all wrong; that this incessant pleasure-seeking would end some day in an explosion of despair. But what could I do about it, when the object of all our lives—mine, Katia's, and of all the people round us—was merely to enjoy ourselves? Sometimes I sit here looking at the sea and think: there is a Russia that tills the soil and herds the cattle, and hews the coal; that weaves and forges and builds; there are also the people who compel Russia to do all this; but we, the intelligentsia, the intellectual aristocracy of the country, have nothing whatever to do with this Russia, except that it keeps us. We are butterflies. It is a tragedy. If I were to try, for example, to grow vegetables,

or do some other useful thing, nothing would come of it. I am doomed to be a fluttering butterfly to the end of my days. Of course we write books and make speeches and dabble in politics, but all these also belong to the sphere of pastimes, even when our consciences prick us. With Katyusha these uninterrupted pleasures have ended in a sort of mental devastation. It was inevitable. . . . Ah, if you knew what a lovely, sweet, gentle creature she was! I corrupted her, turned her into an empty shell. . . . Yes, you are right. . . . We must go to her . . ."

It was decided that they should both go to Paris—at once, as soon as their passports came through. After dinner Nikolai Ivanovich went into the town, and Dasha set about re-making her hat for the journey—but all she achieved was to spoil it, so she gave it to the maid. Then she wrote a letter to her father, and after that she suddenly felt so tired that she lay down on her bed in the twilight, rested her cheek on her hand and let the slowly receding, pleasant murmur of the sea sing her to sleep.

Then all at once it seemed as though someone was bending over her, smoothing back a lock of hair from her face and kissing her eyes, her cheeks and the corners of her mouth—gently, like a breath. The sweetness of these caresses flooded her whole body. Dasha slowly woke. A few stars showed through the open window, and a little breeze blew in and rustled the pages of the letter. Then a human form appeared as if out of the wall. It leant over the window-sill from outside and stared at Dasha.

Dasha was quite awake now. She sat up and raised a hand to her breast, where her dress was unbuttoned.

"What do you want?" she asked, hardly audibly. The man at the window answered in Bessonov's voice:

"I have been waiting for you on the beach. Why didn't you come? Are you afraid?"

Dasha replied, after a pause: "Yes."

Bessonov stepped over the window-sill, pushed the table aside and came up to the bed.

"I have had a very bad night—I felt like hanging myself. Have you any feeling for me at all?"

Dasha shook her head, without opening her lips.

"Listen, Daria Dmitrievna, this thing must happen some time, if not to-day, then to-morrow, or next year. I can't live without you. Don't make me forget all human decency." He spoke in a low, hoarse voice, and moved quite close to Dasha. Never taking her eyes off his face, she heaved a deep, short sigh and kept her eyes fixed on his face.

"All I said yesterday was a pack of lies. . . . I am in torment. . . . I cannot get you out of my mind. . . . I am asking you to be my wife. . ."

He bent over Dasha, breathed in her fragrance deeply, put his hand round her neck and pressed his lips to hers. Dasha tried to push him away, but her arms would not obey her will. Then a calm thought flitted through her numbed consciousness: "This is *it*—this is what I feared and what I longed for—but it is just like a murder. . . ." She turned her face away from Bessonov, and heard him muttering something into her ear. His breath was tainted with wine. And Dasha thought: "This is exactly how it was between him and Katia." And already a clear, sobering chill tensed her whole body. The reek of wine seemed sharper and Bessonov's muttering more repulsive.

"Let me go," she said. She pushed Bessonov away with all her strength and moved away from him towards the door, fastening up the neck of her dress.

Bessonov lost all control of himself. He gripped Dasha's hand, jerked her to him and began to kiss her throat. She pressed her lips together and struggled without a sound. But when he lifted her off her feet and carried her towards the bed, Dasha said in a quick whisper:

"Never, never, not even to save your life . . ."

She pushed him away violently, tore herself free and leant against the wall. Still breathing hard, he sank on to a chair and sat motionless. Dasha rubbed the places on her arms where he had left the marks of his fingers.

"It was a mistake to be in too much of a hurry," Bessonov said.

Dasha said: "You are nauseating."

At these words Bessonov threw back his head so that it rested on the back of the chair, and turned it from one side to the other like a man in violent pain.

"You are mad," Dasha said. "Go away . . ."

She repeated this several times. At last he understood, got up from the chair and climbed clumsily out of the window. Dasha closed the shutters and began to pace up and down in the dark room. That night she could not sleep.

In the early morning Nikolai Ivanovich shuffled along to her door on his bare feet and asked sleepily:

"Have you got toothache, Dasha?"

"No."

"Then what was that noise in the night?"

"I don't know."

He went away muttering: "Amazing business."

Dasha could neither sit nor lie down; she only walked, walked, walked from window to door, and back again in the attempt to tire out the loathing she felt for herself, a feeling as sharp as toothache. Perhaps, she thought, it would have been better if Bessonov had had his way with her. And with fierce pain she recalled the white steamer flooded with sunshine; she thought of the deserted lover in the aspen grove cooing and mumbling, running on and on, telling lies, asserting that Dasha was in love.

And how had it all ended? Dasha glanced at the bed gleaming white in the semi-darkness—that horrible spot where a little while ago a human face had been transformed into the mask of a beast—and she felt that it was impossible to live on with this image in her thoughts. No agony would be too high a price to pay if only she could get rid of this queasiness. Her forehead was burning. She felt as if her face, her neck, her whole body were swathed in cobwebs and she longed to brush them off.

At last the light filtering through the shutters showed quite bright. Doors began to slam in the hotel, and a clear feminine voice called out: "Matryosha, bring some water!" Nikolai Ivanovich woke up, and Dasha heard him brushing his teeth on the other side of the wall. She washed her face, put on a hat, pulling it down over her eyes, and walked out to the beach. The sea was like milk; the sand was moist, and there was a smell of seaweed in the air. Dasha turned off towards the fields and strolled along the road, on which a dog-cart was coming towards her, raising a cloud of dust. It was driven by a Tartar and carried a passenger, a broad-shouldered man, dressed all in white. Dasha glanced at them, and thought sleepily (she could hardly keep her eyes open, what with the sun and her weariness): "*There goes another good, happy man, and what of it if he is good and happy!*" And she stepped off the road. Suddenly she heard a startled voice from the dog-cart:

"Daria Dmitrievna!"

Someone jumped out and ran towards her.

At the sound of that voice Dasha's heart leapt in her breast, and her knees turned to water. She turned round and saw Telegin running towards her. He was sunburnt and excited, blue-eyed and somehow so surprisingly near and dear that Dasha impulsively put her hands on his chest, pressed her face against it and began to cry—loudly, like a child.

Telegin held her firmly by the shoulders. When Dasha, in a broken voice, tried to explain, he said:

"Please, Daria Dmitrievna, please, later on. It doesn't matter at all . . ."

The breast of his linen jacket was wet with Dasha's tears. And she began to feel better.

"You were coming to see us?" she asked.

"Yes, I have come to say good-bye, Daria Dmitrievna. I only found out yesterday that you were here, and so . . . I wanted to say good-bye."

"To say good-bye?"

"I've been called up—there's nothing for it."

"Called up?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"No."

"There's a war on. That's what it is."

Dasha looked at him, blinked, and even then did not understand.

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE OFFICES of the great Liberal paper *Voice of the People* a special editorial conference was in progress in the Editor's room.

A decree issued the previous day having prohibited the sale of all alcoholic beverages, brandy and rum in more than the usual quantities were brought in with the editorial glasses of tea.

Big, bearded Liberals sat and smoked in deep armchairs, feeling rather bewildered. The younger members of the editorial staff perched on the window-sills or sat on the famous leather settee which was the stronghold of the opposition—and which a prominent author had indiscreetly alleged was infested with bed-bugs.

The Editor—a grey-headed, red-faced man, who looked like an Englishman—delivered with his precise elocution one of his famous speeches which were intended to set the tone—and in fact did set the tone—of the whole Liberal press.

"The complexity of our task lies in the circumstance that, while not yielding an inch in our opposition to the Imperial government, we must in face of the danger threatening the Russian Empire as a whole, join hands with that same government. Our gesture must be sincere and frank. The question of the blame attaching to the government for plunging Russia into this war is at the present moment a question of secondary importance. First we must win the war, and then judge the guilty. Gentlemen, at this very moment, while we are talking here, a bloody battle is in progress near Krasnostav, where the Guards have been thrown in to seal up a break-through in our front. The issue of the battle is as yet unknown, but we must bear in mind that Kiev is threatened. There

is no doubt that the war cannot last more than three or four months, and, whatever its outcome, we shall be able to say with pride to the Imperial government: in the hours of trial we were with you and now we call you to account . . ."

One of the oldest members of the editorial staff Belosvyetov found this too much for him and shouted beside himself:

"The government of the Tsar is waging a war—what has that to do with us? For the life of me I can't see why we should join hands with it. Simple logic demands that we should keep out of this adventure—and with us all the intelligentsia. If the Emperors want to break each other's necks—so much the better for us."

"I quite agree. Really, gentlemen . . . to join hands with Nicholas II is a bit stiff, you know," mumbled 'Alpha', the leader-writer, as he took a piece of cake from the plate.

Then several voices spoke together:

"There are not, and there cannot be, any conditions under which we could compromise with . . ."

"What is this? Capitulation? I ask you!"

"An infamous end to the whole progressive movement!"

"As for me, gentlemen, I should be glad if someone would explain to me what is the aim of this war."

"You will find that out when the Germans wring your neck for you!"

"Apparently you have turned nationalist, my dear sir?"

"No, I just don't fancy being beaten."

"But it is Nicholas II who will get beaten, not you."

"Indeed? And what about Poland? Volhynia? Kiev?"

"The more we are beaten, the sooner the revolution will come."

"But I don't want to give up Kiev for the sake of any silly revolution."

"Pyotr Petrovich, my dear sir, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Having with some difficulty restored order, the Editor explained that a state of emergency had been proclaimed, that the military censorship would close down the paper at the slightest criticism of the government, and the rudimentary freedom of the Press, won at the cost of so much effort, would be lost again.

"For this reason I suggest that the present meeting should devise a mutually acceptable platform. For my own part, I venture to express what may be a paradoxical view: that we must accept this war as a whole, with all that it entails. Don't forget that the war is exceedingly popular with the public. In Moscow it was proclaimed the second patriotic war"—he smiled subtly, and lowered his eyes. "His Majesty was given an almost warm reception in Moscow. Among the common people mobilization is proceeding better than anyone could have expected, or dared to expect . . ."

"Vasili Vasilyevich, are you joking?" Belosvyetov cried, almost in tears. "Why, you are giving up our whole philosophy! You suggest that we should help the government? But what about the tens of thousands of Russia's best sons rotting in Siberia? What about the massacres of striking workers? Why, their blood isn't dry yet."

These were all very beautiful and very honourable sentiments, but everyone knew perfectly well all the time that an understanding with the government could not be avoided. Hence, when the composing-room sent up the proofs of the leading article which began with the words: "In face of the German invasion we must close our ranks and stand together . . ."—the meeting read

the galleys in silence. Someone gave a half-suppressed sigh, and someone else said with special emphasis: "So it has come to this!" Belosvyetov abruptly buttoned up his black frock-coat, which had ash all over it; but then thought better of it and sat down again in his armchair. The next issue of the paper came out with this headline:

'THE FATHERLAND IS IN DANGER. TO ARMS!'

Nevertheless, there was doubt and alarm in every heart. It was difficult for the editorial staff to realize—and too bitter for them to admit—that within twenty-four hours the whole solid European world had been blown sky-high, and that the humanitarian civilization of Europe—the model which had daily provided the *Voice of the People* with the means of attacking the government and stirring the conscience of the philistines—had collapsed like a house of cards. Europe had invented printing and electricity and even radium: but when the time came, the same old beastly, hairy cave-man armed with a bludgeon had been revealed under the starched shirt-fronts.

The meeting dispersed in gloomy silence. The master-minds went out to lunch at an expensive restaurant, while the juniors adjourned to the news-editor's office. It was decided to undertake a detailed investigation of the feeling among the various sections and groups of the public. Antoshka Arnoldov was sent to make a call at the offices of the military censorship. He took an advance of salary, and clattered off in a smart cab along the Nevski Prospect to the headquarters of the General Staff.

The public relations officer, Colonel Solntsev, saw Arnoldov in his office and heard him out very politely, meeting his gaze with his own bright, rather protruding eyes. Antoshka had expected to find some fabulous ogre, some purple-faced, tigerish general, a scourge of the free Press—but here he was, facing a perfectly groomed suave gentleman of irreproachable manners, who neither roared nor bellowed, nor threatened to 'crush' or 'nip in the bud' anything at all. It was rather difficult to reconcile all this with the usual conception of the 'minions of the Tyrant'.

"Well, Colonel, I hope you will not withhold your authoritative opinion on the questions I have noted here," Arnoldov said, with a sidelong glance at the dark, full-length portrait of Tsar Nicholas I which stared down with pitiless eyes at the representative of the Press, as if trying to say to him: *Your jacket is too short, your shoes are yellow, your nose is shiny, your whole appearance is sickening, and you're in a funk, you son of a bitch!* "I am not doubting, Colonel, that the army will be in Berlin by the new year; but what my office is mainly interested in are certain problems of detail . . ."

Colonel Solntsev politely interrupted him:

"It seems to me that Russian public opinion is insufficiently aware of the vast scale of the present war. Certainly I can only welcome your praiseworthy desire that our valiant army may enter Berlin, but I am afraid that will be more difficult than you imagine. I, for my part, believe that the most important task of the Press at the present moment is to impress upon the people the idea of the very serious danger which threatens our country, and also of the extremely great sacrifices which we must all make."

Arnoldov lowered his writing-pad, and glanced at the colonel with amazement.

Solntsev went on: "We did not seek this war, and for the time being we are merely defending ourselves. The Germans are superior to us in the quantity of their artillery and in the density of their railway communications. Nevertheless, we shall do our best to prevent the enemy from crossing our

frontiers. The Russian armies will do their duty. But it would be most desirable that the public, for its part, should also be permeated with a sense of their duty towards the country." Solntsev raised his eyebrows. "I understand that among certain sections the feeling of patriotism is somewhat complicated by other feelings. I feel confident, however, that in the face of so serious a danger all quarrels and old scores will be put aside until a better time. Not even in 1812 was the Russian Empire in such grave jeopardy. That is all I should like you to note. The public ought also to be informed that the available military hospitals are insufficient to receive the expected number of casualties. In this direction, too, therefore, the public should prepare to give all possible assistance."

"Excuse me, Colonel, I don't understand—what is the expected number of casualties?"

Solntsev again raised his eyebrows very high.

"I think that in the next few weeks we shall have to envisage two hundred and fifty to three hundred thousand wounded."

Arnoldov swallowed hard, wrote down the figures and asked, quite deferentially this time:

"In that case, how many killed must be expected?"

"We usually estimate ten per cent of the number of wounded."

"Oh! Thank you."

Solntsev got up; Arnoldov hurriedly took his leave. As he opened the oak door, he bumped into Atlant, a consumptive, touzled reporter in a crumpled jacket and rather the worse for not having drunk any vodka since the day before.

"Colonel, I have come to you about this war," Atlant said, putting up his hand to conceal his dirty shirt-front.

"Well, what do you think? How long will it be before we take Berlin?"

From General Staff headquarters Arnoldov emerged into Palace Square. He put on his hat and stood there for a while with his eyes screwed up.

"War to a victorious conclusion," he muttered between clenched teeth. "Hold on now, you old galoshes, we'll show you a spot of 'defeatism'."

All over the vast, cleanly-swept square with the massive granite column of Alexander, groups of ungainly, bearded peasants were moving about. Sharp orders rang out. The peasants formed into line, ran about and lay down. At one point fifty men rose from the pavement, and with a ragged "Hurrah!" ran forward at a jerky trot. . . . "Halt!" "Attention! . . . you muckers, you sons of bitches!" a hoarse voice shouted at them. From another direction Arnoldov heard: ". . . when you get to them, stick your bayonets into their bellies, and if the bayonet breaks bash 'em with the butt."

These were the same gnarled peasants with shovel beards, birch-bark shoes and sweat-stained homespun shirts who, two hundred years ago, had come to this marshy shore to build a city. To-day they had been summoned once more to prop up the tottering pillars of the Empire with their shoulders.

Arnoldov turned off on to the Nevski, thinking all the time about the article he would have to write. Two companies of soldiers in full campaign kit, with packs, mess-tins and trenching tools, were marching down the middle of the street, to the sound of fifes wailing like the autumn wind. The high-cheekboned faces of the men looked tired and were crusted with dust. A dapper little officer in a green tunic, with new leather straps crossed on his chest, turned round every few minutes, rose on tiptoe, rolled his eyes and shouted: "Left!

Right! Left! Right!" The Nevski, noisy and bright, with its elegant carriages and flashing panes of glass was like a dream. "Left! Right! Left! Right!" The patient, heavy-footed peasants marched with a rhythmic swing behind the little officer. A black thoroughbred, covered with foam, overtook them at a fast trot and the broad-backed coachman pulled the horse up with a jerk. A beautiful woman rose to her feet in the carriage and watched the marching soldiers, making the sign of the Cross over them with a white-gloved hand as they passed her.

The soldiers marched past, and were swallowed up in the stream of traffic. The pavements were hot and crowded; everyone seemed to be expecting something. Passers-by stopped and listened to the talk and shouting, elbowed their way through, asked questions, and went off excitedly to join other groups.

The aimless movement of the crowd soon took on a definite direction; people turned off the Nevski and into Morskoe Street, where a crowd was already moving briskly forward. A few under-sized lads ran past, silent and purposeful. At the cross-roads caps were flung into the air and parasols waved. Cheers rent the air. Small boys emitted shrill whistles. All along the street smartly dressed women were standing up in stationary carriages. The crowds pushed into Isaakievsky Square, poured along it and climbed over the railings of the gardens. Every window and roof and the flight of granite steps in front of the cathedral was packed with people. And all these tens of thousands of people were looking at puffs of smoke rising from the upper windows of the massive dull-red building which had been the German Embassy. People ran about inside and flung bundles of papers down to the crowd through the broken windows; the papers scattered and floated slowly down. A roar ran through the crowd at each puff of smoke, at each new object thrown out of the windows. But now some more of the busy little men appeared on the façade of the building, where two bronze giants were holding horses by the bridle. The crowd grew quiet, and one could hear the metallic clang of hammers. The giant on the right tottered and crashed on to the pavement. A howl went up from the crowd; there was a surge towards the fallen statue; a terrible crush began, as people rushed up from all directions.

"To the Moika! To the Moika with the damned things!" The second statue also crashed. A plump be-spectacled lady caught Arnoldov by the shoulders and shouted at him: "We'll drown them all, young man!" The crowd shifted towards the Moika. Then they heard the horns of the fire-brigade, and saw brass helmets glittering in the distance. Mounted police appeared in the street. And suddenly, in the middle of the rushing, yelling crowd Arnoldov saw a bareheaded man whose face was terribly pale and whose eyes were wide open in a glassy stare. He recognized Bessonov, and accosted him.

"Were you there?" Bessonov asked. "I heard them killing someone."

"Has someone been killed? Who was it?"

"I don't know."

Bessonov turned away and crossed the square, walking unsteadily, as if he could not see. The remnants of the crowd were now running in detached groups towards the Nevski, where people were wrecking a café owned by a German.

That same evening Arnoldov, standing at a desk in one of the smoke-saturated editorial offices, wrote rapidly on narrow strips of paper:

". . . To-day we have seen the wrath of the people in all its power and beauty. It must be noted that in the cellars of the German Embassy not a single bottle of wine was drunk—all the bottles were smashed and poured into the Moika. There can be no compromise. We shall fight on to the victorious end, whatever sacrifices it may cost us. The Germans expected to find Russia asleep, but at the thundering call: 'The Fatherland is in danger', the nation rose up as one man. Its wrath will be terrible. 'Fatherland' is a mighty word, but we had forgotten it. At the first discharge of a German gun it has come to life again in all its chaste beauty, and now gleams in letters of fire in all our hearts."

Arnoldov frowned and shook himself. Phew! The stuff one had to write! A bit different this from two weeks ago when he had to write a review of summer entertainments. He recalled how a man dressed up as a pig had come out on that platform at the *Bouffes* and sang: "I am a little pig, and not ashamed of it. I am a little pig and proud of it. My mama was a sow, I am very like her now . . ."

"We are entering upon a heroic epoch. We have been rotting alive long enough. The war will purify us," Arnoldov wrote with spluttering pen.

Arnoldov's article was published in the face of violent opposition from the defeatists headed by Belosvyetov. The only concession made to the old policy was that the article was printed on page 3 under the somewhat academic title: 'Days of the War.' Letters from readers immediately began to arrive at the editorial office, some expressing enthusiastic approval of the article, others written with bitter irony. But the first were decidedly in the majority. Arnoldov's line rate was increased, and a week later he was summoned to the editor's room. Vasili Vasilyevich, grey-haired and ruddy, smelling of English eau-de-Cologne, offered Arnoldov an armchair, and said with a slightly worried air:

"We want you to go to the country."

"Yes, sir."

"We must know what the muzhiks are thinking and saying." He brought down his hand on a great heap of letters. "The intelligentsia is showing a tremendous interest in the villages. We must give them a vivid first-hand impression of the rural Sphinx."

"The mobilization results indicate an immense upsurge of patriotism, Vasili Vasilyevich."

"I know. But, damn it, where on earth did it come from? Go where you like, and listen and ask questions. By Saturday I expect five hundred lines of your impressions from the villages."

From the office, Arnoldov went to the Nevski; he bought a travelling suit of military cut, yellow leggings and a cap. Having dressed himself in these things he lunched at Donon's, drank a whole bottle of French champagne all by himself and came to the conclusion that the first village to be visited was Khylba, where Yelizaveta Kievna was spending the summer with her brother Kii. That evening he took a sleeper, lit a cigar, looked at his creaking masculine leggings and thought to himself: "This is the life!"

The village of Khlyba consisted of sixty houses, with gardens full of gooseberries, and a row of ancient lime trees in the middle of the street. On a little hill stood a large building, formerly the manor house, now converted into a school. The village lay in a hollow, between a swamp and a little river. There was very little common land; the soil was poor, and nearly all the men worked in industry in Moscow.

Arnoldov reached the village towards evening: the stillness surprised him. Only some stupid hen clucked as it ran from under the horse's hoofs; an old

dog barked in a barn; from the brook came the sound of a woman beating washing, and two rams clicked their locked horns in the middle of the street. Arnoldov paid the deaf old man who had driven him up from the station, and walked up the path towards the white pillars of the school showing through the green of the birches. Kii Kievich, the schoolmaster, and Yelizaveta Kievna were sitting there on the half-rotten steps of the porch and talking in a desultory way. The long shadows of huge willows spread out on the meadow below. A flock of starlings flitted past like a little dark cloud. A horn blew in the distance, calling the herd home. A few red cows came out of the reeds, and one raised its head and mooed. Kii Kievich, very much like his sister—with the same unreal-looking eyes—was saying in the intervals of chewing a straw:

"On top of everything else, Liza, you are extremely unorganized in the sphere of sex life. Types such as you are the repulsive by-products of bourgeois culture."

Yelizaveta Kievna was looking with a lazy smile at the meadow where shadows and grasses were turning yellow and warm in the rays of the setting sun.

"Surprising how boring you can be, Kii. You've learnt everything by heart, and everything is quite clear to you, like a book."

"Every human being, Liza, must see to it that his or her ideas are put into some system and order. Whether I am boring or not doesn't matter."

"Well, see to it then, as much as you like."

It was a still evening. The transparent branches of the weeping willows hung motionless in front of the porch. The cry of a corncrake came from the foot of the hill. Kii Kievich was chewing grass stalks. Yelizaveta Kievna was looking dreamily at the trees dissolving into the bluish twilight when she saw a nimble little man with a suit-case coming towards them.

"There she is," he shouted. "Liza, good evening, my beauty . . ."

Yelizaveta Kievna was delighted to see Arnoldov. She jumped up impetuously and embraced him. Kii Kievich greeted him rather drily and went on chewing grass.

Arnoldov sat down on the steps and smoked a cigar.

"I've come to you for information, Kii Kievich," he said. "Tell me, please, in as much detail as possible, what they're thinking and saying about the war in Khlyba . . ."

Kii Kievich smiled wryly.

"The devil knows what they're thinking. They're saying nothing. Same as wolves when they are about to raid the folds."

"Then there has been no resistance to the mobilization?"

"No, none at all."

"Do they understand that the Germans are the enemy?"

"No; they're not concerned with the Germans."

"With whom, then?"

Kii Kievich smiled again.

"No, it's not the Germans they're thinking of—it's the rifles. . . . They want to get hold of rifles. A man with a rifle has a different psychology. If we live, we shall see in which exact direction the rifles intend to fire. Yes, sir!"

"Well, but still, do they talk about the war at all?"

"Go down to the village and listen to them . . ."

Arnoldov and Yelizaveta Kievna went down to the village in the twilight. The August constellations came out all over the sky. Down in the village it was damp and the smells of the dust the herd had raised and of boiled milk

were in the air. Unharnessed carts were at the gates. Under the lime-trees, where it was completely dark, they could hear the winch of a well creaking and a horse snorting, and drawing in its breath as it drank. In an open space in front of a thatched wooden shed three girls were sitting on logs and singing in low voices. Yelizaveta and Antoshka went nearer and sat down. The girls sang on. One of them turned towards the two new-comers and said in a low voice:

"Well, girls, time to go to bed."

But they sat there and did not budge. Someone was moving about in the shed; then the door creaked, and a bald peasant in a sheep-skin coat open at the breast came out. He took a long time to fasten the padlock, grumbling all the while; then he came up to the girls, put his fists on his hips and thrust his goatee forward:

"Well, you nightingales, still singing, are you?"

"We're singing, but not about you, Uncle Fyodor."

"And what if I take a whip to you this minute? . . . What do you mean by singing songs all night? . . ."

"Maybe you envy us?"

Another of the girls said with a sigh: "There's nothing else left for us to do now, Uncle Fyodor, except sing."

"Too true. It's a bad business. You girls have been left in the lurch." Fyodor sat down by the girls.

One of them said: "The women in Kosmodamyansk said the other day that half the world was going to war."

"They'll soon be calling you up, too, girls."

"What? Us? For the war?"

The girls laughed, and the nearest one asked: "Uncle Fyodor, with whom is our Tsar fighting, then?"

"With another Tsar."

The girls looked at each other. One sighed, another pulled her shawl up, and the nearest one said: "That's what the women in Kosmodamyansk said: that it was with another Tsar."

Then a tousled head rose from behind the planks and a hoarse voice said: "Chuck that nonsense. What other Tsar! It's the Germans we're at war with."

"Maybe so," Fyodor replied.

The head vanished again. Arnoldov pulled out his cigarette-case and offered Fyodor a cigarette; then he enquired cautiously:

"Tell me, did the men in your village go willingly when they were called up?"

"Quite a lot did, master."

"You mean there was a wave of patriotic feeling?"

"Why, yes, some of them did wave. Why shouldn't they? They thought they'd go and see how things were. As for getting killed—we must all die some day. The land here is poor, and it's hard to make both ends meet. But out there, they say, the food is very good: meat twice a day and sugar and tea, and tobacco—you smoke as much as you like."

"But weren't they afraid of the fighting?"

"Yes, of course they were afraid."

CHAPTER XV

TARPAULIN-COVERED WAGONS, cartloads of straw and hay, ambulances and the huge troughs of pontoons moved, swinging and creaking, along the wide slush-covered highway. A light rain poured down incessantly, sweeping slantwise across the road. The furrows in the ploughed fields and the roadside ditches were full of water. Trees and copses showed in the distance as mere faint outlines.

The supply columns of the advancing Russian Army were moving in one unbroken avalanche, through mud and rain, with shouting and swearing, cracking of whips and creaking of axles. Dead and dying horses lay on both sides of the road, and overturned carts reared their wheels towards the sky. From time to time an army car would tear into this moving stream. There would be cries and mutterings, horses would shy and plunge and some heavily-laden wagon would topple down the slope, its crew tumbling after it head over heels.

Farther on, where the stream of vehicles ended, a long straggling line of soldiers with packs and tents on their backs struggled along in the slippery mud. In the midst of this shapeless crowd moved carts piled high with baggage, rifles sticking out in all directions, and orderlies precariously perched on top. From time to time a man would leave the road, lay his rifle on the grass and squat in the field.

Farther along were more carts, pontoons, ambulances, town carriages full of men wrapped in sopping wet officer's capes. The rumbling stream would roll down into a dip, pile up amid much shouting and fighting, and then draw slowly up the next slope and be lost to sight as it passed the crest. More carts loaded with grain, hay and ammunition kept joining the column from side roads. Small cavalry detachments moved across the fields, passing the baggage-train.

From time to time artillery would cut into a column with a clatter and thunder of steel. Huge deep-chested horses, and on their backs bearded ferocious-looking Tartars who slashed at both horses and men with their whips, ploughed a path for themselves and the wide-mouthed, jerking guns trailing behind them. Everywhere people were running about and standing up in carts waving their hands. And then once again the stream would close and roll on into a wood smelling sharply of mushrooms and rotting leaves and full of the soft murmur of falling rain.

Farther on, both sides of the road were lined with chimneys sticking up from heaps of rubble and embers; a broken lamp swung on a pole, and a cinema advertisement banged against the brick wall of a house turned inside out by a direct hit. Here, in a cart minus its front wheels, lay a wounded man in a blue Austrian greatcoat; his face was shrunk and yellow, his eyes were dim and full of sorrow.

Twenty miles away the dull thunder of guns rolled along the smoky horizon towards which these troops and carts were moving day and night, together with trains full of food, men and ammunition coming from all parts of Russia. The whole country had been roused by the roar of the guns. At last the hour of freedom had come for all the rapacious, evil impulses which, stifled and suppressed, had long been gathering unsatisfied.

The inhabitants of the towns, sated with the disfigured, impure life they were leading, seemed to wake from an oppressive dream. The thunder of the guns was the stirring call of a tempest that would sweep the world. The old life began to seem no longer tolerable. The population welcomed the war with malignant zest.

In the villages no one troubled to ask who the enemy was or why the war was being fought—it was all the same to them. Bitterness and hate had for a long time veiled their eyes with a mist of blood. Now the time had come for terrible deeds. Young husbands, young lads left their wives and sweethearts; recklessly and eagerly they crowded into goods trucks and hurtled past town after town, whistling and singing bawdy songs. The old life was over—Russia seethed and bubbled as if stirred by some giant spoon. Everything was in motion, everything was shifting, intoxicated by the fumes of war.

The supply columns and army units dispersed and melted away as they reached the battle zone which filled the air with thunder for scores of miles. Here all that was alive and human was at an end. Each man was allotted a place in a trench in the ground. There he slept, ate, killed lice, and poured bullets from his rifle into the rainy mist.

At night the whole horizon was lit up with the purple glare of slowly-spreading fires; rockets traced sparkling lines across the sky and burst in showers of stars; shells flew over with a piercing whine, and exploded in columns of flame, smoke and dust.

Here a sickening fear sucked at the men's bowels until their skin contracted and their fingers clenched convulsively. About midnight was zero hour, when officers, their faces set grimly, came running to rouse the men with shouts, curses and blows. The men, their faces puffy with sleep and damp, shouting obscene curses or howling like animals, stumbled in ragged lines across the fields, throwing themselves down flat and then jumping to their feet, until, deafened, maddened and beside themselves with horror and rage, they burst into the enemy's trenches.

Afterwards no one ever remembered what had happened there in those trenches. When the men wanted to boast of their heroic exploits—how bayonets had been driven home and skulls split and brained with rifle-butts, they had to invent it. Only corpses remained behind after these nocturnal deeds.

Then a new day began. The field kitchens drove up. The chilled and exhausted soldiers ate and smoked. Then they talked about the filth, about women—and most of their talk was lies. They searched themselves for lice, and slept. They slept for days on end in that bleak zone of din and death befouled with human filth and blood.

Telegin, too, lived the same life as all the others, in dirt and damp, without undressing or taking off his boots for weeks on end. The regiment to which he had been posted as an ensign was taking part in an offensive. It had lost more than half of its officers and men, had received no reinforcements, and was waiting for one thing only: the moment when, half-dead with fatigue and with their uniforms in tatters, they would be withdrawn from the firing-line.

But the supreme command wanted to break through the Carpathians before the winter at whatever cost, and ravage Hungary. They were not sparing of men's lives—human reserves were plentiful. They thought that the sustained effort of three months of ceaseless fighting would break the resistance of the Austrian armies, already retreating in disorder. Cracow and Vienna would fall, and the left wing of the Russian army could then attack Germany in her unprotected rear.

Following up this plan, the Russian armies moved west without a halt, capturing tens of thousands of prisoners and immense stores of food and ammunition, arms and clothing. In former wars a fraction of these successes, a single

one of these continual bloody engagements in which whole army corps were wiped out, would have decided the outcome of the campaign. But even though the regular armies were destroyed in the very first encounters, the bitterness only increased. Everyone, the entire nation, from children to old men, was immersed in the war. There was something in this war which was beyond human understanding. It seemed as if the enemy had been routed and drained of blood, and that just one more effort would bring final victory. But when the effort was made, fresh enemy armies sprang up in place of those destroyed and came forward to death and destruction with dogged persistence. Not the Tartar hordes, not the Medes and Persians, had fought more ferociously and died more willingly than these weak, pampered Europeans or the canny Russian muzhiks, who knew well enough that they were mere cannon-fodder, merely cattle driven to be slaughtered in this shambles brought about by their masters.

The remnants of Telegin's regiment had dug themselves in along the bank of a deep, narrow stream. It was a bad position, open to view from all sides, and the trenches were shallow. The regiment was expecting to be ordered forward any minute; meanwhile, the men were glad to get some sleep, take off their boots and rest a little, although they were under heavy fire from the other side of the river, where the Austrian troops were entrenched.

Towards evening, when the firing usually died down for about three hours, Telegin went to regimental headquarters, located in a deserted castle about a mile behind their positions. A ragged fog lay over the little winding stream and hung in the undergrowth that covered the banks. The air was still damp and laden with the smell of wet leaves. From time to time the dull report of a single shot rolled like a ball along the water.

Telegin jumped across the roadside ditch, and stopped on the highway to light a cigarette. On both sides of him great bare trees loomed enormously tall in the fog. The swampy hollow in which they grew looked as if full of spilt milk. A bullet whistled mournfully past in the silence. Telegin sighed deeply and walked along the crunching gravel, looking up at the shadowy trees. The peace around him and the fact that he was walking by himself and thinking, made him forget the shattering din of the day—his whole being was at rest and a subtle, yet piercing sadness stole into his heart. He sighed once more, threw away his cigarette, clasped his hands behind his neck and walked along in a magic world in which there were only phantom trees, his beating love-sick heart, and Dasha's intangible loveliness.

Dasha was with him in that hour of rest and quiet. He felt her touch every time there was a respite from the iron howl of shells, the crack of rifle fire, the screams and the oaths—all those noises so unnecessary in God's universe. Then he would seek refuge somewhere in a corner of the dugout and let Dasha's invisible charm touch his heart.

It seemed to Telegin that if he were to die he would feel the happiness of that touch up to the last moment. He did not think of death or fear it. Nothing, not even death, could now rob him of that stupendous wealth of life which had come to him.

That summer, on his journey to Eupatoria to see Dasha—as he thought, for the last time—Telegin had been nervous and despondent, and had invented all kinds of excuses for his visit. But their meeting in the road, Dasha's unexpected tears, her golden head pressed to his chest, her hair, her hands and shoulders fresh with the tang of the sea, her little mouth, like a child's,

saying to him through her sobs, as she raised her face with narrowed eyes and wet lashes to his: "Ivan Ilyich, my darling, how I have been waiting for you"—all these unspoken things that had fallen as if from the sky, there on the road by the sea, had in the space of a few seconds transformed Telegin's whole life. He had looked into her sweet face and said:

"All my life I shall love you."

Afterwards it even seemed to him that perhaps he had not said these words, only thought them—but Dasha had understood all the same. She had taken her hands from his shoulders and said:

"There is such a lot I must tell you. Let's go."

They walked down to the water and sat on the sand. Dasha picked up a handful of pebbles and tossed them slowly into the sea one by one.

"The point is that it is not at all certain whether you will still be able to like me when you know all about me. Though it makes no difference—like me or leave me." She sighed. "I have behaved very badly while you were away, Ivan Ilyich. You must forgive me if you can."

And she began to tell him everything, honestly and in detail; all about Samara, and how she had come here and had met Bessonov, and had grown tired of life—because she had come to loathe the whole Petersburg mirage which had risen again and poisoned her blood and fired her curiosity.

"How long was I to play the squeamish lady? If I wanted to wallow in filth what was to stop me? But then, at the last moment, I got cold feet. . . . Ivan Ilyich, darling. . . ." Dasha threw her arms up: "Help me. I can't, I don't want to hate myself any longer. Surely I can't be altogether lost. I want something different, something quite different." After this outburst, Dasha had said nothing for a very long time.

Telegin had stared fixedly at the blue, mirror-like water glittering in the sun; his heart was overflowing with happiness in spite of everything. Only later when the rising wind brought a wave up that wet her feet did Dasha realize that there was a war and that Telegin would have to leave next day to join his regiment.

"Ivan Ilyich."

"Yes?"

"Are you fond of me?"

"Yes."

"Very fond?"

"Yes."

She had slipped nearer to him, sliding on her knees over the sand and put her hand into his, just as she had done once before, on the steamer.

"Ivan Ilyich, I, too am very fond of you." She had pressed his trembling fingers and asked, after a pause: "What was that you told me up there on the road? She frowned. "About a war? With whom?"

"With the Germans."

"And you?"

"I must go to-morrow."

Dasha had caught her breath at that but had said nothing.

Far off along the beach Nikolai Ivanovich—in striped pyjamas, obviously straight out of bed—had come running towards them, waving a newspaper and shouting something. He had paid no attention to Ivan Ilyich. But when Dasha said:

"Nikolai, this is my best friend," Nikolai Ivanovich had only gripped Telegin's arm and bawled in his face:

"We've lived to see it, young man! Call this civilization! Why, it's monstrous! Understand? These are the ravings of a lunatic, sir!"

Dasha had not left Telegin for a minute all that day. She had been very quiet and thoughtful. And to him it had seemed that that day, a day full of the blue light of the sun and the noise of the sea, was incredibly long. Each minute had seemed to extend into a whole lifetime.

Telegin and Dasha had roamed along the beach, lain on the sand or sat on the terrace, but it had been as if they were in a fog all the time. Nikolai Ivanovich had followed them about everywhere, making tremendous speeches about the war and German brutality and violence.

Towards evening they had at last succeeded in getting rid of Nikolai Ivanovich, and had gone away by themselves far along the shore of the bay. They had walked silently, keeping in step. Then it had occurred to Telegin that he ought after all to say something to Dasha. Of course she was expecting him to make some ardent, and moreover definite declaration. But what could he say? Could any words express what was in him now? No; how could they?

"No, no," he had thought, keeping his eyes on the ground. "It would be irresponsible to say such things to her; she cannot possibly love me, but being the frank and kind-hearted child she is, she would say yes if I proposed to her. But that would be an outrage. And I have all the less right to speak because we must part for an indefinite period, and it is very probable that I shall not come back from this war . . ."

But while he was thus tormenting himself, Dasha had suddenly stopped, and grabbed his shoulder and taken off one of her shoes.

"Ah, my God! my God!" she had said, as she shook the sand out of her shoe; then she had put on the shoe again, straightened up and said with a deep sigh: "I shall love you very much, Ivan Ilyich, when you go away."

Then she had put her hand round his neck, looked into his eyes almost sternly with clear, grey, unsmiling eyes, and sighed softly once more.

"We shall be together there too, won't we?"

Telegin had cautiously drawn her to him and kissed her soft, trembling lips. Dasha had closed her eyes. Then, when neither of them had any breath left, Dasha had moved away and taken his arm, and they had walked on by the dark heavy water licking the beach at their feet in purple gleams.

Telegin remembered all this with never-tiring emotion every time there was a moment's peace. Sauntering along the road now, in the fog, between the trees, with his hands clasped behind his neck, he once again saw Dasha's searching eyes and felt her long kiss.

"Halt! Who goes there?" a rough voice shouted to him out of the fog.

"Friend, friend!" Telegin answered. He put his hands into the pockets of his greatcoat, and turned under the oaks towards the shadowy mass of the castle where a few windows were bright with yellow light. In the porch a soldier, recognizing Telegin, threw away his cigarette and stood to attention.

"Any mail to-day?"

"No, sir, we're expecting it any minute."

Ivan Ilyich went on into the hall. At the far end, above a wide oak staircase, hung an ancient tapestry depicting Adam and Eve standing among some slender trees; Eve was holding an apple in her hand and Adam a severed branch with flowers on it. A candle in a bottle on the post at the foot of the banisters threw a feeble light on their faded faces and bluish-grey bodies.

Telegin opened the door on the right and went into an empty room the stucco ceiling of which had fallen down at one corner, where a shell had hit the

wall the day before. Lieutenant Prince Byelski and Sub-lieutenant Martynov were sitting on a camp-bed in front of a blazing fire. Telegin exchanged greetings with them, asked them when they expected the mail car to arrive from headquarters, and sat down on an ammunition box near them, shading his eyes from the light.

"Well, how are things going down there in your part of the world?" Martynov asked.

Telegin did not answer, only shrugged his shoulders. Prince Byelski went on talking in a low voice.

"The main thing is the stink. I wrote home that I'm not afraid of death. I am quite prepared to sacrifice my life for my country; strictly speaking that was the reason why I transferred to the infantry and am sitting here in the trenches—but the stink is just killing me."

"The stink is nothing. If you don't like it, don't smell it," Martynov said, fumbling with his shoulder-strap. "But that there are no women here is a serious matter, and no good will come of it. Judge for yourself—our army commander is as dry as an old sand-box and he's arranged a sort of monastery for us here. No drinks, no women. What about the welfare of the troops? What sort of a war do they call this?"

Martynov got up from the bed, and began to stir up the blazing logs with his boot. The prince smoked thoughtfully, looking into the fire.

"Five million soldiers relieving themselves," he said, "and then all these corpses and carrion rotting under our noses. For the rest of my life I'll remember this war as an abominable stink. Ugh!"

At that moment they heard the throb of a car in the courtyard.

"Gentlemen, the mail has arrived!" an excited voice called through the door.

The officers went outside to the porch. Dark figures were moving near the car, and men were running about the courtyard. A hoarse voice kept repeating: "Gentlemen, please don't snatch them out of my hands."

Bags of letters and parcels were being carried into the hall, and opened on the staircase, under Adam and Eve. A whole month's mail was there. It was as if a whole ocean of love and anxiety—all the dear, irretrievable life all these men had left behind—was hidden in those dirty canvas bags.

"Gentlemen, don't snatch them out of my hands," shouted stout, purple-faced Captain Babkin. "Ensign Telegin, six letters and a parcel. . . . Ensign Nezhni, two letters . . ."

"Nezhni has been killed, sir. . . ."

"When."

"This morning."

Telegin went back to the fire. All six letters were from Dasha. The envelopes were addressed in a very large hand. Ivan Ilyich was overcome with tenderness for that dear hand, which wrote such large letters. Bending over the fire he carefully tore open the first envelope. The scent that rose from it brought back such memories that for a moment he had to close his eyes. Then he read:

After we saw you off, Nikolai Ivanovich and I left the same day for Simferopol, and that evening caught a train for Petersburg. Now we are in our old flat. Nikolai Ivanovich is very worried: there is no news of any sort from Katyusha and we don't know where she is. What happened to you and me was so magnificent and so sudden that I am still quite overcome. Don't blame me for not writing

to you more affectionately. I love you. I will love you faithfully and very much. But now everything is so confused—soldiers are marching through the streets, with bands playing and it is all so mournful as if happiness itself was marching away with the brass bands and the soldiers. I know that I oughtn't to write this, but all the same take care of yourself in the war.

"Your honour, your honour!" Telegin turned round with an effort; an orderly was standing in the doorway. "A telephone message, sir. . . . You are wanted at company headquarters."

"Who wants me?"

"Lieutenant-Colonel Rozanov. They said it was very urgent, sir."

Telegin folded the letter which he had not finished reading and put it with the other envelopes into his shirt, pulled his cap down over his eyes and went out.

The fog was even thicker now, and the trees were invisible. It was like walking through milk; he could find the road only by the sound of his feet crunching on the gravel. Telegin repeated: "I will love you faithfully and very much." Suddenly he stopped and listened. Not a sound could be heard through the fog except the splash of heavy drops falling now and then from the trees. Then he began to distinguish a kind of gurgle and a soft rustling nearby. He went on, and the gurgle grew more distinct. Suddenly his foot went down into space. He jumped back as far as he could. A huge lump of earth had given way under his foot and fell with a heavy splash into the water.

Evidently this was the spot where the road came to an end above the river by the bridge that had been burnt down. Telegin knew that on the opposite bank, a hundred paces away, the Austrian trenches came right down to the river. Following the splash in the water, a shot cracked like a whip from that direction and the report rolled along the river; a second and a third shot came and then, with an iron crash, a long volley rang out. The fire was promptly returned by shots from every direction, their sound muffled by the fog. The rattle and roar grew louder and louder all the way along the river, and in the midst of the infernal racket came the busy chatter of a machine-gun. There was a loud bang somewhere in the wood. The rumbling ragged fog hung thickly over the ground, covering up all this familiar and loathsome business. Several times bullets struck the trees near Ivan Ilyich with a smack, scattering some twigs. He turned aside from the road, and made his way at random through the bushes. The firing abated and then stopped as suddenly as it had started. Telegin took off his cap and wiped his wet forehead. It was quiet again, only the raindrops dripped from the bushes. Thank God—he would read Dasha's letters that day. Telegin laughed, and jumped a ditch. He heard someone quite near him say with a yawn:

"There—that was a nice nap. Vasili, I tell you, that was a nice nap."

"Wait a bit," someone said sharply. "There's someone there!"

"Who goes there?"

"Friend, friend," Telegin answered hurriedly, and at the same moment he saw the earthen parapet of a trench before him, with two bearded faces looking up out of the ground.

"What company?" he asked.

"The third, your honour, that's ours. Why do you walk out there on the top, sir, you might get hit?"

Telegin jumped down into the trench and walked along it to the communication trench leading to the officers' dug-out. Some of the soldiers who had been roused by the firing were saying:

"In a fog like this they can easily cross the river somewhere."

"No difficulty about that."

"All at once they start firing, kick up a row—and all for no reason whatever. . . . Do they want to frighten us, or are they frightened themselves?"

"Well, aren't you frightened?"

"Of course I am."

"Here, lads, Gavrila has had his finger torn off."

"He's making quite a moan about it and holding it up in the air, like this."

They laughed.

"Some fellows have all the luck. . . . They'll send him home with that finger."

"Home? What a hope. Not unless his whole hand's blown off. Just one finger means they'll let him rot awhile somewhere near, and then shove him back to the unit."

"But when's this war going to end?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"It will end sometime all right, only we won't be there to see it."

"If we could take Vienna, at least."

"What on earth do you want with Vienna?"

"Oh, I'd just like to see it."

"If the fighting isn't over by spring the whole bunch will desert anyway. Who's to plough the land—the women? Enough fellows have been done in as it is. Enough. We've had enough and we'll go."

"No, the generals won't stop fighting so soon."

"What's all this here? . . . Who's that talking over there?"

"Stow that, corporal, and clear out."

"The generals won't stop fighting."

"True, boys. First of all, they get double pay and crosses and orders. One fellow, he told me that for each recruit, he said, the English pay our generals thirty-eight roubles and a half per nose."

"Ah, the sons-of-bitches! They sell us like cattle."

"Never mind. You wait and see."

When Telegin entered the dug-out, his battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Rozanov—a fat man with spectacles and thinning curly hair—who was sitting on a pile of horse blankets in a corner under fir branches, said to him:

"So you're here at last, eh, my boy?"

"I am sorry, Fyodor Kuzmich, I lost my way—the fog is awful."

"The point is, my dear chap, there's a job for you to-night."

He put into his mouth a crust of bread which he had been holding all the time in a grimy fist. Telegin slowly clenched his teeth.

"The point is, my dear Ivan Ilyich, that we've been ordered to cross the river. It would be good if we could fix it somehow without too much difficulty, eh? Sit down here by me. Would you like some brandy? Well, now, I've thought out a plan. It's like this: we build a bridge, just here—opposite that big alder. And get two platoons across to the other side . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

"SUSOV!"

"Here, sir!"

"Dig here. . . . Easy, don't chuck it into the water! . . . Here, lad, forward now! . . . Zubtsov!"

"Here, sir!"

"Wait a second. . . . Put it here. . . . Dig a little more. . . . Lower away! Easy . . ."

"Easy, lads, you're tearing my arm out! Shove now!"

"Come on, shove!"

"Quiet, you fool! Don't bawl like that!"

"Fix the other end. . . . Shall we lift it now, sir?"

"Are the ends fast?"

"All ready."

"Heave away then!"

In clouds of fog saturated with moonlight, two long beams fastened together by cross-pieces rose creaking into the air—an emergency bridge. Hardly discernible figures were moving along the bank—these were the men who had volunteered for the venture. They were talking and swearing in hurried whispers.

"Well, is it in place?"

"All correct, sir!"

"Lower away then. . . . Careful there . . ."

"Easy, easy, boys."

The beams, the ends of which were wedged in the bank at the narrowest point of the river, began to drop slowly and hung in the fog over the water.

"Will it reach the bank?"

"Go slow now . . ."

"It's very heavy . . ."

"Not so fast, easy there!"

But the far end of the bridge dropped on the water with a loud splash after all. Telegin shrugged his shoulders!

"Lie down!"

Without a sound the volunteers lay down and hid in the grass on the bank. The fog was getting thinner, but it was darker and the air was raw with approaching dawn. All was quiet on the farther side.

Telegin said: "Zubtsov!"

"Here!"

"Slip in and fix the planks."

Vassili Zubtsov's tall form slid past Telegin with a reek of acrid sweat and slipped down the bank into the water. Ivan Ilyich saw his huge hand tremble, clutch the grass, let go, and disappear.

"It's very slippery," Zubtsov said in a frozen whisper from somewhere down below. "Give me some planks, lads."

"Planks, bring some planks."

Hurriedly and noiselessly they began to pass planks along from hand to hand. It was not possible to nail them together—because of the noise. When he had put the first few planks across, Zubtsov climbed out of the water on to them and said in a half-whisper between chattering teeth:

"Faster, pass them on faster. . . . Don't sleep on the job . . ."

The icy water gurgled under the bridge, and the beams were swaying. Telegin

could distinguish the dark outline of bushes on the far side, and although they were exactly the same bushes as those on his own side, they seemed uncanny to him. He went back to the bank where the volunteers were lying and called out sharply:

"Up!"

Indistinct and exaggeratedly large forms rose at once in the white clouds of fog.

"Single file—at the double!"

Telegin turned back to the bridge. At that very moment something like a ray of sunlight pierced the shifting cloud of fog and lit up the yellow planks and Zubtsov's bearded head raised in alarm. The beam of the searchlight groped about, shifted to the bushes, picked out a crooked branch with bare twigs and then again settled on the bridge. Telegin clenched his teeth and ran across the bridge. And the next second the whole black silence seemed to collapse in thunder about his ears. Rifle and machine-gun fire began to pour down on the bridge from the Austrian side.

Telegin sprang on to the far bank, crouched down and looked back. A tall soldier was running across the bridge—Telegin could not make out who it was—holding his rifle pressed tight to his chest . . . then he dropped the rifle, raised his arms and toppled sideways into the water. The machine-gun swept the bridge, the water and the bank. . . . A second soldier ran across —Susov—and lay down near Telegin.

"We'll get them, blast their guts!"

Another soldier ran across, a third and a fourth, and then one more fell with a shriek and floundered in the water.

All the others ran across, lay down, and quickly began to throw up the earth in front of them with their spades. By now the savage rattle of shots had spread along the river. They could not raise their heads—the machine-gun was pouring lead on the spot where they were lying. Suddenly there was a whining sound not high above the ground—once, twice, six times—and six explosions thudded in front of them. The Russian guns were shelling the machine-gun nest.

Telegin and Vassili Zubtsov jumped up, ran forward forty paces, and lay down again. The machine-gun was chattering out of the darkness on their left. But it was clear that the fire from the Russian side was stronger and that the Austrians had been driven underground. Taking advantage of the intervals in the firing, the volunteers ran forward to the spot where, the day before, the Russian artillery had demolished the wire entanglements in front of the Austrian trenches.

The Austrians had already started to replace the wire during the night and there was a body hanging on it. Zubtsov cut the wire, and the body fell like a sack in front of Telegin. Then Laptev, one of the volunteers, put down his rifle, crawled up on all fours, leaving the others behind, and lay down right under the parapet of the trench. Zubtsov shouted to him:

"Get up and throw a grenade!"

But Laptev did not reply, nor did he move or turn round. Perhaps he was paralysed by fear. The firing grew more intense, and the volunteers could not move. They kept close to the ground and dug themselves in.

"Get up and throw a grenade!" Zubtsov shouted. "You son of a bitch! Throw a grenade!" and, stretching himself out, holding his rifle by the butt, he pricked Laptev with the bayonet in the back of his greatcoat. Laptev's face looked round snarling; then he unhooked a hand-grenade from his belt

and, suddenly throwing himself with his chest against the parapet, flung it into the trench, waited for the explosion and then jumped in after it.

"At them, at them!" Zubtsov shouted hoarsely.

Ten men jumped up, ran forward and vanished into the earth—all that could be heard was the sharp rending noise of the explosions.

Telegin rushed blindly about on the parapet of the trench, fumbling vainly to unfasten a hand-grenade. Finally he jumped down into the trench and ran along it, his shoulders rubbing against the sticky clay. He stumbled on, yelling at the top of his voice. He saw a face, white as a plaster cast—it was a man shrinking into a niche in the trench side. Telegin gripped his shoulder, but the man only kept muttering, as if in his sleep . . .

"Shut up, damn you, I'm not going to hurt you," Telegin, almost in tears, shouted into the white mask and ran on, jumping over bodies. But the fighting was already over. A crowd of grey men who had thrown away their rifles were climbing out of the trench into the field. Their captors drove them forward with blows from rifle butts. But the machine-gun in its covered nest forty paces away, was still rattling, keeping up the fire on the crossing. Telegin squeezed past the volunteers and their prisoners, and shouted:

"What the hell! Are you daft? . . . . Zubtsov! Where's Zubtsov?"

"Here, sir!"

"What the hell d'you think you're doing? Silence that machine-gun!"

"Can't be done, sir. Can't get at him."

They ran forward.

"Stop! There it is!"

A narrow passage led from the trench to the machine-gun nest. Bending down, Telegin ran along it and jumped into the dug-out where everything was shaking in the darkness from the continual rattle of fire. He gripped an elbow and pulled. Immediately the noise stopped; the only sound came from the man whom he was pulling away from the machine-gun, and who grunted as he struggled.

"He's tough, the beggar, he won't come away. Leave him to me," Zubtsov muttered from behind him, and brought down the butt of his rifle three times on the man's skull. The Austrian shuddered, said: "Boo, boo, boo," and was still . . .

Telegin loosed his grip and came out of the dug-out. Zubtsov shouted to him from behind.

"He's chained to the gun, sir!"

Soon it grew quite light. Pools and trickles of blood showed on the yellow clay. A few shabby haversacks, tins and frying-pans lay scattered among bodies huddled up like sacks. The volunteers were exhausted and limp; some lay down, others ate tinned rations or ransacked the abandoned Austrian packs.

The prisoners had long ago been driven across the river. The regiment made the crossing and occupied the positions. The artillery was now shelling the second Austrian line, from which a listless fire came in reply. It began to drizzle, and the fog melted away. Ivan Ilyich, resting his elbow against the edge of the trench, looked at the field across which they had run the night before. The field was like every other field, brown and wet; here and there were bits of wire, black piles of heaped-up earth, and a few dead volunteers. The river was quite close. There were none of the immense trees and uncanny bushes of the night before. Yet how much energy had been expended to cover those three hundred paces!

The Austrians went on retreating, and the Russian troops pursued them

without rest until nightfall. Telegin was ordered to advance with his volunteers and occupy a thicket which showed blue on a little hill. Towards evening they took it after a short rifle duel. They hurriedly dug themselves in, posted sentries, laid a telephone line to their unit, and ate the food that was in their haversacks. Then, although their orders were to keep up firing all night, many of them fell asleep in the darkness, bedded on dead leaves under the light rain.

Telegin sat on a stump and leaned against the trunk of a tree soft with moss. Now and then a drop would fall inside his collar, and this was good as it kept him awake. The excitement of the morning had long since worn off; gone, too, was the terrible weariness he had felt when he had to make his way over miles of sodden stubble, climb over fences and cross ditches, with numbed feet shuffling along at random and a head splitting with pain.

Someone came up to him over the carpet of leaves, and Zubtsov's voice said softly:

"Would you like a biscuit, sir?"

"Thanks."

Telegin took the biscuit and began to munch it; it was sweet, and it melted in his mouth. Zubtsov squatted on his heels beside him.

"May I smoke, sir?"

"Yes, but be careful with it."

"I've got a pipe."

"Zubtsov," Telegin said, "I think it was a pity to kill him, all the same."

"The machine-gunner?"

"Yes."

"Of course it was a pity, sir."

"Do you want to sleep?"

"No, I'll stay awake."

"If I doze off, give me a prod, please."

Drops of rain fell slowly and softly on the rotting leaves, on the hands of the men and on the peaks of their caps. After the noise, the shouting and the revolting bustle of the day, after the killing of the machine-gunner, the drops fell like globules of glass into the darkness, into the depths, where everything smelled of rotting leaves. They rustled and kept Telegin awake. . . . Mustn't . . . mustn't . . . sleep. . . . He forced his eyes open and saw the vague outlines of the branches as if drawn in charcoal. . . . But to fire all night long . . . what rot . . . let the men rest. . . . Eight killed, eleven wounded. . . . Of course, one had to take care of oneself in war. . . . Ah, Dasha, Dasha. The glass globules made everything peaceful and calm.

"Ivan Ilyich!"

"Yes, Zubtsov, I'm not asleep."

"Isn't it a pity to kill a man in any case? . . . He's probably got his own home, and some sort of family, and you stick a bayonet into him as you would into a dummy—and you think yourself a splendid fellow. The first time I stuck a man dead I couldn't eat afterwards. I felt sick. . . . But now it's the ninth or tenth I've done in. . . . Awful, isn't it? It must be that someone has already taken the sins of all this on himself?"

"What sins?"

"Well, mine, for instance. I say, someone must have taken my sins on himself—some general, or someone else in Petersburg who is in charge of all this business . . ."

"How can you call it a sin to defend your country?"

"Yes, I know, but listen, Ivan Ilyich, someone must be to blame—and we'll

find out who it is. Those who let this war happen will have to answer for it. . . . Answer without mercy for all these deeds . . ."

A shot cracked in the wood. Telegin started. A few more shots rang out from the opposite direction.

This was all the more surprising because they had not been in contact with the enemy since the evening. Telegin ran to the telephone. The telephonist stuck his head out of his pit.

"The telephone isn't working, sir."

By now there was a patter of shots from all round the wood, and bullets were whistling through the branches. The outposts were falling back, firing as they withdrew. One of the volunteers, Klimov, appeared near Telegin and said in a coarse, hard voice: "They're surrounding us, sir." Then he put his hand up to his head, sat down, and fell over on his face. Someone else screamed out of the darkness:

"Brothers, I'm done for!"

Telegin could distinguish the long motionless figures of his men among the trunks of the trees.

He could feel that they were all looking in his direction and he ordered them to scatter and make their way singly towards the northern end of the wood, which was probably not yet surrounded. He himself would stay there, in the trenches, with anyone who wanted to stay with him, and try to hold the enemy back as long as possible.

"Five men are wanted. Any volunteers?"

Zubtsov, Susov and a young lad named Kolov, stepped away from the trees and came towards him. Zubtsov turned round and shouted:

"Two more are wanted! Riabkin, come on!"

"All right, I'm coming . . ."

"A fifth, a fifth!"

A short soldier in a sheepskin jacket and a shaggy fur cap got up from the ground.

"Well, here I am, I'll stay."

The six men lay down twenty paces from each other and opened fire. The figures of the others vanished behind the trees. Telegin used up several clips of cartridges, and suddenly saw in the clearest detail what would happen in the morning; men in blue-grey coats would turn his grinning corpse over on to its back and ransack his pockets, and dirty hands would grope under his shirt.

He laid down his rifle and scooped out a hole in the damp, crumbling earth; then he took out Dasha's letters, kissed them, put them into the hole, covered them with earth and scattered rotting leaves over the hole.

"Oh, oh, lads . . ." he heard Susov's voice say from his left. He had two clips of cartridges left. Telegin crawled across to Susov, who lay with his face to the ground, crouched by him and took his cartridges. By now only Telegin and another man to the right of him were firing. At last all the cartridges were gone. Telegin waited, looked round, stood up and began calling his men by name. Only one voice answered: "Here!"—and Kolov came up, leaning on his rifle.

"No cartridges left?" Telegin said.

"No."

"The others don't answer?"

"No, none of them."

"All right, let's go! Run!"

Kolov slung his rifle across his back and began to run, taking cover behind the tree trunks. But Telegin had not gone ten paces when from behind him a blunt steel finger was poked into his shoulder.

CHAPTER XVII

ALL CONCEPTIONS OF war as a series of dashing cavalry charges, extraordinary feats of marching and heroic exploits by soldiers and officers proved utterly out of date.

The total result of the famous charge of the Horse Guards—when three of their squadrons, fighting on foot, penetrated the enemy's barbed-wire defences without firing a shot, led by Prince Dolgorukov, the commander of the regiment, who strolled about under machine-gun fire with a cigar in his mouth and, as usual, swearing in French—was that the Horse Guards, after having lost half their effectives in killed and wounded, captured two heavy guns which proved to be damaged and which had been defended by a single machine-gun.

A Cossack captain said about this affair: "If I had been told to do the job, I'd have taken that muck with a dozen Cossacks."

After the first few months it was obvious to everyone that the sort of courage required from the soldiers of the old days—those fearless bearded giants who could ride and slash, and who did not duck their heads for any bullet—was now utterly useless. Technical devices and the organization of the rear had now moved up to take first place. What the soldiers were required to do was to die obediently and stubbornly at certain points defined on the map. The sort of soldier wanted was one who was able to conceal himself, to dig himself in, to merge with the colour of the soil. The sentimental rules of the Hague convention, defining which methods of killing men were moral and which immoral, had simply been torn up. And together with that scrap of paper the last shreds of moral precepts, now no longer of use to anyone, were blown away.

In the course of a few months the war thus completed the work of a whole era. Until then a great many people still thought that human life was directed by some higher law of good and evil and that in the end good would of necessity triumph over evil and mankind would become perfect. Alas, these were mere mediæval traditions which weakened the will and put a brake on the advance of civilization. Now even the most obstinate idealists understood that good and evil were merely philosophical concepts and that the human genius was serving a bad master.

It was a time when even little children were being taught that slaughter, destruction, the extermination of whole nations were fine and praiseworthy actions. Every day millions of newspaper columns asserted, repeated, and confirmed this. Special experts predicted the outcome of battles every morning. The newspapers printed the prophecies of the famous prophetess, Madame Thèbes. All sorts of soothsayers, astrologers and fortune-tellers began to appear in great numbers. There was a scarcity of all goods. Prices soared. In the three ports of the North and East—the only ones to remain open in the closely walled-up country—only weapons and munitions of war were being unloaded. The land was being tilled badly. Milliards of roubles in paper

money streamed into the villages and the peasants were already reluctant to sell their produce for paper.

At a secret congress of the Occult Lodge of the Anthroposophists held in Stockholm, the founder of the movement said that the terrible struggle being fought out in higher spheres had now been transferred to the earth as well, that a world catastrophe was impending and that Russia would be sacrificed as a burnt-offering in atonement for all sins. In fact, all reasonable thought was being drowned in an ocean of blood which was being spilt in a tremendous area of three thousand versts encircling all Europe. There was no sensible explanation to be given of the fact that mankind was obstinately destroying itself by means of steel, dynamite and famine. Century-old ulcers had opened. Evil heritages of the past had come to life. But even this could explain nothing.

Famine was rife in the warring countries. Life came to a standstill everywhere. The war began to appear only as the first act of the tragedy.

In the face of this spectacle the individual, who had so recently seemed a microcosm in itself, with a hypertrophied personality, began to shrink and quickly contracted into a helpless speck of dust as the primitive masses of the people came forward to take the leading part before the footlights of the tragic stage.

Hardest of all was the lot of the women. Until now each of them had spun her little web according to her beauty, charm and ability, and although the threads were thin they were strong enough for the normal needs of life. At all events those for whom the webs were intended fell into them and buzzed lovingly.

But the war tore these webs too. To spin new webs was unthinkable in the cruel times that came. There was nothing for it but to wait for better days. So the women waited patiently, and time passed and their measured years went by fruitlessly and in sorrow.

Husbands and lovers, brothers and sons—now turned into mere numbers and abstract units—were laid under mounds of earth in field and forest and by the roadside. And no artifice could smooth out the ever-increasing wrinkles on the ageing faces of the women.

CHAPTER XVIII

"I SAID TO my brother: you are a bigot. I hate you social-democrats. Under your régime people would be tortured for getting a single word wrong. I said to him: you're one of those astral people. That was more than he could stand, and he chucked me out. Now I'm in Moscow, with no money. It's terribly amusing. Please, Daria Dmitrievna, speak to Nikolai Ivanovich on my behalf. It's all the same to me what job it is—of course, a hospital train would be the best."

"All right, I'll tell him."

"I don't know anyone here. But do you remember our 'Central Station'? Valiet has evacuated himself practically to the Chinese frontier. Sapozhkov is somewhere at the front. Zhirov is in the Caucasus, giving lectures on futurism. Where Ivan Ilyich Telegin is I don't know. You used to know him fairly well, didn't you?"

Yelizaveta Kievna and Dasha were walking slowly down an alley between high snowdrifts. Snow was falling and the ice was crackling under their feet. A low sledge jogged past, and the driver, his stiff felt boots hanging over the dashboard, called out to them:

"Ladies, look out! You'll get yourselves run over!"

There was a great deal of snow that winter. The lime branches hanging over the roads were covered with snow. And the white, snowy sky was full of birds. Jackdaws in straggling flocks flew screeching over the city, came to rest on its domes and spires and then winged off again into the frozen sky.

Dasha stopped at the corner and adjusted her white nurse's cap. Her sealskin coat and muff were covered with snowflakes. Her face had grown thinner, and her eyes were larger and sterner.

"Ivan Ilyich has been reported missing," she said. "I have no news of him."

Dasha raised her eyes and looked at the birds. The jackdaws must be starving in the town with all this snow, she thought. Yelizaveta Kievna stood with bent head, the smile frozen on her far too red lips. She was wearing a cap with flaps and a man's coat too tight over the chest, a fur collar that was too wide, and sleeves so short that they left her reddened hands exposed. Snowflakes fell slowly and melted on her waxy-yellow neck.

"I will see Nikolai Ivanovich about you to-day," Dasha said.

"Tell him that I am willing to take on any kind of work." Yelizaveta Kievna looked at her feet and shook her head. "I was terribly fond of Ivan Ilyich, terribly fond." She giggled and then her short-sighted eyes filled with tears. "Well, I shall be round to-morrow. *Au revoir.*"

She said good-bye to Dasha and went off, striding along in her felt overshoes, her frozen hands thrust man-like into the pockets of her coat.

Dasha followed her with her eyes, frowned, and then went on her way. Turning a corner, she entered the porch of a private mansion which was now a hospital. Here, in high oak-panelled rooms smelling of disinfectant, wounded men, close-cropped and wearing hospital clothing, were sitting or lying on their cots. Near the window two of them were playing draughts. Another was pacing up and down noiselessly on slippered feet. When Dasha came in, he looked quickly at her and wrinkled his low forehead in a frown; then he lay down on his bed and put his hands behind his head.

"Nurse!" a weak voice called. Dasha went over to a tall, heavy, thick-lipped lad. "For the love of God, turn me over on to my left side," he said, with a groan after each word. Dasha put her arms round him, and exerting all her strength raised him a little and turned him over like a sack. "It's time to take my temperature, nurse." Dasha shook down the thermometer and put it under his arm. "I am sick, nurse, if I eat so much as a crumb—and I can't keep anything down, I just can't."

Dasha covered him up with the blanket and passed on. The men on the beds nearby smiled, and one of them said:

"All he is after, nurse, is for you to coddle him—otherwise he's as sound as a roach."

"Let him be, why shouldn't he have what he wants," another voice said. "He's doing no harm—nurse is here to look after us, and he's feeling dull."

"Nurse, Semyon here wants to ask you something, but he's too shy."

Dasha went across to a man who was sitting up in bed; he had merry eyes as round as a jackdaw's, and a small mouth like a bear's; his enormous, broad beard was neatly combed. He threw back his head and pursed up his lips as Dasha came near.

"It's just their little joke, nurse. I'm quite all right, thank you very much."

Dasha smiled and the heaviness was lifted from her heart. She sat down on Semyon's bed and, turning back his sleeve, examined his bandage. And he, wishing to please her, began to describe exactly how and where his arm was hurting him.

Dasha had come to Moscow in October, when Nikolai Ivanovich, carried away by his patriotic fervour, had joined the Moscow section of the Municipal League, which was now engaged in defence work. He had let his Petersburg flat to a member of the British military mission, and was now living in lodgings in Moscow with Dasha. He wore a leather tunic, cursed the flabby intelligentsia, and worked—as he put it—like a horse.

Dasha read criminal law, managed their small household and wrote to Ivan Ilyich every day. Her mind was closed and at rest. The past seemed far away, as if it belonged to some other person's life. She lived without ever taking a deep breath, as it were; she was always full of fear and expectation of what news would come, always anxious to keep herself pure and austere for Ivan Ilyich.

At breakfast one morning early in November, Dasha, turning over the pages of the *Russkoe Slovo*, read Telegin's name under the heading: 'Reported missing.' The casualty list filled two columns in small type: wounded—so and so; killed—so and so; missing—so and so, and right at the very end, Telegin, Ivan Ilyich, Ensign.

That was how the event that darkened her whole life was recorded—one little line of brevier type.

Dasha felt as if those tiny letters, those dry lines, columns and headings were dripping with blood. It was a moment of indescribable horror—the sheet of newspaper seemed to turn into what was printed on it—into an evil-smelling welter of blood. A stench of carrion rose from it, and the screams of unheard voices . . .

Dasha shivered. Even her grief was submerged in this primitive horror and loathing. She lay down on the divan and wrapped herself up in her fur coat. When Nikolai Ivanovich came home to dinner, he sat down on the end of the divan and silently stroked Dasha's feet.

"You must wait, that's the main thing—you must wait, Danyusha," Nikolai Ivanovich said. "He is missing—obviously he's been taken prisoner. I know thousands of such cases."

That night she had a dream: in a bare narrow room, the window of which was thick with cobwebs and dust, a man in a soldier's tunic was sitting on an iron bed. His ashen-grey face was distorted with pain. Both his hands were picking at his bald skull—he was peeling it like an egg, and picking out what was under the skin, putting it into his mouth with his fingers and eating it.

Dasha screamed so loudly in the middle of the night that Nikolai Ivanovich came in with a blanket thrown round his shoulders and stood by her bed; for a long time he could not make out what had happened. Then he poured a sedative into a glass for Dasha and drank some himself.

Dasha was sitting up in bed, tapping her chest with her fingers and saying softly but with despair in her voice: "Please understand, Nikolai, that I can't go on living any longer. Understand that I can't and I don't want to."

To go on living at all after what had happened was very difficult; but to go on living as Dasha had lived until then was quite impossible.

The war had merely touched Dasha lightly with its iron finger, and yet every death and every tear had now come to be her concern too. And so, when

the first days of acute despair had passed, Dasha did the only thing she could do and knew how to do: she took a short course of training in nursing and went to work in a military hospital.

It was very difficult at first. From the fronts came wounded men whose wounds had not been dressed for several days and the stench that rose from their bandages made the nurses feel sick. During operations Dasha had to hold legs and arms that were turning black and from which pieces of rotting flesh came away with the bandages; she had to watch strong men grind their teeth, and saw their bodies quiver and twitch in helpless agony.

There was so much of this suffering that all the charity in the world would not have been enough to shed pity on all those who suffered.

Dasha began to feel that she was now for ever bound up with this life of mutilation and blood and that there was no other life left at all—nothing but the green lampshade glowing in the night-nurse's room, men muttering in delirium on the other side of the wall, and medicine-bottles tinkling on the shelves as a lorry drove past. Her own sorrow was merely a particle of these realities of life.

Sitting at the table in the night-nurse's room in the small hours, Dasha thought of the past, and it seemed to her more and more like a dream. She had lived on heights from which the earth was no longer visible; she had lived as all the others up there had lived; she had been haughty and wrapped up in herself. But now she had fallen from those clouds into this mess of blood and mire, into this hospital smelling of sick bodies, where men groaned heavily in their sleep and raved and muttered. To-night there was a Tartar soldier on the point of death, and in ten minutes' time she would have to go and give him an injection of morphia.

The meeting that day with Yelizaveta Kievna had disturbed Dasha. It had been a hard day: wounded men had been brought in from Galicia in such a condition that one had to have his hand amputated at the wrist, and another his whole arm; two others were raving in their beds in the delirium that precedes death. Dasha was worn out by the end of the day, but still she could not forget Yelizaveta Kievna, her red hands and her man's coat, her pitiful smile and the humble look in her eyes.

Sitting down for a rest in the evening, Dasha looked at the green lampshade and thought how good it would be to be able to cry at a street-corner like Yelizaveta, and say to a stranger: "I loved Ivan Ilyich terribly, terribly much."

Dasha sat down in the large armchair, crossed her legs and opened a book. It was the quarterly report on the work of the Municipal League—columns of figures and absolutely incomprehensible words—and the book brought her no comfort. She glanced at the clock, sighed, got up and went into the ward.

The wounded men were sleeping and it was very stuffy in the ward. High up under the oak ceiling a dim lamp was burning in the iron ring of a chandelier. The young Tartar soldier whose hand had been amputated was raving in a fever and tossing his shaved head about on the pillow. Dasha picked up the ice bag from the floor, put it back on his flushed forehead, and tucked in the blanket. Then, when she had walked round all the beds, she sat on a stool, with her hands on her knees.

"My heart is unschooled, that's what it is," she thought. "It is attracted only by the exquisite and beautiful. It has not learned to love and pity the unlovable."

"You're very sleepy, nurse," she heard a voice say in a friendly tone, and

she turned round. The bearded man, Semyon, was looking at her from his bed.

Dasha asked: "Why aren't you asleep?"

"I slept enough during the day."

"Is your arm hurting?"

"Not much. . . . Nurse!"

"Yes?"

"Your face is so tiny and you're so sleepy. . . . Go and take a nap. I'll keep a look-out, and call you if you're wanted."

"No thanks, I don't want to sleep."

"Got any one in the army?"

"The man I'm engaged to."

"Well, God will protect him."

"He is reported missing."

"Ai, ai!" Semyon sighed and wagged his beard. "A little brother of mine was missing, but then a letter came from him—he was a prisoner. Was this chap of yours a good man?"

"A very, very good man."

"I may have heard about him. What's his name?"

"Ivan Ilyich Telegin."

"I've heard the name. Wait a minute—wait a minute. I've heard it. They said he was captured. What regiment?"

"The Kazans."

"The very man! He's been taken prisoner. He's alive. Aye, he's a good man! Don't worry, nurse, just be patient. The snows will melt—the war will end—we'll have peace again. You'll bear sons to him yet, believe me!"

Dasha listened to him, and sobs rose in her throat—she knew that Semyon was inventing it all and had never heard of Ivan Ilyich before. Yet she felt grateful to him. Semyon said in a low voice:

"Ah, you pretty little thing . . ."

Once again sitting in the night-nurse's room, with her face against the back of the armchair, Dasha felt that now she, a stranger, had been lovingly accepted by the men as one of themselves. And it seemed to her that she could feel pity now for all these suffering, sleeping men. And feeling this pity, her thoughts ran on, and suddenly there came into her mind, with startling clearness, how Ivan Ilyich, too, must be sleeping, breathing somewhere on a narrow bed, just like these men here . . .

Dasha began to pace up and down the room. Suddenly the telephone rang. She started violently: the sound was so harsh and piercing in that dreamy silence. *They must be bringing in more wounded from the night train*, she thought.

"Yes. What is it?" she said. And the husky, agitated voice of a woman said hurriedly into her ear.

"Ask Daria Dmitrievna Bulavin to come to the telephone, please."

"Speaking," Dasha answered, and her heart began to beat terribly. "Who is that? . . . Katia? . . . Katyusha. . . . You? . . . Oh, my dear!"

CHAPTER XIX

"WELL, GIRLS, HERE we are all together again," said Nikolai Ivanovich, buttoning his leather tunic over his stomach. Then he put his hand under Katia's chin and gave her a juicy kiss on the cheek. "Good morning, my dear; how did you sleep?" Passing behind Dasha he kissed her hair.

"Nothing will ever part Dasha and me now, Katyusha—she's a girl in a thousand—and what a worker."

He sat down at the table covered with a clean tablecloth, reached for an egg in a china egg-cup and slashed off the top with his knife.

"Just imagine, Katyusha—I have come to like eggs as they eat them in England—with mustard and butter: it's very tasty, you must try it. And now the Germans are issuing one egg to each person once a fortnight. How do you like that?"

He opened his great mouth and laughed.

"We shall smash Germany like a soft-boiled egg by means of these very eggs. They say German children are already being born without skins. Bismarck told them, the fools, that they must live in peace with Russia. They didn't listen to him, and thought us of no account—so now they can enjoy their two eggs a month."

"It's horrible," Katia said, lowering her eyes, "to think that children are born without any skin—and it's horrible just the same, whoever they are—Russian or German."

"I'm sorry, Katyusha, but you are talking utter rot."

"All I know is that all this killing, killing, killing day after day, is so awful it makes me feel I don't want to live any more."

"There's nothing for it, my dear—we've simply got to learn at our own expense what this Russia of ours really is. Up to now we've only read in all sorts of history-books how our *muzhiks* conquered land on all those battlefields, Kulikovo and Borodino and what not. We thought: "*Whew! What a huge country Russia is! Just look at the map!*" But now we have to put ourselves out, and sacrifice a certain percentage of lives to maintain intact that something coloured green on the map and sprawling right across Europe and Asia. Not so pleasant, eh? If you say that our machinery of government is bad—well, I agree with you on that. And if I have to go out to die for my country, what I want to know first of all is: What about you, who send me to my death—are you fully equipped with all the wisdom of statecraft? Can I be assured of that when I shed my blood for my country? Alas, Katyusha, the Government, out of old habit, still continues to look askance at social organizations—but it is quite obvious by now that it can't get on without us any longer. And as for us, we'll take one finger first, and then the whole hand. I feel very optimistic." Nikolai Ivanovich stood up, took the matches from the mantelpiece, lit a cigarette, and dropped the dead match into the egg-shell. "All this blood will not have been shed in vain. The war will end up by putting people of our kidney, our sort of public men, in control of the State. The war will do what the 'Land and Freedom League', the revolutionaries and Marxists could never achieve. Good-bye, girls." He buttoned up his tunic and went out of the room. Seen from behind he looked like a stout woman dressed as a man.

Katia sighed, and sat down by the window with her knitting. Dasha perched on the arm of Katia's chair, with one arm round her shoulders. They both

wore black high-necked dresses, and as they sat silently side by side they looked very much alike. Outside the window a light snow was falling and a bright, snowy light was on the walls of the room. Dasha pressed her cheek against her sister's hair, faintly scented with an unfamiliar perfume.

"Katyusha—what have you been doing all this time? You never speak about it at all."

"What am I to tell you, my kitten? I wrote to you."

"All the same, Katyusha, I don't understand. You are beautiful, attractive and sweet. I don't know anyone else like you. Why are you so unhappy? Your eyes are always sad."

"I suppose it is just that I'm one of the unhappy sort."

"Come, Katia, this is serious."

"Yes, darling, and I am thinking of it all the time myself. Real unhappiness is when you've got everything—and are unhappy in spite of it. I have a good husband, a pretty little sister, I am free . . . and yet I live as if in a dream and I myself am like a ghost . . . I remember in Paris I sometimes used to think I should like to live in some little provincial town, and keep chickens and grow vegetables, and in the evenings slip away across the brook to meet my sweetheart. . . . But no, Dasha, my life is finished . . ."

"Katyusha, don't talk nonsense."

"Do you know"—Katia looked at her sister with clouded, vacant eyes—"I feel *that* day . . . sometimes. . . . Sometimes I clearly see a striped mattress, a tumbled bed, and a basin full of bile . . . and myself lying dead, grey-haired and yellow."

Katia put down her knitting and gazed at the snowflakes floating earthward in the still air. Far in the distance, jackdaws were circling like a cloud of black leaves round one of the spires of the Kremlin, crowned by a golden spread-eagle.

"I remember one day, Dashenka, when I got up early, very early in the morning. From the balcony I could see Paris all veiled in a bluish haze. White, grey and blue puffs of smoke were rising in the air everywhere. It had rained during the night, and there was a fresh smell of green things and vanilla. Children were walking along the street with books, and women with baskets, and the grocery shops were opening up. It all seemed so solid and eternal, I wanted to go down and mix with the crowd, and meet some man with kind eyes and put my hand on his breast. But when I got down to the great boulevards the whole city had already gone mad. Newsboys rushed about, and there were excited groups of people everywhere. All the papers were full of hatred and the fear of death. The war was on. And ever since that day the only thing I hear is: death, death, death. . . . What is there left to look forward to?"

Dasha said nothing for a while. Then she asked:

"Katyusha . . ."

"What is it, my sweet?"

"How about you and Nikolai?"

"I don't know. Apparently we have mutually forgiven each other. I have been back three days now—and he is very kind to me. Besides, this is no time for that sort of thing. We can suffer or go crazy—who cares? All that is just the piping of a mosquito, scarcely audible even to yourself. I envy the old women—things are so simple for them: death is coming soon, and all they need do is to prepare for it."

Dasha shifted round on the arm of the chair, sighed deeply several times and took her hand from Katia's shoulder.

Katia said gently: "Dashenka, Nikolai Ivanovich told me that you are engaged. Is it true? My poor darling!" She took Dasha's hand and kissed it, then she put it on her breast and began to stroke it. "I am sure Ivan Ilyich is alive. If you love him very much you won't want anything else, nothing else in the world but him."

The two sisters fell silent and watched the snow falling outside the window. A platoon of cadets, their towels and a change of linen tucked under their arms, were marching along the street towards the public baths. As they passed they sang and whistled.

"Soar up, you hawks, like eagles . .
Have done with sorrow and care."

After a few days at home, Dasha resumed her work at the hospital, and Katia was left alone all day in the flat, where everything was unfamiliar: two trivial landscapes on the wall—a hayrick, and a pool with bare birches round it; some photographs of strangers over the divan in the drawing-room; and in the corner a dusty sheaf of plumed grass.

Katia tried the theatre, where the same old actresses were playing Ostrovsky; she went to picture exhibitions and museums; but everything seemed to her pallid, faded and only half-alive, and she herself like the lingering shadow of a way of life long since abandoned by all.

She sat for hours by the window, near the warm radiator, and looked out at quiet, snow-clad Moscow, its soft air full of falling snow and the mournful clanging of bells, ever tolling, now for a memorial service; now for the funerals of the fallen. Books had lost their attraction: what should she read? What could she dream about? All her old thoughts and dreams seemed futile now.

The measure of time was the span from the morning paper to the evening paper. All the people around Katia were living only in the future, in some imaginary future of victory and peace; they welcomed everything that strengthened these hopes with exaggerated joy, and hung their heads and were gloomy whenever anything went wrong. People lost their sense of proportion and snatched eagerly at every kind of gossip and fantastic rumour; a single newspaper headline could rouse them to a frenzy.

Katia finally made up her mind, and asked her husband to find her some sort of war work to do. Early in March she began to work in the same hospital as Dasha.

At first she was repelled by the dirt and suffering just as Dasha had been. But she conquered this feeling and was gradually drawn into the work. This victory over herself made her glad. For the first time she felt in touch with the life around her. She grew to like the hard and dirty work, and pitied those for whom she was working. Once she said to Dasha:

"What on earth put it into our heads that we must live a specially refined life different from everyone else's? At bottom we are both just the same as any peasant woman: what we want is a good husband and a lot of children, and to be closer to the things that matter . . ."

In Easter week it was Katia who took the hospital's Easter cakes to church to be blessed. She and Dasha broke their fast together at the hospital. Nikolai Ivanovich had a special meeting that night, and it was three in the morning when he drove up to the hospital in a car to pick up the two sisters. Katia said that she and Dasha did not feel like going to bed, but wanted to be taken for a drive. It was a silly idea, but they gave the chauffeur a glass of brandy and drove out to the Khodinka Fields.

There was a light frost in the air that cooled their cheeks. The sky was cloudless, with a few bright stars. Ice crunched under the wheels. Katia and Dasha, both in white head-cloths and grey furs, huddled close to each other in the back seat of the car. Nikolai Ivanovich sat in front with the chauffeur. He looked round at them: both had the same dark eyebrows and large eyes.

"I'm blessed if I know which of you is my wife," he said quietly.

And one of them answered. "You'll never guess," and both of them laughed.

Over the edge of the vast, misty field the sky was slowly taking on a greenish tinge, and the black outlines of the Silver Woods loomed up in the distance.

Dasha said softly: "Katyusha, I do so want to be in love."

Katia squeezed her hand, and her eyes filled with tears. A great star, its light waxing and waning as if it was breathing, shone in the green haze of the dawn above the woods.

"I quite forgot to tell you, Katyusha," Nikolai Ivanovich said, turning his whole body round on the seat, "that our representative, Chumakov, has just arrived, and he says that the position in Galicia is very serious indeed. The Germans are hammering away at us with such a barrage that whole regiments are being wiped out, while we are short of ammunition, if you please. . . . In a word, it's a hell of a mess . . ."

Katia did not answer; she only looked up at the stars. Dasha pressed her face against Katia's shoulder. Nikolai Ivanovich went on grumbling for a bit, and then told the chauffeur to drive home.

On the third day of the Easter holiday Katia felt unwell. She did not go to the hospital but stayed in bed. It turned out to be pneumonia; she had caught a chill in the cold wind during their night drive.

CHAPTER XX

"THE WAY THINGS are going—it gets me down . . ."

"You've goggled at that fire long enough—lie down and get some sleep."

"The way things are going. . . . Yes, chums, our Russia's done for, so it is."

Three soldiers were sitting against the mud wall of a high, thatched shed in front of a smouldering fire. One had hung his foot-rags on pegs to dry, and was watching them to keep them from scorching; another was sewing a patch on to his trousers, cautiously pushing and pulling the thread in and out; the third, a pock-marked man with a big nose and a thin black beard, was sitting cross-legged with his hands stuck deep into the pockets of his coat, and gazing into the fire with sunken, feverish eyes.

"We're being sold all round," he said in a low voice, "that's what it is. As soon as we start getting the better of them, the order comes: Retreat! All the likes of us hears is: 'It's all the fault of the Jews'; but, mark you, it's at the very top that treachery comes from."

"I am so fed up with this war that no newspaper could ever describe it," said the soldier who was drying his foot-rags, and carefully put some more brushwood on the embers. "First we go forward, then we go back; then we attack again, and then back again to as you were. There's no end to it! All no good!" He spat into the fire.

"A little while ago that Lieutenant Zhadov came up to me," the soldier who was patching his trousers said, without taking his eyes off his work. "All right. From boredom or what the devil he starts finding fault with me. Why was there a hole in my trousers? And how was I standing, anyway? I said nothing. And then, just like that, he fetched me a clip on the jaw."

The soldier who was drying his foot-rags answered:

"No rifles, no ammunition, no nothing. In our battery there are seven shells for each gun. All the officers know is bash us chaps on the jaw!"

The man who was patching his trousers looked at him in surprise, and nodded his head as if to say: "Yes, go on."

The black-bearded man with feverish eyes said: "They've called up all the men—taking them up to forty-three now. With so many men we could take the whole world. We're quite willing to fight, too; we're doing our bit—but are *they* doing theirs?—that's the point!"

The man who was patching his trousers said: "That's right."

"I saw a field near Warsaw," the black-bearded man went on, "with five or six thousand Siberian riflemen lying on it. They were all lying dead, like sheaves. What for? Why? I'll tell you why. . . . When the Council of War decides anything, one of the generals goes straight away and wires it all to Berlin in code. Get me? Two Siberian army corps marched straight from the station, straight to that field—and there were the machine-guns lying in wait for them. You say you've had a punch on the jaw? What of it? My father, if I didn't buckle the harness on properly, he used to come up and hit me in the face, and he was right—a man must learn, he must be taught. But what were those Siberian riflemen slaughtered for like sheep? I tell you, lads, Russia is done for, sold out. And the man who's sold us is one of our own sort, a peasant from my own village, from Pokrovskoye, a tramp. I don't want even to speak his name. . . . He can't read or write, a rascal with a smooth tongue. He wouldn't work, and took to stealing horses and hanging about the monasteries—got used to women and drink. . . . And now he is sitting in Petersburg in the place of the Tsar, with ministers and generals bowing and scraping all round him. We get slaughtered; thousands of us lie dead in the wet earth; but they in Petersburg sit with all the electric lights ablaze and eat and drink and are bursting with fat . . ."

Suddenly he stopped talking. It was quiet and damp and they could hear the horses munching in the shed; one of the horses kicked the wall with a dull thud. A night-bird flew down from the roof over the fire, and winged away with a mournful screech. At the same moment they heard a whining, rending sound far away in the sky, but coming rapidly nearer, as if some wild beast was pushing with incredible speed through the darkness and had crashed against some obstacle. Beyond the shed the roar of an explosion shook the air and made the ground tremble. Inside the shed the horses shied and set their chains jingling. The soldier who had been patching his trousers said with a worried air:

"That was a big one!"

"And what a gun!"

"Wait a minute!"

All three raised their heads. A sound was again rising into the starless sky. It seemed to last about two minutes, and then a second shell burst somewhere quite close behind the shed showing the black pyramids of the firs outlined against the sky. Again the ground shook. The next second they could hear a third shell coming over. The sound was a sort of bubbling, choking, all-

absorbing noise, so unbearable to the ear that their hearts almost stopped beating. The black-bearded soldier got up and began to back away from it. There was a blast from above like a black flash of lightning, and a column of blackness and fire flew up with a ragged rumble.

When the column subsided there was only a deep shell-hole where the men and their fire had been. The thatch on top of the ruined walls of the shed was burning, and throwing off a yellow smoke. A long-maned horse rushed snorting out of the flames, and bolted towards the pines which stood out from the darkness.

Already flashes of flame were twinkling on the jagged edge of the plain and guns were booming in the distance. Rockets rose into the air like long bright worms and flares slowly falling from them lit up the dark, waterlogged ground. Shells bored their way, whining and screeching, across the sky.

CHAPTER XXI

THAT SAME EVENING in the officers' dug-out, not far from the shed, the officers of one of the companies of the Usolsk regiment were having a celebration. The occasion was the news just received by Captain Tetkin, that his wife had borne him a son. Deep underground, under triple cover, in a low dug-out lit by clusters of candles stuck in glasses, eight officers, a doctor and three nurses from the mobile hospital were sitting at a table.

They had been drinking heavily. Captain Tetkin, the happy father, was asleep with his face in a plate full of food scraps, and one grimy wrist sticking up above his bald skull. The stuffy atmosphere, the liquor and the soft candle-light combined to make the nurses seem very attractive. One of them was called Mushka; she had black hair twisted into two coils on her temples; she laughed all the time, throwing her head back, and her white throat held the heavy gaze of the two officers sitting next to her and of the two sitting opposite. The second nurse, Maria Ivanovna, plump, with cheeks red all over right up to her eyebrows, was singing gipsy songs and singing them exceptionally well. Her audience were beside themselves with enthusiasm; they banged the table with their fists and said over and over again:

"Damn it, that was the life!"

The third nurse at the table was Yelizaveta Kievna. The little flames of the candles gleamed and were split up in her eyes; many faces showed white through the smoke, but Yelizaveta Kievna saw only the face of Ensign Zhadov, the officer sitting next to her, and it seemed to her both terrible and beautiful. He had brown hair and broad shoulders; he was clean shaven, and had very pale, almost translucent eyes. He was sitting bolt upright, tightly belted, drinking a great deal, very pale and turning paler after each drink. Whenever black-haired Mushka burst into a roar of laughter, or Maria Ivanovna picked up the guitar, wiped her face with a crumpled handkerchief, and sang in a deep chesty voice: *I was born in the steppes of Moldavia*, Zhadov slowly smiled with the corners of his straight, narrow mouth, and poured himself out another drink.

Yelizaveta Kievna looked closely at his clear-cut smooth face as he made polite and trivial conversation, and told her, among other stories, that there was

a Captain Martynov in their regiment, who was said to be a fatalist, and who after a few drinks would go out at night past the wire entanglements, creep close up to the enemy trenches, and swear at the Germans in four languages. Not long ago, however, he had paid for his ambitions with a wound in the stomach. Yelizaveta Kievna sighed and said that Captain Martynov must be a hero. Zhadov laughed.

"Excuse me, there are ambitious people and there are fools, but there is no such thing as a hero."

"But when you go out to attack, isn't that heroism?"

"In the first place, one doesn't go out to attack, one is forced to go, and those who go are cowards. Of course, some men do risk their lives without compulsion, but those are men who have an inborn urge to kill." Zhadov drummed on the table with his nails. "If you like, you can say that they are people with a higher level of contemporary consciousness."

Half-rising from his chair, he reached for a large box of fruit jellies standing on the far corner of the table and offered some to Yelizaveta Kievna.

"No, thanks," she said, and felt her heart beating fast and her body relaxing. "Well, what about yourself?"

Zhadov frowned, and his face looked suddenly old, and unexpectedly wrinkled.

"What do you mean—what about me?" he asked sharply. "Yesterday I shot a Jew dead behind the shed. Do you want to know whether it was pleasant or not? What nonsense!"

He clenched his sharp teeth on his cigarette and struck a match. The flat fingers holding it were steady, but all the same the flame did not touch the cigarette, and it did not light.

"Yes, I'm drunk—excuse me," he said, throwing away the match, which had burnt down to his finger-nails. "Let's go and get a breath of air."

Yelizaveta Kievna got up as if in a dream, and followed him to the narrow manhole leading out of the dug-out. Cheerful, drunken voices shouted after them, and Maria Ivanovna strummed on the guitar and drawled out in her deep voice: "The night breathed voluptuous rapture . . ."

Outside there was a sharp smell of spring and of rotting leaves, and it was dark and still. Zhadov walked rapidly over the wet grass, his hands in his pockets. Yelizaveta Kievna kept a little behind him, smiling all the time. Suddenly he stopped and asked abruptly:

"Well, what about it?"

The blood rushed to her face. Swallowing a lump in her throat, she whispered:

"I don't know."

"Let's go in there!" He jerked his head towards the dark roof of the shed. After walking a few paces he stopped again, and his ice-cold hand firmly grasped Yelizaveta Kievna's hand.

"My body is like a god's," he said with unexpected passion. "I can break a silver coin in two with my hands. I see right through people, as if they were made of glass. . . . And I hate them. . . ." He stopped short, as if he had remembered something, and stamped his foot. "All this giggling and singing and cowardly talk makes me sick! They are like maggots in warm manure. . . . I feel like crushing them. . . . Listen . . . I don't love you, I can't love you and I won't love you. . . . Don't flatter yourself. . . . But I want you. . . . I loathe this feeling of dependence. . . . You must understand. . . ." He slipped his hands under Yelizaveta Kievna's arms, pulled her forcibly to him and kissed her with lips as dry and hot as live coals.

Yelizaveta Kievna struggled to free herself, but he crushed her to him in a breath-taking embrace and she bent her head and hung unresisting in his arms.

"You are not like those others—like everyone," he said. "I will teach you. . . ." He suddenly stopped and raised his head. A sharp, piercing sound rose out of the darkness.

"Damn it!" Zhadov said through his teeth.

Immediately afterwards a shell burst in the distance. Yelizaveta Kievna struggled again, but Zhadov held her still more firmly. She said despairingly:

"Let me go!"

A second shell burst. Zhadov continued muttering something, and suddenly a pillar of black fire rose just behind the shed, and with a roar the explosion hurled burning pieces of thatch into the air.

Yelizaveta Kievna tore herself free and ran towards the dug-out.

The officers were hurriedly emerging from the manhole; they glanced at the burning shed, and then ran at a trot across the ground which was chequered with black shadows from the slanting light of the fire. Some ran to the little wood on the left where the trenches were, and others to the right, to the communication trench leading to the bridge-head defences.

Far away, beyond the hills on the other side of the river, the German batteries were thundering. They were shelling both the bridge on the right and the ford across the river leading to the farm which the sixth company of the Usolsk regiment had recently occupied on the other side of the river. Part of the fire was concentrated on the Russian batteries.

Yelizaveta Kievna saw Zhadov walking bareheaded, with his hands in his pockets, straight across the field to the machine-gun post. Suddenly a ragged ball of smoke and fire rose up in place of his tall figure. Yelizaveta Kievna closed her eyes. When she looked again, Zhadov was walking more to the left, with his elbows sticking out just as before. Captain Tetkin, who was standing next to Yelizaveta Kievna and looking through his field-glasses, cried angrily:

"I said that farm wasn't a damned bit of use to us! Now just look, they've messed up the whole ford. Ah, the scoundrels!" He put his field-glasses to his eyes again. "Ah, the scoundrels, they're dropping them right on the farm! The sixth company is done for. Ah!" He turned round and scratched the bald back of his head. "Shlyapkin!"

"Yes, sir," a short, large-nosed man in a fur cap answered at once, saluting.

"Have you been through to the farm?"

"The line's dead, sir."

"Tell the eighth company to send reinforcements to the farm."

"Yes, sir," Shlyapkin answered, smartly dropping his hand from his temple. He took two steps and then stopped.

"Lieutenant Shlyapkin!" the captain shouted again furiously.

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly carry out my orders."

"Yes, sir." Shlyapkin walked a little farther, and then, with his head bent forward, began to poke the earth with his cane.

"Lieutenant Shlyapkin!" the captain roared.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you understand plain Russian or don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Then give the eighth company my order. You can tell them from yourself not to carry it out. They wouldn't be such idiots as to send men there, anyhow. Let them send fifteen men to cover the crossing. Telephone at once to divisional headquarters that a shock group of the eighth company is forcing the crossing with a dashing attack. If headquarters inquire about our losses, give them names of casualties from the sixth company. They won't know the difference. Go along now. Here, you, miss, take yourself off," he said, turning to Yelizaveta Kievna. "Get the hell out of here—the bombardment's just about to start."

At that moment a shell came over with a whine and burst quite close to them.

CHAPTER XXII

ZHADOV LAY AT the very edge of the machine-gun pit with his field-glasses glued to his eyes, eagerly following the battle. The pit had been dug on the slope of a wooded hill. At the foot of the hill the river wound in a slanting curve; to the right the bridge that had just been burnt down was pouring out clouds of smoke; beyond it, in a grassy bog, lay the broken line of trenches held by the first company of the Usolsk regiment. To their left a brook wound through the reeds and flowed into the river; still farther left, on the far side of the brook, three of the farm buildings were burning; beyond them a line of trenches, pushed forward in the shape of a wedge, was held by the sixth company. About three hundred yards away from these, the German lines began, stretching away to the right towards the wooded hills in the background.

The flames of the two fires painted the river a dirty purple, and the water in it was seething with the hail of falling shells that sent up fountains of brown and yellow spray.

The heaviest gunfire was concentrated on the farm. Every second bursts of shrapnel flashed above the burning buildings, and shaggy black pillars of smoke rose near the corner of the broken line of trenches. Needles of rifle fire darted out from the reeds and grass on the far side of the brook.

Explosions of the heavy shells shook the air with a rolling rumble. Shrapnel plopped feebly over the river, over the fields, and over the trenches on the near river-bank which was held by the second, third and fourth companies. Deep-voiced thunder rolled out from beyond the hills where flashes gleamed from twelve German batteries. The answering Russian shells whistled through the air on their way to the far side of those hills. The noise was shattering; it lay like a weight on men's chests, and filled their hearts with hate and rage.

So it went on for a long, a very long time. Zhadov looked at the luminous dial of his watch—it was half-past two: in a little while it would be light, and the Germans would attack.

The thunder of the guns grew more intense, the water in the river boiled even more fiercely, shells poured down on the crossing and on the hills on the near side of the river. Sometimes the ground would tremble ominously and clay and pebbles would roll down off the sides and ceiling of the machine-gun pit. The burnt-out farm was now quiet. Suddenly, from far away, dozens of rockets rose in ribbons of fire slanting towards the river, and the ground was lit up as if by sunlight. When the flares died away it was completely dark for a few minutes. The Germans had gone over the top and were coming in for a charge.

In the murky half-light of the dawn Zhadov could at last distinguish tiny figures moving across the fields far away; they were dropping down out of sight, and then racing forward by turns. Not a single flash of fire came from the farm to meet them. Zhadov turned round and shouted:

"Give them a burst!"

The machine-gun shook as though with diabolical fury, and began rapidly spitting out lead and puffing out acrid smoke. Immediately the figures on the field began to move faster, and some of them fell. But by now the whole field was full of the little dots that were the attacking troops. The foremost among them raced to the shattered trenches of the sixth company. Twenty men rose from the trenches. They were rapidly swallowed up in a crowd of Germans.

This fight for the farm was merely an infinitesimal particle of an immense battle raging over a front of several hundred miles, and costing each side several hundred thousand lives. Russians had occupied the farm two weeks before in order to secure a bridgehead in the event of an attack across the river. The Germans decided to take the farm in order to shift their observation posts nearer to the water. These aims were of importance only to the divisional commanders, both Russian and German, as part of the strategical plan for the autumn campaign which each had worked out meticulously to the last detail.

General Dobrov, commanding the Russian division—who had assumed this name instead of his former non-Russian name by imperial permission only six months before—was sitting playing patience when the news came of the German attack on the sector held by the Usolsk regiment.

The general left his game and went with the senior staff officers and his two aides to another room where topographical maps were lying on a table. A report came in that the crossing and the bridge were being shelled by the enemy. The general saw that the Germans intended to re-take the farm, the very place on which he had built up his marvellous offensive plan, already approved by corps headquarters and now under consideration by the general in command of the army. By attacking the farm the Germans had ruined the whole plan.

Telephone messages coming in every minute confirmed the general's fears. He took the pince-nez from his big nose, fiddled with them, and said calmly but firmly:

"Very good. I shall not give up an inch of the positions occupied by my troops."

A telephone message was immediately sent to the effect that the farm was to be defended to the last. The Kundravin regiment of territorials, until then held in reserve, was ordered to send up two battalions to support Tetkin at the ford. Immediately after this order was sent, a report came in from the commander of the heavy battery: there were very few shells left, one gun was already out of action, and there was no possibility of any adequate reply to the enemy's barrage.

General Dobrov looked sternly at his officers and said:

"Very well, when all the shells are gone we shall fight with cold steel." He took a snow-white handkerchief from the pocket of his red-tabbed grey tunic, unfolded it, wiped his pince-nez, and bent over the map.

The door opened to admit the general's junior aide, Cornet Count Bobruiski, dressed in a dark brown uniform that fitted him like a glove.

"Your Excellency," he said, with a barely discernible smile at the corners of his delicate, boyish mouth, "Captain Tetkin reports that the eighth company is forcing the crossing by a dashing thrust in the face of the enemy's murderous fire."

The general looked over his pince-nez at the cornet, opened and shut his clean-shaven lips, and said:

"Very good."

But for all his cheerful tone, more and more alarming reports were coming in from the firing-line. The Kundravin regiment had reached the river crossing and had dug itself in. The eighth company continued its 'dashing thrust', but somehow never got across after all. Captain Islambekov, in command of the mortars, reported that two of his pieces were out of action and that he had only a few shells left. Colonel Borozdin, commanding the first battalion of the Usolsk regiment, reported that owing to their exposed positions the second, third and fourth companies were suffering heavy losses, and he therefore asked to be permitted either to advance and throw back the insolent enemy, or to withdraw to the outskirts of the woods. No report came through from the sixth company, which had been holding the farm.

At half-past two in the morning a council of war was held. General Dobrov said that he himself would march at the head of the troops entrusted to him, but he would not yield an inch of the bridge-head that had been won. Just then a report came in that the farm had been taken by the enemy and the sixth company wiped out to the last man. The general clenched his fist over his lawn handkerchief and closed his eyes. His chief of staff, Colonel Svyechin, shrugged his massive shoulders, and his fleshy, black-bearded face flushed as he said hoarsely and with precision:

"Your Excellency, I pointed out many times that it was risky to occupy positions on the right bank. We may lose two, three, or four battalions at the crossing, and even if we recapture the farm it will be extremely difficult to hold it."

"We need that bridge-head; we must have it, and we *shall* have it," the general said, and beads of sweat appeared on his nose. "The point is that the loss of the bridge-head nullifies my whole offensive plan."

Colonel Svyechin, his face an even deeper purple, objected:

"Your Excellency, the troops are physically unable to cross the river under that barrage with insufficient support from our own guns—and, as you know, our artillery has no ammunition with which to support them."

The general answered: "Very well, in that case tell the men that George Crosses are hanging on the wire on the far side of the river. I know my soldiers."

After these words, destined to be recorded in history, the general stood up and, holding his gold pince-nez behind his back and twirling them in his short fingers, stared out of the window at the meadow on which a wet birch tree stood out in the delicately bluish morning haze. A flock of sparrows settled on its thin, light-green branches, twittered hastily and anxiously and then suddenly rose and flew away. Now the whole misty field with its dimly outlined trees was already being pierced by the slanting golden rays of the sun.

The fighting ended at sunrise. The Germans were in possession of the farm and the left bank of the brook. The only part of the bridge-head still in Russian hands was the low-lying land on the right side of the brook, held by the first company. A desultory fire was maintained all day across the brook, but it was clear that the first company was in danger of being surrounded. Direct communication between them and the Russian bank of the river had been severed by the burning of the bridge, and it seemed that the most sensible thing to do was to withdraw from the bog during the night.

But in the afternoon Colonel Borozdin, commanding the first battalion, received orders to prepare to ford the river that night to strengthen the first company's position in the bog. Captain Tetkin was ordered to assemble the fifth and seventh companies below the farm and cross the river on pontoons. The third battalion of the Usolsk regiment, which had been held in reserve, was to occupy the positions previously held by the companies which were to make the attack. The Kundravin regiment was to cross by the shallows near the burnt bridge and make a frontal attack.

The orders were definite, and the plan clear: the farm was to be taken by a pincer movement by the first battalion from the right, and the second from the left—while the Kundravin territorial regiment was to draw the enemy's fire and attention. The attack was timed for midnight. At nightfall Zhadov posted machine-guns at the ford; then, taking all precautions against being seen, he took one machine-gun across by boat to a tiny island measuring only a few dozen yards square and covered with willow bushes. Zhadov himself remained here with the gun.

All day the Russian batteries kept up a sporadic fire on the farm and the advanced German positions by the river. From time to time rifle shots cracked here and there along the banks. At midnight the Russian troops, in dead silence, began a simultaneous crossing at three points. In order to distract the attention of the enemy, units of the Bielotserkov regiment, five versts upstream, tried to provoke an exchange of fire. But the Germans did not reply and remained on their guard.

Zhadov watched the crossing intently through the tangled willow-branches. To the right an unwinking yellow star hung low over the wooded hills, and its pale reflection trembled on the black water. Dark objects began to cut across this streak of light. Running figures appeared on the sandy islands and in the shallows. Ten of the figures passed quite close to Zhadov, making a faint splashing noise: they were up to their necks in water, and held their rifles and cartridge pouches over their heads. It was the Kundravin regiment fording the river.

Suddenly short spurts of flame flashed far away on the other side, and shells came flying over with a whine; shrapnel after shrapnel burst high above the river with a metallic clang. Each flash lit up white, bearded faces looking upwards out of the water. The whole of the shallows was seething with running men. Another batch of shells came over. Men cried out and rockets rose, burst and spread a blinding light all over the sky. The Russian batteries opened fire. The current threw a struggling man up at Zhadov's feet. "My head, they've smashed my head," he repeated in a strangled voice, and clutched at the willow branches.

Zhadov ran across to the other end of the island. In the distance, pontoons full of men were moving across the river, and he could see units that had already landed racing across the fields. The deafening, blinding hurricane of the barrage was thundering savagely over the river, on the crossings and against the hills just as it had the day before. The seething water seemed to be alive with maggots; soldiers swarming and shouting and floundering among the black and yellow clouds of smoke and columns of spray. Those who reached the far side climbed out on to the bank. Zhadov's machine-gun rattled in their rear. Russian shells burst far in front of them. Captain Tetkin's two companies kept up a heavy cross-fire on the farm. The spearheads of the Kundravin regiment, which had, it was discovered later, lost half their men during the crossing, attempted a bayonet charge, but were held and lay down under the

wire entanglements. Then the first battalion attacked in close formation out of a reed thicket along the brook. The Germans now abandoned their trenches.

Zhadov was lying at his machine-gun, gripping the crazily dancing handle and pouring a devastating fire on to the grassy slope behind the German trenches, across which men were running in twos and threes and larger groups; invariably, all these men stumbled and fell on their sides or on their faces.

"Fifty-eight . . . sixty." Zhadov counted. Another brittle little figure now stood up and staggered up the slope, holding his head with both hands. Zhadov swung the muzzle of his machine-gun round and the figure first dropped to its knees and then lay down. Zhadov counted: "Sixty-one." Suddenly a blinding, searing light flashed in front of his eyes and he felt himself being hurled through the air, a fierce pain stabbing his hand.

The farm and all the lines of trenches round it were captured, with some two hundred prisoners. At dawn the gunfire from both sides died down and the stretcher-bearers began to bring in the dead and wounded. The ambulance men searching the islands found an overturned machine-gun in a broken willow tree, and near it a soldier half-buried in the sand, the back of his head blown off. Ten yards away, on the other side of the island, Zhadov was lying with his feet in the water. They lifted him up, and he groaned. A sliver of pink bone protruded from his sleeve clotted with blood.

When they brought Zhadov to the field hospital, the doctor called out to Yelizaveta Kievna: "They've brought in your young man. Put him on the table: we must amputate straight away."

Zhadov was unconscious; his nose was sharpened, his eyes sunken, his mouth black. As she took off his shirt, Yelizaveta Kievna saw a tattoo-mark on his white, broad chest: two monkeys with their tails intertwined. He ground his teeth during the operation, and his face twitched convulsively.

When the agony was over and he had been bandaged up, he opened his eyes. Yelizaveta Kievna bent over him.

"Sixty-one," he said.

Zhadov was delirious until next morning, and then fell asleep. Yelizaveta Kievna asked permission to accompany him to the large hospital at divisional headquarters.

CHAPTER XXIII

DASHA CAME INTO the dining-room and stood by the table. Nikolai Ivanovich and Dmitri Stepanovich, who had arrived from Samara two days before in response to an urgent telegram, were sitting there in silence. Holding her white shawl under her chin, Dasha looked at her father's flushed face and dishevelled hair as he sat there with his legs crossed. She looked at Nikolai Ivanovich, at his grief-distorted face and swollen eyelids. Then she, too, sat down and looked out of the window at the bright, slender sickle of the moon hanging in the blue twilight outside.

Dmitri Stepanovich was smoking and scattering ash all over his shaggy waistcoat. Nikolai Ivanovich was carefully piling up a little heap of crumbs on the tablecloth. They sat silent for a long time. At last Nikolai Ivanovich said in a choking voice:

"Why has she been left alone? That's not right."

"You stay, I'll go," Dasha answered, getting up. She no longer felt any pain or weariness in her body. "Papa, please come and give her another injection," she said, and drew her shawl over her mouth. Dmitri Stepanovich sniffed violently and threw the butt of his cigarette away over his shoulder. The floor all round him was strewn with cigarette ends.

"Papa, please give her another injection, please, please!"

Nikolai Ivanovich exclaimed in the same irritated, almost theatrical voice: "She can't live just on camphor. She is dying, Dasha."

Dasha turned impetuously to him: "How dare you talk like that!" she cried. "How dare you! She is not going to die!"

Nikolai Ivanovich's yellow face twitched. He turned towards the window, and he, too, saw the narrow, gleaming sickle of the moon in the blue void.

"What agony," he said. "If we lose her—I can't . . ."

Dasha crossed the drawing-room on tiptoe, glanced at the windows—beyond which lay an icy, eternal infinity—and then slipped noiselessly into Katia's bedroom which was dimly lit by a night-light.

On a wide, low bed at the far end of the room, a thin, motionless face, framed in straggling, dry, darkened hair, was visible against the pillows. Lower down, a narrow, upturned hand lay on the blanket. Dasha went down on her knees by the bedside. Katia's breathing was scarcely audible. After a long while she said softly and plaintively:

"What time is it?"

"Eight, Katia."

Katia breathed, and then again asked in the same plaintive tone:

"What time is it?"

She had been repeating the same question all that day. Her almost transparent face was calm, and her eyes were closed. . . . For a long while now she had been walking along the soft carpet of a long, yellow corridor. It was all yellow—walls and ceiling. On the right, a yellowish, tormenting light was shining through the dusty windows. On the left, a multitude of flat doors. Beyond them—if they were opened—was the end of the earth—the abyss. Katia walked slowly, ever so slowly, as in a dream, past these doors and dusty windows. In front of her lay the long, smooth corridor, full of yellow light. It was stuffy there and a breath of deadly anguish blew from each door. When, oh Lord, was the end coming? Should she stop and listen? . . . No use, she could not hear anything. . . . But in the darkness behind the doors there was a buzzing, like the winding up of a grandfather clock, a slow, low sound. . . . Oh, the agony! . . . If only she could recover consciousness . . . and say something simple, something human . . .

And with an effort Katia said again in that plaintive tone:

"What time is it?"

"Katyusha, why do you keep asking that?"

"*Good. Dasha is here. . . .*" And once again the soft carpet of the corridor spread out sickeningly under her feet, the glaring, sultry light poured in through the dusty windows, and the clock spring began to buzz in the distance.

"*Oh not to hear. . . . Not to see. . . . Not to feel. . . . To lie down and hide my head. . . . If only the end would come. . . . But Dasha is in the way, she won't let me relax. . . . She holds my hand, she kisses me—and keeps murmuring and murmuring. . . . It's as if something alive was flowing out of her into my light, empty body. . . . How unpleasant! . . . If I could only explain to her that it's easy to die—easier than to feel this living something in me. . . . If she would only let me go.*"

"Katyusha, I love you, I love you, do you hear?"

"*She holds on to me, she's sorry for me. . . . So I mustn't. . . . The little girl would be left alone, orphaned . . .*"

"Dasha!"

"Yes, Katia?"

"I am not going to die."

Ah, that must be her father coming in—there is a smell of tobacco. He bends down to her, turns back the bedclothes, and slips a needle into her chest—just a little sharp, sweet pain. A soothing wave of calm spread all through her body. The walls of the yellow corridor sway and move apart, and a cool breeze is blowing in. Dasha is stroking the hand lying outside the bedclothes, she presses her lips to it and her lips bring warmth. Another moment, and Katia's body would sink into the sweet darkness of sleep. But once again the hard yellow lines emerge from the sides, from inside her eyes, and behold, they are there again, they multiply and build up again the tormenting, sultry corridor . . .

"Dasha, I don't want to go there."

Dasha, alive and strong, puts her arm round Katia's head and lays her own on the pillow, clasping her tight: and a rough, warm power seems to flow from her so that Katia may live!

But the corridor is there again, spreading out in front of her: she would have to get up and stagger along it, with a ton weight on each foot. She must not lie still. Dasha was holding her, lifting her, saying: Go!

For three days Katia fought off death. She felt Dasha's passionate will unceasingly in her, and but for Dasha she would have long since lost all strength and found peace.

All the evening and night of the third day Dasha never left Katia's bed. It was as if the sisters had become a single being, one in suffering and one in will. Towards the morning of the fourth day Katia at last began to perspire and turned over on her side. Her breathing was hardly audible now. Dasha, greatly alarmed, ran to call their father. There was nothing to do but to wait. At seven that morning Katia sighed and turned over on her other side. The crisis was over, and the return to life had begun.

Dasha, too, now slept for the first time in three days, sitting in the big armchair at Katia's bedside. When Nikolai Ivanovich heard that Katia was safe, he put his arms round Dmitri Stepanovich and wept on his shaggy waistcoat.

The next day was a day of joy—it was warm and sunny, and everyone thought everyone else very kind. A white lilac bush was brought from a flower-shop and put in the drawing-room. Dasha felt that she had, with her own hands, snatched Katia back from a black cold hole in eternal darkness. And there was nothing on earth more precious than life—she knew this now beyond question.

At the end of May, Nikolai Ivanovich took Katia to a place in the country near Moscow. The house was a little wooden chalet, with two verandas—one looking on to a grove of white birches, where piebald calves roamed through the ceaselessly shifting green shadows; the other on to a slope of smoothly undulating fields.

Every evening Dasha and Nikolai Ivanovich got out of the down train at the country halt and walked across a marshy field with a cloud of gnats dancing over their heads. Then they had to climb the hill. Here Nikolai

Ivanovich usually stopped, as if to look at the sunset; and he would puff and say: "Ah, how beautiful it is, devil take it!"

Above the darkening, undulating plain covered with alternate strips of corn, and hazel and birch copses, the sky was full of sunset clouds, purpling, motionless and barren. Through long rifts in them the fading glow of the sunset showed dimly. Not far away a strip of orange sky was reflected in the flooded brook, along which the frogs croaked and moaned. The ricks and roofs of the village loomed dark against the flat fields where a fire was burning. A train emerged with a long-drawn whistle from the edge of the forest; it was carrying soldiers away towards the west, into the paling sunset.

As Dasha and Nikolai Ivanovich approached the chalet along the path skirting the wood, they could see through the glass of the veranda the table laid for supper, and on it the lamp with its frosted glass globe. Sharik, the house-dog, would dash out to meet them with a welcoming bark, madly wagging his tail, and then would rush into the bushes and bark again just to make sure.

Katia would drum a welcome with her fingers on the glass of the veranda—she was not yet allowed to go out after sunset. Nikolai Ivanovich would close the wicket-gate behind him and say: "A nice little place, very nice indeed." Then they would all sit down to supper and hear all the local news from Katia: about a mad dog that had come from Tushino and bitten two of Kishkin's chickens; about the Zhilkins who had moved into the neighbouring chalet only to-day and had already had their samovar stolen; about Matryona, the cook, who had thrashed her son again.

Dasha would eat in silence; she got terribly tired after her day in town. Nikolai Ivanovich would pull a bundle of newspapers out of his brief-case and begin to read them, while he dug at his teeth with a toothpick. When he came to any unpleasant news, he would click his tongue, until Katia said: "Please, Nikolai, don't make that noise." Dasha would go outside and sit on the porch, her chin propped on her hand, looking at the darkened plain, at the fires showing here and there, and at the little summer stars coming out in clusters in the sky with the smell of watered flower-beds rising from the garden.

On the veranda Nikolai Ivanovich would rustle his papers and say:

"This war can't last much longer if only for the reason that the Entente and we, their allies, are being utterly ruined."

Katia asked: "Would you like some clotted milk?"

"Yes, if it's cold. . . . This is awful! Awful! We have lost Lvov and Lublin. What a mess! How can we fight when traitors are stabbing us in the back! It's incredible!"

"Nikolai, don't click your tongue."

"Leave me alone! If we lose Warsaw, too, we shall be ashamed to go on living. Really, sometimes I think it might be better to accept any sort of armistice and then turn our bayonets against Petersburg."

They could hear a train whistling in the distance; then they heard it clatter across the bridge over the brook in which they had just seen the sunset reflected: it was probably bringing wounded soldiers back to Moscow. Nikolai Ivanovich again rustled his paper.

"The columns are being sent to the front without rifles; they sit in the trenches armed with nothing but sticks. One rifle to every five men. They go over the top with sticks, the idea being that when a man falls, the man next to him takes his rifle. Damn it, oh damn it! . . ."

At this stage Dasha usually came down from the porch, and stood leaning

against the wicket-gate. The light from the veranda fell on the shiny burdocks by the fence and on the path. Matryona's son, Petka, would shuffle forward reluctantly and go past her with his head bent, kicking up the dust with his bare feet. There was nothing left for him to do but go back to the kitchen, take his thrashing and go to bed.

But that evening Dasha went out of the gate and walked slowly along to the brook. There, standing on the little bluff in the darkness, she listened to a spring gurgling somewhere so faintly that it could only be heard at night; a clod of earth rolled down the dry side of the bluff and fell into the water with a splash. The black outline of trees showed motionless on each side. Suddenly the leaves began to rustle dreamily, and then it was still again. Dasha clasped her hands together and said softly: "When? Oh, when . . .?"

One holiday early in June Dasha got up, and in order not to disturb Katia, went outside to wash in the kitchen. A pile of vegetables was lying on the table, and on top of it a greenish postcard which the greengrocer must have brought up from the post office with the newspapers. Matryona's son Petka was sitting on the doorstep, sniffing and tying a chicken's leg to a stick. Matryona was hanging out the washing on an acacia tree. Dasha poured some water that smelt of the brook into the earthenware basin, dropped her vest from her shoulders, and looked again at the strange postcard. She picked it up by one corner with her wet fingers and read:

Dear Dasha, I am worried because I haven't had an answer to a single one of my letters: have they all gone astray?

Dasha hurriedly sat down on a chair; a mist rose in front of her eyes, and her knees went all weak. . . .

My wound is now completely healed. I do physical jerks every day, and in general am keeping fit. I am also learning English and French. My love to you, Dasha, if you still remember me.—IVAN TELEGIN.

Dasha pulled her vest back over her shoulders and read the card a second time. "If you still remember me!" She jumped up and rushed into Katia's bedroom, and drew back the chintz window-curtains with a quick jerk.

"Katia, here, read it—read it aloud."

Without waiting for Katia, who was quite taken aback, Dasha sat down on the bed and read it aloud herself, then jumped up again at once and clapped her hands.

"Katia, Katia, isn't it awful!"

"Why, Dasha, thank God that he's alive!"

"I love him! . . . What shall I do? . . . I want to know when this war is going to end."

Dasha snatched up the postcard and rushed to Nikolai Ivanovich. Having read it to him, she demanded categorically in a tone of despair that he should tell her precisely when the war was going to end.

"But, my dear child, no one can tell you that."

"Then what are you doing in your silly Municipal League? All you do is chatter nonsense from morning to night. I am going to Moscow at once to see the Commander-in-Chief. . . . I shall demand of him . . ."

"What will you demand of him? . . . Dasha, Dasha, my dear, you must wait, like everybody else."

For a few days Dasha chafed and fretted, and then all at once she calmed down, as if numbed; she retired to her room early every evening to write letters to Ivan Ilyich, make up parcels for him and sew them up in canvas. When Katia mentioned Telegin to her, she did not respond; she gave up her

evening walks and sat with Katia, sewing and reading; it seemed as if she wanted to bury her emotions deep within herself, and protect herself by an impenetrable shell of everyday affairs.

Although Katia completely recovered during the summer, she, too, seemed numbed like Dasha. Often the two sisters would talk to each other of the weight that lay on them like a milestone, and indeed on everyone in those days. It was a burden to wake up, a burden to walk about, a burden to think, a burden to meet people—they could hardly wait until it was time to go to bed, and when bedtime came they were so tired and tormented that all they wanted was to fall asleep and forget it all. On one occasion the Zhilkins invited them to come and try their new home-made jam, but after tea the newspapers were brought in and there was Zhilkin's brother in the casualty list among those killed in action. The Zhilkins retired into the house, and the guests sat on the veranda in the twilight and talked in low voices, as one does at a funeral. And it was the same everywhere. Then prices began to go up. The future was uncertain and dark. Warsaw was given up. The fortifications of Brest-Litovsk were blown up and abandoned. Spies were being hunted everywhere.

A gang of bandits established themselves in a ravine by the River Khimka. No one dared to go through the wood for a whole week, until the police drove the bandits out of the ravine; two were captured, but the third got away, it was said, to the Zvenigorod district.

One morning a cabman, standing up in his droshky, came tearing into the square near the Smokovnikovs' chalet. The village women and children gathered quickly round him from every direction. Something had happened. Some of the summer visitors came out of their chalets to find out what was up. Matryona trudged across the garden too, wiping her hands on her apron. The cabman, red-faced and hot, was standing up in the droshky and speaking:

". . . They dragged him out of the office, and threw him on the pavement and then into the Moskva river, and at the factory another five were hiding—Germans. . . . Three of them were found, but the police got them away or they, too, would have been in the river. . . . All round Lubyansk Square the pavement is covered with silks and velvets. There's looting all over the city . . . crowds of people. . . ."

He lashed his spirited black stallion with the reins, as hard as he could—it had sat down between the curved shafts. "None of your tricks." He lashed again. The stallion snorted, dashed forward and flew with the swaying, jolting droshky along the street towards the village inn.

Dasha and Nikolai Ivanovich were in Moscow. From that direction a column of black smoke rose and spread in a cloud over the greyish misty sky that shimmered in the sun. The fire could be seen clearly from the village square and the villagers were standing about in groups watching it. When some of the summer visitors joined them the talk stopped; the villagers looked at the gentry with a mixture of derision and a queer air of expectancy. A thick-set man in a torn shirt and without a cap suddenly appeared on the steps of the little brick chapel and shouted:

"They're killing all the Germans in Moscow!"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, a pregnant woman gave tongue and the crowd pushed towards the chapel. Katia ran with them. The crowd was restless and noisy.

"The Warsaw station is burning, the Germans set it on fire."

"Two thousand Germans have been killed!"

"Not two—six thousand! Thrown into the river they were!"

"They began with the Germans, then they went on cleaning up the others. They say the Kuznetski is all cleared out."

"Serves them right. They've fed on our sweat and blood long enough—the dirty profiteers. Anyway, there's no stopping our people now."

"In the Petrovski Park—so help me God, I'm telling the truth—my sister's just come running from there—in a house in the park, they say, they found a wireless telegraph, and with it were two spies with false beards—they were killed on the spot, of course."

"All the chalets ought to be searched, that they ought."

Then girls with empty sacks came running along under the hill to the embankment which carried the road to Moscow. People shouted after them. The girls turned round and waved their sacks, laughing. Katia asked a respectable-looking old peasant, who was standing near her leaning on a long staff:

"Where are those girls going?"

"To loot, dear lady."

At last, at six o'clock, Dasha and Nikolai Ivanovich arrived from town in a cab. They were both excited, and reported, interrupting each other all the time, that the people all over Moscow were collecting in crowds and sacking the houses where Germans lived and also German shops. Some of the houses had been burnt down. Mandel's shop, which sold ready-made clothes, had been cleared out. The whole of the Becker piano warehouse on the Kuznetski had been smashed up; the pianos had been thrown out of the second-floor windows and piled up to make a bonfire. Lubyansk Square was strewn with medicines and broken glass. It was said that some people had been killed. Patrols came out after midday, and began to move the crowds on. Now all was quiet.

"Of course, this is barbarism," Nikolai Ivanovich said, blinking with excitement. "But I like this vigour, this lively temper of the people. To-day they smashed the German shops, and to-morrow, damn it, they'll be building barricades. The government deliberately permitted this pogrom. Yes, yes, I assure you—to give the people an outlet for their anger. But this kind of thing will give the people a taste for something more serious. Ha, ha!"

That same night the Zhilkins' cellars were cleaned out and the Svyechnikovs' washing stolen from the loft. In the inn the lights were on all through the night. And even a week later there was still much whispering in the village, and the villagers stared inscrutably at the summer visitors every time they went out for a walk.

Early in August the Smokovnikovs moved back to town, and Katia took up her work in the hospital again. That autumn Moscow was full of refugees from Poland. One could hardly get through the crowds on the Kuznetski, the Petrovka and the Tverskaya. The shops, the cafés, and the theatres were full to overflowing.

All this bustle and luxury, all these crowded theatres and hotels, all these noisy streets flooded with electric light, were shielded from all danger by the living wall of an army, twelve million strong, which was bleeding from countless wounds. The military situation continued to be alarming. Everywhere, at the front and in the rear, there was talk of Rasputin's evil influence, of treachery, of the impossibility of fighting any longer, unless St. Nicholas helped by some miracle.

And then, at the moment of utter depression and demoralisation General Ruzski unexpectedly stopped the advance of the German armies in a pitched battle.

his neck to illustrate this point. "Why haven't I done it already? Only because I'm afraid of being caught, tried and hanged. That's logical, isn't it? The question of killing and robbing an enemy has been decided by the government—that is to say, by a moral code established by the powers that be—that is to say by the civil and criminal codes—and decided in the affirmative sense. Hence, the question resolves itself into my personal feelings as to whom I consider my enemy."

"But there is a difference between the enemies of your country and your own personal enemies," Yelizaveta Kievna said under her breath.

"Oh, thank you, you're going to lecture me about Socialism again! Rot! Morality is based on the rights of the individual, and not of the collective. I maintain that the reason why mobilization was a brilliant success in every country, and the war has already been going on at full blast for over two years in spite of all the Pope's protests—is that every one of us, each individual, has outgrown his swaddling clothes. We want to kill and loot—or if we don't exactly want to, at any rate we have no objection to it. Killing and looting have been organized by the State. Fools, milksops and women still call killing and looting murder and robbery. But I, for my part, will call them from now on: 'the full realization of individual freedom'. The tiger takes what it wants. I am superior to any tiger. Who dares to curtail my rights? The statute book? Bah! That is food for worms."

Zhadov drew in his legs, got up and strode up and down the room which was dimly lit up by the fading streak of the sunset coming through the dirty windows.

"Thousands of millions of people are engaged in some form of war activity, and fifty million men are fighting at the fronts. They are organized and armed. For the time being they form two hostile groups. But what is to prevent them from ceasing fire one fine day and joining hands? This will happen as soon as some man says to those fifty million men: 'You fools, you're shooting at the wrong target'. The war is bound to end in mutinies, revolutions, a world conflagration. The bayonets will be turned against the enemy at home and the fifty millions will be the masters. A beggar covered with sores will sit on the throne of the Tsars, and everyone will bow down to him. I don't mind. That gives me all the more elbow-room for the struggle. On the one hand, the law of the masses: on the other, the law of the individual, stark and unrestricted. For you, Socialism; but for us the law of the jungle—sacred anarchy, organized with iron discipline."

Yelizaveta Kievna's heart was beating wildly. Here was that very 'abyss' about which she had dreamed in Telegin's flat long ago. But now it was no longer a flippant jest, like the twelve articles of 'self-provocation' which Telegin's lodgers had pinned on her door. . . . Now, in the twilight, a man was striding up and down by the window, a really terrible man, a man like a puma in a cage. That he was talking at all was merely because he was not free. As she listened to him Yelizaveta Kievna felt as if she could almost see a mad galloping of horses over wide plains, the glare of fires in the sky. . . . She could almost hear cries and the clamour of battles, the shrieks of dying men and the songs of the steppes.

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE MIDST of the universal dejection and hopeless waiting at the beginning of the winter of 1916, the Russian troops, tunnelling deeply through the snow and struggling over ice-covered rocks, unexpectedly took the fortress of Erzerum by storm. This was the time when the British armies had suffered reverses in Mesopotamia and at Gallipoli, when fierce battles were being fought for the Isère ferry on the Western Front, and when the capture of a few yards of blood-soaked ground was regarded as a victory and the Eiffel Tower hastily broadcast it to the world at large.

On the Austrian front the Russian armies commanded by General Brussilov no less unexpectedly went over to the offensive and vigorously followed up their initial thrust.

These events created an international sensation. In England somebody wrote a book about the 'enigmatic Russian soul.' For it was indeed contrary to all logic that after eighteen months of war and devastation, the loss of eighteen provinces, universal despondency, economic dislocation and political chaos, Russia should suddenly attempt an offensive along the whole length of her two-thousand-mile front. A tidal wave of apparently inexhaustible strength began to flow westward. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners were dragged into the depths of Russia. Austria had received a mortal blow, and two years later she fell to pieces as easily as a cracked earthenware pot. Germany made secret offers of peace. The rouble went up. Once again hopes were high of finishing the world war by a single military thrust. The 'Russian soul' became exceedingly popular. Russian divisions were embarked in ocean-going steamers. Muzhiks from Orel, Tula and Ryazan marched singing their peasant songs through the streets of Salonica, Marseilles and Paris, and made fierce bayonet charges 'to save European civilization'.

The Russians maintained their offensive all through the summer. More and more men were called up. The age limit was put up to forty-three and peasants were taken straight from their work in the fields. Reinforcements were kept in readiness in every town. The number of men mobilized rose to twenty-four million. The ancient menace of the hordes of Asia rose like a dark cloud over Germany, over all Europe.

Moscow was very empty that summer—the war had sucked away the male population like a pump. Nikolai Ivanovich had gone to the front, near Minsk. Dasha and Katia were leading quiet and solitary lives in town: there was a great deal of work to be done. Now and then a brief melancholy postcard would come from Telegin; it appeared that he had made an attempt to escape, but had been recaptured and sent to a fortress.

At times the two sisters had a welcome visitor: a Captain Roshchin, who was in Moscow to supervise the inspection of equipment. Nikolai Ivanovich had brought him home one day for dinner, and after that he had been coming regularly.

Every evening as it was growing dark there would be a ring at the front door. Katia would give a half-suppressed sigh and go to the sideboard to put more jam in the jar or cut slices of lemon for tea. Dasha noticed that when Roshchin came in a few minutes after the ring, Katia never turned to him immediately but would wait a moment or two, and then smile her usual sweet smile. Vadim Petrovich Roshchin would bow to her without a word. He was a slim man

with dark, pensive eyes and a close-cropped, well-shaped head. He would come forward slowly, sit down at the table and give them the war news in a quiet voice. Katia would sit silent behind the samovar looking at him; but her eyes, with their wide pupils, showed that she was not listening to him with any great attention. Whenever their eyes met Roshchin seemed to frown slightly and his spurs would jingle under the table. Sometimes there would be a long silence, and then Katia would sigh suddenly, blush scarlet and smile apologetically. At eleven o'clock Roshchin would get up, kiss Katia's hand deferentially and Dasha's absent-mindedly, and go out, after having asked them not to bother to see him to the door. His firm, measured steps could be heard for a long time as he walked along the empty street. Katia would wash up the cups, close the sideboard, and—still without saying a word—go off to her own room and turn the key in the door.

Once, towards evening, Dasha was sitting by the open window. Swifts were flying high over the street. Dasha listened to their thin, tinkling notes and thought to herself that the weather next day would be bright and hot, as the swifts were flying high, and that the swifts knew nothing of the war, the lucky birds.

The sun had set, and a golden dust hung over the city. People were sitting on the doorsteps and porches in the twilight. Dasha was sad and waiting for something. Not far away a barrel-organ began to play with the age-old vulgar evening melancholy of barrel-organs. Dasha put her elbows on the window-sill. A high female voice began to sing at the very top of the scale:

"*Dry crusts have ever been my food, cold water my drink has been. . . .*"

Katia came up behind Dasha's chair and seemed to be listening too, because she did not move.

"Katia, how well she sings."

"What for?" Katia suddenly said in a voice that yet held a note of fierce passion. "Why has this been put on us? How are we to blame? By the time this is over I shall be an old woman, understand? I can't go on any more, I can't, I can't." She was standing against the wall breathing hard and holding on to the curtains. She was pale, and little wrinkles showed round her mouth; she looked at Dasha with dry, dark eyes. "I can't go on, I can't!" she repeated in her soft husky voice. "It never will end! We shall die . . . we shall never know happiness again. . . . Listen to that woman keening. . . . As if she was burying me alive. . . ."

Dasha put her arms round her sister and tried to calm her down, but Katia held her off with her elbows.

At that moment there was a ring at the front door. Katia pushed her sister away and looked at the door. It opened and Roshchin came in, wearing a coarse cloth tunic, and new oiled boots. He greeted Dasha with a smile, shook hands with Katia, suddenly looked at her with surprise and frowned. Dasha left them and went into the dining-room. As she was laying the tea things on the table she heard Katia ask Roshchin, in the same soft husky voice:

"You are going away?"

He coughed, and then answered dryly: "Yes."

"To-morrow?"

"No—in an hour."

"Where?"

"On active service." And then, after a short silence, he added: "In all probability, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, we are seeing each other for the last time, and I decided to tell you. . . ."

Katia hurriedly interrupted him. "No, no! . . . I know it. . . . And you, too, know about me. . . ."

"Yekaterina Dmitrievna, you. . . ."

Katia cried in a tone of despair: "Yes—you can see for yourself. Please go now. . . ."

The cup in Dasha's hand was shaking. They were silent in there, in the drawing-room. And at last Katia said in quite a low voice:

"Vadim Petrovich, please go."

"Good-bye."

Roshchin drew a sharp breath. His clumsy regulation boots creaked. The front door slammed. Katia came into the dining-room and sat down at the table, pressing her hands to her face.

From that time on she never mentioned the man who had gone.

She did not complain, but in the mornings her eyes were red and her lips swollen. Roshchin sent a postcard from somewhere on his journey—"Greetings to the sisters"—and they propped it up on the mantelpiece where the flies settled on it.

Every evening the two sisters went down to the Tverski boulevard to sit on a bench, listen to the music and watch the girls in pink and white frocks strolling under the trees. There were a great many women and children; now and then a soldier would pass, with his hand in a sling or walking with the aid of crutches. The brass band played a waltz and the melancholy sound of the horns died away in the evening sky. Dasha took Katia's thin, feeble little hand in hers.

"Katyusha, Katyusha," she said, looking through the branches at the sunset glow, "I believe that, if we have the courage, we shall live to see a time when we can love without heartaches. . . . We know now that there is nothing in the world greater than love. Sometimes I think that when Ivan Ilyich comes back from the prison camp he'll be altogether different, a new man. And we shall meet as if we had loved each other in some other life, not in this."

Katia leant against Dasha's shoulder and said:

"But my heart, Danyusha, has grown quite old with pain and darkness. You will see happy days yet, but I shall see nothing more: my days of bloom are over and the blossoms were barren."

"Katyusha, you shouldn't say such things."

"Why not, little girl, it's best to face the truth."

One such evening on the boulevard a man in uniform sat down at the other end of the bench. The band was playing an old waltz. The dim lights of the street lamps glowed among the trees. The man at the other end of the bench was staring so fixedly at Dasha that she began to feel uncomfortable. She turned towards him, and suddenly exclaimed in a low, startled voice:

"No!"

The man was Bessonov, thin and shabby, in a tunic that hung on his shoulders like a sack, and a cap with a Red Cross badge on his head. He stood up and shook hands with her without a word. Dasha said: "How are you?" and pressed her lips together. Katia leaned against the back of the bench, hid behind Dasha's hat, and closed her eyes. Bessonov looked grey, as if he were dusty or unwashed.

"I saw you on the boulevard yesterday, and the day before," he said to Dasha, raising his eyebrows. "But I did not venture to speak to you. . . . I am going away to fight—as you see, they have got even me."

"How can you say you are going to fight—you're in the Red Cross, aren't you?" Dasha said with sudden irritation.

"Of course the danger is certainly less, comparatively speaking. But I don't care in the least whether I get killed or not. . . . It's all so boring, Daria Dmitrievna," he raised his head and looked at her with lustreless eyes. "So boring, all these corpses, corpses, corpses. . . ."

Katia, without opening her eyes, asked:

"Do they bore you?"

"Yes, very much, Yekaterina Dmitrievna. There was a time when I still had some kind of hope. . . . But after all these corpses the final darkness is coming . . . corpses and blood and chaos. . . . The fact is, Daria Dmitrievna, that I sat down here by you because I wanted to ask you to give me half-an-hour of your time."

"What for?" Dasha looked into his strange unhealthy face, and suddenly she felt—very clearly—that she was seeing this man for the first time.

"I have thought a great deal about what happened in the Crimea," Bessonov said, frowning. "I wanted to speak to you . . ."—he slowly felt in his side-pocket for his cigarette case—"I should like to dispel certain unfavourable impressions. . . ."

Dasha blinked. No trace of the old magic was left in that unpleasant face.

"I don't think we have anything to discuss with each other," she said firmly and turned away.

"Good-bye, Alexey Alexeyevich."

Bessonov smiled wryly, raised his cap and walked away. Dasha looked at his weak back, at the much too wide trousers that looked as if they might drop any minute, at his clumsy, dusty army boots—could this really be the same Bessonov who had haunted her virginal nights?

"Katyusha, wait for me, I'll be back in a moment," she said quickly, and hurried after Bessonov. He turned into a side street; Dasha, quite out of breath, overtook him and caught his sleeve. He stopped and turned round: his eyelids came down over his eyes like those of a sick bird.

"Alexey Alexeyevich, don't be angry with me."

"I'm not angry—it's you who didn't want to speak to me."

"No, no. . . . You misunderstand me. . . . I have the greatest regard for you and I wish you well. . . . But there's no point in recalling what is past . . . it is over and done with. . . . I feel guilty and I am sorry for you. . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders, smiled and said, looking past Dasha at the passers-by:

"I thank you for your compassion."

Dasha sighed. Had Bessonov been a little boy she would have taken him home, washed him with warm water and fed him with sweets. But what could she do with this man who had created a little hell of his own for himself and was now suffering, being angry and taking offence.

"Alexey Alexeyevich—if you care to write to me, write every day, and I will answer every letter," Dasha said, looking him in the face with as friendly an expression as she could muster. He threw back his head and said with a wooden, angry laugh:

"Thank you. . . . But I have an aversion to paper and ink. . . ." He made a wry face, as if he had swallowed something acid. "Either you are a saint, Daria Dmitrievna, or you are a fool. . . . You are all the torments of hell sent to me while I'm still alive—do you understand that?"

He made an effort to go, but seemed to be rooted to the ground. Dasha stood with drooping head—she understood it very well and was sorry, but her heart was untouched. Bessonov looked at her bent neck, at her tender, virginal breast showing through the slit of her white dress, and thought that this, beyond doubt, was death.

"Be merciful," he said in a simple, quiet, human voice.

She did not raise her head, but answered at once in a whisper: "Yes, yes," and walked away between the trees. For the last time Bessonov's glance picked out her golden head in the crowd: she did not look back. He put his hand on the trunk of a tree and dug his fingers into the green bark: the earth, his last refuge, was slipping from under his feet.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DULL RED sphere of the moon hung low over the bleak peat bog. Mist curled along the trenches of abandoned positions. The charred stumps of trees were everywhere, and stunted pines showed black against the sky. It was damp and quiet. An ambulance column was moving slowly in single file along the narrow cordwood track laid through the bog. The front lines were only two miles away beyond the serrated outline of the silent forest.

On one of the carts Bessonov, covered with a horse-blanket smelling of horse sweat, was lying on his back in the hay. Every night at sunset the fever came on him: a shivering fit would make his teeth chatter, his whole body seemed to dry up, and clear, light, brightly-coloured thoughts seethed coldly in his brain. It was a heavenly sensation, as if his body had lost all weight.

Pulling the horse-blanket up to his chin, Bessonov looked up into the misty, feverish sky. There it was—the earthly journey's end: mist, moonlight, and a cart rocking like a cradle. Once again the swing of the centuries had come full circle and the cartwheels of the Scythians were creaking again. Everything had been a dream: the lights of Petersburg, the austere magnificence of its buildings, the music in warm, glittering halls, the magic of the rising curtain in the theatre and the magic of stormy nights, and the magic of feminine arms opening on a pillow, of dark, maddened eyes. . . . The storms and triumphs of fame. . . . The twilight of his study, the rapturous beating of his heart, the ecstasy of nascent words. . . . A girl with white daisies in her hat, coming impetuously from the lighted hall into the darkness of his room, into his life. . . . All dreams. . . . The cart was swaying . . . a peasant, with his cap pulled down over his eyes, was walking alongside . . . for two thousand years he had walked thus alongside his cart. There it was, stretching out in the mist of the moon: the endless expanse of time. . . . Shadows rose audibly out of the darkness of centuries, the carts creaked, and their black wheels furrowed the earth. And there, in the murk, charred chimneys, the smoke of fires rising to the very sky; and the creaking and rumbling of wheels —the creaking and rumbling grew louder and spread, and the whole sky was filled with a soul-rending roar. . . .

Suddenly the cart pulled up. Through the din filling the white, misty night Bessonov heard the frightened voices of the ambulance men. He sat up. Low above the wood a long cylinder with shimmering facets was floating

along in the moonlight. Gleaming, it turned with a roar of engines and out of its belly a long pencil of bluish-white light darted out and groped over the bog, the tree-stumps, the fallen trees, the pine wood, and came to rest on the road and on the carts.

Faint sounds could be heard through the roar, like the rapid ticking of a metronome. . . . A trickle of men poured out of the carts. An ambulance wagon turned aside into the bog and toppled over. . . . And then, a hundred paces away from Bessonov, a blinding fountain of light flared up on the roadway; a horse and cart flew up into the air in a black mass, an immense column of smoke rose up, and the whole line of carts was scattered by a roaring whirlwind. The horses stampeded into the bog, trailing fragments of carts behind them. Men ran in all directions. The cart in which Bessonov was lying lurched and turned over, spilling him into the roadside ditch; a heavy kit-bag hit him in the back and a cartload of straw fell on him and covered him up.

The Zeppelin dropped a second bomb; then the roar of its engines receded and died away. Bessonov gasped and began to burrow through the straw; having extricated himself with some difficulty from under the baggage, he shook himself and climbed back on to the road. Here a few carts were lying on their sides, with their shafts torn away; a horse with shafts still attached to it was lying in the bog, with its head thrown back and its hind legs kicking rhythmically, like clockwork.

Bessonov put his hand up to his face and head; there was a sticky mess round his ear. He pressed his handkerchief to the scratch and walked along the road in the direction of the wood. His knees trembled so much from fright and the shock of his fall that after a few steps he had to sit down on a heap of broken stones. He wanted some brandy, but his flask was with the baggage in the ditch. With an effort he took his pipe and matches from his pocket and lit up: but the smoke was acrid and nauseating. Then he remembered the fever. It was a bad business: he would have to reach the wood at all costs; he had heard that there was a battery in there. Bessonov stood up; his legs were quite numb; they felt like wooden stumps, and he could hardly move them. He sat down on the ground and began to rub, stretch and pinch them; when he could feel the pain he got up and staggered on.

The moon was now riding high in the sky, and the road wound on, seemingly endless, through the mist across the bog. Bessonov stumbled on, his hands braced against the small of his back. Each boot seemed to weigh a ton and he could hardly lift them. He muttered to himself as he went:

". . . Shuffle along, shuffle along, till the wheels run over you. You wrote verses and seduced silly women. . . . Then you were picked up and chucked out: shuffle towards the west until you drop. . . . Protest if you like. Protest, howl, try it, yell as hard as you can; go on, howl. . . ."

Suddenly he turned round. A grey shadow slid from the road into the bog. A cold shiver ran down Bessonov's spine. He laughed and started off again along the road, shouting broken, meaningless phrases. Then he peered round cautiously: there it was again—a dog with a big head and long legs slinking along fifty paces behind him.

"What a mess!" Bessonov muttered. He quickened his pace, and looked over his shoulder again. There were five grey dogs now, following him in single file with their heads down, and their hind quarters held low. He threw a stone at them: "I'll show you! Get away, you vermin!"

The beasts silently slunk away off the road into the bog. Bessonov picked up more stones, and from time to time stopped and threw them; then he went

on, whistling and shouting. The beasts got back on the road again and crept along after him in single file.

The road now lay between some stunted trees. And there at the bend in the road Bessonov saw a human figure in front of him. It stood still, and looked at him, and then slowly retreated into the shadow of the trees.

"What the devil!" Bessonov whispered to himself, and he, too, stepped back into the shadows, and stood there for a long time trying to calm the wild beating of his heart. The beasts, too, stood still, not far away; the foremost one lay down with his snout on his paws. The man in front did not move. Bessonov noted every detail of a long, white, filmy cloud that passed across the moon. Then a sound rang out, piercing his brain like a needle: it was the snap of a twig, probably under that man's foot. Bessonov quickly moved out into the middle of the road and strode forward clenching his fists in fury. At last he caught sight of the man again: he was tall, with a military great-coat thrown over his stooping shoulders: he had no eyebrows, and his long face was like the face of a corpse—grey, with half-open mouth. Bessonov shouted:

"Hi! you there! What regiment?"

"Second battery."

"Come on, show me the way to it."

The soldier stood silently looking at Bessonov with troubled eyes, and then he turned his face away.

"What be them things?"

"Dogs," Bessonov answered impatiently.

"No; not dogs they bean't."

"Come on, about turn and show me the way."

"No, not me," the soldier said quietly.

"Look here, I've got fever; please show me the way to the battery and I'll make it worth your while."

"No, not to the battery." The soldier raised his voice. "I'm a deserter."

"Fool, they'll catch you."

"Maybe so."

Bessonov glanced over his shoulder—the beasts had disappeared; no doubt they were among the trees.

"Is the battery far?"

The soldier made no reply. Bessonov turned to go, but the soldier immediately seized him firmly by the arms and held him in a grip like a vice.

"No, don't go there. . . ."

"Let go of my arm."

"No!" Without releasing Bessonov's arm the soldier looked to the side of the road, over the trees. "I've had nothing to eat for three days. . . . I was asleep in the ditch when I heard somebody pass. . . . I thought it was just some unit marching and stopped where I was. They marched past, many of them, march in step they did, on the road. What's this, I ask? I took a look at them from the ditch: there they were, all marching in winding-sheets, there was no end to them. . . . Like a cloud they were. . . ."

"What are you saying?" Bessonov shouted hoarsely, and tore himself free.

"It's the truth, and you've got to believe it!"

Bessonov tore himself free and ran as fast as he could, but his legs felt like cotton-wool. The soldier, breathing noisily, clattered after him in his heavy boots and gripped his shoulder. Bessonov fell, covering his neck and his head with his hands. The soldier sniffed and jumped on him, thrusting hard

fingers towards his throat: then he pressed harder and harder and did not loosen his hold.

"So that's who you are!" the soldier whispered through his teeth. When a long shudder had passed through the prone body and it had stretched out and sagged and lay flat in the dust, the soldier let go and rose to his feet. He picked up his cap, and without looking back at what he had done, walked away along the road. He staggered, shook his head, and sat down with his feet in the ditch. A grey shadow flitted across the road.

"What next; where can I go now?" the soldier said to himself. "This is the end! Tear me to pieces then, you beasts. . . ."

CHAPTER XXVII

IVAN ILYICH TELEGIN tried to escape from the prison camp, but was caught and transferred to a fortress, where he was kept in solitary confinement. There he thought out another plan of escape, and in the course of six weeks filed through the bars of his window. In the middle of the summer, however, the fortress was unexpectedly evacuated, and as Telegin was under punishment he was sent to a primitive camp nicknamed "Rotten Hole." This was a terrible, depressing place. Four long, low huts surrounded by barbed wire stood on swampy ground in the middle of a wide valley. In the distance, near the hills, brick chimneys poked into the sky, and the rusty rails of a narrow-gauge railway ran across the bog, ending up near the huts in a deep cutting, the result of works carried out there the previous year, in which more than five thousand Russian soldiers had perished from typhus and dysentery. On the other side of the brownish-yellow valley the serrated peaks of the Carpathians loomed purple against the sky. To the north of the huts, a long way off, in the swamp, a great many pinewood crosses could be seen sticking out of the ground. On hot days moist fumes rose from the valley, swarms of gadflies buzzed around the huts, and the sun, a muddy red, seemed to burn up this home of despair.

The food was coarse and inadequate. Half the prisoners were ill with stomach troubles, fever, abscesses and rashes. But all the same there was a feeling of elation in the camp: Brussilov was advancing, with heavy fighting; the French were beating the Germans in the Champagne and at Verdun; the Turks were evacuating Asia Minor. The end of the war now really seemed to be not so far off. But soon the summer was over and the rains began. Brussilov had captured neither Cracow nor Lvov, and the costly battles on the French front died down; the Central Powers and the Allies were both licking their wounds. It was obvious that the end of the war was again deferred until the following autumn.

It was then that the men in "Rotten Hole" began to lose hope. Viskoboinikov, the man who had the bunk next to Telegin's, suddenly gave up shaving and washing, and lay four days on end on his unmade bunk and did not answer if anyone spoke to him. Sometimes he would start up and scratch himself savagely. A red rash would come and go all over his body. Once he roused Telegin in the middle of the night and asked him in a dull voice:

"Telegin, you married?"

"No."

"I have a wife and daughter at Tver. Go and tell them, d'you hear!"

"Sh-sh. Better go to sleep."

"I'll go to sleep soon enough, brother."

Next morning Viskoboinikov did not show up at the roll-call. They found him in the latrine, hanging by his leather belt. The whole hut was in an uproar. The prisoners crowded round the body lying on the floor. A lantern lit up the hideously distorted face, and the chest on which scratches showed under the torn shirt. Even the light of the lantern seemed dirty and the faces of the living men bending down over the corpses were puffed and yellow and disfigured. One of the men, Lieutenant-Colonel Melshin, turned towards the darkness of the hut and said in a loud voice:

"Well, comrades, are we going to stand for this?"

A low growl ran through the crowd and along the bunks. Now the door swung open and the camp commandant, an Austrian officer, came in. The crowd opened a lane for him to the dead body, and at the same moment angry voices shouted:

"We won't stand this any longer!"

"He was driven to it!"

"It's a deliberate system!"

"I'm rotting alive myself!"

"We're not convicts!"

"You haven't been beaten enough yet, you beasts?"

Raising himself on the tips of his toes, the commandant shouted: "Silence! Everyone to his place! You Russian swine!"

"What? . . . What did he say?"

"We're Russian swine?"

At that moment Captain Zhukov, a thick-set man with a tangled beard all over his face, elbowed his way through the crowd to the commandant. With a broad hairy hand he cocked a snook, right in the Austrian officer's face and shouted: "This is what I think of you, you son of a bitch, you!" Then he shook his shaggy head, caught the commandant by the shoulders, shook him savagely, flung him to the ground and jumped on him.

The officers formed a close ring round the two men in complete silence. But soon they heard running soldiers clattering across the wooden floor, and the Austrian commandant shouted: "Help!"

Telegin pushed his comrades aside. "Are you fellows crazy," he said, "he'll throttle him in another minute!" He caught Zhukov by the shoulders and dragged him off the Austrian. "You're a blackguard!" he roared at the commandant in German.

Zhukov was breathing heavily, and saying in a low voice: "Let me go, I'll teach him to call us names." But the commandant was already on his feet and had put on his cap, which had been knocked off in the struggle; he cast a quick, piercing glance at Zhukov, Telegin, Melshin and two or three other officers standing by them, as if trying to fix their faces in his memory. Then, with a resolute jingle of his spurs, he strode out of the barracks. The doors were immediately locked, and sentries posted outside them.

That day there was neither roll-call nor drum-tattoo, nor acorn coffee. Towards noon soldiers with a stretcher came into the hut and removed Viskoboinikov's dead body; then the door was locked again. The prisoners dispersed, each to his own bunk; many of them lay down. It grew very quiet in the hut: the position was clear—mutiny, a physical assault and—a court-martial.

Telegin began the day as usual, breaking none of the rules which he had made for himself and had kept strictly for more than a year now. At six in the morning he pumped up some of the camp's brown water into a bucket, poured it over himself and rubbed himself down; then he went through a hundred and one gymnastic exercises, making sure that his muscles were properly worked out; then he dressed and shaved; and as there was no coffee that day, he sat down to his German grammar with an empty stomach.

The most difficult and devastating part of being a prisoner was the physical abstinence involved. Many came to grief on this; one man suddenly began to powder his face and mascara his eyes and eyebrows and whisper in corners all day with just such another powdered fellow; another kept away from everyone and lay all day unwashed on his unmade bunk with the blanket pulled up over his head; another again began to talk obscenities, rammed his smutty stories down everyone's throat and finally did something so indecent that he was taken away to a mental hospital. The only salvation from all this lay in austerity. During his captivity Telegin had become very taciturn; his body in its armour of muscles became spare and taut; his movements were precise and quick—a cold obstinate gleam appeared in his eyes, and in moments of anger or determination their gaze could have frightened any man.

That day Telegin memorized the German words written out the day before with even greater care than usual, and then opened a tattered volume of Spielhagen. Zhukov came and sat down on his bunk. Telegin did not turn round, but went on reading to himself in a low voice. Zhukov sighed and said:

"At the court-martial I intend to plead insanity, Ivan Ilyich."

Telegin threw him a quick glance. Zhukov's ruddy, good-natured face, with its wide nose, curly beard and warm, soft lips showing through a tangle of moustache, was now downcast and had a guilty look; his light eyelashes kept blinking.

"I don't know what possessed me to cock that snook at the fellow—I don't know myself what I was trying to do. I realize I was to blame, of course. . . . I lost my temper, and have got you all in a mess. . . . So I've made up my mind to say I'm mad. . . . Do you approve?"

"Look here, Zhukov," Telegin answered, closing the book with his finger inside to mark the place, "they'll shoot a few of us anyhow. . . . You realize that?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't it be simpler not to play the fool at the court-martial? . . . What do you think?"

"Yes, that's true, of course."

"None of our fellows blames you. Only the price for the pleasure of clouting the Austrian's snout is a bit too high."

"Ivan Ilyich—how d'you think I feel about it . . . to get my comrades court-martialled!" Zhukov shook his shaggy head. "If only the swine would put it all on to me!"

He went on speaking for some time, but Telegin was no longer listening to him—he was reading Spielhagen again. Then he got up, and stretched himself until his muscles cracked. At that moment the outer door was flung open with a clatter, and four soldiers came in with bayonets fixed; they halted, two on each side of the door, and clicked the locks of their rifles. Then a sergeant-major came in—a surly fellow, with a bandage over one eye—glanced round the hut and shouted in a hoarse, brutal voice:

"Captain Zhukov, Lieutenant-Colonel Melshin, Second-Lieutenant Ivanov, Second-Lieutenant Ubeiko, Ensign Telegin!"

The officers whose names had been called stepped forward. The sergeant-major looked each one over carefully and snapped out an order; the soldiers surrounded the prisoners and escorted them out of the hut across an open space to the wooden house where the commandant lived. An army car which had just arrived stood in front of the house. The barbed-wire barriers which closed the passage through the wire entanglements to the road were open. A sentry was standing motionless in front of a sentry-box painted with black and yellow stripes. The driver of the army car, a lad with puffy eyes, was lolling back in his seat behind the steering wheel. Telegin nudged Melshin, who was walking next to him, and asked:

"Can you drive a car?"

"Yes; why?"

"Hush!"

They were led into the commandant's office. Three high-ranking Austrian officers, who had just arrived, were sitting at a pinewood table covered with pink blotting-paper. One of them, very closely shaven, with purple patches on his fat cheeks, was smoking a cigar. Telegin noticed that he did not even glance at the prisoners as they came in; his clasped hands, fat and hairy, were lying on the table; his eyes were screwed up to protect them from the cigar smoke, and his collar cut deep into his thick neck. "This one has already made up his mind," Telegin thought.

The second judge, the president of the court, was a lean old man with a long, sad, wrinkled face and downy white whiskers. He was wearing an eye-glass, and carefully scrutinized each of the accused; his large grey eyes looking through the eye-glass—it was a bright, intelligent and friendly eye—settled on Telegin, and his white whiskers quivered.

"Worse and worse," Telegin thought, and looked at the third judge who sat at the table with a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles and a quarto sheet of paper closely covered with writing in a small hand in front of him. He was a thick-set man with a complexion like clay, stiff coarse hair and huge ears like pancakes. Red tape and unsatisfied ambition were written all over him.

When the accused stood up in a row in front of the table, he slowly put on his round spectacles, smoothed down the piece of paper with the palm of his hand, and suddenly, opening wide a mouth full of yellow false teeth, he began to read the indictment in a loud voice.

The camp commandant who had brought the charge was sitting at the side of the table and scowling with tightly compressed lips. Telegin tried to follow the wording of the indictment, but in spite of himself his thoughts were running in quite another direction.

". . . When the body of the suicide was brought into the hut, some of the prisoners seized this opportunity to incite their fellow-prisoners to open insubordination, and began to shout abusive and scandalous expressions, at the same time shaking their fists menacingly. One of them, Lieutenant-Colonel Melshin, held an open penknife in his hands. . . ."

Through the window Telegin saw the youthful driver of the army car pick his nose with his finger, turn sideways on his seat and pull the huge peak of his cap down over his face. Two undersized soldiers with blue great-coats thrown over their shoulders walked up to the car and stood there looking at it; one of them bent over and touched the tyre. Then they both turned round—a field-kitchen had driven into the yard and a wisp of smoke was rising peacefully

from its chimney. The field-kitchen turned towards the barracks and the soldiers sauntered off in the same direction. The chauffeur did not raise his head or turn round—he had obviously fallen asleep. Biting his lips with impatience, Telegin again set himself to listen to the prosecutor's croaking voice.

". . . The above-mentioned Captain Zhukov, with the unmistakable intention of threatening the commandant's life, first held up his clenched fist with the thumb protruding between the index finger and the second finger; this obscene gesture was evidently meant to express contempt of the Imperial and Royal army. . . ."

At these words the commandant, his face all blotched with purple, rose and began to explain in detail to the judges exactly what Captain Zhukov had done with his fingers—a matter which they did not appear to have fully understood. Zhukov himself, who knew very little German, was listening intently, obviously eager to put in a word; he looked at his comrades with an apologetic and good-humoured smile and then, unable to restrain himself, said to the prosecutor in Russian:

"Colonel, allow me to explain: I said to him in Russian: 'Why do you treat us like this; what for?' I didn't know how to say it in German, so I showed him with my fingers."

"Be quiet, Zhukov!" Telegin said through his teeth.

The president tapped the table with his pencil. The prosecutor went on with his reading.

After describing exactly how and where Zhukov had caught hold of the commandant and how, "throwing him down, he had pressed his fingers into his throat with the intent to cause his death," the colonel went on to the most ticklish part of the indictment:

". . . the Russians urged the murderer on by cries and gestures; one of them, namely Ensign Ivan Telegin, hearing the soldiers running up, rushed to the scene of the crime and dragged Zhukov away, else in another second the commandant would have been strangled to death."

The colonel demanded severe penalties for Telegin, Zhukov and Melshin, who had 'incited to murder' by brandishing a penknife. To strengthen the case against these three, he went so far as to exonerate Ivanov and Ubeiko, 'who had acted while the balance of their minds was disturbed'.

After the reading of the indictment, the commandant confirmed the facts as stated. The soldiers were then called as witnesses; their evidence confirmed that the first three were guilty, but that there was nothing against the other two. The president, rubbing his bony hands, proposed that Ivanov and Ubeiko should be acquitted owing to lack of evidence. The purple-faced officer, who had now smoked his cigar down to his lips, nodded; the prosecutor, after some hesitation, also signified agreement. Two men of the escort shouldered arms. Telegin said, "Good-bye, comrades!" Ivanov bowed his head; Ubeiko looked silently at Telegin, his eyes full of horror; then they were both taken away and the president asked the accused whether there was anything they wished to say.

"Do you plead guilty to incitement to mutiny and to an attempt on the life of the camp commandant?" he asked Telegin.

"No."

"Have you anything else to say?"

"From the first word to the last, the accusation is a pure fabrication."

The camp commandant jumped to his feet in a fury and demanded an explanation, but the president stopped him with a sign.

"You have nothing to add to your statement?"

"Nothing at all."

Telegin stepped back from the table and looked fixedly at Zhukov. Zhukov flushed, sniffed, and in reply to the president's questions repeated word for word what Telegin had said. Melshin gave the same answers. The president listened to them, and then closed his eyes wearily. Finally, the judges rose and went into the adjoining room. At the door the purple-faced officer, who was the last of the three, spat out the stub of his cigar, which he had smoked down to the very end, raised his arms and stretched himself with evident enjoyment.

"To be shot—I gathered as much when we came in," Telegin said in an undertone. Then he turned to one of the guards: "Please bring me a glass of water."

The soldier stepped quickly forward to the table and without putting down his rifle, began to pour out some of the turbid water from the decanter. Telegin hurriedly whispered into Melshin's ear:

"When they take us out, try to start the car engine."

"I understand."

A minute later the judges reappeared and occupied their previous places. The president slowly removed his eye-glass, and holding close to his eyes a piece of paper that was trembling slightly, read out the brief sentence condemning Telegin, Zhukov and Melshin to death by shooting.

As the fatal words were actually being spoken, Telegin, although he had never doubted what the sentence would be, yet felt the blood leave his heart. Zhukov bowed his head. Melshin, tall and strong, with a hawk's beak of a nose, slowly passed his tongue over his lips.

The president rubbed his tired eyes and covered them with his hand; then he said quietly but very distinctly:

"The commandant is instructed to carry out the sentence without delay."

The judges rose. The commandant, looking greenish about the gills, remained seated for another second in a stiff attitude; then he stood up, pulled down his tunic smartly, and in an exaggeratedly sharp voice, ordered the two remaining soldiers to remove the condemned men.

Telegin paused for a second at the narrow doorway, thus giving Melshin the chance to go out first. Melshin, pretending to feel faint, grabbed hold of the guard's arm and stammered in broken German:

"Come on, come on, please, just a little further. . . . I got belly-ache, I must . . ."

The soldier looked at him in surprise, resisted his pushing and looked round in alarm, not knowing what to do in these circumstances. But Melshin had already dragged him to the front of the car and had squatted down, pulling faces, groaning, and with shaking fingers alternately fumbling with his buttons and clutching at the starting-handle. The guard looked on with an expression of mingled compassion and contempt.

"If you've got the belly-ache, relieve yourself," he said angrily. "But be quick about it!"

But now Melshin suddenly swung round the starting-handle with a fierce effort. The soldier bent down to him in alarm and tried to drag him away. The young chauffeur woke up, shouted something in an angry voice, and jumped out of the car. All the rest happened in a few seconds. Telegin, keeping as close as he could to the second guard, had been watching Melshin's

every movement. As the engine sprang to life his heart began to beat in rhythm with its sharp, wonderful throbbing.

"Zhukov, get his rifle!" Telegin shouted. He caught the soldier round the body, lifted him up, threw him violently to the ground, and with a few bounds reached the car, where Melshin had snatched the other soldier's rifle and was struggling with him. Telegin punched the soldier behind the ear with all his strength, and the soldier gasped and collapsed. Melshin jumped into the driving seat and slammed in the gears. Telegin saw Zhukov climbing into the car with a rifle, saw the young Austrian driver stealing cautiously along the wall and then suddenly jumping for the door of the commandant's house, saw a long face, distorted with fury and an eyeglass in one eye looking out of the window, and then saw the dapper figure of the commandant, rushing out and pointing a revolver at the car with unsteady hands. A shot cracked, then another shot. . . .

"He has missed. Missed," Telegin thought. It seemed as if the car would never move. But the engine revved up, and the car jerked forward suddenly. Telegin fell back on the leather seat. The wind blew strongly in his face. They were rapidly approaching the striped sentry-box and the sentry, who raised his rifle and fired, but the car roared past him like a whirlwind. Behind the fugitives soldiers with rifles were running to and fro all over the camp and dropping on one knee. Pak! Pak! Pak! Shots cracked, but their sound was merely a feeble click. Zhukov turned and shook his fist at them. The sombre quadrangle of huts was rapidly growing smaller and lower, until the camp was hidden behind a bend. Telegraph poles, bushes, and milestones with numbers on them flew to meet them and flashed madly past.

Melshin turned round. His forehead, eyes and cheeks were covered with blood. He shouted to Telegin: "Straight on?"

"Straight on across the bridge—then to the right, into the hills."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CARPATHIANS ON a windy autumn evening are a bleak and dismal spot. By the time they reached the crest of the range along the winding road scoured by heavy rains, the fugitives were uneasy and worried. Three or four great pine trees swayed over a sheer precipice, and an almost invisible forest rustled in a dense mist below them. Still farther down, at the bottom of the precipice, a swollen torrent seethed and thundered over the rocks.

Through the pine-trunks, far beyond the lonely wooded peaks, a long red streak of sunset glinted between leaden clouds. A strong mountain breeze rattled the leather hood of the car. The fugitives were sitting in silence. Telegin was bending over the map. Melshin, his head bandaged with a rag, was looking towards the sunset.

"What are we going to do with the car?" he asked in a low voice. "There's no petrol left."

"We must not leave it here on any account," Telegin said.

"Push it over the cliff, and have done with it."

Melshin cleared his throat, jumped out on to the road and stamped and stretched his legs. Then he shook Zhukov by the shoulder.

"Hi, captain, wake up, we've arrived!"

Zhukov scrambled out of the car without opening his eyes, stumbled, and sat down on a stone. Telegin got out some leather coats and the hamper of food intended for the judges' lunch. The three men divided up the food and put it in their pockets, put on the coats, and then, with their hands on the mud-guards, began pushing the car towards the edge of the precipice.

"You've done the job, old girl," Melshin said. "Now then, shove!"

The front wheels were now over the edge. The long, dust-grey car, upholstered with leather and faced with bronze, obeyed like a tame animal: she settled down, dipped her bonnet and then slid down in a shower of rocks and rubble, hit a projecting rock with a loud bang, turned over, and crashed down into the torrent, accompanied by a growing rumble of flying stones and broken metal. The echo of the crash rolled on and on along the misty canyons.

The fugitives turned into the wood and walked on among the trees on a line parallel to the road. They spoke little, and only in whispers. It was quite dark by now. The pines rustled solemnly above their heads—the sound was like water falling far away. From time to time Telegin went back to the road to look at the milestones. At one point where they thought there was a military post they made a wide detour; they scrambled through several gullies, stumbling in the dark over fallen trees and into mountain springs, getting soaked through and through and tearing their clothes. But they pressed on all through the night. Once, towards daybreak, they heard the hum of a car; they hid from it in a ditch, and the car sped by so close that they could even hear the voices of the passengers.

In the morning the fugitives picked a place to sleep by the side of a brook in a thickly wooded ravine. They ate, and drank half of the flask of brandy, and Zhukov asked them to shave him with a rusty razor they had found in the car. When his beard and moustache were taken off they were surprised to see that he had a chin like a child's and pouting, childish lips. Telegin and Melshin roared with laughter, pointing at him and slapping their thighs. Zhokov was delighted; he pursed up his lips and mooed like a cow—but only because he was drunk. The others covered him up with leaves and told him to sleep it off.

Telegin and Melshin then spread out the map on the ground and made little topographical sketches from it for each of them. They decided to separate the next day—Melshin and Zhukov were to make for Rumania, and Telegin for Galicia. They buried the large map in the ground. Then they heaped up some leaves, covered themselves with them, and were asleep in a moment.

High up on the edge of the arterial road running above the ravine a man stood leaning on his rifle; a sentry guarding the bridge. The forest wilderness around and below him was quiet; only a heavy black-cock made a rustle as it flew through a clearing, brushing the fir trees with its wings, and the monotonous sound of falling water could be heard in the distance. The sentry stood and listened for a moment, then shouldered his rifle and went on.

It was dark when Telegin opened his eyes. Clear bright stars were shining among the motionless black network of branches. He recalled the events of the day before, but the memory of the mental tension during the court-martial and during their flight was so distasteful to him that he drove these thoughts out of his head.

"You are not asleep, Ivan Ilyich?" Melshin asked in a low voice.

"No, I've been awake some time. Better get up and wake Zhukov."

An hour later Telegin was walking alone along a road that gleamed white in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIX

ON THE TENTH day Telegin reached the battle zone. For ten days he had moved only at night; at daybreak he would hide in the forest, and when he had to come down from the mountains into the treeless plains he always chose for his sleeping-place a spot as far from human habitations as possible. He lived on raw vegetables which he took from kitchen gardens.

It was a cold, rainy night. Telegin was making his way along a road past ambulances full of wounded men moving westward, peasant carts loaded with household goods, and crowds of women and old men lugging children, bundles and utensils along with them.

In the opposite direction, towards the east, baggage trains and troops were moving up to the front line. It was strange to think that 1914 and 1915 had passed, and 1916 was drawing to its close, and still the lines of wagons were creaking along the battered roads, and the inhabitants of burned and ravaged villages were still trudging on in resigned despair. The only difference was that now the huge army horses could hardly drag themselves along, the soldiers were ragged and of smaller build, and the crowds of homeless refugees taciturn and indifferent. And there, to the east, from where a brisk breeze was driving low-lying clouds before it, men were still killing men and neither side could wipe out the other.

A vast mass of people and carts was moving in the darkness across a marshy valley and over a bridge across a swollen river. Wheels groaned, whips cracked, orders rang out, and a multitude of lanterns were dancing about, their light falling on the muddy water swirling between the piles.

Struggling along on the slippery slope of the roadway, Telegin reached the bridge, over which a column of army carts was just passing. There was no hope of getting over to the other side before daybreak.

At the approach to the bridge the horses crouched between the shafts, and dug their hoofs into the wet planks in the effort to drag the carts up. On one side of the approach a man on horseback, wrapped in a cape that ballooned in the wind, was holding a lantern and shouting hoarsely. An old man came up to him, took off his cap, and evidently asked him something. Instead of a reply the man on horseback struck him in the face with his heavy lantern, and the old man fell under the wheels.

The far end of the bridge was wrapped in darkness, but spots of light showed that there were thousands of refugees on that side. The line of carts continued to move slowly across. Telegin was walking by the side of a cart in which a gaunt woman wrapped in a blanket, with her hair hanging down over her eyes, sat, holding a bird-cage with one hand and the reins in the other. Suddenly the carts stopped. The woman turned her head in terror. A clamour of voices rose from the far side of the bridge and lanterns flitted about rapidly. Something had happened. A horse screamed wildly. A drawling voice shouted in Polish: "Look out, there!" At that moment a rifle volley rent the air.

Horses reared, carts rattled, and women and children screamed and wailed aloud.

In the distance, to the right, a few flashes showed and an answering volley rang out. Telegin stepped on to the hub of the wheel to look. His heart was hammering against his ribs. There seemed to be firing from all sides, all along the river. The woman with the bird-cage got out of the cart; her skirt caught, and she fell. "Oh! Oh!" she cried in a deep voice. The bird-cage rolled down the slope of the embankment.

With much shouting and clatter of wheels the column moved across the bridge at a trot. "Stop! Stop!" many warning voices shouted immediately. Telegin saw a huge wagon tilt over towards the parapet of the bridge and crash through the railings into the river. He jumped down from the wheel, sprang over the bundles lying abandoned in the road, overtook the column of carts and threw himself face down on to one of them. The sweet smell of newly-baked bread made him feel faint. He reached down under the tarpaulin, broke a chunk off a loaf, and began to eat so greedily that he choked.

At last, amidst much turmoil and shouting, the carts reached the far side of the bridge. Telegin jumped down, and threaded his way through the vehicles of the refugees, left the road and walked along on its verge. From the fragments of talk he could make out in the darkness he gathered that the exchange of shots had been with an enemy, i.e. a Russian patrol. This meant the front line could not be more than six miles away.

Telegin stopped several times to get his breath. It was hard going against the wind and rain. His knees ached, his face was hot, and his eyes were swollen and inflamed. Finally he sat down on the edge of the roadside ditch and rested his head on his hands. Icy drops of rain were running down his neck and he was aching all over.

At that moment his ears caught a dull rumble like the noise of a distant landslide. A minute later the sound was repeated. He raised his head and listened. Between these deep booms he caught another sound which rose and fell in an angry rat-tat. Some of the sounds were coming from where he was heading, some from almost the opposite direction. Telegin moved to the other side of the ditch; now he could clearly see low, ragged clouds flying across the murky iron-grey sky. It was the dawn. There was the east. There was Russia.

Telegin got up, tightened his belt and sliding about in the slippery mud began to walk in that direction across wet stubble, ditches and the half-collapsed remnants of last year's trenches.

When it had grown quite light Telegin again found a road crowded with people and carts. He stopped and looked round. A white chapel stood just off the road under a huge almost bare tree. The door was broken off and sodden leaves were scattered over the round dome of the chapel and on the ground.

Telegin decided to wait there until dark. He entered the chapel and lay down on the mossy floor inside. The delicate drowsy smell of leaves numbed his brain. In the distance he heard the rumble of wheels and the cracking of whips. These noises seemed surprisingly pleasant, and suddenly they broke off. He felt as if fingers were pressing his eyes shut. A moving speck appeared for a moment in the leaden heaviness of his sleep. It seemed to be trying to take shape in an apparition, but in vain. Telegin was so utterly weary that he groaned and burrowed even deeper into sleep. But the speck troubled him. His sleep grew lighter and lighter and again he heard the rumble of distant

wheels. He drew a deep breath and sat up. Through the door he could see dense, flat clouds; from under their leaden bases the sun, near its setting, thrust out wide beams of light. A faint reflection of them fell on the ancient wall of the chapel and lit up the golden-haloed bent head of a wooden Madonna discoloured by time; an infant Jesus, dressed in a faded chintz frock, was lying on her knees; her hand, raised in blessing, was broken off.

Telegin went out of the chapel. A young woman with a child on her knees was sitting on the stone doorstep. Her white peasant smock was spattered with mud. One hand supported her head; the other lay on the child's brightly-coloured blanket. Slowly she raised her head and looked at Telegin. Her glance was vivid and strange and her tear-stained face seemed about to smile. She said softly in Ruthenian:

"The little one is dead."

Then she bent her head on her hand again. Telegin stooped over her and stroked her head. She responded with a sound that was half sob and half sigh.

"Come, I will carry him," he said gently.

The woman shook her head.

"Where can I go? Go alone, kind gentleman."

Telegin hesitated a moment, then he pulled his cap down over his eyes and walked away. At that moment two Austrian military police, whiskered and grey, rode out at a trot from behind the chapel; their coats were soaking wet and covered with mud. As they rode past they glanced at Telegin and reined in their horses. The one in front shouted hoarsely:

"Come here!"

Telegin obeyed. The policeman leaned over from his saddle and looked him over searchingly with brown eyes inflamed by the wind or by lack of sleep. Suddenly they glinted eagerly.

"A Russian!" he shouted, and grabbed Telegin by the collar. Telegin did not attempt to tear himself from his grasp, but only smiled wryly.

They locked him up in a cart-shed. It was already dark. The thud of gunfire could be heard plainly. Through cracks in the walls Telegin could see the dull red glare of a fire. He ate the rest of the bread he had taken from the cart the day before and searched the wooden walls for any possibility of escape. Stumbling over a bale of pressed hay, he yawned and lay down. But he got no chance of sleep. Soon after midnight he heard the thunder of heavy guns not far away. Reddish flashes showed through the cracks. Telegin got up and listened. The intervals between the volleys grew shorter, the walls of the shed shook, and suddenly rifle shots crackled quite close to it.

It was obvious that the fighting was coming nearer. Through the walls he heard excited voices and the hum of a motor-car. He heard the trampling of many feet. A heavy body fell against the outside wall. Only then did Telegin distinguish among all the uproar a sound like peas rattling against the wall. He immediately lay down flat on the ground.

The smell of gunpowder penetrated even into the shed. The firing was continuous—the Russians were evidently attacking with terrific speed. But the storm of ear-splitting noise did not last long. Telegin heard the bursts of exploding hand-grenades, like nuts being cracked. He jumped up and paced up and down. Would the Russian attack be beaten off? At last he heard a deep-throated roar, screams and the trampling of feet. The firing stopped immediately. There was a long moment of silence broken only by soft thuds and the clang of metal. Then terrified voices cried out:

"Kamerad! Russ! Russ!"

Telegin tore out a slat to widen a crack in the door, and saw men running, with their hands up to protect their heads. Huge shadows—mounted men—rushed at them from the right, cut into the crowd and wheeled round. Three men on foot turned towards the shed. A man on horseback, with a Caucasian cape flying out behind his back, spurred after them. The horse, an immense beast, reared and snorted. The rider brandished his sabre as if drunk; his mouth was wide open. When the forefeet of the horse touched the ground again, he slashed at something with his sabre; it whistled through the air, the blade struck home and snapped off.

"Let me out!" Telegin shouted, beside himself, and battered on the door.

The horseman pulled up. "Who's that shouting?"

"A prisoner. A Russian officer."

"One moment." The horseman flung away his sword-hilt, bent down and pushed back the bolts. As Telegin emerged, the man who had released him, an officer of the 'wild' Caucasian division, said with a touch of irony:

"It's a small world, isn't it."

Telegin looked at him. "I don't know you, do I?"

"Oh yes, I'm Sapozhkov. Sergey Sergeyevich." He laughed loudly. "You didn't expect to see me here? What a war. . . . Damn it, what a war!"

CHAPTER XXX

IT WAS THE last hour before Moscow. With a long-drawn whistle the train rattled past the empty chalets of the summer resorts in the forest. Its white smoke caught in the autumn foliage, in the transparent yellow birch coppices and the purple aspen groves from which came the smell of mushrooms. Occasionally the russet network of a maple branch hung right down on to the permanent way. Through the bushes one could see the chalets with their closed shutters, their flower-beds decorated with coloured glass globes and their paths and doorsteps covered with fallen leaves.

Then the train passed a little station where two soldiers with kitbags stared indifferently at it and a melancholy, lonely girl in a little check coat was sitting on a bench and drawing patterns on the wet planks of the platform with the tip of her umbrella. On a bend a wooden signboard came into view behind the trees; it had a bottle painted on it with the inscription: 'Shustov's elderberry vodka has no equal'. Then the forest came to an end, and fields with long rows of whitish-green cabbages took its place on both sides of the line. At a level crossing a cart loaded with straw was waiting for the train to pass; a woman in a man's sheepskin jacket was holding the frightened pony's head. In the distance, under a long cloud, the pointed spires of Moscow were already visible, with the gleaming cupola of St. Saviour's towering above the city.

Telegin was sitting by the carriage window and breathing in the rich odours of September; the smell of rotting leaves and mushrooms, of burning straw, and earth chilled by a light morning frost.

Behind him lay two years of torment and at their end there was now this marvellous, long hour of expectation. He figured it out: at exactly half-past two

he would press the bell-knob on that one and only door—he thought it would be of light oak, with two little windows at the top.

The vegetable gardens came to an end, and little suburban houses spattered with mud flashed past on both sides of the line; roughly paved streets loud with rumbling carts; fences, and behind them gardens with ancient limes whose branches met across the street brightly coloured signboards; passers-by intent on their own trifling affairs and paying no attention either to the train as it thundered by or to him, Ivan Ilyich Telegin, sitting at his window. Far below him in the street he saw a tram running, and it looked to him like a toy; the dome of a little church appeared behind the houses, then the wheels clattered over points, and at last, at last, after two long years, the wooden platform of Moscow Station glided past the window. Neat and completely indifferent old men in white aprons climbed into the train. Telegin stuck his head far out of the window and looked about him expectantly "You fool," he reminded himself, "why look? You didn't let anyone know you were coming."

As he left the station he could not help laughing. About fifty yards away a long line of cabs stood waiting for fares in the square. The drivers on their boxes were waving their arms and shouting:

"I'll take you, I'll take you, I'll take you!"

"This black one is the one!"

"Take my prancer! He can go!"

The horses, checked by the reins, were stamping and snorting and whinnying. The whole square was in an uproar. It looked as if in another moment the row of cabs would storm the station.

Telegin picked a very high droshky with a narrow seat. Its handsome and impudent driver asked: "What address?" with amiable condescension; then, sitting sideways for swank, with the reins loosely held in his left hand, he gave the horse its head. The pneumatic tyres flew over the cobble-stones at a breakneck pace.

"From the war, your honour?" the driver asked.

"I was a prisoner of war and escaped."

"Really? Well, how are things over there? People say they have absolutely nothing to eat there. Hey, look out, granny! . . . A national hero, eh? Quite a lot are escaping from over there. . . . Look out, carter! Go and boil your head, you silly fool! . . . You don't happen to know Ivan Trifonich?"

"Who's that?"

"He's a cloth merchant, on the Rasgulyai. Yesterday he rode with me, he was crying. What a story! He made a fortune out of army contracts, he's lousy with money—but his wife ran away from him with a little Polish gent the day before yesterday. We cabmen told all Moscow about it. Ivan Trifonich daren't show his face in the street. That's all *he* got out of his profiteering."

"Look here, brother, I'm in a hurry," Telegin said, although the high-stepping stallion was already racing along like the wind, his head thrown back viciously.

"Here we are, your honour, entrance two. . . . Whoa, Vassya!"

Telegin threw a quick, anxious glance at the little white house and the six windows with their clean lace curtains, and then jumped out of the droshky. The door was old, carved with a lion's head, and there was only a bell-handle instead of the button of an electric bell. He stood there for a few moments,

unable to raise his hand to the bell-handle; his heart was beating slowly and painfully. "*Actually nothing is decided as yet. They may all be out or they may not wish to see me,*" he thought, as he pulled the brass bell-handle. A bell tinkled inside. "*Of course no one is in.*" At that moment he heard a woman's quick light steps. Telegin looked round distractedly: the cabman gave him a cheerful wink, but already the door-chain jingled, the door opened a little, and the pock-marked face of a housemaid peered out.

"Does Daria Dmitrievna Bulavin live here?" Telegin asked, clearing his throat.

"Yes, sir, Miss Daria is in, step this way, sir," the girl answered in a friendly drawl. "Miss Daria and the mistress are both in."

As in a dream Telegin walked through a little entrance hall with a glass partition. It was full of baskets and trunks, and the smell of fur coats. The housemaid opened the second door on the right—a door covered with black baize. In the half-darkness of a little passage a woman's coat was hanging on a hook. Gloves, a nurse's head-dress with the red cross sewn on it, and a swansdown scarf were lying on a shelf with a mirror behind it. All these innocent things emitted the familiar, hardly perceptible smell of an intoxicating scent.

The maid went off to announce Telegin without asking him for his name.

Telegin touched the swansdown scarf with his fingers, and suddenly felt that there could be no connection between this pure, exquisite life and himself, who had only just climbed out of a welter of blood. "There's someone asking for you, Miss Daria," he heard the maid's voice say somewhere in the house. He closed his eyes—as if a thunderbolt was about to fall—and trembling from head to foot he heard a voice say, rapidly and distinctly: "Asking for me? Who is it?"

He heard footsteps coming towards him through the rooms. They were flying out of an abyss of two years of waiting. Dasha appeared at the door of the hall, outlined against the light from the windows. Her light hair gleamed like gold. She seemed taller, and thinner. She was wearing a knitted blouse and a blue skirt.

"You wanted to see me?" she said, and stopped dead.

Her face set, her eyebrows rose and her mouth opened—but the next instant the shadow of a momentary fear disappeared from her face, and her eyes lit up with surprise and joy.

"It's you?" she whispered. Then she raised her arms impulsively, put them round Telegin's neck, and kissed him with tender, trembling lips. Then she drew back, called to him, "Come, Ivan Ilyich," and ran before him to the drawing-room, sat down in an armchair and covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, it's silly, it's silly, I know. . . . I'll get over it in a minute," she whispered, wiping her eyes as hard as she could. Telegin stood there in front of her. Suddenly Dasha gripped the arms of her chair and raised her head.

"Ivan Ilyich, did you escape?"

"Yes."

"Thank God!—and then?"

"Well, then I . . . I came straight here."

He sat down on a chair opposite her, clasping his cap tight.

"How did it happen?" asked Dasha, her voice breaking.

"Oh, just the usual way."

"It was dangerous?"

"Yes. . . . That is, not particularly."

So they went on for a little while longer, saying anything that came into their heads. Gradually both of them began to feel self-conscious. Dasha kept her eyes on the floor as she asked:

"Have you been in Moscow long?"

"I've only just come from the station."

"I'll order some coffee immediately."

"No, don't bother. I must go now and find a hotel."

Then Dasha asked, very softly: "You'll come this evening?"

Telegin nodded without speaking. He could hardly breathe. He got up.

"I'll go now," he said. "I'll come back this evening."

Dasha held out her hand to him. He took her delicate, firm hand, and the touch of it made him hot all over and the blood rushed to his face. He squeezed her hand and went into the hall, but turned round at the door. Dasha was standing with her back to the light and looking at him from under her eyebrows.

"May I come at seven, Daria Dmitrievna?"

She nodded. Telegin went out quickly, and said to the cabman:

"To a hotel, a good one—the very best!"

Leaning back in the droshky with his hands thrust into the sleeves of his greatcoat, Telegin smiled broadly. Bluish shadows of some sort—people, trees, carriages—swam before his eyes. The cool breeze, laden with the smells of a Russian town, chilled his face. He raised his hand, that was still burning from Dasha's touch, to his nose and said to himself, with a laugh: "Magic!"

Meanwhile Dasha, having seen Telegin out, was standing by the window in the drawing-room. Her head was singing; try as she would she could not muster up courage enough to realize what had happened. She puckered up her eyes, then sighed, and went quickly to her sister's room.

Katia was sitting by the window, sewing and thinking. When she heard Dasha's footsteps she asked, without raising her head:

"Dasha, who was that who came to see you?"

Dasha looked at her and her face trembled.

"He . . . don't you understand, Katia? He—Ivan Ilyich."

Katia put down her sewing and slowly clasped her hands.

"Katia—can you understand this?—I'm not even glad—I am only frightened," Dasha said, in a dull voice.

CHAPTER XXXI

TOWARDS EVENING DASHA began to shudder at every rustle, then start up, rush into the drawing-room and listen. . . . Several times she opened an indifferent novel—always at the same page—and read: "Marussya was very fond of the chocolates her husband brought her from Kraft's. . . ."

Across the road, in the flat of Charodeyeva the actress, two windows suddenly lit up in the frosty twilight. A maid in a white cap could be seen laying the table. Then Charodeyeva herself came into view, bony as a skeleton. She had a velvet cape thrown over her shoulders. She sat down at the table and yawned—she must have been sleeping on the divan in the background. She ladled some soup on to her plate but seemed lost in thought, staring with glassy eyes at a little vase with a withered rose in it.

"Marussya was very fond of the chocolates . . ." Dasha repeated through her teeth. All at once the bell rang. Dasha's heart stood still. But it was only the boy delivering the evening paper. "He won't come," Dasha thought and went into the dining-room, where only one bulb was alight above the white table-cloth. A clock was ticking in the gloom. It was five minutes to seven. Dasha sat down at the table. "This is how life ticks away, second by second," she thought.

There was another ring at the front door. Dasha sighed, choked, jumped up and ran out into the hall. . . . It was a messenger from the hospital, bringing a bundle of papers. Of course Ivan Ilyich would not come. Served her right if he didn't: she had waited two years, and then when at last he had come, she had found nothing to say to him.

She took out a tiny handkerchief and began to bite a corner of it. This is terrible, she thought. She did not notice that the door had opened and the pock-marked maid had come in:

"A gentleman to see you, Miss."

Dasha caught her breath, and then went into the dining-room. Katia saw her first and smiled at her. Ivan Ilyich jumped up, blinked, and drew himself up.

He had on a new serge tunic with a brand new belt across one shoulder; he was freshly shaved and had had a hair-cut. Now it was particularly noticeable how tall and broad-shouldered he was. This was an altogether new man, there was no doubt about that. There was the old determined look in his clear eyes, but two deep creases ran down on each side of his firm, straight mouth. . . . Dasha realized that these were the traces of death, of horror and of suffering. His hand was as strong and cool as ever.

Dasha drew back a chair and sat down next to Telegin. He put his hands on the tablecloth, clenched his fists, and hurriedly began to tell them the story of his captivity and escape. Dasha, sitting quite close to him, kept her eyes on his face, and listened with slightly parted lips. While he was telling his story, it seemed to Telegin that his own voice sounded strange and distant, and he himself was greatly shaken and excited. Here, by his side, with her dress touching his knees, sat a being whom no words could describe—a completely incomprehensible young woman who emitted a warm fragrance that made his head reel.

Telegin went on talking all the evening. Dasha asked him questions and interrupted him, clapped her hands and appealed to her sister.

"Katyusha—imagine! They sentenced him to be shot!"

When Telegin described the fight for the car, the split-second that separated them from death, then the car's sudden leap forward, and at last the wind of liberty and life blowing on his face, Dasha grew pale and put her hand in his.

"We will never let you go again!"

Telegin laughed.

"Oh, they'll call me up again; that can't be helped. I only hope that they'll assign me to duty in some armament factory."

He cautiously pressed her hand. Dasha looked into his eyes searchingly; then she blushed slightly and drew her hand away.

"Why aren't you smoking? I'll get some matches."

She went out quickly and returned a moment later with a box of matches; then she stood in front of Telegin and began to strike matches, holding them by the very end. They broke off. "Look at the matches our Lisa buys!" she said, but a match did light at last, and as Dasha cautiously held the flame to

Telegin's cigarette, it lit up her own delicate chin. Telegin drew at his cigarette, screwing up his face. He had never known that there could be so much happiness in lighting a cigarette.

All the time Katia was silently observing Dasha and Telegin. She was glad, very glad, for Dasha; and yet she felt very sad. She had not forgotten Vadim Petrovich Roshchin as she had hoped she would. She could not get him out of her thoughts now. He, too, had sat at that table just like Telegin, and once she, too, had brought in matches and lit one for him, but she had not broken any like Dasha.

Telegin left them at midnight. Dasha put her arms round her sister and kissed her firmly; then she went to her room and locked herself in. Lying in bed with her hands behind her head, she thought to herself that now at last she had emerged from her dismal hopelessness and that although she was still surrounded by an empty, terrifying wilderness, the horizon was blue and she was happy.

CHAPTER XXXII

ON THE FIFTH day after his arrival Telegin received an official letter instructing him to report at once at the Baltic Works.

It was all like a dream—his joy when he opened the letter; the rest of the day spent with Dasha in the bustle of the town; the hurried leave-taking at the station; and then the second-class compartment, warm and dry, with its crackling radiator pipes, and the pleasure of finding in his pocket a little packet tied up with ribbon and containing two apples, some chocolate and a few patties. Telegin unfastened the collar of his tunic and stretched out his legs. He found he was unable to banish a foolish smile from his face, and glanced at the stranger sitting opposite him, a severe-looking old man wearing spectacles.

"Coming from Moscow, sir?" the old man asked.

"Yes, from Moscow." Lord! what a glorious, wonderful word it was: Moscow! . . . The narrow streets flooded with autumn sunshine, dry leaves underfoot, and Dasha, light and slim, walking over them, her clear, cultured voice—he could not remember a single word she had said—and the constant scent of warm flowers when he bent towards her or kissed her hand.

"It's a regular Sodom and Gomorrah, that city!" the old man said. "I spent three days there. . . . That was enough for *me*." He spread out his legs encased in knee-boots and high goloshes, and spat. "On the streets you see people hurrying this way and that. And at night: lights, noise, electric signs, all wheeling and reeling. And the crowds! There's no sense to it. Yes, that's Moscow; the seed from which all the earth has grown. But all I saw was a satanic, senseless running to and fro. You've been in the war, young man, haven't you? Perhaps even wounded, eh? I could see that at once. Tell me, I'm an old man—is it really for all this accursed Moscow bustle and vanity that our blood is being shed out there? What about our country? What about our faith? What about our Tsar? Where are they, tell me. . . . I'm on my way now to Petrograd, trying to buy some yarn. But what do I care about yarn? When I get back to Tyumen—what will I bring back? Yarn? No, not yarn—I shall go back and tell the people: 'We're done for', that's what I'll tell them. You mark my words, young man, we shall have to pay for all this. . . . We shall have to pay for all the foolishness. . . ."

The old man planted his hands on his knees, got up and pulled down the blinds of the carriage window, outside which the sparks from the engine were flying through the darkness in long, fiery lines.

"We've forgotten God, and God has forgotten us. I'll tell you something: there will be a reckoning, a cruel reckoning. . . ."

"What sort of reckoning do you think it will be? Will the Germans conquer Russia?" Telegin asked.

"Who knows? Whoever the Lord sends to chastise us—from him we shall accept our punishment. Suppose some of the boys in my shop started misbehaving, I'd put up with it for a while, and then perhaps I'd give one a box on the ear and another a punch on the chin and turn a third out into the street. . . . But Russia is not my little shop. Russia is a big business. The Lord is merciful, but when people forget the road that leads to Him, the road has got to be cleared, hasn't it? That's what I'm talking about. . . . God has turned his face away from this world. Nothing could be more terrible than that. . . ."

The old man crossed his hands on his stomach, closed his eyes, and settled himself in the corner of the grey plush seat; his spectacles glinted severely as he swayed with the motion of the train. Telegin went out and stood at the window in the corridor, with his face almost touching the glass.

A keen fresh wind was blowing in through the ventilator slits. The darkness outside the window was cut by fiery lines that flew out, crossed each other, and then fell to the ground. From time to time grey clouds of smoke rushed past. Wheels clanked in obedient rhythm. Then the engine gave a long-drawn wail and rounded a bend; the glow of the furnace lit up the black pyramids of fir trees; for an instant they stood out from the darkness and then vanished. Points clattered, the carriage swayed gently, the green disc of a signal light gleamed, and then long lines of fiery rain began to fly past the window again.

As he stared at them, Telegin, with an overwhelming burst of joy suddenly realized to the full all that had happened to him in the last five days. Had he been able to describe this emotion to anyone, they would have thought he was crazy. But to him there was nothing either strange or unhinged about it: everything was perfectly clear.

He felt that millions and millions of people were living, suffering and dying in nocturnal darkness. But they were only alive to a certain degree, and everything that was happening in the world was only relative, almost fictitious. It was indeed unreal to such an extent that if he, Telegin, were to make one more effort, everything would change and turn into something entirely different. Among all these unrealities there was only one living core: he himself, Ivan Ilyich Telegin, looking out of the window, a being beloved by somebody, a being who had left the world of shadows and was whirling along across a darkened earth in a rain of fire.

This strange emotion of love for himself lasted only a few seconds. He went back into the compartment and climbed into the top berth. While he was undressing he looked at his large hands, and for the first time in his life thought them beautiful. He put them behind his head and closed his eyes, and immediately saw Dasha. She was looking into his eyes with passion, just as

she had looked in the dining-room that day. She had been wrapping up some patties, and Telegin had gone round the table to her and kissed her warm shoulder; she had turned round quickly and he had asked: "Dasha, will you marry me?" but she had said nothing and had only looked at him.

Now, in his berth, seeing Dasha's face and never tired of seeing it, Telegin, again for the first time in his life, felt exultant and triumphant because Dasha loved him—him, the man with the big, beautiful hands.

On arriving in Petersburg, Telegin reported at the Baltic Works the same day and was assigned to the night shift in the factory.

A great deal had changed in the Works during those three years. There were three times as many workers: some of them were youngsters, others had been brought from the Urals, and others transferred back from active service. The workers read the newspapers and cursed the war, the Tsar, the Tsarina, Rasputin and the generals. They were discontented, and all of them were confident that after the war "the revolution would break out." What made them all particularly angry was that the town bakeries had started adding chaff to the bread; that sometimes for days on end there was no meat at all in the markets, or if there was some, it was putrid; that the potatoes were frozen, and the sugar full of dirt, and that on top of it all food prices were rising, while the shopkeepers and the profiteers and speculators made fortunes out of army contracts, paid fifty roubles for a box of candy, drank champagne at a hundred roubles a bottle, and wouldn't hear of making peace with the Germans.

Telegin was given three days' leave to settle his personal affairs, and spent them flat-hunting all over the city. He looked at dozens of places, but did not like any of them. But on the last day he found exactly what he had dreamed of in the train: five rooms, not too large, with clean, bright windows looking out to the west. The rent was really more than he could afford, but he took the flat at once, and wrote to Dasha about it.

On the fourth night he went to the factory. In the factory yard, black with coal dust, lanterns were burning on tall posts. The wind and the rain drove the smoke from the chimneys down to the ground, and the air was foul with the yellow suffocating fumes of the furnaces. Through the huge, dusty, semi-circular windows of the factory buildings he could see countless pulleys and transmission belts whirling round, and great machines drilling, planing and turning steel and bronze. The vertical discs of stamping machines were whizzing round. Overhead the platforms of travelling cranes would flash past and disappear into the darkness. The furnaces blazed with a red and white glare. A gigantic steam hammer shook the ground with short, rapid blows. Pillars of flame shot out of the low chimneys into the grey darkness of the sky. Human figures moved about slowly through the clatter and rumble of the machines. . . .

Telegin went into the workshops where presses were stamping out shrapnel cases. One of the engineers, Strukov, an old acquaintance, took him through the shop, explaining the details of the work that were new to Telegin. Then they both went to the little office partitioned off in one corner of the workshop, where Strukov showed Telegin the books and forms, handed over the keys, put on his coat and said: "The shop is turning out twenty-three per cent scrap at present: you must try and keep to that figure."

From this and from his manner in handing over the shop Telegin got the feeling that Strukov had little interest in the work, although the Strukov whom he had known in the past had been a very keen and competent engineer. This distressed him, and he asked Strukov:

"Don't you think the proportion of scrap could be lowered?"

Strukov shook his head with a yawn, pushed his cap down over his tousled hair and walked back with Telegin towards the machines.

"I shouldn't bother, brother. Isn't it all the same to you whether we kill twenty-three per cent fewer Germans at the front? Besides, there's nothing we can do about it—the machines are all worn out, blast them."

He stopped near a press. An old, short-legged workman in a leather apron put a white-hot block of metal on the press, the frame came down and the die drove into the hot steel as if it was butter; a flame flared up, the frame rose and a shrapnel case fell on to the earth floor. And immediately the old man lifted up a new block of metal. Another workman, a tall young fellow with a black moustache, was busy at the furnace. Turning to the old man, Strukov said:

"Well, Rubliov, plenty of scrap with these cases?"

The old man laughed, wagged his thin beard and squinted towards Telegin with cunning, narrowed eyes.

"True, we've got scrap enough. Watch this press working!"

He put his hand on the column, green with oil, which supported the frame of the press. "Too much vibration in it. Should have been scrapped long ago."

The young worker at the furnace, Vasska, Rubliov's son, laughed.

"There's a lot more here should be scrapped. The whole machinery's gone rusty."

"Easy there, Vasska," Strukov said cheerfully.

"All right, easy then!" Vasska shook his curly head, and his thin face, with its high cheek-bones, black moustache and mischievous, keen eyes, broke into a malicious, self-confident grin.

"The best workers in the shop," Strukov said in a low voice to Telegin as they walked away. "Good-night, then. By the way, I am going to the 'Red Jingles' to-night. Ever been there? A very cosy little place and you can get drinks there, too."

Telegin watched the Rubliovs, father and son, with some curiosity. He noted with surprise the tone of their talks with Strukov and the smiles and glances the three exchanged, which seemed almost as if they were an agreed code; as if the three of them were testing him to find out whether he was friend or foe. But the ease with which the Rubliovs entered into conversation with him the next night made him understand that he was being regarded as one of themselves.

Their acceptance of him as such probably had no reference to Telegin's political views, which were superficial and vague, but was due rather to the feeling of confidence with which he inspired people; he said and did nothing out of the ordinary, but it was evident to all that he was honest, sincere and kind-hearted, clean through and through, a man to be relied on.

When he was on night shift, Telegin would often seek out the Rubliovs and listen to father and son arguing with each other.

Vasska Rubliov was well-read and talked of nothing else but the class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat, expressing himself bookishly, but forcibly. His father, Ivan Rubliov, was a nonconformist, a cunning and by no means God-fearing old man.

"At home," he would say, "in the Perm forests, in the hermitages, it's all written down in the books—all about this very war, and the ruin that will come to us out of the war—how our whole land will be ruined—and how many

of the people will survive—there won't be many—and how a man will come from a hermitage in the forest, and how he will rule the earth, and rule it with the terrible word of God."

"Mystical rot," Vasska interjected."

"Ah, you rascal, you clod, getting hold of all those long words. . . . You call yourself a Socialist! What sort of a Socialist are you—you're a Cossack, that's all you are. I used to be just the same. He's all agog to cut loose, his cap on one ear, seeing red and yelling: 'The last fight let us face'. Fight against whom? For what? You blockhead, you!"

"Just listen to the old man," Vasska said, jerking his thumb towards his father. "He's a dangerous anarchist; he can't make head or tail of Socialism, and he barks at me like that every time instead of answering me properly."

"No," Ivan Rubliov broke in, pulling a sparkling ingot out of the furnace, "no, sir." Swinging the metal in a semi-circle through the air, he deftly placed it under the descending rod of the press. "You read books enough, true, but the wrong ones. Your sort has no humility—you never think of that. You don't understand that in our days everyone must be meek at heart. . . ."

"There's nothing but muddle in your head, Dad," Vasska said. "Who shouted a little while ago: 'I'm a revolutionary, that's what I am'?"

"Yes, I shouted that. Why not? If anything happens, my boy, I'll be the first to grab a pitchfork. Why should I stand by the Tsar? I'm a muzhik. I worked with a wooden plough for thirty years. Do you know how much earth I turned with it? Of course I'm a revolutionary! Do I want to save my soul, or don't I?"

Telegin wrote to Dasha every day; she answered less often. Her letters were strange—they seemed to be wrapped in ice, and Telegin always felt a slight shiver when he read them. Usually he sat at the window and read every page of Dasha's letter through several times—the writing was large, and the lines slanted downwards. Then he would gaze at the purplish-grey woods on the islands, at the cloudy sky—as muddy as the water in the canal—and think that everything was as it should be and that Dasha's letters need not be affectionate, as he unreasonably wanted them to be.

My dear friend, she wrote, *you've taken a flat with five whole rooms in it. Just think how expensive that is. Even if you're not going to live alone, five rooms are too much. You would need two maids to run it—and you know what that means nowadays. Here in Moscow autumn has come; it is cold and rainy, no sunshine. We must wait until spring. . . .*

Just as Dasha had answered only with a look that day when he had left Moscow and had asked her whether she would marry him, so now, in her letters, she never directly mentioned either their marriage or their future life together. He would have to wait till spring.

This waiting for the spring and a vague, desperate hope of some miracle now filled every heart. During the winter life was in suspense—people seemed to hibernate, as if they could no longer remain awake and face the anticipation of another spring of bloodshed.

Dasha wrote one day: *I did not mean to tell you or to write to you about Bessonov's death, but yesterday I again heard details of his appalling fate. Ivan Ilyich, not long before he went to the front, I met him on the Tverski boulevard. He seemed utterly miserable, and I believe that if I had not repulsed him then, he would not have perished. But I did repulse him. I could not help it, and I should do it again in the same circumstances.*

Telegin spent half a day over his answer to this letter.

How can you think that I would not accept everything that is connected with you, he wrote, very slowly, thinking it out carefully, so as to get every word exactly right. *I sometimes check up on myself: if you were to love someone else, which is the most awful thing that could happen to me, would I accept even that? Yes, I would. I should not be reconciled to it—no, my sun would have grown dark. But does my love for you consist only in happiness? I know what it is to want to die because your love is too deep. . . . That must be how Bessonov felt when he left for the front. And you, Dasha, must feel that you are quite free. I demand nothing of you, not even love. I have come to understand this in these last few weeks. . . .*

Two days later Telegin came home from the factory at dawn. He took a bath and went to bed, but was roused again immediately by a telegram. It read:

Everything splendid love you terribly—Your Dasha.

One Sunday Strukov the engineer called for Telegin and took him to the 'Red Jingle' bar.

The bar was in a basement. Its vaulted ceiling and its walls were decorated with coloured birds, babies with vicious faces and significant convexities. There was a lot of noise and smoke. A bald little man with rouged cheeks was sitting on a platform and running his fingers over the keys of a concert grand. A group of officers were drinking some strong liquor out of shallow glasses and making loud remarks about the women who were coming in. Dilettante barristers were shouting and arguing about art. The queen of the bar, a handsome black-haired girl with puffy eyes, was laughing loudly. Antoshka Arnoldov, his fingers in his hair, was writing a dispatch from the firing-line. Near the wall, where the level of the floor was slightly raised, the founder of futurism, a veterinary surgeon with a crooked, consumptive face, was dozing drunkenly, his head sunk on his chest. The owner of the place, a long-haired, gentle drunkard of an ex-actor, appeared from time to time framed in a side door, stared with crazy eyes at his guests and disappeared again.

Strukov, who was slightly tipsy after a few drinks, said to Telegin: "Do you know why I like this joint? Because you can find the rottenest lot of all here. Look at that one sitting over there in the corner, that awful bony creature, she can hardly move, hysterical to the *nth* degree—and would you believe it, she is very popular."

Strukov laughed, had another drink and without bothering to wipe his soft lips, which were overshadowed by a tiny toothbrush moustache, he went on naming the guests to Telegin, pointing his finger at their sleepy, diseased, half-crazy faces.

"The last of the Mohicans, all of them. The dregs of the æsthetic drawing-rooms. Whew! Mouldy, eh? They get together here and pretend that there is no war on at all and everything is as it used to be."

Telegin looked and listened. The heat, the smoke and the drink made it all seem like a dream. His head reeled. He saw a few people turn towards the entrance; even the veterinary surgeon opened his yellow eyes sticky with sleep; the crazy face of the landlord appeared from behind the wall; the half-dead bony woman sitting on one side of Telegin raised her drowsy eyelids and her eyes suddenly came alive, she straightened up with incomprehensible

vitality and looked in the same direction as all the others. It was suddenly quite still in the bar. A glass fell tinkling to the floor.

Framed in the entrance stood an elderly, middle-sized man, one shoulder thrust forward, both hands in the pockets of his short cloth coat. His narrow face framed in a long black beard was smiling merrily, forming two deep folds at the corners of his mouth. His intent, intelligent, piercing eyes seemed to burn with a grey light in front of his face. He stood thus for a moment, then another face appeared from the darkness of the door, a figure in uniform who smiled a frightened smile and whispered something in his ear. The black-bearded man wrinkled his big nose in disgust: "You with your nonsense again. . . . Leave me alone." He cast an even merrier glance at the people in the bar, shook his bearded chin and said in a loud drawling voice: "Well, good-night, friends!" and was gone. The door slammed to. The whole basement buzzed like a hive. Strukov gripped Telegin's arm.

"Did you see him? Did you see him?" he asked breathlessly. "That was Rasputin."

CHAPTER XXXIII

AT FOUR A.M. on a frosty December night Telegin left the factory on foot. He could not find a cab; nowadays it was difficult to find them at that hour, even in the centre of the town. Telegin walked briskly along the empty streets, his nose buried in his upturned collar. In the light of the rare street lamps he could see the air pierced by countless falling needles of ice. The snow under his feet crunched loudly. Reddish reflections gleamed on the flat yellow façade of a house ahead. Turning a corner, Telegin saw the flames of a fire in a brazier, and around it frozen, heavily wrapped figures veiled in a cloud of vapour. Farther along the pavement about a hundred women, old men and young boys were standing motionless in a long line —it was a queue in front of a provision shop. Alongside of them a night-watchman was stamping his felt-booted feet and slapping himself with his mittened hands.

Telegin walked along the queue, looking at the dejected figures wrapped in shawls and blankets and pressing close to the wall.

"Yesterday, on the Vyborg side, they cleaned three shops right out," a voice said.

"That's the only thing to do."

A third voice said: "Yesterday I asked for a pint of paraffin. They said there wasn't any, and there wouldn't be any more paraffin at all, and then the Dementievs' cook came in, and right there in front of me she bought five pints at a black market price."

"How much was that?"

"Two and a half roubles a pint, my girl."

"What, for paraffin?"

"That shopkeeper won't get away with it. We'll remember him when the time comes."

"My sister told me there was a shopkeeper in Okhta and he'd been carrying on like that so they took him and pushed him head first into a barrel of pickle and drowned him, for all he begged hard to be let go."

"They let him off too easily at that—ought to have tortured him a bit first."

"And meanwhile we can freeze out here."

"While he's swilling hot tea."

"Who's swilling tea?" a hoarse voice asked.

"All of them. My mistress, she's a general's wife, she gets up at noon, and then she guzzles till late at night, it's a miracle she doesn't burst, the pampered bitch."

"And we can freeze here and catch our death of cold!"

"That's right. I'm coughing already."

"My mistress, duckie, she's a kept woman—when I get back from the market the dining-room's full of guests, all drunk as lords, of course. They want scrambled eggs and black bread and vodka, in a word, all the commonest stuff."

"It's English money they're spending on drink," a voice said in a confident tone.

"What's that you're saying?"

"We've all been sold—believe me, you stand in your queues and you don't know a thing, but you've all been sold into slavery for fifty years to come. And the whole army's been sold."

"Goodness me!"

Another frozen voice said: "Mr. Watchman, hey, Mr. Watchman!"

"What's the matter?"

"Will they be giving out salt to-day?"

"Probably not."

"Ah, damn them!"

"There's been no salt for five days."

"Look what they are doing to the people, the blood-suckers!"

"If you women keep shouting like that you'll be giving yourselves sore throats," the watchman said in a deep bass voice.

Telegin walked on past the queue. The ominous muttering died away, and once again the straight streets were deserted, losing themselves in the frosty mist.

Telegin reached the embankment and turned to cross the bridge. The wind tore at the skirts of his coat. He remembered that he must find a cab somehow—but forgot all about it the next instant. Far away on the opposite side of the river the street lamps—mere flickering spots of light—were barely visible. A line of dim lights marked a footpath running diagonally across the ice. A freezing wind was blowing across the dark, wide expanse of the Neva, whirling up the snow and whistling mournfully through the tram wires overhead and the slits in the iron parapet of the bridge.

Telegin stopped for a moment, gazed into the gloomy darkness round him, and then went on again, thinking as he always did in those days about Dasha, about himself, and about that moment in the train when his happiness had flared up within him like a flame.

The world around him was troubled, confused, contradictory and hostile to this happiness of his. He had to make an effort now to tell himself calmly 'I am alive and happy, my life will be full of light and gladness'. On that occasion, at the train window, among the flying sparks, it had been easy to tell himself that; but now he had to make a tremendous effort to draw a line between himself and those half-frozen figures in the queues, the December wind wailing as if in mortal agony, the general deterioration of everything and the sense of impending disaster.

Telegin was certain of one thing: his love for Dasha, Dasha's loveliness, his own joyful consciousness of himself as he stood by the window of the train, knowing that Dasha loved him—all this was good. But the old, comfortable temple of life—perhaps a bit cramped, but still divine—was being shaken and shattered by the blows of the war; its pillars were tottering, there were cracks right across its dome, and the old stones were crumbling to dust. And yet amid the flying dust and the rumble of the crashing temple, two human beings, he and Dasha, wanted, with the cheerful unreason of love, to be happy in spite of everything. Was that right?

Peering into the dreary darkness of the night, watching the flickering lights, and listening to the melancholy wailing of the wind, Telegin thought: "Why deceive myself? The desire for happiness comes first. I want it in spite of everything. Can I put an end to the queues and feed the hungry? Can I stop the war?—No, I can't. And, if I can't, must I, too, plunge into this gloom and renounce happiness? No, why should I?—But can I, will I, be happy?"

He crossed the bridge and walked along the embankment without knowing where he was going. Here were bright electric lights, swinging high up in the wind. The powdery snow was driving along the wooden paving-blocks with a faint rustle. The windows of the Winter Palace were dark and empty. A gigantic sentry in a sheepskin coat and with his rifle pressed to his breast was standing beside a striped sentry-box against which the wind had piled up the snow.

Telegin stopped for a moment and looked up at the windows. Then he hurried on, first fighting against the wind and then being driven by it from behind. It seemed to him that now he could tell everyone the clear and simple truth, and that they would all believe him. He would say: "It's obvious that it is impossible to go on like this: all states are built up on hatred, the frontiers have been drawn by hatred, and each one of you is just a bunch of hatred—a fortress bristling with guns aiming in all directions. Life is cramped and full of fear. The whole world is choking with hatred—men are exterminating each other, and rivers of blood are flowing. Is that not enough? Are your eyes not opened yet? Must you wait until men are cutting each other's throats here in every house? Wake up, throw away your weapons, break down the frontiers, open the doors and windows of life. There is land enough for grain and pasture enough for cattle and mountain slopes for vineyards. The riches in the bowels of the earth are inexhaustible—and there is room enough for us all. Can't you see that you are still living in the darkness of bygone centuries?"

Even in this part of the town no cabs were to be found. Telegin crossed the Neva again and plunged into the labyrinth of narrow streets of the Petersburg Quarter. Thinking hard and talking to himself, he finally lost his way and wandered at hazard through the dark and empty streets until at last he found himself on the embankment of a canal.

He stopped, drew a deep breath, laughed, and looked at his watch. "This is a nice little walk, I must say!" he said to himself. It was just five o'clock. A huge open motor-car without lights appeared from round the nearest corner, the snow crunching loudly under its wheels. The driver was an officer. His greatcoat was unbuttoned, his clean-shaven face pale and his eyes glazed as if he were very drunk. Behind him sat a second officer, his cap pushed to the back of his head and his face hidden behind a long bundle wrapped in matting, which he supported with both hands. The third man in the car was a civilian; his coat-collar was turned up and he wore a high fur cap on his head. He rose slightly in his seat and put his hand on the driver's shoulder. The car stopped close to the little bridge. Telegin saw the three men jump into the snow, take out the bundle, drag it over the snow for a few yards, then lift it with an effort, carry it to the middle of the bridge, hoist it over the parapet and drop it under the bridge. The officers immediately returned to the car; the civilian stayed behind, bent over the parapet and looked down; then he turned down his collar and joined the other two men at a run. The car leapt forward and disappeared at high speed.

"Whew, what a beastly business," Telegin muttered, having watched all the time with bated breath. He walked to the bridge and looked over the parapet, but could see nothing in the huge ice-hole under the bridge, except the stinking warm water bubbling out of a drain-pipe opening just there.

"Whew, what a beastly business," he muttered a second time, frowned and walked along the edge of the canal. At the next corner he finally found a cab—but the cabman was a half-frozen ancient and his horse a bony beast with huge hairy lips. When Telegin was seated in the sleigh at last, he buttoned the rug over his knees and closed his eyes, his whole body tingling with fatigue. "I am in love, that is a reality," he thought to himself, "and whatever I do is right if it is done for love."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE BUNDLE WRAPPED in matting which the three men had thrown into the ice-hole from the bridge had been the dead body of the murdered Rasputin. In order to kill this superhumanly tough and powerful peasant, the assassins first gave him wine mixed with potassium cyanide, then shot him in the chest, in the back, and in the head, and finally smashed in his skull with a life-preserver. And yet when the body was found and recovered from the ice-hole, the post-mortem showed that Rasputin was still alive when he was thrown in under the ice.

This murder was like an earnest of all that was to happen two months later. Rasputin had said more than once that with his death the throne would collapse and the Romanov dynasty perish. Evidently this savage and violent man had the same vague premonition of disaster that dogs have before a death in the house, and he clung fiercely to life, this last defender of the throne, peasant, horse-thief, outrageous blasphemer and infidel.

His death caused fear and dejection in the imperial palace and outbursts of joy all over the country. People congratulated each other in the streets. Nikolai Ivanovich wrote to Katia from Minsk: "When the news was received, the officers of the commander-in-chief's staff ordered eight dozen of champagne for their mess. The soldiers cheered the news all along the front. . . ."

In a few days Russia had forgotten the murder. Not so the Palace; there the prophecy was believed and preparations for the outbreak of a revolution were made in a mood of dreary despair. Petrograd was secretly divided into sectors. The Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich was asked to send machine-guns; when he refused, machine-guns were brought from Archangel and four hundred of them posted in attics at street crossings. The censorship was intensified and the newspapers came out with great white gaps in their columns.

The Empress wrote desperate letters to her husband with the object of rousing his will and stiffening his backbone. But the Tsar was sitting at Mogilev as if under a spell, surrounded by ten million bayonets of the fidelity of which he had not the slightest doubt. Rioting women and the grumbling of the Petrograd queues appeared to him far less formidable than the armies of three empires pressing against the Russian front. He never suspected that in Mogilev itself, at that very moment, General Alexeyev, chief of staff to the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, was preparing a plan to arrest the Tsarina and annihilate the pro-German faction at court.

In January an offensive was ordered on the northern sector of the front with the object of forestalling a spring offensive on the part of the enemy. The attack began near Riga, on a very cold night. When the artillery opened fire a blizzard rose and the troops had to move forward in deep snow to the howling of the snowstorm and the flaming hurricane of exploding shells. Dozens of aeroplanes which had gone up to support the attacking units were blown down by the wind and in the white fog of the snowstorm they mowed down friend and foe alike with their machine-guns. For the last time Russia attempted to break through the iron ring which was stifling her; for the last time Russian muzhiks, dressed in white shrouds, driven on by an arctic blizzard, fought for an empire which embraced one-sixth of the earth, for an autocracy which at one time was feared by the whole world, but now was only an all too lingering survival, a historical absurdity, a mortal disease on the body of the country.

The battle lasted ten days. Thousands of lives were buried under the snow. The offensive was halted and froze into immobility. The front again lay motionless in the snow.

CHAPTER XXXV

TELEGIN HAD COUNTED on visiting Moscow during the Christmas holidays, but instead of that, he was sent on a business trip to Sweden by the Baltic Works, and he did not get back until February. He immediately put in for three weeks' leave of absence and sent a wire to Dasha that he was coming on the twenty-sixth.

Before he could go he had to be on duty at the factory for a whole week. He was surprised at the change that had taken place in his absence. The management treated the workers with a civility and consideration quite unknown in the past, while the workers were all surly and short-tempered. It seemed as if at any moment one of them would throw down his spanner and shout: "Stop work and out into the street!"

The workers were particularly irritated that week because of the reports of the Duma debate on the food situation. These reports made it clear that the government was fighting off the attacks of the opposition with an almost complete loss of its presence of mind and dignity, and that the members of the cabinet had lost all their bravado and arrogance; they also made it clear that neither the Ministers nor the deputies in the Duma were speaking the truth, while the real truth was on every tongue in the form of dark, ominous rumours of the imminent general collapse of the front and rear through famine and disorganization.

During his last night's work Telegin noticed that the workers were more

agitated than usual. Every few minutes they would leave their machines and gather for discussions—they were evidently expecting news of some sort. When Telegin asked Vasska Rubliov what the discussion was about, Vasska suddenly threw his wadded coat over his shoulders with an angry gesture and walked out of the shop, slamming the door behind him.

"Vassili is getting very rough nowadays, the scoundrel," Ivan Rubliov said. "He's picked up a revolver somewhere, and carries it about in his pocket."

But Vasska soon reappeared, and all the workers left their machines and crowded round him at the back of the workshop. "Proclamation of Lieutenant-General Khabalov, commanding the troops of the Petersburg military district," Vasska began to read from a white notice in a loud voice, stressing certain words.

"*During the last few days the issue of flour to the bakeries and the baking of bread has proceeded in the same quantities as before. . . .*"

"That's a lie!" several voices shouted immediately.

"There's been no bread for three days. . . ."

Vasska read on:

"*There should be no shortage in the sale of bread.*"

"He's decreed it; he's fixed it all!"

"*If, however, there should be insufficient supplies of bread in certain shops, this is because many people, fearing a shortage, have hoarded bread and made it into biscuits.*"

"Who is making biscuits? Show us those biscuits!" a voice shouted. "He ought to get them rammed down his throat!"

"Keep quiet, comrades," Vasska shouted even louder. "Comrades, we must go out on the streets. Four thousand men from the Obukhov Works are marching to the Nevski, and others are marching from the Viborg Quarter."

"That's right! Let them show us the bread!"

"They won't show you any bread, comrades. There's only three days' supply of flour in the city and there is no more coming after that of either bread or flour. The trains are all standing beyond the Urals. On the far side of the Urals the granaries are full of grain. In Chelyabinsk three thousand tons of meat are rotting in the railway station. In Siberia they're greasing the wheels with butter. . . ."

The whole workshop was buzzing like a hive. Vassili raised his hand.

"Comrades! . . . No one is going to give us any bread until we take it ourselves. . . . Together with the other factories we must go out into the streets, comrades, with the slogan: 'All power to the Soviets!' "

"Knock off! Stop work! Put out the furnaces!" the workers shouted, and scattered all over the shop.

Vasska Rubliov came up to Telegin. His moustache was twitching.

"Go away!" he said, very distinctly. "Go, while the going's good."

Telegin slept badly the rest of that night, and woke with an uneasy feeling. It was a grey morning, and the rain was dripping on to the iron cornice. He lay trying to collect his thoughts, but his uneasiness did not pass off and the drip of the rain irritated him, as if the drops were falling on his brain. "I must not wait till the twenty-sixth—I must go to-morrow," he thought. He jumped up, threw off his nightshirt and walked through to the bathroom naked, turned on the shower and stood under the icy water.

There was a good deal to do before he left. He hurriedly drank his coffee, went out into the street and boarded a crowded tram, still with the same feeling

of uneasiness. As usual, the passengers were grimly silent; they tucked their feet under their seats, and jerked the corners of their coats from under their fellow-passengers with the same irritated gesture; it was sticky underfoot, and drops were running down the windows; the bell on the front platform jangled irritatingly. Opposite Telegin sat a military official with a puffy, yellow face; his clean-shaven lips were fixed in a twisted smile, and he was looking about him with a curiosity and alertness quite out of keeping with his appearance. Looking around, Telegin saw that the passengers were all staring at each other with the same puzzled, inquiring expression.

At the corner of the Great Prospect the tram stopped. The passengers fidgeted in their seats, some looked out of the windows, and a few jumped off the platform. The driver took off the driving-handle and shoved it into the breast of his blue coat; then, opening the door at the front end he said in an alarmingly malicious tone:

"The car's not going any further!"

Tramcars were standing all along the main streets as far as the eye could reach. The pavements were teeming with people. From time to time the iron shutters of a shop window would come down with a clang. Flakes of wet snow were falling slowly.

A man in a long, unbuttoned coat appeared on the roof of a tramcar, took off his cap, and shouted something. A long-drawn groan seemed to pass through the crowd. The man tied a rope to the roof of the car, straightened up and took off his cap a second time, and the crowd groaned again in response. The man jumped off the tram to the pavement. The crowd drew back, and exposed to view a solid group of people sliding about on the dirty yellow snow and pulling at the rope that was tied to the tram. The tram began to heel over. The crowd withdrew further; street urchins began to whistle applause. But the tram righted itself and its wheels, which had been off the ground, now came down on the rails again with a clatter. Now men were running up from all sides to join the group pulling on the rope, and they too began to pull, silently and earnestly. The tram heeled over again and suddenly crashed on its side with a jingle of breaking glass. The crowd, still silent, closed in on the overturned car.

"That's upset the apple-cart!" someone behind Telegin said. It was the official with the yellow, puffy face. Immediately a number of discordant voices began to sing the funeral march.

On the way to the Nevski, Telegin noticed the same bewildered looks and excited faces. Everywhere groups of eager listeners were forming like little whirlpools round people who brought the latest news. Fat door-keepers were standing in the doorways, and maids were sticking their noses out of the windows and looking down the streets. One gentleman with a well-groomed beard, his fur-lined coat unbuttoned, and a brief-case in his hand, asked a door-keeper:

"Can you tell me, my man, what this crowd is doing here and what is going on?"

"They're demanding bread; they're rioting, sir."

"Oh!"

At a street corner a lady, very pale in the face, hugging a wretched, drooping, shivering little dog to her breast, kept asking passers by:

"What is that crowd over there? What do they want?"

"It looks like revolution, madam," the gentleman in the fur coat said cheerfully as he passed her.

A working man came walking along the edge of the pavement, the skirts of his sheepskin coat flying behind him. He looked ill and his face was twitching; suddenly he turned round and shouted in a strained, tearful voice: "Comrades, how much longer are they going to drink our blood?"

A young rosy-cheeked officer hailed a cab, got in, then standing up and holding on to the driver's belt, he watched the surging groups of people as if he was watching an eclipse of the sun.

"Come on! Look! Have a good look!" the workers shouted at him as he passed.

The crowd was growing and now filled the whole street; it buzzed excitedly and moved towards the bridge. At three points white flags were raised. Passers-by were drawn into the stream like chips of wood. Telegin crossed the bridge with the crowd. A few men on horseback were galloping across the Field of Mars, which was shrouded in mist, covered with snow and pitted with footprints. When they saw the crowd, the riders turned their horses and approached it at a walking pace. One of them, a red-faced colonel with a forked beard, laughed and saluted. The crowd was singing in dismal tones. From the bare, dark branches of the mist-filled Summer Garden a flock of bedraggled crows took wing—the same perhaps that had so badly frightened the assassins of the Emperor Paul in their time.

Telegin walked on; a lump rose in his throat. He cleared his throat and coughed, but the lump of emotion rose again and again. He passed the old palace of the Emperor Paul, turned left and walked along the Liteiny Prospect, into which a second crowd was pouring from the Petersburg Quarter, completely filling the bridge and the streets beyond. Every doorway was packed with onlookers, and there were excited faces in every window.

Telegin stood in a gateway with an elderly civil servant whose flabby cheeks were quivering like jelly. Far away on the right a file of soldiers was drawn up across the street; they were standing motionless, resting on their grounded rifles.

The crowd advanced, but its pace slowed down. Frightened voices called out: "Halt! Halt!"

And immediately the high-pitched voices of thousands of women began to shout: "Bread! Bread! Bread!"

"Quite impermissible," the civil servant said, looking severely at Telegin over his spectacles. At that moment two tall house-porters came out of the house and began to jostle the group of onlookers. The civil servant's cheeks shook again, and a young lady in pince-nez cried out: "How dare you push me, you brute!" But the house-porters paid no attention and closed the gates. All the gates and doors along the street were being closed one after the other.

"Don't close them! Don't!" shouted many frightened voices.

The shouting crowd came nearer. A young fellow in a wide-brimmed hat shading an apple-cheeked excited face was striding along at its head.

"The flag to the front! The flag to the front!" shouted the voices.

At that moment a tall, slim-waisted officer, with a fur cap over one ear, appeared in front of the file of soldiers. Keeping his hand on the pistol holster on his hip, he shouted something. Telegin made out some of it: "The order has been given to fire. . . . I want to avoid bloodshed. . . . Disperse. . . ."

"Bread! Bread! Bread!" the voices cried fiercely as the crowd closed in on the soldiers. Men with frantic eyes began to push past Telegin. "Bread! Down with them! Down with the blackguards!" One man fell, and raising

his wizened, wrinkled face from the ground shouted, beside himself: "I hate them! . . . I hate them! . . ."

Suddenly there was a sound in the street like the tearing of oilcloth. A schoolboy snatched at his cap and plunged into the crowd. . . . The civil servant raised his blue-veined hand to make the sign of the cross.

The volley had been fired into the air, and no second volley followed. But the crowd retreated, some scattering and others marching with the flag towards Znamenskaya Square. Caps and goloshes lay scattered all over the yellow snow of the street. Turning into the Nevski, Telegin once again heard the hum of many voices. It was a third crowd which had crossed the Neva from Vassilyevski Island. The pavements were packed with well-dressed women, soldiers, students and strangers of foreign appearance. An English officer with a rosy childish face was standing stiff as a ramrod. Powdered, beribboned shop-girls flattened their noses against the glass doors of the shops. And down the middle of the street, dwindling away into the fog, an angry crowd of working men and women was marching and shouting: "Bread! Bread! Bread!"

At the kerb a cabman, sitting sideways on the box of his sleigh, was saying cheerfully to a purple-faced, frightened lady:

"How can I drive on, you can see for yourself that a fly couldn't get through here."

"Drive on, you fool, how dare you talk back to me!"

"No, lady, now I'm not your fool any more. Get out of my sleigh!"

The pedestrians on the pavements pushed and jostled, peered over each other's heads, listened and asked excitedly:

"What, a hundred people killed on the Liteiny?"

"Nonsense. One pregnant woman and an old man were shot."

"Good Lord, why shoot an old man?"

"Protopopov is in complete charge, and everybody knows that he is mad!"

"Gentlemen, the latest news! Incredible! General strike!"

"What? Water and electricity too?"

"God be thanked, it's come at last. . . ."

"Stout fellows, the workers!"

"Don't you be so jubilant—the strike will soon be smashed!"

"Look out that you aren't smashed first, you and that smug mug of yours!"

Telegin, annoyed that he had lost so much time, walked on to the addresses he wanted, but found no one in, and strolled back along the Nevski in an angry mood.

Sleighs were gliding along again, house porters were coming out to clear away the snow, and at the cross-roads the big policeman in the long black coat appeared again and raised high above the excited heads and muddled thoughts of the populace the magic wand of order—a white truncheon. A malicious passer-by crossing the street might have looked at the policeman and thought: "You wait, my man, your day will come!" But it never entered anyone's head that the day had come already, and that the big whiskered fellow standing there like a pillar with his truncheon raised was already a mere phantom, which would vanish by to-morrow from the cross-roads, from life, from memory even.

"Telegin! Telegin! Wait a minute, you're as deaf as a post!"

Strukov came running up to him, with his cap on the back of his head and a fierce satisfaction in his eyes. "Where are you going? Let's go to a café."

He took Telegin's arm and dragged him into a café. The cigar smoke was so thick it made the eyes smart. Men in bowler hats and fur caps, their fur coats unbuttoned, were arguing and shouting, coming and going. Strukov pushed his way through to the window and sat down with Telegin at a little table.

"The rouble is falling!" he cried, clutching the table with both hands. "Shares are dropping to hell! This is the real stuff! Tell me all about what you saw."

"I was in the Liteiny," Telegin said. "There was some shooting, but apparently in the air."

"Well, what do you think of it all?"

"I don't know. I think the government ought to make a serious effort to bring up food supplies."

"Too late!" said Strukov, thumping the glass table-top. "Too late! We've eaten our own guts! It's the end of the war, that's flat! Do you know what they're shouting in the factories?—Convoke the Soviet of Workers' Deputies!—that's what they're shouting. And they won't trust anyone but the Soviets."

"Is that so?"

"It's the end, the real thing, my lad. Tsarism is all washed up. Open your eyes. . . . This isn't a revolt. It's not even a revolution. It's the beginning of chaos. Of the very father and mother of chaos. Within three days there'll be no more government, no more army, no more provincial governors, no more police. Only a hundred and eighty million wild-and-woollies. And do you understand what our wild-and-woollies are? Tigers and rhinoceroses are toys for children compared with them. A cell of a putrefied organism—that's what a wild-and-woolly is. Absolutely terrifying."

"Go to the devil!" Telegin said. "You're talking rot. It's nothing of the sort. It's a revolution—and about time, too!"

"No! What you saw to-day isn't revolution—it's the disintegration of matter. The revolution will come later. But you and I won't live to see it."

"Perhaps not," Telegin said, getting up. "Vasska Rubliov, now—he's the revolution. But not you, Strukov. You make too much noise, you're too clever by half. . . ."

Telegin went home early and at once went to bed. But he slept only for a short while. Then he turned over heavily on his side and opened his eyes. The room smelt of the leather suit-case lying open on a chair. In the suit-case, which he had bought in Stockholm, there was a wonderful silver-fitted toilet set in a leather case; a present for Dasha. Telegin was very fond of it, and every day he would take it out of its tissue-paper wrapping and admire it. He imagined a compartment in a train, with a long window such as railway coaches have outside Russia, and Dasha sitting on the seat, dressed in a travelling costume, and on her knees this case smelling of scent and leather—the emblem of care-free, marvellous journeys.

He sat up and looked out of the window at the dirty-purple reflection of the city's lights in the hazy sky. And he felt distinctly the heart-ache and hatred with which the people who had been crying that day for bread must look at that glow. It was an unbeloved, sultry, hateful city—and yet it

was the brain and the will of the country, now struck down by a deadly disease —a city in its death-throes.

Telegin left home at noon. The wide, foggy street was deserted. Snow was falling. Through the sweating window of a flower shop he saw a cut-glass vase with a magnificent bunch of red roses, sprayed with great drops of water. He looked at it with tenderness through the falling snow.

A Cossack patrol of five troopers came riding abreast from a side street. The last man on the off side reined in his horse and cantered across to the pavement where three men in caps and tattered coats were walking along and talking with great animation but under their breath. They stopped at the approach of the Cossack, and one of them said something in a cheerful tone and laid a hand on the horse's bridle. It was such an unusual thing to do that Telegin's heart was in his mouth. But the Cossack only laughed, nodded, urged on his dancing, thick-necked horse, overtook the other troopers, and the five of them went off at a brisk canter and were lost in the fog.

Near the river groups of excited people were arguing and passing on news and rumours. They were obviously still under the impression of yesterday's events. Crowds were also moving towards the Neva. Along the granite parapets of the embankment several thousand onlookers swarmed like black ants on the snow, while on the bridge itself a handful of loud-mouthed individuals were creating an uproar. They yelled at the soldiers who were barring the way across the bridge and lining its whole length to the further end, which was almost invisible through the curtain of falling snow.

"Why have you closed the bridge? Let us through!"

"We've got to get to the city."

"A scandal, the way they molest tax-payers!"

"The bridges are for us to use, not for you to close!"

"Are you Russians or not? Let us through!"

A tall corporal with four George Crosses on his chest was pacing from parapet to parapet with his spurs jingling. When someone from the crowd shouted curses at him, he turned his sullen, yellow, pock-marked face towards those who shouted and said:

"Gentlefolk by the looks of them, and using such language!" His waxed moustaches twitched with annoyance. "I can't allow anyone to cross the bridge —I shall be compelled to resort to the use of arms if there is any disobedience."

"The soldiers won't fire," other loud voices shouted.

"Damn you, you pock-marked dog!"

The corporal turned again and remonstrated, and although his voice was hoarse and his tone curt there was in his words the same undercurrent of alarm and perplexity as in everyone else's in those days. The people shouting at him realized this and went on cursing and pressing against the barrier.

A tall, gaunt man, pince-nez all awry, his long neck wrapped in a scarf, suddenly said in a loud, dull voice: "They're obstructing the traffic and setting up barriers everywhere, and now they've closed the bridges. This is an outrage. May we move freely about our own city, or is even this denied us now? Citizens, I propose that we ignore the soldiers and cross to the other side over the ice."

"That's right! Across the ice! Hurrah! . . ." and the next instant a few men ran to the snow-covered granite steps leading down to the frozen river. The tall man, with his scarf flying out behind him, strode resolutely across the ice in a line parallel with the bridge. The soldiers leaned over from the bridge and shouted:

"Hey, turn back or we'll shoot! Turn back, you long-legged devil!"

But the man strode on without turning his head. More and more people began to trot after him in single file. They jumped down with a clatter from the embankment on to the ice, and their tiny black figures ran briskly over the snow. The soldiers shouted to them from the bridge, and the men running put their hands up to their mouths and shouted back. One of the soldiers raised his rifle, but another touched his shoulder, and he did not fire.

As it transpired afterwards none of the people who came out into the streets had any definite plan; but when they saw the bridges and cross-roads barred, they of course immediately wanted to do the very things they were forbidden to do—cross by these bridges and get together in crowds. The ban fired their already abnormally stimulated imaginations. The rumour went round that all this disorder was being directed by some unknown hand.

Towards evening on the second day contingents from the Pavlovsk regiment lay down on the Nevski and opened fire on the knots of sightseers and individual pedestrians. The populace now began to realize that what was going on was very like the birth of a revolution.

But no one knew where its focal point was, or who was leading it. Neither the officer commanding the troops nor the police knew it, and still less the dictator Protopopov, a cloth manufacturer from Simbirsk, now the imperial favourite who in his time had had his head broken for him in a public-house brawl by a certain Naumov, a local landowner. The head was broken by smashing through a panel in a door, and the injury to the skull and brain induced headaches and nervous troubles which later, when the fate of the Russian Empire was entrusted to such hands, led to fatal confusion. There was a focal point of revolution everywhere, in every house, in the head of every man-in-the-street crammed with fancies, resentment and discontent. This inability of the authorities to track down the nerve-centre of the revolution was an ominous sign. The police were chasing a shadow. In fact they would have had to arrest the two million four hundred thousand inhabitants of Petrograd.

Telegin spent the whole day on the streets—he had an extraordinary feeling of continued giddiness, a feeling that all the others probably shared. He felt the excitement in the city growing almost to the point of insanity; everyone seemed to merge into a general mass giddiness. And the masses, roaming and surging through the streets, were looking eagerly for some signal, some dazzling flash of lightning, that would fuse them all into a single block.

The firing on the Nevski frightened no one. People gathered round two bodies—a woman in a gingham skirt and an old man in a fur coat—lying at the corner of Vladimir Street. When the firing increased in intensity, the crowd dispersed and kept near the walls of the houses as they moved along.

Towards evening the firing died down. A cold wind had cleared the sky overhead, and a sombre sunset flared up in the clouds towering over the sea. The narrow pointed sickle of the moon rose low over the city, where the sky was black as coal. The street lamps were left unlit that night. Windows were dark, and house doors closed. All along the fog-shrouded, deserted Nevski stood little pyramids of piled arms. Tall sentries kept look-out at the street crossings. The moonlight gleamed on plate-glass windows, tram-lines, and bayonets alike. Everything seemed calm and quiet. But in each house the telephones were buzzing and muttering with crazy talk about the events of the day.

On the morning of the twenty-fifth of February Znamenskaya Square was packed with troops and police. A troop of mounted police on golden-brown, slim-legged, dancing horses were drawn up in front of the Northern Hotel. Black-coated police on foot were posted round the statue of Alexander III and in small groups round the square. Bearded, laughing Cossacks with their fur caps tilted over one ear, stood in front of the railway station with bundles of hay strapped behind their saddles. The muddy-grey coats of the Pavlovsk regiment were just visible from the direction of the Nevski Prospect.

Telegin, carrying a suitcase, climbed the stone steps of the station approach, from where he had a good view of the whole scene. On a blood-red block of granite in the middle of the square stood the gigantic bronze horse, its head bowed under the weight of the rider and on the horse sat the ponderous figure of the emperor like the very embodiment of the force of gravity, its heavy shoulders and round cap covered with snow. Crowds of people, shouting, whistling and swearing, were pressing forward towards the pedestal of the statue from the five converging streets.

As on the bridge the day before, the soldiers, and especially the Cossacks, riding in twos at a walking pace close up to the people pouring in from all directions, began to exchange banter and grins. But among the little groups of the policemen, big sullen fellows, there was silence and obvious indecision.

Telegin was familiar with this state of restlessness when awaiting an order to attack—when the enemy is almost on you, and everyone knows what is to be done, but the order has not yet been given, and the minutes drag on tormentingly. Suddenly one of the station doors slammed and an officer of the military police appeared on the steps. He was dressed in a short coat with the badges of a colonel. His face was very pale. Drawing himself up to his full height, he surveyed the square, and his light-grey eyes glided over Telegin's face. Then he ran down light-footed through the ranks of the Cossacks, who made way for him, and said something to the Cossack captain, turning his bearded chin up towards him. The captain listened, leaning back in his saddle with a wry smile. The colonel nodded in the direction of the Old Nevski, and walked across the square over the carpet of snow. A tremendously fat, tightly belted police inspector ran forward to meet him, his saluting hand trembling under the peak of his cap. The shouts of a crowd approaching from the direction of the Old Nevski were growing louder, and soon it was possible to distinguish that they were singing. A man got a firm grip on Telegin's sleeve, and clambered up alongside him. He was very excited; he was bareheaded and a purple weal ran right across his dirty face.

"Brothers! Cossacks!" the man shouted in that horrible strained voice with which people cry out when they are facing bloodshed and slaughter—a wild, savage voice that makes the heart sink and the eyes see red. "Brothers! They have killed me! Stand up for us, brothers! They are killing us!"

The Cossacks turned round in their saddles and looked at him without a word, but their faces paled and their eyes widened. At that moment a dense black wave swept forward from the Old Nevski: it was a crowd of workers from the Kolpino district. The wind tugged at the wet bunting of their red flag. The mounted police moved forward from the Northern Hotel, and suddenly the broad blades of their drawn sabres flashed in their hands. A furious yell rose from the crowd. Telegin caught a glimpse of the police colonel: he was running with one hand on his holster and waving the Cossacks forward with the other. The Kolpino crowd pelted the colonel and the mounted police with stones and chunks of ice, and their slim-legged golden bays danced all the more.

Telegin heard the faint popping of revolver shots, and saw puffs of smoke round the foot of the statue. The police were firing at the Kolpino workers. And at that very instant a red, round-nosed Don mare in the Cossack ranks ten yards from Telegin reared up; her rider bent over her neck and spurred her forward. In a few bounds the Cossack was within reach of the police colonel, drew his sabre, slashed with it so that it whistled through the air, and reined back his mare so that she reared again.

The Cossacks surged forward to the spot where the police colonel had been killed. The crowd broke through all barriers and flooded the whole square. A few shots rang out, but they were drowned in the triumphant cheers that rose on all sides. . . .

"Telegin, what are you doing here?" said a voice.

"I must leave Petrograd to-day at all costs—on a goods train, or an engine, it's all the same to me."

"No use! You can't get away to-day. My dear chap, can't you see that this is the revolution!" Antoshka Arnoldov, shabby and unshaven, his bulging eyes red-rimmed, caught Telegin by the lapel of his coat. "Did you see that police chap's head fly off? It rolled like a football—beautiful! You fool, can't you see—it's the revolution!" Antoshka rambled on as if in a delirium. Telegin and he were standing in the entrance to the station, with the crowd packed tightly round them. "This morning the Lithuanian and Volhynian regiments refused to fire. A company of the Pavlovsk regiment came out on the streets fully armed. The whole city is standing on its head, but no one has any idea what is going on. The soldiers on the Nevski are crawling about like autumn flies—they're afraid to go back to the barracks."

CHAPTER XXXVI

DASHA AND KATIA, in fur coats and with swansdown scarves over their heads, were walking quickly along the dimly lighted Malaya Nikitskaya. A thin crust of ice was crackling under their feet. The crescent moon had risen, bright and slender, in the cold, green-tinted sky. Dogs were barking behind the gates. Dasha, smiling into the wet down of her scarf, was listening to the crunching of the ice.

"Katia, if someone invented some kind of instrument and put it there"—she put her hand on her breast—"one might record extraordinary things." Dasha began to hum under her breath.

Katia took her arm. "Come along now."

A few yards further on Dasha stopped again. "Katia, do you believe that it's the revolution?"

"Yes, yes, there's unrest in the very air."

"Katyusha—that's from spring. Look—the sky's green."

In the distance they saw the bright electric bulb over the door of the Law Society club where a public meeting was being held at 8.30 p.m. for an exchange of views and the working out of a joint plan of action; the meeting had been called by the Constitutional Democrats in view of the amazing rumours that had reached them from Petersburg.

The sisters hurried up the staircase to the second floor; they did not take off their fur coats, but only threw off their scarves as they entered the hall.

It was crowded with people, all listening intently to an apple-cheeked, bearded, heavily-built gentleman who gestured gracefully with his large hands as he spoke.

". . . Events are developing with breath-taking rapidity," he said, in a sonorous baritone. "General Khabalov was invested with full powers in Petrograd yesterday, and he has had the following proclamation posted throughout the city:

In the last few days disorders have occurred in Petrograd, accompanied by violence and attempts on the lives of military and police officers. I prohibit all gatherings on the streets. I warn the population of Petrograd that I have authorised the troops to make use of their weapons and to stop at nothing to restore order in the capital . . .!

"Murderers!" a deep bass voice shouted from the back of the hall.

". . . This proclamation, as was to be expected, was the last straw. The patience of the people was at an end. Twenty-five thousand soldiers of all arms of the Petrograd garrison have joined the insurgents."

Before he could finish the sentence the hall shook with a storm of applause. Men jumped up on to their chairs and yelled, making gestures as if stabbing the old order to the heart. The speaker looked at the enthusiastic audience and smiled broadly. Then he raised his hand for silence and continued:

"A most important telephone message has just been received." He put his hand into the pocket of his check coat and unfolded a sheet of paper. "To-day, Rodzianko, President of the State Duma, has sent this telegram to His Majesty:

The position is serious. The capital is in a state of anarchy. The Government is paralysed. Transport, food and fuel are completely disorganized. Shots are being fired in the streets. Troops are firing at each other. A man trusted by the whole nation must immediately be appointed to form a new government. There must be no delay. Any delay would be fatal.. I pray God that in this hour responsibility may not fall upon the Crown."

The apple-cheeked gentleman put down the sheet of paper and looked round the hall with sparkling eyes.

"Gentlemen, we are on the verge of the greatest events in our history," he went on in a velvety, vibrant voice. "It may be that at this very moment there"—he stretched out his hand like Danton's statue—"there, in Petrograd, the hopes of so many generations have already been fulfilled, and the weeping shades of the Decembrists avenged! . . ."

"Oh, Lord!" a woman's voice groaned.

"It may be that tomorrow all Russia will be united in one bright, fraternal choir of liberty! . . ."

"Hurrah! Liberty!" shouted the audience.

The speaker sat down and passed the back of his hand across his forehead. A tall man with long, straw-like hair, a narrow face and a lifeless, reddish beard, got up from a corner of the table and, without looking at anyone, began to speak in a sarcastic tone.

"I have just heard some comrades shouting 'Hurrah! Liberty!' That's fine. What could be better than to arrest Nikolai II at Mogilev, bring his Ministers to trial, kick out the governors and the police, and raise the red banner of revolution? Quite a good beginning. By all accounts, the revolutionary process has made a good, vigorous start, and to all appearances it's not going to be a flop this time. But a gentleman has just made a beautiful speech here, and, if I heard aright, he expressed complete satisfaction with the impending

revolution, and expected to unite all Russia in the very near future in one bright, fraternal choir. . . ."

The man with the straw-like hair pulled out his handlerchief and put it to his mouth as if to hide a smile. But red spots stood out on his cheek-bones, his bony shoulders heaved and he coughed. Someone behind Dasha asked:

"Who is that speaking?"

"Comrade Kuzma," the answer came in a hurried whisper.

"In 1905 he was in the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. He's not long back from Siberia."

"In my opinion the last speaker's enthusiasm was perhaps a trifle premature," Comrade Kuzma continued, and his waxen face suddenly grew angry and resolute. "Twelve million peasants, trussed for slaughter, are still at the front. Millions of workers are gasping for air in basements and starving in queues. Is it on the backs of these workers and peasants that your fraternal choir is going to sing . . .?"

There was some hissing in the hall, and an indignant voice shouted: "This is provocation!" The apple-cheeked gentleman shrugged his shoulders and shook a little hand-bell. Kuzma continued:

". . . The Imperialists have plunged Europe into this monstrous war; the bourgeois classes, from top to bottom, have proclaimed it a crusade, a holy war for world markets and the crowning triumph of capitalism. Those yellow curs, the Social Democrats, gave their masters a leg-up, and confirmed that the war was really a national war and a crusade, yes sir! The peasants and workers were driven to the slaughter. Who, I ask you, has raised his voice in these days of blood . . .?"

"What's he saying? Who is he? Shut him up!" angry voices shouted. There was an uproar. Some of the audience jumped up and waved their arms.

"The hour has struck. The flame of the revolution must spread to the great mass of the peasants and workers."

By now the noise in the hall made it impossible to hear what the speaker was saying. A few men in dinner-jackets ran forward to the table. Kuzma jumped down from the platform and disappeared through a door. A lady well-known for her activities in connection with juvenile education took his place.

"The revolting speech of the previous speaker. . . ."

At that moment someone whispered excitedly and tenderly into Dasha's very ear:

"Good evening, my sweet."

Dasha stood up quickly without even looking round. Telegin was standing in the doorway. She looked at him and thought: he is the most handsome man on earth and he is mine. Telegin for his part was overcome once again—as he had been so often before—by the fact that Dasha was not at all as he had imagined her, but infinitely more beautiful. A warm flush spread over her cheeks, and her blue-grey eyes were fathomless like two lakes. She was perfect, she lacked nothing.

Dasha said softly: "Good evening." She took his arm, and they went out into the street together.

Once outside, Dasha stopped, looked at Telegin, smiled, drew a deep breath, then raised her hands and kissed him on the mouth. Again he was conscious of her fragrance, her slightly acrid perfume.

Dasha silently took his arm and they walked on. The crackling scales of ice gleamed in the light of the sickle moon that hung low over the street.

"Ah, I love you so much, Ivan! How I have been longing for you!"

"I couldn't come—you know that?"

"You're not angry with me for writing you such horrid letters—I'm no good at writing. . . ."

Telegin stopped and looked at her silent smiling face upturned to his. It looked particularly sweet and simple framed in the swansdown scarf, under which her eyebrows showed in a dark line. Cautiously he drew her to him; she took a step forward and pressed herself to him, still looking into his eyes. He kissed her again; then they walked on.

"Are you here for long, Ivan?"

"I don't know, what with all this going on!"

"Yes, of course, the revolution!"

"Do you know—I had to ride on the footplate."

"Do you know what, Ivan . . ." Dasha was walking in step with him, and looking down at the toe of her boots.

"What?"

"I am coming with you now—to you."

Telegin did not answer. Dasha only felt that he tried several times to draw a deep breath and could not. A great tenderness and pity for him flooded her heart.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE FOLLOWING DAY was remarkable chiefly for the way in which it confirmed the theory of the relativity of time. Thus it took a cabman approximately a year and a half to drive Telegin from his hotel on the Tverskaya to Dasha's flat in the Arbat.

"No, sir," said the cabman, "those days are over when you could drive about for fifty kopeks. In Petrograd the people have taken their freedom. We'll do the same here in Moscow any day now. Look at that policeman standing over there. I'd like to drive up to the son of a bitch and slash him across the mug with my whip. Just you wait, sir, we'll settle accounts with the lot of them before long."

Dasha met him at the door of the dining-room. She was in her dressing-gown and her fair hair was twisted into a loose knot. She smelt of fresh water. The bell of time tolled once and time stood still. All time was full of Dasha's voice, Dasha's laughter, and her bright hair gleaming in the morning sun. Telegin felt uneasy even when she went to the far end of the table. As she raised her arms to open a cupboard and her wide sleeves slipped back and left them bare, Telegin thought that human beings could not have arms like that—only two tiny white scars above the elbows showed that they were actual human arms. Dasha got out some cups, and turning her head towards him said something wonderful and laughed.

She made Telegin drink several cups of coffee. She said something, and Telegin said something, but apparently human speech has a meaning only when time is moving as usual—and that day time stood still. Katia, sitting with them in the dining-room, listened to Telegin and Dasha waxing enthusiastic over something and forgetting it the next instant, and talking extraordinary nonsense about the coffee, about a leather dressing-case, about a head cut off in Petrograd,

and about Dasha's hair, which, marvellous to relate, had a reddish tinge in bright sunlight.

The maid brought in the newspapers. Katia unfolded the *Russkie Vyedomosti*, uttered an exclamation and began to read aloud the Tsar's ukase dissolving the Duma. Dasha and Telegin were very much surprised at this, but Katia did not read the rest of the news aloud and Dasha said to Telegin: "Let's go to my room." She walked in front of him through the narrow dark corridor, went into her room first and said hurriedly: "Wait, wait, don't look," and hid away something white in a drawer of the chest of drawers.

For the first time in his life Telegin saw Dasha's room—her dressing-table, with its multitude of mysterious articles; her narrow, white bed, with two pillows on it, one large and one small, and by the window a large armchair with the swansdown scarf thrown over the back. Dasha told Telegin to sit in this chair, and she herself pulled up a stool and sat down facing him, with her elbows on her knees and her chin resting on her hands. Looking into his eyes without blinking, she told him to tell her how he loved her. The bell of time tolled once again.

"Dasha," said Telegin, "if I were to be given everything in the world for my own, the whole earth, it couldn't make me any happier—can you understand that?" Dasha nodded. "If I were alone, what good could I be? Isn't that so? What use could I be even to myself?" Dasha nodded. "Eat, sleep and drink—for what? What are these hands and feet for? What good would it be to me, if, for instance, I were to be fabulously rich? You can imagine the torment of being lonely. . . ." Dasha nodded. "But now, with you sitting there like that—I no longer exist in myself. . . . All I feel is that this is you—and that this is happiness. You are everything. I look at you, and my head reels: can it be true that you are real, that you are alive and that you are mine? Dasha, do you remember something?"

"I remember," Dasha said, "sitting on deck on the steamer, and a breeze blowing and wine gleaming in our glasses—and then suddenly feeling that we were floating on to happiness."

"And do you remember how blue the shadows were?"

Dasha nodded, and at once it seemed to her that she, too, could remember those beautiful, blue shadows. She remembered the gulls flying after the boat, the low banks and far away on the water the gleaming sun-path which, it seemed to her, would end somewhere in a blue, radiant sea of happiness. Dasha even remembered the dress she had worn that day. How many weary years had passed since then!

That evening Katia came home glad and excited from the Law Society club, and told them the news:

"In Petrograd all power has been taken over by a committee of the Duma. The Cabinet has been arrested. But terribly alarming rumours are going round—they say the emperor has left General Headquarters and that General Ivanov, with a whole army corps, is on the way to Petrograd to restore order. Here in Moscow it has been decided to storm the Kremlin and the Arsenal to-morrow—Ivan Ilyich, Dasha and I will come to your hotel to-morrow to watch the revolution. . . ."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

FROM THE WINDOWS of Telegin's hotel they could see a crowd slowly flowing in a black stream along the narrow Tverskaya below: a mass of restless heads, caps, caps, more caps, hats, shawls, and the yellow dots of faces. There were onlookers at every window, and small boys on the roofs.

Katia, a veil held before her face to cover it up to the eyebrows, was standing by the window clutching now Dasha's and now Telegin's arm.

"How terrible!" she said. "How terrible!"

"Yekaterina Dmitrievna, I assure you that the intentions of the people are perfectly peaceful," Telegin said. "Before you came I went across to the Kremlin—negotiations are in progress there, and the Arsenal will probably be handed over without a shot being fired."

"But why are they going there? Look at all these people—what do they mean to do?"

Dasha glanced at the surging stream of heads and then at the outlines of the roofs and towers. It was a mild, misty morning. In the distance a flock of jackdaws circled over the golden domes of the Kremlin churches and the imperial eagles straddling the slender spires. It seemed to her as if great rivers had burst their banks and flooded the land, and that she and the man she loved had been caught up in the current, and that now the only thing she could do was to hold on to his hand and not let go.

"I want to see everything—let's go down to the street," Katia said.

The revolutionaries had established their headquarters in the Town Hall—a dirty brick building with pillars like bottles and with balustrades, balconies and little towers all over it, which were now dressed with red flags. Strips of bunting were wound round the pillars and hung above the main entrance. On the frozen pavement in front of this main entrance four grey guns stood on high-wheeled gun-carriages. In the entrance itself, machine-gunners, with bunches of red ribbon threaded through their shoulder-straps, were sitting beside their guns. Great crowds of people were looking, with a curious uneasy exuberance, at the red flags and the dusty, black windows of the Town Hall, when a small, excited figure came out on the balcony over the porch, waved his arms, and shouted something. Although no one could hear what it was, the whole crowd burst into a hearty cheer.

When the crowd had stared its fill at the flags and the guns, it moved on over the trampled, slushy snow and passed under the deep arches of the Iverski chapel out into the Red Square, where negotiations were in progress at the Spasskaya and Nikolskaya gates between the insurgent troops and the delegates of a territorial regiment which had barricaded itself in its barracks in the Kremlin.

Katia, Dasha and Telegin were swept away by the crowd right to the entrance of the Town Hall. The shouting along the Tverskaya and in the square was growing ever louder.

"Comrades, make way. . . . Comrades, maintain order" shouted youthful, excited voices. Four schoolboys, brandishing rifles, and a pretty girl with tousled hair, and a drawn sabre in her hand, were elbowing their way through the crowd to the porch. They were escorting ten policemen they had arrested. The policemen, great hulking, whiskered fellows, with scowling, crestfallen faces, had their hands tied behind their backs. One of them was an inspector;

he was bare-headed; black blood was clotted on his shaven head over one temple; his piercing russet-coloured eyes darted rapidly from one sneering face in the crowd to another; his epaulettes had been torn off his greatcoat together with the cloth.

"Got what was coming to you at last, my beauties!" someone in the crowd shouted.

"You've bullied us long enough, it's our turn now!"

"Your rule is over!"

"Get them and lynch them!"

"Come on, lads!"

"Comrades, comrades, make way, please—maintain revolutionary discipline!" the schoolboys shouted in thin squeaky voices. They shoved the policemen forward into the entrance of the Town Hall and disappeared beyond the great doors. A few people pushed after them through the doors; among these were Katia, Dasha and Telegin. They saw the machine-gunners squatting by their guns on the wet floor of the bare, high, dimly-lighted vestibule. A fat-cheeked student, who seemed to be drunk with shouting and exhaustion, rushed up to everyone who came in and yelled:

"No excuse now! Your pass!"

Some showed him passes, others simply waved him away and walked up the wide staircase to the second floor. Dusty, sleepy, taciturn soldiers, rifles in hand, were sitting and lying against the walls in the wide corridors on the second floor. Some were lazily chewing bread, others were snoring. The crowd of civilians wandered idly past, looking at the weird inscriptions on the doors and at the weary commissars rushing from room to room in a state of the greatest possible excitement.

Katia, Dasha and Telegin, having seen their fill of all these extraordinary goings-on, made their way to the council hall. The great windows at both ends of the hall were draped with faded purple curtains; semi-circular settees upholstered in purple were arranged on the floor in the shape of an amphitheatre. On the main wall empty gold frames—formerly containing portraits of the Tsars—yawned around ten-foot black gaps and in front of them a marble Empress Catherine II in a bronze imperial mantle smiled at her people with a gracious and sophisticated air. The settees of the amphitheatre were occupied by exhausted, unshaven men. Some sat resting their heads on their hands, others slept with their heads down on the desks. Others again were peeling the skin off bits of sausage or munching bread. Down below, in front of the smiling marble Empress, hollow-cheeked young men in black Russian blouses were sitting at a long table covered with a gold-fringed green cloth. One of them had long hair and a russet beard.

"Dasha! Look! There's Comrade Kuzma, at the table!" Katia said.

At that moment a girl with bobbed hair and a sharp, pointed nose came up to Comrade Kuzma and whispered something in his ear. He listened, without turning his head, then stood up, and said:

"Guchkov, the Mayor, has again announced that no weapons will be issued to the workers. I move that we adopt, without discussion, a resolution of protest against the actions of the Revolutionary Committee."

Telegin finally discovered (from a diminutive schoolboy smoking a cigarette with a rather worried air) that this was the Empress Catherine Hall and that the Soviet of Workers Deputies had now been in continuous session in it for the last forty-eight hours.

At dinner-time the soldiers of the territorial regiment occupying the Kremlin

saw the smoke of field-kitchens rising in Red Square, opened the gates and surrendered. Triumphant shouts rang out all over the Square, and caps were flung into the air.

On the mound in Red Square where the scaffold stood in olden days; where the naked dead body of the false Dimitri had lain with a sheep's head masking his face and a mountebank's bagpipe on his belly; where Tsars were proclaimed and deposed; from where all liberties and servitudes of the Russian people had been announced—to this little mound, so often overgrown with burdock and so often drenched with blood, came a little common soldier in a dirt-stiffened shabby greatcoat, saluted the crowd, pulled his fur cap down to his ears with both hands and began to speak. But the noise was so great that no one could make out what he was saying. The soldier was a scrawny little fellow, one of the C3 men combed out by a final call-up—but in spite of that a slightly dishevelled young lady wearing a hat with a feather in it, rushed up and kissed him; at this the crowd pulled him off the mound, lifted him up and carried him shoulder-high amid much cheering.

Meanwhile on the Tverskaya some bright lads climbed up on to General Skobelov's statue standing opposite the Governor-General's residence and tied a red flag to the general's sword. The crowd cheered. Then certain mysterious individuals broke into the premises of the Secret Police through the back; there was a crash of glass, and soon smoke began to pour out. Again the crowd cheered. From the pedestal of the Pushkin monument on the Tverski Boulevard a famous authoress, with tears streaming down her face, addressed another crowd. She spoke about the dawn of a new life, and—not without some assistance from a nimble schoolboy—stuck a small red flag into the thoughtful Pushkin's hand. There were more cheers for this.

All that day the whole city seemed drunk. No one went home; people stood about in groups, talked, wept for joy, embraced each other and waited for some sort of 'telegram' until the middle of the night.

Katia, Dasha and Telegin went home at dusk. They found that the housemaid, Lisa, had gone out to a meeting, and that the cook had shut herself up in the kitchen and was howling fit to break her heart. Katia could hardly persuade her to open the door.

"What's the matter, Marfusha?"

"They've murdered our Tsar," she wailed, and put her hand up to her thick lips swollen with weeping. She smelt of vodka.

"Nonsense!" Katia said irritably. "No one has killed the Tsar."

She put the kettle on the gas and went to lay the table. Dasha was lying on the sofa in the drawing-room, with Telegin sitting at her feet.

Dasha said: "Ivan, dear, if I go to sleep, please wake me up when the tea comes—I am dying for a cup of tea." She settled herself on the sofa, put her hand under her cheek, and said, sleepily: "I love you very much."

The swansdown scarf on Dasha's neck gleamed white in the twilight. Telegin could hear her breathing as he sat motionless, and his heart filled to the brim. A light appeared through the crack of the door, then the door opened, Katia came in and sat down on the arm of the sofa next to Telegin. She clasped her knees, and after a short silence asked softly:

"Is Dasha asleep?"

"She asked me to wake her when the tea came."

"Marfusha is bawling in the kitchen that the Tsar has been killed. Ivan Ilyich, what next? I feel as if all barriers were down. My heart is heavy and I am worried about Nikolai Ivanovich. Could you please send him a telegram

first thing to-morrow morning. . . . ? And tell me, when do you think you will take Dasha to Petrograd?"

Telegin said nothing. Katia turned her head to him, and looked thoughtfully into his face with large solemn eyes, very like Dasha's, except that they were the eyes of a mature woman. Then she smiled, drew Telegin to her and kissed him on the forehead.

The next day all Moscow was in the streets from an early hour. Lorry-loads of soldiers bristling with bayonets and sabres passed along the Tverskaya, through dense, incessantly cheering crowds. Young tense-faced girls with drawn sabres in their hands, and ruthless armed schoolboys calling themselves 'revolutionary militia', stood on dirty heaps of snow along the pavement, 'maintaining order'. Shopkeepers climbed up ladders and effaced the imperial eagle on their signs. A few sickly-looking girls from a tobacco factory paraded the town with a portrait of Leo Tolstoy, whose frowning eyes looked sternly down from under his bushy eyebrows on all these wondrous happenings. It seemed as if there could be no more war, no more hatred; as if all that still remained to be done was to hoist the red flag on some high steeple somewhere, and all the world would understand that all men were brothers, and that the only things that mattered on earth were joy, liberty, love and life.

When telegrams brought the shattering news that the Tsar had abdicated and handed over power to the Grand Duke Michael, and that he in his turn had refused the crown, no one was particularly shattered: much greater marvels were taken for granted in those days.

The stars shone brightly in the transparent abyss of the sky above the ragged line of roofs and the orange glow in the west, against which the bare branches of the lime trees stood out black and motionless. It was quite dark under the trees. The frozen pools on the pavements crackled underfoot. Dasha was walking along with her hand clasped in Telegin's; she stopped and looked over a low fence at a faint light showing through the window of a little church. The church and its forecourt lay in the shadow of the limes. A door slammed in the distance, and a little man in a mushroom-like hat and a coat reaching down to the ground, walked across the churchyard, the ice crackling under his felt boots. They could hear the jingling of his keys and the sound of his footsteps as he climbed slowly up to the belfry.

"It's the verger going to ring the bell," Dasha whispered, and looked up. The gleam of the sunset lit up the small golden cupola.

The bell that had called the parishioners to worship for three centuries began to toll. Dasha crossed herself. A memory flashed across Telegin's mind: a little chapel in Galicia, and on the steps of it a woman in a white coat weeping silently over a dead child on her knees. Telegin pressed Dasha's hand with his elbow. Dasha looked at him, as if to ask: what is it?

"Would you like to go in?" she asked in a quick whisper. "Let's go in."

Telegin smiled broadly.

Dasha frowned and stamped her felt-shod foot. She thought: When a girl is walking arm-in-arm with the man she loves more than anything in the world, and she sees a light through the window of a church, there is nothing ridiculous about going in and getting married. She paused for a moment, and then took Telegin's arm again.

CHAPTER XXXIX

"CITIZENS, FROM NOW on you are soldiers of the free Russian army. I have the signal honour of congratulating you on a great and happy event: the chains of slavery have been broken. In three days, without shedding a single drop of blood, the Russian people have completed the greatest revolution in history. The Emperor Nicholas has abdicated, his Ministers have been arrested; Michael, the heir to the throne, has refused a crown too heavy for his head. Now all power has passed into the hands of the people. A provisional Government has been set up for the purpose of holding within the shortest possible time, a general election for an All-Russian Constituent Assembly. The suffrage is to be direct, universal and equal, and the ballot secret. Long live the Russian Revolution! Long live the Constituent Assembly! Long live the Provisional Government!"

"Hurrah-rah-rah!" came the protracted roar of thousands of soldiers' voices. Nikolai Ivanovich Smokovnikov pulled out a large khaki handkerchief from the pocket of his leather tunic and wiped his neck, face and beard. He was speaking from a platform made of planks, to which he had had to clamber up as best he could. Behind him stood the battalion commander, Tetkin, recently promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, a man with a weather-beaten complexion, a fleshy nose and an expression of tense concentration on his face. When the cheers rang out he raised his hand to the peak of his cap with a worried air. The field in front of the platform, on which black patches of bare earth alternated with patches of dirty snow, was packed with some two thousand soldiers in steel helmets and crumpled, untidy, unbelted coats; they carried no weapons, and were listening open-mouthed to the amazing stuff this strange gentleman with a face as red as a turkey-cock was telling them. In the grey distance the scorched chimneys of a burnt village bored into the sky. Beyond the village were the German lines. A few bedraggled crows were flying across the dreary landscape.

"Soldiers!" Nikolai Ivanovich continued, raising his hand with the fingers spread apart. His neck went quite red with the effort. "Only yesterday you were just cannon-fodder whom the Tsarist staff drove to slaughter. You were not asked what you were ready to die for. . . . You were flogged for slight offences, and shot without trial." Lieutenant-Colonel Tetkin coughed and shifted his weight from one foot to the other but said nothing, only bent his head again and went on listening attentively. "I, appointed by the Provisional Government as commissar to the army of the Western Front, herewith announce to you that henceforward there will be no 'common soldiers'—that name has been abolished. Henceforward, soldiers, you are citizens of the Russian State, with equal rights—there is no longer any difference between soldiers and army commanders. All titles such as Your Honour, Your Excellency, and the like have been abolished. In future you will say: 'Good-day General' or 'no, General' or 'yes, General'. Soldiers are no longer required to salute officers of whatever rank. If you wish to greet a general by shaking hands with him, you are at perfect liberty to do so."

"Ha-ha-ha"; a laugh ran through the ranks; Tetkin smiled too, but his face was twitching nervously.

"And now I come to the most important thing. Soldiers! Up to now the war has been conducted by the Tsar's ministers—but from now on it will be waged by the common people—by yourselves! With this object in view, the Provisional Government proposes to you that you should form soldiers' committees in every unit—that is, in every company, battalion, regiment and army. Send into these committees comrades whom you can trust. Henceforward the soldier's finger will follow operations over the military maps side by side with the pencil of the commander-in-chief. Soldiers, I congratulate you on this greatest achievement of the revolution!"

The whole field again resounded with shouting and cheers. Tetkin stood at attention, his hand at the salute. His face was very pale.

Some of the soldiers began to shout questions: "When are we going to make peace with the Germans?"

"How much soap will be issued per man?"

"What about home leave? Has anything been said about that?"

"Mr. Commissar, how do we stand now—are we going to elect a king or what? Who's going to fight the war now?"

In order the better to answer these questions Smokovnikov got off the platform and was immediately surrounded by excited soldiers. Lieutenant-Colonel Tetkin stood with his elbows on the rail of the platform and watched the uncovered, close-cropped head and fat neck of the military commissar move away amid a bobbing mass of steel helmets. One of the soldiers, a red-headed, gaily mischievous fellow—Tetkin knew him well, he was in signals—caught Smokovnikov by the belt and, looking round at his comrades as if for their approval, began to ask questions:

"Mr. Army Commissar, you've told us a lot of nice things, and we've listened to you nicely. Now will you answer a question I want to ask. . . ."

There was a buzz of approval from the soldiers, and they crowded closer round. Lieutenant-Colonel Tetkin frowned and got off the platform with an expression of alarm on his face.

"This is my question to you," the soldier went on, almost touching Smokovnikov's nose with his black finger-nail, "I've had a letter from my village—our cow is dead, we never had a horse, and so now my wife and children have had to go begging for a crust of bread. . . . Would you say that if I went home now you would have the right to shoot me for desertion?"

"If you put your own personal welfare above liberty—if you are ready to betray its cause like Judas, Russia will fling it in your face that you are unworthy to be a soldier of the revolutionary army. . . . Go home!" Smokovnikov shouted angrily.

"Here, don't you shout at me."

"Who are you to shout at us!"

"Soldiers!" Smokovnikov raised himself on the tips of his toes. "There is some misunderstanding. The first commandment of the revolution, gentlemen, is loyalty to our Allies. The free Russian revolutionary army must turn with renewed vigour against imperialist Germany, that vicious foe of liberty."

"What about yourself? Have you fed the lice in the trenches, eh?" a surly voice asked.

"He's never even seen one in all his born life."

"Let him have a few so he can breed them."

"Don't talk to us about liberty! Talk about the war! We've been fighting three years. It's all right for you at home to grow a fat paunch, but we want to know when the war's going to be over."

"Soldiers," Smokovnikov shouted again, "the banner of the revolution has been raised for liberty, and war to a victorious conclusion."

"Just listen to the bloody fool!"

"We've been fighting three years, and we haven't seen any victory."

"What was the good of getting rid of the Tsar if we're to go on fighting?"

"They chucked the Tsar out because he tried to prevent them from going on with the war."

"Comrades, this fellow's in somebody's pay!"

Lieutenant-Colonel Tetkin elbowed his way through the crowd to Smokovnikov, and saw a huge, dark, round-shouldered gunner seize the commissar by the breast of his coat and shake him, shouting into his face:

"What did you come here for? Out with it! What did you come to us for? To sell us, eh? That's what you have come for, you son of a bitch!"

Smokovnikov drew his head in between his shoulders and his beard that looked as if it were painted on his cheeks, jerked about as the soldier shook him again. He tried to push the man away but his fingers caught in the collar of the man's tunic and ripped it open. The soldier scowled, snatched off his steel helmet and violently struck Smokovnikov with it several times on the head and face.

CHAPTER XL

A NIGHTWATCHMAN AND a policeman were sitting in the doorway of Muraveichik's jewellery shop and talking in undertones. The street was deserted and the shops closed. A March breeze was whistling through the bare branches of the acacias and rustling a Liberty Loan poster imperfectly stuck on a fence. A bright southern moon looking like a live jellyfish stood high above the town.

"He was just having a little holiday in Yalta," the nightwatchman was relating to the policeman in a leisurely way, "just going for a little walk, all in white ducks, with all his medals and decorations, when a telegram was handed him right there in the street, a telegram about the abdication of His Majesty the Emperor. He read it, poor fellow, and burst into tears in front of all the people."

"Poor man," said the policeman.

"And in a week's time he got the sack himself."

"What for?"

"Just because he was governor—governors aren't wanted any more now."

"Bad job," said the policeman, watching a ginger cat cautiously stealing along on some private business in the moon-shadows cast by the acacias.

". . . all this time His Majesty the Emperor was living in Mogilev among his troops without any worries. He slept during the day and at night he read dispatches about all the battles that were going on."

"He must be thirsty, the rascal; he's trying to get to the water," the policeman said.

"What's that?"

"I'm talking about the cat. It's just come out of the tobacconist's shop."

"Never mind that. All at once His Majesty the Emperor is told over the phone that the people are up in arms in Petersburg and the soldiers don't want to fire on the people; they want to go home. 'Oh well', His Majesty says to himself, 'matters could easily be worse.' So he called together all his generals, put on all his medals and ribbons, went out to them and said: 'The people are up in arms in Petersburg, the soldiers don't want to fire on the people, they want to go home. What am I to do? Give me your opinion.' And what do you think: His Majesty looks at the generals, but the generals don't give him their opinion, they only turn their faces the other way."

"That's bad!" said the policeman.

"Only one of them did not turn away: an old general, a bit of a drunkard. 'Your Majesty', says he, 'say the word and I am ready to die for you'. But His Majesty shook his head and laughed bitterly. 'Of all my subjects, all my servants, only this one has remained faithful, and he is drunk every day from morning to night. I see that the end of my reign has come. Give me a sheet of official paper so I can write my abdication.' "

"And did he write it?"

"He wrote it and then he wept bitter tears."

"That's bad!" said the policeman a second time.

While they were talking, a tall man with the peak of his cap drawn deep down over his eyes walked quickly past the shop. One empty sleeve of his military tunic was stuck into his belt. He turned his face towards the men sitting in the doorway of the shop and his white teeth gleamed in the moonlight.

"That man is going past here for the fourth time," the watchman said quietly.

"Must be a bandit by all accounts."

"Lots of bandits about now. It's this war that breeds them. You get them everywhere, where none were ever seen before. Real artists they are."

A clock on a distant church-tower struck three and immediately afterwards a cock crowed. The one-armed man again appeared in the street, but this time he made straight for the door of the jewellery shop and its guardians, who watched his approach in silence. Suddenly the watchman whispered hurriedly to the policeman:

"Blow your whistle, Ivan, or we're done for!"

The policeman was reaching for his whistle when the one-armed man jumped at him, kicked him in the chest and at the same time struck the nightwatchman on the head with the butt of his revolver. A second man, squat, long-whiskered, dressed in a military greatcoat came running up, rushed at the policeman and twisted his hands behind his back with a rapid, violent gesture.

The two bandits then tackled the lock of the shop in complete silence. They soon had the door open and dragged in the stunned nightwatchman and the pinioned policeman, closing the door after them.

In a few minutes it was all over and the precious stones and gold tied up in two bundles.

"What about these?" the squat man asked. He prodded the policeman, who was lying on the floor behind the counter, with the tip of his boot.

"No, no, please don't," said the policeman. "Don't, for the love of God!"

"Come on," the one-armed man said sharply.

"But I'm telling you they will give us away."

"Come on, you scum!" Arkadi Zhadov said, seized his bundle in his teeth and pointed the muzzle of his Mauser at his companion. The squat man gave a short laugh and walked towards the door. The street was as empty as before. The two men calmly stepped out of the shop, turned a corner and walked away towards "Château Cabernay."

"You blackguard, you bandit, you bungler," Zhadov said to the squat

man as they walked along. "If you want to work with me, you can't do that sort of thing. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Well, give me the bundle now and go get the boat ready. I'll fetch my wife. We must be at sea before sunrise."

"Are we going to Yalta?"

"That's none of your business. Perhaps to Yalta, perhaps to Constantinople. . . . I'm giving the orders here."

CHAPTER XLI

KATIA WAS LEFT alone. Telegin and Dasha had left for Petrograd. Katia saw them off at the station—they were like sleep-walkers so wrapped up were they in each other—and then returned home in the dusk.

The house was empty—Marfusha and Lisa had gone to a meeting of 'domestic assistants'. The dining-room smelt of cigarette smoke and flowers. On the table a small flowering cherry-tree stood amid a litter of crockery. Katia watered the tree, cleared away the crockery, and sat down at the table with her face to the window. She did not switch on the light. The sky was dark, and overcast with clouds. The clock was ticking on the wall and she thought that, even if her heart were breaking, it would go on ticking just the same. She sat for a long time without moving; then she picked up her swansdown shawl from the armchair, put it over her shoulders and went into Dasha's room. In the half-light she could only just distinguish the striped mattress of the orphaned bed; an empty hat-box lay on a chair, and bits of paper and cloth littered the floor. When Katia saw that Dasha had taken all her little knicknacks with her, leaving nothing, forgetting nothing, she felt so hurt that she began to cry. She sat down on the bed, on the striped mattress, and remained motionless for a long while, as she had done in the dining-room.

The clock in the dining-room sonorously struck ten. Katia adjusted her shawl and went into the kitchen. She stood still and listened; then, stretching up to her full height she got the kitchen book off a high shelf, tore out a clean sheet and wrote in pencil on it: "Lisa and Marfusha, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves for being out all day until late at night." A tear dropped on to the sheet of paper. Katia put the note on the kitchen table, went to her bedroom, undressed quickly, got into bed and lay still.

At midnight the kitchen door slammed, and Lisa and Marfusha came in, talking loudly and stamping about noisily. In the kitchen they were quiet for a moment, evidently while they read Katia's note—and then burst into loud laughter. Katia opened and shut her eyes, but did not move. Finally there was silence in the kitchen. The sleepless clock boomed out the hour: One. Katia turned on to her back, kicked off the bedclothes, sighed deeply, as if short of breath, and jumped out of bed. She switched on the light, screwed up her eyes and went to the long dressing-mirror. Her thin day vest hardly reached to her knees. She looked herself over anxiously, but rapidly, as one looks at familiar things; suddenly her chin quivered, she drew closer to the mirror and lifted her hair on the right side of her head. "Yes, yes, of course—there, there—and there again." She scrutinized her whole face.

"Yes, of course—in a year my hair will be grey, and in another year I shall be old." She turned out the light and lay down again, covering her eyes with her arm. "Not one moment of happiness in all my life. And now it's all over—no one will put his arms round me, hold me tight, no one will say to me: my darling, my sweet, my joy, my love. . . ."

Among these bitter thoughts and regrets a picture flashed through her memory: a wet, sandy path, a glade blue-grey with rain, tall lime trees, and she, Katia, walking along the path in a brown dress and a black apron. The sand crunches under her little shoes, she feels all light and slim and small with the wind in her hair; and beside her—off the path, on the wet grass—Alyosha is pushing his bicycle. Katia turns her face away or she would laugh at him. Alyosha is saying glumly: "I know there is no hope of your loving me in return. I just wanted to tell you this, Katia: I shall finish my life in some railway station in the back of beyond. Good-bye!" He jumps on to his bicycle and rides off across the grass, leaving a bluish trail in the grass behind him. His stooping shoulders in the grey school tunic and his white cap disappear among the foliage. Katia shouts: "Alyosha, come back!"

. . . Had she, this Katia, now tormented by insomnia, once really stood on that wet path, the summer wind that smelt of rain tugging at her black school apron? Katia sat up in bed and covered her face with her hands, her elbows resting on her naked knees. She thought of the dim light of street lamps, powdery snow, wind singing through bare trees, the shrill, dreary, hopeless creaking of sledges, Bessonov's icy eyes close to her own, the sweetness of being weak and of giving way. . . . The sickening cold touch of curiosity. . . .

She lay down again. The front door bell rang out sharply in the silence of the house. Katia stiffened. The bell rang a second time. Lisa, half-asleep, shuffled angrily along the corridor on her bare feet; the chain of the front door jangled and then Lisa knocked at Katia's door:

"A telegram for you, madam."

Katia took the narrow envelope from her with a frown and tore open the flap. The words swam in front of her eyes.

"Lisa," she said, looking at the girl, whose lips were trembling with fright, "Nikolai Ivanovich is dead."

Lisa screamed and began to cry. Katia told her to go. Then she read the ugly letters on the telegraph tape for the second time:

Nikolai Ivanovich died severe wounds received honourable fulfilment of duty stop body on way to Moscow at cost of League. . . .

Katia felt sick, and everything went black before her eyes. She fell back on the pillow and lost consciousness.

Next day the very same apple-cheeked, bearded gentleman whose speech she had heard in the Law Society club on the first day of the Revolution, called to see her. His name was Prince Kapustin-Unzhesky, and he was a well-known Liberal politician. He took both her hands in his, and, pressing them against his rough waistcoat, began to say that, on behalf of the organization in which he had worked with Nikolai Ivanovich, on behalf of the city of Moscow, of which he was now vice-commissar, on behalf of Russia and of the Revolution, he had come to offer Katia the most heartfelt sympathy on the occasion of the untimely death of a glorious fighter for their cause.

The Prince was by nature so comfortable, healthy and cheerful, and he was so sincerely distressed, and his beard and waistcoat smelt so pleasantly of cigars, that Katia really felt consoled for a moment. She raised her sleepless eyes to his and opened her parched lips:

"Thank you for saying that of Nikolai Ivanovich."

The Prince pulled out an immense handkerchief and wiped his eyes. Having fulfilled his painful duty; he drove away—his car revving up with a monstrous roar in the narrow street, while Katia returned to her pacing to and fro in the room. She stopped in front of the photograph of some unknown general with a leonine face. Aimlessly she picked up an album, a book, a Chinese box with a heron holding a frog in its beak on the lid. Then she paced to and fro again, staring at the wallpaper and the curtains. She left her dinner untouched.

"You might at least eat a little of the jelly, madam," Lisa suggested.

But Katia only shook her head and kept her teeth clenched. She began to write a short letter to Dasha, but tore it up again.

She knew she ought to lie down and get some sleep. But lying in bed was like lying in a coffin; it was too awful after last night. What was most painful was her hopeless pity for Nikolai Ivanovich: he had been such a nice, easy-going, foolish man—she should have loved him as he was. But she had only tormented him. And that was what had turned his hair grey so early. Katia looked out of the window at the sombre whitish sky and clasped her hands together.

Next day a requiem service was held for Nikolai Ivanovich, and the day after that he was buried. Beautiful speeches were made at the graveside. The dead man was compared with an albatross that had perished in a crevasse, and with a man who had held high a flaming torch throughout an exemplary life. One of the speakers, a little man in spectacles, a well-known Socialist-Revolutionary leader, arrived late, barked angrily at Katia: "Now then, get out of the way, citizeness!" elbowed his way through to the graveside and made a speech to the effect that Nikolai Ivanovich's death once more confirmed the correctness of the agrarian policy put forward by his, the speaker's, party. A clod of earth slipped from under his dilapidated boots and fell with a clatter on to the coffin. Katia's throat contracted with a spasm of nausea. She slipped away unnoticed and drove home. There was only one thing she wanted —to wash and go to sleep. But when she entered the house a wave of aversion swept through her for the striped wallpaper, the photographs, the box with the heron, the crumpled tablecloth, the dusty windows. How horrible they all were!

She told Lisa to run a bath for her and then immersed herself in the hot water with a sigh. Her whole body was mortally tired. She reached her bedroom with an effort and fell asleep on the bed without uncovering it. In her sleep she seemed to hear bells, footsteps, voices, and someone knocking at her door, but she did not answer.

When she woke up it was quite dark and there was a terrible ache in her heart. "What is it?" she asked in a frightened, complaining voice. She sat up in bed, and for a moment hoped that the terrible experiences of the day had been only a bad dream. Then, for another moment, she felt hurt. It was all so unfair. Why were they tormenting her? Finally, fully awake now, she smoothed down her hair, groped for her slippers with her naked feet, and thought to herself clearly and calmly: "I've had enough."

She walked slowly across to a little medicine cupboard fixed to the wall and began to read the inscriptions on the bottles in it. She opened a phial of morphia, sniffed at it, closed her hand round it and went to the dining-room for a glass, but stopped half-way when she saw a light in the drawing-room. "Lisa, is that you?" she asked softly, and opened the door a little.

A tall man in a military tunic was sitting on the sofa. There was a black bandage round his shaven head. He stood up hurriedly as Katia came in. Her knees turned to water, and she felt a void opening under her heart. The man looked at her with wide-open, frightening eyes; his straight lips were tightly pressed together.

It was Vadim Petrovich Roshchin. Katia put both her hands to her breast. Roschin said in a slow, firm voice, without taking his eyes off her face:

"I came to pay my respects. Your maid told me of your bereavement. I stayed because I wanted to tell you that I am at your disposal, as long as I live."

His voice shook as he said the last words, and a brown flush spread over his lean cheeks. Katia pressed her hands to her breast as hard as she could. Roshchin saw from her eyes that he must go to her. As he came nearer to her, she said between teeth that chattered:

"I am glad to see you, Vadim Petrovich."

Involuntarily he raised his arms to put them round her; she was so frail and looked so unhappy as she stood there convulsively gripping the phial. But he immediately dropped his hands again and bent his head. Her woman's instinct told Katia that unhappy, small, sinning, shiftless as she was, she was yet something this taciturn, hard-living man needed and loved above all and that he wanted to take her soul into his own. Containing her tears, unable to say a word or unclench her teeth, she bent over Roshchin's hands and pressed her face and lips to them.

CHAPTER XLII

DASHA WAS LOOKING out of the window, with her elbows on the marble window-sill. The glow of the sunset spread half-way up the sky over the dark woods in the west. Ivan Ilyich was sitting by her side and looking at her. He did not stir, though he might have moved as much as he liked—Dasha would not have vanished from that room with the ruddy reflection of the sunset on the wall.

"How sad, and how beautiful it is," Dasha said. "It's as if we were floating in an airship."

Ivan Ilyich nodded. Dasha took her hand from the window-sill.

"I feel I must have some music," she said. "Do you know how long it is since I've touched a piano? Since the war began. Just think—and the war's still going on. But we. . . ."

Telegin stirred. Dasha went on at once:

"When the war's over we'll have lots of music. Remember, Ivan, how we lay on the beach, and the sea ran up over the sand? Remember what the sea was like? That faded blue? I felt I had loved you all my life."

Telegin stirred again, and tried to say something, but Dasha suddenly started up, cried: "The kettle's boiling!" and ran out of the room. As she stopped to open the door in the semi-darkness, he could see only her face, her hand clinging to the curtain, and her grey-stockinged leg—then she was gone. Telegin put his hands behind his head and closed his eyes.

Dasha and Telegin had arrived in St. Petersburg at two o'clock that after-

noon. They had had to sit all night on their luggage in the crowded corridor of the train. But when they got to the flat, Dasha at once unpacked her things, looked into every corner, dusted everything, was delighted with the flat, but immediately decided to rearrange all the furniture. Telegin fetched the caretaker, and the three of them carried wardrobes and divans from room to room. When everything had been rearranged, Dasha asked Telegin to open all the windows and went off to the bathroom for a wash. She splashed about for a very long time, and did something to her face and hair, and banished him first from one room and then from another, although Telegin's main concern that day was to be with Dasha every minute and look at her.

Towards evening Dasha calmed down at last. Telegin, freshly washed and shaved, came into the dining-room and sat down by her. For the first time since Moscow they were quiet and alone. But Dasha tried to keep talking all the time, as if she was afraid of this quiet. Very much later she admitted to Telegin that she had suddenly felt afraid that he would say to her in 'that sort of voice':

"We-ell, what about it, Dasha?"

While she was seeing about the kettle, Telegin sat with his eyes shut. Dasha was not in the room, but the air was still full of her breath. Her little heels went clip-clop in the kitchen with indescribable charm. Suddenly something tinkled and crashed, and Dasha said in a piteous voice: "A cup!" A hot wave of happiness flowed through Telegin. "When I wake up to-morrow, it won't be an ordinary morning—it will be a Dasha morning." He got up quickly as Dasha appeared in the doorway.

"I've broken a cup. Ivan, do you really want tea?"

"No."

She came across the room to him, and as it was quite dark now, she put her hands on his shoulders.

"What were you thinking about?" she asked gently.

"About you."

"I know. But what were you thinking about me?"

In the half-light her face seemed to be frowning, but really she was smiling. She was breathing evenly and her chest rose and fell in smooth rhythm.

"I was thinking that things were somehow confused in my mind—I couldn't realise that you are my wife. Then I suddenly understood and was coming to tell you, but now it's gone again."

"Oh, oh!" Dasha said, going to the window. "Sit down, and I'll sit on the arm of the chair." Telegin sat down in the armchair, and Dasha perched herself on the arm of his chair. "And what else were you thinking?" she said.

"I sat here while you were in the kitchen and thought that a perfectly wonderful creature had come to stay in the house. Was that bad?"

"Yes," said Dasha pensively. "That was very bad."

"Do you love me, Dasha?"

"Oh," she said, nodding her head, "I love you right to the little birch tree."

"To what birch tree?"

"Don't you know? At the end of life there's a little mound for everyone, and on it a little weeping birch."

Telegin put his arms round Dasha's shoulders. She yielded herself to his embrace. As it had been that time on the beach, their kiss lasted until both of them were out of breath. Dasha said "Ah, Ivan!" and put her arms round his neck. She heard his heart thudding heavily, and felt sorry for him. She drew a deep breath, got up from her chair and said simply: "Let's go in, Ivan."

On the fifth day after their arrival Dasha got a letter from her sister. Katia wrote to tell her that Nikolai Ivanovich had been killed.

"*. . . I went through a time of despondency and despair. I felt quite distinctly that now I was alone for ever. It was terrible, so terrible that I decided to end it all. You know what I mean, Dasha? Then a miracle saved me: or perhaps an accident. . . . No, It was more like a miracle. I can't write about it yet. . . . I'll tell you when we meet.*"

The news of her brother-in-law's death, and Katia's letter, upset Dasha very much. She wanted to go to Moscow at once, but next day a second letter came from Katia in which she wrote that she was packing her things and coming to Petrograd, and asked Dasha to find her a cheap room. There was a postscript: "Vadim Petrovich Roshchin will come to see you. He will tell you all about me. He is like a brother to me, like a father, like a life-long friend."

Dasha and Telegin walked along the avenue. It was a Sunday in April. Frail fragments of cloud dissolving in the sunlight drove across the cool blue spring sky. The sunshine that seemed to be filtering through water on to the avenue played on Dasha's white dress. The dry red trunks of the pine trees moved forward to meet them; their tops sang in the breeze and their leaves rustled. Dasha glanced at Telegin. He had taken off his cap and his face was relaxed in a smile. She felt content and full of the loveliness of the day, of the joy of breathing such air and walking so lightly, of yielding herself so fully to that day and to the man who was walking by her side.

"Ivan," Dasha said, and she smiled at him.

He smiled too, and asked: "What is it, Dasha?"

"Nothing. I was thinking."

"What were you thinking?"

"Nothing. Later."

"I know what it was."

Dasha turned to him quickly.

"On my word of honour, you don't know."

They came to a large pine and stopped. Telegin prised off a piece of the scaly bark covered with soft drops of resin. He broke it in his fingers and looked tenderly from under his eyebrows.

"Yes, I do!"

Dasha's hand trembled.

"Listen," she said in a whisper, "I feel that I must overflow into some still greater happiness; I am so full, full to the brim."

Telegin nodded. They walked on into a glade carpeted with yellowish green grass and yellow buttercups trembling in the wind. The wind caught Dasha's dress. Still walking, she bent down several times to pull her skirt down, and said over and over:

"What a dreadful wind!"

The glade ended at the tall railings of a palace; their gilded spikes were tarnished by age. A pebble got into Dasha's shoe. Telegin sat down and pulled off the shoe; he kissed Dasha's warm, white-stockinged foot. Dasha put on her shoe again, stamped her foot and said:

"I want a child by you, Ivan."

CHAPTER XLIII

KATIA HAD TAKEN a room with two old ladies in a little wooden house not far from Dasha's flat. One of the old ladies, Klavdia Ivanovna, had been a singer long ago; the other, Sofochka, was her companion. In the morning, Klavdia Ivanovna would paint her eyebrows and put on her black wig and sit playing Patience all day. Sofochka kept house for her, and made conversation in a masculine voice. The house was clean, a bit crowded in the old-fashioned way, with many little embroideries and screens and faded portraits dating back to an irretrievable youth. In the morning the rooms smelt of good coffee; later, when Sofochka began to cook the dinner, Klavdia Ivanovna would complain of the smell of cooking and sniff at her smelling-salts, while Sofochka would shout from the kitchen: "Well, where d'you expect me to put the smell; or am I to fry the potatoes in eau-de-Cologne?" In the evenings they lit paraffin lamps with frosted glass globes.

The old ladies looked after Katia well. She lived quietly in this old-world comfort which had survived the storms of time. She got up early, did her own room, and sat by the window mending her underclothes, darning her stockings or re-modelling her old evening dresses into plainer styles. After breakfast she usually went for a walk to the islands, taking a book or her embroidery with her. Her favourite place was a bench near a little lake where she would sit and watch the children playing on a sand-heap, or read, or embroider, or just sit and think. At six o'clock she would come back and go to Dasha's for dinner. At eleven, Dasha and Telegin would see her home; the sisters would walk in front, arm in arm, and Telegin, whistling and with his cap on the back of his head, would walk behind them—'bringing up the rear'—for in those days it was not safe to walk about the streets in the dark.

Every day Katia wrote to Vadim Petrovich Roshchin, who had been away all this time on a mission at the front. In her letters she told him, very frankly and in great detail, everything that she had done and thought that day. Roshchin had asked her to do this, and repeated the request in his letters.

"Whatever you tell me, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, I treasure: that you were walking across the Yelagin Bridge, and it started to rain, and that you had no umbrella and had to wait under the trees until the rain stopped. Even the most trifling events in your life are dear to me, so dear that I think I could not live without them any more."

Katia realized that this was an exaggeration, and that of course Roshchin could go on living without her trifles; but the prospect of being alone with herself again even for a single day terrified her to such an extent that she tried not to think at all, but simply believe that her whole life was necessary and dear to Vadim Petrovich. For this reason everything she did now had a special significance. If she missed her thimble, spent a whole hour looking for it, and found it finally on her finger, she thought that Vadim Petrovich would be sure to laugh at her absent-mindedness. She no longer thought of herself as belonging to herself alone. Once, as she was working at the window lost in thought, she became aware that her fingers were shaking. She stuck her needle into the sewing on her knee, raised her head, and stared in front of her for a long time. At last her eyes fell on the mirror in the door of the wardrobe, and she saw a thin little face with big, mournful eyes and hair combed back and twisted into a plain knot. Katia thought: is that really my face? She dropped her eyes and went on with her sewing but her heart was racing so fast that she pricked her finger. She put it to her mouth, and glanced again at the mirror—but what she now saw was her own face, and it looked worse than the other one. That same evening she wrote to Vadim Petrovich:

"*I was thinking of you all day to-day. I miss you, my dear friend, and I sit at my window all day waiting for you. Something I thought I had long forgotten is happening to me—just as though I was a girl again. . . .*"

Even Dasha, distracted and absorbed as she was by her own complicated relations with Telegin, which seemed to her unparalleled since the creation of the world, noticed the change in Katia, and one evening when they were drinking tea she argued at length that Katia now ought to wear only plain black high-necked dresses.

"I assure you," she said, "you can't see yourself, Katyusha, as I do; you look—well, you look like a girl of nineteen. Ivan, isn't it true, she looks younger than I?"

"Yes—that is, not altogether, but perhaps. . . ."

"Ah, you don't understand anything," Dasha said. "A woman is young not on account of her years, but for quite different reasons. Age has nothing at all to do with it."

The small sum of money left to Katia after Nikolai Ivanovich's death was dwindling away. Telegin advised her to sell her old flat on the Panteleimonskaya which had been empty since March. Katia agreed, and drove to the flat with Dasha to bring away a few things that she valued for their associations.

They climbed up to the second floor and looked at the familiar oak door with the brass plate marked "N. I. SMOKOVNIKOV". Katia felt that her life had come full circle. The old, familiar porter who, in the old days used to open the front door for her at midnight, wheezing crossly and turning up his coat collar to protect his throat, and who always turned out the electric light before Katia could get to the second floor, now opened the door with his key, took off his cap, and letting Katia and Dasha in, said reassuringly:

"Don't worry yourself, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, not a crumb's missing. I kept my eye on the lodgers day and night. Their son got killed at the front, or they'd be living here still; they liked the flat very much."

The hall was dark, and smelt of emptiness; the blinds were down in every room. Katia went to the dining-room and switched on the light. The cut-glass chandelier flared up brightly above the table covered with a grey cloth. And in the middle of the table, just as before, there was the china basket of flowers, with a branch of mimosa that had long since withered. Indifferent witnesses of the noisy gaiety of the past, the tall-backed chairs with leather seats were ranged in a row against the wall. One door of the carved sideboard—it was as big as an organ—was open, and they could see the glasses inside standing upside down. The oval Venetian mirror was thick with dust, and on top of it the little golden boy was still asleep as he was long ago, and still stretching out his hand to a golden scroll.

Katia stood motionless at the door.

"Dasha," she said softly, "you remember, Dasha? Just think—and they're all gone!"

Then she went into the drawing-room and switched on the huge chandelier; she looked round the room and shrugged her shoulders. The cubist and futurist pictures which used to seem so daring and uncanny now hung on the walls, faded and pitiful, like flummeries discarded after some carnival, long, long ago.

"Katyusha, do you remember this?" Dasha said, pointing to the 'Contemporary Venus' sprawling in her yellow corner. "It seemed to me at the time that she was at the root of all our troubles."

Dasha laughed, and ran her fingers over the keys of the piano. Katia went to her own bedroom. Here everything was just as it had been three years before when, dressed for a journey, she had run back into this room for the last time to pick up her gloves from the dressing-table.

Now a kind of dimness lay over everything, and everything seemed much smaller than before. Katia opened the wardrobe; it was full of scraps of lace and silk and bits of cloth, of stockings, slippers and what not. In these things, which once had seemed so necessary to her, a faint smell of her perfume still lingered. Katia fingered them aimlessly—each of them brought back some memory from the life that had gone for ever.

All at once the silence in the whole house was shaken and filled with the sound of music—Dasha was playing the sonata which she had learnt while she was preparing for her examination three years ago. Katia slammed the door of the wardrobe shut; she came into the drawing-room and sat down by her sister.

"Katia—isn't this wonderful?" Dasha said, half turning round. "Listen to this passage. . . ." She played a few more bars and picked up another volume of music from the floor. Katia said:

"Let's go. I've got a headache."

"But what about the things?"

"I don't want to take anything from here. I'll just have the piano sent round to your place, and let the rest go."

Katia came to dinner that evening; she was stimulated by her quick walk there, and radiant in a new hat with a blue veil.

"I ran all the way," she said, touching Dasha's cheek with her warm lips, "but I got my feet wet all the same. I must change my shoes." She pulled off her gloves and walked to the window. The rain, which had held up several times, was now pouring down in a grey torrent, swirling with the gusts of wind and rushing and gurgling along the gutters. Hurrying umbrellas could be seen moving about far below. A bright flash lit the darkening sky outside the window, and there was such a clap of thunder that Dasha jumped.

"Do you know who is coming here this evening?" Katia asked, curling her lips in a smile. As Dasha asked "Who?"—there was a ring at the door, and she ran to open it. Katia heard a laugh, the scraping of feet on the floorboards, and then Telegin and Dasha, laughing and talking loudly, went into the bedroom. Katia put down her gloves, took off her hat and tidied her hair. All this time her lips were still pursed in a smile both roguish and tender.

During dinner Telegin, red-cheeked and cheerful, his hair plastered with rain, began to tell them what had happened that day. The workers at the Baltic Works—and, for that matter the workers of all other factories—were in a state of great excitement. The Soviets invariably supported their demands. Private enterprises were beginning to close down one after another, and the State enterprises were working at a loss; but in these days of war and revolution, no one was concerned with profits. That day there had been another meeting at the works. A Bolshevik speaker had been put up, and all the men cried with one voice: no concessions to the bourgeois government, no agreements with the employers, all power to the Soviets, the Soviets would soon put things right.

"I also climbed up to speak," Telegin related, "but they pulled me off the platform. Vasska Rubliov rushed up. 'I know quite well', he said, 'that you're not against us, so why talk such rot, your head's full of rubbish'. I said to him: 'Vassili, within six months the works will be standing idle, and there'll be nothing to eat'. And he said to me: 'Comrade, by the New Year all the land and every factory will belong to the workers, we shan't leave a single bourgeois in the Republic, and there'll be no money any more. A man will be able to work, to live—everything will be ours. Can't you see that this is a social revolution?' And he promised it all by the New Year!"

Telegin laughed, but shook his head all the same and began sweeping the crumbs on the tablecloth into a little heap with his finger. Dasha sighed.

"There's a lot of trouble ahead. I can feel it," she said.

"Yes," Telegin said, "the point is that the war is still going on. What, after all, has changed since February? The Tsar has gone, but things are getting worse and worse for all that, while a little bunch of lawyers and professors, undoubtedly gentlemen of good education, are telling the country to wait and go on fighting; they say that the time will come when they can give us a constitution every bit as good as the British, perhaps even better. They don't know Russia, those professors. They've read Russia's history all wrong. The Russian people isn't some kind of high-brow stunt. The Russian people are a passionate, gifted, strong people. The Russian muzhik padded along in his bast shoes all the way to the Pacific Ocean. A German will sit down in one place and work and suffer for a hundred years in order to get what he wants. But the Russians are impatient. They can be carried away by a dream to conquer the universe, and do it too, all in their homespun trousers and their bast shoes, and with their axes stuck into their belts. But these professors want to squeeze the raging ocean of our people into a respectable constitution. Yes, we can expect very serious trouble, no doubt about that."

Dasha was standing at the table and pouring out the coffee. Suddenly she put down the coffee-pot and hid her face on Telegin's breast.

"Come, Dasha, don't get so excited," he said, stroking her hair. "Nothing terrible has happened yet. And we've been in much worse messes. I remember —listen—I remember when we got to. . . ."

And he began to tell them about his adventures in the war. Katia glanced at the clock on the wall and left the room. Dasha looked at her husband's calm, strong face and his grey laughing eyes, and felt a little reassured—he would look after her, she had nothing to fear. When he had finished his story she went into the bedroom to powder her nose and found Katia sitting at the dressing-table, doing something to her face.

"Danyusha," she said eagerly, "you haven't any of those scents left—you remember, the Paris ones?"

Dasha sat down on the floor beside her sister and looked at her in amazement; then asked in a whisper:

"Katyusha, are you preening your feathers?"

Katia blushed, and nodded.

"Katyusha, what's the matter with you to-day?"

"I wanted to tell you, but you didn't hear me out—Vadim Petrovich is arriving this evening, and he's coming straight here from the station. It wasn't convenient for him to come to my place, it would have been too late."

At half-past nine the door-bell rang. Katia, Dasha and Telegin rushed out into the hall. Telegin opened the door, and Roshchin came in, with his cap pulled deep down on his ears and his crumpled greatcoat thrown over his shoulders. His lean, sombre, bronzed face softened in a smile when he saw

Katia. She looked at him and her eyes were shy and glad. He threw his coat and cap on a chair and said in his strong, deep voice:

"Excuse me for bursting in at such a late hour—but I wanted to see you to-day, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, and you too, Daria Dmitrievna."

"I am glad you have come, Vadim Petrovich," Katia said, and her eyes were radiant.

When he bent down to her hand, she kissed his hair with lips that quivered.

"Pity you didn't bring your things," Telegin said, "but you'll stay for the night just the same."

"In the dining-room, on the Turkish divan—and if it's too short we'll add a chair," Dasha said.

Roshchin listened, as if in a dream, to what these pleasant, well-groomed people were saying to him. He had come here all bristling still after the sleepless nights of his journey, the ceaseless struggles to get to a window where food was being issued or simply for a foot of space in a compartment, with obscene curses clogging his ears. He was still overwhelmed by the fact that these almost unimaginably beautiful, clean, and pleasant-smelling people standing on the polished parquet of a brilliantly-lighted hall, should be rejoicing over his, Roshchin's, arrival. As if in a dream, he saw Katia's beautiful eyes saying: "I am glad, glad, glad!" He tightened his belt and threw back his shoulders, drew a deep breath, and said:

"Thanks, where am I to go?"

Telegin took him to the bathroom for a wash and then to the dining-room for some food. He ate without hesitation whatever they put in front of him, but soon said he could eat no more, pushed his plate away and lit a cigarette. His stern, thin, clean-shaven face, which had frightened Katia when he entered the hall, was softer now, and seemed even more tired. Katia could see his large hands, on which the light fell from the orange lampshade, trembling when he lit a match. As she sat in the shadow watching him, she felt that she loved every hair on his head, every button on his dark-brown crumpled tunic. She noticed also that when he spoke he sometimes clenched his jaws and spoke through his teeth. His sentences were abrupt and disjointed. It was evident that he was aware of this, and was trying to fight down a long-standing anger.

Dasha exchanged glances with her sister and her husband, and then asked Roshchin whether he was tired and would like to go to bed. He suddenly flared up, and sat bolt upright in his chair.

"Really, I didn't come here to sleep. No, I didn't." And he went out on to the balcony and stood in the darkness in the drizzling rain. Dasha glanced towards the balcony and shook her head. Roshchin said from the balcony:

"Forgive me, Daria Dmitrievna, I have had no sleep for the last four nights. . . ." He came in again, smoothed down his hair, and sat down in his former place. "I have come straight from General Headquarters," he said. "I am bringing the most alarming news to the Ministry of War. It gave me a shock to see you again, Yekaterina Dmitrievna. Let me tell you everything now, for no one in the world is closer to me than you." Katia grew very pale at these words. Telegin leant against the wall, putting his hands behind his back. Dasha looked at Roshchin with terrified eyes. "Unless a miracle happens," he said and cleared his throat, "we are lost. The army no longer exists. The front is in flight. The soldiers are going home on the roofs of trains. It's beyond human power to stop this collapse of the front. It's like the ebb-tide of an ocean. The Russian soldier has lost all notion of what he

is fighting for; he has lost all respect for war, he has lost respect for everything connected with the war—for the State, for Russia. The soldiers are convinced that all they have to do is to shout 'peace' in order to end the war the same day.

"They think it's only we, the 'gentry', who don't want to make peace. You understand—the soldiers are quitting the ranks where they have been deceived for three years; they have thrown away their rifles and it's no longer possible to make them fight. In the autumn, when the whole ten million of them will flood the rear, Russia will cease to exist as a sovereign power."

He clenched his teeth so tightly that the muscles on the side of his jaw bulged out in a knot. The other said nothing. Roshchin went on in a toneless voice:

"I am the bearer of a plan to be submitted to the Ministry of War. A few generals have drawn up this plan to save the front. It's an original affair. At any rate, our allies won't be able to reproach our generals with any lack of desire to fight. This is the plan: proclaim complete demobilisation within a very short period, that is to say, organize the mass desertion, now in progress anyway, and by these means save the railways, the artillery, munitions, and food stocks. Declare firmly to our allies that we are continuing the war. At the same time establish, in the Volga basin, a barrier line held by loyal units—such units are available—and then organize a completely new army beyond the Volga, the core of which is to consist of volunteer units; encourage the forming of partisan groups and then, basing ourselves on the Ural factories and the Siberian coal and grain, begin the war afresh. . . ."

"What? Open the front to the Germans? Abandon the country to be pillaged by the enemy?" Telegin shouted.

"Neither you nor I have a country any more—there is only a space where our country used to be," Roshchin answered, clenching his great fists as they lay on the tablecloth. "Our Russia has ceased to exist from the moment when the nation threw down its arms: you don't seem to realize that this is an accomplished fact. Can Saint Nicholas help you now? Why, we've even forgotten how to pray to him. Our Russia is now dung, good only for ploughing under. Everything will have to be remade: the army, the State—and we ourselves must have a new soul put into us too."

He drew in a deep breath through his nostrils, dropped his head on to his hands on the table, and wept. His deep, chesty sobbing was like the barking of a dog.

That evening Katia did not go back to her home for the night; she slept with Dasha in Dasha's bed. Telegin made a bed for himself in the study. Roshchin, after his outburst, which had been painful for all of them, went out on to the balcony, got wet through, then came back into the room, asked them to forgive him, and suggested that the most sensible thing was to go to bed. He fell asleep almost before he had finished undressing. When Telegin came in on tiptoe to put out the light, Roshchin was asleep on his back, with his great hands folded on his chest; his thin face and tight-shut eyes, the wrinkles thrown into clear relief by the bluish light of the dawn, were like those of a man struggling to conquer pain.

Katia and Dasha, lying under the same blankets, spoke to each other for a long time in a whisper. From time to time Dasha listened to what was going on in the flat. Telegin was still moving about in the study. Dasha said:

"There he is, still walking about, and at seven o'clock he has to go to the factory."

She slipped out from under the blankets and ran barefoot to her husband.

Telegin, shirtless, with his braces hanging down over his trousers, was sitting on the made-up divan reading an immense book which he was holding on his knees.

"Not asleep yet?" he asked, looking at Dasha with bright, unseeing eyes. "Sit down. Listen to this I've found." He turned over the page and read in a low voice: 'Three hundred years ago the wind blew freely through the forests and the plains of the steppe, through the vast graveyard which was known as the land of Russia. The charred walls of towns were there, ashes where villages had been, crosses and bones on roads overgrown with grass, flocks of ravens, and the howling of wolves at night. Here and there through the forest paths the last marauding bands of Shishi made their way; they had long ago squandered in drinking-bouts the furs taken from the boyars, the chalices of precious metals, the pearl ornaments of the icons, all the fruits of ten years of pillage. There was nothing left to loot in Russia, everything had been scraped clean.

'Russia was empty and unpeopled. Even the Crimean Tartars no longer went out on forays into the wild Steppes—there was nothing more to rob. During the ten years of the Troubles, impostors, thieves, Cossacks and Polish raiders ravaged the whole Russian land with sword and fire from border to border. There was a terrible famine. People ate horse dung and salted human flesh. The black death stalked through the land. The remnants of the people scattered, some to the White Sea in the North, some to the Urals, some to Siberia.

'In those troublous times a frightened boy, chosen on the advice of the patriarch by all the impoverished boyars, the tradeless traders and the stern peasants of the North and the Volga to be Tsar in Moscow, was driven in a sledge over the muddy March roads to the charred walls of ruined and ravaged Moscow, cleared of the Polish invaders after gigantic efforts and now an immense heap of rubble and ashes. The new Tsar could do nothing but weep and pray. He prayed and wept, looking in fear and horror out of his sledge at the ragged, savage crowds of Russian people who came out to meet him outside the gates of Moscow. The Russian people had no great faith in the new Tsar. But they had to live. And they began to live somehow. They borrowed money from the Stroganovs, the merchants. The townspeople began to build, and the peasants to plough the empty land.

'They began to send out worthies on horse and foot to kill the robbers on the roads. They lived poorly and austerely. They bowed low to the Crimean Tartars, to the Lithuanians, to the Swedes. But they kept their faith. They knew that there is only one thing really invincible: a robust, wide-awake, light-hearted people. They hoped that they would survive by patience and they survived. And once again the deserts overrun with weeds began to be peopled.'

Telegin slammed the book shut.

"You see. . . . We shall survive again as we always did. Russia lost indeed! Why, the grandsons of those same tattered muzhiks who came to rescue Moscow with pointed stakes for weapons, defeated Charles XII and Napoleon. And a grandson of that boy who was dragged to Moscow on a sledge by force was the man who built Petersburg. The old Russia is lost, true! But if one parish is left of it, a new Russia will be born in its place."

He snorted and looked out of the window, beyond which a grey mornnig was dawning. Dasha rested her head on his shoulder, and he stroked her hair and kissed it.

"Go and sleep, faint-heart!"

Dasha laughed, and said good-night. As she was leaving the room she turned round in the doorway and said:

"Ivan, how Katia loves him!"

"Why not? He's a fine fellow."

It was a still, warm evening. The air smelt of petrol fumes and the tar of wooden pavements. A brightly coloured, straggling crowd of people was moving along the Nevski through a haze of tobacco smoke and dust. Government cars with fluttering flags hooted and screamed as they passed. The shrill trebles of the newsboys were calling out the most staggering news, which no one believed any more. Cigarette sellers, match sellers, and sellers of stolen goods dived through the crowd. The squares were full of soldiers lying on the grass among the flower beds and chewing sunflower seeds.

Katia was returning alone from the Nevski. She had arranged to meet Roshchin on the Neva embankment at eight o'clock. She turned into Palace Square. Yellow lights were showing through the black windows on the second floor of the gloomy, ox-blood-coloured palace. A few cars stood in front of the main entrance; soldiers and chauffeurs were strolling about and laughing. A motor-cycle dashed by with a clatter; the dispatch rider was a mere boy in a crash helmet and a shirt that ballooned behind his back. An old man with a long grey beard was standing motionless on the corner balcony of the palace. Katia circled it and turned round. Above the Arch of the General Staff the light bronze horses were still rearing to meet the sunset as of old. She crossed the embankment and sat down on a granite seat by the water. The bluish transparent outlines of the bridges hung over the lazily flowing Neva. The spire of St. Peter's and St. Paul's glistened in pure gold, its reflection trembling on the river. A miserable little boat bobbed its way through the reflections on the water. In the Petersburg Quarter, above the roofs and the smoke, the dull ball of the sun was sinking in an orange glow.

Katia sat quietly with her hands on her knees, looking at the fading sunset and waiting meekly and patiently for Vadim Petrovich. He came up behind her unnoticed and, resting his elbows on the granite, stood looking down at her. She felt his eyes on her, turned round, smiled and stood up. He looked at her with a strange, astonished look. She walked up the steps to the embankment and took his arm. They walked on. Katia asked softly:

"Well?"

His mouth contorted in a grimace of distaste, he shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing.

They crossed the Troitski Bridge in silence. Roshchin jerked his chin towards a large mansion, faced with brown tiles, which they were passing. The wide windows of the conservatory were brightly illuminated. A few motor cycles stood near the porch.

This was the house of a famous ballerina, and now the headquarters of the Bolsheviks.

Typewriters clattered day and night like peas rattling in a sieve. Every day a large crowd of workers gathered in front of the mansion and the leader of the Bolshevik party came out to the balcony and told the crowd that the workers and peasants must take power, immediately put an end to the war and establish a new, just order of things in Russia and throughout the world.

"I was in the crowd here yesterday and listened," Roshchin said, between

clenched teeth. "From this balcony they lash out with whips of flame and the crowds listen. . . . Oh, how they listen! . . . I no longer know now who are the strangers in this city, we or they?" He nodded towards the balcony. "No one listens to us any more. We mutter words that have lost their meaning. . . . On my way here I knew I was a Russian. . . . But here I am a stranger. . . . I don't understand. . . . I just can't understand. . . ."

Katia and Roshchin walked on. They were overtaken by a man in a tattered coat and a straw hat; in one hand he was carrying a small bucket, and in the other a bundle of posters.

"I understand only this," Roshchin said in a subdued voice, and turned away to conceal the expression on his face, "that your heart, Katia, is a dazzling, live spot in this chaos and that you and I must never part. . . ."

Katia answered softly:

"I didn't dare say that to you. But why should we ever part, my dear?"

They reached the spot where the man with the bucket had just pasted up on the wall a small white poster, and because both of them were excited, they stopped for an instant. By the light of a street lamp, they could read on the poster:

To all! To all! To all! The Revolution is in danger!"

"Yekaterina Dmitrievna," Roshchin said, taking her thin hand in his and walking slowly along the wide, now quiet avenue, at the end of which the sunset glow still lingered. "The years will go by, and wars will cease—revolutions will die down, but one thing will remain imperishable—your gentle, tender loving heart."

Through the open windows of the large houses they heard cheerful voices, quarrels and the sound of music. The round-shouldered man with the bucket again overtook Katia and Roshchin, put up a poster and turned round. Terrible eyes, burning with hatred, looked out at them from under his battered straw hat.

PART TWO

1918

Heated in three waters
Bathed in three bloods
Boiled in three lyes
Cleaner are we than clean

CHAPTER I

IT WAS ALL over. Along the deserted silenced streets of Petersburg icy gusts drove paper litter—tatters of army decrees, theatre-bills, appeals to the "Conscience and Patriotism" of the Russian nation. The many-hued scraps of paper, mottled with dried paste, rustled ominously as the snow-laden ground-wind swept them along.

That was all that was left of the recent noisy, drunken turmoil of the capital. The idle crowds were gone from the streets and squares. The Winter Palace stood empty, its roof pierced by a shell from the cruiser *Aurora*. Influential bankers, famous generals, the ministers of the Provisional Government had all fled no one knew where. Resplendent carriages, well-dressed women, officers, officials and muddle-headed public men had disappeared from the neglected, dirty streets. The nights resounded with the tap-tap of hammers boarding up the doors of shops. Here and there a shop window still displayed a piece of cheese or a stale cake—but that only sharpened the yearning for the life that had vanished for ever. Frightened pedestrians hugged the wall and looked askance at passing patrols—bands of resolute men marching along with red stars on their caps and with rifles slung over their shoulders, barrel to the ground.

The north wind sent its icy breath into the darkened windows of the houses and blew through the deserted porches, sweeping out the ghosts of past luxury. Petersburg was terrible at the end of 1917.

It was terrible, incomprehensible, inconceivable. Everything had come to an end. Everything was being abolished. A man with pail and brush, in a battered hat, hurried through the storm-swept street, pasting the white patches of ever-fresh decrees on the centuries-old plinths of the houses. Titles, honours, pensions, officers' shoulder-straps, the letter *vat*, God, private property and the very right to live as one pleased had been abolished. Abolished! The bill-poster looked fiercely from under his hat at the glass windows behind which the residents, in felt boots and fur coats, wandered through the unheated rooms, wringing their hands and muttering:

"What does it all mean? Where will it end? The ruin of Russia, the end of everything . . . Death . . ."

Coming closer to the windows they saw that across the road, in front of the house where His Excellency lived—and where in the old days a policeman used to stand straight as a ramrod with eyes riveted on the grey façade—a long van was waiting and armed men were carrying furniture, carpets and pictures out to it through the wide-open doors. A little red bunting flag hung over the

porch, and under it His Excellency, with side-whiskers *à la* General Skobelev, but wearing a summer overcoat, was treading from one foot to the other, his grey head trembling. He was being evicted! Where was he to go in this cold? Wherever he thought fit. . . . And this to His Excellency, a mainspring in the mechanism of the State!

Night comes. It is pitch dark, there are neither street lamps nor lights from the windows. There is no coal, but people say that the Smolny is ablaze with light and that the lights are on in the factory quarters. The snowstorm roars through the tormented, bullet-riddled city; it whistles in at the dilapidated roofs: "A desert shall be in the place of Petersburg." Shots ring out in the darkness. Who fired them? At whom? Why? Was it not from over there, where the glare of a fire flickers and paints the snow-clouds red? The spirit warehouses are burning there.. In the cellars men are wallowing in the liquor that flows out of the smashed barrels. . . . Who cares? Let them burn alive!

Oh, these Russians, these Russians!

These Russians, troop-train after troop-train, were crowding home from the front in their millions, home to their villages, to the steppes and marshes and forests. . . . Home to the land, home to their women. . . . In the railway coaches—where not a window-pane was whole—they stood motionless, so tightly wedged that even if a man died there on his feet he could not be pulled out of the packed mass and thrown out of the window. They rode on the buffers and on the tops of the coaches. They froze to death; they were killed under the wheels; they shattered their skulls against the arches of bridges. In trunks and bundles they carried the loot that chance had thrown in their way—it might come in handy on the farm: machine-guns and breech-locks, odds and ends taken off dead men, hand-grenades and rifles, gramophones and leather cut off the seats of railway coaches. Only money was not taken—the stuff was no use, not even to roll a cigarette with.

The troop-trains crept slowly across the Russian plains. They stopped exhausted before station buildings, where paneless windows gaped and doors were off their hinges. The troop-trains met each station with a roar of foul language. Greycoats sprang from the coach-tops, slammed home the bolts of their rifles and ran to find the station-master and slay on the spot the "lickspittle of the international bourgeoisie". "Give us an engine!" "Are you tired of life, you bastard, why don't you send off our train!" They ran to the engine, which was gasping its last and from which both driver and fireman had bolted into the steppe. . . . "Get coal! Get wood! Smash the fences, break up the doors and windows!"

Three years ago no one had stopped to ask against whom and for what he was to fight. Mobilization and war had come like a cloud-burst, like an earthquake. The people understood that the days of wrath had come. The old life was over. Each man had a rifle in his hand. Come what might—one thing was sure—there was no return to the past. A grudge nursed for centuries boiled over.

In three years they had learned what war was. Machine-guns in front and machine-guns behind too. Lie in the muck and get eaten by lice while you're alive. Then a shock came and their heads swam with it. . . . Revolution! . . . They woke up then and asked themselves: what about us, eh? Are we to be betrayed again?

They listened to the propagandists who told them that they had been fools before but that now they must be sensible. . . .

They had fought, and now they were returning home to take it out of somebody. Now they knew into whose belly to stick their bayonets. Now there was no God, no Tsar any more. Only we ourselves. Let's get home and divide up the land! . . .

The troop-trains from the front passed over the Russian plains like ploughshares, leaving behind them a trail of gutted railway stations, broken rolling-stock, and looted cities. Villages and farms heard the rasping, squeaking sound of shot-guns being sawn off near the breech. The Russian people took the land in earnest. In the peasant huts pine-splinters were lit as they had been long, long ago, and the women fixed warps on the ancient looms. Time seemed to be rolling backwards, into an age past and gone. This was in the winter, when the second revolution began: the October revolution. . . .

Starving Petersburg, despoiled by the villages, frozen to the marrow by polar winds, surrounded by an enemy front, shaken by conspiracies—a city without fuel, without bread, with its factory-chimneys no longer smoking, a city like an exposed human brain—Petersburg was at this time emitting frenzied bursts of ideas through the wireless waves of the Tsarskoye Selo station.

"Comrades!" a thin little man in a Finnish cap worn back to front was shouting at the top of his voice from the granite pedestal of the monument—"comrade deserters, you have turned your backs on the imperialist vermin. . . . We, the workers of St. Petersburg, say to you: Comrades, you have done well! . . . We don't want to be hirelings of the blood-stained bourgeoisie. . . . Down with imperialist war!"

"Down . . . Down . . . Down . . ." the shout ran lazily through the ranks of bearded soldiers. Without troubling to slip their rifles and bundles from their shoulders they stood, weary and heavy, before the statue of Alexander III. The vast black figure of the Tsar on his bob-tailed charger was covered with snow, and so was the speaker who stood under the horse's head, with his shabby overcoat thrown open.

"Comrades. . . . It is too early yet to pile our arms. . . . The revolution is in danger. . . . Enemies are coming against us from the four corners of the earth . . . with mountains of gold and terrible weapons of destruction in their greedy hands. . . . They tremble with the joyful anticipation of seeing us weltering in our blood. . . . But we are not afraid. . . . Our weapon is our burning faith in a worldwide social revolution . . . it is coming, it is near. . . ."

The wind carried away the rest of the sentence. A broad-shouldered man with upturned coat-collar stopped at the foot of the statue to satisfy a natural need. He seemed to be quite unaware of the statue, of the speaker, of the soldiers and their bundles. But suddenly some phrase caught his attention, not so much the phrase itself as the fanatical faith with which it was shouted from under the bronze mouth of the horse:

". . . but understand . . . in six months we shall have done away for ever with the greatest evil . . . with money itself. . . . There will be no hunger, no poverty, no humiliation. . . . You will be able to take everything you need from the common stores. . . . Comrades, we will use gold to build public lavatories . . ."

At that moment the snow-wind blew right down the speaker's throat. Furious at the interruption, he bent forward and began to cough, and could not stop. His lungs seemed to be bursting. The soldiers stood there for a while, nodding their high fur caps, and then went their way . . . some to the railway stations, some through the town and across the river. The speaker climbed

down from the pedestal, his feet slipping on the frozen granite. The man with the upturned coat-collar called out to him softly:

"Hullo, Rublyov!"

Vassili Rublyov, still coughing, buttoned up his coat. He did not offer to shake hands, and looked sullenly at Ivan Ilyich Telegin.

"Well, what do you want?"

"I'm simply glad to see you, that's all."

"These devils, these clods," Rublyov said, looking towards the blurred, snow-covered outlines of the railway station, where the same bearded, louse-ridden front-liners were standing in groups round their piled-up kit. "As if one could move them by mere words! They run from the firing-line like black-beetles. Half-wits. . . . What we need is a terror. . . ."

His frost-bitten dark hand clutched at the snow-laden wind. . . . His fist hammered something into it. Then his hand went limp and he shivered with the cold. . . .

"Rublyov, old chap, you know me well enough"—Telegin turned down his coat-collar and bent down to Rublyov's ashen-grey face—"for God's sake explain. . . . Why, we are putting our necks into a noose. . . . The Germans can be in Petrograd in a week if they choose. . . . You must know I was never interested in politics. . . ."

"What do you mean—not interested?" Rublyov was angry, and turned sharply to him. "What *does* interest you, then? Do you know who is not interested nowadays?"—he looked furiously at Telegin. "Those who remain neutral are the enemies of the people."

"That's just why I want to talk to you. . . . But please keep a civil tongue in your head."

Telegin, too, was bristling with rage. Rublyov drew a deep breath through his nostrils:

"You're a queer fish, Comrade Telegin. I just haven't got the time to talk to you—can you understand that?"

"Look here, Rublyov, I'm in such a state of mind that . . . Have you heard that Kornilov is organizing a rising among the Don Cossacks?"

"Yes. We've heard it."

"I shall go there . . . or join your side."

"What is to decide which it is to be?"

"I'll join the side in which I can believe. . . . You are for the revolution, but I am for Russia. . . . God knows. . . . Maybe I, too, am for the revolution. . . . You know that I am a front-line officer."

The anger in Rublyov's dark eyes died out. Only a sleepless weariness showed in them now.

"All right then," he said. "Come to the Smolny to-morrow and ask for me. . . . Russia"—he nodded and laughed—"sometimes I get so angry with this Russia of yours that I see red. Still, we may all die for her yet. Oh, and you might go down to the Baltic station straight away. About three thousand deserters have been camping on the ground there for the last three weeks. Hold a meeting with them, speak for Soviet power. Tell them that Petrograd needs bread. Tell them we need fighters." His eyes grew hard again. "Tell them that if they are going to do nothing but scratch their bellies in front of the fire they will die like sons of bitches! They will get the revolution written on their backsides with the knout! Get this into their thick heads! No one can save Russia and save the revolution now except the Soviet government. Understand? There is nothing in the world more important now than our revolution."

Telegin climbed up five flights of frozen stairs in the dark to his flat. He groped for the door and knocked three times and then once. Somebody came to the door from inside and after a long silence his wife asked in a low voice:

"Who is there?"

"It's all right, Dasha, it's only me."

There was a sigh behind the door. The chain rattled. The hook resisted a long time. He could hear Dasha whisper:

"Oh, my God, my God. . . ." Finally she opened the door and immediately disappeared in the darkness of the passage and sat down somewhere.

Telegin carefully closed the door and secured all the bolts, locks and chains. He took off his goloshes and groped about—damn it, no matches. Without taking off his coat and cap he walked in the same direction in which Dasha had disappeared, stretching out his hands in front of him.

"How annoying," he said. "No light again. Dasha, where are you?"

After a short silence she said in a low voice, from the study:

"The light was on, then it went out."

Telegin entered the study. This was the warmest room in the whole flat, but to-day it was cold even here. He looked round but could distinguish nothing; he could not even hear Dasha breathing. He was very hungry, and more than anything else he wanted a cup of tea. But he felt that Dasha had nothing ready for him.

Turning down his coat-collar, Telegin sat down in an easy chair near the divan facing the window, where a vague light flickered in the snowy darkness. In Kronstadt, or perhaps some other place even nearer, a searchlight was groping in the sky.

"What about lighting the fire?" Telegin thought. "Perhaps I might ask Dasha where she keeps her matches."

But he could not make up his mind to ask her. He would have liked to know precisely what she was doing—was she crying or was she asleep? The quiet was too much for him. The silence of the desert lay over the whole many-storied block of flats. There was only the occasional faint sound of shots from somewhere in the distance. Suddenly the six lamps of the electric chandelier began to glow feebly. The reddish glimmer dimly lit up the room. Dasha was sitting at the writing-desk in her fur coat, with one felt-booted foot stretched out. Her head lay on the table, with her cheek resting on the blotting-pad. Her face was thin and drawn with suffering, and her eyes were open. So she had not even troubled to shut her eyes: she was sitting in an uncomfortable, unnatural position. . . .

"Dashenka, you can't go on like this," Telegin said stolidly. He was so sorry for her that it hurt him unbearably. He went up to the desk. But the red threads in the lamps flickered and went out. The light had lasted only a few seconds.

He stood behind Dasha and bent down with bated breath. How simple it would be to pass his hand over her hair, without saying anything. But when he came close to her she did not make any response: she was like a corpse.

"Dasha, don't torment yourself like this. . . ."

A month before Dasha had given birth to a child. The baby, a boy, died on the third day. The birth was premature and followed upon a terrible shock. One day, in the darkening twilight, Dasha was attacked on the Mars Field by two superhumanly tall figures muffled in shrouds. They were probably those 'leapers' who in those fantastic times fastened special springs to their feet and held all Petrograd in fear. They whistled and gnashed their teeth at Dasha and

she fell to the ground. They tore off her coat and disappeared in long leaps over the Swan Bridge. Dasha lay for a time where she had fallen. The rain was streaming down, and the bare limes in the Summer Garden were rustling wildly in the wind. Beyond the Fontanka somebody screamed loudly: "Help! Help!" The child kicked its little foot in Dasha's womb; it was asking to come into the world.

The child was insistent, and Dasha got up and crossed the Troitski bridge. The wind pressed her against the iron railings, her dripping dress clung to her legs. There was no light. No one was in the streets. Below her was the turbulent blackness of the Neva. When she was across the bridge Dasha felt the first pang. She realized that she could never reach home; all she wanted now was to get to a tree and shelter from the wind. Here on the Street of the Red Dawn she was stopped by a patrol. A burly soldier, rifle at the ready, bent down to her waxen ghastly face:

"They have stripped her, the blackguards. Look, she's with child, too."

He took Dasha home, half-carrying her up to the fifth floor. He banged the butt of his rifle against the door and roared at Telegin as he came to open it:

"How can you let the little lady go out alone at night? . . . The baby was nearly born in the street. . . . You bloody block-headed bourgeois. . . ."

The pains began the same night. A garrulous midwife put in an appearance in the flat. The ordeal lasted twenty-four hours. The child, a boy, was not breathing. They slapped him and rubbed him and blew in his mouth. He screwed up his nose, puckered his forehead and began to cry. The midwife was confident, although the child began to cough. It wailed all the time, pitifully, like a kitten. It did not take the breast. Then it stopped crying, and only gasped. And on the third morning, when Dasha stretched out her hand to the cradle she felt that the little body was cold. She snatched it up and unwrapped it; the sparse fair hair on the baby's high skull was standing on end.

Dasha screamed. She rushed to the window—to smash it, throw herself from it, and not live any more—"I have betrayed him . . . I can't, I can't," she repeated. Telegin was hard put to it to hold her back and get her to bed. He took the little body away. Dasha said to her husband:

"While I was asleep, death came to him; you see, his little hairs were standing on end. . . . He was alone in his torment. . . . I was asleep."

No arguments could dispel the picture in her mind of her little son's solitary battle with death.

"All right, Ivan, I won't," she answered Telegin, if only to get rid of his admonishing voice and his healthy red-cheeked face, still cheerful despite all privations.

Telegin's robust health was more than enough to permit him to run about in his ragged goloshes from dawn till late at night in search of odd jobs, food, firewood, and everything else. He came home several times a day and was more considerate and attentive than ever.

But it was precisely this tender solicitude that Dasha wanted least of all just then. The more Telegin's everyday activities developed, the more hopelessly distant Dasha felt from him. She sat the whole day in the cold rooms. She counted herself lucky if she could doze a little. Sometimes she went into the kitchen, remembering that Telegin had asked her to do something for him. But even the simplest work was too much for her. The November rain pattered on the window-panes. The wind roared over Petersburg. And in this cold weather the dead body of her little son was lying there in the churchyard beside

the sea—of the little son who had not even been able to complain. Dasha wept.

Telegin understood that Dasha was almost insane. It was sufficient for the electric light to go out in the house for Dasha to creep away to an armchair in some corner, cover her head with a shawl and sit still in deathly anguish. But they had to live somehow. Telegin wrote about Dasha to her sister in Moscow, but either the letters did not reach her, or Katia did not reply, or else something had happened to her too. The times were hard.

Fidgeting behind Dasha's back Telegin by chance trod on the box of matches. He immediately understood what had happened: after the electric light went out, Dasha had been fighting the darkness and her misery by lighting matches from time to time.

"Poor little thing," he thought, "of course, she's been alone all day."

He cautiously picked up the matchbox—there were still a few matches left in it. Then he brought in from the kitchen the firewood he had prepared in the morning—some carefully sawn-up bits of an old wardrobe. Squatting on his heels he began to lay a fire in the little brick-lined stove, from which an iron stove-pipe meandered across the room. Soon the pleasant smoke of burning pine splinters filled the air. The draught roared in the chinks of the stove door. A circle of flickering light showed on the ceiling.

These hand-made stoves were later given the widespread nickname of "burzhuyka" and also "little bee". They faithfully served humanity all through the period of war communism. There were plain ones made of iron, standing on four legs, with a single chamber, there were intricate ones with ovens in which pancakes (made out of coffee grounds) and even fish pies could be baked; there were elegant ones decorated with tiles torn from some fire-place. They all warmed and boiled and baked and sang the eternal song of fire to the accompaniment of roaring blizzards. People gathered around their glowing embers as they had gathered of old round the fire on the hearth, warmed their chilled hands and waited for the lid on the tea-kettle to begin to dance. They also talked together and it is a pity that these conversations were not recorded. Bearded professors wearing felt boots and muffled in rugs drew their shabby armchairs closer to these stoves and wrote admirable books. Poets grown semi-transparent with starvation composed poetry about love and about the revolution. Conspirators sitting in a circle put their heads together and passed on whispered rumours, each stranger and more fantastic than the other. And much magnificent antique furniture flew out in the shape of smoke through the iron stove-pipes in those years.

Telegin had a great affection for his stove; he smeared its cracks with clay, and had hung up a can under the stovepipe so that no soot should drop on the floor. When the kettle boiled he pulled a little packet out of his pocket and poured sugar from it into a glass, plenty of it. From another pocket he took a lemon which had fallen into his hands that day by some miracle (he had exchanged it for a pair of mittens with a crippled soldier on the Nevski Prospect), dropped a slice in Dasha's tea and put it in front of her.

"Dashenka, there's lemon in it. . . . I'll fix up the winkie in a minute."

'Winkie' was the name for a device consisting of a tin can in which a little wick floated on sunflower oil. Telegin brought in the 'winkie' and the room lit up dimly. Dasha was already sitting up in the chair drinking her tea. Telegin was very pleased. He sat down near her.

"Do you know whom I met to-day? Vassili Rublyov, do you remember?

He and his father worked under me in the factory. We were awfully good friends. The father is as cunning as they make them—with one foot on the farm and the other in the machine-shop. A remarkable type! Vassili was a Bolshevik even then—clever, but as spiteful as the devil. In February our shop was the first to go out into the street. Vassili chased round all the attics hunting for police snipers: they say he killed about half a dozen of them himself. . . . After the October uprising he became a big noise. . . . We had a talk together. . . . Are you listening, Dasha?"

"Yes," she said. She put down the empty glass, propped up her chin with her thin little fist and stared into the tiny floating flame of the 'winkie'. Her grey eyes were indifferent to everything in the world. Her face was drawn, her tender skin seemed transparent and the tilted nose which was once so independent and even frivolous had grown quite sharp.

"Ivan," she said (probably to express her thanks for the tea with lemon), "as I was looking for matches, I found a box of cigarettes behind the books. If you want any . . ."

"Cigarettes! Why, they are old ones, Dashenka, the kind I like best!" Telegin pretended to be overjoyed, although it was he himself who had hidden the cigarettes behind the books for an emergency. He lit one, stealthily glancing from time to time at Dasha's lifeless profile, and thought that she ought to be taken away from here, somewhere far away, where the sun shines.

"Well, my dear, I had a talk with Vassili Rublyov and he helped me a lot. Dasha, I don't believe that these Bolsheviks will suddenly disappear just like that. . . . There's a solid foundation in Vassili Rublyov, you know. True, nobody elected them to take power. . . . And their power turns on a hair—they are strong only in Petersburg, Moscow and a few provincial centres. . . . But the whole secret is in the nature of their power. . . . This government is bound up with fellows like Vassili Rublyov by bonds of blood. There are not many of them in the country, but they have faith. . . . If Vassili were to be thrown to the lions and tigers or burned at the stake he would start singing the 'International'. . . ."

Dasha made no reply. Telegin poked the fire. Squatting in front of the stove, he said:

"Do you see what I am getting at? One must make one's choice right now. . . . I don't think I'd like to sit round and wait until everything has been settled. . . . I should be ashamed of myself if I sat by the roadside asking for charity. I'm a man, and I'm no saboteur. To tell the truth I am just aching to do something. . . ."

Dasha sighed. Her eyelids quivered and a tear crept down from under her eyelashes. Telegin drew a deep breath:

"Of course we must first settle what you are going to do, Dasha. . . . You must get a grip on yourself, find the strength to live. . . . The life you are leading now is slow extinction. . . ."

He could not refrain from stressing angrily the word 'extinction'. Then Dasha said in a voice like a complaining child:

"Is it my fault that I did not die then? And now I am keeping you from living. . . . You bring me lemons. I didn't ask you to. . . ."

"What is one to do?" Telegin strode up and down the room and drummed with his nails on the steamy window-panes. Snow was falling. The blizzard wailed and the fierce wind swept along with such force that it seemed as if it was trying to overtake time itself and fly into the future to tell of the strange events that had come to pass.

"Send her abroad?" Telegin pondered. "Or to her father in Samara? How complicated it all is. . . . But we can't go on like this any longer."

Dasha's sister Katia had taken her husband, Vadim Petrovich Roshchin, to her father's house in Samara, where they could wait quietly for the spring without having to worry about every crust of bread. By the spring the Bolsheviks would of course be finished. Doctor Dmitri Stepanovich Bulavin, Katia's father, knew the exact time when this would happen: between the end of the frosts and the beginning of the spring floods the Germans would start an offensive along the whole front, where the remnants of the Russian armies were holding meeting after meeting, and the soldiers' committees, in the midst of chaos, treason and desertion, were vainly striving to find new forms of revolutionary discipline.

Dr. Bulavin had aged during the last few years; he was rather hard up, and talked politics more than ever. He was very pleased about his daughter's visit and immediately set himself to convert Roshchin. They would sit hour after hour in the dining-room, drinking tea from the samovar. This was a huge battered contraption through which a whole lake of boiling water had passed; it had grown so expert in its old age that as soon as a piece of charcoal was thrown into it, it would start singing provincial samovar songs and keep singing them for a long time. Dr. Bulavin, very carelessly dressed, his face sagging and puffy under the eyes, his grey curls unbrushed, would smoke one evil-smelling cigarette after the other, cough until he was purple in the face, and talk, talk, talk. . . .

"Our dear country has gone to the devil, we've lost the war, sir . . . no offence meant to you, lieutenant-colonel. . . . We ought to have made peace in 1915 and then gone to the Germans and learned from them. And then after they had taught us something, we might have become something like men. But now that is all over and done with. . . . Medical science is powerless in this case, as we doctors say. . . . Oh, cut that out, please. . . . Defend ourselves? With what? With three-pronged hay-forks? During this summer the Germans will occupy all Southern and Central Russia, the Japanese will take Siberia, our glorious champions with their hay-forks will be driven into the tundras of the Arctic circle, and then order, culture and respect for human dignity will be introduced into Russia. . . . And we shall be 'Russland' . . . and I shall be very glad, yes, sir!"

Dr. Bulavin was an old Liberal and now ridiculed his former idols with bitter scorn. His whole house bore the stamp of this self-abasement. The rooms were not cleaned, the windows were dusty, the portrait of Mendeleyev which hung in the study was thick with cobwebs, the plants had withered in their pots, and carpets, books and pictures lay in boxes under the divans, untouched since the summer of 1914 when Dasha had been there last.

When the Soviets took power in Samara and the majority of the local doctors refused to work for them, Dr. Bulavin was offered the post of director of all municipal hospitals. As the Germans, according to his reckoning, would in any case occupy Samara in the spring, he accepted the appointment. No drugs were available, and Dr. Bulavin's activities were restricted to administering enemas. "The bowels are the crux," he said to his assistants and looked at them through his cracked eyeglasses with ironical superiority. "During the war the population did not open its bowels. If you investigate the primary cause of our blessed anarchy you will come up against constipation. Yes,

gentlemen, an unconditional enema is the thing for every man jack of them. . . ."

Tea-table talk of this sort was extremely distasteful to Roshchin. He had not quite recovered from the concussion he had suffered in the street fighting on the first of November, when he had commanded a company of cadets defending the approaches to the Nikitski gate. Sablin with his Bolsheviks was pressing them hard from Strastnaya Square. Roshchin had known this Sablin in Moscow as a schoolboy, a blue-eyed cherubic youngster who was very shy and was always blushing. It was difficult to link up the young scion of a good old Moscow family with this fanatic Bolshevik or Left Social-Revolutionary (what was the difference anyway?), with his long greatcoat and his rifle, taking cover behind the lime-trees of that same Tverski Boulevard, of which Pushkin had sung and along which he, a well-behaved secondary-school boy, had walked so recently with his schoolbooks under his arm. "Betray Russia and the army, open the gates to the Germans, release the wild beasts from their cages—so that is what you are after, Mister Sablin! The rank and file, this mob of blackguards might be forgiven, but you . . ." Roshchin lay down behind the machine-gun that stood in a shallow trench at the corner of Malaya Nikitskaya Street near Chichkin's dairy, and when the slender figure in the long great-coat again jumped out from behind a tree, he gave it a burst. Sablin dropped his rifle and sat down, gripping his thigh near the groin. Almost at the same instant a splinter knocked off Roshchin's cap and he lost consciousness.

On the seventh night of the battle a thick yellow fog settled down on the city. The firing ceased. In some places isolated groups of cadets, students and officials were still fighting, but the Committee of Public Safety, headed by Dr. Rudnyov, went out of existence and the city was occupied by the troops of the revolutionary committee. The very next day the streets were full of young men in mufti with bundles in their hands and an evil look in their eyes. They were all going to one of the railway stations, the Kursk station, the Bryansk station. . . . And although they wore military leggings or cavalry boots, nobody did anything to stop them.

Roshchin would have gone with them if he had been unhurt. But he was affected by a kind of paralysis; then he lost his eyesight for a time and finally had some trouble with his heart. He was continually expecting the arrival of troops sent by General Headquarters, who would bombard the Kremlin with six-inch guns from the Sparrow Hills. But the revolution was only just beginning to penetrate into the masses of the people.

Katia persuaded her husband to go away, to forget the Bolsheviks and the Germans for a while. After that, they would see.

Roshchin agreed. He lived in Samara, hardly ever leaving his father-in-law's house. He ate and he slept. But forget? Never! Every morning when he unfolded the *Samara Soviet Herald* (printed on wrapping paper) he clenched his teeth. Every line lashed him like a whip.

"The All-Russian Congress of Soviets calls upon the workers, peasants and soldiers of Germany and Austria-Hungary to reject unconditionally the imperialist demands of their own governments. . . . It calls upon the soldiers, workers and peasants of France, Britain and Italy to compel their own blood-stained governments immediately to conclude an honourable and democratic peace with all nations. . . . Down with imperialist war! Long live the brotherhood of the workers of all countries!".

Forget! Katia, Katia! One would have to forget oneself first! To forget the past of a thousand years! Forget our former greatness. . . . Less than a

century ago Russia dictated her will to Europe. . . . Shall we humbly lay all this at the feet of the Germans? Dictatorship of the proletariat indeed! What a word! What rot! And the peasants? Oh, the peasants! There will be the devil to pay for what they have done and they will be the ones to pay it. . . .

"No, Dmitri Stepanovich," Roshchin replied to the doctor's lengthy disquisitions at the tea-table, "there are forces enough in Russia yet. . . . We are not dead yet. . . . We are not just manure for your Germans. . . . We shall fight yet. . . . We will win back Russia! And punish them . . . punish them cruelly. . . . You wait and see. . . ."

All that Katia, the third person sitting by the samovar, understood of these discussions was that Roshchin, the man she loved, was unhappy and suffering as if from slow torture. His close-cropped bullet-head turned silver. His lean face with the deep-set dark eyes looked as if turned to stone. When he clenched his heavy fists over the torn oilcloth covering the table, and said: "We will take revenge! We will punish them!" it merely seemed to Katia as if he had come home hurt, tired and exhausted, and was threatening somebody from the window: "Just you wait, you out there, we'll get even with you. . . ." But on whom was it that Roshchin, gentle, tactful and tired to death, could take revenge? Surely not on those ragged Russian soldiers who were begging bread and cigarettes in the frozen streets? . . . Katia sat down beside her husband and cautiously stroked his hand. She was overwhelmed with tenderness and pity for him. She was incapable of perceiving evil—if she felt it in somebody she would certainly have blamed herself first of all. She could not understand anything of what was going on. The revolution appeared to her like a stormy night that had come down over Russia. She was afraid of certain words: Soviet seemed to her a ferocious word, and the word Revcom terrible, like the roaring of the bull that once in her childhood had pushed its curly head through the paling into the garden where she was playing. When she unfolded the brown pages of the newspaper and read: "French imperialism, with its dark schemes of expansion and its rapacious alliances . . ." she thought of Paris, peaceful in the bluish haze of summer, the smell of vanilla and of sorrow, the gurgling rivulets running by the side of the pavements. She remembered a strange old man who followed her about wherever she went and one day before his death spoke to her, on a bench in the park: "You need not be frightened of me. I am an old man. I have angina pectoris. A great misfortune has befallen me: I have fallen in love with you. Oh, how sweet your face is, how sweet." "Why call them imperialists?" thought Katia.

The winter was coming to an end. The town was full of rumours, each stranger than the last. People said that the English and the French were secretly making peace with Germany and would then attack Russia with united forces. People talked of the legendary victories of General Kornilov, who with a handful of officers had been routing Red Guard detachments of thousands and was taking Cossack villages and then giving them up again—evidently because he had no use for them, as he was preparing a general offensive against Moscow for the spring.

"Oh, Katia," Roshchin said, "I am sitting here while down there they are fighting. . . . It won't do, it won't do."

On February 4th a crowd carrying flags and banners passed the doctor's house. Heavy snow was falling; a blizzard was blowing. Brass trumpets blared the 'International'. The doctor, his fur coat and cap covered with snow, rushed noisily into the dining-room:

"Ladies and gentlemen, peace with the Germans!"

Roshchin glanced silently at the fatuously smiling, broad, wet, knowing face of the doctor, got up and walked to the window. . . . Behind the solid curtain of the March blizzard a countless multitude was marching. They marched arm-in-arm in groups, shouting and laughing—trench-coats, more trench-coats, sheepskin jackets, women and children: ragged, grey, old Mother Russia on the march. Where had they all come from?" he asked himself.

Tense and at a loss Roshchin drew his silvered head in between his shoulders. Katia caressed his shoulder with her cheek. A life she could not understand was going past outside that high window.

"Look, Vadim," she said, "how glad all their faces are. . . . Can it really be the end of the war? I can hardly believe it—what happiness!"

Roshchin drew away from her, clasped his hands behind his back and the thin line of his mouth was cruel:

"They'll soon laugh on the other side of their mouths."

Five men were sitting round a table in a small vaulted room. They were wearing crumpled coats and cloth army shirts. Their faces were dark with the weariness of sleepless nights. On the scorched cloth covering the table stood telephones and glasses of tea among official papers, cigarette-ends and crusts of bread. From time to time the door opened on to a long passage crowded with people, and a stalwart soldier with a leather belt and cross-straps came in, bringing papers to be signed.

The chairman, a little man in a short grey jacket, was sitting in an armchair much too high for him and seemed to be dozing. His left hand was raised to his forehead, shading his eyes and nose and leaving visible only his straight mouth with a toothbrush moustache and his unshaven cheek in which a muscle was twitching. Only those who knew him well might have noticed that through a slit between the fingers that wearily covered his face, a sharp, shrewd eye was watching each speaker and noting the play of their features.

The telephones were ringing almost without intermission. The same broad-shouldered man in uniform, with the leather straps, took off the receivers and said in a staccato half-whisper: "Council of People's Commissars. In conference. Impossible. . . ." From time to time someone pushed against the door leading to the passage. The brass door-knob turned. Outside a high sea-wind was raging and dashing sleet and raindrops against the windows.

The man who was speaking had finished his report. The others round the table bent their heads or cradled them in their hands. The chairman moved his hand higher up on his bare skull and wrote a little note in which he underlined a word three times so vigorously that the pen buried its point in the paper. Then he threw the note across to the third man on his left, a lean, dark man with a black moustache and stiff black hair.

The third man on the left read the note, smiled into his moustache and wrote an answer on the same piece of paper. . . .

The chairman glanced at the window and the howling snowstorm outside, then slowly tore the note into tiny fragments.

"We have no army, we have no food; the speaker is right, we are just scrambling about in a void," he said in a subdued voice. "The Germans are advancing and will continue to advance. The speaker is right. . . ."

"Is this the end? What is the way out? Are we to capitulate? Go underground?" several voices asked all at once.

"What is the way out? To fight! Fight like hell. Smash the Germans. And if we can't smash them just now, withdraw to Moscow. If the Germans take Moscow, withdraw to the Urals. Set up a Ural-Kusnetsk republic. There is plenty of coal and iron there and a militant working class. We can evacuate the workers of Petrograd to the Urals. Quite a neat idea. And, if necessary, we can withdraw all the way to Kamchatka. There is only one thing to keep in mind—we must preserve the flower of the working class, we must not allow them to be massacred. Moscow and Petrograd we can retake later. . . . Meanwhile a lot of things can happen in the West. . . . To pull a long face and tear one's hair is not how Bolsheviks behave . . ."

With unexpected vivacity he jumped up from his armchair, stuck his hands in his pockets, ran to the door and threw open one half of the double door. From the passage, out of the dim light, amidst a cloud of human exhalations he saw turning towards him the lean, be-whiskered, wrinkled faces and burning eyes of Petrograd working-men. . . . He raised his large hand with the ink-stained fingers:

"Comrades! Our Socialist mother-country is in danger!"

At the beginning of winter two human torrents met on the railway junctions of Southern Russia. Public men, officers in mufti, merchants, policemen, land-owners whose estates were ablaze, speculators, actors, writers, government officials, half-grown lads wanting to play at Red Indians—in other words the only recently so noisy and colourful population of both capitals were flying from the north and its apocalyptic terrors towards the good lands of the Don and Kuban and Ter, where there was plenty to eat.

In the opposite direction, from the south, came in a solid mass the millions of the Transcaucasian army with their weapons, guns and shells, truckloads of salt, sugar and textiles. Where the two torrents crossed there were jams in which the White Guard spies were hard at work. Cossacks from the Cossack villages came to the stations to buy weapons; rich peasants bartered bread and salt for clothing materials. Bandits and petty swindlers were here, there and everywhere. Those of them that were caught were killed on the spot.

The barriers put up by the Red Guards were ineffective—men went through them as if they had been spiders' webs. This was the steppe, the free steppe. Here even in the old days men walked with their caps jauntily cocked over one eye. Everything was unstable, fluid, uncertain. One day the new-comers and smallholders had the best of it and elected a soviet; the next, the local Cossacks drove out the Communists with cold steel and sent a messenger—with a letter in his cap as of old—to Kaledin the Cossack Ataman in Novocherkassk. They did not give two hoots here for the central government in far-away Petrograd.

But after the end of November this central government came down to brass tacks. The first revolutionary detachments were formed, consisting of mobile groups of sailors, workmen and homeless front-liners travelling about in dilapidated railway trucks. They were disorderly, obeyed orders reluctantly, fought fiercely, but at the slightest reverse took to their heels and then held noisy meetings after the fight, threatening to tear their commanders to pieces.

According to a plan already worked out at the time, the Don and Kuban regions were being surrounded from three basic directions. From the north-east came Sablin, cutting off the Don from the Ukraine; Sievers was approaching Rostov and Novocherkassk on a semicircular line; and detachments of Black Sea sailors were pressing forward from Novorossissk. Within the region uprisings were being prepared in the industrial districts and in the coalfields.

In January the Red detachments were closing in on Taganrog, Rostov and Novocherkassk. In the villages of the Don the quarrel between Cossacks and the new settlers from other districts had not yet reached the state of tension which called for the use of armed force. The Don was still lying inert. Under the pressure of the Reds the paltry forces of Ataman Kaledin withdrew from the front without giving battle.

The Reds grew into a deadly menace. In Taganrog the workers rose in arms and drove the Volunteer regiment of General Kutepov from the city. A Red force under Sergeant Podtelkov smashed and annihilated the last line of Ataman Kaledin's defences near Novocherkassk.

Ataman Kaledin now turned to the Don with a last desperate appeal: he asked the Cossacks to volunteer for the only stable military formation in being—for the Volunteer Army formed in Rostov by Generals Kornilov, Alexeyev and Denikin. But none responded to the Cossack Ataman's appeal.

On January 29th Kaledin called a meeting of his government in the palace at Novocherkassk. Fourteen regional commanders of the Don Cossacks, a few prominent generals and representatives of the "Moscow Centre for the Struggle against Anarchy and Bolshevism" sat down at the horseshoe table in the white hall. The Ataman, tall, frowning, with long drooping moustache, said with gloomy calm:

"Gentlemen, I must inform you that our position is hopeless. The Bolshevik forces are increasing day by day. Kornilov is recalling all his troops from our front. His decision is immutable. My appeal to defend the Don brought us one hundred and forty-seven volunteers in all. The population of the Don and Kuban regions not only gives us no support but is hostile to our cause. Why is this so? What name shall we give this horrible disgrace? Self-seeking has been our ruin. There is no longer any sense of duty and of honour left. I propose to you, gentlemen, that we should divest ourselves of our powers and surrender our authority into other hands." He sat down and added, without looking at any of those present: "Gentlemen, be brief, time is precious . . ."

The Ataman's second-in-command, Mitrofan Bogayevski—'the nightingale of the Don'—shouted angrily:

"In other words, you propose to surrender government into the hands of the Bolsheviks? . . ."

To this the Ataman replied that the members of the government might do as they saw fit—and immediately left the meeting. He went out with a heavy tread, through a side door, to his own room. There he looked out of the window at the bare trees of the park swaying in the wind and at the dreary grey clouds. He called to his wife, but she gave no answer; he walked on, to the bedroom, where a fire was blazing in the grate. He took off his tunic and the cross he wore on a ribbon round his neck; then, for the last time, he looked closely, as if not yet quite convinced, at the tactical map on the wall above his bed. Little red flags were clustering densely around the Don and the Kuban steppes. One pin with a tricolour flag was stuck in the black dot representing Rostov. Nowhere else. The Ataman took a flat, warm, black automatic pistol out of the back pocket of his blue breeches with a general's stripes along the side-seams —and shot himself through the heart.

On February 9th General Kornilov led his small volunteer army, consisting entirely of officers and gentleman cadets, with the baggage of all the generals and specially important refugees, out of Rostov and into the steppes beyond the Don.

The general himself, of small stature, with a Mongol cast of features and a very peppery temper, marched on foot with the vanguard, carrying a soldier's pack on his back. In one of the wagons of the baggage-train rode General Denikin, muffled in a tiger-skin rug, suffering from bronchitis and very miserable.

CHAPTER II

BROWN FIELDS STRIPPED of snow floated past the carriage windows. A fresh breeze, laden with the smell of thawed earth, blew in through the broken panes. Katia looked out of the window. Her head and shoulders were covered with an Orenburg shawl tied in a knot at the back. Roshchin, in the military overcoat of a private and a ragged cap, stretched out his legs and dozed. The train was creeping slowly along. Tall bare trees, their closely growing branches thickly covered with nests, floated by. Clouds of rooks circled round the trees and swung on the branches. Katia moved nearer to the window. The rooks cawed restlessly and wildly, as they always did in spring, as they had done in Katia's far-off childhood—cawed of spring waters, of mists, of early thunderstorms.

Katia and Roshchin were going south. Where to? To Rostov, to Novocherkassk, to the Donets? To wherever the knot of civil war was being tied. Roshchin was asleep. His head had dropped on to his chest; his unshaven face was drawn and sharp creases ran down both sides of his mouth, which was puckered in an expression of disgust. And suddenly Katia felt afraid: this was not Vadim's face—it was a strange face, a face with sharp features. . . . The wind brought the cries of the rooks in at the window. The train moved slowly, bumping over the points. A row of vehicles was moving along the muddy road slanting away from the railway track into the steppe; shaggy ponies harnessed to peasant carts and driven by dirty, bearded, uncouth and terrible men. Roshchin began to emit in his sleep a hoarse and tormenting sound, more a groan than a snore. Katia touched his face with trembling hands:

"Vadim, Vadim . . ."

He stopped the dreadful noise with a start and opened unseeing eyes.

"Ugh! I've had a foul dream!"

The train stopped. Human voices mingled with the cries of the rooks. Women in thick peasant boots and thick coats, carrying sacks, shoved and pushed and climbed into the cattle-truck, showing their white legs. A hairy face, covered with a matted beard up to the little bear-like eyes, appeared at the window of Katia's carriage, almost touching her:

"Might you have a machine-gun to sell, perhaps?"

Somebody chuckled on the upper berth, somebody turned round heavily and answered in a cheerful voice:

"We've got a few cannon, but the machine-guns are all sold out."

"We don't want cannon," said the peasant, opening his large mouth so that his beard stuck out on both sides of his face like a broom. He put his elbows on the frame of the window and looked round the interior of the carriage as if in search of some other bargain. A huge soldier slipped down from the upper berth. He had a broad face, bold blue eyes and a well-shaped shaven head. With a sharp tug he tightened the belt over his greatcoat.

"Your fighting days ought to be over, uncle—your place is on the top of the stove."

"You're right there," the peasant replied, "I should be on the stove. But, soldier, nowadays you can't sleep on the stove. They won't let you. You've got to get your living somehow."

"By a spot of robbery, eh?"

"I shouldn't say that . . ."

"Then what do you want machine-guns for?"

"Well, it's like this," the peasant puckered up his nose and parted the wool on his face with his calloused hand—only to hide the glint in his eyes, which were laughing slyly all the time. "One of my sons has come home from the war. All the time he's been worrying me: 'Father, go down to the station, see whether you can buy a machine-gun. For about four poods of wheat.' Anything doing?"

"You kulaks!" the soldier said with a laugh, "you're as slick as the devil. And how many horses have you, uncle?"

"Eight, thank God. Any other things or weapons—anything for sale?" He looked the passengers of the compartment over once more, and suddenly his smile vanished, his eyes dulled and he turned away as if the passengers were not human beings but just rubbish. Then he went off, striding through the mud on the platform, swinging his whip.

"Did you see that?" the soldier said, with a friendly glance at Katia. "Eight horses! And he has twelve sons on top of that. He will set them on the horses and send them out into the steppe to see what they can bring home. And he himself will sit on the stove, with his backside in the grain, piling up the loot."

The soldier turned to Roshchin, and suddenly he raised his eyebrows and beamed all over his face:

"Vadim Petrovich, of all people!"

Roshchin quickly looked at Katia—but there was nothing for it, so he held out his hand to the soldier and shook his firmly. "Good morning!" he said, and moved over to sit by him. Katia saw that Roshchin was uneasy.

"It's a small world," he said sourly. "I'm glad to see you in good health, Alexey Ivanovich. . . . And I, as you see, am in fancy dress. . . ."

Katia suddenly realized that the soldier was Alexey Krassilnikov, who had been Roshchin's orderly. Roshchin had often mentioned him to her; he thought Krassilnikov a splendid type of intelligent and gifted Russian muzhik. It was strange of Roshchin to treat him so coldly now. But Krassilnikov evidently understood the reason. He smiled and lit a cigarette. Then he asked under his breath in a matter-of-fact tone:

"The lady your wife?"

"Yes. I'm married now. Let me introduce you. Katia, this is the guardian angel I told you about, you remember. . . . Well, we've been to war, Alexey Ivanovich—and now we can congratulate ourselves on a shameful peace. . . . Russian eagles, ha-ha! . . . So I am trying to get through to the South with my wife. . . . Nearer to the sun, you know." The word 'sun' sounded all wrong; Roshchin frowned as he said it, but Krassilnikov did not turn a hair. "There was nothing else to do. Our grateful country is rewarding us . . . with bayonets in our guts (he squirmed as if lice were swarming all over his body). . . . We are outlaws, enemies of the people. . . . That's how it is."

"Yes, your position is difficult," Krassilnikov said, and shook his head; he looked out of the window and narrowed his eyes. Outside a crowd was gathering inside the broken fence of the railway enclosure. "As if you were in a foreign country. I can understand you, Vadim Petrovich, but others wouldn't. You don't know our people."

"What do you mean, I don't know our people?"

"What I say! You never did know them. You were always being deceived, all the time."

"Who deceived us?"

"Why, we did—the soldiers, the peasants. . . . When you turned your backs we laughed at you. Ay, Vadim Petrovich, all this stuff about indomitable courage, loyalty to the Tsar, patriotism and all that—it was all invented by the gentlemen, and we common soldiers had to play the game. . . . I am a muzhik myself, I know. My brother is in hospital in Rostov, with a Russian officer's bullet through his chest. I am going now, to take him home to the village. Perhaps we shall go on farming, perhaps fighting. We shall see. But if we fight, we'll do it our own way, without frills, and without mercy. No, don't go to the South, Vadim Petrovich, nothing good will come of that. . . ."

Roshchin looked at him with glittering eyes and licked his dry lips. Krassilnikov was paying more and more attention to what was going on outside. The angry hum of voices was growing louder. A few men were climbing trees, to get a better view.

"Take it from me, you will never get the people down again. They look on you as foreigners, they call you 'burzhuys'. That is a dangerous word nowadays, it's like calling you 'horse-thief'. General Kornilov is a fine soldier and he pinned my George Cross on my tunic with his own hands. He thought he could get the Cossacks to fight for the Constituent Assembly, and what happened? It all came to nothing, he could not find the right things to say, though he knows our people as well as anybody. The muzhiks say: 'The burzhuys are angry because they are not allowed to do as they please in Moscow.' And so they cleaned their rifles and greased them, just in case. No, Vadim Petrovich, you had better go back to town with your lady. . . . You will be safer there than among the muzhiks. . . . Look what they are doing!" He suddenly raised his voice and frowned. "They'll kill him in a minute. . . ."

Things were obviously coming to a head outside. Two sturdy soldiers with savage faces were holding in a merciless grip a scraggy little man wearing a ragged blanket coat. The man was unshaven, his nose was swollen and his face deathly pale, and a thin thread of blood ran down from the corner of his trembling lips. With eyes glittering and bulging with fear he followed every movement of a young peasant woman. In a passion of rage she tore off her headcloth, rushed at the pale little man, took him by his ruffled hair and shrieked with a note of delight in her voice:

"He stole it, he took it from under my skirt, the filthy beast. . . . Give me back my money!" She dug her nails into his cheeks and held him.

The pale man suddenly twisted his face out of her hands, but the two stalwarts did not let him go. The women screamed. Then the hairy peasant who had wanted to buy machine-guns appeared on the scene. Pushing his way through the crowd he shoved the woman aside with his shoulder and gave the pale man a jolting, well-aimed blow on the mouth. The man collapsed immediately. Somebody shouted from the nearest tree: "They are beating him." The crowd closed in. In the middle, where the body lay, men were bending down and rising again, swinging their fists.

At last the railway carriage drifted past the crowd. Katia suppressed a scream and felt it sticking in her throat. Roshchin frowned in disgust. Krassilnikov shook his head:

"Pity! The odds are they killed him all for nothing. These women will go for anybody. They are worse than the men. You wouldn't believe what has

become of them in these four years. When we came back from the war we stared—our women were all different. You can't beat them with the reins any more now—you must look out yourself and keep a civil tongue in your head. Yes, the women are on the war-path all right. . . ."

At the first glance it might appear inexplicable why the two commanders-in-chief, Alexeyev and Kornilov, 'organizers of the rescue of Russia', led a handful of officers and cadets, about five thousand in all, with ridiculously inadequate artillery and practically no ammunition, to the south towards Yekaterinodar, into the very thick of the Bolshevik forces then surrounding the capital of the Kuban Cossacks in the form of a semicircle.

It would be vain to look for a strictly strategic plan in all this. The Volunteer Army had been thrown out of Rostov, which it had been unable to hold. It was the hurricane of the revolution that drove them out into the steppes of the Kuban. But there was a political conception behind the move, and two months later its soundness became apparent. This conception was that the rich Cossacks would inevitably rise in arms against the 'new-comers', i.e. against the entire immigrant population which lived by renting the land from the Cossacks and had no rights and privileges whatever. In the Kuban the proportion of Cossacks to new settlers was one million four hundred thousand to one million six hundred thousand.

The 'new-comers' would inevitably want to seize the land and take power. No less inevitable was it that the Cossacks would have recourse to force of arms in defence of their privileges. The 'new-comers' were led by the Bolsheviks. At first the Cossacks wanted no one to rule them—they would have liked nothing better than to sit in their villages and play the squire. But in February an adventurer of the name of Golubov, himself a Cossack born, forced his way with a band of twenty-seven Cossacks into a conference at the Novocherkassk headquarters of Ataman Nazarov and held up the meeting at the point of his pistol and his men's rifles, shouting: "Stand up, you scum! I, Golubov, Soviet Ataman, have come to take over power." The next day he shot Ataman Nazarov and his staff in a copse outside the city, took the atamanic mace into his own hands, shot another two thousand Cossack officers, then rode away into the steppe, seized Mitrofan Bogayevski and dragged him from meeting to meeting, canvassing for a free Don with himself as Ataman, until he was finally killed at a meeting in the Cossack village of Zaplavskaya. Thus, the Cossacks were left without a leader in February, just when an impatient, hungry, chaotic Russia was bearing down upon them from the north.

To become the leaders of the Cossacks; to sit tight in Yekaterinodar; to mobilize the Cossack regulars; to cut off the Caucasus with the oil of Grozny and Baku from Bolshevik Russia and demonstrate their fidelity to the allies—such was the immediate plan of the commanders of the Volunteer Army when that army set out on the operation later called 'the icy campaign'.

Able Seaman Semyon Krassilnikov, Alexey's brother, had been lying with his mates in a ploughed field, on the edge of a bluff near the railway embankment. Next to him a soldier was scooping out a hole with his trenching tool, burrowing hastily like a mole. Having dug himself in he laid his rifle down in front of him and turned to Semyon:

"Better dig in a bit deeper, brother."

Semyon had to work hard to scoop out the sticky clay. Bullets sang over his head. The spade rang on a brick. He swore, got up on his knees, and

immediately felt a hot shock in his chest. He choked and fell, with his face in the hole he had been digging.

This was one of the numerous short battles which barred the advance of the Volunteer Army. Nearly always the Red forces were larger and they could fight and withdraw without coming to much harm; in this first period of the war, victory in battle was not imperative for the Reds. If their position was bad, or if the 'cadets' showed too much fight—very well, they could put up another bar somewhere else, and they let Kornilov get through.

But for the Volunteer Army every skirmish was a matter of life and death. The army *had* to win and move forward another day's march with its baggage train and its wounded. There was no room for it to retreat. Hence in every clash the men of General Kornilov fought with all the fury of despair—and won. It was the same on this occasion.

Five hundred yards from the line of his troops lying prone under machine-gun fire, General Kornilov stood straddle-legged on a rick of last year's hay. He raised his elbows and looked through his field-glasses. A canvas haversack swung at his back. His black sheepskin coat, edged with grey, was thrown open. The General felt hot. His obstinate chin, covered with grey bristle, jutted out from under the field-glasses.

Below the General his aide, Lieutenant Dolinski, was leaning against the rick. He was very young, with dark eyebrows and big dark eyes; he wore an officer's greatcoat, with his cap at a rakish angle. Swallowing his agitation, which made a lump rise in his throat, he gazed upwards at the grey chin of his commander as if that terribly human and familiar grey stubble were a haven of refuge.

"Your Excellency, come down, I entreat you—you might be hit," Dolinski repeated again and again. He saw Kornilov's purple lips part in a convulsive grin. That meant that things were not going well. Dolinski no longer looked in the direction where the dense lines of the Bolsheviks, tiny black figures against the brown and green of the steppe, jumped up, ran forward and lay down again. Shrapnel flew towards them with a whine. But Dolinski knew that they had not enough shrapnel—damn, much too few. . . . 'Boom' . . . a Soviet six-inch gun thudded gravely beyond the blown-up bridge. . . . A machine-gun chattered hastily. Bullets hummed like bees somewhere near, over the head of the Commander.

"Your Excellency, you will get hit."

Kornilov took the binoculars from his eyes. His brown Mongol face, with eyes as black as a lark's, puckered up into a web of wrinkles. Trampling down the hay, he turned round and bent down to speak to the dismounted Tekintses who formed his personal escort and who were standing behind the rick. They were gaunt, bow-legged men in enormous round sheepskin hats and salmon-coloured striped Circassian coats. They stood in picturesque immobility, holding their lean horses by the bridles.

Sharply Kornilov barked an order and pointed towards the bluff. The Tekintses jumped into their saddles with cat-like agility, one of them shouted a guttural command in their own language, then they jerked their scimitars from their scabbards and, first at a canter then at a gallop, rode away into the steppe, towards the bluff where the ploughed fields showed black against the narrow line of the railway embankment.

Semyon Krassilnikov was now lying on his side. This position eased his pain. An hour ago he was strong and fierce; now he only moaned feebly and frequently and with an effort spat out the blood rising to his mouth. To the right and left of him his comrades-in-arms were firing by fits and starts. They

were looking in the same direction as Semyon: at the brown steep hill on the opposite side of the hollow. About fifty mounted men were rushing down it at breakneck speed. It was the attack of the cavalry reserve.

A man came running forward from the rear. He knelt down beside Krassilnikov, waved his pistol, and shouted at the top of his voice. He was wearing a black leather jerkin. The riders were already in the hollow. The man in the jerkin shouted, not in the military manner at all, but with tremendous insistence:

"No retreat! Stand your ground!"

But now huge caps were coming into view over the near edge of the hollow and a long-drawn yell was heard, like the wailing of the wind. The striped coats of the Tekintsi came on. Bending over the manes of their horses they galloped across the muddy field where dirty snow was still lying in the furrows. Clods flew into the air, churned up by the hooves of the horses. "E-e-aaa, ee-aaa," squealed the dark faces, bright teeth showing between moustaches under the great fur caps. Already the watery gleam of the scimitars was visible. *Oh, our men can't stand up to a cavalry attack!* The grey greatcoats in the ploughed field jump up, fire and give ground. The commissar in the leather jerkin moves fast, rushes at one of the men, hits him in the back:

"Forward! Bayonet charge!"

Krassilnikov saw one striped coat roll off a horse as if on purpose, and saw the good horse look round, startled, and then gallop away. A metallic whine ploughed through the ranks, a volley of shrapnel exploded with yellow fire and puffs of smoke. Then Vasska, the buffoon of the Red unit, wearing a coat much too large for him, lost his head. He dropped his rifle and stared, pale as a sheet, his mouth agape; he stared at his death galloping towards him. The troopers were coming nearer, they and their horses loomed larger and larger. One of them was ahead of the rest, his horse lowered its head and stretched out like a greyhound; the rider straightened up in the saddle and rose in his stirrups, his coat-tails flying.

"The bloody swine!" Krassilnikov stretched out his hand for his rifle. "Our commissar is done for!" The Tekinets pushed his horse towards the leather jacket. "Why don't you shoot, you fool!"

Krassilnikov saw only the glint of the curved scimitar as it slashed the leather jacket. . . . Then the whole cavalry troop was on the red soldiers. He caught a whiff of the hot sweat of horses.

The Tekintsi cut clean through the Red ranks and turned towards the flanks. Meanwhile, light grey and black greatcoats, with gleaming officers' shoulder-straps, were running on to the ploughed field from the hollow.

"Hurrah!"

The battle moved away towards the permanent way. For a long time Krassilnikov heard nothing but the groans of the wounded commissar. The firing thinned more and more, the guns were altogether silent and Krassilnikov closed his eyes. His head was singing and his chest hurt him. He was sorry for himself and did not want to die. But his body drew him heavily down to the ground. He felt sorry for his wife Matryona. She would surely perish without him. How she had waited for him, had written to Taganrog asking him to come home. If Matryona saw him now, she would bandage his wound, bring him a drink. Water, or sour milk . . . how good it would be . . .

When Krassilnikov heard foul oaths in voices that belonged to gentlemen, not his own sort, he opened one eye a little. There were four of them, one in a grey Circassian coat, two in officers' greatcoats and the fourth in a student uniform with a corporal's stripes. They carried their rifles like hunters, under their arms.

"Look, a sailor, the swine, give him a prod," one of them said.

"What for—he's carrion anyway. . . . But this one's alive."

They stopped and looked at the buffoon Vasska, as he lay on the ground. The man in the Circassian coat suddenly barked fiercely:

"Get up, you," and kicked him hard.

Krassilnikov saw Vasska scramble to his feet and saw that half his face was covered with blood.

" 'Tention!" shouted the man in the Circassian coat, and punched Vasska in the face. Immediately all four of them threw up their rifles and held them at the ready. Vasska cried in a pitiful voice:

"Have mercy on me, uncle."

The man in the Circassian coat stepped back, blew out his breath sharply and jabbed his bayonet into Vasska's belly, turned, and walked away. The others bent over Vasska. They were pulling off his boots.

When the victorious Whites, having shot all prisoners and set the local administrative offices on fire (so the people should remember them), moved away towards the South, Semyon Krassilnikov was picked up by the Cossacks where he lay. The Cossacks had returned to their villages with their wives, their children and their cattle as soon as the supply columns of the 'cadets' had disappeared below the skyline.

Semyon was afraid he would die there among strangers. He had money on him and he asked one of the Cossacks to take him to Rostov in his cart. From Rostov he wrote to his brother Alexey that he was severely wounded in the chest, that he was afraid he would die here among strangers and that he would like to see his wife Matryona. He sent the letter by hand, through a man from his own village.

Up to 1918 Semyon had served in the Black Sea fleet as an able seaman in the destroyer *Kerch*.

Commander of the fleet was Admiral Kolchak. Although intelligent and well educated and—at least in his own opinion—unselfishly devoted to his country, this officer understood nothing of what was happening at the time and what would inevitably happen in the future. He knew the strength and armaments of all the navies of the world, could infallibly recognize the outline of any warship in a sea-fog, was a prominent expert on sea mines, and the greatly improved efficiency of the Russian navy after the battle of Tsushima was due chiefly to his efforts; but had anyone mentioned politics to him before 1917 he would have said that he was not interested in politics, did not understand politics and thought only newspapers, students, slatternly female undergraduates and Jews ever bothered about politics.

He saw Russia in his mind's eye as a squadron of battleships (both existing and projected) steaming in line with the Cross of St. Andrew proudly flying from the flagship's masthead in defiance of Germany.

He loved the severe and courtly empire-style entrance hall of the Admiralty, with the familiar commissionaire who would help him out of his greatcoat with such a paternal touch and say every time: "Very nasty weather to-day, Alexander Vassilyevich"; he loved the well-bred, well-groomed Navy officers with whom he served and the exclusive, congenial atmosphere of the Navy Club. The head of this whole system, the centre of these traditions, was the Tsar-Emperor.

No doubt Kolchak also loved that other Russia which manned the yards in peakless, long-ribboned caps; that broad-faced, bronzed, sturdy Russia which sang the evening prayer with such fine voices when the flag was hauled down at

sunset and which died 'without a murmur' if ordered to die. That Russia, too, was something to be proud of.

In 1917 Kolchak did not hesitate to swear the oath of loyalty to the Provisional Government and he retained the command of the Black Sea fleet. With sharp bitterness he accepted the fall of the head of the empire as inevitable; he accepted with clenched teeth the existence of sailors' committees and revolutionary conditions in general—but only because he wanted the navy and Russia to remain in a state of war with Germany. If only one single minelayer had been left to him of all the fleet, he would still have gone on fighting.

He frequented the meetings of the sailors in Sebastopol, and in answering hecklers, both local and coming from other places, he said that he personally had no use for the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, as he himself owned neither land nor factories nor had anything whatever to export to other countries, but that he wanted war, war, war—to the last man—"not as a hireling of the bourgeoisie"—here a grimace distorted his clean-shaven face with its strong chin, feeble mouth and deep-set eyes—but as "a Russian patriot!"

The sailors laughed. It was terrible! The faithful sailors, who yesterday were ready to go through fire and water for their flag and their country, now shouted at their admiral—"Down with the hirelings of imperialism!" He pronounced the words 'Russian patriot' with emotion and with a broad gesture, himself ready at that moment to die; but his sailors, apparently possessed by the devil, listened to their admiral as to an enemy who was trying to trap them!

At these meetings Semyon Krassilnikov heard that it was not the 'patriots' who wanted to go on with the war, but the manufacturers and great landowners, who were making huge profits out of it. He heard that the nation did not want this war and that the Germans were exactly the same sort of peasants and working men as the Russians, and that they were fighting because they were deceived by their own bloody bourgeoisie and reformist labour leaders. The crowds at these meetings were mad with hate. "For a thousand years they have been cheating the Russian people! For a thousand years they have been drinking our blood! The landowners, the burzhuys, the vermin!" Their eyes were opened: so this was why they had lived worse than brute beasts. . . . Here was the true enemy! . . . And Semyon, although he was very homesick for the farm and the young wife he had left behind him, yet clenched his fists, listened to the speakers, grew drunk like all the others with the wine of revolution and in this drunkenness forgot his homesickness and his longing for his wife, the lovely Matryona. . . .

One day a prominent propagandist arrived from Petersburg. His name was Vassili Rublyov, and he was as spiteful as they make them. He put it to them:

"Well, brothers, how long are you going to let them make fools of you, how long are you going to do nothing but show your teeth at meetings? Kerenski has sold you to the bosses long ago. They'll let you shoot off your mouths a little longer, and then the counter-revolution will knock your blocks off. You must get rid of Kolchak before it's too late, and take the fleet into your own worker and peasant hands."

The next day a wireless message was broadcast from one of the battleships: "Disarm the whole of the commanding staff." A few officers shot themselves, the rest gave up their arms. Kolchak himself, on his flagship, gave the order to pipe all hands on deck. The sailors laughed, but obeyed. Admiral Kolchak stood on his bridge in the full-dress uniform of an admiral.

"Sailors," he shouted in a cracked, high-pitched voice, "an irrevocable misfortune has happened: enemies of the people, secret agents of the Germans, have disarmed your officers. What silly fools could really believe in a counter-revolutionary plot of the officers? And besides, I must say . . . there is no such thing in the world as counter-revolution."

At this point the admiral began to pace up and down the bridge rattling his sword:

"I regard what has happened in the first place as a personal insult to myself as senior officer of this fleet," he shouted, "and naturally I can and will no longer command it. I shall immediately send a telegram to the Government that I am leaving the fleet and going away. I've had enough!"

Semyon saw the admiral grip his gilded sword with both hands, try to unbuckle it without success, then jerk it off, his lips blue with rage.

"In my place every decent officer would do the same!"

He raised the sword and flung it into the sea. But even this historical gesture made not the slightest impression on the sailors.

After that big things began to happen in the fleet. The glass fell to 'hurricane'. The sailors, welded closely together by the crowded life on board ship, healthy, daring and skilled men who had seen foreign seas and lands, more advanced than the rank and file of the army and feeling more vividly the impenetrable barrier between the forecastle and the ward-room—these sailors were an easily inflammable force. The revolution hastened to make good use of it. With all the unexpended passion of their hearts they threw themselves into the thick of the battle; and by so doing roused to action the forces of the enemy which until then had been undecided and hesitating, had been merely waiting and mustering their forces.

Semyon was too busy now to think of his home and of his wife. In October the fine words were finished and the rifles began to speak. The enemy was everywhere; death was rampant in every covert glance of fear and hate. From the Baltic to the Pacific, from the White Sea to the Black, Russia was in the throes of a confused and ominous upheaval. Semyon shouldered his rifle and set out to fight 'the hydra of counter-revolution'.

Roshchin and Katia, with their bundles and tea-kettle, pushed their way through the crowds at the station. Swept along by a human stream, they passed the threatening bayonets at the barrier and wandered along the main street of Rostov.

Only six weeks ago the flower of Petersburg society had been strolling here from shop to shop. The pavements were gay with guardsmen's caps, spurs jingled, much French was spoken and dainty ladies hid their little noses from the damp cold in costly furs. With incredible frivolity they had gathered here thinking merely to pass the winter and then return to Petersburg to their own houses with their respectable doorkeepers, their pillared halls, their carpets and flaming log fires. Oh, Petrograd! But things would surely get put right in the end. The dainty ladies were certainly not to blame for anything that had happened.

But the great stage-manager had clapped his hands, and everything had vanished as if on a revolving stage. The setting changed. The streets of Rostov were deserted. The shops were boarded up, the glass panes pierced by bullets. The ladies hid away their furs and wrapped themselves in shawls. A small section of the officers fled with Kornilov; the rest, with the speed of a quick-change artist, turned themselves into harmless citizens, into actors, music-hall

singers, dance instructors and the like. . . . The February wind blew heaps of litter along the pavements.

"Yes, we have come too late," said Roshchin. He walked along with his eyes on the ground. It seemed to him that the body of Russia was being broken up into a thousand fragments. The single dome covering the empire had been smashed to atoms. The people were turning into a herd; history, the great past, was disappearing like the cloudy gauze curtains of a stage illusion. The naked, scorching desert was laid bare—and in it were graves, graves and more graves. . . . The end of Russia. He felt that something within himself, something he had known to be the immutable hub of his life was being shattered and was stabbling him with its sharp splinters. He stumbled along in Katia's wake. "Rostov has fallen, Kornilov's army, the last drifting fragment of Russia, will be destroyed to-morrow if not to-day, and then—a bullet in the head."

They wandered about at random. Roshchin remembered the addresses of some of the officers of his own division. But perhaps they had fled or been shot? If so, then—it would be death in the street for Katia and him. He looked at Katia. She was walking along serenely and modestly in her short cloth jacket and her Orenburg shawl, her sweet face with its great grey eyes naïvely turning to look at the damaged signs and broken shop-windows, the corners of her mouth almost smiling. "Can it be that she does not understand the horror of it all? What all-forgiving tolerance is this?"

A group of unarmed soldiers stood at a street corner; one of them, a pock-marked fellow with a black eye, holding a greyish loaf of bread under his arm, was slowly tearing off bit after bit of crust and pensively chewing it.

"You can't make out who is in power here, the Soviets or somebody else," said another soldier who was carrying a wooden box with a pair of well-worn felt boots tied to it. The one who was eating replied:

"Power is Comrade Broinitski. If we can get through to him and he gives us a train, we can go home. Otherwise we'll rot here in Rostov."

"What is he? What rank?"

"Military commissar or something. . . ."

Approaching the soldiers, Roshchin asked them how to get to the address he wanted. One of them answered with an unfriendly scowl:

"We are strangers ourselves."

Another soldier said:

"This is a bad time for an officer to come to Rostov."

Katia immediately plucked at her husband's sleeve and they crossed over to the other side of the street. There, on a broken bench under a bare tree, sat an old man in a shabby fur coat and a straw hat. His bristly chin rested on the crook of his stick; he was trembling all over and tears were streaming from his closed eyes down his sunken cheeks.

Katia's face twitched. Roshchin took her by the sleeve:

"Come on, let's go; one can't be sorry for every one of them."

They wandered about for a long time in the dirty and neglected streets, and finally found the address they were seeking. Entering the house, they saw a short-legged, thick-set man with a skull as bare as an egg. He wore the quilted jerkin of a Russian private soldier, spattered with something all over. In his hands was a pot, from which he turned his face away because of the vile smell of it. This was Roshchin's messmate, Lieutenant-Colonel Tetkin. He put the pot on the ground and kissed Roshchin, then clicked his heels and shook hands with Katia.

"I know, I know, you needn't explain. I'll fix you up. Only you will have

to live in one room. To make up for that you will have a cupboard with a mirror and a rubber-tree in a pot. My wife is a native of this place. In the beginning we lived there"—he pointed to a brick-built two-storey house—"and now we have moved to this place"—he pointed to the tumble-down wooden outhouse—"as befits proletarians. And I, as you see, make this stuff, boot-polish. I have also registered with the labour exchange as unemployed. . . . If the neighbours don't carry tales we shall manage somehow. We are Russians, we're used to trouble."

He laughed out loud, opening his large mouth wide and showing a fine row of teeth. Then he said thoughtfully: "Yes, it's all very strange," and wiped his skull with his hand, smearing it with boot-polish.

His wife, small and thickset, like her husband, welcomed the guests in a sing-song voice, but her brown eyes showed that she was not very pleased. Katia and Roshchin were quartered in a little room with a low ceiling and torn wall-paper. In one corner there was, just as Tetkin had said, a mean little cupboard and on it a mirror turned to the wall, a rubber-tree and an iron bedstead.

"We turned the mirror to the wall as a precautionary measure, as it is valuable, you know," said Tetkin. "Otherwise, when they come to make a search they immediately smash the glass. They can't bear to see their own image." He laughed again and wiped the top of his head. "To tell the truth, I can understand them: everything is being broken up and here is a mirror—of course they want to smash it."

His wife laid the table; the cloth was clean, but the forks were rusty and the plates chipped—the best set had evidently been hidden away. Roshchin and Katia ate the smoked fish, white bread, scrambled eggs and bacon with keen pleasure. Tetkin bustled about, and heaped up their plates again and again. His wife clasped her plump hands on her breast and complained of the life they were leading:

"Such disgusting conditions everywhere, such oppression, it's like the seven plagues of Egypt, it really is. I haven't been out of the house for months. . . . If only these Bolsheviks were driven out at last. . . . What are people saying about it in Petrograd? Will they be done for soon?"

"Now, now, better be careful," Tetkin said nervously. "You know that such talk won't earn you a medal nowadays, Sophia Ivanovna."

"And I am not going to hold my tongue! Let them shoot me!" Sophia Ivanovna glared and clasped her hands tighter on her breast. "Our Tsar will come back, so he will. . . ." To her husband, her breast heaving: "You are the only one who doesn't see what is going on. . . ."

Tetkin frowned shamefacedly. When his wife got up and flung out of the room he said in a whisper:

"Never mind her, she is a good sport, and a splendid housewife, but all these events, you know—they have almost turned her head. . . ." He looked at Katia, flushed with her tea, and at Roshchin, who was rolling a cigarette. "Yes, Vadim Petrovich, it's not simple, all this. . . . One must go slow . . . and be very careful. . . . I get about a lot, and meet a lot of people, so I see a lot. I often go to Bataisk, on the other side of the river. The people who live there are mostly poor—working men they are. Are they bandits, Vadim Petrovich? No, they are humiliated, oppressed human beings. How they waited for the Soviets to come! For God's sake, don't run away with the idea that I am a Bolshevik or something" (he pressed his broad hairy hands to his breast with an imploring gesture, as if apologizing.) "Haughty and inefficient

rulers abandoned Rostov to the Soviets. . . . You ought to have seen what was going on here under General Kaledin. . . . On Garden Street, you know, the Guards officers swaggered along, insolent and overbearing. . . . 'We'll chase the riff-raff back to their holes,' was what they said. But the riff-raff is the whole Russian people . . . and it is resisting, it doesn't want to go back to its holes. I was in Novocherkassk in December. You remember the guardhouse on the main street there—a little empire-style building, it may have been put there by Ataman Platov himself under Alexander I. If I close my eyes, Vadim Petrovich, I can still see the steps leading to the entrance dripping with blood. . . . I walked past there and heard a terrible noise, shrieks you know, as if a human being was being tortured to death. In broad daylight, in the centre of the capital city of the Don province. I went nearer. There, round the guardhouse, I saw a crowd, Cossacks, but on foot. They said nothing, only looked on. Under the colonnade an execution was in progress—as a warning to the inhabitants. Working men were led out two by two from the cells. They had been arrested for sympathy with the Bolsheviks. You understand, for 'sympathy' only. Their arms were twisted and tied to the pillars, and four sturdy Cossacks started beating them with knouts on the back and buttocks. The knouts whistled, the shirts and pants flew in shreds, the flesh in lumps, and the blood poured out on the steps like in a slaughter-house. . . . I am not easily staggered . . . but I was staggered then. . . . They screamed so horribly —a man doesn't cry out like that with mere physical pain. . . ."

Roshchin listened with his eyes on the table: the fingers holding his cigarette were trembling. Tetkin was following the outline of a mustard stain on the table-cloth with his finger:

"Well, General Kaledin is dead, the flower of the Cossack nobility lies buried in the hollow behind the town—the blood on the steps called for vengeance. . . . Now the poor men are in power. . . . Personally it is all the same to me, whether I make this boot-polish or do something else. . . . I came back alive from the world war and hold only one thing dear—the breath of life. . . . Excuse the figure of speech, I read so many books in the trenches that I got into the way of using metaphors. . . . My point of view is"—he glanced towards the door and lowered his voice—"I accept any order of things if I see the people happy. . . . I am not a Bolshevik, Vadim Petrovich, understand that"—again he pressed his hands to his breast—"I want nothing for myself except a loaf of bread, a pinch of tobacco and the possibility of sincere relations with my fellow-men." He laughed a short, embarrassed laugh. "But the trouble is that in our town even the workers are grumbling, not to mention the middle class. . . . Have you heard of Comrade Broinitski, the military commissar? My advice is, if you see him tearing along in his car, run for cover. He appeared from nowhere immediately after the town was taken. If anybody dares to raise an objection he goes off the deep end: 'Comrade Lenin himself has a very high opinion of me, I will send a personal wire to Comrade Lenin!' he roars. . . . He surrounded himself with gangsters; requisitions and shootings occur every day. At night his men strip anybody they meet. He behaves like a bandit. . . . What does it mean? What happens to the requisitioned things? . . . And, you know, the revolutionary committee can do nothing about it. They are afraid of him. . . . I can't believe that he is a man with ideals. . . . He does the proletarian ideals more harm than good. . . ." At this point Tetkin felt that he had gone too far, and turned away, sniffed, and again, this time without speaking, pressed his hands to his chest.

"I am at a loss to understand you, lieutenant-colonel," Roshchin said coldly.

"All these Broinitskis and the like are precisely what the Soviets are, the genuine twenty-four carat article. . . . Our business is not to try and justify them, but to fight them for all we are worth. . . ."

"For whose sake, sir?" Tetkin asked quickly.

"For the sake of our great Russia, lieutenant-colonel.

"And what is that, sir? Excuse me, I want to ask a stupid question: Russia, but which Russia, whose notion of Russia? I would like to know precisely whose? Of the upper-class society in Petrograd? That is one side, sir. . . . Or of the fusilier regiment in which we both served, and which died the death of heroes, on the barbed wire? Or of the Moscow Chamber of Commerce—do you remember when Ryabushinski in the Bolshoy Theatre sobbed about our Great Russia? That is yet a third side. Or is it the conception of the working man whose outlook on this Great Russia is through the window of a filthy pub on a holiday? Or of the hundred million muzhiks who . . ."

"Why, damn you . . .!" Katia quickly squeezed his hand under the table. "Excuse me, lieutenant-colonel. Up to now I had a notion that Russia was a stretch of territory extending to one-sixth of the globe and inhabited by a people with a great history. . . . Perhaps according to the Bolsheviks this is not so. . . . I beg your pardon. . . ." He laughed bitterly, hardly able to control his irritation.

"No, that is so, sir. . . . I am proud of it. . . . And I myself am quite satisfied when I read a history of the Russian Empire. . . . But the hundred million muzhiks don't read books and are not proud. They want to have their own history, and that not in the past but in the future. . . . A history in which they get enough to eat. . . . There is nothing you can do about that. . . . On top of that they have now got a leader—the industrial working class. And the workers go even farther than the muzhiks, they dream of making world history, so to speak. . . . There's nothing you can do about that either. . . . You accuse me of being a Bolshevik, Vadim Petrovich. . . . What I accuse myself of is being detached . . . and that is a heinous sin. But my excuse is that I am exhausted by years of life in the trenches. In time I hope to become more active, and then perhaps I shall plead guilty to your accusation!"

Tetkin had lost his temper, his scalp was fiery red and covered with little drops of sweat. Roshchin was buttoning his coat hurriedly, fumbling unsuccessfully with the buttons. Katia looked with a frown from her husband to Tetkin and back again. After an oppressive silence Roshchin said:

"I am sorry to lose a comrade-in-arms. Thank you very much for your hospitality. . . ."

He left the room without shaking hands with Tetkin. Katia, always so silent and gentle, Katia, the lamb-like, clenched her hands and almost shouted:

"Vadim, please wait." He turned round with raised eyebrows. "Vadim, you are wrong. . . ." Her cheeks flushed scarlet. "In such a mood, with such feelings, it is impossible to live. . . ."

"Oh, is it?" Roshchin rejoined menacingly. "My congratulations!"

"Vadim, you never consulted me, I never insisted that you should. I did not interfere with your affairs. . . . I trusted you . . . But understand, Vadim darling, that what you are thinking is all wrong. . . . I wanted to tell you long ago. . . . You must do something quite different. . . . Not what you came here for. . . . You must first try to understand. . . . And only if you are so convinced that you can take it on your conscience—only then can you go to kill men. . . ." She dropped her hands, but wrung them under the table in her agitation.

"Katia!" Roshchin cried angrily as if he had been struck. "Please stop that!"

"No! I am saying this because I love you. . . . You must not be a murderer, you must not, you must not. . . ."

Tetkin, afraid to speak directly to either of them, said over and over again in a whisper:

"Friends, my friends, let us talk it over, let us clear this up. . . ."

But this was no longer possible. All the rage that had been seething in Roshchin during recent months boiled over in a burst of hate. He stood near the door, his neck craning forward, his teeth bared.

"I hate you . . ." hissed Roshchin, "to hell with you and your love. . . . Go and find yourself a Jew . . . a Bolshevik. . . . To hell! . . ."

He made a sound in his throat, the same tormenting sound that he had made in his sleep in the train. It looked as if he had lost control of himself completely, and Tetkin moved closer to protect Katia. But Roshchin slowly narrowed his eyes and left the room.

Semyon Krassilnikov sat frowning on his hospital bed and listened to his brother Alexey. The presents sent by Matryona—bacon, chicken and cakes—were lying at the foot of the bed. Semyon did not even look at them. He was thin, and his unshaven face had an unhealthy colour. His hair was matted through lying in bed so long, and stuck up round his head; his legs, in yellow cotton drawers, looked wasted. He was tossing a red egg from one hand to the other. His brother Alexey, his beard golden against his tanned face, was sitting on a stool stretching out his legs encased in a fine pair of boots. He was talking amiably, caressingly, yet with every word he said Semyon's heart grew colder and colder.

"The line of the peasants is one thing, brother, the line of the industrial workers another," Alexey said. "In our village, at the mine, the workers used to go down the pit; now the pit is flooded, the engines are not working, the engineers have all gone. But a man must eat, mustn't he? So the miners went and joined the Red Guards to a man. Their interest is to extend the revolution. Is that so or isn't it? But our peasant revolution only goes down two feet in the black soil. All we want is to plough, to sow, to harvest. Agreed? So if we all go off to fight who is going to do the work? The women? They have their hands full if they just attend to the cattle. And the land likes attention, wants to be well looked after. That is the position, brother. Come home with me, you'll soon get better on home food. We have plenty of land now. What we want is hands. The harrowing, the sowing, the harvesting—do you think I can manage it all, with only Matryona to help me? We have eighteen pigs now and I am buying another cow. We need hands everywhere."

Alexey pulled a tobacco pouch from the pocket of his coat. Semyon refused a smoke with a shake of his head. "It hurts my chest." Alexey went on persuading his brother to return to the village. He ran his hands over the presents, took up a huge cake and touched his brother:

"You must eat this, Matryona put more than a pound of butter into this one alone."

"Look here, Alexey," Semyon said, "I don't know what to say to you. Go home? Yes, with pleasure, until my wound is healed. But I won't stay at home to help with the farming, don't count on me for that."

"Is that so? May I ask why?"

"I can't, Alexey . . ." Semyon said with visible effort. "You must understand—I can't. I can't forget my wound. . . . I can't forget how they did my mates to death." He turned to the window, shivered and looked out, his eyes burning with rage. "You must put yourself in my position. I can think of nothing else—those beasts . . ." He whispered something inaudible, then said louder, crushing the egg in his fist, "I shan't have any peace or quiet while those vermin drink our blood. . . ."

Alexey Krassilnikov shook his head. Then he spat, put out the stub of his cigarette with his fingers, looked round for somewhere to put it, and threw it under the bed.

"Well, Semyon, you know best, and it is a good cause. . . . Come along home to get well again. I shan't keep you when you want to go."

Hardly had Alexey Krassilnikov left the hospital when he met a man from his own village, Ignat, a first-line soldier. They stopped and exchanged greetings, asking each other how they were getting on. Ignat said that he had a job as a driver under the Executive Committee of the Soviet.

"Come along with me to the 'Sun' and then to my house. I'll put you up for the night," Ignat said. "There's a scrap on in the 'Sun' to-day. Have you heard of Broinitski, the military commissar? Well, I don't know how he can get away with it again this time. His lads are so bright that the whole town is in an uproar. Yesterday in broad daylight they killed two schoolboys on that corner there, and all for nothing, just carved them up with their sabres. . . . I stood over there near the post, it turned my stomach to see it. . . ."

While they were talking, they reached the 'Sun' picture house. There was a crowd round it. They pushed their way through and found a place near the orchestra. On the stage was a table at which sat the committee—a round-faced woman wearing a military greatcoat, a scowling soldier with his head in a dirty lint bandage, a wizened old working man in spectacles and two young fellows in army shirts. A very pale man with a stoop and a shock of jet-black hair was walking up and down in front of the table like an animal in a cage. He was speaking and making monotonous gestures with one weak little fist, while his other hand gripped a bundle of newspaper cuttings. Ignat whispered to Alexey Krassilnikov:

"That's a school-teacher, he's in the Soviet."

". . . we cannot be silent . . . we must not be silent. . . . Is what we have in this town, comrades, the Soviet power you have fought for? No, comrades . . . what we have is tyranny. . . . A despotism worse than that of the Tsar. . . . The homes of peaceful citizens are broken into. . . . One can't go out into the street after dark without being stripped. . . . Children are being killed in the streets. . . . I have spoken of this in the Executive Committee, I have spoken of it in the Revolutionary Committee. . . . They are powerless to help. . . . The military commissar is covering all these crimes with his unlimited powers. . . . Comrades!" He thumped his chest with the bundle of newspaper cuttings. "Why do they kill children? Let them shoot us. . . . But why do they kill children?"

His last words were drowned in the excited hum of the hall. The audience exchanged glances of fear and agitation. The speaker sat down at the platform table and hid his wrinkled face behind a newspaper. The soldier with the bandaged head, who was in the chair, threw a glance into the wings:

"The next speaker is Comrade Trifonov, commanding the Red Guard. . . ."

The whole hall clapped applause. They clapped with their hands held high

in the air. A few female voices at the back of the hall cried: "Speak up, Comrade Trifonov!"—and a bass voice barked: "Give us Trifonov!"

It was at this moment that Alexey noticed a tall, slim man in a smart leather jacket, with belt and cross-straps, standing in a negligent attitude at the front of the hall with his back to the public. This man suddenly straightened up and turned to face the hall. His clear, steely, protruding eyes slid contemptuously and coldly from face to face—and in an instant hands were lowered, heads were drawn back into shoulders and the applause ceased. A man walked towards the exit, bending forward in haste.

The man with the steely eyes laughed contemptuously. With an abrupt gesture he shifted the holster strapped over his jacket. His face was long and clean-shaven like an actor's. He turned to the stage again, putting both his elbows on the edge of the orchestra railings. Ignat poked Krassilnikov in the ribs:

"That's Broinitski. He can scare any man by just looking at him like that."

Trifonov, commander of the Red Guard, came from the wings, clattering loudly across the platform with his heavy boots. A strip of red bunting was tied round the sleeve of his frieze coat. He held his cap in his hand; a strip of red cloth was tied round it too. He was thick-set and heavily-built, and very calm. He walked slowly to the edge of the stage. The grey skin on his shaven crown twitched. The shadows cast by his brows hid his eyes. He lifted a hand, and the hall grew quiet. With his bent palm he pointed to Broinitski, standing below him:

"Well, comrades, you see here Comrade Broinitski, military commissar. Very good. Let him answer a question. And if he does not want to answer, we will make him. . . ."

"Oh, will you?" said Broinitski menacingly from below.

"Yes, we will make you. We represent the government of workers and peasants, and it is your duty to obey. The times are such, comrades, that it is not easy to get things clear all at once. . . . Times are troubled. . . . And everybody knows that scum always swims on the surface. . . . From that we draw the conclusion that all kinds of rogues are trying to take advantage of the revolution. . . ."

"Meaning whom? . . . Names, please!" Broinitski shouted with a strong Polish accent.

"We'll come to the names in time, there's no hurry. Comrades, by the blood and efforts of the workers and peasants we have cleared the town of Rostov of the White Guard bands. . . . Soviet power is firmly established on the Don. Then why do complaints come from every side? The workers are restless, the Red Guards are dissatisfied. The troop-trains mutiny—they ask us why we let them rot on the sidings. . . . We have just heard here the voice of a representative of the intelligentsia"—he indicated the first speaker with his palm. "What is all this? It looks as if everyone was discontented with Soviet power. People say, 'Why do you rob us, why are you drunk, why do you kill children?' The preceding speaker even suggested that *he* should be shot. . . ."—Laughter and applause. "Comrades, Soviet power commits no robberies and does not murder children. But all sorts of scum who hang on to the skirts of Soviet power do commit robberies and murder children. . . . And by doing so they undermine faith in Soviet power and put a deadly weapon into the hands of our enemies. . . ." He paused; there was a dead silence, and hundreds held their breath. "So I want to ask Comrade Broinitski a question. . . . Does he know that two lads were murdered here yesterday?"

An icy voice spoke from below:

"Yes, I know."

"Very good. And does he know of the nightly robberies and of the drunken orgies in the Palace Hotel? Does he know what has become of the requisitioned property? You are silent, Comrade Broinitski? No need for you to answer. We know. The requisitioned goods go to pay for the drinks of a gang of bandits." (A murmur rose from the hall. Trifonov raised his hand.) "And there is another thing we have found out. . . . That no one gave you any powers in Rostov, that your credentials are forgeries and that your talk about Moscow and about Comrade Lenin are impudent lies. . . ."

Broinitski was now standing up straight. His handsome pale face was twitching. Suddenly he dashed to the side exit where a fair-haired young soldier stood staring with his mouth open. Broinitski took him by the coat, and pointing to Trifonov, shouted in a terrible voice:

"Shoot him down, the bastard!"

The soldier lad's face contorted, he swung his rifle from his shoulder. Trifonov stood motionless, his legs firmly planted apart; he only bent his head—like a bull lowering its horns. Leaping hurriedly down from the wings a workingman suddenly appeared beside Trifonov, rapidly clicking the breech of his rifle. After him came another, and another, until the whole stage was black with jackets and coats. Bayonets rattled as the men jostled each other. The chairman got up on to the table, and pushing up the bandage which had slipped down over his eyes he shouted hoarsely:

"Comrades, no panic, please! Nothing unforeseen has happened. Close the door at the back there. Comrade Trifonov is quite safe. The next speaker is Comrade Broinitski."

But Broinitski had disappeared. Only the fair-haired soldier, with the rifle, still stood near the orchestra, his mouth open with astonishment.

CHAPTER III

NEAR THE VILLAGE of Korenovskaya the White army met with very serious resistance. Still, the village was taken, although not without heavy losses. Here they got confirmation of an event which up to then had been concealed from the army, and which the Whites had feared more than anything else in the world: a few days earlier Yekaterinodar, capital city of the Kuban, main objective of the campaign, haven of rest and base for the future struggle, had surrendered to the Bolsheviks without resistance. The Kuban Volunteers commanded by Pokrovski, the Ataman himself and the Parliament of the Kuban, had fled, no one knew whither. Thus suddenly, only three days' march away from the objective of the campaign, the White army found itself in a blind alley.

Hopes of a friendly reception in the Kuban also proved illusory. The Cossacks had obviously decided to paddle their own canoes without any assistance from the 'cadets'. The farms on the line of march of the army were deserted, ambushes waited in every village, machine-guns guarded the crest of every hill. What could the Volunteer Army hope for now? Could they expect that the Cossacks of the Kuban, whose origins lay in the Ukraine, or the Circassians who remembered only too well their ancient feud with the Russians, or the troop-trains of the Caucasian army, happily stranded in the rich Kuban, would suddenly join hands with the brass-hatted officers and callow cadets and sing "For Kornilov,

for our country, for our faith we'll give a mighty cheer!" For this empty, hackneyed formula, as worn as a Tsarist penny, was all the Volunteer Army had to offer the rich Cossack villagers—who were thinking rather of forming their own independent Cossack republic—or the newcomers in the Kuban, who were rallying to the red flag and fighting for equal rights to the land in the Don and Kuban, for equal fishing rights and for village Soviets.

True, the army had with it in its baggage-train a famous propagandist, Able-Seaman Fedor Batkin, a bow-legged, dark-skinned man in a sailor's jumper and cap with black-and-yellow ribbon. Often enough the officers had tried to shoot him as he rode with the baggage, regarding him as a Jew and a Red son-of-a-bitch. But he was under the personal protection of Kornilov, who thought that the notorious sailor Batkin could make up single-handed for all the ideological deficiencies of his army. When the commander-in-chief was scheduled to make a public speech in the villages, he sent Batkin on to precede him, and Batkin craftily explained to the villagers that Kornilov was defending the revolution and that the Bolsheviks on the contrary were counter-revolutionaries who had sold out to the Germans.

There was no possibility of surrender for that army—in those times no prisoners were taken. If they scattered, they would be killed one by one. There was some talk of breaking through to the Volga across the Astrakhan steppe and escaping to Siberia. But General Kornilov insisted that they should go on to Yekaterinodar and carry it by storm. From Korenevskaya the army turned south and after heavy fighting at Ust-Lab forced the river Kuban, swollen and turbulent at this time of the year. The army marched without a halt, dragging along in its wake a baggage-train full of wounded men. But it was still formidable enough, and struck such blows that each time the ring of Red troops broke and allowed it to pass.

The army moved towards Maikop to deceive the enemy, but when it reached the village of Filippovskaya it crossed the river Belaya and turned sharply west to the rear of Yekaterinodar. Here, beyond the Belaya, they were attacked in a narrow gorge by superior Red forces. The position seemed hopeless. Rifles were issued to the not too seriously wounded. The battle lasted all day. The Reds bombarded the White forces with shells from above, and raked the fords and the train with machine-gun fire, giving the Whites no chance for a charge. But in the evening, when the battered White units with a last desperate effort launched a counter-attack, the Reds retreated from the heights and left the road open to the west for Kornilov's army to pass. What had happened before happened again: the victory went to those who had the military experience and who knew that the stake in the game was their life.

All night the surrounding villages were blazing. The weather grew worse, and a north wind sprang up. The sky was overcast with impenetrable masses of cloud. Rain started to fall, and then poured in rivers all night. On March 15th the army, approaching Novo-Dmitrovskaya, saw before it an unbroken surface of water and liquid mud. A few knolls here and there, scored with the deep ruts of cart-tracks, were lost in the mist hanging over the ground. The men waded up to their knees in water, the carts and gun-carriages sank in up to the axles. A wet snow was falling, and the wind increased to a blizzard.

Roshchin got out of the goods van in which he had been travelling, eased the rifle and pack on his shoulder and looked round. Groups of soldiers belonging to the Varnavski regiment were on the permanent way, talking

excitedly. Some of them were wearing greatcoats, some short sheepskin coats, some town overcoats belted with a piece of string. Many had machine-gun ammunition belts, hand-grenades and revolvers. Some had cloth caps and others army fur caps, and one man a bowler hat, taken perhaps from the head of a profiteer. Ragged boots, felt overshoes and feet wrapped in rags were kneading the sticky mud. Bayonets clanged and men shouted: "Come along, boys, we're having a meeting! We'll settle this business for ourselves! They've been driving us to slaughter long enough!"

The excitement was due to the rumours—exaggerated as such rumours always are—that Red units had suffered a defeat near Filippovskaya. The men shouted: "Kornilov has fifty thousand cadets and we are sent to be slaughtered regiment by regiment. . . . We are betrayed, lads! . . . Where's the commander?"

The soldiers assembled in the station enclosure, immediately beyond which lay the steppe, shrouded in a curtain of rain. The doors of the goods vans rolled back with a crash, and wild-eyed men with rifles in their hands jumped out and ran eagerly to join the crowd. The wind whistled in the bare branches of the tall poplars and rooks circled cawing overhead. The speakers used a hatch covering the entrance to a cellar as a platform, and shouted with outstretched fists: "Comrades, why do the Kornilov bandits beat us every time? . . . Why were the cadets allowed to get through to Yekaterinodar? . . . What's the idea? . . . Let the commander answer!"

A thousand voices roared: "Answer!" with such force that the startled rooks took wing and flew right up into the clouds. Roshchin was standing on the roof of the station building and could see the crumpled cap of the commander float up through the mass of swaying heads, on to the hatch. The commander's bony, clean-shaven face was pale and resolute, and his eyes were fixed in a stony stare. Roshchin recognized an old acquaintance: it was Sergei Sergeyevich Sapozhkov.

Long ago, before the war, Sapozhkov had been the spokesman of the group 'Men of the Future', and had ranted against the old conception of morals. He used to appear in bourgeois society with alluring little drawings on his cheeks, and dressed in a frock-coat of bright green bombazine. When the war broke out he enlisted as a volunteer in the cavalry, and was known as a dare-devil patrol rider and swashbuckler. He was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant, and then suddenly, in the beginning of 1917, he was arrested, taken to Petrograd, and sentenced to be shot on a charge of belonging to a secret organization. Liberated by the February revolution, he was for a time the spokesman of the Anarchists in the Soviet of soldiers' delegates. Then he completely vanished and turned up again in October, taking part in the storming of the Winter Palace. He was one of the first regular officers to take service in the Red Guards.

Slipping and scrambling, he climbed up on to the hatch, and pulling in his chin and sticking his thumbs into his belt, looked down on the thousand faces turned up to him.

"You want to know, you noisy devils, why those scoundrels with the golden shoulder-straps are beating you? It's because of all this shouting and disorder," he said scornfully and not very loudly, but so that everyone could hear him. "You not only chew over the commander-in-chief's orders—you not only kick up rows over everything . . . but now some of you are also trying to start a panic. . . . Who told you that our side was routed at Filippovskaya? Who said that Kornilov was allowed to get through to Yekaterinodar by

treachery? It was you, was it?" He quickly jerked his thumb from his belt, and in an instant was holding a pistol in his hand and pointing it at one of the men in front of him. "All right, come out here, let's have a little chat. Oh, so it wasn't you at all? . . ." He reluctantly stuffed the pistol back into his breeches pocket. "You think I'm such a fool and such a greenhorn that I don't understand what you are grousing about? . . . Well, I'll tell you if you like. Here——" He pointed again with his finger. "Fedka Ivolgin is one, Pavlenkov another, Terenti Dulia one more . . . they have received a secret report by private cable that at Afipskaya station there are some cisterns full of booze. . . ." There was a burst of laughter. (Roshchin laughed wryly: 'He's wriggling out of it, the scoundrel, the buffoon.') "Of course, things being as they are, these boys of ours are just dying for a little scrap. Of course the commander-in-chief is a traitor. . . . God forbid that any cisterns of spirits should fall into the hands of the Kornilov officers. . . . What a blow, what a loss to the Republic!" A shout of laughter again sent the rooks winging up into the sky. "I consider the incident closed. . . . Now, comrades, I will read to you the latest official report."

Sapozhkov pulled some papers from his pocket and began to read them out in a loud voice. Roshchin turned away, went through the booking hall to the platform, sat down on a broken bench and rolled himself a cigarette. A week ago he had joined up under a false name with a Red Guard unit drafted to the front. He had made some sort of arrangement for Katia. After the bitter dispute at Tetkin's tea-table, Roshchin had wandered aimlessly about the town all the rest of the day; then he had gone back at night to Katia and, avoiding her eyes in order not to soften, had said sternly:

"You'll stay here a month or two—I don't know how long. . . . You will, I hope, fully share his convictions. . . . At the first opportunity I will pay for your board. But I insist that you tell him immediately, please, that it will not be for nothing, and that I don't want his charity. . . . Well, and I shall be away for some time."

Hardly moving her lips Katia asked:

"To the front?"

"Really, you know, that is entirely my own affair. . . ."

So the arrangement made for Katia was a bad business altogether. Last July, on the embankment, where the bridges and colonnades of Vassilyevski Island were reflected in the mirror-smooth Neva, on that day that had receded so far into the distance, Roshchin had said to Katia, sitting by the river on a granite seat:

"Wars come to an end, revolutions pass, empires disappear, only your heart will remain unchanged for ever." And now they had parted as enemies in a dirty courtyard. Katia had not deserved such a farewell. But what did it matter? When all Russia was going under.

Roshchin's plan was simple enough: to get through to the battle zone with a Red Guard unit and then desert to the Whites at the first opportunity. He was personally known to General Markov and Colonel Nezhentsev in the White army. He could give them valuable information concerning the position and strength of the Red troops. But the main thing was—he would feel at home, he would be able to discard this cursed mask, to breathe freely at last and spit into the faces of these 'gullible fools, these savages let loose', a bloody clot of hate together with a clip of bullets.

"The commander was quite right about the liquor. We make a lot of noise. We kicked up a hell of a row, but how we are going to sort things out? Makes

one think, mate," said a soldier, who sat down on the bench near Roshchin and asked him for tobacco. He was an insignificant-looking man in a sheepskin coat torn at the armholes and across the back. "I'm old-fashioned, you see, I like to smoke a pipe," he said, and turned his cunning, weatherbeaten face, his dusty beard and his slits of eyes towards Roshchin. "I had a job with a shop-keeper in Nizhni, in the warehouses, and I got into the habit of smoking a pipe. I've been soldiering since 1914, got so used to it I can't stop. There's a warrior for you, mate, by Christ!"

"Yes, high time for you to have a rest," Roshchin said unwillingly.

"A rest! What a hope! You, my lad, are not a poor man, I can see that. No, I shan't stop fighting. I've had to stand too much from the burzhuys. I've been in service since I was sixteen, always as a watchman. Once I was promoted to be coachman to the Vassenkovs, merchants—perhaps you've heard of them—but I spoilt a pair of greys for them, good horses they were too—I did it on purpose, I'm telling you straight. So they sacked me, of course. My son was killed in the war, my wife died long ago. Tell me now, for whom shall I fight: for the Soviets or for the bourgeoisie? I get enough to eat, I've got good boots—I took them off a dead man last week, they're watertight, just look at them, best leather they are. . . . All there is to do is just shoot a bit, charge with the bayonet and then sit down and eat. And after all, my lad, we're doing it for ourselves. Poor men, have-nots, with hardly a shirt to their backs, in whose houses sorrow and misfortune sit at table with the family—that's our army. But the Constituent Assembly—I saw them elected in Nizhni—they're nothing but intellectuals and merciless old men."

"You've learnt to speechify all right, haven't you?" Roschin said with a covert glance at his companion. His name was Kvashin, and they had been travelling together for a week in the same truck and had slept side by side in the upper berths.

Kvashin was nicknamed 'Grandad' in the truck. Whenever he could, he got hold of a newspaper, clipped a golden pince-nez on his nose and began to read under his breath. "This pair of spectacles was given me in Samara, by order. It was made for Bashkirov, the millionaire, but now it is I who am using it," he used to say.

"True, I've learnt it," he answered Roshchin. "I never miss a meeting, and whenever we come to a station I read all the decrees and ordinances and everything. Our proletarian strength lies in speech. What good are we if we don't talk, and don't understand? No better than cattle! . . ."

He took out a paper, unfolded it, unhurriedly adjusted his pince-nez and began to read the editorial, pronouncing the words as if they were not written in Russian at all:

"Remember that you are fighting for the happiness of all those who toil and are exploited, you are fighting for the right to build a better, more just life . . ."

Roshchin turned away and did not notice that Kvashin, as he said these words, was staring at him fixedly over his pince-nez.

"Yes, lad, it's clear that you are one of these rich people," said Kvashin in quite a different voice. "You don't like my reading at all. You aren't a spy by any chance, eh?"

From Afipskaya the Varnavski regiment moved in marching order towards Novo-Dmitrovskaya. In the midnight darkness the wind whistled in the stubble of bayonets, tore at the men's clothes, and slashed their faces with

icy sleet. Their feet broke through the crust of snow and sank deep into viscid mud. Through the noise of the wind they heard shouts: "Halt there! Not so fast! Where d'you think you're going, you devils?"

The wind blew right through their threadbare coats to the marrow of their bones, and chilled them to the heart. Roshchin thought: "I mustn't fall—they'd trample me to death. . . ." Worst of all were the stoppages and shouts from the front ranks. It was obvious that they had lost their way and were straying along the edge of a chasm or watercourse. "I can't go on, mates," a voice sobbed in farewell. "Was that Kvashin who said that? He was here beside me all the time. He spotted me, he did not believe a word I said," thought Roshchin. He had had all the trouble in the world to get rid of Kvashin last night. There was another stoppage in front. Roshchin bumped into somebody's frozen back. Standing there with his numbed hands thrust into the sleeves of his coat, his head hanging on his breast, he thought: "For four years now I have been conquering weariness, have marched thousands of miles only to kill other men. That is very important and significant. I have hurt and deserted Katia—that is less important. To-morrow, or the day after, I shall cross the lines and begin to kill these very men, these Russians, in just such a snowstorm. Strange. Katia said that I was decent and kind-hearted. Strange, very strange."

He noted these thoughts of his with curiosity. But the train of thought broke off. "That's bad," he thought, "very bad. I'm beginning to freeze to death. These are the last, the most important ideas. That means that in a minute I shall lie down in the snow . . ."

But the frozen back in front of him swayed and moved forward. Roshchin swayed and moved forward after it. His boots began to sink in up to the knees: they weighed a stone, and he could hardly drag them out of the clay. The wind brought back the fragment of a shout: "The river, boys!" . . . Somebody swore loudly. The wind whistled in the bayonets all the time, engendering strange thoughts. Vague, bent figures staggered past Roshchin. With an effort he dragged his feet out of the mud and trudged on.

The rapid torrent cut a thick black line through the snow. Beyond it everything was hidden behind a curtain of flying snow. Their feet slipped on the steep bank. The dark water rushed along fiercely. Men shouted: "The bridge is flooded. . . ."

"Shall we go back?"

"Who said that about going back? You there. . . . You want to go back, eh?"

"Let go of me, let go of me."

"Give him one with the butt!"

"Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Oh!"

A cone of light from an electric torch shone out below, on the edge of the water, illuminating the broken stump, of the bridge railing and the arch of the bridge, flooded with grey, rushing water. The torch was waved high in a zig-zag and went out. A hoarse, terrible voice roared:

"Company. . . . Cross over. . . . Rifles and ammunition on your heads! Don't crowd! Double file. March!"

Holding his rifle up at arm's length, Roshchin waded up to his waist in water which, cold as it was, was yet less cold than the wind. It beat strongly against his right side, pushing him and trying to wash him away into the grey-white darkness, into the swirl beyond. His feet kept slipping, too numbed to feel the boards of the broken bridge.

The Varnavski regiment had been ordered to Novo-Dmitrovskaya to reinforce the local contingents. The whole population of the village was busy digging trenches—they were fortifying the village hall and other houses, and posting machine-guns. The heavy guns were brought into position in Grigoryevskaya, a village farther south. The Second North Caucasian regiment was in the same sector; it was commanded by Dmitri Shelest, who had pursued the Volunteer Army all the way from Rostov. Farther west in Afipskaya there was a garrison, artillery and armoured trains. The forces of the Reds were scattered, an impermissible thing in this season of breaking frost and impassable roads.

Towards evening a Cossack, covered with wet snow and mud, galloped up to headquarters and pulled up his steaming horse before the door.

"Where is the Comrade Commander?"

Several men ran out into the porch, hastily buttoning up their overcoats. Sapozhkov, in a short calvary fur coat and with a pipe in his mouth, pushed through them and came out.

"I am the commander."

Breathing hard and bending forward on his saddle, the Cossack said:

"Our advance line is broken. I was the only one to get away."

"Anything else?"

"Only that you can expect Kornilov here to-night. He is coming with his whole army. . . ."

The men on the porch exchanged silent glances. Among them were Communists who were organizing the defence of the village. Sapozhkov sniffed, drew in his chin and said: "I am ready. How about you, comrades?" The Cossack dismounted and told the story of how it all happened, how the line was attacked and cut down by the Circassians of General Erdeli's brigade. Soon a dense crowd of soldiers, Cossack women and children gathered round the porch and listened in silence.

Roshchin was there too. During the night he had slept well and dried his clothes in a warm and stuffy hut, where about fifty Red Guards had slept huddled up among foot-rags and wet clothes. The hostess, a young Cossack woman, had baked bread at dawn, cut it up herself and given each man a chunk:

"Do your best, boys, don't let the officers into our village."

The soldiers answered the handsome young woman:

"Don't you be afraid, my dear. . . . All you need be afraid of is . . ." and out came a word which made her lift a hand as if to hit them. . . .

"Oh, listen to these rakes! That's all they think about even when, maybe, they're about to die. . . ."

Last night's march had left Roshchin with rheumatic pains and a dull ache in his whole body. But his decision was unshaken. In the morning he had been digging up the frozen earth in the orchards and afterwards he had been detailed to carry boxes of cartridges from the munition carts into the village headquarters. For dinner they were issued with a mug of spirits and the fiery liquid cured Roshchin's aches and loosened his joints. He decided not to put it off but to end the business that very day.

He loitered near the porch on the watch for a chance to volunteer for some duty that would take him to the front line. He had made provision for everything, down to a captain's shoulder-straps sewn into the breast of his tunic. It all happened as he expected. The second in command, a gloomy, bearded sailor in a sweater and fur cap, came out of the house and called for volunteers for a dangerous job.

"Messmates," he said in a metallic voice, "any of you here care to take a chance?"

An hour later Roshchin left the village as one of a detail of fifty men. They went out into the plain, shrouded by a dense mist. Night was coming on. The snowfall had ceased, and the gusty wind slashed their faces with huge drops of rain. They struggled on through the trackless water, as unbroken as the surface of a lake, towards the hills where they were to dig trenches.

The wet morning mist was torn by a flash. Then by a bang. Then a whine rose and died away. . . . And then on the hills and on the banks of the river shots began to crackle in staccato rhythm. . . . Another flash, a rifle shot and in front, in the mist, the chatter of a machine-gun.

It was Kornilov's army approaching. His vanguard had already crossed the river. It seemed to Roshchin that he could distinguish two or three human figures running from bush to bush and crouching so low as almost to touch the water. His heart beat fast. He craned forward out of the little trench dug into the sloping bank above the river.

The turbulent, leaden stream was swirling high between its banks; the half-submerged bridge showed in the middle of the river, to the left. About two dozen indistinct figures climbed on to it from the water and ran forward, crouching as they ran. The shooting from the hills grew more and more erratic and more and more frequent: it was the bridge and the river that were being fired at. Quite near, on the other bank, the long flame of a field-gun flared out. Shrapnel burst over the shallow trench in which Roshchin was sitting. From the crest of the hill little grey and black figures poured down to the ford, running, sliding on their backs, falling. All had officers' shoulder-straps, visible as tiny dots on their shoulders.

Another shell burst and another roar deafened the trench. "Oh . . . oh . . . boys," wailed a voice. Then through the crackling of shots someone yelled:

"They're surrounding us! Get back, mates!"

Roshchin felt that this was the moment for which he had been waiting so long. He quickly threw himself down on his face and did not move. The idea flitted through his mind: "I haven't got a handkerchief—I must stick a piece of my shirt on the bayonet and shout, in French, it absolutely must be in French."

Somebody fell heavily across his back, slumped down, threw his arms round Roshchin's neck, and, breathing heavily, groped for his throat. Roshchin threw back his head and saw a face over his shoulder—a face covered with blood, with protruding bloodshot eyes and wide-open toothless mouth. It was Kvashin again. He repeated as if in a dream:

"You made the sign of the cross . . . you saw your own sort coming."

Roshchin attempted to shake him off his back; he got on his feet and rose to his full height, staggering. But Kvashin stuck to him like a leech. In the struggle Roshchin leant against the parapet of the trench and in his rage tore at Kvashin's stinking fur coat with his teeth. He felt that his knees and elbows were beginning to slip on the wet clay—and two paces away was a sheer drop.

"Let me go!" he snarled finally, but the earth gave way under him and the two men rolled down the bank together into the river.

The whole countryside echoed with the boom of gunfire, the earth trembled with the explosion of shells. The main forces of the White army were fording

the river. The fords were kept under fire by the artillery from Grigoryevskaya. The shells fell here and there on the snowy fields and into the river, raising shaggy columns of water.

The White infantry crossed the river on horseback, two men on each horse. The horses shied at the water, and were prodded from behind with bayonets. From the steep bank, trampled into mud by men and horses, a gun-carriage galloped down into the river. Rolling from side to side, the gun disappeared in the water. The gunners lashed their horses and the gaunt beasts dragged the gun on to the arch of the half-submerged bridge. The water was boiling with shells falling to left and right of them. The horses reared and got entangled in their traces.

Down below, two-wheeled machine-gun carriers dashed into the river beside the bridge. Taking the water, they lost their footing. One was overturned and swept away, horses and all, its crew clinging to the wheels. A shell dropped from the sky into the tangled mass, and a high column of water squirted up, carrying with it pieces of wood and lumps of torn human flesh.

On the river bank a little bearded man in a brown frieze jacket and a white fur cap coming down over his ears was fidgeting about on a muddy pony. With knout raised in a gesture of menace, he shouted in a high-pitched arrogant tone. This was General Markov, in charge of fording operations. Fantastic tales were told of his fearless courage.

Markov was one of those who, having fought through the world war, were for ever poisoned by its carrion-stench. When he sat his horse with his field-glasses to his eye, or when he advanced, sabre in hand with a storming column, commanding men in the terrible game of war, he must have experienced an incomparable rapture. He would have fought, if need be, with anyone and for anything. All his brain held were a few stereotyped phrases about God, the Tsar and Russia. For him they were the absolute truth and he demanded nothing else. Like a chess-player deciding on a move, he saw of the whole vastness of the world only the movement of the pieces on the squares of his board.

He was ambitious, haughty and peremptory with his subordinates. In the army he was feared and many men nursed grudges against this man who regarded other men merely as pieces on a chessboard. But he had courage and was skilled in recognizing those critical minutes in a battle when a commander who makes a decisive move must challenge death and walk out in front of the line with a swagger-cane, under a withering fire.

The fording operation went on one hour, two hours, three hours. The river and the banks were again shrouded in a snowstorm. The wind grew stronger as it shifted to the north. It was rapidly growing colder. Roshchin, lying with a sprained shoulder under the steep bank, had long ceased to hope that he would attract somebody's attention. In spite of the pain in his shoulder he got out the shoulder-straps from their hiding-place and pinned them on to his tunic as best he could. He wrenched the five-pointed star from his cap. The river had washed away Kvashin's corpse long ago. Wounded men were lying about everywhere.

The army, after crossing the river, advanced without a pause towards Novo-Dmitrovskaya, fighting all the time. The clothes froze on the men and covered them with a shell of ice. The earth stiffened, and rang with the impact of wheels and hoofs. Frozen ruts and tree-stumps pierced the men's boots and tore at their feet. Here and there a wounded man got up and crawled up the pitted bank, slipping and stumbling. Roshchin felt that his feet were freezing to the ground. Clenching his teeth with the pain of his injured shoulder, back

and knee, he got up and followed the long line of the wounded. No one paid any attention to him. It was very difficult to get up on to the top of the bluff. Up there the blizzard struck them in the face, and the whistling of bullets blended with the whistling of the wind. A man who was stumbling along in front of him, in a frozen trench-coat and high pointed hood, suddenly darted out to the left and fell. Roshchin only bent lower to resist the wind.

A horse lay by the way, covered with snow and stretching a hind leg up to the sky. Two bony jades stood near an abandoned gun, their heads hanging, their flanks frozen together and their backs covered with a little mound of snow. In front the machine-guns were rattling more and more menacingly and insistently. The White army was fighting to pass the night in warm huts and not stay out dying of cold in the blizzard-swept open field.

The attack was met by artillery fire from Grigoryevskaya. But the rest of the Red forces and the reserves in Afipskaya were not thrown into the battle. The Second Caucasian regiment was ordered into action only when the Varnavski regiment was already surrounded, and was being exterminated in a hand-to-hand fight in the streets of the village. The Second Caucasians marched ten miles through swamps and bogs, lost an entire company by drowning and frost, but, taking the Whites in the rear, gave all that was left of the Varnavski regiment the opportunity of breaking through the surrounding ring.

Similar disorder and confusion reigned on the White side. The Kuban detachment commanded by Pokrovski, which ought to have attacked the village from the south, refused to go through the swamps. Pokrovski himself, promoted to the rank of general by the Kuban government and not by the Tsar, had been cruelly insulted in a war council meeting by General Alexeyev, who said to him with brass-hat arrogance: "Oh, that will do, Colonel, or whatever it is you call yourself." Pokrovski's answer to this 'colonel' was that his troops did not go through the swamp. General Erdeli's cavalry, sent out to take the village from the north, were held up by a gully turned into a torrent by the melting snows, and returned in the night to the ford.

The first to reach Novo-Dmitrievskaya was a regiment consisting of officers only. Half-frozen and frenzied with rage, the officers, all experienced campaigners, smelt the smoke of cow-dung fires and newly baked bread and saw the warm lights in the windows; without waiting for reinforcements they crept forward over the frozen mixture of snow and mud and through the water covered with a thin sheet of ice. They had already reached the outskirts of the village when the defenders saw them and opened fire with machine-guns. The officers made a bayonet charge. Each of them knew exactly what to do every second of the time. It was a battle of commissioned ranks against a mob of unskilfully led and undisciplined privates.

The officers broke into the village and engaged in a hand-to-hand fight in the streets with the men of the Varnavski regiment and with partisans. In the darkness and confusion the machine-gunners were bayoneted at their guns or torn to pieces by grenades. The Whites were continually receiving reinforcements. The Reds, surrounded on every side, began to retreat to the market-place, where the Revolutionary Committee had its headquarters.

Shots were fired from every bit of cover, there was fighting on every street corner. A gun-carriage galloped up in a whirlwind of mud and turned at the corner of the market-place. The gun was trained on the façade of the Red headquarters and began to spit shells at it—bang—crash! Bang—crash! Men sprang out of the windows of the house, and yellow smoke poured out after them, as box after box of ammunition was exploded by the fire of the artillery.

It was at this moment that the Second Caucasian regiment opened fire on the attackers from the east, in their rear. The men of the Varnavski regiment, hearing the firing in the rear of the enemy, picked up heart, and Sapozhkov, who had completely lost his voice through shouting and swearing, snatched the regimental banner out of its baize cover and waving it ran across the market-place to the tall poplars where the Whites were thickest. Men of the Varnavski regiment emerged from behind doors and fences, jumped up from the ground, came running from every direction with bayonets levelled. They swept away all resistance, broke through the Whites, and left the village in a western direction.

Roshchin spent the night in an abandoned wagon, having first dragged two rigid corpses out of it, and crept into the hay. All night long the guns boomed and shells burst over the village. In the morning the baggage-train of the White army, which had spent the night in a neighbouring village, arrived in Novo-Dmitrievskaya. Roshchin got out of his cart and followed them. He was so excited that he felt no pain.

The wind, though still strong, was now blowing from the east and scattering the clouds of snow and rain. About eight o'clock in the morning a patch of clear spring sky showed blue through the ragged storm-clouds sailing overhead. The sunlight fell down to the earth in hot rays, straight as swords. The snow was melting. The steppe grew darker; emerald strips of meadow and yellow strips of fallow field emerged from under the snow. Water glistened and rivulets ran in the ruts of the roads. Dead bodies, high and dry, stared with lifeless eyes into the blue.

"Look! If that isn't Roshchin, by Christ! Roshchin, how on earth did you get there?"—somebody shouted from a passing cart. Three men were sitting in the dirty, dilapidated cart driven by a surly Cossack in a shabby fur jacket; their arms were in slings and their heads were bandaged. One of them, a tall, gaunt fellow with a long neck sticking far out of his collar, greeted Roshchin with rapid little nods of his head, and his parched mouth opened in a grin. Roshchin hardly recognized in him an officer of his own regiment, Vaska Teplov, once a rosy-cheeked and merry young fellow fond of fun, drink and women. He silently went up to the cart, put his arms round Teplov's neck and kissed him.

"Tell me, Teplov, where am I to report? Who is your chief of staff? My shoulder-straps are only pinned on. I deserted over the line only yesterday. . . ."

"Get in. Stop, pull up, you scoundrel!" Teplov shouted at the driver. The Cossack muttered something but pulled up. Roshchin climbed into a corner of the cart and let his legs hang over the side. It was pure bliss—to ride like this in the hot sun. Tersely, as if reporting to a superior officer, he described his experiences from the time he left Moscow. Teplov said, with a dry cough:

"I'll go with you myself to see General Romanovski. . . . As soon as we get to the village and have had something to eat, I'll fix everything for you in two shakes. You're a funny fellow! So you intended to go straight to the Commander and report: 'I deserted yesterday from the Red bands and have the honour to report myself.' . . . You don't know our people. They wouldn't have taken you to the chief of staff, they'd have stuck a bayonet into you on the spot. . . . I say, look there," he said pointing to a tall corpse in an officer's trench-coat. "Why, it's Mishka, Baron Korf, sprawling there. . . . You remember him, don't you? He was a lad! Listen, have you got any cigarettes? What a morning! Listen, friend of my heart, the day after to-morrow we shall

reach Yekaterinodar, sleep our fill in a real bed, and then—on the boulevards! . . . Music, girls, beer! . . ." He laughed loudly and his laugh was like a sob. His face was that of a very sick man, with the skin drawn taut over the bones and the red patches of fever on his cheeks.

"That's how it will be all over Russia: music, girls and beer. We'll have a rest in Yekaterinodar—a month or so, clean ourselves up and then what-ho for the pay-off. Ho-ho. Now we know what's what, brother mine. . . . We have bought the right to boss the Russian Empire, bought it with our blood. We'll show 'em . . . the swine! Look at that one sprawling there"—he indicated the edge of a ditch where a man in a sheepskin cap was lying a-sprawl in an unnatural posture—"that must be one of these Dantons of theirs . . ."

A clumsy wickerwork buggy overtook the cart. In it were two men, plastered with mud, wearing peasant top-coats with unbuttoned collars and wet fur caps. One of them was a huge fat man with a dark bloated face; the other had a long cigarette-holder drooping from the corner of a loose mouth, his beard was unkempt and he had puffy bags under his eyes.

"Saviours of the fatherland," Teplov said, cocking his chin at them. "We suffer them for lack of something better. Might come in useful."

"That big one is Guchkov, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh, and he'll be shot, all in good time, don't worry. . . . And the other fellow, with the holder in his mouth, is Boris Suvorin, another beauty. . . . One can't make him out: he seems to want a restoration of the monarchy, but then again not quite; he wobbles about, but he's a very good journalist . . . we shan't shoot *him*."

The cart was entering the village. The huts and houses behind the fences seemed deserted. The embers of a fire were still smoking. Dead bodies lay about, half-buried in mud. Scattered shots rang out now and then—the inhabitants, found in cellars or hay-lofts, were being shot. The baggage-train was standing in the market-place in complete confusion. Wounded men were groaning and screaming. Worried, exhausted nurses in soiled military coats threaded their way through the maze of carts. Howls as of a beast in pain came from one of the homesteads, mingled with the thud of whips. Horsemen galloped to and fro. A group of cadets were drinking milk from a tin pail in the shadow of a fence.

The sun shone ever brighter and hotter in the wind-swept blue sky. From a gallows improvised between a tree and a telegraph pole seven long corpses swung in the wind, their necks twisted, their unshod feet stretching their toes towards the ground. They were Communists from the Revolutionary Committee and the Revolutionary Tribunal.

It was the last day of General Kornilov's campaign. Mounted scouts, shading their eyes with their hands, had seen the golden domes of Yekaterinodar lift out of the morning mist on the far side of the Kuban river.

The task of the cavalry advanced striking force was to drive the Reds from the only ferry crossing the Kuban in that region, near the village of Yelisavetinskaya. This was another of Kornilovs cunning stratagems. The enemy might expect him from the south, from Novo-Dmitrievskaya or from the south-west along the railway line from Novorossisk to Yekaterinodar. But Artomonov, the commander of the Red forces, and his staff could hardly expect that Kornilov in attacking the city would choose an extremely risky outflanking movement to the west, involving the crossing of the turbulent Kuban river with his whole army solely by means of the ferry, a tactical move excluding all possibility of a retreat. But the cunning old fox Kornilov picked

precisely this road, least defended of all, giving his forces two or three days of respite from fighting and leading his army straight into the gardens and orchards of Yekaterinodar.

They remedied their lack of ammunition when they took the railway station of Afipskaya, where they blew up the line in order to safeguard themselves against the fire of armoured trains. Only one of the Red armoured trains succeeded in reaching the flank of the attackers with its machine-guns. The Whites were advancing up to their knees in spring floods, and when the line of bullets and the little fountains they raised reached the men they dived into the water head foremost, like ducks, then came up again and ran forward. The garrison of Afipskaya put up a desperate resistance, but they were doomed because they did nothing but defend themselves while the enemy was advancing.

Slowly the snake-like firing line of the Volunteer Army crept forward, surrounded Afipskaya and pressed on. The blue plain, with trees, hayricks and cottage roofs rising from the water, was bathed in sunlight and shadows of spring clouds flitted across the sheets of water. Kornilov rode through this mirage of mirrors at the head of his staff officers. He wore a short fur coat with soft shoulder-straps showing the insignia of a general, with binoculars and map-case slung over his shoulder. He sent out orders by dispatch-riders who galloped away on their ponies, churning up jets of water. At one time the general came under fire, and General Romanovski who was riding at his side was slightly wounded.

When the village was outflanked from the west and the general attack began, Kornilov set spurs to his horse and cantered straight towards Afipskaya. He had no doubts about his success. Along the railway line, among the chain of goods vans, between the station buildings and store-rooms, in the barracks, everywhere, the advancing White units were exterminating the Reds. This was the last, but the most bloody victory of the Volunteer Army.

Colonel Nezhentsev, apple-cheeked, young-looking and excited, ran towards Kornilov, jumping over dead bodies that lay in his way and reported, the glasses of his pince-nez gleaming as he drew himself up: "Afipskaya is taken, Your Excellency."

Kornilov impatiently cut him short: "Any ammunition taken?"

"Yes, sir, seven hundred shells and four truckloads of small-arms ammunition."

"Thank God!" Kornilov crossed himself with a broad gesture, scratching the mud-plastered surface of his coat with the nail of his little finger as he did so. "Thank God . . ."

With his eyes, Nezhentsev indicated a crowd of shock troopers standing in a bunch in front of the railway station. They belonged to a special regiment of desperate cut-throats and wore a tricolour triangle on their sleeves as a badge. They stood leaning on their rifles in the attitudes of men who had just climbed a steep mountain. Their faces were frozen into weary masks of fury, their hands and faces were smeared with blood, their eyes shifted restlessly.

"They have saved the situation twice and were the first to break through, Your Excellency!"

"Good!" Kornilov gave his horse the spurs and approached the shock-troopers at a full gallop, although the distance was short. They saw him coming and immediately sprang to life and lined up. Kornilov reined in his horse to make it rear—in the attitude usually seen in equestrian statues—threw his head back and shouted jerkily:

"Thanks, my eagles! I thank you for a brilliant feat of arms and once more for having seized the ammunition! My congratulations!"

Having received fresh stocks of ammunition, the army began to cross the Kuban river by a ferry that had been seized by an advance force of cavalry. At this time the army numbered nine thousand bayonets and sabres and four thousand horses. The river crossing took up three days. A vast camp of men, carts and guns sprawled on both sides of it. Ragged freshly-washed shirts hung from cart-shafts and flapped in the spring breeze. Fires smoked. Hobbled horses grazed in the meadows. Boisterous officers climbed on top of the carts and tried to distinguish through their binoculars the gardens and church domes of the promised city showing in the blue distance.

"My word! This must have been how the crusaders approached Jerusalem . . ."

"There, gentlemen, they found nice little Jewesses, and we shall find nice little proletarianesses!"

"We'll decreee the nationalization of women, ha-ha!"

"To the baths, to the boulevards and beer, gentlemen!"

From Yekaterinodar no attempt was made to hinder the crossing. Only patrols fired now and then. But the Reds were not giving up without a fight. Trenches were dug in a hurry by the whole population, including women and children. Barbed-wire entanglements were put up, guns brought into position. Troop-trains full of Black Sea sailors arrived bringing more guns and shells. The commissars made speeches in the units about the class character of the Kornilov volunteers and said that they were backed up by the "merciless world bourgeoisie which we, comrades, must fight to the end," and swore that they would die, but never give up Yekaterinodar.

On the fourth day the White army moved on to storm the Kuban capital.

The furiously advancing columns of the Whites were met with a barrage from the Red batteries posted near the railway station and the wharves on the river Kuban. But the broken ground, the gardens, dry ditches, fences, and water-courses permitted the attackers to approach the town without excessive losses. Then the battle began.

Near the so-called 'Farmhouse', a little white house standing on the edge of a grove of still leafless poplars on the high bank of the river Kuban, the Reds offered stubborn resistance. They were driven out, but came on again in dense swarms, rushed the machine-guns and took the farmhouse, but were driven out a second time one hour later by the Kuban scouts of Colonel Ulagai.

General Kornilov immediately established himself in the farmhouse, with his staff. From here he could see, as on a map, the straight streets of Yekaterinodar, its tall white houses, its gardens and cemeteries, its railway station and, in front of the whole panorama, the long irregular line of trenches. It was a clear windy spring day. Little puffs of smoke rose into the air on all sides, and the whole bright countryside thundered with the deafening roar of ceaseless gun-fire. Neither the Whites nor the Reds were sparing of their lives that day.

In the little white house a corner room was set aside for General Kornilov, and a table, an armchair and field-telephones put in. The General immediately went in, sat down at the table, unfolded a map and immersed himself in plans for the next move in the game which had just begun. One of his two aides, Lieutenant Dolinski, stood near the door, the other, Khan Khadzhiev, at the telephone.

The Kalmuk face of the Commander-in-Chief, with its high cheekbones, wrinkled skin and stiff crop of grizzled hair, was dark and grim. His dry little hand, with its gold signet-ring, lay lifeless on the map. Alone and against the counsels of Alexeyev, Denikin and all the other generals, he, Kornilov, had decided to attempt this assault on Yekaterinodar, and now, at the end of the first day, his self-confidence was shaken. But he would not have admitted this even to himself.

He had made two mistakes. One was that he had left one-third of his forces under General Markov at the ford to guard the baggage-train, and for this reason the first thrust at Yekaterinodar had not been powerful enough and had not brought the expected results; the Reds had stood their ground, held their trenches, dug themselves in, and were evidently intending to stay there. The second mistake was that in Yekaterinodar the White army applied the same tactics, only suitable for a punitive expedition, which they had applied in the villages on their way. The town was invested from every side—on the right flank by the infantry and scouts along the river down to the leather factories, and on the left by an outflanking movement of Erdeli's cavalry—the idea being to close every outlet and then to deal with the defenders and inhabitants as 'bandits' and 'slaves in revolt' by hanging, shooting and flogging. In this instance, as in every other, such tactics caused the defenders to prefer death in battle to death on the gallows. "Kornilov is going to slaughter us all," the people in the streets shouted. Women, girls, children, old and young, all ran to the trenches under a hail of bullets to bring the soldiers jugs of milk, cakes and pies:

"Eat, sailor-boys, eat, soldier-boys, dear comrades, make a stand, and save us!" And the population continued to carry both food and ammunition to the defenders in the trenches, although mounted men were galloping about the town all the time and especially after nightfall, shouting: "Clear the streets! Go home! Lights out!"

Thus the first day closed to the advantage of the Reds. The Whites lost three of their best commanding officers during the day in addition to about a thousand other officers and men, and had used up over one-third of their available ammunition without appreciable results.

Meanwhile battered trains full of sailors, guns and shells were continually arriving from Novorossisk, breaking through a curtain of fire. The men ran from the railway carriages straight to the trenches. Their losses were enormous because of their lack of leaders and their tendency to crowd together.

Kornilov sat all day in his corner room in the farmhouse poring over the map. He was aware by now that there was no other way out for them—they had to take the town or die. He even contemplated suicide. . . . The army under his sole command was melting away like toy soldiers thrown into a furnace. But this fearless and unintelligent man was as obstinate as a mule.

A score of wounded officers were sitting sunning themselves on the church porch in the village of Yelisavetinskaya. They could hear the thunder of guns coming with varying intensity from the east. But here the sky was cloudless over the belfry shattered by a shell. Pigeons fluttered to and fro over their heads. The open space in front of the church was empty, the cottages deserted, their windows broken. At the base of a fence along which the buds of lilac bushes were just opening, lay a corpse, half-buried in earth and covered with flies.

The officers on the porch were talking in low tones.

"I was engaged to a girl, a lovely, charming girl—I remember her in a pink pleated dress. I have no idea where she is now.

"Ye-es, love. . . . It seems quite strange . . . and yet one yearns for the

old life. . . . Clean women, you yourself well dressed, sitting quietly in a restaurant. . . . It was a good life, gentlemen . . ."

"Say, our friend the Bolshevik here is a bit high, isn't he? Perhaps we ought to plant him . . ."

"Why bother? The flies will look after him . . ."

"Shsh! Just a moment, gentlemen. That was another barrage . . ."

"It's the end, believe me. Our fellows are in the town by now."

There was a silence and all turned to look towards the east where smoke and dust hung in a grey and yellow cloud over Yekaterinodar. A red-headed officer, gaunt as a skeleton, limped up to the group, sat down and said:

"Vaika conked out just now. . . . Cried for his mother all the time . . ."

A sharp voice cut in from the porch above:

"Love! Young ladies in pleated dresses! Rot! Baggage-train talk! My wife was better-looking than your pleated fiancée, but I sent her to blazes for all that" (the speaker snorted angrily), "and anyway, it's all lies, you never had a fiancée. . . . The pistol in your holster and the sabre at your side is all the family you'll ever have . . ."

Roshchin, on sentry-go with a rifle in front of the church, stopped and looked at the speaker. He was young, with a boyish, snub-nosed face and fair hair. There were two sharp folds at the corners of his mouth and his eyes were old and heavy, of a clouded blue colour—the eyes of a sleepless murderer. Roshchin leant on his rifle—his leg was still painful—and thoughts crowded in on him which he did not want. The memory of Katia, whom he had deserted, rose in his mind with a sharp pang of regret. He pressed his forehead to the cold steel of his bayonet. "Enough of this weakness, all that is done with. . . ." He shook himself and began to pace to and fro again on the young grass. "This is no time for regrets, no time for love . . ."

At the foot of a brick wall, pierced by shells, stood a sturdy thick-set man and looked, frowning, through a pair of binoculars. His smart leather tunic, leather breeches and soft, high Cossack boots were splashed with dried mud. From time to time bullets smacked against the brick wall near him.

Lower down, about a hundred paces away, stood a battery of guns and some green ammunition boxes. The horses had only just been unharnessed and they were standing beside the fence with their heads low and dropping smoking dung. The gun-crew sat on the gun-carriages, smoking and laughing. Now and then they glanced towards their commander—the man with the binoculars. Nearly all of them were sailors with the exception of three ragged, bearded gunners.

The horizon was veiled in dust and smoke, hiding the lines of trenches, the folds in the ground, the gardens and everything else. The point the commander was watching appeared indistinctly and disappeared again from his field of vision. But now a sailor in nothing but trousers and singlet appeared from behind the house where the commander was standing. The sailor was tanned to a copper colour. He slipped cat-like along the wall, sat down at the feet of the man with the binoculars, clasped his muscular, much-tattooed hands around his knees and narrowed his eyes that were russet-coloured like those of a hawk.

"Right on the bank, those two trees—see them?" he said in an undertone.

"Yes."

"Beyond them a little house, a white wall, see those?"

"Yes."

"That's the farmhouse."

"I know."

"Bit farther right—look—a copse. And a road over there."

"I see."

"From four o'clock mounted men have been coming and going and a lot of others. Two carriages arrived in the evening. That's where the old devil has quartered himself, nowhere else."

"All right, go down," the thick-set man said peremptorily, and called to the captain of the battery. A bearded man in a sheepskin coat climbed up the slope to him. The thick-set man handed him the binoculars and the gunner looked through them a good while.

"That's the Slyussariov Manor—they call it the farmhouse," he said in a husky voice. "Distance, four thousand two hundred and fifty yards. We can do the Slyussariov place."

He returned the binoculars, scrambled down clumsily, drew in his chin and barked:

"Battery, make ready! Distance. . . . Number One. . . . Fire . . .!

The guns boomed with throats of thunder, the barrels ran back on their mountings, tongues of flame shot out, and heavy shells flew away, muttering of death on their way, towards the high bank of the Kuban river, towards two bare poplars, where Kornilov was sitting grimly studying his maps.

On the second day of the siege General Markov and his regiment of officers were ordered forward. Roshchin was with this unit as a private. They advanced seven versts within an hour, covering the distance to Yekaterinodar at the double, over ground even more thickly covered with the smoke of the bombardment than the previous day. General Markov marched at the head of the column, his fur cap at the back of his head and his padded jacket unbuttoned. Turning to the staff colonel, who was hard put to it to keep up with him, he cursed and swore at the Superior Command.

"They tore the brigade to bits, and made me blank-blank stay in the rear there with the train. If they had let me do the job with the whole brigade we should have blank-blank been in Yekaterinodar long ago."

He jumped a ditch, turned round to face the column scattered over the green field, raised his knout and gave a word of command. The veins on his neck stood out with the exertion of shouting.

The officers, out of breath, their stern faces covered with sweat, wheeled as if round an axle and spread out into four zigzag lines across the field in full view of the town. Roshchin found himself near Markov. They all stood still a few minutes, and examined their rifles and ammunition bags and shifted them round to a handy position.

Markov shouted another order, drawing out the vowels. The advance guard stepped forward and marched away at the double in front of the others. The main force moved along in their wake.

From the left, along a badly-rutted road, a long procession of carts ambled to meet them. Wounded men were being taken to the rear. Some of the wounded were walking, with heads bent. Others were sitting on the edges of the roadside ditches or on overturned carts. There seemed to be no end to the carts and wounded—there was a whole army of them.

A tall, stout man on a black horse overtook the regiment. He wore whiskers, a cap with red edgings and a well-cut tunic with the shoulder-straps of the army service corps. He shouted something cheerfully at General Markov, but the general turned away and made no reply. The stout man was Rodzianko, who

had asked to be allowed forward from the baggage train to see the assault on the town.

The regiment halted once more. A word of command came faintly from far away. Many of the men lit cigarettes. No one spoke. They were all looking in the direction where the advance guard was hidden among knolls and ditches. General Markov, swinging his knout, walked away towards a grove of tall poplars, where from among the trees, hardly touched as yet by green, jagged columns of smoke rose at short intervals, and branches of trees and lumps of earth were whirled high into the air.

They stood there for a long time. It was already five o'clock. From behind a copse a horseman came at a gallop bending forward over his horse's neck. Roshchin saw the pony, all in a lather, shy at the ditch and at first refuse to jump; then swish its tail and take the leap. The rider lost his cap. Dashing up to the regiment, he shouted:

"Attack! . . . Artillery barracks! . . . The general's in front . . . over there . . ."

He pointed with his hand to a hill where a few figures were to be discerned, one of them in a white fur cap.

The order was given:

"Forward, march!"

A lump rose in Roshchin's throat and his eyes went dry. It was a moment of rapture and fear; his body became immaterial, he wanted to run, to shout, to shoot, to stab. He wanted his heart to fill with blood in that instant of ecstasy, his heart to be a sacrifice.

The first line started to move forward. Roshchin was on the left flank. They reached the hill where General Markov was standing facing the regiment, his legs planted firmly apart.

"Forward, friends, forward!" he repeated, and his eyes, usually half-closed, now seemed wide open and terrible.

Then Roshchin saw the sharp dry stalks of the stubble, and everywhere between them, lying like sacks, on their faces or their sides, motionless men in soldiers' tunics, sailors' jumpers or officers' coats. He saw before him a low wall of stones and bare thorn-bushes. With his back to the wall sat a long-faced fellow in the quilted jerkin of a private soldier; he was incessantly opening and closing his mouth.

Roshchin leapt the wall and saw a wide road before him, on which little jets of dust were rapidly coming nearer. The Bolsheviks were sweeping the road with machine-gun fire to hold up the attack. He stopped, drew back, held his breath and looked round. Those of the attackers who had also jumped over the fence were all lying down. Roshchin lay down too and put his cheek to the rough earth. He forced himself with an effort to lift his head. The detachment was lying down. In front of them, across the field, about fifty paces away, ran the bank of a ditch. Roshchin jumped up and bending low, dashed to the bank, his heart thumping fiercely against his ribs. He fell into the sticky mud of the ditch. The whole unit followed suit, one by one. Some of them fell before they reached the ditch. Those who were lying in the ditch breathed hard. Above their heads the banks of the ditch were riddled by bullets.

But something had changed over there in front. Shells came whining towards the barracks from somewhere. The machine-gun fire slackened. The detachment got up with an effort and moved forward. Roshchin saw his own long reddish-black shadow sliding over the uneven surface of the field, bending and shortening and then again stretching out to God knows what length. He thought it strange that he was still alive and could even throw a shadow.

The firing from the direction of the barracks picked up again, but the thin line of attackers had already found cover in a deep gully about a hundred paces away. On the grey loam of its bottom Markov was pacing up and down. His eyes were terrible to see.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "a little breathing-space. Smoke if you like, and then—the last blow. It's nothing, a mere hundred paces in all. . . ."

Next to Roshchin a squat, bald officer was watching the rim of the ravine, where the bullets raised a curtain of dust. He stared and repeated the same foul word over and over again in a low voice. A few men lay down and covered their faces with their hands. One man crouched down, put his hand to his forehead, and vomited blood. Many paced up and down the bottom like hyenas in a cage. Then the order came: "Forward! Forward!" No one seemed to hear it. Roshchin tightened his belt with a jerk, took a grip on a bush and crawled up the side of the gully. The bush gave way and he slid back. Gritting his teeth, he climbed up again. At the top he saw General Markov squatting on his heels and shouting:

"To the attack! Forward!"

Roshchin saw Markov's ragged boots moving rapidly a few paces in front of him. Several men overtook them. The brick wall of the barracks shone in the light of the setting sun. The broken windows gleamed red. Tiny figures were running away from the barracks towards the little houses and gardens in the distance.

A group of civilians and soldiers were standing in the sandy yard of the artillery barracks. Their faces were pale and tense, with an expression of concentration; their eyes were fixed on the ground, and their hands hung down lifelessly.

In front of them stood a smaller group—officers—leaning on their rifles. They eyed the prisoners with the heavy looks of hatred. Both groups stood still and expectant; they were waiting for something. Suddenly an officer came out into the yard with a quick springy step. Roshchin recognized him: it was Captain von Mecke, the man with the eyes of a sleepless murderer. He shouted with obvious pleasure:

"All of them! The orders are: All of them. Gentlemen, ten of you please step forward."

Before the ten officers, clicking their rifles, could step forward, there was a movement among the prisoners. One of them, tall and deep-chested, pulled his cloth shirt over his head. Another, a civilian, consumptive and toothless, with a straight black moustache, shouted in a vibrant voice:

"Here, you parasites, drink our proletarian blood."

Two of the prisoners embraced. A hoarse voice began to sing out of tune: "Arise, ye starvelings. . . ." Ten officers nestled their rifle-butts into the hollow of their shoulders. Roshchin, sitting on a box, taking off his boots, suddenly felt that somebody was looking at him fixedly. He raised his head and saw a pair of eyes looking at him reproachfully, eyes with the agony of death in them, familiar, kindred grey eyes that he had known and loved. "Oh, my God!"

"Fire!"

The volley rang out, hasty and ragged. Groans and cries were heard. Roshchin bent down and wrapped a dirty foot-rag round his leg, which had been scratched by a bullet.

The second day did not bring victory for the Volunteer Army any more that the first. The artillery on the right flank had been taken; but in the centre they could make no headway at all, and the Kornilov regiment, fighting there, lost its commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Nezhentsev, a favourite of Kornilov. On the left flank Erdeli's cavalry was in full retreat. The Reds showed a hitherto unprecedented stubbornness, although their wounded were lying in nearly every house in Yekaterinodar. Many women and children had been killed near the trenches and in the streets. Had a capable and energetic commander been in the place of Avtonomov, a general assault of the Red forces would have inevitably overrun and annihilated the badly mauled, disorganized Volunteer army.

On the third day the Volunteer regiments, having been reinforced to some extent, returned to the attack and were again thrown back to their original positions. Many now threw away their rifles and went back to the baggage-train. The generals were despondent. Alexeyev came, inspected the positions, shook his head and went away again. But none of them dared to go to the Commander-in-Chief and tell him that the game was up and that even if they could by some miracle fight their way into Yekaterinodar, they would never be able to hold the town now.

Kornilov, after having kissed the dead forehead of his favourite officer, Nezhentsev, whose body had been brought back to the farmhouse on a peasant cart, did not open his mouth, and spoke to no one. Only once, when shrapnel burst right in front of the farmhouse and one of the bullets came in through the window and buried itself in the ceiling, did he gloomily indicate the bullet with a bony finger and for some reason told his aide, Khadzhiev, to keep it.

By the night preceding the fourth day it had become evident that the force of the attack had greatly decreased. General Kutepov, who had taken the place of the late Colonel Nezhentsev, was unable to induce the Kornilov regiment (the best regiment of the army) to leave its positions in the orchards and go forward. The troops fought half-heartedly. Erdeli's cavalry was still retreating. Markov, completely hoarse with shouting and cursing, was asleep on his feet with fatigue, and his officers were incapable of getting farther than the barracks.

At noon a council of war consisting of Generals Alexeyev, Romanovski, Markov, Bogayevski, Filimonov and Denikin met in Kornilov's quarters. Kornilov, his little silver head drawn in between his shoulders, was listening to the report being made by Romanovski:

"We have no ammunition for either the guns or the rifles. The Cossack volunteers are dispersing to their villages. All regiments are depleted, and their mood is one of despondency. Many men are leaving the front line without being wounded . . ." and so forth.

The generals were listening with their heads bent. Markov was asleep with his head on somebody's shoulder. In the semi-darkness of the closely-curtained room the face of Kornilov, with its high cheekbones, looked like that of a shrivelled mummy. He said in a dull voice:

"I gather, gentlemen, that the position is undoubtedly very difficult. I see no other way out than to take Yekaterinodar. I have decided to make an assault on the town to-morrow at dawn along our whole front. Kazanovich's regiment has been in reserve until now. I shall lead them myself to storm the town."

He sniffed suddenly and said no more. The other generals sat with bowed heads. General Denikin, stout and grizzled, with a little pointed beard, looking like a superannuated government clerk and suffering from bronchitis, exclaimed involuntarily: "Oh, my God!" fell into a fit of coughing and went to the door. Kornilov's black eyes flashed as they followed the general's progress. Then he listened to the objections of the others, stood up and dismissed the council. The decisive assault was fixed to take place on the first of April.

Half an hour later Denikin returned to the room. His breath was still coming with a wheeze. He sat down and said softly and soulfully:

"Excellency, will you permit me to ask you a question as one man to another?"

"Yes, go ahead."

"General, why are you so inflexible?"

Kornilov replied immediately, as if he had had the answer to this question prepared for a long time:

"There is no alternative. If we don't take Yekaterinodar I shall put a bullet through my brain."

With a finger, the nail on which was chewed down to the quick, Kornilov pointed to his temple.

"You can't do that!" Denikin raised his plump white hands and pressed them to his chest. "In the name of God, in the name of our mother country, General—who would lead the army? . . ."

"You, Excellency."

And Kornilov indicated by an impatient gesture that he considered the interview closed.

The morning of the thirty-first of March was hot and cloudless. Steam rose from the sprouting earth in waves. The muddy-yellow waters of the Kuban river flowed lazily between their high banks, undisturbed except for the splash of a leaping fish now and then. It was very quiet. At rare intervals only did the crack of a rifle, the boom of a distant gun or the whine of a passing shell break the silence. The men were resting before new bloody battles on the morrow.

Lieutenant Dolinski, General Kornilov's aide, was sitting smoking in the porch. He thought that it would be good to wash his shirt, drawers and socks . . . and that he could do with a bath. Even the birds were singing more cheerfully than usual in the copse. Dolinski raised his head and listened. A shell whined past and burst with an iron clang among the trees. The birds stopped singing. The aide threw the stub of his cigarette at a silly hen, which had escaped the soup-pot by some miracle, went back into the house and sat down near the door. He immediately sprang up again, however, and went into the half-darkened room where Kornilov was standing by the table pulling on his breeches.

"Isn't breakfast ready yet?" he asked in a low voice.

"It will be ready in a minute, Your Excellency. I've ordered it."

Kornilov sat down, put both elbows on the table, and rubbed the dry wrinkles of his forehead with his hand.

"I wanted to tell you something, lieutenant. . . . But I can't remember what it was, it's really too bad . . ."

The aide, standing in front of his chief, bent over the table, expecting an order. This low voice and this vagueness were so unlike the Commander-in-Chief that the aide felt alarmed.

Kornilov repeated: "It's too bad. . . . I shall remember presently; don't go, please. . . . I was just looking out of the window, what a lovely morning. . . . Oh, yes, what I wanted to say . . ."

He paused, and raised his head to listen. Dolinski, too, could now distinguish

the approaching ear-splitting whine of a shell, apparently just behind the curtains. The aide started back. There was a terrible crash, the air was rent with flame and blast, and the sprawling body of the Commander-in-Chief was flung headlong across the room.

Dolinski was hurled through the window. He sat on the grass with his lips quivering and flakes of whitewash all over him. Men came running from every side. . . .

A doctor was crouching beside a stretcher. On it lay Kornilov's body, covered to the waist with a Caucasian cape. A group of staff officers stood a few paces away. Between them and the stretcher hovered General Denikin, his wide-topped cap at an awkward angle on his head.

A minute ago Kornilov had still been breathing. His body showed no visible injuries except a little scratch on the temple. The doctor was not a sensitive person, but at this moment even he understood that he was the centre of attention now, and although he knew perfectly well that Kornilov was dead he went on examining the body with an air of importance.

Then he slowly rose to his feet, adjusted his spectacles and shook his head as if saying: "Unfortunately medical science is powerless here. . . ."

Denikin strode up to him and said in a subdued voice:

"Is there no hope?"

"Quite hopeless!" The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "He is gone."

Denikin jerked out a handkerchief and pressed it to his eyes. His shoulders heaved. His whole squat figure slackened. The group of staff officers drew nearer, their gaze no longer directed to the corpse but to the general. Denikin went down on his knees, made the sign of the cross over the waxen-yellow face of Kornilov, and kissed him on the forehead. Two officers helped the general to his feet again and a third said excitedly:

"Gentlemen, who will take command?"

"I, of course, I will take over," Denikin cried in a high vibrant voice. "General Kornilov made arrangements to that effect only yesterday. . . ."

That same night all White forces noiselessly abandoned their positions, and infantry, cavalry, baggage-train, field hospitals and cartloads of political camp-followers retreated towards the north, taking with them the dead bodies of General Kornilov and Colonel Nezhentsev.

The Kornilov campaign had failed. Its chiefs and half of its effectives had perished. To all appearances a future historian might have dealt with it in very few words.

Actually, however, Kornilov's 'icy campaign' was of the greatest importance. It was in this campaign that the Whites first found their tongue, their myth, their battle language—everything down to the newly-founded White order showing a sword and a crown of thorns on the ribbon of the George Cross.

In all their further policy, in all their requisitions and call-ups, in all their unpleasant altercations with foreigners and misunderstandings with local populations they always used this crown of martyrdom as their first and foremost argument. And in truth there was no counter argument to this: what if, for instance, General So-and-so had a whole parish flogged with ramrods (or 'ramrodded', as the expression ran at the time)—after all the floggers were martyrs of the successors of martyrs and so there was no more to be said.

The Kornilov campaign was the curtain-raiser following upon the prologue, after which scenes of horror, each more terrible than the last, were enacted in fearful abundance.

CHAPTER IV

ALEXEY KRASSILNIKOV JUMPED off the steps of the railway carriage, took his brother in his arms like a child and put him down on the platform. Matryona was standing at the station entrance near the bell-tower. Semyon did not recognize her at the first glance: she was dressed in town clothes and her glossy black hair was covered by a clean white headcloth, tied behind the head in the new Soviet fashion. Her round, youthful, pretty face wore an expression of fear, and her lips were tightly compressed.

When Semyon, leaning on his brother's arm, slowly shuffled towards her, Matryona's brown eyes opened and shut quickly and her face twitched.

"Good God," she said in a low voice, "how ill you look!"

Semyon sighed, put his hand on his wife's shoulder and touched her clean, cool cheek with his lips. Alexey took the whip from her. They stood awhile without speaking. Then Alexey said:

"Well, here's your husband back again. They tried to kill him, but left off half-way through. Never mind, we'll be harvesting together for all that. Come, let's get home."

Matryona put her arm tenderly and firmly round Semyon's back and helped him to the cart, where embroidered pillows were lying on the hand-woven rug. She helped him in and got up beside him, stretching out her legs and revealing new town-made shoes. Alexey gathered in the reins and said cheerfully:

"In February a trooper deserted his unit. I kept him in moonshine for forty-eight hours, and gave him five hundred roubles in Kerenski money. So now I've got a horse." He affectionately patted the strong brown gelding on the croup. Then he jumped on to the front of the cart, pushed back his lambskin cap and slapped the horse with the reins. They drove over a country road between fields just beginning to sprout; over them a lark sang in the sunlight, floating on quivering wings. Semyon's grey unshaven face broke into a smile. Matryona pressed him to her and asked him a mute question with her eyes; he answered:

"Yes, you're not doing so badly here."

Semyon was pleased as he entered the roomy, spotless whitewashed house. He noted the green shutters on the little windows, the new carved porch, and then passed through the familiar low door: there was the warm snow-white stove, the solid table covered with an embroidered cloth, and, on the shelf, china crockery and nickel contraptions of a sort never seen in the village before. On the left was Matryona's bedroom; he looked in and saw a wide metal bedstead covered with a lace bedspread, and on it a heap of swelling pillows. On the right was Alexey's room (which used to be their father's), and on the wall fishing tackle, a saddle, a headstall, a sword, a rifle and photographs. In all the rooms carefully-tended plants in pots, rubber trees and cacti. All this abundance and cleanliness surprised Semyon. It was only eighteen months since he had been here last, and lo! since then all these rubber trees had appeared and a bed fit for a princess and town clothes on Matryona.

"You live like gentlefolk," he said, sitting down on the bench and unwinding his muffler with an effort. Matryona put away her town coat in the chest, tied an apron over her dress, turned the tablecloth over and quickly laid the table. She pushed the baking-shovel into the oven and drew out a huge iron pot full of borsch; bacon and pickled goose and smoked fish were already on

the table. Matryona gave Alexey a meaning glance; he winked, and she brought in an earthenware jar of home-made vodka.

Then both brothers took their places at the table. Alexey poured out the first glass for his brother. Matryona bowed. And when Semyon drank the fiery liquor at a draught, both Matryona and Alexey wiped their eyes. That meant that they were very glad that Semyon was alive and sitting at table with them.

"Yes, brother, we aren't living just anyhow; we're not making out so badly," Alexey said, when they had finished the borsch. Matryona cleared away the plates with the bones and sat down close to her husband. "You remember that strip of land by the prince's summer-house, near the spinney—the soil is a gold-mine there. It took me a lot of speechifying in the Soviet, and six buckets of liquor for the peasants as well, but they let me have it in the end. Matryona and I ploughed it the other day. The harvest on the strip near the river was not bad either. So we've come through all right this year. Everything you saw—the bed, the mirror, the coffee-pots, the spoons and all the other junk—we picked up last winter. Your Matryona is as sharp as they make them. She didn't miss a single market day. I still hold with the old ways—selling for cash, but she . . . oh, no. She just kills a pig, a few chickens, takes a little flour, some potatoes, puts them in the cart, sticks her skirt-hem into her girdle and away she goes to town. . . . Mostly she didn't even bother to go to the market, but went straight to the houses of all these former gentlefolk, had a look round, and said: 'For that bed I'll give you four stone of flour and six pounds of bacon. And for that bedspread,' she said, 'you can have some potatoes.' It was really funny the way we came home from market, like gipsies we were, with all sorts of truck in the cart."

Matryona squeezed Semyon's hand and said:

"You remember my cousin Avdotya? She is a year older than I am—we are marrying her to Alexey."

Alexey laughed and groped in his pocket.

"These women decided everything before ever they asked me. . . . But it's true, brother; I've had enough of this widower business. You get drunk, then you go to the women and—it's a dirty business, fair turns your stomach."

He took out a pouch and a seasoned pipe with little brass ornaments hanging from it, filled it with home-grown tobacco and blew the smoke about the room. Semyon's head was in a whirl, what with the vodka and the talk. He sat, and listened and wondered.

In the evening Matryona took him to the bathhouse, washed him carefully, steamed him, rubbed him down, and wrapped him in a fur jacket. Then they sat at table, had supper, and finished off the earthenware jar to the last drop. Semyon, though he was still weak, went to bed with his wife and slept with her hot arm round his neck. In the morning, when he opened his eyes, the house was clean and warm. Matryona, all sparkling eyes and white-toothed smiles, was kneading dough. Alexey was expected to be home from the fields soon for breakfast. The spring light poured in at the clean little windows, and the leaves of the rubber tree glistened with it. Semyon sat up in the bed and stretched himself; after this night spent with Matryona he felt twice the man he had been yesterday. He washed and dressed, asked where his brother kept his razor, and shaved in his room near the window in front of a little fragment of looking-glass. He went out into the street, stood leaning on the gate, and bowed to a very old man who was sitting in the next-door garden and could remember four Tsars. The old man took off his cap, nodded his head

with dignity, and again sat still, his feet stiff in their felt boots and his blue-veined hands clasped over the crook of his stick.

The familiar street was empty at this hour. Between the houses strips of green could be seen, stretching far into the countryside. Horseless carts showed here and there on the skyline, where the ground rose. Semyon looked to his left, where two windmills were lazily turning their sails above a chalk buff. Lower down on the slopes, among gardens and thatched roofs, the bell-tower gleamed white. Behind the copse—he could still see through the trees—the windows of the former ducal mansion blazed in the sun. The rooks cawed over their nests. The copse and the fine façade of the mansion were mirrored in a lake of flood-water. Down at the water's edge cows were lying and children playing.

Semyon stood and looked from under his knit brows, his hand buried in the spacious pockets of his brother's coat. He looked, and his heart grew heavy; through the transparent waves of heat that hung over the village, over the lilac-tinted gardens and the ploughed fields, he saw something very different from this peace and quiet. Alexey, coming in with the cart, shouted to him cheerfully from the distance. As he opened the gate he gave Semyon a searching glance. He unhitched the horse and began to wash his hands in the yard under the hanging washstand.

"Never mind, brother, it will pass off," he said affectionately. "It was the same with me when I came back from the German front—I didn't want to look at anything, there was blood in my eyes, I was wretched. . . . Curse this war. . . . Well, let's go and have breakfast."

Semyon said nothing. But Matryona, too, noticed that her husband was not happy. After breakfast Alexey drove off again and Matryona, barefoot, her skirt-hem tucked into her girdle, went out with the second horse to shift manure. Semyon lay down on his brother's bed. He turned from side to side but could not go to sleep. His heart was heavy. He clenched his teeth and thought: "It's no use talking to them, they won't understand." But in the evening when all three went outside and sat on a log by the door, Semyon could not refrain from saying:

"Still, Alexey, you might clean that rifle."

"To hell with the rifle . . . we shan't go to war now for a hundred years."

"You're counting your chickens before they are hatched. You've started keeping rubber trees a damned sight too early."

"And you needn't worry before there's anything to worry about." Alexey lit his pipe and spat between his feet. "Let's have some plain speaking, we're not at a public meeting here. I know all about the things they say at meetings—I've done some shouting myself. But what you must learn, Semyon, is to hear what is good for you and be deaf to what isn't. Now take the slogan, 'The land for the toilers'. That is quite correct. Then there's another slogan about 'poor peasants' committees'. In our village we keep these committee-men well under control. But in Sosnovka, for instance, the poor peasants' committee does as it pleases, there are such requisitions and such disorder that it's enough to drive a man away. The whole estate of Count Bobrinski was given to a Soviet farm, the muzhiks did not get a single inch of land. And who is on the committee? Two local labourers, without a single horse between them, and as for the rest—the devil only knows who they are, or where they come from—jail, most likely. Do you understand that or not?"

"That's not what I'm talking about . . ." Semyon said, turning away.

"That's just it, you're not, but I am. At the front in nineteen-seventeen I,

too, used to shout about the bourgeoisie. But I saw that however much a man eats, next day he wants to eat again. So we must work. . . ."

Semyon was drumming on the log with his nails.

"The ground is burning under your feet, and you lie down to sleep."

"Perhaps down there in the navy, or in the towns, the revolution isn't finished yet," Alexey said firmly, "but here it was finished as soon as we divided up the land. This is what is going to happen next: as soon as the sowing is over we'll take these committee-men in hand. By the end of July there won't be a single one of these committees left. We'll bury them alive. We're not afraid of the Communists. We're not afraid of the devil himself, remember that. . . ."

"Stop it, Alexey Ivanovich, can't you see he is trembling all over?" Matryona said quietly. "You can't talk to a sick man like that."

"It's not that I'm sick. It's that I'm a stranger here!" Semyon shouted, got up and went outside.

That ended the discussion.

Two bats like two little devils were flying about, showing black against the red streak of sky left by the sunset. Here and there a light showed in the windows —people were just finishing their supper. From the distance came the sound of girlish voices singing. The song suddenly broke off, and from the broad street, now enveloped in darkness, came the rhythmic beat of horses' hoofs. The rider pulled up his galloping horse, shouted something, and rode on full tilt. Alexey took his pipe out of his mouth and listened. Then he got up from the log.

"Has something happened?" Matryona asked, and her voice shook.

At last the rider came their way. He was a young lad, bareheaded. His bare feet hung down the horse's sides.

"The Germans are coming!" he shouted as he rode. "They have already killed four men in Sosnovka!"

IX

AFTER THE CONCLUSION of the peace in the middle of March, new style, the German troops began their invasion of the Ukraine and the Don basin along the whole line from Riga to the Black Sea.

According to the treaty signed by the Ukranian Central Council, the Germans were to receive 75 million poods of grain, 11 million poods of meat on the hoof, 2 million geese and hens, 2½ million poods of sugar, 20 million litres of alcohol, 2,500 railway trucks of eggs, 4,000 poods of bacon and quantities of butter, leather, wool, timber and other goods. . . .

The Germans invaded the Ukraine in great style with columns of dusty-green troops in steel helmets. The thin line of Red forces was swept away by the fire of the heavy German artillery.

On went the infantry, the motorized baggage-train, the gun-batteries painted with dazzle patterns, on thundered the tanks and armoured cars, the pontoons and complete bridges for river crossings. Strings of aeroplanes droned in the sky.

It was an onslaught of mechanized arms against a practically unarmed people. The Red units, consisting of ex-servicemen, peasants, miners and industrial workers, hopelessly outnumbered by the Germans and without a united command, made a fighting withdrawal towards the north and east.

In Kiev the Central Council, which had sold the Ukraine to the Germans, was discarded in favour of General Skoropadski, formerly general *à la suite* to the Tsar. General Skoropadski, wearing the blue coat of the Ukranian

separatists, one hand on hip, the other holding the mace of the Hetmans of the Ukraine, proclaimed:

"Long live the Greater Ukraine! From now on and for ever, peace, prosperity and order! Workers—to your benches; peasants—to your ploughs! Away, away with the Red plague!"

A week after the harbinger of the terrible news had galloped along the village street in Vladimirskoye, a mounted patrol appeared early one morning on the edge of the chalk bluff near the windmills: twenty men on big black horses. The men were big, too, and un-Russian in type; they wore short green-grey coats and braided Uhlan caps. They looked down at the village, and dismounted.

There were plenty of people in the village—many had stayed at home that day instead of going out to the fields. The village boys ran from door to door, the women called to each other across the fences, and soon there was a crowd assembled in the church square. They looked up to where the Uhlans—they could be seen quite clearly—were bringing two machine-guns into position beside the mill.

Soon after that, from another direction, iron-bound wheels thundered through the village, a whip cracked and a pair of brown horses, all in a lather, came at a brisk pace to the square in front of the church, with an army cart behind them. The driver was a pale-eyed, long-jawed, clumsy soldier in a little peakless cap and a tight uniform, and behind him, hand on hip, sat a German officer, a gentleman of strange and masterful mien, with a bit of glass in his eye and a trim little cap which looked like a toy. Sitting on his left side the villagers saw an old acquaintance—the prince's bailiff, who the autumn before had fled from the estate in nothing but his underclothes.

Now he was sitting there and scowling—Grigori Karlovich Mill—in a smart overcoat and warm cap, round-faced, clean-shaven, and wearing gold spectacles. The muzhiks scratched their heads when they caught sight of Grigori Karlovich.

"Caps off!" the German officer suddenly shouted in Russian. A few of the men standing near by unwillingly pulled off their caps. The square remained quiet. The officer, still sitting as before with his hand on his hip and the piece of glass glistening in his eye, began to speak, pronouncing the words precisely and correctly, though sometimes with some difficulty.

"Farmers of the village of Vladimirskoye, you have seen up there on the hill two German machine-guns. They are in excellent working order. You are, of course, sensible farmers. I should not like to do you any harm. I wish to say that the German troops of our Kaiser Wilhelm have come here to re-establish the decencies of life among you. We Germans do not like people to steal the property of others; we punish such things without mercy. The Bolsheviks have taught you the contrary, eh? That's why we have driven out the Bolsheviks, and they will never come back again. I advise you to consider well all the evil things you have done, and also to return immediately to the owner of this estate everything you have stolen from him. . . ."

Someone in the crowd groaned. Grigori Karlovich Mill sat all the time with the peak of his cap pulled down over his eyes, observing the muzhiks with great attention. Once a triumphant sneer appeared on his face—he had evidently recognized someone. The officer finished his speech. The peasants were silent.

"I have done my part. It is your turn now, Herr Mill," the officer said to Mill in German.

Herr Mill declined this proposal in very deferential terms.

"There is nothing more I can say to them, lieutenant. They have understood everything already."

"All right," the officer said; he didn't care one way or another. "August! Drive on!"

The soldier in the peakless cap cracked his whip and the army cart passed through the crowd and rolled up to the ducal residence, which only three days ago had been the seat of the District Executive Committee. The peasants stared at the receding carriage.

"He had his hands on his hips, that German!" a voice in the crowd said.

"And Grigori Karlovich didn't open his mouth, boys."

"He'll find his tongue soon enough, never fear."

"What a misfortune! My God! And why?"

"Now we shall soon get the police back too."

"In Sosnovka they've got one already. He called a meeting of the whole village and began to swear at the muzhiks; you, he said, sons of one thing and another, robbers, bandits, have you forgotten the year nineteen-five? For three hours he kept at it, and all the time in the foulest language. He explained the whole political situation."

"And what's going to happen next?"

"Floggings, of course."

"Well, and what about the crop? Whose is it now?"

"They'll share the crop half and half. They'll let us harvest it, and the prince will take half."

"Damn it! Then I'll clear out. . . ."

"Where to, you fool?"

The peasants talked a little longer and then dispersed. And in the evening they returned the mansion divans and easy chairs, bedsteads and curtains, mirrors and pictures in gilded frames.

The Krassilnikovs were eating their evening meal; they had not lighted the lamp. Alexey kept putting down his spoon, looking out of the window, and sighing. Matryona crept about, as quiet as a mouse, between the stove and the table. Semyon sat with bowed head, his curly dark hair falling over his forehead. Every time Matryona cleared away his plate and put fresh food in front of him, she touched him with her arms or breast; but he did not look up, and kept obstinately silent.

Suddenly Alexey darted to the window, pushed it open and looked out. In the quiet of the evening they could hear clearly a distant, long-drawn savage howl of pain. Matryona immediately sat down on the bench and clasped her hands between her knees.

"They are flogging Vaska Dementyev," Alexey said quietly. "A little while ago they took him up to the house."

"He's the third to be flogged," Matryona whispered.

They listened in silence. In the evening stillness the village re-echoed those horrible, despairing screams. Semyon got up with a jerk. With a sharp movement he tightened his belt over his breeches and went into his brother's room. Matryona ran after him without saying a word. He was taking the rifle from the wall. Matryona threw her arms round his neck and hung there, her head thrown back, her teeth clenched. Semyon wanted to push her away, but could not. The rifle fell on to the earth floor. Semyon threw himself on to the bed and buried his face in the pillow. Matryona sat down beside him, anxiously stroking his hea[illegible]

Grigori Karlovich had little confidence in the village police or the *haidamaks*, a newly-formed Ukranian force, and he applied for a German garrison to be sent to the village of Vladimirskoye. The Germans were only too willing to oblige in such cases, and soon two companies came to Vladimirskoye, bringing their machine-guns. The soldiers were billeted on the householders. It was said that Grigori Karlovich had himself picked out the houses in which German soldiers were to be placed. Be that as it might, every peasant who had taken part last year in the sack of the prince's estate, and all the non-party members of the village Soviet Executive—except about ten young men, who had got away before the Germans came—had a soldier and a horse to keep at his own expense.

So one day a German soldier knocked at the door of Alexey Krassilnikov's house; he was in full field kit, with rifle and coal-scuttle hat. Chattering incomprehensibly, he showed Alexey the billeting order and patted his shoulder.

"Kharasho, brother. . . ."

The soldier was given Alexey's room; they removed only the harness and the weapons. The soldier immediately made himself at home, put a good blanket on the bed, hung up a portrait of the Kaiser, demanded that the floor should be swept cleaner, and while Matryona swept he got out his soiled linen and asked her to wash it for him: "*Shmootsig, phui!*" he said, "*bitte*, wash." After that, quite content with the world, he threw himself on the bed, boots and all, and lit a cigar.

The soldier was big, with flat moustaches turned upwards. His clothes were good and fitted well. He ate like a boar. He ate everything Matryona brought him to his room; he was especially fond of salt bacon. It nearly broke Matryona's heart to feed the German with this bacon, but Alexey said:

"Nonsense! Let him feed till he bursts or falls asleep, then he won't stick his nose where he's not wanted."

When he had nothing to do, the German sang army marches to himself in a husky voice, or wrote home on picture postcards showing views of Kiev. He behaved himself, and was not rude; the only thing was that his boots were so heavy—he clamped about the house as if he was the master.

It was as if a corpse lay in the Krassilnikov house. They sat down to eat and got up again without saying a word. Alexey was gloomy, frowning all the time. Matryona lost weight, sighed all day, and wiped her eyes on her apron when no one was looking. She was very anxious about Semyon; she was afraid he might lose his temper and get into trouble. But Semyon seemed to have calmed down; he spoke little, and kept to himself.

In the parish office and on the doors of the houses fresh decrees of the hetman were stuck up every day. They dealt with the return of the land and cattle to their former owners, with requisitions and levies, with the compulsory sale of grain, with merciless penalties for any attempt at revolt, for sheltering Communists, and the like.

The muzhiks read the decrees and said nothing. But then ominous rumours began to fly about. In one village, it was said, buyers, escorted by German cavalry, had taken away even the unthreshed grain, and had paid for it with some un-Russian paper money that even the women didn't want to accept. In another village they had driven away half the cattle, and in yet another, it was rumoured, they hadn't left enough even to make a cropful for a sparrow.

The peasants began to meet at night in small groups in secret hiding-places; they listened to the stories, and grunted. What could they do? Where could they get help? The enemy was too strong. There was nothing for it but to submit.

Semyon began to frequent these meetings in the backs near the brook, under the willows. He sat on the ground with his coat thrown over his shoulders, and smoked and listened. Sometimes he wanted to jump up, throw down his coat, square his shoulders and begin: "Comrades!" But he knew it would be no use, the muzhiks would be scared; they would shake their shaggy heads and go away. One evening he was walking through a field when he met a man who stopped and grinned. Semyon wanted to pass him, but the other man said:

"Hi! Messmate!"

Semyon stopped in his tracks—could it be a comrade? Looking askance at the man he asked:

"What do you want?"

"You're Alexey's brother."

"What of it?"

"Don't know your own again, eh? Remember the crew of the *Kerch*?"

"Kozhin? You!" Semyon gripped the man's hand.

They stood eyeing each other. Kozhin cast a rapid glance all round and asked:

"Are you sawing off your shotguns?"

"No, everything is pretty quiet here for the time being."

"Any lads with guts about?"

"Can't say, until we've tried 'em. Everybody's waiting to see what happens."

"Waiting for what?" Kozhin asked, his eyes shifting all the time, to take in the shadowy contours of his surroundings. "What are you waiting to see? You are being plucked like geese and you just keep still and let them do what they like with you. Do you know that Usspenskoye has already been destroyed by gun-fire? The women and children have fled, God knows where, and the men to the forest. . . . The people are leaving Novospassk, Fedorovka, Gulyai-Polye . . . they are all coming to us."

"How do you mean—to us?"

"Do you know Dibrivsk forest? That's where we all meet. . . . Well, so long. You had better whisper to the lads that your Vladimirovka ought to supply forty good sawn-off shotguns or rifles with about ten rounds of ammunition each, and hand-grenades, as many as you can get. Hide it all in the ricks out in the fields. . . . Got that? In Sosnovka they've already got the stuff in the ricks, the lads are only waiting for the word. . . . In Gundayevka thirty mounted men are waiting. It's time to go."

"Go where? To whom?"

"To the ataman. His name is Shchus. We are now forming groups all over the Yekaterinoslav district. . . . Last week we routed the *haidamaks* and burned down an estate. It was great fun: we gave all the spirits and sugar to the muzhiks free of charge. . . . Well, don't forget—I shall be back in a week's time."

He nodded to Semyon, jumped over the wattle fence and ran, bending low, into the reeds where the frogs were croaking loudly.

News of atamans and of raids had reached Vladimirskoye but had been disbelieved. But now an actual eye-witness had turned up. Semyon told his brother about it the very same evening. Alexey listened gravely.

"What is the ataman's name?"

"Shchus, they say."

"Never heard of him. There's been a rumour about Makhno Nestor Ivanovich, that he has a gang of about twenty-five cut-throats and that he raids estates, but I've not heard of Shchus. Still, it's possible; nowadays the muzhiks will stick at nothing. All right, if it's Shchus, let it be Shchus. It's all in a good cause. Only one thing, Semyon, you had better not tell the men just yet. When the time comes, I'll tell them myself."

Semyon laughed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't mind, wait if you like until they have plucked you naked."

Kozhin had evidently seen others besides Semyon that day. In the village men began to whisper about sawn-off guns, grenades, and guerilla bands led by atamans. Here and there on the farms files began to squeak on gun-barrels at night. But all was quiet for the time being. The Germans even thought of making the place tidy—they gave orders for the street to be swept on Saturday night. Very well: the street was swept.

But after that the blow fell. One early morning, before the cattle had been driven out to water, village policemen and sergeants in uniform walked along the well-swept street and knocked at every window:

"Come out!"

The muzhiks ran out to their doors barefoot, buttoning up their clothes as they ran, and were there and then served with an official document saying that such-and-such a farm was to supply such-and-such a quantity of grain, wool, bacon, and eggs to the German commissariat at such-and-such a price in German money. German army carts were already waiting in front of the church. Steel-helmeted German soldiers—rifle on shoulder—stood grinning in the yards and at the gates of their billets.

The muzhiks scratched their heads. Some called God to witness; others dashed their caps on the ground:

"But we haven't got any grain! You can kill us, but there just isn't any!"

At that moment the bailiff came driving along the street in his droshky. His gold-rimmed spectacles frightened the muzhiks more than all of the policemen and soldiers, for the bailiff saw and knew everything.

He pulled up his stallion. The police inspector went up to him. They spoke a few words; then the inspector barked an order to his men. They entered the first farmyard, and in a minute found the stocks of grain under the manure heaps. When Grigori Karlovich heard the cries of the muzhik whose farm it was, his spectacles gleamed even brighter.

All this time Alexey was striding up and down his own yard. He was in such a state of nerves that he was pitiful to look at. Matryona, her headcloth pulled over her eyes, was weeping in the porch.

"What use are these German marks to me—what use are they?" Alexey asked, picking up a log or a broken cart-wheel and flinging it into the nettles growing under the hedge. He saw the cock strutting along and stamped his foot at it:

"You beast!" He twisted the lock of the little shed backwards and forwards with one hand. "What are we going to eat? These paper marks or what? So they want us to go begging? Ruin us completely? Drive us back into the old slavery again?"

Semyon, sitting beside Matryona, only said:

"There is worse to come. . . . They'll take your horse too."

"Not my horse! I'll be there with an axe if they try."

"A bit too late for that, brother."

"Oh, oh," Matryona wailed, "I'll bite their throats through with my teeth! . . ."

The butt of a rifle crashed against the door. It was their billetee, the big German. He came in calmly and cheerfully, as if coming home. After him

came six policemen and a civilian official with the hetmanic trident badge on his uniform cap, and a book in his hand.

"There's a lot here," said the German, pointing to the shed. "Bacon; grain."

Alexey gave him a fierce scowl, then drew back and flung the huge rusty iron key at the feet of the Ukranian official with all his force.

"What's this, you rascal!" shouted the official. "Do you want a flogging, you son of a bitch?"

Semyon pushed Matryona away with his elbow and rushed forward, but the broad blade of a bayonet pricked his chest the same instant.

"Halt!" the German shouted in a rough, commanding tone. "Stay where you are!"

The loading of the carts lasted all day, and they did not leave until late in the night. The village was completely pillaged. No fires were lit in the houses, and no one sat down to supper. The women wailed in the dark houses, with paper marks clutched in their fists. They had something to cry about: those handfuls of paper money were all that was left of a whole year's toil.

Suppose a man were to go to town with his wife and these same paper marks—he would find all shops empty, not a nail, not a yard of cloth, not an inch of leather would there be. The factories were not working. The grain, the sugar, the soap—all raw materials were being taken away to Germany by the trainload. All the muzhik might get would be perhaps a concert grand, an old Dutch master or a Chinese teapot, and what good was that to him? So the muzhik with his wife would stare at the long-whiskered touzled *haidamaks* in blue coats and red-topped lambskin caps, would rub shoulders in the main street with blue-chinned, bowler-hatted dealers in foreign currencies or just in air, would heave a bitter sigh and go home again with empty hands. And if they had to stop on the road—it was twenty miles or so there and back—because of a hot axle, there would be no axle-grease, no machine-oil, because the Germans had taken it all. The railwaymen would put sand on the axle and they would go on and soon the axles would be hot again.

So the women howled, and the men drove the cattle out into deep ravines in the forest, for who knew what new decrees the hetman would issue to-morrow?

Not a light burned in the village. All the cottages were dark. Only the windows of the prince's mansion beyond the copse across the lake were brightly illuminated. The bailiff was giving a dinner in honour of the German officers. An army band was playing, and the strains of German waltzes hovered, strangely gruesome, over the darkened village. A rocket rose like a string of fire to amazing heights; it had been let off to amuse the German soldiers quartered in the mansion yard, where a barrel of beer had been rolled out for them. The rocket burst, and the thatched roofs, the gardens, the willows, the white clock-tower and the wattle fences were lit up by slowly-falling stars. Many gloomy faces were lifted to those balls of fire. The light was so bright that every grim wrinkle showed on their faces. It was a pity no photographs could be taken of them at that moment by some invisible camera; the pictures might have given the German general staff furiously to think.

Even in the fields half a mile from the village it was as light as day. A few men approaching an isolated rick quickly threw themselves on the ground. Only one man did not lie down, but remained standing beside the rick. He threw back his head, looked into the sky, and laughed.

"Look at the bitch! What a rocket!"

The stars went out as they fell, and the night was as black as before. The

men gathered beside the rick. There was a clatter of arms thrown on the ground.

"How many altogether?"

"Ten sawn-off shotguns, Comrade Kozhin, and four rifles."

"Not much."

"There was little time. To-morrow we'll bring some more."

"What about ammunition?"

"Here you are. Our pockets are full. There's plenty of ammunition."

"Good. Hide it all under the rick. . . . Grenades, lads, see that you get more grenades. . . . Sawn-off shotguns are all right for an old man who sits behind a bush, in a ditch, in ambush. . . . He shoots, fills his pants with fright, and there's his whole battle. . . . But young fighters want rifles and above all . . . hand-grenades. Understand? And sabres if you know how to handle them. It's the weapon of weapons, the sabre."

"Comrade Kozhin, how about to-night for this business?"

"The whole village would rise. . . . They are furious . . . this has cut them to the quick, they'd go with hay-forks, scythes, anything they can get hold of. . . . And we could kill the lot in their sleep as easy as winking. . . ."

"And who are you? Are you in charge here?" Kozhin cried in a sharp voice. Then he paused and went on, affably at first and then raising his voice more and more: "Who is in charge here? It would be interesting to know. Or am I talking to a bunch of silly fools? If so, I'll go right away. Let the Germans or the *haidamaks* beat you and rob you. . . ." There was a whispered oath. "Don't you know what discipline is? I've slashed plenty of heads off with my sabre for that." He paused again and lowered his voice. "When you join our detachment you must swear that you will unconditionally obey the ataman. . . . Better stay away else. You have plenty of freedom with us, you can drink and do as you please, but if the captain shouts 'To horse!' you're no longer your own master. Understand?" He paused again. Then in a conciliatory but severe tone he went on: "You must not touch the Germans, neither to-day nor to-morrow. We need more men for that."

"Comrade Kozhin, perhaps we might just do in the bailiff—he'll give us no peace, anyway."

"As to the bailiff, that will be all right, but not before next week, or I won't be able to fit things in. . . . A few days ago a German raped a woman, in Ossipovka it was. All right. She baked him a cake and put needles in it. He ate it, jumped up, ran outside, toppled over, and after a bit turned up his toes. The Germans killed the woman on the spot. The muzhiks took to their axes. . . . Then the Germans—I'd rather not think of what they did. . . . To-day you could hardly find the place where Ossipovka used to be. . . . That is what happens if you just sail in without stopping to think. Understand?"

Matryona sighed as she turned on her bed. The dawn was breaking. Cocks crowed. Dew lay on the sill of the open window. A mosquito sang in her ear. The cat, asleep on the stove, woke up, jumped down lightly, and nosed about in the corner.

The brothers were talking under their breath at the bare table. Semyon's head was resting on his hand and Alexey was bending over and looking into his eyes.

"I can't, Semyon. Understand me, brother. How could Matryona carry on with the farm alone? How can I leave all this—it's taken years of labour? They would ruin everything. We would come back to a desert."

"What do you mean, leave it all?" Semyon answered. "What if the house is destroyed? If we win, we'll build a stone house." He laughed. "What is wanted is a guerilla war, and you think of nothing but your farm."

"I ask again—who is going to feed you?"

"It's not us you are feeding, anyway, but the Germans and the hetman and all his rabble. . . . You're a slave!"

"Wait a bit. In nineteen-seventeen I fought for the revolution, didn't I? I was elected to a soldiers' committee, wasn't I? I helped to demoralize the imperialist front. Or didn't I? Well then. . . . Don't be in such a hurry to despise me, Semyon. . . . Even now, if the Red army came here, I would be the first to take a rifle. But how do you expect me to take to the woods with some ataman or other?"

"In times such as these even atamans can come in useful."

"True, but——"

"This cursed wound is keeping me." Semyon stretched out his arm over the table. "That is what torments me. . . . There are a lot of fellows of our Black Sea fleet in these detachments. . . . We'll set all Ukraine alight from end to end, just you wait. . . ."

"Have you seen Kozhin again?"

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"Well, we've arranged with him that soon there is going to be a little illumination here in your village."

Alexey glanced at his brother, grew pale and hung his head.

"Of course, that would be a good thing. . . . This cursed mansion is like a cataract on your eye. . . . While the bailiff is alive, he won't give us any peace."

Matryona jumped from her bed in her shift, slipped her shawl—with the roses on it—over it, came to the table and rapped on it with her knuckles:

"It's my property they are taking, and I won't stand it! We women will do for these devils, if you men won't."

Semyon looked at her with surprised amusement:

"Oh, will you? And how are you women going to fight them? I'd like to know."

"We'll fight them as women can. When they sit down to feed, we'll give them rat-poison. . . . We'll get the powders all right. We'll lure them to the hay-loft, or to the bath-house—do you think I haven't got a knitting needle? I know where to stick it so he wouldn't even groan. We'll start it, if you've got the guts and back us up. . . . And if need be, we'll take up the rifles as well as you men."

Semyon clasped her round the waist and laughed boisterously:

"A woman in a thousand, by Christ!"

"Let me go!" Swinging her shawl, Matryona went to the door, stuck her bare feet into the slippers on the threshold, and went out to look after the cattle. Semyon and Alexey were still shaking their heads and laughing. "What a woman; she's as good as an ataman by herself!" A light morning breeze blew in at the window, rustled the leaves of the rubber tree and brought with it muttered words and snatches of some un-Russian song. It was their German billetee, stumbling back drunk from the mansion.

Alexey closed the window angrily, with a bang.

"You had better go in now, Semyon, and go to bed."

"Are you afraid?"

"Yes, he may start something, the drunken swine. He hasn't forgotten how you went for him."

"Well, I'll go for him again soon." Semyon got up to go to his room. "Yes, Alyosha, the revolution is perishing because it's so difficult to rouse you fellows. . . . Kornilov was not enough for you. . . . The *haidamaks*, the Germans, aren't enough. What more do you want?" He suddenly broke off. "What's that?"

From outside came the sound of a voice and the heavy clatter of boots, then the angry cry of a woman: "Let me go!" Then the sound of a scuffle, and again, louder, as if in pain, Matryona's voice crying: "Semyon, Semyon!"

Semyon rushed out of the house like a man possessed. Alexey only grasped the bench and remained sitting—it was no good, he knew what happened when a man rushed out like that. He thought: "I left the axe outside a while ago, he'll take it I suppose. . . ." Outside, Semyon gave a savage shout. Then the crash of a blow falling. . . . Something hissed and gurgled out in the yard, then something heavy fell.

Matryona came in, white as a sheet, dragging her shawl after her. She leant against the stove, fighting for breath. Then she waved her hands at Alexey, seeing him staring at her. . . .

Semyon appeared in the doorway, calm and pale:

"Brother, help me carry him away somewhere and bury him."

CHAPTER V

THE GERMAN TROOPS reached the Don and the Sea of Azov and there they stopped. They had conquered a rich territory, larger than the whole of Germany. Here, on the Don, as in the Ukraine, the German general staff immediately took a hand in politics and strengthened the power of the big landowners, the rich Cossacks, who only four years before had boasted that they would take Berlin in their stride. These same sturdy Cossacks, strong as forged steel, with high cheekbones and red stripes along the seams of their trousers, now showed themselves to be as gentle as lambs.

The Germans had not yet reached Rostov when a Cossack army of ten thousand men, under the command of Ataman Popov attacked Novocherkassk, capital of the Don province. There was a bloody battle on a high plateau above the Don and the Red Cossacks of the Novocherkassk garrison, together with Bolsheviks just arrived from Rostov, were about to rout the Don Cossacks, when the fate of the battle was decided by an incredible accident.

A Volunteer unit, commanded by Colonel Drozdovski, having marched all the way from Rumania, had suddenly raided Rostov on April 22nd, held the town until the evening and been driven out. The detachment took to the steppe to search for Kornilov's army which they wished to join. On April 25th, on the march, they heard the din of battle near Novocherkassk. Without asking who was fighting whom, for what reason and to what end, Drozdovski and his men turned towards Novocherkassk, cut into the Red reserves with an armoured car and caused complete confusion among them. Taking advantage of the assistance which seemed to have dropped from the clouds, the Don Cossacks made a counter-attack, in which they overran and routed the Reds. Novocherkassk was taken, and power passed from the hands of the Red Revolutionary Committee to the 'Saviours of the Don'. Presently the Germans arrived.

Under their protection the Cossack organization in Novocherkassk—a place the Germans wisely refrained from occupying—offered the ataman's feather-knobbed staff of office to General Krasnov, who had described himself as 'a personal friend of Kaiser Wilhelm'. A ceremonial peal was rung on the cathedral bells. On the vast cobble-paved square in front of the cathedral the Cossack yeomen cheered and grey-haired Cossacks wished the new ataman good luck.

The Germans did not go beyond Rostov into the depths of the Don and Kuban provinces. They had tried to tame Bataisk, a place on the left bank of the Don river opposite Rostov, inhabited by the work-people of the Rostov factories and workshops and by the suburban poor. But although they put an artillery barrage across and made several bloody attacks, they were unable to take the town. Bataisk, almost completely under water through the spring floods, offered a desperate resistance and remained unsubdued.

The Germans did not go beyond this line. They confined themselves to the strengthening of the ataman's government and to the supplying of arms taken from the Russian military stores in the Ukraine. They showed no less caution in their attitude towards the two Volunteer groups: Denikin's army and Drozdovski's force. The creed of these Volunteers comprised two tenets: the annihilation of the Bolsheviks and the renewal of the war against Germany, i.e. fidelity to the Allies to the last. The first tenet struck the Germans as reasonable and desirable, the second they regarded as a not too dangerous piece of folly. Hence they pretended to be ignorant of the existence of the Volunteers; while Denikin's and Drozdovski's men, for their part, pretended not to notice that there were Germans on Russian soil.

Once Drozdovski's forces had to cross a river on their way from Kishinev to Rostov. On one side of the river, in Borislavl, there was a German force, on the other side, in Kakhovka, a Bolshevik detachment.

The Germans were unable to force the bridge across the river. So the men of Drozdovski forced it themselves, drove the Red force from Kakhovka and marched on, without waiting for the Germans to thank them.

Denikin found himself in a similarly ambiguous position, though on a larger scale. By the end of April the remains of the Volunteer army which had been so badly mauled at Yekaterinodar, somehow succeeded in reaching the region of Yegorlitskaya and Mechetinskaya, about thirty-five miles from Novocherkassk. Here they heard the amazing good news that the Germans had taken Rostov and the Don Cossacks Novocherkassk. The Reds were leaving the Volunteers alone and had turned against the new enemy, the Germans.

The Volunteers could have a rest, tend their wounded and recuperate their strength. First of all they had to re-equip their army.

All stations between Tikhoretskaya and Bataisk were crammed with vast stores of war materials for the impending Red counter-offensive against Rostov. Generals Markov, Bogayevski and Erdeli, with three columns attacked the Red rear at its nearest point, on the stations Kryslovskaya, Sosyk and Novo-Leushkovskaya, routed their troop-trains, blew up their armoured trains and returned to the steppe with enormous booty. The Red offensive against the Germans had been made impossible.

Roshchin's sprained shoulder and the insignificant scratches received in the fight soon healed. He felt better than ever; his skin was bronzed, and during the last days in the quiet billet he had been eating his fill.

The task which had tormented him like an obsession ever since he left

Moscow was now fulfilled—he had revenged himself on the Bolsheviks for his humiliation. He remembered a certain moment when he was running to the railway embankment. . . . It was a victory. . . . His knees had trembled, the blood had throbbed in his temples. He had taken off his soft cap and wiped his bayonet with it. He had done this mechanically, as an old soldier should, to keep his weapons clean.

But now he no longer felt that insane hatred which had been like a leaden band round his head and had made him see red. He had grappled with his mortal enemy—he had plunged in his blade and even wiped it: he had been right. But had he? Why, if all this was right, was he asking himself questions, why was he in doubt?

It was Sunday. Mass was being said in the village church. Roshchin had been late, had stood among a crowd of freshly-shaved heads in the porch and had then strolled on beyond the church into the old churchyard. He walked on the grass among the dandelions, plucked a blade of grass and, sitting on a mound, began to chew it. Here was he, Roshchin, a sincere and—so Katia said—kind-hearted man.

Through the half-open window, covered with cobwebs, he could hear children singing, and the throaty chant of the deacon seemed to him so wrathful and merciless that he half expected the childish trebles to take fright and fly away. His thoughts involuntarily strayed into the past, as if he was trying to find something bright, something that was without sin. . . . He wakes up happy. Beyond the clean, high window is a dark blue spring sky—he had never since seen such a sky. He hears the trees rustle in the garden. On a chair beside his wooden cot lies his new satin blouse, with blue spots. It smells of Sunday. He thinks of what he will do all this long day and whom he will meet: it is so pleasant and attractive that he wants to stay in bed a little longer. . . . He looks at the wallpaper; it has on it in endless repetition a Chinese house with a curved roof, a steep little bridge, two Chinamen with parasols and a third Chinaman, in a hat like a little lampshade, fishing from the bridge. Those nice, funny Chinamen, how happily they lived in the little house by the water. . . . From the hall comes his mother's voice: "Vadim, will you be ready soon? I'm ready!" . . . That dear, calm voice that resounded through his whole life, breathing well-being and happiness. . . . He is standing in his spotted blouse beside his mother. She is wearing a beautiful silk dress. She kisses him, takes a comb from her hair and combs his with it: "There, now you look nice. Let's go!" Coming down the broad staircase she opens her parasol. In the well-swept drive, with the broom-marks still showing, a troika waits. Three sorrel horses paw the ground impatiently. The coachman, fat and jolly, in a velvet jerkin and purple sleeves, turns his beard towards them and wishes a happy holiday. His mother settles herself comfortably in the carriage, already warm with the sun. Vadim clings to his mother, full of happiness and pleasant anticipations. Soon the wind will be singing in his ears and the trees will rush along to meet him. The troika dashes round the corner of the big house, into the village street; the muzhiks bow with dignity, and cackling hens fly out from under the wheels. Here is the white enclosure of the church, a green meadow, little birches over slanting crosses and mounds . . . the church porch with its beggars . . . the familiar odour of incense. . . .

That church and those birches were still there. It seemed to Roshchin that he could still see their green lace pattern in the blue sky. . . . Under one of the birches, the fifth from the church wall, his mother had been lying for many a year; there was a railing round the mound that covered her. Some

three years ago the old verger had written to Roshchin to tell him that the railing was broken and the wooden cross had rotted away. . . . It was only now that he remembered, with terrible remorse, that he had never answered that letter. . . . That sweet, kind face, that voice that roused him every morning and filled him with gladness for the whole day. . . . That love for every little hair, for every little scratch on his body. . . . God, yes, he knew that however great a sorrow he might feel, it would always melt away in her great love. And all this was now lying mute under a little mound in the shadow of a birch and mingling with the earth. . . .

Roshchin put his elbows on his knees and buried his face in his hands. Long years had passed. It had always seemed to him that one more effort was needed, and then he would again wake up happy on just such a blue morning as that one long ago. The two Chinamen with their parasols would lead him over the curved bridge into the house with the upturned eaves. . . . There someone he loved more than he could express, who was closer to him than words can say, would be waiting for him. . . .

"My home!" Roshchin thought, and again recalled the troika dashing through the village. "That is Russia . . . that was Russia. . . . But it's all gone, never to return. . . . The boy in the satin blouse has become a murderer."

He got up quickly and strode up and down on the lawn, his hands behind his back, cracking his finger-joints. His thoughts involuntarily carried him to where he had, as he thought, slammed the door to for ever: for he had believed that he was going to his death. . . . And now he was still alive. . . . How simple it would be to be sprawling now, covered with flies, in some ditch in the steppe. . . .

"Oh, well," he said to himself, "it's easy to die but difficult to live. . . . Therein lies our merit—we give our dying country not merely a living bag of flesh and bones but all our thirty-five years of life, with all our affections and hopes, all our solitude and our Chinese house and all our purity. . . ."

He groaned and then looked round to see if anyone had heard him. But the voices of the children sang on as before and the pigeons cooed on the rusty cornice.

Hurriedly, almost stealthily, he recalled a moment of unbearable compassion —he had never spoken of it to Katia. It had happened a year ago, in Moscow. Roshchin had heard at the railway station that Katia's husband was to be buried that day and that Katia was quite alone. He went to see her in the evening; the maid said she was sleeping, but he decided to wait, and sat down in the drawing-room. The maid told him in a whisper that her mistress wept night and day: "She turns her face to the wall in her bed and cries like a child —we close the door of the kitchen so as not to hear it." He decided to wait all night if need be, and listened to a clock ticking somewhere, ticking away the time, ticking away the seconds of life, laying wrinkles on a beloved face, turning hair into silver, unmercifully, inexorably. . . . It seemed to Roshchin that if Katia was not sleeping she must be thinking of this and listening to the ticking of the clock. . . . Then he heard her footsteps, faint and wavering, as if her ankles were turning under her. She was walking about the bedroom and seemed to be whispering to herself. Then she stopped and did not move for a long time. Roshchin began to feel anxious, as if he could sense Katia's thoughts through the dividing wall. A door creaked—she had gone into the dining-room. There was a clatter of glass on the sideboard. Roshchin got up, ready to dash in. She opened the door a little, and said: "Is that you, Lisa?" She had on a

camel-hair dressing-gown, and she was holding a glass in one hand and a pitiful little bottle in the other. . . . She wanted by this means to rid herself of her melancholy, of loneliness, of inexorable time, of everything. . . . Her drawn face, with its grey eyes, was like the face of a lonely child. She belonged in the little Chinese house. Roshchin said to her then: "I am yours to command, my whole life is yours. . . ." And she had believed him; she had believed that in his love, in his tenderness, she could drown all her loneliness, all the remaining years of her life.

What was it, really—what the devil had he done? Of course he knew perfectly well that the thought of Katia had never left him for a single instant, not even when his hatred was strangling him with a leaden noose, not even during that dreadful month of fighting. Like an invisible shadow, spreading her arms in voiceless entreaty, she had barred his way, and when he, hoarse with savage shouting, had plunged his bayonet into a Red army greatcoat he had plunged it through that shadow of his inseparable companion. And then he had taken off his cap and wiped the blade. . . .

The service was over. A crowd of sun-tanned cadets and officers poured out of the church. After them came, in leisurely procession, all the famous, stern-eyed generals in clean tunics, with medals and crosses on their chests. There was tall, slim Erdeli, as handsome as a picture, with a double-pointed beard and his cap over one eye; there was undersized, sharp-tongued Markov in a dirty fur cap; there was snub-nosed, squat Kutepov with his little eyes like a bear's; there was Bogayevski, the Cossack, with long twisted moustaches. Then came Denikin in conversation with cool, handsome, clever-looking Romanovski, whom the army called the 'enigma'. When the Commander-in-Chief appeared, all stood to attention, and those who were smoking under the birches threw away their cigarettes.

Denikin was no longer the miserable old man in down-at-heel boots and civilian clothes, suffering from bronchitis and following the army with the baggage-train which included no baggage of his own. He held himself upright now, and was well dressed to the point of foppishness; his little silver beard inspired feelings of filial respect; his eyes had widened and were moist and stern like those of an eagle. Of course he was nothing like Kornilov, but still he was the most experienced and sensible of all the generals. Raising two fingers to his cap he walked with dignity through the church gates and got into his carriage, accompanied by Romanovski.

Roshchin was accosted by Teplov, a tall, lanky fellow with his arm in a sling and a crumpled cavalry greatcoat thrown round his shoulders. He had shaved in honour of the holiday and was in the best of humours:

"Have you heard the news, Roshchin? The Germans and the Finns will be taking Petrograd any day now. Mannerheim is in command—do you remember him? He was a general *à la suite*, a fine fellow and a real fire-eater. In Finland he bumped off all the Socialists bar none. The Bolsheviks are already bolting from Moscow with their suit-cases via Archangel. . . . It's a fact, on my honour. . . . Lieutenant Sedelnikov has just arrived from Novocherkassk —he told us about it. . . . Yes, and in Novocherkassk there are plenty of women and girls, nice ones, ten for each. Sedelnikov told us. . . ." He planted his legs wide apart and laughed so that his double chin slipped out of the collar of his tunic.

Roshchin did not encourage the story about the nice girls and Teplov again returned to the political rumours on which the army lived in the solitude of the steppes:

"All Moscow is mined, the Kremlin, the churches, the theatres, all the most important buildings and whole districts. Electric cables run out to Sokolniki, where there is a mysterious villa guarded day and night by chekists. . . . . If we should come near Moscow, you see the idea, all Moscow would fly sky-high with a bang. . . ." He bent down and lowered his voice. "It's a fact, word of honour. The Commander-in-Chief has taken appropriate measures; special secret agents have been sent to Moscow to ferret out these cables and prevent an explosion as we approach Moscow. Instead of that we'll hang the lot of them! In the Red Square! In public, with drums beating!"

Roshchin frowned and got up:

"Perhaps you had better tell us about the girls, Teplov."

"Why? Don't you like what I'm saying?"

"No, I don't." Roshchin looked firmly into Teplov's stupid reddish eyes. The other pulled a wry face:

"So apparently you can't forget that you served with the Reds. . . ."

"What?" Roshchin raised his eyebrows and came a step nearer. "What did you say?"

"I said what everyone in the regiment is saying. It's time you gave an account of your work in the Red army, Roshchin. . . ."

"You dirty hound!"

It was only the fact that Teplov had one arm in a sling and was still on the sick-list that saved him from a blow. Roshchin put his hand behind his back, turned on his heel and walked away with a wooden gait, between the graves.

Teplov jerked up the coat which had slipped from his shoulders and looked at Roshchin's straight back with an angry laugh. Two officers came up to him: Captain von Mecke, and his inseparable companion, a freckled youngster with large, light, dreamy eyes, Valerian Onoli by name, the son of a Simferopol tobacco manufacturer. Onoli was wearing a much-worn student coat with a corporal's shoulder-straps. The coat was covered with brown stains.

"What happened—have you had a row?" von Mecke asked in that peculiar sharp voice which is often found in deaf people. Teplov, still puzzled, pulled at his drooping moustache and repeated the whole conversation.

"Strange that you are still surprised, captain," Onoli drawled, looking at Teplov with his dreamy eyes. "It was obvious to me from the first that Lieutenant-Colonel Roshchin is a spy."

"Stop that, Valka," von Mecke said; he had had shell-shock and his left cheek kept twitching. "The point is that General Markov knows him personally. So you had better mind what you are saying. But I would stake my shirt that Roshchin is a Bolshevik, a bounder and a bastard."

Until the end of May things were comparatively quiet in the Northern Caucasus. Both sides were preparing for the decisive battle. The Whites wanted to seize the main railway junctions, cut off the Caucasus from the rest of the country, and with the assistance of the White Cossacks drive the Reds out of the province. The Central Executive Committee of the Kuban-Black-Sea Republic for its part was fighting on three fronts: against the Germans, against the White Cossacks, and finally against the Denikin bands which had now again come to life.

The Caucasian Red army, consisting in its overwhelming majority of former front-line men of the Tsarist Transcaucasian army and of young Cossack smallholders and 'new-comers', numbered approximately a hundred thousand men.

Their Commander-in-Chief, Avtonomov, was suspected by the members of the Kuban-Black-Sea government of dictatorial ambitions; he was constantly quarrelling with that government. At a mass meeting held in Tikhoretskaya he called the members of the government German spies and *provocateurs*. In reply the government proclaimed Avtonomov—and Sorokin, who supported him—bandits and enemies of the people, and held them up to execration and eternal infamy.

All these bickerings paralysed the army. Instead of striking a concentrated blow from three directions against the Volunteer Army, surrounded on all sides, the army was in a constant state of unrest, held meetings, deposed its commanders, and was at best capable only of making a last tragic stand.

Finally, orders from Moscow succeeded in breaking through the obstinacy of the provincial authorities. Avtonomov was appointed inspector of the front and the command of the northern group was entrusted to Lieutenant-Colonel Kalnin, a surly Latvian. Sorokin retained the command of the western group.

Meanwhile the Volunteer army had been strengthened by Colonel Drozdovski, who brought with him three thousand picked, ferocious officers, each worth ten privates in battle. In addition well-to-do, well-mounted Cossacks had joined them, and officers from Petrograd, Moscow and all Russia, who had heard of the prodigious feats of the icy campaign, were filtering through individually and in groups. General Krasnov supplied weapons and money, though none too generously. With every day the Volunteer Army grew stronger and the feeling among the men was stirred up to white heat by the skilful propaganda of the generals and politicians, by the clumsy actions of the local Soviet authorities, and by the stories told by eye-witnesses arriving from the north.

By the end of May the local Red forces had lost all chance of crushing this army, which took the offensive and near the railway station of Torgovaya inflicted a terrible defeat on the northern group of the Red Army under Kalnin.

"Well, mates, why have you stopped singing?"

"We're hoarse."

"May I have a light for my pipe?" Ivan Ilyich Telegin crouched down beside the fire on which a railway signboard that had just been thrown and was burning brightly. He lit his pipe and remained there to listen.

It was late. Nearly all the fires along the permanent way were out. The night was cool and bright with stars. The fire lit up the goods trains standing on the top of the embankment: the brick-red vans were in bad need of repair. Some of them had come from the shores of the Pacific, others from the Arctic snowfields, from the sands of Turkestan, from the Volga, from the Volhynian swamps. Each was marked: 'Return urgently!' But the time for their return had long gone by, and the patient little vans, built for the works of peace, but running now with unsmeared axles and broken sides, were resting under the stars, in anticipation of new and quite fantastic activities. They were destined to be hurled down steep slopes in whole train-lengths and fully laden; to be packed tight, like herring barrels, with captive Red soldiers, and with doors and windows screwed up, to be hauled away thousands of miles, marked: 'Non-perishable goods. Low speed'. They would be turned into coffins for typhus patients, and into refrigerator cars for the transport of frozen corpses. They would fly sky-high in flaming explosions. . . . Their doors and sides would be stolen in the Siberian forests to be used for fences and stables. And

even the survivors, scorched and broken, would have to wait a very, very long time before the request, 'Return urgently!' was granted and they rattled home on rusty rails for a rest and repairs.

"Well, Comrade Telegin, what are they saying in Moscow? Will the civil war be over soon?"

"As soon as we have won it."

"Oh, is that it ? So they pin their hopes on us, then?"

A few bearded, bronzed, dark men were lying lazily round the fire. They had no wish to sleep, but neither did they want to talk too much. One of them asked Telegin for some tobacco.

"Comrade Telegin, who are these Czecho-Slovaks? Where do they come from? In old times I can't remember any such people. . . ."

Telegin explained that the Czecho-Slovaks were Austrian prisoners of war, and that the Tsarist government had already begun to form them into an army corps, intending to send them to the French front, but couldn't finish the job. . . .

"And now the Soviet government can't let them out, because they want to go to the imperialist front. They were asked to give up their arms. At that they mutinied. . . ."

"But, Comrade Telegin! Shall we have to fight all these Czecho-Slovaks as well?"

"No one knows anything now. . . . The news is very vague. . . . But I don't think so. . . . There are only forty thousand of them in all. . . ."

"Oh, we can beat that much."

They sat silent again round the fire. The man who had asked Telegin for tobacco glanced at him askance and said, evidently only out of politeness:

"Under the Tsar they drove us out to Sarakamish. Nobody explained anything—why we should beat the Turks, why we should die there. The mountains there are terrible. When you look up at them you're sorry you were ever born. . . . But now it's different, this war is for ourselves, an all-out war. . . . And it's all quite clear: who is fighting whom, and why. . . ."

"Now take me, for instance. My name is Chertogonov," another soldier said in a deep voice, propping himself up on his elbow and moving so close to the blaze that it was surprising his beard did not catch fire. He looked a terror; his black hair fell straight over his forehead, and his round eyes glowed in his sun-tanned face. "I've been twice in the Far East. I've been in jail, don't know how often, for vagrancy. . . . All right. They took me to the barracks just the same, gave me a soldier ticket and sent me to the wars. . . . Six wounds. . . . See here. . . ." He put his finger in his mouth and pulled up his lip, showing the stumps of broken teeth. "I managed to get to Moscow, to the hospital, and then the Bolsheviks came. My troubles were over. They asked me: 'Your social position?' I said to them: 'You don't want to look any further: here I am, hereditary and honorary casual labourer, kith and kin unknown. . . .' How they laughed! They gave me a rifle and a pass. In those days we were scouring the town, searching for burzhuys. . . . We'd go to a swell flat—the people, of course, would be scared. . . . We looked if they had anything hidden, flour or sugar or what not; the rascals were afraid, they trembled all over, but talk to us they wouldn't, they just wouldn't. Sometimes I got a bit angry—I'm a human being, after all—damn your smooth faces, why don't you speak, why don't you curse, why don't you beg? So I swore at them, but they wouldn't say anything. What's the matter? I ask myself. I was angry—all my life I've had to hold my tongue and work for them, the smooth devils,

and spill my blood for them. . . . And they don't even regard me as a human being. . . . So that's what they are like, the burzhuys! And then I began to burn with class hatred. All right, then. . . . Once we had to go and commandeer the mansion of a certain Ryabinkin, a merchant. We went there, four of us with a machine-gun, just to frighten them. We knocked at the front door. After a while a neat parlourmaid opened the door; poor little thing, she went as white as a sheet and started back, 'Oh! Oh!' all on her tiptoes. . . . We sent her off and went into the parlour—it was a huge room with pillars and in the middle a table, and at the table this same Ryabinkin was eating pancakes with a lot of guests. It was carnival time, and they were all drunk, of course. . . . And that while the proletariat was starving! . . . I stamped my rifle-butt on the floor, and shouted at them! But they only sat there and smiled. . . . And this Ryabinkin came up to us, all red in the face and merry, with his eyes popping out of his head: 'Dear comrades,' says he, 'of course, I've known for a long time that you were going to commandeer my house and all my property! Let us just finish the pancakes, and by the way, why not sit down with us. . . . You needn't worry, all this is the property of the people,' he said, and pointed to the table. . . . We were in two minds about it, but we sat down at last, holding our rifles and frowning. . . . This Ryabinkin brought us vodka, pancakes, snacks . . . talking and laughing all the time. . . . God knows all the things he talked about and everything all in rigmaroles, tricky as anything. . . . The guests roared with laughter, and we began to laugh too. All sorts of jokes they made, about the doings of the burzhuys, and there were some quarrels, but as soon as one of us began to get riled, the host smothered him with vodka—in tea-glasses. . . . Smaller glasses weren't used. . . . They began to uncork champagne, and we stood our rifles in a corner. 'Chertogonov,' I thought, 'is this you, this fellow who is staggering round the room and grabbing at the pillars?' We all began to sing songs in chorus. In the evening we put up the machine-gun in the entrance so that no strangers would come butting in. Then we drank for a day and a half. I made up for all my past dumb life. But Ryabinkin got the better of us after all, the cunning fox! . . . While we were having our fun, he shifted all the diamonds, gold, foreign bank-notes and all sorts of valuable stuff to a safe hiding-place. All that was left for us to requisition were the walls and the furniture. . . . When he said good-bye to us the morning after, he said to us: 'Dear comrades, take everything. Take it all, I don't care. I have come from the people and I return to the people.' . . . And bolted the same day—went abroad. I was taken to the Cheka. I said to them: 'All my fault, shoot me!' But they didn't, because it was only lack of class-consciousness on my part. . . . And I'm glad even now that I had a good time for once. . . . It's something to remember."

"There are many evil-doers among the burzhuys, but there aren't so few among us either," said another man, who was sitting hidden behind the smoke. The man who had asked Telegin for a cigarette joined in:

"Once they started shedding blood in 1914, our people won't stop at anything now."

"That's not what I'm talking about," the voice behind the smoke answered. "Enemies are enemies and blood is blood. But I am talking of evil-doers."

"And who are you?"

"I? I am one of the evil-doers," the voice answered quietly.

At that they were all silent, and looked at the embers in the dying fire. A shiver ran down Telegin's spine. The night was cold. Someone turned round and lay down near the fire with his cap for a pillow.

Telegin stood up, stretched himself, and pulled his coat straight. Now that the smoke had died down, he could see the 'evil-doer' sitting cross-legged on the other side of the fire, chewing a wormwood twig. The glow lit up his long, narrow, soft, almost feminine, face covered with a fair, thin down. A shabby cap was pushed to the back of his head and a soldier's coat hung over his narrow shoulders. He was naked to the waist under it; his shirt, which he had evidently been searching for lice, was lying by his side. Meeting Telegin's eyes, he lifted his head and smiled slowly, like a child.

Telegin recognized him; he was a man from his own company, Mishka Solomin, from the neighbourhood of Yeltsy, a peasant who had joined the Red Guards as a volunteer and had come to the Northern Caucasus with Sievers' army.

He met Telegin's eye for an instant and immediately lowered his own, as if embarrassed. Only then did Telegin remember that Mishka Solomin had a reputation in the company as a writer of verse and a desperate drunkard, though he was very seldom actually seen drunk. With a lazy twitch of his shoulders he threw off his coat and put on his shirt. Telegin climbed up the slope to the passenger carriage where, with uneasy vigilance, a paraffin lamp was burning in the compartment occupied by Sergei Sergeyevich Sapozhkov, commander of the regiment. From here he could see the stars above, and the red spots of dying fires below.

"The kettle is boiling, come along, Telegin," Sapozhkov said, leaning out of the window with a pipe between his teeth.

The paraffin lamp attached to the side wall shed a dim light on the shabby second-class compartment. Weapons hung from the coat-hooks, and books and war maps littered the whole place. Sapozhkov, in a dirty cotton shirt and braces, turned to Telegin as he entered:

"Want some brandy?"

Telegin sat down on the bunk. The window was open, admitting the cool night air, the clucking of quails and the clatter of stumbling footsteps as a Red army man sleepily climbed out of a goods van to satisfy a natural need. A balalaika was tinkling softly, and somewhere quite near a cock crowed harshly —it was already one o'clock.

"How's that?—A cock?" Sapozhkov asked, putting down the teapot he had just filled. His eyes were red, and livid spots stood out on his lean face. He groped behind him in the bunk, found his pince-nez, put them on, and stared at Telegin.

"How on earth can a live cock still exist in the area occupied by this regiment?"

"Some more refugees have arrived; I have already reported it to the commissar. Twenty carts with women and children. . . . It's a devil of a business," Telegin said, stirring his tea.

"Where from?"

"From Privolnaya. There were more of them, but they were attacked by Cossacks on the way. All poor people, 'new-comers'. It appears that two Cossack officers of their village collected some men, formed a troop, raided the village in the night, bust up the Soviet, and hanged some of them."

"Same old story, eh?" Sapozhkov said, pronouncing every letter very precisely. He seemed to be very drunk and had invited Telegin in to unburden his heart. Telegin was so tired that his whole body ached with fatigue, but it was so pleasant to sit on a soft seat and drink from a cup that he did not go away, although he knew that nothing sensible could come of his talk with Sapozhkov.

"Where's your wife, Telegin?"

"In Petrograd."

"You're a funny chap. In peaceful times you would have made a comfortable petty bourgeois with a virtuous wife, two virtuous children and a gramophone. . . . What the devil made you join the Red army? Why, you'll get yourself killed!"

"I've already told you . . ."

"Perhaps you want to get into the Party?"

"If it's necessary, I'll join the Party too."

"And as for me"—Sapozhkov blinked behind the dim glasses of his pince-nez —"even if they boil me in three waters they'll never make a Communist of me."

"Well, if anyone is a funny chap, you certainly are, Sapozhkov."

"Nothing of the kind! I haven't got the dialectic mind. I'm just a savage, always squinting with one eye towards the primeval forest. H'm. So you say I'm a funny chap. . . ." He laughed with evident satisfaction. "I've been fighting for the Soviets since October. H'm. Did you ever read Kropotkin?"

"No."

"So I see. . . . I'm bored, brother. . . . The bourgeois world is vile, and it bores me stiff. . . . And if we win, the Communist world will be just as boring and grey, virtuous and boring. . . . Kropotkin is a nice old man: all poetry, all dreams, about a classless society. And he is really charming: 'Give men anarchic liberty, shatter the bonds of worldly evil, that is, the great cities— and classless humanity will then create a rural paradise on earth; for the fundamental motive force in man is love for his neighbour.' . . . Ha, ha, ha!"

Sapozhkov laughed shrilly, as if trying to hurt someone's feelings. His pince-nez danced on his bony nose. Still laughing, he bent down, got out a tin can of vodka from under the seat, poured some out, drank it and noisily crunched a lump of sugar:

"Our tragedy, my dear fellow, is that we, the Russian intelligentsia, have been cradled in the peaceful lap of serfdom, and the revolution has terrified us out of our wits; it has given us a kind of vomiting of the brain. It's not right to frighten delicate people like that, is it? We used to sit in a quiet country arbour, with birds singing round us, and think to ourselves: 'Really, it would be very nice indeed to fix things up so that everybody would be happy.' That's our past. . . . In the West the intelligentsia have brains; they are the pick of the bourgeoisie and they are doing a tough job: the job is to develop science and industry and spread the consoling mirage of idealism all over the world. . . . In the West the intelligentsia knows its purpose in life. . . . But we in Russia —good Lord! . . . Whom are we serving? What is our job? On the one hand we are the flesh of the flesh of the Slavophils, their spiritual heirs. And do you know what Slavophilism is? Idealism *à la* Russian landowner. On the other hand we get our money from the Russian bourgeoisie; it is they who keep us, but in spite of that we want to serve only the people! What silly fools we are!—serve the people indeed! It's a tragi-comedy. We wept so much over the sufferings of the people that our tears ran dry. And when these tears were taken away from us, we found we had nothing to live for. . . . We had been dreaming that soon our dear muzhiks would reach Constantinople; they would climb into the cupola and plant the orthodox cross on St. Sophia. . . . We dreamt that we would give the whole terrestrial globe to our dear muzhiks. But the muzhiks went for us—us the enthusiasts, the dreamers, the sob-sisters— with pitch-forks, if you please! . . . An unprecedented scandal! And a

dreadful shock! The next thing is, we begin to sabotage. . . . The intelligentsia jibs, begins to pull its head out of the harness: 'I won't play any more, and you can see how you get on without me.' . . . This, when Russia was on the edge of a hellish abyss. . . . A tremendous, an irreparable mistake. It all comes from our gentle nurture; we're too squeamish; we can't understand a revolution without nice little books. . . . In the nice little books the revolution is described very attractively. . . . But this our people simply deserts from the front, drowns officers, lynches the Commander-in-Chief, burns manors, hunts the merchants' wives on the railways, and digs their diamond ear-rings from all sorts of places under their petticoats. No, we say, we don't want to play with this nasty people, there's nothing written in our books about such a people. . . . What's to be done? Shed an ocean of tears at home in our flats? The trouble is we have lost even the habit of weeping. . . . All our dreams are smashed to smithereens. There's nothing left to live for. And so, out of horror and disgust, some of us stick our heads under the pillow; others slink away to foreign parts; and those who are angriest take up arms. The result: a dreadful scandal in a respectable family! And the people, seventy per cent illiterate, doesn't even know how to slake its hatred, just runs amuck in blood and horrors. . . . 'They've sold us!' it says. 'They've done us down! Break the mirrors, smash up everything!' And in our intelligentsia there was only one little bunch, the Communists, who made good. When a ship is sinking, what's got to be done? Throw overboard everything that isn't needed. . . . The first thing the Communists did was to throw overboard the old barrels full of 'Russian' idealism. . . . All this was the old man's doing—he's a thoroughbred Russian, he is, brother. . . . And the people immediately felt, by a sort of animal instinct, that these were their own people, not gentlemen; these weren't going to sit down and weep, these were quick on the trigger. . . . That, my dear friend, is why I am with them, although I was reared in a Kropotkinian hot-house, under glass, amid dreams. . . . There are lots of such fellows with us, you know. . . . Don't grin, Telegin, you're just an embryo, a cheerful primitive. . . . But there are others, you know, who must quite deliberately turn themselves inside out, with the flesh side outwards, and feeling every touch, carry on by the sheer force of their will power—and their hatred. . . . A man can't fight without that. . . . We will do everything that is humanly possible; we will set the goal towards which the people is progressing. . . . But we are few and the enemy is everywhere. . . . You've heard about the Czecho-Slovaks? The commissar will be here soon, he'll tell you all about it. . . . Do you know what I am afraid of? That this whole business is suicide. . . . I don't believe that we can hold on for more than a month or two or six. . . . Unless. . . . No! . . . We are doomed, brother. . . . The end of it will be—just another general. But let me tell you that the Slavophils are to be blamed for it all. . . . When the emancipation of the serfs began, they should have set up a howl: 'Help! We are going to the dogs! We need intensive agriculture, a tremendous development of industry, education for everyone! . . . Let another Pugachev come or another Stenka Rasin, if only the whole framework of serfdom is smashed to bits!' That is the lesson we ought to have carried into the masses then; that is what we ought to have instilled into the intelligentsia. . . . But instead we shed rivers of happy tears: 'Oh, God, how boundless and how inimitable is our Russia! And our dear muzhik is now as free as air, and the landowners with their Turgenievian young ladies are all right too, and the mysterious soul of our people is quite different from the mercenary Western soul.' So now, Telegin, I trample every sort of dream underfoot! . . ." Sapozhkov had talked himself

to a standstill. His face was crimson. And yet it was clear that he had left the most important thing unsaid.

Telegin, stunned by the torrent of his words, was sitting open-mouthed, with the cup of cold tea on his knees. From the corridor of the carriage came the sound of footsteps, as if some incredibly heavy person was passing along it. The door of the compartment opened, and a broad-shouldered man of medium height appeared in the doorway. His dark hair was plastered over his high forehead. He sat down under the lamp without a word, and put his huge hands on his knees. The wrinkles on his weather-beaten, rough-hewn face looked like scars, and his eyes were hardly visible in the shadow cast by his overhanging brows and long eyelashes. This was Comrade Gymsa, chief of the security service of the regiment.

"Got hold of some drink again, have you?" he asked in a low voice, very gravely. "Take care, comrade. . . ."

"Who's talking about drink? To hell with you! Don't you see we are drinking tea?" answered Sapozhkov.

Gymsa remained motionless, but his deep voice had a ring in it:

"Lies, on top of the booze? That makes it worse. The place is reeking with the smell of it; the men are getting restless in the vans—they're smelling it too. . . . Haven't we had enough trouble as it is? And then you've started your philosophical chatter again, your idiotic rigmaroles, hence I infer that you are drunk."

"All right, I'm drunk. All right, shoot me!"

"You know quite well I'd shoot you soon enough, and if I don't it's because I take your fighting qualities into account."

"Give me some tobacco," Sapozhkov said.

Gymsa slowly pulled a pouch from his pocket. Then he turned to Telegin and went on in a slow voice, as if he were turning a millstone:

"Every time it's the same impermissible story. Last week we shot three blackguards. I questioned them myself; they were yellow, confessed everything. . . . And then he immediately got drunk. . . . To-day again: we shot an obvious swine, a Denikin spy; it was he himself who caught him hiding in the reeds. . . . And there you are again . . . he gets himself fuddled, and starts to argue. And he talks such nonsense—I was standing under the window just now and heard him, it made me feel sick, as if I'd been eating carrion. . . . For this kind of philosophy anyone in my place would have sent him to the special branch long ago as a disruptive element. And after such affairs he's sick for a couple of days and can't command the regiment. . . ."

"But if the fellow you shot was a university pal of mine?" Sapozhkov asked, screwing up his eyes; his nostrils were quivering.

Gymsa made no reply, pretending not to have heard it. Telegin hung his head. Sapozhkov pushed his face forward quite close to Gymsa's.

"A Denikin scout, yes. . . . But we used to go to the lectures in the Philosophical Evening Club together. . . . God knows what made him join the White army. . . . Despair, maybe. . . . And I myself brought him to you. . . . Isn't it enough that I did my duty? Or did you want me to dance a jig while you were taking him into the gully. I was walking behind you, I saw it all." Sapozhkov pressed his knees against Gymsa's and stared straight into the dark hollows of his eyes. "May I keep my human feelings, or must I burn everything up inside me?"

Gymsa replied slowly:

"No, you may not keep them . . . Somebody else might, I don't know.

. . . But you should burn up everything inside you. . . . It's in nests such as you that the counter-revolution is hatched."

They were silent a long time. The air seemed to hang heavily over them. All sound died down outside the dark window. Gymsa poured himself out some tea, broke off a great lump of grey bread, and began to eat it slowly. Then he began to tell the other two about the Czechoslovaks. The news was alarming. The Czechoslovaks had mutinied in all the troop-trains from Penza to Vladivostock. The Soviet authorities had hardly had time to realize what was going on when the Czechs were already in possession of railways and cities. Those whose trains were in the West had evacuated Penza, marched on Syzran and taken that city, and were now advancing towards Samara. They were well disciplined and well armed, and fought with skill and determination. It was as yet difficult to say whether this was simply a mutiny of soldiers or whether they were directed by some outside hand. Apparently both. In any case a new front had flared up like a train of powder from the Pacific to the Volga, boding terrible misfortunes.

Someone outside came up to the window. Gymsa stopped talking and turned round with a frown.

A voice called him:

"Comrade Gymsa, come outside a minute. . . ."

"What do you want? . . ."

"It's confidential."

Gymsa knit his brows, put his hands on the seat on each side of his legs, and sat like that for a second. Then he hoisted himself up with a visible effort and went out. His shoulders brushed both door-posts as he passed through the door. When he reached the platform of the carriage he sat down on the steps and bent forward. A tall figure approached him from the darkness, a figure in a cavalry coat. Spurs jingled. The figure quickly whispered something in Gymsa's ear. . . .

As soon as Gymsa had left the compartment, Sapozhkov began to pull violently at his pipe, and spat angrily out of the window several times. He took off his pince-nez, flung them aside and suddenly began to laugh.

"Here's the whole secret: to give a straight answer to a straight question. . . . Does God exist?—No. May one kill a man?—Yes. What is the immediate objective?—The world revolution. . . . Just like that, brother, without any high-falutin' emotions."

He suddenly broke off, grew tense, and listened. The whole carriage shook —Comrade Gymsa had banged his fist against the side. His hoarse voice snarled angrily:

"Well, if you've lied to me now, you son of a bitch. . . ."

Sapozhkov gripped Telegin's arm:

"Hear that? D'you know what it's all about? There are unpleasant rumours about concerning Sorokin, our Commander-in-Chief. . . . That chap's an agent of the special branch just back from staff headquarters. . . . D'you know now why Gymsa is so devilish glum?"

XII

THE STARS WERE already paling with the approaching dawn. The cock crowed again among the carts. Dew was falling on the sleeping camp. Telegin returned

to his own compartment, pulled off his boots, sighed and lay down on the seat, making its springs creak under his weight.

Sometimes he felt as if the short happiness of his life had been only a dream he had dreamt somewhere in the green steppe to the clatter of wheels. . . . Long, long ago there had been a peaceful, successful life: student years in vast, bottomless Petersburg; his job, and the care-free little band of cranks living with him in his flat across the river. It had seemed then that his future was all cut and dried and he never even thought about it; the years passed over his head without haste and without fatigue. Telegin knew then that he was honestly doing the work entrusted to him, and that when his hair grew grey he would be able to look back and see that he had travelled a long, long road without turning off into dangerous blind alleys—just like many thousand similar Telegins. But then Dasha had imperiously entered his simple, hard-working life—and a terrifying happiness had shone on him out of her grey eyes. True, he had always had short moments of secret doubt; all this happiness could surely not be for him. But he had driven these doubts from his thoughts and planned to make a happy little home for Dasha as soon as the war was over. Even when the main walls of the Empire crumbled to dust, when everything collapsed, and a nation of a hundred and fifty millions was screaming with pain and fury—Telegin had still thought that the storm would blow over and leave only a pool of rain shining in the sun after the storm in front of Dasha's little house. . . . But now he was again lying on a troop-train berth. . . . Yesterday there was a battle and to-morrow there would be another. Now it was clear that there was no bringing back the past. He was ashamed to think of how he had fussed over the furnishing of their flat in Petersburg a year ago. He had bought a mahogany bedstead, only for Dasha to bear her dead son on it.

Dasha was the first to hit the bottom of the whirlpool. To her the revolution meant the footpads attacking her near the Summer Park, the hair standing on end on her dead baby's head, the starvation and the cold, the decrees, every word of which breathed wrath and hate. The revolution whistled over the roofs in stormy nights, dashed frozen snow against her windows and shouted "Stranger!" at her with the voices of the blizzard. And when Petersburg's grey spring brought wet winds, when the roofs began to drip and icicles fell with a crash through the broken rain-pipes, Dasha had spoken to Telegin. He had come home animated and cheerful, with his overcoat unbuttoned, and had looked at Dasha with unusually sparkling eyes—and she had shrunk back and wrapped herself in her shawl up to the chin.

"How I would like, Ivan, to dash my head against the wall, to forget everything, for ever. . . . Then perhaps I might still be a friend to you. . . . But as it is, to lie down in this dreadful bed, to begin another appalling day—you must realize: I just can't, I can't go on like this. . . . Don't think I just want to live comfortably, nothing of the kind. . . . But I want to live, filling my lungs deep. . . . I don't want crumbs. . . . I don't love you any more. . . . Forgive me. . . ." She said it and turned away.

Dasha had always been austere in her emotions—now she had grown hard. Telegin asked her:

"Perhaps we had better separate for a time, Dasha?"

And then, for the first time that whole winter, he saw Dasha's eyebrows rise in an expression of pleasure; there was a strange gleam of hope in her eyes, and her thin face twitched pitifully. . . .

"It seems to me," she said, and put her hands on his chest, "that we had better separate, Ivan."

After that, with Rublyov's aid, he had enlisted in the Red army, and at the end of March left with a troop-train for the South. Dasha saw him off from the platform of the October Station, and when the windows of his carriage floated past she wept bitterly, pulling her knitted shawl over her face.

Since then Ivan Ilyich had travelled hundreds of miles, but neither battles, nor fatigue, nor privations, could make him forget that beloved, tear-stained face in the crowd of women standing by the grimy station wall.

Dasha had said farewell to him as people do when they are parting for ever. He tried hard to understand why he had failed with her. Of course it was he who was to blame for her estrangement: for she was not the only woman who had borne a child and lost it. And it was not the revolution that had torn away her heart. . . . There were many couples he could think of who had huddled closer to each other in those terrible chaotic weeks. What exactly had been his mistake?

Sometimes he had lost his temper—oh, all right, my dear, try and find somebody else who will coddle you as I do. . . . The world was bursting out of all its seams, but to her all that mattered were her own emotions. . . . She was simply spoilt, she had got used to French rolls: now she had to eat black bread with chaff in it and didn't like it.

All this was true, no doubt. But the conclusion it led to was that Ivan Ilyich himself was a splendid fellow and it was a crime not to love him. Ivan Ilyich stumbled over this every time. . . . "Actually what is there in me that makes me different from other men? I'm physically healthy, that's one. Extraordinarily clever and interesting?—No, just normal, like a pair of number ten goloshes. . . . A hero, a great man? Or a male with exceptional sex appeal?—No, none of these. Just a plain, workaday citizen like millions of others. . . . By pure chance I've drawn a winning number in a lottery: a charming girl, a girl a thousand times more passionate and clever than I am, a girl far superior to me fell in love with me—and then in the same unaccountable way grew tired of me."

Looking at himself he thought that perhaps the reason was that he was not big enough for these times—that he did even his fighting in a commonplace way, like a clerk going to his office. Nowadays he often met men who were terrible in good and in evil, who threw enormous shadows as they strode through bloody slaughter. "But you, Ivan Ilyich, if at least you could hate the enemy with all your heart, or fear death as you should. . . ."

It all distressed Telegin very much. And without being aware of it himself, he became one of the most reliable, level-headed and courageous workers in his regiment. Dangerous operations were entrusted to him, and he carried them out brilliantly.

The conversation with Sapozhkov made him think deeply. His commanding officer, who always appeared so cheerful, was also writhing in torment? And Mishka Solomin? And Chertogonov? And thousands of others whom he passed without noticing? They were all of a piece with the times; the huge, unkempt muzhiks, distorted with suffering, some of them lacking even the words to express themselves, with only the rifle in their hands; and those others with their savage debauchery and their aftermath of repentance. . . . There's Russia for you, there's the revolution! . . .

"Comrade Company Commander! Wake up!"

Telegin sat up in his berth. Through the window of the carriage he could see the golden ball of the sun hanging over the edge of the steppe, yellow as a newly-hatched chicken.

A broad-faced soldier, with a beard as red as the morning sun itself, shook Ivan Ilyich again:

"The commander wants you urgently. . . ."

In Sapozhkov's compartment the evil-smelling little lamp was still burning. Gymsa was there, and Sokolovski, the regimental commissar, a black-haired, consumptive young man with sleepless, blazing black eyes; two battalion and a few company commanders, and a representative of the soldiers' committee, with an independent and even offended expression on his face. . . . They were all smoking. Sapozhkov, in military tunic and with a revolver in his belt, was holding the tape of a telegram in a hand that was shaking.

". . . thus the unexpected capture of the station by the enemy has cut off our troops and laid them open to attack from two directions," Sapozhkov was reading in a hoarse voice when Telegin appeared at the door of the compartment. ". . . For the sake of the revolution, for the sake of the unfortunate population, inevitably faced with death, executions and torture if we leave them at the mercy of the White bands, do not lose a minute, send reinforcements."

"What shall we do without instructions from the Commander-in-Chief?" Sokolovski cried. "I'll go and try to get in touch with him again by teleprinter . . ."

"Try it by all means," Gymsa said ominously. Everyone looked at him. "But listen to me—what you've got to do is to take four good men, take Telegin here, and get to staff headquarters along the railway line on a trolley. . . . And don't come back without those instructions. . . . Sapozhkov, write out a report to Commander-in-Chief Sorokin . . ."

From a grassy hillock a rider shading his eyes with his hand was attentively watching the strip of permament way on which the little cloud of dust was rapidly approaching.

When it disappeared in a dip the rider touched his horse's flank with knee and spur; the lean red stallion jerked its vicious mouth, wheeled and jumped off the hillock, on both slopes of which a platoon of the Volunteer Army, all of them officers, was lying behind little mounds of earth they had evidently just dug up.

"It's a trolley," said von Mecke, jumping from the saddle and tapping the stallion on the forefeet with his riding-whip. "Lie down!" The horse stiffened its legs and laid its ears back viciously, but then resigned itself and sank to the ground with a deep sigh, lying with its muzzle on the earth. Its bony ribs lifted once and then it lay still.

Von Mecke squatted on his heels on the top of the hill, alongside of Roshchin. The trolley had by this time emerged again from the hollow, and they could distinguish six men in grey greatcoats.

"They're Reds all right!" von Mecke said, turning his head to the left. "Platoon!" He turned to the right. "Ready! At a moving object . . . fire!"

The volley tore the air round the hillock like the tearing of starched calico. Through the cloud of dust they could see a man fall off the trolley, turn over several times and roll down the slope, clutching at the grass with his hands.

The men in the disappearing trolley returned the fire, three with rifles and two with revolvers. In a minute a second hollow and a signalman's shack

would hide them. Von Mecke was furious; his whip whistled through the air, and he shouted:

"They're getting away! They're getting away! You ought to be shooting crows! Shame!"

Roshchin was considered a good shot. Sighting a foot ahead, he took careful aim at a broad-shouldered, tall, clean-shaven fellow, evidently the commander. . . . "He looks exactly like Telegin!" he thought. "Perhaps. . . . No, that would be too horrible. . . ."

Roshchin fired. The cap flew off the other man's head, but the trolley dived into the second hollow. Von Mecke threw his whip down.

"Muck! The whole platoon's just muck! You're not shots, gentlemen, you're a heap of muck!"

He cursed and swore, his eyes, the eyes of a sleepless murderer, bulging out of his head with rage, until finally the officers got up from the ground, dusted their knees and began to mutter:

"Better keep your tongue in check, captain, there are higher-ranking men here than yourself."

As he slipped in a fresh clip, Roshchin felt that his hand was still trembling. Why on earth? Could it be because of the mere thought that the man on the trolley looked so much like Telegin? Nonsense—Telegin was in Petrograd. . . .

Commissar Sokolovski and Telegin, his head bandaged, went up the steps of a two-storey brick-built house opposite the church in the unpaved square where in old times the market used to be held. Now the market booths were boarded up, windows were smashed and railings broken away. The church was used as a hospital, and in the churchyard the soldiers' ragged linen was dancing in the wind on pieces of string.

The house was the staff headquarters of Sorokin, their Commander-in-Chief. The hall was littered with papers and cigarette-ends; a staircase led upwards, and at the foot of it a Red soldier was sitting on a bentwood chair with his rifle between his legs. His eyes were closed, and he was humming a song of the steppes. He was a broad-faced lad, with a bunch of hair—the approved symbol of dash and daring—sticking out from under the cap he wore at the back of his head.

"We want Comrade Sorokin. . . . Where is he?" Sokolovski asked impatiently.

The lad opened his eyes, fogged with sleep and boredom. He looked at Sokolovski, at his face, his clothes, his boots, then at Telegin in the same way. The commissar impatiently went up to the lad:

"I am asking you, comrade. . . . We must see the Commander-in-Chief on a matter of greatest importance."

"You mustn't talk to a sentry," the lad answered.

"Oh, hell! In staff headquarters you always get these oafs, these sticklers for formalities!" Sokolovski cried. "I insist that you tell me, comrade: is Sorokin in or not?"

"How should I know?"

"Where is your chief of staff? In the office?"

"Yes, in the office."

Sokolovski pulled Telegin's sleeve and started to run up the stairs. Then the sentry leaned forward and picked up his rifle, but remained sitting on his chair.

"Where are you going?"

"What do you mean? To the chief of staff of course."

"Got a pass?"

Sokolovski was literally foaming with rage as he began to explain to the sentry on what business they had rushed here on a trolley along the railway lines. The lad listened, looking at the machine-gun standing at the entrance, at the decrees and ordinances, announcements and lists with which the walls of the hall were covered, and shook his head:

"You must understand, comrade, if you're really class-conscious," he said in a complaining voice. "If you've got a pass, go up; if you haven't, I shall shoot."

There was nothing for it but to submit, although the passes were issued somewhere on the other side of the square and the chances were that the office would be closed and the man in charge gone for the day. . . . Sokolovski felt somehow very tired all at once. . . . At that moment a little shrimp of a man in a shirt open to the navel rushed in from the porch with a great clatter of boots and shouted:

"Mitka, they're issuing soap!"

The sentry vanished from his chair as if the wind had blown him away. Sokolovski and Telegin walked up unobstructed to the second floor, and after they had been sent from pillar to post by slightly puffy-eyed pretty girls in silk blouses, they at last found the office of the chief of staff.

There they found a foppishly-dressed officer, lying boots and all on a shabby divan and examining his nails. With exquisite politeness and carefully 'proletarian' manners, calling them 'comrade' at every word—although the word 'comrade' as he said it, sounded just as if he had said 'Lord Sokolovski' or 'Prince Telegin'—inquired their business, asked to be excused and left the room, his brown-laced knee-boots creaking as he walked. They could hear whispering next door. Then a door slammed somewhere far away and everything was quiet.

Sokolovski looked at Telegin with flaming eyes:

"Do you understand it? Where the devil are we? This is like a White headquarters." He shrugged his lean shoulders.

There were whispers again beyond the wall. The door was thrown open and the chief of staff came in—a man of middle age, stocky, with a high bald forehead, wearing a coarse shirt such as soldiers wear, with a Caucasian belt round his fat paunch. He frowned sharply at Telegin, nodded to Sokolovski, and sat down at the table, putting his hairy hands on it. His forehead was moist, as if he had just been eating and drinking well. He felt that he was being closely scrutinized and the frown deepened on his handsome, but puffy face.

"The officer on duty tells me, comrades, that you have come on urgent business," he said with frigid importance. "I was puzzled why the commander of the regiment, or yourself, comrade commissar, did not make use of the direct line. . . ."

"I tried to get through three times!" Sokolovski jumped up, and pulling the telegraph tape from his pocket held it out to the chief of staff. "How can we wait calmly while our comrades are dying! No instructions came from army headquarters. . . . We have been entreated to send assistance. . . . The 'Proletarian Freedom' regiment is being wiped out, and the regiment has two thousand refugees in its train. . . ."

The chief of staff negligently glanced at the tape and threw it down. It curled itself round the massive inkstand on the table.

"We're not ignorant of the fact that there is some fighting at present in the

sector held by the 'Proletarian Freedom' regiment, comrades. . . . I must commend your zeal and your revolutionary enthusiasm . . ."—he seemed to be searching for the right words—"but in future I should be obliged to you if you refrained from developing panics. . . . Especially as the operations of the enemy are of a purely incidental nature. . . . In other words, all necessary measures have been taken and you can return to your duties reassured."

He raised his head. His eyes were clear and severe. Telegin understood that the interview was at an end and got up, but Sokolovski remained sitting as if he had been stunned.

"I can't go back to the regiment with such an answer," he said. "If I do, our soldiers will call a meeting to-day, and to-day the regiment will go into action on its own initiative in aid of the 'Proletarians.' . . . I warn you, comrade, that at that meeting I shall speak in favour of such action. . . ."

The chief of staff grew purple in the face and his vast, bald forehead began to glisten. Pushing back his chair with a clatter, he rose to his feet.

"If you do, you will answer for it to the revolutionary tribunal of the army, comrade! This is not nineteen-seventeen, don't you forget!"

"You can't frighten us, comrade."

"Hold your tongue!"

At that moment the door suddenly opened to admit a tall and extremely well-built man wearing a blue Circassian coat of fine cloth. His sullen, handsome face, with dark hair falling over his forehead and a drooping moustache, was of that peculiar delicate rose-colour which is found in desperate drunkards and very cruel men. His lips were moist and red, his black eyes wide open. Swinging the left sleeve of his coat he went up to Sokolovski and Telegin and looked fiercely into their eyes. Then he turned to the chief of staff. His nostrils were quivering with anger:

"Again these throwbacks to the old régime! What is this 'hold your tongue'? If these men are guilty they will be shot. . . . But don't come the general over them, please. . . ."

The chief of staff took the rebuke in silence, with his head bent. There was no reply to be made—this was Sorokin, the Commander-in-Chief, in person.

"Sit down, comrades, I am listening," he said, somewhat more calmly, and sat down on the window-sill.

Sokolovski began a second time to explain the reason for their coming, to get permission for the Varnavski regiment to go to the assistance of their neighbours the 'Proletarians'; in addition to the revolutionary duty, this operation was also indicated by the simple calculation that if the 'Proletarians' were routed the Varnavski regiment would be cut off from its base. . . .

Sorokin did not remain sitting on the window-ledge more than an instant. Then he began to pace rapidly to and fro, throwing curt questions over his shoulder, and turning so sharply that the wind of it blew his hair right and left.

The soldiers liked him for his lively temperament and his courage. He was a good speaker at meetings. These two qualities in those times often served as a substitute for military ability. Originally he had been a Cossack officer and had fought in Transcaucasia as a sub-lieutenant in Yudenich's army. After the October revolution he returned to his village in the Kuban district and there organized a partisan troop which successfully fought at the siege of Yekaterinodar. His star rose rapidly. His sudden fame went to his head. His energies brimmed over—he had time both to fight and to carouse. In addition, his chief of staff took particular care to surround him with pretty women and all the other requisites of debauchery.

"What reply did you get from my staff?" he asked when Sokolovski had finished and was wiping his forehead with a dirty rag of a handkerchief.

The chief of staff replied hurriedly:

"I said that we have taken all necessary measures to save the 'Proletarian Freedom' regiment. I said that the command of the Varnavski regiment was interfering with the instructions of army headquarters, that this was quite impermissible, and that in addition a quite groundless panic was being engendered. . . ."

"No, comrade, that's not the right way to tackle this business," Sorokin said in an unexpectedly conciliatory tone. "Discipline must be maintained, of course. . . . But there are some things a thousand times more important than your discipline. . . . The will of the masses. . . . Revolutionary zeal must be fostered even if it contravenes your scientific principles. . . . Even if the action of the Varnavski regiment were useless or even harmful . . . after all, devil take it, this is a revolution. . . . Forbid them to take action and they will all rush to a meeting. . . . I know these wind-bags, they will all shout again that I am selling the army. . . ."

He strode across to the stove and looked fiercely at Sokolovski:

"Give me your report!"

Telegin immediately took out the report and put it on the table. The Commander-in-Chief seized it, ran his eyes over it rapidly, and began to write with a spluttering pen:

"The Varnavski regiment is ordered to go into action immediately to carry out its revolutionary duty."

The chief of staff looked at him with a smile, and when the Commander-in-Chief held out the paper to him, stepped back and put his hands behind his back:

"You can court-martial me, but I'm not going to countersign that."

In the same instant Telegin sprang forward and caught Sorokin's wrist, preventing him from raising his revolver, while Sokolovski stepped in between him and the chief of staff. All four of them were breathing hard. Sorokin tore himself free, put the pistol in his pocket and went out, slamming the door so hard that bits of plaster fell from the wall.

Doors slammed, and the furious footsteps died away in the distance.

The chief of staff said, lowering his voice to make it sound conciliatory:

"I can assure you, comrades, that if I had signed the order, the disaster might have assumed considerable dimensions."

"What disaster?" Sokolovski asked hoarsely, and cleared his throat. The chief of staff looked at him curiously.

"You can't guess what I'm driving at?"

"No!" Sokolovski's face twitched.

"I am speaking of the whole army. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"I have no right to reveal military secrets to a regimental commissar. Isn't that so, comrades? You ought to be the first to shoot me if I did. . . . But we have gone too far. Very well. Take it all on your own responsibility."

He walked over to the map, which was studded with little flags. Sokolovski and Telegin went and stood behind his back. The hot breath of two mouths so close to him obviously irked the chief of staff, and his shoulder-blades squirmed under his tunic. But he calmly took out a dirty tooth-pick and moved its point, ragged with chewing, along the map from the tricolour flags downwards to the south where the red flags were thickest.

"This is where the Whites are," the chief of staff said.

"Where? Where?" Sokolovski went close up to the map and his eyes darted from point to point on it. "But that is Torgovaya! . . ."

"Yes. Torgovaya. With its fall the road is nearly clear for the Whites."

"I don't understand. . . . We thought the Whites were many miles farther North."

"We thought so, but the Whites didn't, comrade. . . . At the present moment a concentrated attack is being made on Torgovaya. The Whites have aeroplanes and tanks. This is not Kornilov's old rabble. They are advancing on the inner lines, and attack us wherever they like. The initiative has passed into their hands. . . ."

"But north of Torgovaya there is Dmitri Shelest's Iron Division," Telegin said.

"Shelest has been routed."

"And the cavalry brigade?"

"Routed."

Sokolovski stretched out his neck and peered at the map:

"Your self-control is very great, comrade," he said. "You seem to be quite resigned to the fall of Torgovaya. . . . Everybody seems to have been routed. . . ." He turned on the chief of staff. "And our army?"

"We are awaiting orders from the Supreme Command. Comrade Kalnin has his own ideas. Army headquarters can't very well bang their fists on the table and demand action from general headquarters, can it? A war isn't a public meeting."

The chief of staff smiled subtly. Sokolovski held his breath and stared at the fat calm face. The chief of staff stared back at him.

"Yes, comrades, that is the position," he said, and walked back to the table. "That is why I have no right to take even a single unit from the front, even though it might seem quite reasonable and even necessary. Our position is not at all easy. So you had better return to your unit without delay. All that I've told you must be treated as confidential for the time being. There must be no uneasiness in the army. As to the 'Proletarian Freedom' regiment, you need not be anxious about its fate—I have received encouraging reports."

The chief of staff knit his brows above his hooked nose and dismissed his visitors with a perfunctory nod. Telegin and Sokolovski left the office. In the next room the orderly officer was standing by the window cleaning his nails. He bowed politely to them as they went out.

"Scoundrel!" Sokolovski whispered. When they reached the street he clutched at Telegin's sleeve. "Well? What do you make of it?"

"From the formal point of view he is right. In reality, it's sabotage, of course."

"Sabotage? No—he's playing for bigger stakes than that. I'll go back and shoot him."

"Chuck it, Sokolovski, don't be a fool!"

"It's treachery, I tell you, treachery!" Sokolovski muttered. "Gymsa gets reports every day: army headquarters are rotten with drink and debauchery. Sorokin has driven out the commissars. But what can we do? Sorokin is God and the Tsar in the army, damn him. They like him for his courage—and then he's one of themselves. But the chief of staff—d'you know who that is? Belyakov, ex-colonel of the Tsarist army. . . . See what a mix-up it is? Well, let's go. Do you think we'll get through all right?"

The chief of staff touched a bell; the orderly officer appeared smartly in the doorway.

"Find out the condition of the Commander-in-Chief," Belyakov said, looking sternly at his papers.

"Comrade Sorokin is in the dining-room. Condition: half-seas-over."

The orderly officer waited for the chief of staff to laugh first, then he also smiled meaningly and said:

"Zinka is with him."

"Good. You can go."

Belyakov went into the communications office, looked through the telephone reports, signed a few papers in a small, neat hand, and stopped for a moment outside the last door in the corridor. He could hear the low strumming of a guitar inside. The chief of staff pulled out his handkerchief, wiped his fat red neck, knocked, and went in without waiting for an answer.

Sorokin was sitting in the middle of the room at a table covered with unfolded newspapers and littered with dirty plates and glasses. The wide sleeves of his Circassian coat were turned back. His handsome face was as sullen as before. A lock of dark hair had fallen forward on his moist forehead. He stared at Belyakov with dilated pupils. On a low stool at his side sat Zinka—her legs crossed to show her garters and lace underclothes—and strummed a guitar. Zinka was a young woman with bright blue eyes and moist red lips; she had a fine-cut, determined-looking little nose and a tangled mass of red hair combed up high over her head. Only the lines at the corners of her mouth, though hardly visible, gave her delicate face the expression of a small animal that could bite. According to her passport she came from somewhere near Omsk, and was the daughter of a railway labourer—but of course nobody believed this, just as nobody believed that she was eighteen years old, or that her surname was Kanavina, or her Christian name Zinaida. But she was a very good typist, drank vodka, played the guitar and sang gipsy songs pleasantly. Sorokin had undertaken to shoot her with his own hand at the first attempt on her part to introduce White Guard rot and mould into his headquarters. That satisfied everyone.

"You're a fine fellow, aren't you," Belyakov said, shaking his head, but keeping near the door—just in case. "You put me in a pleasant position, didn't you? Two obvious Central Committee supporters turn up and threaten us with meetings, and you immediately take their part. The simplest thing would be for you to go to the telephone and ring up Yekaterinodar. They'll immediately send you some little Jew-boy, and he'll appoint your staff, sleep in the same bed with you, go along with you to the latrine and keep a check on your very thoughts. Oh! Oh! How awful! Commander-in-Chief Sorokin has a deviation towards dictatorship! He must be kept under control! If that's what you want, please yourself. But as for me, I beg to be excused. . . . You can shoot me if you like, but I won't stand your threatening me with a pistol in front of subordinates. How can there be any discipline after that? Go to the devil."

Still looking at his chief of staff, Sorokin stretched out his large, powerful hand, and missing his aim, closed his fist on air instead of the neck of the bottle. His lips trembled slightly, and his moustache twitched. Then he got hold of the bottle and poured out two glasses:

"Sit down. Drink."

Belyakov squinted towards Zinka's lace knickers, and came up to the table. Sorokin said:

"If you were not so clever, you'd have been done for long ago. Discipline indeed! My discipline is—fighting. Let any of you come and try to rouse the masses. . . . It's I that can lead them—no one else. Presently I'll crush the White Guard scum all on my own. . . . The world will tremble!"

His nostrils sucked in the air greedily, and the purple veins on his temples began to throb.

"I can do without the Central Committee men. I can clean up the Kuban and the Don, and the Terek, too. They're past-masters at speechifying in Yekaterinodar, in their committees. The bastards, the cowards! But all the same—I'm the man on horseback—I do the fighting—I'm the dictator—it's I who lead the army. . . ."

He stretched out his hand towards his glass, but Belyakov forestalled him and upset it.

"You've had enough."

"Oh, are you giving orders here?"

"I am asking you as a friend."

Sorokin leant back in his chair and sighed. His eyes wandered about the room until they rested on Zinka. She swept the strings with her nails, lazily raised her eyebrows, and began to sing a sentimental gipsy song.

Sorokin listened, and the veins on his temples throbbed more violently. He stood up, bent back Zinka's head, and began to kiss her lips greedily. She ran her fingers over the strings, and then the guitar slipped off her knees.

"That's another business altogether," Belyakov said good-humouredly. "I like you, Sorokin. I don't know why, but I do. . . ."

Zinka finally extricated herself and bent down, very red in the face, to pick up her guitar. Her bright eyes glinted from under her dishevelled hair. She licked her pouting lips with the tip of her tongue and said:

"You hurt me . . ."

"Well, friends, tell you what . . . I've an extra special bottle in reserve . . ."

Belyakov broke off in the middle of a word. His open hand stopped in mid-air. Through the window came the sound of shots and the buzz of angry voices. Zinka vanished with her guitar into thin air. Sorokin frowned and went to the window.

"Don't go down. I'll find out first what it is," the chief of staff said hurriedly.

Such scenes and shootings were a common occurrence at army headquarters. Sorokin's army was composed of two main groups: the Kuban Cossacks, the nucleus of which group Sorokin had formed the year before; and the Ukrainians, formed of the remnants of the Ukrainian Red army, which had retreated under the pressure of the Germans. A feud of long standing existed between the two groups. The Ukrainians fought none too well to hold a territory not their own, and were none too restrained in requisitioning food and forage when they passed through the Cossack villages.

Fights and rows were everyday occurrences. But the affair which had started that day was of a more serious nature. Mounted Cossacks galloped about shouting. Frightened infantrymen ran for cover to the hedges and fences. A violent fusillade came from the direction of the railway station. On the square, just under the windows of army headquarters, a wounded Cossack writhed in the dust and screamed horribly.

At headquarters the staff was all at sixes and sevens. That morning no answer had come over the wires, but now a batch of crazy reports was pouring in. The only thing that could be made out from the reports was that the Whites were rapidly advancing towards the line Sosky-Umanskaya, and were driving

panic-stricken Red troop-trains before them. The first of these Red troop-trains had now arrived and had begun to loot the station and the village. The Kuban Cossacks had opened fire on them, and a battle was in progress.

Sorokin dashed through the gateway on his tall, vicious red mare, followed by half a squadron of his mounted escort, in Circassian coats with the hoods flying out behind them, their curved scimitars drawn. Sorokin sat his horse as if he was glued to the saddle. He wore no cap, so that he should be recognized immediately. His handsome head was thrown back; the wind tugged at his hair and at the sleeves and long tails of his Circassian coat. He was still drunk, resolute and pale. His eyes were fixed in a piercing stare, and the look in them was terrible. The dust rose in clouds behind the galloping horses.

Near the station shots were fired from behind a hedge. A few men of the escort cried out and one fell from his horse, but Sorokin did not even turn his head. He was looking at the grey mass of soldiers swarming round the goods trains, shouting and running to and fro.

They recognized Sorokin from afar. Many of them climbed up on to the tops of the trucks. Some waved their rifles and shouted. Sorokin jumped the fence of the station garden without slackening speed, and dashed on to the permanent way where the men stood thickest. They seized the horse's bridle. He raised his hand above his head and shouted:

"Comrades, companions in arms, warriors! What has happened? Why this shooting? Why this panic? Who has been turning your heads? Where is the scoundrel?"

"We have been betrayed!" a panic-stricken voice whined.

"The commanders have sold us! They have broken up the front!" shouted voices here and there. And the whole enormous crowd on the permanent way, in the field and on the vans roared all together:

"They have sold us. . . . The whole army is smashed up. . . . Down with the Commander-in-Chief! Lynch the Commander-in-Chief!"

The crowd whistled and roared like a gale out of hell. The horses of the escort snorted and reared. A few distorted faces and black hands had already pushed their way through to Sorokin. He shouted at the top of his voice, and his strong neck swelled with the effort:

"Silence! You are not a revolutionary army, you're a gang of bandits and scoundrels. . . . Hand over the panic-mongers, the slackers! Hand over the White Guard whisperers!"

He suddenly gave his mare the spurs. The beast reared up and plunged deeper into the crowd. Sorokin, leaning forward in his saddle and pointing at one of the men, shouted:

"There he is!"

The crowd involuntarily turned towards the man at whom Sorokin was pointing, a tall thin man with a big nose. His face grew pale and he spread out his elbows to back out of the crowd. Whether Sorokin really knew him, or sacrificed him at random to save the situation, no one ever knew. The crowd was out for blood. Sorokin drew his sabre and it whistled through the air and struck the tall man on his long neck. Blood spurted up in a thick stream and splashed the horse's head.

"Thus does the revolutionary army deal with the enemies of the people!"

Sorokin spurred his mare forward again. Brandishing his blood-stained sabre, pale and terrible, he made his way through the crowd, cursing, threatening, and reassuring them.

"Who told you the army was defeated? White agents and spies are trying

to create a panic. . . . They put you up to looting the villages, to breaking discipline. . . . Who said we were routed? Who saw us beaten? You, you scoundrel, did you see it? Comrades, I have led you in the fight, you know me. I have twenty-six wounds on me! I demand that you immediately stop looting! Go back to your troop-trains! To-day I shall lead you to the attack. . . . The cowards and shirkers will feel the weight of the anger of the people!"

The crowd listened. In their amazement they got up on each other's shoulders to have a look at their commander-in-chief. There were still some shouts here and there, but the men were cooling down. Here and there they could be heard saying: "Well, what he's saying is right. . . . Let him lead us, we'll follow."

The company commanders, who had gone into hiding, reappeared, and little by little the units drew off to their trains. The coat on Sorokin's breast was torn—he had torn it open to show his old wounds. His face was pale and distorted with passion. The panic died down, and machine-guns were posted to control further troop trains that were arriving. Telegrams of the most resolute tenor were flying up and down the line.

Still, a retreat was unavoidable. It was only some days later, near Timashevskaya, that it was possible to re-establish order among the men and begin a counter-attack. The Reds advanced towards Vyselki and Korenevka in two columns. Wherever the issue hung in the balance, the Red soldiers saw Sorokin galloping on his red mare. It seemed as if by the sheer force of his own passionate will he changed the fortunes of war and saved the Black Sea country. The Central Executive Committee of the North Caucasian Republic had no option but to confirm his leadership in all military operations.

CHAPTER VI

DURING THOSE SAME last days of May when Denikin's army started out on what was later called the 'second Kuban campaign', another storm was gathering over the Russian Soviet Republic. Three Czech divisions, moving from the Ukranian front towards the east, mutinied almost simultaneously in their troop-trains along the whole line from Penza to Omsk.

This mutiny was the first of the premeditated interventionist blows aimed at the Soviet Union. The Czech divisions, formed from 1914 onwards out of Czechs living in Russia and later out of Austrian prisoners of war of Czech nationality, proved after the October revolution to be a foreign body within the country, interfering with the internal affairs of Russia by armed force.

It was easy to persuade these Czechs to rise in arms against the Russian revolution. They looked upon Russia of old as the future liberator of the Czech people from the Austrian yoke, and with the Czech peasants, when they fattened their geese for Christmas, it was an old tradition to say: "One goose for the Russ." The Czech divisions, as they made a fighting retreat before the advancing Germans in the Ukraine, were preparing to transfer to the French front in order to demonstrate in the eyes of the world for the freedom of Czechia and her right to participate in the victory over the Austro-Germans.

At the same time German and Magyar prisoners of war were moving homewards in the opposite direction to the Czechs whose goal was Vladivostok. These, especially the Magyars, were much hated by the Czechs. Wherever

the two currents met violent passions were let loose. White Guard agents whispered in the ears of the Czechs about the insidious intentions of the Bolsheviks who were said to want to disarm the Czechs and deliver them up to the Germans.

On May 14th a serious clash occurred between Czechs and Magyars on the railway station at Chelyabinsk. The Chelyabinsk Soviet thereupon arrested a few of the especially arrogant Czechs. The whole Czech troop-train rose in arms at this. The Soviet had only a few ill-armed Red Army men at its disposal and was compelled to give way to the Czechs. But the story of the Chelyabinsk incident spread all along the line. The explosion came as a result of the treacherous and provocative order issued in connection with the incident by the Chairman of the Supreme Military Council of the Republic:

"All local Soviets must disarm the Czechoslovaks and will be responsible for carrying out this order; any Czechoslovak found armed on the railway lines is to be shot immediately; all Czechoslovak units among which there is even a single armed soldier must be immediately detrained and confined in a camp for prisoners of war."

As the Czechs were well disciplined, abundantly equipped with guns and machine-guns, possessed plenty of battle experience and were closely united for a common cause, while the Soviets had only poorly-armed detachments of Red Guards lacking experienced commanders—it was not the Czechs who were destroyed, but the Soviets, and the Czechs became masters of the whole railway line from Penza to Omsk.

The mutiny began in Penza where the Soviet sent five hundred Red Guards to deal with fourteen thousand Czechs. The Red Guards attacked the railway station and were killed almost to the last man. The Czechs took with them from Penza the printing equipment for the printing of bank-notes and State bonds, defeated the Reds in a great battle near Bezenchuk and Lipyagi and took Samara.

Thus a new front of the civil war was formed and rapidly extended to the enormous spaces of the Volga region, the Urals and Siberia.

Dr. Dmitri Stepanovich Bulavin was leaning out of the window and listening to the dull rumble of artillery fire. The street was empty. A white-hot sun beat down with intolerable heat on the walls of the low houses, on the dusty windows of the empty shops, on the useless signboards and the asphalt street thick with chalk dust.

To the right, where the doctor was looking, was a square, and in it the wooden obelisk-like structure housing the statue of Alexander II, still covered with rags of discoloured bunting. On one side of it stood a gun. A group of men were turning over paving-stones and digging something that was obviously useless. They were all there: Slovokhotov the dean; Mishin the notary, the joy and pride of the Samara intelligentsia; Romanov, owner of the delicatessen shop; Strambov, ex-member of the Zemstvo, and Kuroyedov, tall, grey-haired and handsome, formerly a landowner and a very great man in the town. They were all patients of Dr. Bulavin, all his partners at cards. A Red army soldier sat on a barrow, his rifle between his knees, and smoked a cigarette, spitting every now and then.

The thunder of the guns came from beyond the little river Samarka. The noise caused the glass of the window-panes to tinkle softly, and the doctor to

snort and twist his mouth into a sneer. The doctor's pulse was a hundred and five; the old civic passions were not dead in him yet. But it would have been dangerous for the time being to give any other expression to his feelings. Just opposite him, on the other side of the street, on the boards covering the broken plate-glass windows of Leder's jewellery store, he could see the white poster with the revolutionary committee's proclamation threatening counter-revolutionary elements with the death penalty.

Now a strange figure of a man appeared in the empty street. He wore a coconut-fibre snap-brim hat and a tussore jacket of pre-war style. He was also very frightened and crept along the walls of the houses, frequently looking over his shoulder and jumping every now and then as if a shot had been fired under his nose. His hair, the colour of a loofah, hung down to his shoulders, and his reddish beard looked as if it had been stuck on his very pale, long face.

This was Govyadin, statistician of the Zemstvo, who at one time had vainly attempted to rouse the 'beautiful beast' in Dasha. He was coming to see Dr. Bulavin, and the matter seemed so serious that he mastered his fear of the empty street and the thundering guns.

Seeing the doctor at the window, Govyadin made a desperate gesture, meant to convey: "Look away, I am being followed." Hugging the wall, he looked round as he passed the revolutionary committee's manifesto, and then rushed across the street and disappeared into a doorway. A minute later he was knocking at the back entrance of the flat.

"For God's sake close the window, we are being kept under observation," he said in a stage whisper as he entered the dining-room. "Draw the blinds. . . . Or—no, better not draw them. . . . Dmitri Stepanovich, I have a message for you."

"What can I do for you?" the doctor asked ironically, sitting down at the table covered with a scorched and dirty oilcloth. "Sit down, and let's hear."

Govyadin seized a chair, threw himself into it, and whispered loudly right into the doctor's ear:

"Dmitri Stepanovich. . . . At a secret meeting of the Committee of the Constituent Assembly a motion has been adopted to offer you the portfolio of Under-Secretary for Public Health."

"Under-Secretary, eh?" the doctor repeated, dropping the corners of his mouth until his whole chin was gathered into folds. "H'm. And of what republic, please?"

"Not of any republic, but of the government. We are taking the initiative into our own hands. We are forming a front. We are to be sent a machine to print bank-notes. With the Czechoslovak army corps as a vanguard we shall march against Moscow. We'll convoke a Constituent Assembly. We, do you understand?—we are going to do all this. There was a lively clash to-day: the Socialist-revolutionaries and the Mensheviks demanded all the seats in the cabinet. But we, the Zemstvo men, stood up for you and got you the portfolio. I am proud of it. You accept?"

At that precise moment there was such a frightful bang beyond the Samarka that the glasses tinkled on the table, and Govyadin jumped up with his hand clutching at his heart:

"Those are the Czechs . . ."

There was another bang and then a machine-gun began to rattle, apparently quite close. Govyadin, pale as a sheet, sat down again, tucking up his leg under him:

"And this Red rabble. . . . They've got machine-guns on the granary. But there is not the slightest doubt that the Czechs will take the town."

"Well, I suppose I ought to accept," Dr. Bulavin said in a deep voice. "Will you have some tea? Though it's cold by now."

Govyadin declined the tea and whispered dreamily:

"The government is led by patriots, honest men and noble souls. Volski, you know him, the solicitor from Tver, the salt of the earth. Staff-captain Fortunatov. Klimushkin, from our own town, an excellent man too. They are all Socialist-Revolutionaries, irreconcilable fighters. They are expecting Chernov himself to come here, but that is a great secret. He is fighting the Bolsheviks in the north. The officers are in closest contact with us. They are putting forward Colonel Galkin, they say he is another Danton. . . . In a word, everything is in readiness. We are only waiting for the attack. To all appearances the Czechs will launch their attack to-night. I myself am in charge of the militia. It's dreadfully dangerous and worrying—but one must fight, one must sacrifice oneself. . . ."

The strains of the 'Internationale' played loudly and out of tune by fifes floated in through the window. Govyadin bent down and lay with his head against Dr. Bulavin's stomach. His straw-coloured hair looked lifeless, like the hair on a doll.

The sun had set behind a thunder-cloud but the night brought no relief from the heat. The stars were swimming in a haze. The gunfire beyond the river grew louder and more frequent. The houses shook with the explosions and a six-inch battery of the Bolsheviks returned the fire from behind the granary. Machine-guns rattled from the roofs. In the suburbs, beyond the Samarka, linked with the town by a wooden bridge, the Red army rearguard maintained a feeble fire.

A dark cloud came up, bringing with it claps of thunder. It was completely dark. There was not a light to be seen in the town or on the river; except the flashes of the guns.

No one slept in the town. Somewhere in a basement the secret Committee of the Constituent Assembly was in permanent session. Volunteers of the officers' organizations waited nervously in their quarters, all dressed and armed. The ordinary citizens stood at their windows and stared into the fearsome darkness. Patrols challenged each other in the streets. In the intervals of silence one could hear the whistles of engines taking the rolling stock towards the east.

People looking out of their windows saw a zigzag flash of lightning that ran from one edge of the horizon to the other, and threw a sudden light on the muddy waters of the Volga, where the outlines of barges and ships at their moorings, and the wooden slopes beyond, showed in relief. High up above the river, above the sheet-iron roofs, loomed the huge bulk of the granary, the sharp spire of the Lutheran church, and the white belfry of the convent, built, it was said, with the money collected by the mendicant nun Susanna. Then it was dark again.

The next moment the sky seemed to split open. A wind rose, whining horribly in the chimneys. The Czechs were storming the town.

They attacked in a widely-spaced line from the direction of Kryazh railway station towards the railway bridge and past the bacon factories towards the suburbs on the far bank of the river. The rough ground, the dam and the dense growth of willows hampered their advance.

The keys to the city were the two bridges—the wooden bridge and the railway bridge. The Red artillery, posted in the square beyond the granary, kept the approaches to them under fire. The heavy thudding and explosions of the guns kept up the courage of the Red units, who had little confidence in the ability of their commanders.

Towards morning the Czechs had recourse to a ruse. They knew that the huts near the granary were inhabited by groups of refugees from Poland with their wives and children. When shells began to burst over the granary, the Poles ran from the huts and rushed about searching for shelter. The gunners drove them away from the guns with cleaning-rods and curses. Then the six-inch guns roared and the refugees ran on blinded and deafened. . . . At that moment another crowd of women came running from the direction of the huts, shouting:

"Don't shoot, *proshe pane*, don't shoot, don't hurt us unfortunates."

They surrounded the guns from every side and these strange Polish women grabbed the cleaning-rods and limber wheels, clung heavily to the bewildered gunners, seized them by their beards and threw them to the ground. . . . Under their blouses these women wore tunics and under their skirts—riding-breeches. . . .

"Hi, men! These are Czechs!" shouted someone, and fell, his head shattered by a bullet from a revolver. Some of the gunners fought back, others fled. The Czechs put the guns out of action and withdrew, holding back pursuit with their fire, and vanished in the narrow openings between the granary sheds as if the earth had swallowed them.

The battery was silenced. The machine-guns fired no longer. The Czechs continued their advance and seized the suburbs of Samara right down to the Volga river.

In the morning the clouds dispersed. An arid sun beat down on the long-unwashed windows of the house. Dr. Bulavin was sitting at the table, dressed with the greatest care. His eyes were sunken; he had not slept all night. The tray, the saucers and the slop-basin were all full of cigarette-ends. From time to time the doctor took out a broken pocket comb and combed his grey locks down on his forehead. He was expecting any minute now that he would be called to take over his ministerial duties. The doctor, it turned out, was devilish ambitious.

A straggling procession of wounded passed along the street under his windows. Some sat on the pavement and leant against the walls of the houses. They had makeshift bandages of bloodstained rags. They looked up at the bleak windows, but there was nobody there whom they could ask for a slice of bread or a glass of water. The street, which the thunderstorm of the night had been unable to cool, was again baking in the sun.

Beyond the river the din continued unabated. A motor-car dashed along the street raising clouds of chalk-dust. In it the military commissar flashed past, his face distorted, his mouth a black hole. The car crossed the wooden bridge below, and as it was said later, was smashed to pieces by a shell, and both its passengers killed. Time had stopped—the battle seemed to last for ever. The whole town was holding its breath. The ladies of the local *élite*, already dressed in white frocks, were lying on sofas, with their heads in the cushions. The Committee of the Constituent Assembly was having early morning tea, provided by the owner of the flour mill; the faces of

the ministers looked like the faces of corpses. The din beyond the river still continued.

At noon Dr. Bulavin went to the window, sniffed, and opened it. He could no longer breathe in the stale tobacco smoke. There were no more wounded in the street now. Many of the windows were opening a little—here an eye squinted out from behind a curtain, there an excited face peered out. Heads peeped out stealthily from the doorways. The Bolsheviks seemed to have gone at last. But the firing beyond the river?—the strain was dreadful!

Suddenly—a miracle—a long-legged officer in a snow-white mess-jacket came round the corner, stood still for a moment, and walked down the street. A sabre clanked against his high boots. His golden shoulder-straps gleamed in the noonday sun. What a memory of happier days!

Something forgotten stirred in Dr. Bulavin's heart, as if he remembered something and was incensed by it. With surprising vivacity he leaned out of the window and shouted at the officer: "Long live the Constituent Assembly!"

The officer immediately winked at the doctor's fat face, and said mysteriously:

"We'll see about that. . . ."

But already people were leaning out of every window, calling out and putting questions:

"Oh, Mr. Officer, what has happened? Have we been taken? Have the Bolsheviks gone?"

Dr. Bulavin put on a white cap, picked up his cane, and, looking himself over in the mirror, went out. People were crowding into the streets as if coming from church. And really—church bells began to ring a festive peal. Joyous, noisy crowds gathered at the street corners. A patient took hold of Dr. Bulavin's sleeve; she was a lady with a triple chin; the artificial flowers on her huge and heavy hat smelt of naphthalene.

"Look, doctor! The Czechs!"

Two Czechs were standing at a crossing with their rifles at the ready and a crowd of ladies all round them. Both of them, one with great black whiskers and the other with a blue-shaven chin, were smiling tensely and scrutinizing windows, house-tops and faces with rapid movements of their eyes. Their trim caps, their leather-buttoned tunics with badges on the left sleeve, their strong haversacks and ammunition bags, their resolute faces all excited admiration and respectful wonder. It was as if these two had dropped down into the main street from another planet.

"Hurrah!" a few officials in the crowd shouted. "Hurrah for the Czechs! Toss them! Take hold!"

Dr. Bulavin pushed his way through the crowd. He wanted to utter a few dignified words of greeting, but what with all the excitement his throat was too dry, and he hurried to the secret meeting place where high duties were awaiting him.

The basement of the flour mill was empty except for stale tobacco smoke, empty glasses and a fair-haired individual who was asleep at the end of the table, with his face on a sheet of paper on which grotesque faces had been drawn. Dr. Bulavin touched the man's shoulder. The man heaved a deep sigh and raised his bearded face; his light-blue eyes were still fogged with sleep.

"What is it?"

"Where is the government?" Dr. Bulavin asked severely. "You are speaking to the Under-Secretary for Public Health."

"Ah, Dr. Bulavin," the man replied. "Hell, and I went to sleep. . . . Well, how goes it?"

"It is not quite liquidated yet. But this is the end. A Czech patrol is on the main street."

The man opened a mouth full of teeth and burst out laughing.

"Fine! That was a slick job they did! Well, the government will meet here at three o'clock sharp. If everything goes well, we'll move to better quarters this evening."

"Excuse me." An alarming guess formed in Dr. Bulavin's mind. "Am I speaking to a member of the Central Committee of the party? Are you not Avxentiev?"

The fair-haired man's reply was an ambiguous gesture, as if to say: "Well, if you know it anyway. . . ." The telephone rang. The young man took up the receiver.

"Go, doctor, your place now is in the street. Remember we must not let things get out of hand. You as a representative of the professional classes should act as a moderating influence. . . . Otherwise, you know"—he winked—"it might prove unpleasant at some future time."

Dr. Bulavin went out. The whole town was now in the streets. People were embracing and kissing each other as if it were Easter, congratulating each other and exchanging news.

"The Bolsheviks are jumping into the Samarka by the thousand. They are swimming over to this side."

"They are being shot at."

"An awful lot of them have been drowned, too."

"That's true. Downstream, beyond the town, the whole Volga is full of corpses."

"Well, thank God for that, says I."

"That's right. A dog's death for the dogs."

"Gentlemen, have you heard? They've thrown the verger from the top of the clock tower."

"Who? The Bolsheviks?"

"Yes, to keep him from ringing the bells. I could understand them doing it to anyone else, but why the verger?"

"Where are you going, papa?"

"Down there, to see whether our shed is all right."

"Are you crazy! The wharves are full of Bolsheviks."

"Dmitri Stepanovich! So we have lived to see the day! Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"Well, they have elected me Under-Secretary."

"My congratulations, Your Excellency!"

"It's too early for that as yet. . . . Once we've taken Moscow. . . ."

"Oh, doctor! . . . Why, we are thankful even to get a breath of fresh air."

Golden shoulder-straps floated martially by in the crowd. Those straps were the symbol of everything old and familiar and comfortable and cherished. . . . A platoon of officers marched by with a resolute swing, accompanied by grimacing urchins. Well-dressed women laughed. The crowd poured into a cross-street past a vulgarly ornate villa decorated with green tiles. A man plunged into the crowd.

"What is it? What has happened?"

"Mister Officer, in this yard there are Bolsheviks, two of them, behind the wood pile!"

"Oho! Gentlemen, please move on!"

"Where did those officers run to?"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, no panic, please!"

"They have found some Cheka men!"

"Dmitri Stepanovich, let's go, or we might . . ."

Shots cracked, and the crowd stampeded; everybody ran, dropping caps and hats. Dr. Bulavin, out of breath, found himself in the main street again. He felt responsible for everything that was going on. As he reached the square he frowned at the structure covering the statue of Alexander II. Stretching out his hand he said loudly and angrily:

"The Bolsheviks are preparing to destroy everything Russian. They want the Russian people to forget their history. Here stands the statue of the Tsar-Liberator and does no harm to anyone. Take off those stupid boards and those disgusting rags."

This was Dr. Bulavin's first public speech. Immediately some bold lads in Russian blouses and caps, apparently shop-boys, began to shout:

"Come on, break it down!"

The boards covering the statue came down with a crash. Dr. Bulavin passed on. The crowd was thinning. Here the shooting beyond the river could be heard more clearly. An almost naked man came running towards Dr. Bulavin from the direction of the river Samarka. His dark hair hung into his eyes, his broad chest bore tattoo marks. A few women shrieked and ran to their doors. The man suddenly swerved and dashed down the slope towards the Volga. After him ran three other men and after them some more, and more again, all wet, half-naked, struggling for breath. People began to shout in the street:

"Bolsheviks! Beat them!"

Like snipe swerving at a shot they all turned down the slope to the river. Dr. Bulavin was excited—he too ran, and stopping a little man with red-rimmed eyes and a crooked nose said hurriedly:

"I am a Minister of the new government. Run quick! A machine-gun is needed here immediately. Run and . . ."

"I don't understand Russian," the thin man answered.

The doctor shoved him out of the way. Things brooked no delay—he must act quickly. He went himself to find the Czechs and their machine-gun. And there before the iron gateway on which a broken red star still hung by one corner he saw yet another Bolshevik. He was a man tanned by the sun to a dark brown, with a shaven head and a Tartar beard. His military tunic was torn and blood was creeping down it from a stain on his shoulder. He was turning his head from side to side—evidently he did not want to die.

The crowd was closing in on him. The women especially were shouting foul words of abuse. Many waved their parasols, their sticks, their clenched fists. . . . On the steps of the porch a retired general was trying to shout louder than anyone else. His huge cap danced on his bald head and the cross of an order dangled from his scraggy neck as he gesticulated with purple hands, pointing to the Bolshevik:

"More resolutely, gentlemen. This is a commissar. No mercy! My own son is a Red. Such a misfortune! Gentlemen, I beg you, find my son, bring him to me! I would kill him here, in the sight of you all. I would kill my own son. And this one deserves no mercy either."

"In this case there is no point in interfering," the doctor thought nervously. He moved on and looked back. The outcry had ceased. On the spot where the wounded commissar had been standing a minute before, sticks and parasols were moving up and down. It was very quiet; there was only the sound of

blows: the retired general, his cap slipping down over his nose, was looking down from the porch and waving his hands gently like the conductor of an orchestra.

Dr. Bulavin was overtaken by Mishin, the notary. Mishin wore a dirty overall buttoned up to the neck; his face was puffy and his pince-nez lacked one glass.

"They killed him. The women beat out his life with their parasols. Horrible, these lynchings! Oh, doctor, they say awful things are happening down there on the river bank."

"We must go there if that is so. You know that I am in the government?"

"Yes, I know, and I am very glad."

Dr. Bulavin, using the name of the government, stopped a platoon of six officers, and ordered them to accompany him to the river, where undesirable disturbances were taking place. By now Czech patrols were standing at every cross-road. Well-dressed women gave them flowers, and started to teach them to speak Russian. The women laughed loudly, and were anxious that these foreigners should like them and the town and Russia in general, although during their years of captivity as prisoners of war the Czechs had grown to loathe Russia with all their hearts.

On the muddy banks of the Samarka volunteers were finishing off the remnants of the Red troops who had escaped from the suburbs. Dr. Bulavin arrived there too late. The Reds who had succeeded in crossing the wooden bridge or who had swum the Samarka had boarded barges and steamers and were escaping up-stream. Several corpses were lying near the bank in the sluggish water. Many hundred dead men had already been washed away by the waters of the Volga.

Govyadin was sitting on an old rotten boat that lay there bottom upwards. A tricolour armlet was pinned to his sleeve; his straw-coloured hair was wet with sweat. His colourless eyes were gazing with pin-point pupils at the sunny river. Dr. Bulavin went up to him and shouted severely:

"Sir, you are second in command of the militia—I have been informed that undesirable disturbances have occurred here. The government desires that . . ."

The doctor did not finish his sentence, for he caught sight of a stake which Govyadin was holding in his hand, and saw that the stake was covered with dried blood and had hairs sticking to it. Govyadin hissed in a woolly, toneless voice:

"There's another one swimming there. . . ."

He limply got off the boat and went down to the edge of the water, looking at a shaven head slowly swimming across the stream. Some five young fellows with stakes joined Govyadin. Dr. Bulavin returned to the officers. They were drinking lemonade they had obtained from a resourceful coster, who had already appeared on the river bank with his wagon. The doctor asked the officers to prevent any superfluous cruelties. He pointed to Govyadin and the floating head. The long-legged captain of a little while ago, trim in his snow-white tunic, wiped his moustache, raised his rifle and fired. The head disappeared under water.

Dr. Bulavin felt that he had done all he could and returned to town. He did not want to be late at the first meeting of the cabinet. The doctor panted as he struggled up hill in the dust. His pulse was at least a hundred and twenty. Dazzling prospects were unfolding before his eyes: a march to Moscow, the peal of bells from the forty times forty churches of the city, who could say,

perhaps even a presidential armchair. . . . A revolution was a queer thing—once it started to roll backwards, all these left-wingers, Socialist-Revolutionaries, Social Democrats and what not lay sprawling under its wheels with their bowels in the dust before you knew where you were. No, no more left-wing experiments for him. . . .

CHAPTER VII

KATIA WAS SITTING in the little low-ceilinged parlour with the rubber-tree, writing a letter to Dasha, her tiny handkerchief, wet with tears, gripped tight in her fist. The rain drove fiercely against the bubbly glass of the window, the acacias in the yard were bending to the wind which blew so hard from the Sea of Azov that the torn wall-paper in the room flapped and rustled with it. Katia wrote:

Dasha, Dasha, my despair is unbounded. Vadim has been killed. I heard it yesterday from Colonel Tetkin, my host, in whose house I am staying. I did not believe it, and asked him how he knew. He gave me the address of Valerian Onoli, a Kornilov officer who had just arrived from the front. I rushed off to see him that same night in his hotel. He was drunk, and he dragged me to a room and began to offer me drinks. It was horrible. You can't imagine what people are like here. I asked him: "Has my husband been killed?" Understand, Dasha, Onoli was his messmate, a comrade-in-arms of his own regiment. He had been with him at the front and saw him every day. He answered in a mocking tone: "Oh, yes, he's been killed, you can set your mind at rest, little girl, with my own eyes I saw the flies eating him" And then he said: "Roshchin was under suspicion and he was lucky to get killed in battle." He told me nothing about the time and place of Vadim's death. I begged him to tell me. I wept. He shouted at me: "I can't remember where each fellow was killed!" And suggested that I should take him in exchange for Vadim. Oh, Dasha! What sort of men are these? I rushed out of the hotel beside myself.

I just can't believe that Vadim has gone for ever. But I can't disbelieve it either—why should the man have lied? And Colonel Tetkin said that it was probable. I got only one letter from Vadim all the time he was at the front, and that was very short and quite unlike him. It came the second week after Easter. It was without any form of address and said word for word: "I am sending you money. I cannot see you. I remember what you said when we parted. I don't know whether a man can cease being a murderer. I can't understand how it came to pass that I became a murderer. I do my best not to think but I shall evidently have to think and to act as well. When all this is over, if it ever is, we shall meet again."

That was all, Dasha. I cried very much. He went away from me to die. How could I have held him back, or brought him back and saved him? What could I do? Press him to my heart with all my strength, that was all. But during the last few weeks he was hardly aware of my existence. The revolution stared him in the face, and blotted out everything else. Oh, I cannot understand anything. Need we all live at all? Everything is broken up. We are being blown about Russia like birds in a hurricane. . . . Why? If at the price of all this bloodshed, all these sufferings and torments, we could get back our house, our clean dining-

room, our friends and card-partners—would we be happy again? No, Dasha, the past is gone, it has perished for ever. Life is finished, let others come now to take our places, who are stronger and better than we.

Katia put down her pen and wiped her eyes with the handkerchief crushed in her hand. Then she looked out at the rain that was running down the four panes of the little window. The acacias outside were bending and tossing their branches, as if the angry wind was tearing their hair. Katia went on with her letter:

Vadim went away, to the front. The spring came. My whole life was only—waiting for him. How sad it was and how useless.

I remember looking out of the window one evening. The acacias were about to bloom, and great clusters of flowers were opening. A flock of sparrows was fluttering about. I was very miserable and lonely . . . I felt I was a stranger on this earth. . . . The war is over and the revolution will be over too some day. But Russia will not be the same. We fight, we die, we suffer. But the trees sprout just the same as they did last spring and many springs before that. And this tree and these sparrows have receded from me into a terrible distance and there live their own life which has become incomprehensible to me. . . .

Dasha, why must we suffer like this? Surely it cannot all be in vain? We women, you and I, knew only our little world. . . . But now all around us, the whole of Russia is ablaze. It must be that a new happiness will be born from all this. It must be. Unless people believed this, how could they hate and destroy each other as they do? I have lost everything . . . I have become useless even to my own self. And yet I live, because I am ashamed—not afraid, ashamed—to go and put my head under a train or throw a noose around a hook.

To-morrow I am leaving Rostov, so that nothing should remind me. The trains run regularly—because we have the Germans here. I am going to Yekaterinoslav. I have friends there. I have been advised to take a job in a confectioner's shop. Perhaps you will come to the South, too, Dasha. I hear that up there in Petrograd things are very bad.

This is the difference—a woman would never leave a man she loves, even though the world came to an end. But Vadim went away. He loved me as long as he had faith in himself. You remember that June in Petrograd and the sun that shone down on our happiness? I shall not forget that pale northern sun as long as I live. I haven't got a single photo of Vadim, not a single keepsake. As if it had all been a dream. I cannot take it in, Dasha, I just cannot realize that he is dead. I shall probably go mad. How sad and useless my life has been!

Katia was unable to write any more. The handkerchief was wet through. But still, she had to let her sister know all about those ordinary, everyday things which are most appreciated in letters by those who get them. So, to the accompaniment of the rain, she wrote many words without putting thoughts or feelings into them. She wrote about the price of food and the high cost of living. "*You can't get any materials, or thread. A needle costs one thousand five hundred roubles or two live sucking pigs. A young seventeen-year-old girl who lives next door came home one night naked and bruised. Bandits had stripped her in the street. Shoes are what they are after more than anything else.*" She wrote about the Germans, that a military band played in the park every day, and the streets were kept well swept, but that grain, butter and eggs were being taken away to Germany by the trainload. The common people,

the workers, hated them, but kept it to themselves as they could look to no one for help.

All this she had heard from Colonel Tetkin. "*He is very kind, but is evidently finding a superfluous mouth a heavy burden. And his wife talks about this quite openly.*" Katia also wrote: "*I was twenty-seven the day before yesterday, but I look . . . Oh, what difference does it make? All this is quite unimportant. Who cares?*"

And again she got out the handkerchief.

Katia gave this letter to Tetkin, who promised to send it to Petrograd at the first opportunity. But even after Katia had gone he carried it about in his pocket for a long time. Connections with the North were very bad. The post did not function. Letters were carried by special carriers, dare-devil adventurers, who charged high fees.

Before she left, Katia sold the few things she had brought with her from Samara except an emerald ring she had been given as a birthday present long ago, before the war. Those days had receded so far back in her memory that she had no longer anything in common with that foggy city where she had spent her youth. Dasha, Nikolai Ivanovich and Katia had been walking along the Nevski. They had chosen the ring. She put the little green spark on her finger. It was the only thing she had brought with her from that life.

Several trains were leaving Rostov station at the same time. Katia was pushed about by everyone, but no one could give her any sensible information. Finally she found herself in a third-class carriage. She took a seat near the window, holding her bundle of much-darned underwear on her knees. Flooded fields, the low valley of the Don, columns of smoke on the horizon, and the hazy outlines of Bataisk floated past. Under the overhanging river bank she saw the half-submerged huts of the fishing villages, little gardens, overturned boats, children playing. Then the Sea of Azov spread out like a milk-white sheet; in the distance a few sails rose slanting from the water. Then came the smokeless chimneys of the Taganrog factories. Steppe. Hills. Abandoned pits. Straggling villages on the slopes of chalk hills. Vultures in the blue sky. The whistle of the train, as melancholy as the landscape. Frowning muzhiks on the stations. The steel helmets of the Germans.

Katia stared out of the window, her back bent like an old woman's. Her face must have been very sad and very beautiful, because a German soldier sitting opposite to her looked long at the strange Russian woman. His lean, bespectacled, tired face seemed to cover itself with a veil of grief.

"Those who are to blame will have to pay for all this, madame, when the time comes," he said softly in German. "It will be the same in Germany and all over the world—there will be a great judgment and the name of the judge will be Socialism."

At first Katia did not realize that the man was talking specially to her and raised her eyes to his large well-polished nickel spectacles. The German nodded to her in a friendly way:

"Does madame speak German?"

"Yes."

"When a human being suffers much, there is consolation in the thought that the causes of suffering serve some purpose," the German said, tucking in his legs under the seat and drawing in his chin so that he was now looking at Katia over his spectacles. "I have given much study to the history of mankind. After a long period of calm we are now again entering on an era of catastrophes. This is my conclusion. We are witnessing the beginning of the

end of a great civilization. The Aryan world has gone through a similar experience once before, in the fourth century when the Barbarians destroyed Rome. Many people try to draw a parallel with our time. But that is all wrong. Rome was demoralized by the ideas of Christianity. What the Barbarians did was merely to tear the dead body of Rome to pieces. But our present-day civilization will be reorganized by means of Socialism. In Rome there was destruction —here we shall have creation. The most destructive ideas of Christianity were equality, internationalism, and the moral superiority of poverty over riches. These were ideas of Barbarians feeding a monstrous parasite, a Rome surfeited with luxury. That was why the Romans feared the Christians so much and persecuted them so savagely. But there was no creative idea in Christianity —it did not organize labour. It was satisfied with mere destruction in this world and with promising everything else in heaven. Christianity was merely a sword of destruction and chastisement. And even in its heaven, in its ideal world it could promise merely the hierarchic, bureaucratic class system of the Roman Empire turned inside out. Such were the basic deficiencies of Christianity. Against it Rome set the idea of order. But in those days disorder, a general chaos, was precisely the dearest wish of the Barbarians who were only waiting for the hour when they could carry the walls of Rome by storm. That hour came eventually. The towns and cities were smoking ruins. The roads were littered with dead bodies crushed under the chariots of the Barbarians or crucified with stakes. There was no salvation. Europe, Asia Minor, Africa, were aflame from end to end. The Romans fluttered like birds in this conflagration embracing their whole world. They were slaughtered by the Barbarians, torn by wild beasts in the forests, they died in the deserts of hunger, thirst and exposure. I read a story by an eye-witness about the flight of Proba, wife of a Roman prefect, who escaped from Rome by night in a boat with her two daughters when Alaric's Goths stormed Rome. As they floated down the Tiber, these Roman women saw the flames which devoured the Eternal City. It was the end of the world. . . ."

The German undid his knapsack and took out a fat note-book bound in leather and much the worse for handling. With a faint smile he turned its pages for some time, said: "Ah, here it is," got up and sat down next to Katia. "So that you may have a better idea of what the Romans were like before they perished, listen to this passage from Ammianus Marcellinus, in which he describes these lords of the universe:

" 'Their long robes of silk and purple billow in the wind and show underneath the rich tunics embroidered with images of various animals. Their closed chariots accompanied by an escort of fifty servants shake the pavement and the houses as they dash past at great speed. If one of them visits the baths usually attached to shops, restaurants or promenades, he demands in a commanding tone that all objects of common use be handed over for his exclusive benefit. On leaving the baths he dons rings and buckles adorned with precious stones and wraps himself in an expensive mantle the cloth of which would suffice for twelve men. On top of this go the over-garments which flatter his vanity and he does not forget to assume a majestic air which it would be hard to bear even from the great Marcellus, conqueror of Syracuse. But sometimes even he undertakes daring expeditions: he goes (with an enormous train of servants, cooks, clients and horribly disfigured eunuchs) to his Italian estates, where he disports himself in hunting birds and rabbits. If by chance, at noon on a hot day, he has the courage to cross the lake of Lucrine in a gilded barge on his way to his seaside villa, he will afterwards compare this journey with the campaigns of

Cæsar and Alexander. If a fly penetrates the silken curtains of the deck or a beam of the sun falls in through its folds, he weeps his misfortunes and deplores that he was not born in the Cimmerian lands where there is eternal darkness. The most welcome guests of the great are the parasites and flatterers who applaud ever word of their host. They look with delight on the marble columns and floors of mosaique. At table birds and fishes of unusual size provoke universal admiration. The toadies bring scales to convince themselves of the weight of these foods, and while sensible guests turn in disgust from such scenes, they demand that a notary be summoned to take note of the existence of such wonders . . .'

"Yes, *sic transit* . . ." said the German and closed his note-book with a snap. "Such men had to wander about in search of food on the roads and destroyed cities, while the waves of Barbarians flowed on from the East, ravaging and looting. In some fifty years there was not a trace left of the Roman Empire. Great Rome was overgrown with weeds and goats grazed among its deserted palaces. A night that lasted nearly seven centuries descended on Europe.

"This happened because Christianity was able to destroy but did not know anything of the organization of labour. In the commandments no mention is made of labour, and their moral precepts are only applicable to people who do not sow or reap and whose sowing and reaping is done for them by slaves. Christianity became the religion of the emperors and conquerors. Labour remained unorganized and outside the moral sphere. But a religion of labour will be brought into the world by other Barbarians who will destroy another Rome. Have you read Spengler? He is a Roman from head to heel and he is right inasmuch as for *his* Europe the sun is going down. But for *us* it is rising. He will not succeed in dragging the working class of the world into the grave with him. Swans sing before they die. Spengler is the swan song of the bourgeois world. . . . He is their last idealistic trump card. The teeth of Christianity are decayed, but our teeth are of iron. . . . We shall set the Socialist organization of labour against Christianity. . . . We are being forced to make war on the Bolsheviks. . . . Oho! Do you think we don't know who is directing our blows and against whom? Oh, we understand much more than meets the eye. . . . Before this we used to despise the Russians. Now we are beginning to admire and respect them. . . ."

The train gave a long whistle as it ran past a large village. Roomy cottages with iron roofs, long straw ricks, fenced gardens, the signs of shops flashed past. A peasant in a military tunic without a belt and a sheepskin cap was driving a cart along the dusty road parallel with the railway. He was standing in the cart, the wheels of which were bound with iron, and whirled the ends of the reins. The well-fed large horse galloped along, trying to overtake the train. The peasant turned towards the passenger coaches and shouted something, showing a wide row of white teeth.

"This is Gulyai Polye," said the German, "a very rich village."

During the journey they had to change trains several times. (By mistake Katia had not taken a through train.) The bustle of it, the waiting on railway stations, the new faces, the great spaces of the steppe she had never seen before floating slowly past the windows diverted Katia from her depressing thoughts. The German had gone long ago, having taken leave of Katia with a vigorous handshake. He was firmly convinced of the lawfulness of everything that was happening and appeared to have determined his own share in it to a nicety. His calm optimism had surprised and alarmed Katia. The things everyone

around her regarded as chaos, ruin and horrors was for him the long-awaited dawn of a great beginning.

That whole year Katia had heard nothing but an impotent gnashing of teeth and sighs of extreme despair, she had seen nothing but distorted faces and clenched fists—as on that March day in her father's house. True, Colonel Tetkin did not sigh and did not gnash his teeth, but then he was, as he said himself, "a bit of a simpleton" and acclaimed the revolution with a kind of unreasoning faith in the justice of things that was all his own. But the whole group of people among whom Katia had passed her life saw in the revolution the final ruin of Russia and of Russian culture, the disruption not only of their own way of life, but of all life, a Pugachev revolt of universal dimensions, the coming to pass of the Apocalypse. There had been an Empire, and the working of its machinery had been clear-cut and easy to understand. The peasants ploughed, the miners hewed coal, the factories produced good and cheap wares, the merchants carried on a brisk trade, the officials worked like the wheels of a watch. At the top some people got all the luxuries of life out of it all. Some people said that such an order of things was unjust. But what could one do, once God had ordained it so? And now suddenly it was all smashed to smithereens, and there was a disturbed ant-heap instead of an empire. The respectable citizens staggered about dazed, wild-eyed with terror. . . .

The train stood for a long time in silence in a little country station. Katia leant out of the window. The leaves of the tall trees rustled softly in the dark. The starry sky seemed to stretch out to infinity over this incomprehensible land. Katia cupped her face in her hand and put her elbow on the edge of the open window. The rustling of the trees, the stars, the warm smell of earth all reminded her of a night in a park near Paris. . . . A party of several of her friends, all Petersburghers, had driven there in two motor-cars and had dinner in an arbour over a pond. It was lovely there. Weeping willows drooped over the water like silver clouds.

One of the company was a German who had lived in Russia but whom Katia had not met before. He spoke French well. He was in evening dress without a hat. He was lean, with a nervous oblong face, a high bald forehead and heavy lids over serious eyes. He was very quiet, sitting with his long fingers on the stem of a wine-glass. When Katia liked a man, she had a feeling of warmth and friendliness. It was as if the July night over the pond was touching her bare shoulders. She could see the stars above through the leaves of the creeper vine that covered the arbour. Candles threw a warm light on the faces of her friends, the moths on the tablecloth and the pensive face of the unknown German. Katia felt that it was looking at her that had made him so pensive. She thought she must be looking well that evening.

When they left the table and walked along a dark avenue of trees, that was like a lofty archway, to the terrace on the edge of the park from where they could see the lights of Paris, the German was at Katia's side.

"Don't you find, madame, that beauty is not permitted and not permissible?" he said in a stern voice as if stressing that he did not wish any ambiguity to attach to his words. Katia was walking slowly along. How good it was that this man was speaking to her and that his voice did not blot out the rustling of the dark archway of trees. The German was on Katia's left and he was looking straight ahead where the purple glow of the city was unfolding before their eyes.

"I am an engineer. My father is very wealthy. I work in a vast enterprise and have to deal with hundreds of thousands of people. I see and know many things of which you are not aware. Excuse me, am I boring you with this sort of talk?"

Katia turned her face towards him and smiled without a word. In the half-light of the distant glow he discerned her eyes and her smile and continued:

"We are living, worse luck, at the junction of two eras. One of these is declining in magnificence and splendour. The other is being born in the clatter of machines and the bleak uniformity of industrial settlements. The name of this era is the era of the masses, the human masses in which all distinctions disappear. A man is only a skilled pair of hands directing a machine. Here there are other laws, another count of time, another truth. You, madame, are the last survival of the past era. That is why I am so sad when I look at your beauty. The new era does not want it any more than all the other useless and unrepeatable things which are capable of rousing such obsolescent emotions as love, self-sacrifice, poetry, tears of joy and all that. . . . Beauty! What for? Beauty is unsettling. . . . It is impermissible. . . . I assure you that in the future there will be laws against beauty. Have you ever heard of work on the production line? It is the latest American novelty. The philosophy of work on the conveyor belt will have to be inculcated in the masses. . . . Theft or murder should appear less criminal than a second of absent-mindedness on the conveyor. . . . Now imagine that beauty, an unsettling factor, were to enter the iron halls of the workshops. . . . What would happen? Movements would get mixed up, muscles would twitch, hands would act a second too late, a fraction of an inch wide of the mark. . . . An error of a second would give hours of delay and hours of delay would lead to catastrophe. . . . My factory would begin to produce goods of a quality inferior to that of my neighbour. . . . My enterprise would be ruined. . . . Somewhere a bank would close down. . . . Somewhere a stock exchange would react by a sudden drop in values. Somebody would put a bullet through his brain. . . . And all this because a criminally beautiful woman passed through a factory workshop with a swish of her skirts."

Katia laughed. She knew nothing of conveyor belts. She had never been in a factory but had only seen their begrimed chimneys spoiling the landscape. . . . She liked the masses, that is, the crowds on the great boulevards, and saw nothing ominous in them. Two of her friends dining with them that night were Social Democrats. So there was nothing to worry about even in the sphere of conscience. The things her companion was saying as he walked slowly with his head erect through the warm darkness of the avenue were interesting and new, just like the cubist pictures Katia had hung in her drawing-room. . . . But that evening Katia was in no mind for philosophy . . .

"Beautiful women must have given you a bad time, that you hate them so much," she said, and again laughed softly, while she thought of something quite different. That something different was vague as the night with its scent of leaves and flowers and its starlight showing in the gaps between the tree-tops —it was the approach of the sweet vertigo of love. Love, not for this tall man or perhaps for him at that. He certainly roused desires in her. What had so recently seemed so difficult and even hopeless, now approached quite easily and enveloped her. . . .

Who knows what might have happened to her in those Paris days . . . ? But it all broke off suddenly when the guns of the world war began to roar. . . . Katia did not meet the German again. . . . Had he known of the

approach of war, or had he guessed? During their further conversation at the stone balustrade from where they watched the lights of Paris scattered across the dark horizon and sparkling like diamonds, the German more than once spoke, with the same stern hopelessness, of the inevitability of a catastrophe. He seemed to be completely dominated by the fixed idea that all was in vain: the beauty of the night and Katia's loveliness.

She could not remember what she had said to the German—probably some silly thing. But that was quite unimportant. He had stood there, his elbows on the balustrade and his cheek almost touching Katia's shoulder. Katia knew that the night air was mingling for him with the scent of her perfume, her shoulders, her hair. It seemed to her now that if then he had laid his large hand on her back, she would not have drawn away. But nothing of the sort had happened. . . .

The wind beat on her cheeks and ruffled her hair. Sparks flew from the engine. The train was moving across steppe country. Katia could still see nothing of it and gave up trying to look out of the window. She settled herself in the corner of her seat and clasped her hands.

She was full of remorse now. What was this? Not a week had gone by since she had received the news of Vadim's death and already she had betrayed him; no, she had done worse than betray him—she had been day-dreaming of a lover who had never even been a lover to her. That German would of course have been killed long ago. He was an officer in the reserve. He must have been killed, he must be dead. They were all dead, they had all perished, everything was broken, crushed, gone with the wind like that night in the park, on the terrace over the river, gone irretrievably.

Katia gritted her teeth to keep herself from groaning. She closed her eyes. A piercing pain was tearing at her heart.

A candle flickered dismally in the dirty compartment. There were few passengers in it. Raised hands, shaggy beards, unshod feet hanging from the upper berth threw trembling shadows on the wall. No one slept although it was late. People were talking in undertones.

"This is one of the worst districts; I told you so. . . ."

"So one is not safe, even here?"

"Excuse me; what is that you are saying? Do robberies occur even here? That is amazing. Why don't the Germans stop it? It is their duty to protect the travelling public. If they have occupied the country, they should see to it that order is maintained."

"The Germans, gentlemen—or perhaps I ought to say citizens—the Germans don't care a damn what happens to us. It's our own fault that we're in such a mess and it's up to us to get out of it, that's their idea. Yes. But banditry is in our blood. Our people are blackguards."

A cocksure voice replied to this:

"We ought to tear up and publicly burn all our Russian literature, gentlemen. We've shown the world! There isn't a single honest man in all Russia perhaps. I remember when I was in Finland I left my goloshes in the hotel—and they sent a mounted man after me with my goloshes, and my goloshes had holes in them at that. That's what I call an honest nation. And how they settled accounts with the Communists, with the Russians in general for that matter! In Abo, after the suppression of the rising, the Finns tortured and burnt the commander of the Red Guard of the town. You could hear the Bolshevik scream right across the river."

"Oh, God, when will there be some sort of order again here?"

"Excuse me; I have been to Kiev. There are fashionable shops there, music in the cafés. The ladies openly wear their diamonds. Life is in full swing. The shops buy up the gold at a good price. Street life is flourishing and all that. It's a fine city."

"And a length of cloth for a pair of trousers costs six months' salary. The profiteers are strangling us. And you know, they all have such bulging foreheads and they all wear dark blue serge suits. They sit about in the cafés and buy and sell bills of lading. One gets up one morning and finds that there are no matches to be had in the town. A week later a box of matches costs one rouble. Or needles, for instance—I gave my wife two needles and a reel of thread for her birthday. In other years I used to give her diamond ear-rings. The intelligentsia is perishing, is becoming extinct. . . ."

"The profiteers ought to be shot without mercy."

"No, mister comrade, we don't want any of your Bolshevising here."

"Well, what else is the news in Kiev? Is the Hetman firmly established?"

"Only while the Germans support him. . . . Now another pretender has turned up in the Ukraine. He calls himself Vassili Vyshivanny and wears the Ukranian national dress, but actually he's a Habsburg prince."

"Citizens, it's time to sleep, you'd better put out the candle."

"Why put out the candle?"

"Well, it's safer. From the fields all the windows show up bright."

Everyone immediately grew silent in the carriage. The clanging of the wheels could be heard very distinctly. The sparks from the engine flew away into the darkness of the steppe. Then somebody grunted indignantly:

"Who said that we should put out the candle?" There was silence. Everyone felt uncomfortable. "And then have a go at the luggage, eh? Let's find out who said it and throw him off the train."

Someone began to suck his teeth unhappily. A frightened voice said:

"Last week I was travelling—and a woman lost two bundles; thieves pulled them out with a long hook through the window."

"That must have been some of Makhno's men."

"Makhno's men wouldn't bother to steal two bundles. They are much more likely to rob a train."

Then story followed story, each more gruesome than the last. Some of them were so horrible that they made the listeners' flesh creep. In the course of the conversation it turned out that the district through which the train was passing—none too quickly—was the very centre of banditry, and that even the Germans didn't like to cross it; even the armed guard had left the train at the last station. In the villages round here the muzhiks wore beaver coats and the girls silk and velvet. Here every day things happened: either the train was taken under machine-gun fire or the last carriages were uncoupled and left to run along down the slope by their own weight, or else, when the train was proceeding at full speed, the door suddenly opened and bearded, masked men with axes and sawn-off shot-guns in their hands came in: "Hands up!" They left the Russians naked as they were born, but that was all; but if they got hold of a Jew . . .

"Why a Jew? What have the Jews got to do with it?" a clean-shaven man in a dark-blue serge suit cried wildly. It was the man who had been so delighted with Kiev. "Why are the Jews to blame for everything?"

This outburst alarmed the passengers more than ever, and they all fell silent. Katia closed her eyes again. She had nothing to lose, except her emerald ring. Still, she was as frightened as the others. In order to get rid of the unpleasant

sinking sensation in her heart, she tried to recall the magic of that unfulfilled evening in Paris. But she could not get away from the noise of the wheels tapping out in the black void of the night: "Ka-ten-ka, Ka-ten-ka, Ka-ten-ka"—give it up, give it up, give it up.

Suddenly the carriage stopped dead, as if it had run into a wall. The brakes screeched with an iron wail, chains rattled, glass tinkled, several bags fell heavily to the floor. What was most surprising was that no one made a sound, although they all jumped up from their places, looked round, and listened. Even without words it was clear that something was wrong.

Then rifle shots cracked in the darkness. The clean-shaven man in the dark-blue serge suit jumped up, dashed about the carriage, and then dived in somewhere and hid. Men were running outside alongside the permanent way. A terrible voice shouted: "Keep away from the windows!" A hand-grenade exploded. The carriage rocked. The passengers' teeth chattered. Then the carriage was boarded. Rifle butts crashed against the door. About a dozen men in sheepskin caps rushed in, threatening the passengers with hand-grenades and clattering with their weapons in the narrow space.

"Take your things, get out!"

"Look sharp, or . . ."

"Mishka, chuck a bomb at the burzhuys!"

The passengers crowded together. A fair-haired young lad with a pale, sullen face, threw all the weight of his body forward, raised his hand with a hand-grenade in it high over his head and held the pose for a moment.

"We are coming, we are coming, we are coming!" the passengers said, hardly above a whisper. Without protest, without a word, the passengers got out of the carriage, some carrying their luggage, some only a cushion or a tea-kettle. One man with pince-nez on his nose and his beard all awry even smiled as he passed through the group of robbers.

The night was cool. The starry sky spread a veil of splendour over the steppes. Katia sat down on a pile of old sleepers, holding her little bundle on her lap. If the robbers hadn't killed them at the start, she thought, they wouldn't kill them now. She felt as weak as if she had just recovered from a swoon. "Isn't it all the same," she thought, "whether I sit here on the sleepers or wander about Yekaterinoslav without a crust of bread?" She felt a shiver run down her spine. She yawned. Big muzhiks were taking the luggage from the racks and throwing it out of the carriage windows. The man with the pince-nez climbed back up the embankment to the carriage:

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, I've got scientific instruments in my luggage; for God's sake be careful, they are breakable!"

Somebody hissed at him, and he was seized from behind by his raincoat and pulled back into the crowd of passengers. At that moment a mounted troop dashed up out of the darkness with a clatter of hoofs and a jingle of spurs. An unnaturally big and burly fellow in a high cap was galloping two horse-lengths in front of the rest. The passengers crowded together. The troop pulled up beside the train, rifles and sabres raised in their hands. The burly man in the high cap cried in a ringing voice:

"Any losses, lads?"

"No, none. We're just unloading. Send the carts!" voices answered. The burly man with the high cap turned his horse and rode it into the crowd of passengers.

"Show your documents," he commanded, making his horse dance until the foam from its mouth flew into the passengers' eyes, bulging with fright.

"You needn't be afraid. You're under the protection of the People's Army of Batko Makhno. We shall shoot only officers, policemen"—here he raised his voice threateningly—"and perhaps profiteers."

Again the man in the raincoat stepped forward and shifted his pince-nez on his nose:

"Excuse me, I can give you my word of honour that among us there are no persons of the categories you indicated. There are only peaceful citizens here. My name is Obruchev, a teacher of physics."

"So you are a teacher," the burly man said reproachfully, "and yet you consort with all sorts of scum. Step aside here. Boys, don't touch this fellow, he's a teacher."

A candle was brought from the carriage and the documents were examined. It turned out that there were really no officers or policemen among the passengers. The clean-shaven fellow in the serge suit was there too, nearer to the candle than anyone else—but now he was not wearing the serge suit, but a much-worn peasant jacket and army cap. It was inconceivable where he had got hold of them unless he had brought them with him in his luggage. He gave the robbers friendly pats on the back:

"I am a singer and I am very glad to make your acquaintance, friends. We artists must study life."

He coughed and cleared his throat. Somebody said to him enigmatically. "We'll find out what sort of artist *you* are. Your troubles aren't over yet!"

The carts drove up—they were small, with two iron-bound wheels. The peasants quickly threw all the trunks, boxes, baskets and bundles on them and jumped up themselves; the drivers whistled in the fashion peculiar to the steppes, the sleek horses galloped away, and the whole baggage-train disappeared in the steppe.

The mounted squad galloped away too. Only a few of Makhno's men stayed behind with the train. The passengers elected a delegation—by simple show of hands—to ask permission of the robbers to continue their journey. The fair-headed lad came up, two knouts stuck into his belt and bombs dangling all over him. A bunch of hair sticking out from under his cap covered one eye. The other eye was blue and merry.

"What is it?" he asked, looking each delegate over from head to foot. "Where do you want to go? And how? The engine-driver beat it anyway; he must be at least ten miles away in the steppe by now. I can't leave you here in the middle of the night; there are plenty of unorganized people prowling in the steppe at night. . . . Citizens! Attention!" He drew back a little, and shifted his heavy belt. The other Makhno men joined him, shouldering their rifles. "Citizens! By fours in column of march. With all your things. Direction, the steppe!"

Passing in front of Katia he bent down and touched her on the shoulder:

"Here, you. Don't cry, we won't hurt you. Take your bundle and come with me outside the ranks."

Katia walked along across the flat steppe with her bundle in her hand and her headcloth pulled down to her eyebrows. The lad with the unruly hair was striding along on her left side, looking, now at the stars and now over his shoulder at the taciturn group of wearily trudging prisoners. He whistled softly through his teeth.

"Who are you? Where do you come from?" he asked Katia. She did not answer, and turned away. She was neither afraid nor excited, only indifferent. Everything was like a dream. The lad repeated his question.

"So you won't condescend to talk to a bandit, eh? Sorry, lady. Only it would have been better to leave these airs and graces behind—these aren't the right times for them."

He whirled round suddenly, snatched the rifle from his shoulder and shouted angrily at an indistinct figure shambling along behind the other prisoners.

"Hi, you there, you rascal—falling back, eh? I'll shoot!"

The figure quickly sprang forward to overtake the others. The lad gave a satisfied laugh.

"Where did the fool think he could escape to? Maybe he only wanted to relieve himself. Yes, lady, such is life. You don't want to talk to me, but it's even worse without talking, isn't it? Don't be afraid, I'm not drunk. When I'm drunk I hold my tongue, and then I'm nasty. . . . Well, let's get acquainted." He raised two fingers to the peak of his cap, sketching a salute. "Mishka Solomin. . . . Deserter from the Red Army. . . . A bandit by nature more than anything else. You must understand that. An evil-doer. You were quite right about that."

"Where are we going?" Katia asked.

"To the village. To regimental headquarters. They'll check up on you, question you; some of you will stick your noses into the ground, the rest will be allowed to go. You as a young woman needn't be afraid. Besides, I am with you."

"It seems to me that you yourself are the one to be feared more than anybody else," said Katia, with a quick glance at her companion. She did not expect her words to sting him as they did. He straightened up, snorted angrily and said under his breath: "You bitch!", his long face showing pale and distorted in the starlight. They went on in silence. Mishka rolled a cigarette as he walked along and lit it.

"You may be as secretive as you like, I know who you are anyway. You are an officer's lady."

"Yes," Katia answered.

"Your husband is in the White bands of course."

"Yes. My husband has been killed."

"I wouldn't swear that it wasn't my bullet that got him," he said and grinned.

Katia looked quickly at him and stumbled. Mishka caught hold of her elbow. She disengaged her arm and shook her head.

"Well, I come from the Caucasian front. I've been only four weeks here, the rest of the time I was fighting the White bandits. I've sent many a bullet out of this rifle into gentleborn bones."

Katia shook her head again. He walked on in silence for a time and then said, laughing:

"We got into a pretty mess down there, near the Umansk railway station. Our Varnavski regiment came to a sticky end. Sokolovski, the commissar, was killed; Sapozhkov, the commander, got away with a mere handful of men, and those all wounded. I myself got away through the German front to Makhno. There's more fun here. No one bothers you, there aren't any superior officers, it's a people's army. We are partisans, lady, but not bandits. We elect our own leaders and sack them too—sometimes with a pistol. The only man who is over us is Makhno himself. You think that now we've looted your train, we'll drink it all. But we'll do nothing of the sort. All the goods go to headquarters. From there they are distributed: part goes to the peasants, part to the army. The trains are our commissariat. And we, the people's army, in other words, the people itself, are at war with Germany. That is

the issue. So we cut the landlords' throats. Policemen and the Hetman's officers do well to keep out of our way; if we get them, we kill them with cold steel. Small detachments of Germans or Austrians we drive back towards Yekaterinoslav. That is the kind of bandits we are."

There seemed to be no end to the steppe and to the stars. At one edge of the horizon, in the direction in which they were going, the sky was just beginning to pale. Katia stumbled more and more often, sighing in spite of herself. But Mishka didn't mind at all, he would march and march with his rifle on his shoulder, a thousand miles if need be.

"Yes, you men are all the same!" She stopped and arranged her headcloth in order to get her breath again, and then went on among the wormwood bushes and vole holes. "We bear you sons only that they may be killed. All killing is wrong—and that is all there is to it."

"We've heard that story before. It's an old woman's story," Mishka said without a moment's thought. "Our commissar used to say about that, that we should look at it from the class point of view. When I put my cheek to my rifle I see before me not a human being but a burzhuy. Understand? Mercy is out of place here—one might even call it counter-revolutionary. But there is another question, my dear."

His voice suddenly changed, and became quite toneless, as if he were listening to his own words:

"I can't drift about from one front to another with my rifle for ever. People say Mishka is a drunken fellow, his road leads to the devil, to the bottom of some ditch. . . . That's true, but not quite. I've no intention of dying soon, not the slightest. . . . The bullet that will kill me isn't cast yet. . . ."

He tossed the lock of hair back from his forehead.

"What does a man amount to nowadays? Just a greatcoat and a rifle? No, not really. The devil knows what I want. I don't know it myself. Sometimes one thinks: a cartload of money? No, that's not it. The man in me is suffering. All the more so because these are such times—what with the revolution and the civil war. If I march till I drop, if I suffer from the cold and from wounds, it's for my class and I do it willingly. This March I had to lie half a day in an ice-hole under machine-gun fire. It turned out that I was a hero to the whole outfit. But to myself, in private, what am I? You fill up with drink, and then you're angry with yourself for no reason, and your hand goes to the knife in the leg of your boot."

Mishka stretched himself again to his full height, and breathed in the fresh night air. His face was sad and seemed almost feminine. He buried his hands deep in his coat pockets and went on talking, not to Katia, but to some shadow floating in front of him.

"I know, I've heard—about this education. My mind just runs wild. My children will be educated. But I, such as I am now, I'm an evil-doer—and that will be the death of me. The intelligentsia gets novels written about it, many interesting words. But why not write a novel about me? I suppose you think only the gentry go out of their minds? I hear cries in my dreams. I wake up. . . . But never mind, I would kill them a second time. . . ."

A group of riders came galloping out of the dark, shouting from afar: "Stop! Stop!" Mishka quickly levelled his rifle. "Stop, damn you! Don't you know your own?" He left Katia, joined the mounted men and talked to them for a long time.

The prisoners stood about, exchanging frightened whispers. Katia sat down on the ground and rested her face on her knees. From the east, where the green

light of the dawn was stronger, came a smell of moisture, the smoke of cow-dung fires, all the homely odours of a village.

The stars of this unending night were paling and vanishing. It was time to get up and go on again. Soon dogs began to bark; the well-beams and house-roofs of the village became visible. The sleeping geese in the meadows looked like heaps of snow. The coral-tinted sunrise was reflected on the surface of the horse-pond. Mishka came up to Katia and said, frowning:

"Don't go with the others. I'll find a place for you by yourself."

"Very well," Katia answered. She heard the words as if from a distance. She did not care where she went, if only she could lie down and sleep.

Through drowsy eyelids she saw huge sunflowers, and behind them green shutters on which flowers and birds were painted. Mishka tapped with his nails on the bubbly glass of a tiny window. A door in the white wall of the cottage opened slowly, and the tousled head of a peasant looked out.

His moustaches climbed up his face as he yawned. "All right," he said. "Come in!"

Katia entered the house unsteadily. Flies flew up and buzzed as she went in. The peasant brought a short fur coat and a pillow from behind a partition, said, "Sleep!" and left her. Katia found herself on a bed behind the partition. It seemed to her that Mishka was bending over her and smoothing the pillow. It was bliss to lie back and forget everything.

She was disturbed by the sound of wheels. They clattered and rumbled. Many carriages were rolling along. Behind them the sun was reflected in the windows of high, very high houses. Domed slate roofs. Paris. Carriages with well-dressed women roll past. They are all shouting something, turning round, pointing. . . . The women flourish their lace parasols. . . . More and more carriages race past! Good God! It's a chase! In Paris, on the boulevards! Here are the pursuers. Gigantic shadows on shaggy horses in the green dawn. And she cannot move, cannot escape! The shouting! The clatter! It takes her breath away! . . .

Katia sat up. From outside came the rattling of wheels and the neighing of horses. Through the uncurtained door in the partition she could see men, armed with every kind of weapon, coming and going. Voices rumbled and boots clattered all over the house. Men were crowding round the table looking at something. It was bright daylight and several dusty rays shone through the tiny windows and into the grey smoke that filled the house.

Nobody paid any attention to Katia. She tidied her dress and her hair, but remained sitting on the bed. Fresh troops had evidently come to the village. She could tell by the anxious hum of voices from the men thronging the house that something serious was in progress. A sharp voice with a slight stammer and a somewhat feminine pitch shouted imperiously:

"The devil take him! Bring him here, the scoundrel!"

Voices, cries flew out of the cottage into the yard, along the street to the spot where groups of soldiers, sailors and armed peasants were standing around troikas and saddled horses.

"Petrichenko! Where's Petrichenko? Run and fetch him!"

"Run yourself, you slinking swine. . . . Hi, brother, go and call the colonel. . . . The devil knows where to look for him. . . . Here he is, sitting on a cart, drunk as a lord. . . . Pour a bucket of water over the blighter. . . . Hi, you there, with the bucket, go fill it at the well, we can't wake the colonel. . . . No use, you fellows, you'll never wake him with water, better smear tar on his snout. . . . He's awake, he's awake. . . . Tell him the *batko* is angry. . . . He's coming . . . coming."

The big man with the tall cap who had commanded the raid came into the room. He had obviously slept very deeply—the puffy slits of his eyes were scarcely distinguishable in his hairy, purple face. . . . He pushed his way through to the table, grumbling all the time, and sat down.

"Here, you! Selling out, are you? Selling the army for a bribe, you scoundrel!" the high rasping voice of the *batko* asked.

"What's it all about? I went to sleep, so what?"—the colonel grunted in a deep bass as if he were talking from under a barrel.

"Just that! Just that, I'm telling you. . . . Just that!" The *batko's* voice broke. "Just that you have slept and missed the Germans . . ."

"I miss the Germans? I missed nothing . . ."

"Where are your road-blocks? We drove all night and found none. . . . Why is the army surrounded?"

"What are you yelling like that for? Who can know where the Germans come from. . . ? The steppe is wide . . ."

"You are to blame, you scoundrel!"

"But . . . but . . ."

"You are to blame, I say!"

"Keep your hands off me!"

Suddenly there was complete silence in the room. The men surrounding the table drew back. There was the sound of a struggle. A hand holding a revolver rose into the air. Several hands snatched at it. A shot went off. Katia stopped her ears and quickly buried her face in the pillow. Flakes of whitewash snowed down from the ceiling. The voices were chattering again, but cheerfully this time. Colonel Petrichenko stood up, his tall sheepskin cap almost touching the ceiling, and walked from the room with an air of importance, a crowd of young men at his heels.

Outside there was noise and movement now. The insurgents mounted their horses or jumped into carts. Whips cracked, axles creaked, men swore profusely. The room was empty now and Katia understood why she had not yet been able to see the man who had shouted so imperiously in so feminine a voice. He was a very small man, sitting at the table with his back to Katia and studying a map.

His long straight chestnut hair hung down over his shoulders, which were as narrow as a boy's. Two straps were crossed over his black cloth coat; two pistols and a sabre were stuck into his leather belt; his legs were encased in well-made high boots with spurs. He was writing so hastily that his pen spluttered and splashed the ink all over the paper; while he was writing he nodded his head so violently that his greasy hair danced on his shoulders.

The peasant who had given up his bed to Katia cautiously stole into the room with an apologetic expression on his pink face. His hair was full of hay. Blinking foolishly, he sat down on the bench opposite the man who was writing, put both his hands under the table and scratched his bare foot with a bare toe.

"Always busy, always busy, Nestor Ivanovich—and I expected you to stay to dinner. We killed a calf yesterday, as if I had known that you would be coming to-day."

"I'm busy . . . don't interrupt. . . ."

The peasant stopped blinking and was silent for a minute. His eyes grew alert and intelligent; he followed the movements of the writer's hand, and then

spoke again: "Well, how is it to be, Nestor Ivanovich, are you going to fight the battle in our village?"

"That remains to be seen."

"Of course, that's a military business. I just asked because—if there's going to be fighting—we must do something about the cattle—drive them out to the farms or something."

The long-haired man threw down his pen and, plunging his hand into his hair, read through what he had written.

The muzhik scratched his beard, scratched himself under the arm-pits and then said, as if he had only just remembered something:

"Nestor Ivanovich, what about the cloth? You know, the cloth you gave us, good cloth. Commissariat stuff, one can see that at a glance. . . . Six cartloads of it . . ."

"Well, wasn't it enough? Not satisfied? Too little?"

"No, no, it's not that. We can't thank you enough for it. . . . You know yourself that we sent forty men to fight with you from this village. My own son too. He said, 'Father, I must go and shed my blood for the peasant cause. . . . If the forty are not enough, we will go and the old men too . . . as long as you fight we'll support you. . . .' But about the cloth . . . if anything were to happen . . . if, God forbid, the Germans or the Hetman's police were to come here . . . ? You know well enough what we must expect from them. So what would you say about the battle—are we safe or not?"

The long-haired little man straightened up. He took his hand from out of his hair and grasped the edge of the table. He took a deep breath and threw back his head. The muzhik cautiously began to slide away from him along the wooden seat, freed his hands from under the table and slowly sidled out of the room.

The chair on which the long-haired man was sitting swayed as he pushed it back with his foot. Katia shivered when at last she saw the face of the little man who looked like a disguised monk in his black, semi-military dress. Brown blazing eyes glared fixedly at Katia from hollow orbits under jutting brows. The face was pock-marked and sallow, clean shaven and feminine; there was in it something immature and cruel with the cruelty of adolescence; but the eyes were old and wise.

Katia would have shivered even more had she known that this was *Batko* Makhno himself. He looked at the young woman sitting on the bed in dusty shoes and a crumpled but still exquisite silk dress, with a dark headcloth knotted peasant fashion; he was evidently puzzled at the strange bird which had settled in that house. His long upper lip curled in a smile, uncovering his widely-spaced teeth.

He asked curtly and sharply:

"Whose are you?"

Katia did not understand, and shook her head. The smile disappeared from Makhno's face.

"Who are you? A prostitute? If you have syphilis I shall shoot you. Well? Can't you understand Russian? Are you sick or well?"

"I am a prisoner," Katia answered almost inaudibly.

"What can you do? Can you manicure? We'll give you the tools."

"Very well," she answered, even less audibly than before.

"But no debauch in this army! Understand? When I come back in the evening after the battle you'll clean my nails for me!"

Many stories about Makhno were current among the people. It was said

that while he was a prisoner in the convict prison at Akatuisk, he repeatedly attempted to escape and once succeeded in getting away but was discovered hiding in a wood-pile and fought the soldiers off with an axe. The soldiers broke every bone in his body with the butts of their rifles and he was taken back and put in irons; for three years he was kept in chains and during that time he did not speak a word; all he did was to struggle night and day to free himself from his chains, but in vain. There, in the convict prison he made friends with Arshinov-Marin, the Anarchist, and became his disciple.

Nestor Makhno was the son of a joiner in the village of Gulyai Polye, in the province of Yekaterinoslav. From childhood, when he had to go to work in the village shop, he had always been beaten and had always been surly and ill-tempered. Once the senior shopman thrashed him and he retaliated by scalding the shopman with boiling water and was sacked. He then gathered a gang of boys and they spent their time robbing orchards and vegetable gardens and generally raising hell until Nestor Makhno's father apprenticed him to a printer. It was said that it was in the printer's shop that he met Volin, an Anarchist who eighteen years later was to become his chief of staff and general adviser on all matters. It was also said that Volin liked the boy so much that he began to teach him to read and write, talked Anarchism to him and sent him to school. It was thus that Makhno became a school-teacher, it was said. This was not true, however; Makhno had never been a school-teacher and it is far more probable that he did not meet Volin until later and that he became acquainted with Anarchism through Arshinov in the convict prison.

From 1903 onward Makhno was again raising hell in Gulyai Polye, but this time it was not in the orchards and vegetable gardens. This time it was in the manor-houses of the country squires and the storehouses of the merchants; one day he would steal the horses, another day he would clear out a wine-cellar or leave a note for a shopkeeper telling him to leave a sum of money under a stone. At that time his relations with the police were strangely and rather drunkenly friendly.

People were now beginning to be seriously afraid of Makhno, but the peasants supported him because he made himself a nuisance to the landowners to an increasing extent with the approach of the revolution of 1905. When the manors went up in flames at last and the peasants drove out their teams to plough up their landlords' land, Makhno hurried to the town to do bigger jobs. At the beginning of 1906 he raided the inland revenue office in Berdyansk with a bunch of his pals, shot three officials dead and took all the money, but was betrayed by an accomplice and sent to penal servitude in Akatuy.

Twelve years later he was released by the February revolution and again appeared in Gulyai Polye, where the peasants had not obeyed the ambiguous instructions of the Provisional Government, had driven out the landlords and divided up the land. Makhno reminded them of his previous services and was elected vice-chairman of the district *Zemstvo*. He immediately advocated a radical policy to promote a "free peasant order of things"; at a meeting of the local council he declared that the *Zemstvo* men were "burzhuys and Cadets". In the ensuing argument he lost his temper, shot a member of the council then and there and appointed himself chairman and district commissar.

The Provisional Government was powerless to deal with him, but a year later the Germans came and Makhno was forced to flee. He wandered about Russia for several months until at last he turned up in Moscow, at that time a hotbed of Anarchism. Here old Arshinov was gloomily watching the progress of the revolution led, through some, to him, incomprehensible vagary of fate, not

by the Anarchists but by the Bolsheviks; here was Volin, the great theoretician, the pillar of Anarchism (that "mother of order"), who never combed his hair or beard; here were the impatient, ambitious Baron and Arten and Teper and Jacob Aly and Krasnokutski and Glagson and Tsintsiner and Chernyak, and many other great men who tried in vain to hitch their wagons to the revolution, sitting in Moscow, completely broke, and holding meetings daily, the sole item on their agenda being "Organization and finance". Some of them later became the leaders of the Makhno brand of Anarchism, and others the authors of the explosion in Leontyevski Street to which the Moscow District Committee of the Bolsheviks fell victim.

There can be no doubt that the arrival of Makhno made a great impression on the Anarchists moping in the Moscow cafés. Makhno was a resolute man of action. It was decided that Makhno should go to Kiev and kill Hetman Skoropadski and his generals.

In the company of one of the Anarchists who was to assist him, Makhno crossed the Ukrainian frontier, eluding the vigilance of the formidable Commissar Sayenko who was blocking the roads. He disguised himself as an officer but changed his mind about going to Kiev when he felt the free winds of the steppe blowing on his face—underground work proved little to his taste. He went straight to Gulyai Polye.

In his native village he picked five trustworthy lads, obtained hatchets, knives and sawn-off shot-guns, and camped with them in a ravine near the house of Resnikov, a local landowner. One night the gang entered the house and without any special fuss killed the squire and his three brothers who were all serving in the state police. They also burned the house. This enterprise provided the gang with seven rifles, some revolvers, several horses, saddles and police uniforms.

Now well armed and mounted, Makhno lost no time in attacking other manors with his five men and setting fire to them at all four corners. More men now joined the band. With furious passion Makhno scoured the district and cleared out all landlords. Finally he brought off a coup which spread his fame far and wide.

It was Whitsun. Mirgorodski, a magnate of the steppe, a landowner in a big way, was marrying his daughter to a colonel of the Hetman's army. Those among the neighbours who were not afraid of crossing the steppe in such dangerous times came to the wedding and other guests arrived from the provincial centre and from Kiev.

The Mirgorodski estate was well guarded by a squad of police. A machine-gun was posted in the attic of the mansion and the bridegroom brought with him in addition a swarm of his regimental comrades, big husky fellows in immensely wide dark blue Turkish *sharovars*, coats of crimson cloth and golden-tasselled caps. At every step their curved scimitars banged against their morocco-leather boots, the tips of which curved upwards Turkish fashion.

The bride had recently arrived from England where she had been to a finishing school, but she could already speak Ukrainian quite well, wore an embroidered Ukrainian blouse, beads, ribbons and little red boots. *Pan* Mirgorodski, her father, was wearing a velvet *zhupan* bordered with fur, which had been specially made for him in Kiev after the one worn by Hetman Mazeppa in the well-known portrait of that worthy. The wedding was to be celebrated in the traditional manner, and although it was difficult to obtain century-old mead in the ravaged Ukraine, there was plenty of everything to eat and drink.

After mass the bride was conducted through the park to the new stone church. The bridesmaids, who accompanied the bride with songs, were marvellously pretty, and the bride herself was like a picture out of a Cossack fairy-tale. "Oho!" said the friends of the bridegroom, waiting for the bride at the church, "oho! we see the good old days have returned to the Ukraine." After the ceremony the newly-weds were pelted with oats in the church porch. *Pan* Mirgorodski, the father, in his velvet Mazeppa coat, blessed them with the ancient icon from Mezhigore. Then they all drank champagne, cheered in Ukrainian "*Hai zhive!*" and broke their glasses for luck. Then the newly-weds drove away to the railhead by car and the guests stayed behind to celebrate.

Night descended on the wide court of the manor, where servants and guards wove intricate steps in a dance. All the windows of the mansion were bright with gay lights. The Jewish band brought from Alexandrovsk sawed away at their fiddles and blew at their brasses with all their might and main. *Pan* Mirgorodski had just finished a devilish *Gopak* and was drinking soda-water. The ladies were already seeking the cool of the open windows, and the friends of the bridegroom, all officers of the Hetman, returned to the tables of the buffet, boasting loudly that they would beat the 'damned Muscovites' and take Moscow into the bargain.

About this time a little man in the uniform of an officer of the Hetman's police appeared among the guests. There was nothing strange in the fact that the police should have come to the manor on such a day. The officer came in unobtrusively, silently bowed, and glanced at the musicians without saying a word. Only a few of those present may have noticed that his uniform seemed too big for him, and one lady said to another in sudden alarm: "Who can this be? He terrifies me!" Although the unknown officer did his best to keep his eyes on the ground, whenever he involuntarily looked up those eyes were blazing with a savage light. Or perhaps it was merely the silly fancy of a drink-soaked mind?

The musicians, after many mazurkas and valses, were now playing a tango. Two or three crimson-coats, whose legs could still carry them, asked the ladies for dances. Someone gave the order to put out the chandelier. In the semi-darkness, to the subdued notes which seemed to come from the depths of long-past years, the couples twisted and turned in a representation of the raptures of death.

At this moment there was a sudden crackle of pistol-shots. The crowd of guests stood stock still. Makhno, in the uniform of a police officer, was standing behind the buffet table near the half-open door and was firing at the crimson-coats from two revolvers. A tall, purple-face colonel, a friend of the bridegroom, threw up his arms and fell heavily against the buffet table, upsetting it. The women screamed. Another crimson-coat half drew his scimitar, but fell with his face on the carpet before he could draw it clear. Three others rushed at Makhno with drawn swords—two of them fell immediately, the third jumped out of the window and screamed like a snared hare. The other door of the hall now opened, revealing two more men in police uniform, fierce and hairy men who opened fire on the guests. The women rushed here and there and fell to the ground. *Pan* Mirgorodski was unable to get up from his arm-chair and Makhno walked up to him and fired a bullet into his mouth. By now there was shooting in the courtyard as well as in the park where a few guests were hiding after they had jumped out of the windows. Very few of them succeeded in escaping behind the bushes and the reeds around the pond in the park. The servants and police guards were all killed. The Makhno gang seized all carts

and carriages and spent the rest of the night loading them with goods and weapons. By sunrise the manor was ablaze.

This bold stroke made a deep impression in Gulyai Polye. At this time the peasants were in a state of dejection due to the pressure of the Germans, the landlords and the Hetman's police. The landlords would not trust the muzhiks again and refused to let them rent their farms, demanding not only the whole harvest of the current year but compensation in kind for the losses in grain suffered the previous year. The peasants saw no way out of their troubles. Then Makhno came and announced his rule of terror. The rumour spread from village to village that a new leader, a *batko*, had arisen.

The peasants took heart. Manor houses and barns went up in flames. Partisan groups boldly attacked trains and barges loaded with grain for transport to Germany. The disorders spread to the right bank of the Dnieper. German and Austrian troops were ordered out to quell them. Hundreds of punitive detachments overran the country. But Makhno forestalled them: with small, well-armed groups he began to attack the Austrian troops.

At this time Makhno's army was small as yet. Its permanent core—those who did not scatter after each adventure—consisted of two to three hundred desperate dare-devils of various sorts. Here were sailors from the Black Sea fleet and soldiers from front-line units who for various reasons could not show their faces in their native villages; minor gang leaders who had brought their gangs along and joined Makhno; nameless men, without kith or kin, who fought for the sake of fighting and because they found the life to their taste.

At this time individual Anarchists also began to filter into Makhno's forces. These so-called 'boyeviks' (activists) had heard of the new freebooters scouring the land on horseback. They arrived on foot in Makhno's camp, hungry and ragged, with a bomb in one hand and a volume of Kropotkin in the other and said to Makhno:

"We have heard that you are a genius, or so people say. Well, we shall see."

"All right. See for yourselves," the *batko* replied.

"If you are really a genius," they said, "you will get into the pages of world history. The devil knows, you might even be destined to become a second Kropotkin."

"Quite possible," said Makhno.

So the Anarchists began to ride about after the *batko* with the supply columns, drink strong liquors with the *batko*, and talk to him—using big words which the *batko* liked very much—about history and about fame. By degrees some of them began to be trusted with responsible jobs and commands. And already each of them had a cart full of loot taken in battle trailing after him: cases of brandy, pots of gold coins, bags of clothing. The names of some of these anarchists have come down to us: Chadlon, Skoropionov, Yugolyubov, Cherednyak, Engarets, Frantsuz—but there were many others. When the detachments halted in any place for a longer stay, they obtained whole brothelfuls of gay ladies and arranged 'Athenian Nights', explaining to the *batko* that such an approach to the problem of sex had a liberating effect on the everyday life of the people and that the danger of syphilis was a trifle not worth mentioning when absolute freedom can be realized thus. Makhno called his Anarchists 'crawling vermin' and often threatened to shoot them all, but he tolerated them after all because they had book-learning and knew all about world fame and such.

The army had no permanent headquarters. It moved, as occasion required,

from one end of the province to the other, using horses and carts as means of transport. When an attack was being planned or a battle was imminent, Makhno sent messengers to the villages and himself made a speech in bigger centres to stir up the people. After his speech his men scattered bolts of cloth and chintz among the crowd from the carts. In a single day the core of his army would be greatly expanded by the arrival of numerous peasant partisans. As soon as the fighting was over, these volunteers dispersed to their villages with the same suddenness, hid their weapons, and stood at their doors with innocent expression on their faces, lazily scratching their heads while the German artillery clattered past searching for the 'enemy'. The German and Austrian troops pursuing Makhno always struck their blows into a void and always found the ubiquitous, devilish enemy sitting on their rear. The partisans, like the nomads of old, never accepted a decisive battle but dispersed amid much howling, whistling and shooting, rode and drove away on their horses and in their carts, then gathered again where they were least expected and struck another sudden blow.

The village was deserted. Makhno had followed his army in a cart drawn by three horses and covered with carpets. It was already noon. A fat peasant girl, her face swollen with weeping, the hem of her skirt stuck in her belt, was sweeping the floor with a broom of wormwood twigs. The master of the house was sitting at the open window and looking towards the hills behind which all the mounted men and the men on foot had disappeared and where two windmills were now turning peacefully. He sighed deeply several times; obviously he had not been reassured by his recent talk with Makhno.

Katia went to the well and washed and tidied herself. The peasant invited her to come and have breakfast—she ate two buns and drank some milk. And after that, not knowing what to do, she sat near the second window. It was very hot. Along the street a lot of hens were pecking among the fresh horse-dung. In the gardens the golden crowns of the sunflowers wilted on their stalks, and the cherry trees were heavy with fruit. Hawks were circling over the village. The peasant groaned and sighed again.

"You'll lift your skirt up over your head next, you shameless wench," he said to the fat girl. "About this thing . . . your trouble. . . . You're not the first."

The girl sniffed, put down the broom and dropped her skirt over her thick white calves. The peasant looked at the broom for a while and then said:

"Who's the fellow? Don't be afraid to tell me, Alexandra . . ."

"I don't even know his name, damn him. . . . One of those strangers. . . . With spectacles . . ."

"Look at that," the peasant said quickly, as if this were pleasant news. "Spectacles, eh? That must be one of those Anarchists." He turned to Katia. "This is my niece Alexandra. . . . I sent her to the barn to get some straw. . . . You know where the barn is? She didn't come back until morning, all messed about." He spat in disgust.

"He was drunk and threatened me with a gun. What could I do?" Alexandra complained, and began to cry softly. The peasant stamped his bare foot at her.

"Get out of here. You might come to grief else."

The girl ran out of the room. The peasant again sat sighing and staring at the hills. "There you are. But what can we do? D'you think we like to fatten these robbers? Take a team, for instance—a team of horses for their carts. They drive the horses eighty versts and more full tilt. . . . A horse is not a

machine, a horse needs looking after. . . . All our beasts are crippled these days. . . . What a war!"

The chimney of the lamp hanging over the table tinkled softly and the glass of the window-panes shook; the hot air in the room seemed to heave a sigh as a sound like the rumble of distant thunder rolled over the fields. The peasant quickly put his head out of the window and looked for a long time towards the hills where a single horseman was indistinctly visible near the windmills. Then he carefully bunched three fingers together, turned towards the icon in the corner and made the sign of the cross.

"It's the German artillery shelling our people," he said. "Ay, these are bad times!" He picked up the broom, threw it into a corner and went out. Again a distant boom passed over the village. Katia could no longer bear sitting in the house and went out into the sweltering yard, which smelt of manure.

At this time the passengers taken last night were walking down the street in a frightened little group. At their head marched Obruchev, the physics master, his spectacles pushed down on his nose so he could look over them. He was wearing a raincoat and goloshes and seemed a leader whom the others trusted.

"Come, join us!" he shouted at Katia. She complied. The passengers looked rather the worse for wear, their faces were thinner and the two elderly women of the party had evidently been weeping. The disguised black marketeer was nowhere to be seen.

"One of our party has disappeared without leaving a trace. They must have shot him," Obruchev said briskly. "The same fate awaits us all, ladies and gentlemen, unless we can find sufficient energy in ourselves to cope with the situation. . . . We must immediately make up our minds whether we are to wait for the result of the battle or make use of the opportunity offered us by the fact that no one seems to be guarding us and attempt to reach the railway on foot. . . . Speakers will be limited to one minute."

Immediately everyone started to speak at the same time. Some pointed out that should the robbers later overtake them in the open steppe, they would undoubtedly kill them all. Others were of opinion that flight would still offer some chance of escape. Others again were convinced that the Germans would win and insisted that the party should wait for the end of the battle. When the guns again began to thunder beyond the hills they all fell silent and, with their faces screwed up in an expression of painful tension, looked towards the hills where nothing was to be seen except the lazily turning sails of the windmills. Obruchev made a neat little speech in which he summed up every objection raised. The two elderly ladies listened to him as if he were a prophet. But the passengers could not make up their minds and remained standing among the hens and sparrows in the empty street, where it would not occur to a single soul to have any sympathy with a fellow Russian. . . . Not much! One bareheaded peasant woman glanced at them from her window, yawned and turned away. From round a corner came an angry peasant in an unbelted shirt. Without so much as a glance at the passengers he scooped up a handful of clay and threw it with all his force at a boar in the street, not his own, of course. The vultures circling over the village did not look more indifferently down at the passengers, who had been robbed and who were now no longer of interest to anyone.

A cloud of dust rose behind the hill. The horseman galloped away from the mill and disappeared. Carts, dashing along at top speed, appeared from

behind the hills. There were four or five troikas in all. They passed round the horse pond and turned up the village street. They were bringing in wounded men. The first troika drew up before a house and a tall partisan who drove it shouted:

"Nadeshda, we've brought your man."

A peasant woman ran out of the house. Tearing at her apron and wailing softly, she approached the cart. A young lad, his face a greenish grey, put his arms round the woman's neck and crawled towards the house. The troika drove on to another house. Three gaudily-dressed girls ran out.

"Take your fellow, my swans, he's not seriously hurt," the driver said cheerfully. Then he turned the cart and drove along slowly, not knowing where to take the last wounded man. In the cart sat Mishka Solomin, his head wrapped in the blood-stained fragments of a shirt and his teeth clenched. Suddenly the driver pulled up his horses:

"Whoa, there! Good God, can it be you! Yekaterina Dmitrievna?"

Katia had certainly not expected anything of the kind here. She ran to the cart, panting with excitement. In the cart stood Alexey Krassilnikov, his legs planted far apart, with one hand on his hip and the other holding the leather reins. A curly beard covered his cheeks, and his light-coloured eyes twinkled merrily. A row of hand-grenades hung from his belt, a machine-gun cartridge-band crossed his breast over his leather coat, and a cavalry carbine hung over his shoulder.

"Yekaterina Dmitrievna! How on earth did you get here? In whose house are you? Here? In Mitrofan's? That's my third cousin, a Krassilnikov too. Look at poor Mishka, shrapnel has blown off half his head. . . ."

Katia walked along beside the cart. Alexey was still hot with the fight, almost as if he were drunk. His eyes and teeth flashed when he smiled.

"We've just given the Germans a good drubbing. The fools—they rushed our machine-guns three times. The whole field is blue with their uniforms. The *batko* has enough uniforms now to dress up his whole army. Whoa, there! Mitrofan! Come out of your den. Take this wounded hero. And you, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, had better not leave this house. It isn't safe."

The church bells rang a peal, the doors of the houses clanged, the shutters of the windows flew open, the women ran out into the street and even the cautious muzhiks came out of their houses. Suddenly, no one knew how, there was a huge crowd of people in the street, and with songs and talk they went out to meet Makhno's victorious army.

Alexey Krassilnikov, assisted by Katia, carried the half-dead Mishka into Mitrofan's house and put him down on Alexandra's bed in a little summer outhouse. Katia attended to his bandages. It was difficult to detach the stiffened rags from his hair. Mishka only ground his teeth.

When they began to wash the terrible wound on the right side of his head, Alexandra, who was holding the basin, caught her breath and staggered. Alexey snatched the basin from her and pushed her away.

"Look, a little sharp sliver of bone is sticking out just there," he said to Katia. "Go, Sashka, bring the sugar-tongs."

"Oh, we haven't got one, it's broken."

Katia seized the piece of bone showing in the wound with her nails and pulled. Mishka cried out. The bone was a splinter without a doubt. Katia's nails slipped off, she took another grip somewhat deeper in the wound and jerked it out.

Alexey gave a loud sigh and laughed:

"That is the way we fight this war—muzhik fashion!"

They bandaged Mishka's head with a clean towel. He lay quivering and drenched with sweat under the sheepskin coat and opened his eyes. Alexey bent down to him:

"Well, how is it? Are you staying alive, eh?"

"Yesterday I boasted to her and this is what came of it," Mishka said, and smiled wanly. He was looking at Katia. She wiped her hands dry, came to his bed and bent over him. His lips moved:

"Alyosha, look after her."

"I will, don't worry."

"I had evil designs on her. You must send her back to town."

He stared at Katia again with a severe, almost ecstatic, gaze. He bore the pain and fever as if it were nothing, a mere unpleasantness. The touch of death had swept away all the passions and contradictions in him. He felt at that moment that it was not his drunkenness and evil deeds that were essential in him; that he was a Russian soul struggling like a bird in a storm; that he was fit for heroic deeds no less than any other man, and that great deeds were within his reach. He felt that Katia could understand all this and that perhaps she had already understood it the night before. He wanted to tell her all this. He tried, muttered something and turned away.

Alexey said softly:

"Let him sleep now. It's nothing. He's a strong lad, he'll get over it."

Katia went out into the yard with Alexey. She was still in that curious state of a waking dream here under the boundless sky, in the hot steppe smelling of the ancient smoke of cow-dung fires; in the steppe where men, after centuries of quiescence, were again roaming on horseback in the teeth of the freely blowing winds and where passions were quenched like a thirst, without stint.

She was not afraid. Her own sorrow had shrivelled to a little knot that was not important to anyone here, not even to herself. Had she at that moment been called upon to make some sacrifice, to suffer martyrdom, she would have gone to it with ease, without even thinking twice about it. Had they said to her: you must die, she would only have shrugged her shoulders, sighed, and looked up at the sky.

"Vadim Petrovich has been killed," she said. "I shall not return to Moscow, I have nobody—and nothing—there. . . . Of my sister I know nothing. . . . I thought I would go somewhere—to Yekaterinoslav, perhaps."

Alexey was standing with his feet apart, looking at the ground between them. He shook his head.

"It's a pity that Vadim Petrovich is dead; he was a good man."

"Yes, yes," Katia said, and tears welled up in her eyes. "He was a very good man."

"You didn't follow my advice, then? Of course, we look after our own interests, and you after yours, and it's no use taking it in ill part. But how could he try to fight the people? As if we would ever surrender! Did you see our men to-day? Well then, you know what I mean. But Vadim Petrovich was a just man."

Katia looked at the heavily-laden cherry branch that was hanging over the fence and said:

"Alexey Ivanovich, advise me what I am to do. After all, one must live." When she had said it she was frightened. Alexey did not answer immediately. Then he said:

"What you are to do? Well, that's a real upper-class question! What do you mean? You are an educated woman, can speak several languages, you are good-looking and you ask a peasant fellow what you are to do?"

A malicious and contemptuous expression came over his face. He softly clinked the bombs in his belt. Katia shrank back. He went on:

"You'll find plenty of jobs in the towns. You can sing and dance in a pub, or be a kept woman, or you can be a typist in an office. You'll be all right."

Katia hung her head. She felt that Alexey was looking at her and she did not care to meet his eyes. And, as the day before with Mishka, she suddenly understood why Alexey's gaze was so angrily fixed on her neck. Katia understood this, and for the first time in the last twenty-four hours she made an attempt to protect herself.

"You did not get my meaning right, Alexey Ivanovich. It isn't my fault that I am being swept along the ground like a dry leaf. What am I to love? What am I to value? Even if I had claws I shouldn't want to scratch. I never learnt how to do it, so don't ask me to. Teach me first."

Alexey was no longer jingling his bombs. He was alert, listening.

Katia went on:

"Vadim Petrovich joined the White Army against my will. I didn't want him to go. He reproached me with being unable to hate. . . . I see everything and can understand it all, Alexey Ivanovich, but I have no part in it. That is terrible. That is what torments me. And that is why I asked you what I was to do, how I was to live."

She paused and looked Alexey Ivanovich straight in the face. He blinked, and his face took on an ingenuous, bewildered expression as if he had just been well scolded. His hand went to his ear and scratched it.

"Yes, it is a tragedy. You are quite right," he said, screwing up his nose. "With us it's all straightforward. My brother killed a German on our farm; we fired the house and ran. Where? To the partisans. But you, the intelligentsia. It's quite true, you're in a fix.

"If we muzhiks feed you townspeople," he went on, stressing his point with a resolute gesture, "that means that you must be on our side. We peasants are against the Germans, against the Whites, against the Communists, but for free village Soviets. Understand?"

"If I were a village girl, everything would be quite clear," she said. "How often have I heard the words 'our country', 'Russia', 'our people', but what the words really mean I am now seeing for the first time." She looked at Alexey Ivanovich, at his little beard that gleamed golden in the bright sunlight, his leather coat, his strong limbs and his formidable weapons.

"The people, yes, the people," he said, more and more disconcerted. "There's nothing much in the people—but still, we'll stick to what is ours." He grasped one of the protruding stakes of the fence and shook it as if to see whether it was firm. "You ought to talk it over with our Anarchists, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, not with me; they are the ones to talk to. . . . Only"—he frowned and his stern eyes searched Katia's face—"the trouble with them is that they are very fond of smut and drink. Perhaps it would be better if they didn't see you at all."

"Nonsense," said Katia.

"Why nonsense?"

"Well, I'm not a little girl, I can take care of myself."

"It's easy to say that."

Katia's chin quivered. She felt the penetrating caress of the sun in her whole body. And this again was a waking dream.

"Still," she said, "what do you think, Alexey Ivanovich, what could I do here among your people?"

"An educational job, maybe. . . . The *batko* is setting up a political department. They say he intends to bring out a newspaper of his own."

"And you?"

"Oh, I? I am a simple rank-and-filer, driver of a machine-gun outfit—my place is in the battle. You had better have a look round first, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, before you decide. I'll make you acquainted with my sister-in-law Matryona, my brother's wife; she is with us in the army as an intelligence agent. My brother is a Lewis gunner. We'll adopt you into the family if you like. . . ."

"But Makhno ordered me to come to him in the evening—to clean his nails."

"What?" Alexey caught hold of his belt with both his hands, and his nose seemed to grow sharp. "His nails? And what did you say?"

"I said I was a prisoner," Katia answered calmly.

"All right, if he sends for you, go. Only I shall be there too."

At this moment a girl came running from the porch, her apron fluttering.

"They're coming, they're coming," she cried, and ran to open the gate. They could hear the sound of cheering in the distance, the crack of single shots, the clatter of horses' hoofs. The Batyko was returning with the army and the people of the village. Katia and Alexey went out into the street. A cloud of dust rose at the end of it. Over the hills, past the mills, horsemen were galloping and carts rattling towards the village.

The vanguard of the army reached the village. Little boys danced all round them, little girls ran on in front. The flanks of the sweating, foaming horses were heaving. Makhno's men, dusty and covered with sweat, were standing up in their carts, their caps at a rakish angle.

Then Makhno himself rode in, sitting on an ammunition box in his cart, one hand on his hip, the other holding his sheepskin cap on his knee. The cart was covered with a Persian carpet the ends of which fluttered in the wind. Makhno's pale face was set, his parched lips were firmly pressed together. Behind him in a second cart came six men dressed in town clothes, wearing soft hats or straw caps; they all had long hair and little beards and wore spectacles: these were the Anarchists of Makhno's staff, his political advisers.

CHAPTER VIII

DASHA TELEGIN HAD been living alone for five months in the empty flat. When Ivan Ilyich left for the front he had given her a thousand roubles, but the money did not last long. Fortunately the flat below, from which a high official and his family had hurriedly fled earlier in the year, was now occupied by a resourceful foreigner of the name of Matte, who bought up pictures, furniture and anything else that offered.

Dasha sold him the double bed, a few prints and some china ornaments. She parted without regret from these things which still bore in them, like a faded scent, memories now no longer painful. The past was gone, finished for ever.

The money received from these transactions carried her through the spring and summer. The city was almost deserted. The fighting zone was only an hour's journey from Petersburg and the government had moved to Moscow.

The palaces along the Neva looked down with empty shot-shattered windows on the river. The streets were unlit. The militiamen were at no particular pains to guard the slumbers of the bourgeoisie, who were in any case doomed. Terrible men appeared in the streets at night, men such as had never been seen before. They looked into the windows, and prowled about on dark staircases, trying the handles of the doors. God help those who did not secure every door with a dozen bolts and chains. There would be a suspicious rustling, then strange men would come in, shout: "Hands up!" rush the peaceful citizens, tie them up with wire flex and then calmly pack up their goods in bundles and take them all away.

Then cholera appeared in the city. By the time the berries were ripe things grew bad indeed; people fell down in convulsions on the streets and in the markets. There was whispering everywhere, and forebodings of some unprecedented catastrophe. It was said that the soldiers of the Red Army were fastening the five-pointed star on their caps upside down, and that this was the seal of the Antichrist. It was said that in the closed chapel on the bridge, now re-named after Lieutenant Schmidt, the apparition of 'the man in white' had been seen again, heralding that the expected catastrophe would take the shape of a great flood. People stood on the bridges, pointed to the smokeless factory chimneys showing black against the sky, and said that they were 'the fingers of the devil'.

One after the other the factories closed down. Some of the workers enlisted in the food-requisitioning detachments and others went home to their villages. Grass sprouted in the streets between the paving-stones.

Dasha did not go out every day, and if she did it was only in the morning, and that only to the market, where unscrupulous Finnish women demanded two pairs of trousers for a *pood* of potatoes. Men of the Red Guard appeared more and more frequently in these markets and fired in the air to drive away these 'relics of the bourgeois order'—the Finnish women with their potatoes and the ladies with their trousers and curtains. It was getting more and more difficult to obtain food. Sometimes Matte came to the rescue, giving tinned food and sugar in exchange for antiques.

Dasha tried to eat as little as possible in order to save herself trouble. She got up early, sewed a little if she had any thread, or took a book dated nineteen-thirteen or nineteen-fourteen and read it, merely with the idea of preventing herself from thinking—but more often she sat near the window, lost in thought; or rather, her thoughts wandered round and round a little dark spot. The emotional shock she had suffered, her despair, her anguish, all seemed now to have contracted to this strange clot in her brain, this residue of her illness. She had grown so thin that she looked like a girl of sixteen, and in fact she felt quite like a girl again, but without the light-heartedness of girlhood.

The summer went by. The 'white nights' were ending, and the sunsets glowed with a darker purple out beyond Kronstadt. Through her open window on the fifth floor Dasha could see far along the deserted streets and the rows of lightless windows with the darkness of the night settling over them. No lamps were lit. Only rarely was the sound of footsteps heard.

Dasha thought: What next? When would this lethargy end? Autumn would come soon, and rain; the freezing cold wind would again howl over the roof. She had no fuel. She had sold her fur coat. Perhaps Ivan Ilyich would return. But again there would be only sorrow, only the same feeble red glow in the lamps, the same useless life. . . .

If she could only find the strength to throw off this torpor, to leave this

house in which she was being buried alive, to leave this dying city! Then something new would assuredly come into her life. For the first time in a whole year Dasha thought of this new thing. She caught herself thinking of it, and was surprised and troubled; it was as if, through the curtain of despair, she had caught a gleam of that far-away radiance of which she had dreamt one day on the Volga steamer.

Then came days when she longed for Ivan Ilyich; she pitied him now in a new way, like a sister; she recalled his patient solicitude for her, his unobtrusive good nature.

She searched the bookcase for the three white volumes of Bessonov's verses —memories now completely faded. She read them in the quiet of early evening, when house-martins were flitting past her windows like black arrows. She found in the verses words which fitted her sorrow, about loneliness, about the dark wind that would whistle over her grave. . . . Dasha mused a little, and wept a little. In the morning she got her wedding dress out of the chest, from among moth balls, and began to alter it.

The house-martins were flitting past her window just as they had done the day before, and the sun was just as pale. From somewhere in the distance came the sound of hammering; now and then there was a crash, and something fell heavily; it might have been a wooden house being demolished round the corner.

Dasha was sewing slowly. Her thimble was constantly slipping off her emaciated finger—once it nearly fell out of the window. She recalled how she had once sat with this thimble on her finger on the chest in the entrance hall of Katia's flat, eating bread and jam. . . . That was in 1914. Katia had quarrelled with her husband and was going away to Paris. She was wearing a tiny hat with a touchingly independent little feather. In the doorway she had turned round, and, seeing Dasha sitting on the chest, she had said: "Danyushka, come with me." But Dasha did not go. But now. . . . Oh, if she could be in Paris now! Dasha knew Paris through Katia's letters: it was all blue, all silky, smelling like a perfume casket. . . . Dasha sewed and sighed sadly. To go away from here! But people said that there were no trains, that no one was allowed across the frontier. She might get through on foot, walk with a haversack through woods, over hills and fields, across blue rivers, from country to country until she reached that divine, that exquisite city.

Tears welled up in her eyes. What nonsense! Oh, what foolishness! There was war everywhere. The Germans were shelling Paris from a giant gun while she was dreaming here of Paris! But was it right to prevent people from living in peace and content? What had Dasha done to them? The thimble fell off and rolled under the arm-chair, the sun was blurred by tears, the martins flitted past with plaintive cries: they did not care as long as they had enough flies and gnats. . . . "But all the same, I will go away—I will!" Dasha said through her tears.

At that moment she heard several sharp, insistent knocks at the door. Dasha put her needle and her scissors on the window-sill, wiped her eyes with her crumpled sewing and threw it into an arm-chair. Then she went to ask who was knocking.

"Does Daria Dmitrievna Telegin live here?"

Instead of answering, Dasha bent down to the keyhole. Someone on the other side did the same, and a cautious voice said into the keyhole: "A letter for her from Rostov." Dasha immediately opened the door. She did not

know the man who came in. He was dressed in a crumpled army great-coat, with a ragged cap. Dasha was frightened; she stepped back, stretching out her hands in front of her. The man said hurriedly:

"For God's sake, Daria Dmitrievna—don't you recognize me?"

"No, no . . ."

"I am Kulichok, Nikanor Yurevich—assistant barrister. Don't you remember Sestroretsk?"

Dasha dropped her hands and looked closer at the sharp, lean, long, unshaven face. There were wrinkles round the quick, alert eyes, which spoke of habitual watchfulness; the lop-sided mouth showed determination and cruelty. He looked like an animal scenting danger.

"Have you really forgotten me, Daria Dmitrievna? I was assistant to Nikolai Ivanovich Smokovnikov, your sister's late husband. I was in love with you, but you sent me about my business—do you remember now?"

He suddenly smiled in a way that somehow belonged to the past, a 'pre-war', candid smile, and this smile brought it all back to Dasha: the flat sandy beach, the sunny haze over the warm, lazy bay, herself a little Touch-me-not with a virginal ribbon on her dress, and Kulichok, very much in love, whom she despised with all her haughty virginity. The smell of the tall pines rustling day and night on the sandy dunes. . . .

"You have changed very much!" Dasha said, and held out her hand to him. Kulichok took it and kissed it. Despite his dirty greatcoat it was immediately apparent that he had spent the years between in a crack cavalry regiment.

"May I give you the letter? If I could go somewhere to take off my boot. . . . You must excuse me, but the letter is in my sock." He gave her a significant look and followed her to an empty room, where he sat down on the floor, began to pull off his muddy boot, his face all wrinkled with the exertion.

The letter was from Katia—it was the one she had given to Lieutenant-Colonel Tetkin in Rostov.

After the first few lines Dasha cried out and put her hand to her throat. Vadim killed! She glanced hurriedly through the letter and then read it thirstily a second time. She felt faint, and sat on the arm of a chair. Kulichok tactfully stood in the background.

"Nikanor Yurevich, did you see my sister?"

"No, I'm afraid I didn't. This letter was given me by someone ten days ago—he told me that Yekaterina Dmitrievna had left Rostov more than a month before."

"Good God! But where is she then? What has happened to her?"

"Unfortunately I had no means of finding out."

"Did you know her husband, Vadim Roshchin? Katia writes that he has been killed. Oh, it's awful!"

Kulichok raised his eyebrows in surprise. The letter trembled so violently in Dasha's frail little hand that he took it from her, and read the part about Valerian Onoli and his telling Katia of her husband's death. Kulichok's lip curled in an ugly expression.

"I always thought Onoli capable of any villainy. According to his information, Roshchin would have been killed in May, wouldn't he? Very strange. . . . It seems to me that I saw Vadim Petrovich alive considerably later than that."

"When? Where?"

But Kulichok only thrust forward his sharp nose and stared at Dasha, although not for more than a few seconds. Dasha's eyes, burning with excitement, her icy, tightly-clasped fingers told him clearly that he had nothing to fear; though she was the wife of a Red officer, she would not betray him. Coming nearer, Kulichok asked:

"Are we alone in the flat?"

Dasha hurriedly nodded.

"Listen, Daria Dmitrievna, what I am going to say puts my life in your hands."

"You are a Denikin officer?"

"Yes."

"You have nothing to fear from me."

"I was certain of that—and I was going to ask you to put me up for a few days."

He said these words firmly, almost menacingly. Dasha nodded.

"Very well."

"But if you are afraid." He stepped back. "No, you're not." He came nearer again. "I quite understand. But there is no need for you to be afraid. I am very careful. I shall go out only at night. Not a soul knows that I am in Petrograd." He took a soldier's pay-book from the lining of his cap. "Here, you see, I am Ivan Svishchev, Red Army man. It's a real one. I took it off the fellow with my own hands. So you would like to hear about Vadim Petrovich? In my opinion there is some misunderstanding here."

Kulichok took Dasha's hand and squeezed it:

"So you are on our side, Daria Dmitrievna? I thank you for that. The whole intelligentsia, all the wronged and unhappy officers are gathering under the holy banners of Denikin's Volunteer Army. It is an army of heroes. And you will see—Russia will be saved, and White hands will save her; save her from the dirty paws of the rabble! We've had enough of sentimentalities. The toiling masses, indeed! I have travelled a thousand miles on the roofs of railway trucks. I've seen these 'toiling masses'! They're like beasts! I declare that only we, our small band of heroes, carry the real Russia in our hearts. And we will nail our law to the portals of the Taurida Palace with the points of our bayonets."

Dasha was overwhelmed by the flow of words. Kulichok was jabbing his dirty finger-nail into space, and there was froth at the corners of his mouth. Apparently he had been compelled to be silent too long on that journey on the top of the truck.

"Daria Dmitrievna, I will be frank with you. I was sent here to collect information and make recruits. Many people still have no conception of our strength. In your newspapers we appear merely as 'White Guard bands', a pitiful little group, which within a day or two will be swept off the face of the earth. It's not surprising that the officers are afraid to join us. But do you know what is really happening in the Don and the Kuban? The army of the Ataman of the Don is growing like an avalanche. The province of Voronesh has been cleared of the Reds. Stavropol is already within range, and from hour to hour we are expecting to hear that Krasnov has reached the Volga and taken Tsaritsyn. It's true he's hob-nobbing with the Germans, but that won't last long. We, Denikin's men, are advancing to the south of the Kuban as if on parade. We have taken Torgovaya, Tikhoretskaya and Velikoknyazheskaya. Sorokin is completely routed. The Cossack villages are welcoming us with enthusiasm. Near Belaya Glina there was a massacre worthy of Mamai Khan; we attacked over such a mountain of dead bodies that yours truly was soaked up to the belt in blood."

Dasha grew pale as she looked at him. Kulichok smiled arrogantly.

"Did you think that was all? Oh no. That was only the beginning of our vengeance. The fire is spreading to the whole country. The provinces of Samara, Orenburg, Ufa and the whole Ural are already aflame. The middle reaches of the Volga are in the hands of the Czechs. From Samara to Vladivostok there is an unbroken line of insurrection. Were it not for these damned Germans, all Little Russia would rise like one man. The towns of the upper Volga are dynamite dumps, where all we have to do is to light the fuse. I would not give the Bolsheviks another month, and I would not give a kopeck for their lives."

Kulichok was trembling with excitement. He no longer looked like a little animal at bay. Dasha looked at his sharp-nosed face, tanned by the winds of the steppe and tempered in the fires of battle. Life—rough, strong, eager—had burst into her unsubstantial loneliness. Dasha felt a sharp throbbing in her temples, and her heart began to beat rapidly. Kulichok showed a row of small white teeth and began to roll himself a cigarette. Dasha said:

"You will win. But the war won't last for ever. What is to happen afterwards?"

"Afterwards?"—Kulichok drew in the cigarette smoke and his eyes narrowed. "Afterwards we shall fight the Germans to a victorious conclusion. Then there will be a peace congress, which we shall attend as the greatest heroes, and after that Russia will be reconstructed by means of the common effort of the Allies and of all Europe. We will re-establish law and order, parliamentary government and liberty. That is the future of course. But for the present . . ."

He thrust his hand into his greatcoat, and after some groping brought out a small piece of cardboard broken into two halves. It was the top of a cigarette box, and Kulichok began to turn it over in his fingers, again looking at Dasha with a piercing gaze.

"I must not take risks. The position is this—people are being stopped and searched in the streets. I will give you something." He carefully opened out the folded bit of cardboard and took out a small triangle cut out of a visiting card and marked with the two letters O and K. "Hide this, Daria Dmitrievna; guard it as something sacred. I'll tell you what to do with it. You are not afraid?"

"No."

"That's splendid."

Without knowing how it all happened, simply carried away by a stronger will, Dasha found herself in the very centre of a conspiracy set on foot by the so-called "League for the Defence of the Fatherland and of Liberty", involving both capital cities and many other towns of Great Russia.

Kulichok's conduct was irresponsible, almost improbable for an emissary from Denikin's staff; after only a few words he had completely given himself into the hands of a woman he hardly knew, the wife of a Red officer. But he had at one time been in love with Dasha, and now, looking into her grey eyes, he could not help trusting her when those eyes said: "Trust me."

In those times enthusiasm and not calm reflection determined men's actions.

A hurricane of events roared over a raging sea of humanity; each individual thought that he could save the sinking ship, and, waving a revolver on the pitching bridge, tried to direct the course to left or right. And at that time nothing was real; mirages of counter-revolutionary wishful thinking hung over the boundless fields of Russia. Men's eyes were dimmed with hate. Every man saw what he wanted to see on the quickly-shifting scene of unreality.

So they believed that the speedy collapse of the Bolsheviks was a foregone conclusion; that the troops of the Allies were already on the seas, coming to the assistance of the White armies from every quarter of the globe; that a hundred million Russian muzhiks were looking to the Constituent Assembly as their god, and that the towns and cities of the one-and-indivisible Empire were only waiting for the signal to overthrow the Soviets and the very next day re-establish law and order and a parliamentary system.

People were all deceiving themselves and seeing mirages; all of them, from the Petersburg society ladies who fled to the south with nothing but a change of underwear, to the most sagacious Professor Milyukov, who with a haughty smile calmly awaited the end of events he had already relegated to their proper place in the historical perspective.

One of the groups believing in such consoling mirages was the so-called 'League for the Defence of the Fatherland and of Liberty'. It had been founded by Savinkov in the early spring of 1918, after the suicide of Kaledin and the retreat of Kornilov's army from Rostov, as a sort of underground organization of the Denikin army.

The head of this organization was the elusive and cautious Savinkov himself, who moved about in Moscow in a disguise consisting of dyed moustaches, an English military tunic, yellow gaiters and a khaki-coloured overcoat. The League was built up on the army model, with staffs, divisions, brigades, regiments, an intelligence section and all sorts of auxiliary services. Its chief of staff was a certain Colonel Perkhurov.

The recruiting of members was carried out according to the strictest conspiratorial rules. Each member knew only four others. Thus in the event of discovery only one group of five could be arrested and there the trail would be lost. None of the members knew the location of headquarters or the names of the leaders. Those who wished to join the organization were visited at their homes by the 'commander' of the 'regiment' or other unit, who questioned the candidate, gave him an advance on his pay and wrote down his address in code on an index card. These cards, with little circles denoting the number of members, and with their addresses, were sent up to headquarters each week. The forces were reviewed on the boulevards, near various monuments or statues; the members were instructed to come with their coats thrown open in a special way or with a ribbon fastened to a special place on the coat. Messengers were given a triangle torn from a visiting card and bearing two letters, one denoting the password and the other the town or city of destination. On arrival the messenger presented his triangle, which was compared with the card from which it had been taken, to see whether it fitted. The League had considerable means of collecting information. In April an underground conference of the League decided to abandon the policy of sabotage and accept appointments in Soviet institutions. Thus the members of the League penetrated to the heart of the machinery of government. A number of them took service in the Moscow militia. One spy even obtained a place within the Kremlin. Members of the League infiltrated into military intelligence and

even into the Supreme Military Council. It seemed as if the Kremlin were solidly enmeshed in their web.

At this time the occupation of Moscow by the German troops of Field-Marshal Eichhorn appeared inevitable. But although there was a strong pro-German trend among the members of the League (some of whom had faith in German bayonets alone and nothing else in the world), the general orientation was pro-Ally. At the headquarters of the League even the day of the German entry into Moscow had been fixed—it was to be on the fifteenth of June. For this reason it was decided to make no attempt to seize Moscow and the Kremlin, but to evacuate the military forces of the League to Kazan, to blow up all bridges and water-towers near Moscow, raise the flag of revolt in Kazan, Nizhni-Novgorod, Rybinsk and Murom, join forces with the Czechs and form an eastern front based on the Urals and the rich regions beyond the Volga.

Dasha believed every word Kulichok told her: that the Russian patriots, or, as he called them, 'Knights of the Spirit', were fighting in order that the insolent Finnish women and their potatoes should vanish for ever; that the streets of Petrograd should be brilliantly lighted and peopled by merry, well-dressed crowds; that ladies suffering from melancholy should be able to put on a little hat with a little feather and go away to Paris. . . . That on the field on the edge of the Summer Garden no 'leapers' should be leaping about any more; that the autumn wind should no longer blow over the grave of Dasha's little son. . . .

All this Kulichok promised her as they sat talking and drinking tea. He was as hungry as a wolf and ate up half her store of tinned food; he even ate raw flour mixed with salt. In the evening he disappeared unnoticed, taking the front-door key with him.

Dasha went to bed. She drew the curtains and lay down. But, as usually happens in the wearisome hours of insomnia, thoughts and images, memories, sudden discoveries, stinging remorse all passed through her mind, overtaking and crowding out each other. Dasha tossed and turned and put her hands under the pillow—but the blanket was burning hot, the springs of the divan dug into her sides, the bedclothes slipped off on to the floor.

It was a bad night—long as a lifetime. The little dark spot in Dasha's mind came to life and drove poisonous roots into all the secret windings of her brain. But why all this remorse, this feeling of being terribly in the wrong, of guilt? If only she could understand!

Kulichok was away for two days, and in his absence several people came, all tall, all wearing shabby jackets, a little embarrassed, but all with impeccable manners. Bending down to the keyhole, they gave her the password, and Dasha let them in. When she told them that 'Ivan Svishchev' was out they did not go away immediately: one of them suddenly began telling her about his family troubles; another asked her permission to smoke, carefully took a stinking Soviet fag, as if it were a fine cigar, from a cigar-case with a coat-of-arms and began to curse the Soviets in the foulest terms but with a lah-di-dah accent. A third began to tell her all sorts of confidential things: that he had a motor-boat all ready on the river and had managed to get the jewels out of the safe deposit—and now the children had gone down with the whooping-cough—wasn't that bad luck?

They were all obviously glad to chat with this slim, big-eyed charming young woman. They kissed her hand when they left. Dasha was surprised at the simplicity of these conspirators—as if they had come straight out of some silly

theatre farce. Nearly all of them enquired in very cautious terms whether Ivan Svishchev had brought money with him. They were all more than convinced that this 'silly Bolshevik business' would be over very soon, and that 'the Germans could occupy Petrograd without the slightest effort'.

At last Kulichok turned up again; he was very hungry again, dirty, and very worried. He wanted to know who had called in his absence. Dasha gave him a detailed account. He grinned:

"The scoundrels! They wanted money. Guards officers! They are too lazy to move their high-born backsides from their easy-chairs; they want the Germans to come and liberate them and report: 'May it please Your Grace, we have just hanged all Bolsheviks, everything is all right again.' It's absolutely scandalous! Of the two hundred thousand officers of the Russian army only a few thousands have proved to be true knights of the spirit: three thousand with Drozdovski, eight thousand with Denikin, and with us in the League another five thousand . . . that is all. And where are the others? They have sold their soul and their conscience to the Red Army. . . . Others are making boot polish or selling cigarettes. . . . Nearly the whole General Staff is with the Bolsheviks. It is a disgrace to us all!"

He ate his fill of flour with salt, drank hot water after it and went to bed. Next morning early he woke Dasha. She dressed quickly and came out into the dining-room. Kulichok was walking round and round the table and making faces.

"Ah, here you are!" he cried impatiently. "Can you take a risk, make a great sacrifice, suffer a thousand hardships?"

"Yes," Dasha answered.

"I cannot trust anyone here. Alarming news has come through. Someone must go to Moscow. Will you go?"

Dasha only blinked and raised her eyebrows. Kulichok came closer, made her sit down at the table, and sat down himself, so close to her that his knees touched hers; then he began to explain whom she was to see in Moscow and what she was to report about the Petrograd organization. He spoke slowly and insistently, impressing the words on Dasha's memory. Then he made her repeat it all. She obediently complied.

"Splendid! Clever girl! You are just the sort we want." He jumped up, rubbing his hands. "Now what about your flat? You will tell the house committee that you are going away to Luga for a week. I shall stay here another few days and after that I will leave the key with the chairman of the house committee. Will that be all right?"

Dasha's head was reeling with all this efficiency. She realized to her surprise that she would go anywhere and do anything she was told. When Kulichok mentioned the flat Dasha looked at the bird's-eye maple sideboard: "What a horrible, depressing sideboard, just like a coffin." She recalled the martins and how they had lured her out into the blue sky. And it seemed to her that it would be happiness to fly out of this dusty cage into some wild, untrammelled life.

"Oh, the flat!" she said. "Perhaps I shall not come back at all. Do as you like about it."

One of the men who had called in Kulichok's absence, a long-legged, long-nosed and very amiable man with a drooping moustache, put Dasha into a third-class carriage all the windows of which had been smashed. Bending over her, he said in her ear in a deep voice: "Your services will not be forgotten," and then vanished in the crowd. Just before the train left, a group of men came running on to the platform, and taking their bundles between their teeth, got in through the windows. The compartment was very crowded and they climbed up into the luggage-racks and crept in under the seats, where they struck matches and smoked their evil-smelling cheap tobacco with relish.

The train dragged itself along slowly, past foggy swamps, smokeless factory chimneys, ponds covered with green scum. In the distance, Dasha saw the Pulkovo hill and on it the observatory where learned astronomers and seventy-year-old Glasenapp himself, forgotten by the whole world, were still continuing their calculations of the number of stars in the universe. Pine woods, pine trees, summer chalets flitted past. An armed guard prevented more passengers from getting in at the stations, so that in spite of the noise there was peace in the carriage.

Dasha was sitting tightly wedged in between two front-line soldiers, one of whom carried a rifle. From the luggage-rack above, a jolly face hung dowards upside down, continually breaking in on the conversation:

"Well, and what happened then?" the man on the rack asked, choking with laughter. "Well, and what did *you* do?"

Opposite Dasha, between two taciturn and care-worn peasant women, sat a lean, one-eyed peasant with a long, drooping moustache and a bristly chin. He wore a straw hat and a shirt obviously made out of a sack but tied at the neck with an embroidered cord. A comb and a stub of copying pencil hung from his belt; a packet of papers was thrust into the breast of his shirt.

Dasha did not listen to the conversation at first. But the stories told by the one-eyed man were evidently very interesting. More and more heads were turned to him from other seats, and the carriage was much quieter. The soldier with the rifle said with assurance:

"Yes, I get you; you're Makhno men—in other words—partisans."

The one-eyed man was silent for a while, smiling slyly into his moustache. Then he said:

"You've heard the bells ring, brothers, but not the right peal," and passing the back of his horny hand over his moustache he wiped away the smile and said with a certain solemn emphasis: "That's a kulak organization, Makhno's is. He is operating in the Yekaterinoslav district. There no farm is less than fifty acres. But we are a different sort. We are Red partisans."

"Well, and what are *you* doing?" the jolly face up above asked.

"Our area of activity is round Chernigov and Nezhin. See? We are Communists. So far as we are concerned, the Germans and the landlords and the Hetman's policemen and our own village kulaks are one and the same thing. So you see, we mustn't be confused with the Makhno men. Is that clear?"

"Oh, yes, it's clear enough. We're not fools; you go on with the story."

"Well, to go on: after the battle with the Germans we lost heart. We retreated to the Koshelevsk forest and hid away in a wilderness where only wolves live. We rested there a bit. People began to come to us from the neighbouring villages. They told us that life was becoming impossible. The Germans had started clearing the district of partisans in earnest. And the Hetman's *haidamaks* were even worse: any day they would come dashing into the village and flog the peasants on any complaint of the kulaks. These stories made our lads so angry, they only ground their teeth. In the meantime a second troop had come into our forest, so now we had a whole army there,

three hundred and fifty strong. We elected a commander for our section. Then we began to think out how we could develop further operations and decided that we would keep the Desna under observation, because German supplies of all sorts came down the Desna. So we went down to the river and picked the spots where the steamboats passed right near the bank. There we sat down to wait."

"And what then?" the head from the luggage-rack asked.

"Then a steamboat came along. 'Stop!' our first line shouted. The captain of the boat did not obey. We fired a volley. The boat, of course, turned inshore. We immediately went on board, posted sentries and began to check documents."

"That's as it should be," the soldier said.

"The cargo of the boat was saddles and harness. Two colonels were in charge, one of them quite old, the other a fine young chap. There was also a consignment of drugs, and that was just what we needed. As I was standing on deck checking documents two men came up whom I knew, two Communists, Piotr and Ivan Petrovski. I immediately saw what they wanted and made no sign that I knew them. I treated them officially and said severely: 'Your documents!' Petrovski gave me his passport, and with it a little note on cigarette paper: 'Comrade Piavka, I am leaving the Chernigov country with my brother for Russia, do not show that you know us, treat us severely so as not to attract attention, because there are spies everywhere.' So far so good. Having examined the papers we unloaded the harness and saddles, the drugs, and also fifteen cases of wine for the benefit of our wounded. In all justice to the ship's doctor he behaved like a hero: 'I can't give you the store of medicines,' he shouted at us, 'to give up medical stores is against every law and against international agreements.' Our reply was short: 'We have our own wounded, and so human—if not international—laws demand that we take the medical stores.' We arrested about a dozen officers, took them ashore and let the boat go on. On the bank the old colonel began to cry, begged us not to kill him, talked about his services in the war. Well, we thought it over one way and another. 'Why should we hurt him, he'll die soon anyway,' so out of our generosity we let him go, and he went off into the forest."

The head on the luggage-rack burst into joyous laughter. The one-eyed man waited until the laughter subsided, then he went on:

"Another of them was an official of the army supply corps, and he made a good impression on us, answered all questions with good humour and wasn't a bit worried, so we let him go, too. The others were taken into the wood and shot because none of them would answer any questions."

Dasha stared with bated breath at the one-eyed man. His face was calm, furrowed with bitter wrinkles; his one eye, that had seen so much, blue-grey, with a tiny pupil, was looking thoughtfully out of the window at the pines flying past. In a little while he went on with his story.

"We could not stay on the Desna long—the Germans outflanked us and we retreated to the Drosdov forests. We gave the booty to the peasants; all we kept was one mug of wine for each man, the rest went to the hospital. At this time Krapivyanski with a large force was operating on our left and Marunya on our right. Our joint task was to get close to Chernigov and take it by a sudden assault. If only we had had proper communications with the other detachments! We had no real contact and we arrived too late. The Germans were pouring in troops, artillery and cavalry day after day. They were very annoyed at our existence. Why? Well, take this for instance: as soon as they left a village, a revolutionary committee would be set up in the village and a couple of kulaks taught to dance on air. . . . At this time I was sent to Marunya's detachment to get some money—we wanted money very badly. We paid the civilian population in cash for any food they let us have—looters or marauders were shot. I got into a droshky and drove to the Koshelevsk forest. There I discussed our affairs with Marunya, got a thousand roubles from him in Kerenski currency and was on my way back. . . . Near the village of Zhukovka, where the road dips down into a hollow, I came on two mounted men, look-outs for the revolutionary committee of Zhukovka. 'Where are you going? The Germans are here.' 'Where?' 'Right here, they're almost in Zhukovka by now.' I turned back, drove the horse into the bushes, got out of the droshky. . . . We began to discuss the best thing to do. There could be no question of any mass resistance to the Germans; a whole column of them was moving up with guns . . ."

"Three against a column is heavy odds," the front-liner said.

"Heavy enough. So we decided to just give the Germans a fright. We crawled forward through the rye. We saw Zhukovka on one side and on the other the German force just coming out of the wood, about two hundred of them, two guns and a supply column and a bit nearer to us a mounted patrol. We could see that the fame of the partisans had spread well enough—they were bringing guns against us. We kept our heads down in the orchards, but morale was high—we even had a good laugh in advance. By now the patrol was fifty paces away. I gave the order: 'Battalion, fire!' We fired a volley, and another. . . . One horse fell, his head between his heels, and the German was spilt into the nettles. But we went on firing, clicking our breechlocks, making a tremendous noise."

The head on the rack listened pop-eyed, holding a hand before his mouth so as not to burst out laughing and thereby miss a word. The front-liner smiled.

"The patrol chased back to the main force. The Germans deployed at once and went over to the attack in a big way. The guns were unlimbered and then the three-inchers began to fly towards the vegetable gardens where the village women were hoeing the potatoes. . . . A shell burst, earth flying in every direction. . . . The women . . ." (he pushed his hat down on one ear and could no longer contain his mirth. The head on the rack burst out laughing). "The women rushed from the vegetable gardens, cackling like hens. . . . The Germans advanced at the double towards the village. So I said to the boys: 'Come on, lads, we've had our fun, let's go!' We crawled back again through the rye into the hollow. I got into my droshky and drove home to the Drozdov forest without incidents. Later the boys from Zhukovka told me what had happened. 'The Germans,' they said, 'advanced against the vegetable gardens, right up to the hedges and then made a bayonet charge. But there was no one on the other side of the hedge. The boys who saw it laughed so, they had to lie down on the ground. The Germans occupied Zhukovka but found no revolutionary committee or partisans there. They declared a state of siege in the village.' Two days later we in the Drozdov forest got a report that a big German supply column with ammunition had arrived in Zhukovka. Ammunition was what we wanted most. We talked it over, the boys got very keen and decided to attack Zhukovka and take the ammunition from the Germans. There were about a hundred of us. We sent thirty men round the backs to cut off the German retreat in case we pulled it off. The others marched towards Zhukovka in column formation. At dusk we crept in close and hid in the rye

near the village. Seven men were sent out to see how the land lay and tell us so we could make a surprise attack in the night. We lay there very quiet. Smoking was out. A drizzle began coming down. We were sleepy and wet. We waited and waited. It was growing light. Nothing happened. We couldn't make it out. The women were already driving the cattle out into the fields. At last our seven scouts came crawling back. As it turned out, they had reached the mill, blast 'em, and had lain down to rest a bit—and slept all the rest of the night until the women found them in the morning. The attack was off, of course. We were so angry that we didn't know what to do with ourselves. We had to deal with our scouts too. We court martialled them and unanimously decided to shoot them. But they began to cry and beg for mercy and freely admitted they deserved none. They were young lads and it was their first mistake. So we decided to pardon them and told them to make up for it in the next battle."

"Sometimes a pardon is a good thing," the front-liner said.

"Yes. . . . Now we sat down to discuss the position and it was decided that as we hadn't taken Zhukovka by night, we must just take it by day. The operation was no child's play, but the lads knew what they were letting themselves in for. We scattered and crawled forward, expecting any minute that the machine-guns would begin on us—we crawled so fast we almost ran on our bellies . . ."

A loud guffaw came from the shelf.

"Then we saw coming to meet us, not Germans but a crowd of women with baskets: they were going out to pick berries, it being a holiday. Oh, did they laugh at us? Too late, they said, the German columns left two hours ago along the Kulikovo road. At that we unanimously decided to catch up with the Germans even if we all got killed. We took some spades with us to dig in and the women brought us pancakes and pies. So we took the field, and half the village followed us out of curiosity—a whole army. Now this is what we did—we gave all the muzhiks and the women sticks and formed two groups and deployed in open order with twenty paces between each man, one being armed and the other a villager with a stick, just for the looks of it. That made our chain about three miles long. I picked fifteen men, among them our sleeping scouts, and also took two officers we had mobilized; these two were open counter-revolutionaries so I warned them that they must justify the trust I put in them if they wanted to save their lives. With this group we went forward in a hurry and got to the road ahead of the German supply column. . . . And then a battle started, brothers, that lasted not one day and not two. . . ." He flapped his hand in disgust.

"How was that?" the front-liner asked.

"Like this. I let the column go past my group and attacked its tail, the supply wagons. We took about twenty ammunition carts. We quickly filled our pouches with cartridges, gave the muzhiks as many rifles as we could, and attacked the column again. We thought we had surrounded the Germans but actually it was the Germans who had surrounded us: they were coming against us with all arms from three directions. We scattered into small groups and took cover in ditches. We were lucky: the Germans developed the operation according to all the rules given in their books for a full-scale battle, or none of us would have escaped with our lives. As it was, out of all the partisans only I and about a dozen more got away. They all fought to the last cartridge. Then we decided that our game was up, we would have to cross the Desna into the neutral zone, to Russia. I hid my rifle and went to Novgorod Severski in the guise of a prisoner of war."

"And where are you going now?"

"To Moscow, for instructions."

During the journey Piavka told them many more stories about the partisans and about village life in those days. "We just go from one misfortune to the next, that's the way it is with us. They have driven the muzhik so hard that now he is just a wolf, ready to spring at their throats." He himself came from somewhere near Nezhin and had worked in the beet-sugar factories. He had lost his eye in the ill-starred June offensive in the Kerenski days. The way he said it was: "Kerenski put out this eye of mine!" It was there, in the trenches, that he fell in with the Communists. He was a member of the Nezhin Soviet and Revolutionary Committee, and was working secretly to organize the partisan movement.

His story profoundly moved Dasha, because there was truth in what he said. All the other passengers understood this and listened to him with rapt attention.

The rest of the day and the night were very tiring for Dasha. She sat with her feet tucked up under her, thinking so hard that her head began to ache and her heart filled with despair. There were two truths: one was the truth of the one-eyed man, of the two soldiers, of these snoring peasant women with their tired, simple faces—and then that other truth, the one Kulichok was so excited about. But there couldn't be two truths! One of them had to be an error—a terrible, fatal error.

They arrived in Moscow at noon. An old cabman drove Dasha at a slow trot along dirty, shabby-looking streets between the mud-spattered windows of empty shops. Dasha was surprised at the emptiness of the city—she remembered it as she had seen it last in the days when huge crowds with flags and songs roamed the snow-covered streets, congratulating each other on the bloodless revolution.

In Lubiansk Square a sharp wind was whirling up a cloud of dust. Two soldiers were trudging across the square, their tunics unbelted, their collars unbuttoned. A scrawny, long-faced man in a velvet jacket looked at Dasha, shouted something, and ran after her cab, but the dust got into his eyes and he fell behind.

The Hôtel Metropole was pitted with the marks of shells; dust was swirling over this square too, and it was surprising to see, in the middle of the rubbish-littered, filthy square, a bed of bright flowers, planted there by someone for some incomprehensible reason.

There was more life on the Tverskaya. A few little shops were still trading. Opposite the City Soviet an enormous wooden cube covered with bunting occupied the spot where the statue of General Skobelov used to stand. Dasha thought it terrible. The old cabman pointed to it with his whip-handle.

"They've pulled down the hero. I've been driving in Moscow these many years and he stood there all the time. But now the government didn't like him, see? How's one to live? Might as well lie down and die. Hay is two hundred roubles a pood. The gentry have gone, and now there are only comrades, and they mostly walk. Nice state of affairs!" He slapped his horse with the reins. "If we could at least have a king or something. . . ."

Near the Strastnaya, under a sign reading, 'Café Bom', idle young men and languid young women were sitting behind plate-glass windows, smoking and drinking some nondescript fluid. A long-haired, touzled, clean-shaven man with a pipe in his mouth was standing in the open door of the café leaning against the doorway with one shoulder. He seemed very surprised to see Dasha and

took the pipe from his mouth. But Dasha drove past the café, past the pink spire of the Strastny monastery and past the statue of the poet Pushkin, who still held under his arm the stick with a faded red flag, stuck there at the time of the stormy days of February. Skinny children played on the granite plinth, and on the stone seat sat a lady with pince-nez, wearing a little hat just like the one the stone Pushkin was holding behind his back.

Thin little clouds were floating over the Tverski boulevard. A lorry-load of soldiers rumbled past. The cabman nodded towards them and said to Dasha: "They're going out looting. Ever heard of Ovsyannikov, Vassili Vassilyevich? He's the richest man in Moscow. Yesterday a lot of such fellows as these went to his place with lorries and cleared out his whole house. Vassili Vassilyevich only shook his head and walked out, no one knows where. People nowadays have forgotten God, that's what the old men say. . . ."

At the end of the boulevard the ruins of the Gagarin mansion came into view. A solitary man in shirt-sleeves was standing on top of a crumbling wall hacking out bricks with a pick and throwing them to the ground. On the left the great bulk of a burned house stared with empty windows into the pale sky. All the houses around it were riddled with bullet-holes. Eighteen months before, Dasha and Katia had been walking along these streets with their swansdown scarfs over their heads; the ice had crackled under their feet and the frozen puddles had reflected the bright winter stars. The sisters were going to the Law Society to hear a special report on the rumours about a revolution alleged to have broken out in Petersburg. The frosty, yet spring-like air had been intoxicating, like happiness.

Dasha shook her head. She did not want to think of those things that were dead and buried.

The cab turned into the Arbat and then left, into a side street. Dasha's heart began to beat so fast that the world grew dark in front of her eyes. Here was the little two-storeyed white house where she had lived with Katia and Nikolai Ivanovich after 1915. Here Telegin had come to see her after he had escaped from the German prison camp. Here Katia had met Roshchin. Dasha had come out of that shabby door with its peeling paint to go to her wedding. Telegin had put her into a carriage drawn by a grey horse, and they had dashed along in the pale spring twilight towards happiness. The windows of the upper storey were smashed. Dasha recognized the wallpaper of her own room—it was hanging down in rags. A rook flew out of the window. The cabman asked:

"Right, left, or where do you want to go?"

Dasha consulted a bit of paper. They stopped in front of a many-storeyed building. The front entrance was boarded up.

As she was not supposed to ask anybody any questions it took Dasha a long time before she found the back entrance of Flat Number 112. Here and there a door opened on the chain at the sound of Dasha's footsteps; it seemed as if someone was standing and watching behind every door to warn the inhabitants of approaching danger.

On the fifth floor Dasha knocked, three knocks and then one, as she had been instructed. She heard cautious footsteps, and somebody looked at her, breathing audibly through the keyhole. Then the door was opened by a tall, elderly lady with bright blue, terrifying goggle-eyes. Dasha silently held out the cardboard triangle. The lady said:

"Oh, from Petersburg! Come in, please."

Passing through the kitchen, in which evidently no cooking had been done

for a long time, Dasha was shown into a large curtained room. In the semi-darkness she could see the outlines of very good furniture and the glint of bronze, but here, too, everything looked unused. The lady offered Dasha a seat on a sofa, sat down beside her and looked at her with those terrifying, wide-open eyes.

"Your message!" she said in a stern peremptory tone. Dasha did her best to concentrate her thoughts, and repeat the bad news exactly as she had heard it from Kulichok. The lady clenched her beautiful, heavily-ringed hands in her lap and wrung them as she listened.

"So in Petersburg you have heard nothing yet?" she interrupted, her deep voice quivering with emotion. "You do not know that Colonel Sidorov's house was searched last night? Our evacuation plans and several mobilization lists were found. You don't know that Vilenkin was arrested this morning?"

The lady straightened up with a jerk, got up from the sofa, drew back the curtain on the door and turned to Dasha:

"Come here. He will see you."

"Password!" a man standing with his back to the window said imperiously. Dasha held out the cardboard triangle. "Who gave you this?" Dasha began to explain.

"Cut it short!"

With his left hand he was holding a silk handkerchief to his mouth, almost completely covering up his face, brown with sun-tan—or grease-paint, perhaps. He looked impatiently at Dasha out of colourless, yellow-rimmed eyes, and again interrupted her.

"Do you know that by joining the organization you are risking your life?"

"I am alone, and I am free," Dasha answered. "I know hardly anything about the organization. Nikanor Yurevich gave me this commission. I could not sit any longer with my hands in my lap. I assure you, I'm not afraid of work or of . . ."

"You are quite a child," the man said just as abruptly as before, but Dasha raised her eyebrows in surprise:

"I am twenty-four."

"Are you married?" Dasha remained silent. "In this case it is important." Dasha nodded an affirmative. "You need not tell me anything about yourself, I can see you as you are, and I trust you. Are you surprised?"

Dasha only blinked. The abrupt, self-confident manner, the peremptory tone and cold eyes quickly conquered her hesitation. She felt the sort of relief that people feel when the doctor sits down at the bedside, and, with his wise eye-glasses glittering, says: "Well, my dear, from now on you will do so-and-so."

She now looked more attentively at the man with the handkerchief over his face. He was of middle height, and was wearing a soft felt hat and a well-cut khaki overcoat with leather piping. His clothes and his precise movements gave him a foreign air, though he spoke with a Petersburg accent. He said in a colourless, dull voice:

"Where are you staying?"

"Nowhere as yet. I came here straight from the station."

"Very good. You will now go to the Tverskaya, to the Café Bom. Have a meal there. A man will come up to you, you will know him by his tie-pin—in the shape of a skull. He will give you the password: 'God speed you on your way'. Then show him this." He tore the cardboard triangle in two and gave one half to Dasha. "Show it so that no one else notices. He will give you further instructions. You are to obey him to the letter. Have you got money?"

He took two thousand-rouble notes out of a pocket-book.

"Your expenses will be paid. Try and keep this money for unexpected emergencies, such as a bribe or flight. You must be prepared for anything. Go now. But first—have you got all this clear?"

"Yes," Dasha said, after a pause, folding the thousand-rouble notes into smaller and smaller squares.

"Don't tell anyone that you've seen me, or that you've been here. Go."

Dasha walked to the Tverskaya. She was hungry and tired. The trees of the boulevard and now and then a gloomy pedestrian floated past her as if in a mist. Still, she was at peace. The immobility that had so tormented her was at an end, and events she did not understand had caught her up like a tornado and carried her off into a life of wild adventure.

Two women in bast shoes passed her like shadows on a screen. One looked at Dasha, and said quietly:

"Look at the shameless creature—she can hardly stand."

A tall lady floated past next. Her grizzled hair was done up in a bun on the top of her head and there were tragic and pitiful wrinkles at the corners of her somewhat puffy mouth. She had a fixed look of extreme perplexity on her face, which at one time must have been beautiful. Her long black skirt was patched, as if deliberately, with a large patch of a different colour. Under her shawl, a corner of which trailed on the ground after her, she was holding a bundle of books, and as she passed Dasha she said in an undertone:

"Banned books . . . buy banned books. . . . I've got Rosanov. . . . Complete works of Solovyov. . . ."

Farther on Dasha saw several old men bending over a park seat. She could not see what they were doing at first, but as she passed them she saw that two men of the Red Guard were sitting on the seat shoulder to shoulder, fast asleep, with their mouths open and their rifles between their knees; the old men were cursing the Red Guards in the foulest words, but under their breath.

A dry wind chased the dust beyond the trees. Now and then a tram clanged past, its broken cow-catcher clattering over the cobbles. Grey-coated soldiers hung like bunches of grapes from its steps. Sparrows, indifferent to all revolutions, hopped about on the head of the bronze statue of Pushkin.

Dasha turned into the Tverskaya: a cloud of dust caught her in the back, covered her with flying pieces of paper and pushed her along until she reached the Café Bom, the last remnant of the old carefree life.

All sorts of people foregathered here—poets of every school, former journalists, literary hacks, slick young men who easily and skilfully adapted themselves to the troubled times, girls poisoned with boredom and cocaine, small-calibre Anarchists in search of high-flavoured distractions, and ordinary people attracted by the cakes they could get here.

Dasha had hardly found a seat at the back of the café under the bust of a famous poet when a man waved his hand to her, rushed through the haze of tobacco smoke and, with a moist giggle that showed his bad teeth, flopped into a chair by her side. It was an old acquaintance of hers, Alexander Zhirov, the poet.

"I ran after you on the Lubianka—I was sure it was you, Daria Dmitrievna. What brings you to Moscow, and where from? Are you alone? Or with your husband? Do you remember me? I was in love with you once—you knew that, didn't you?"

His eyes shone with an oily glitter. He obviously did not expect an answer to any of his questions. He was the same as ever, always in a little fever of

excitement; only his unhealthy skin was flabbier than before and his crooked, bulbous nose seemed larger in his long, lean face.

"I have gone through a lot during these years. . . . It's fantastic! I haven't been in Moscow long. . . . I am in the imagist group with Yessenin, Burlyuk, Kruchenykh, that lot. Did you pass the Strastny monastery? Did you see the huge letters on the wall? It's an unprecedented audacity—even the Bolsheviks were flustered. Yessenin and I worked on it all night. . . . It was about the Mother of God and Jesus Christ—a bit of cosmic bawdiness. In the morning two old women came along and read it and they both fainted on the spot. Daria Dmitrievna, I am also a member of the Anarchist group, 'Black Vultures'. You must join us. We won't take no for an answer. Do you know who our chief is? The famous Mamont Dalski, a genius, another Kean—and a desperate dare-devil. In another two weeks all Moscow will be in our hands. Those will be the times! Moscow under the black flag! We are going to celebrate our victory—do you know how? We'll announce a universal carnival, set up wine-booths in the streets and let military bands play in the squares. A million and a half of men and women all masked. There's not the least doubt that half of them will come stark naked. Then, instead of fireworks, we'll blow up the artillery dump on Lossini island. There has never been anything like it in the history of the world. . . ."

This was the third political system Dasha had come across during the last few days. This time she was simply frightened. She even forgot how hungry she was. Pleased with the impression he had created, Zhirov began to go into details.

"Doesn't the banality of contemporary urban life make your blood boil? My friend Valiet, a painter of genius—you remember him—has drawn up a plan to effect a complete change in the aspect of our towns. . . . We must tear down everything and build afresh, but there is no time to do that between now and the carnival. We have decided to blow up a few things, including of course the Historical Museum and the Kremlin, the Sukharev tower and the Pertsov house. . . . We will put up hoardings to the full height of the houses along the streets and paint them with architectural subjects of a new style never seen before. We are going to repaint the trees—we consider natural foliage impermissible—paint them, as I said, in all sorts of colours by means of spray-guns. . . . Can you imagine—the limes of the Prechistenski boulevard will have black leaves, the Tverski boulevard will be an eerie purple. . . . Simply uncanny! We have also decided to organize a public act of desecration in connection with the Pushkin monument. Daria Dmitrievna, can you remember the 'magnificent blasphemies' and the 'struggle against tradition' in Telegin's flat? Everyone laughed at us then."

He giggled as he brought up the past, came closer to Dasha and several times, as he gesticulated, he touched her delicately curving breast. . . .

"Remember Yelizaveta Kievna and her sheep-like eyes? She was madly in love with your fiancé and had an *affaire* with Bessonov. Her husband is Zhadov, a prominent Anarchist activist. He and Mamont Dalski are our aces. Antoshka Arnoldov is here too. Under the Provisional Government he was in charge of all Press affairs; he had two motor-cars of his own and lived with women of the aristocracy. He had one woman, a Hungarian, from the Villa Rodier, so beautiful that when he slept with her he kept a loaded revolver close to hand. Last July he went to Paris on some mission—as a matter of fact he only just missed being appointed Ambassador. The silly idiot! He did not take the opportunity of sending some foreign currency abroad while the

sending was good, and now he is here, and hasn't enough to eat, the son-of-a-bitch. Yes, Daria Dmitrievna, we must all keep in step with the new epoch. Antoshka Arnoldov ruined himself because he started a *de luxe* flat on the Kirochnaya, with gilded furniture and silver coffee-pots and a hundred pairs of boots and what not. But we must burn, smash, tear up all prejudices. . . . We want absolute, complete, beastly freedom! And there will never be a second chance like this one. We are carrying out a great experiment. All those who hanker after philistine comforts will perish. We will crush them! Man is a complex of unhampered impulses. (He lowered his voice and spoke into Dasha's ear.) The Bolsheviks are muck. They were good in the first week only, in October. . . . But then they immediately wanted to set up a state. Russia has always been an anarchic country and the Russian muzhik a natural-born anarchist. The Bolsheviks want to turn Russia into a factory—all nonsense. Nothing doing. We have Makhno. Compared with him Peter the Great is a puppy. . . . Makhno in the south, Mamont Dalski and Zhadov in Moscow. . . . We'll set Russia alight from both ends. To-night I'll take you to a place where you can see for yourself how great our scope is. . . . Agreed? Will you come?"

While he was talking, a pale young man with a pointed beard had come in and taken a seat at a table close by. From behind a newspaper he stared fixedly at Dasha through his glasses. Dasha was so overcome by Zhirov's flights of fancy that she found nothing to say; in the clouds of tobacco smoke she seemed to see the fantastic ideas of Zhirov flaring up like flashes of lightning, visions of strange faces with dilated pupils and cigarettes clamped between lips. . . . What could she say? She might have chirped something pitiful about her heart flinching from such experiences—but of course her feeble chirrup would be drowned in a burst of diabolic laughter, cheering and guffaws.

Meanwhile the pale young man with the pointed beard was staring at Dasha with ever greater insistence. She saw that he had a tie-pin shaped like a little metal skull stuck in his purple tie and knew that this must be the man she was to meet. She made as if to get up from her seat, but with a curt nod he signalled to her to remain seated. Dasha frowned, trying to guess his meaning. He indicated Zhirov with a glance. She understood, and asked Zhirov to bring her something to eat. When he was gone the man with the pointed beard came up to her table and said, hardly moving his lips:

"God speed you on your way."

Dasha opened her bag and showed her half of the triangle. He fitted it to the other half and then tore it up into tiny pieces.

"How is it you know Zhirov?" he asked.

"I have known him a long time. I knew him in Petersburg."

"That is quite useful. You must see to it that they consider you as one of their set. Agree to everything he suggests. And to-morrow, at the same hour, you are to come to the Gogol statue on the Prechistenski Boulevard. Don't forget. Where are you staying the night?"

"I don't know."

"Put up wherever you like. Get Zhirov to fix it."

"I am dreadfully tired." Dasha was on the verge of tears and her hands trembled, but as she raised her eyes to the tie-pin and saw the expression on the man's malevolent face she obediently bent her head.

"Remember, you must be absolutely discreet. If you give away anything, even unintentionally, we shall have to get rid of you."

He stressed the words 'get rid'. Zhirov was pushing his way to the table

with two plates in his hands. The man with the tie-pin went up to him, curled his thin lips in a smile and Dasha heard him ask: "Who's that pretty girl?"

"Leave her alone, Yurka, she is not for the likes of you," Zhirov answered, revealing black stumps of teeth in a smile that was more like a threat. He set a plate with black bread and sausages before Dasha together with a glass of some dark brew. "Well, how about it? Are you free to-night?"

"It's all the same to me," Dasha answered, and bit off a piece of the sausage with humiliating enjoyment.

Zhirov suggested that they should go to his room in the Hôtel Luxe, just across the street.

"You can have a nap and a wash and at ten o'clock I'll come and call for you."

He fussed over Dasha and bustled about, although he was still, from old habit, a little afraid of her. His room had velvet curtains and a pink carpet, but the bed was in such a dubious condition that even Zhirov felt embarrassed and himself suggested that Dasha should make herself comfortable on the divan. He cleared it of newspapers, manuscripts and books and spread first a sheet and then a dark stone-marten rug, obviously cut out of an expensive fur coat, over it; finally he chuckled to himself and left her. Dasha took off her shoes. Her back, her feet, her whole body ached with fatigue. She lay down and went to sleep immediately, warmed by the deep fur which smelt faintly of perfume and mothballs and animal hair. She did not hear Zhirov come in, bend over her and look at her; nor did she hear a big clean-shaven man who looked like a Roman emperor, say in a deep bass voice from the door: "All right, you can take her there—I'll give you a note."

It was late evening when Dasha woke with a sigh. A yellow moon above the house-tops was reflected brokenly in the uneven glass of the window-panes. A bright strip of electric light showed under the door. Dasha remembered where she was, quickly pulled on her stockings, tidied her hair, put her dress in order and went to the washstand; the towel was so filthy that Dasha hesitated with dripping wet fingers and then wiped them on the inner hem of her skirt.

She felt a sharp stab of despair at all this squalor, and her throat contracted with disgust. She wanted to run from here, run home to her window that was at least clean. . . . She turned her head and looked at the moon, floating over Moscow, a dead, broken, terrible sickle. No, there was no way back. To die alone in the arm-chair by the window above the deserted avenue—to listen to the hammers boarding up the houses. . . . No! . . . Come what may, she could not go back.

Zhirov knocked at the door and came in on tiptoe.

"I've got the note, Daria Dmitrievna, so let's go."

Dasha did not ask what note it was or where they were going, but just put on her home-made hat and pressed her hand-bag containing the two thousand roubles to her side. They went out. One side of the Tverskaya was lit up by the moon; there were no street lamps alight. A patrol passed slowly along the street, and the boots of the men thudded ominously in the silence.

Zhirov turned along the Strastni Boulevard. Patches of moonlight lay scattered on the uneven ground. It was fearsome to look into the thick darkness under the lime-trees. A man seemed to melt into that darkness in front of them. Zhirov stopped; there was a revolver in his hand.

Standing an instant he gave a low whistle. A reply came from the shadows. He gave the password in a loud voice. "Pass, comrade," answered a lazy, clear voice. They turned another corner. Two men in leather jackets came

towards them quickly, looked them over and let them pass. At the entrance to the Commercial Club, where a black flag hung over the gateway, four men came out from behind a pillar and covered them with revolvers. Dasha started. Zhirov said angrily:

"What are you doing, comrades, damn you! Why the devil do you frighten people like that? I've got a note from Mamont."

"Let's see it."

The four armed men, with their beardless cheeks deep in their upturned collars and their eyes concealed behind the peaks of their caps, read the note by the light of the moon. Zhirov's face was set in a fixed smile. One of the four asked rudely:

"Who is it for?"

"The comrade here." Zhirov took Dasha's hand. "She's an actress from Petrograd. She must be fitted out, she is joining our group."

"All right, go in."

Dasha and Zhirov entered the dimly-lighted hall. There was a machine-gun on the stairs. The man in charge appeared: short, with chubby cheeks, wearing the uniform of a student and a little round skull-cap. He read the note several times, turned it over again and again, and finally asked Dasha in a surly voice:

"What is it you want?"

Zhirov answered:

"Mamont gave orders that she should be fitted out from head to foot with the best you have."

"What's that? Mamont gave orders? It's time you understood, comrade, that there are no orders given here. This isn't a shop." He scratched his leg, scowling horribly. "Well, all right, come along."

He pulled out a key and led the way to the former cloak-room, which was now the store-room of the House of Anarchy.

"Daria Dmitrievna, take your choice, don't be shy, all this belongs to the people."

With a sweeping gesture Zhirov pointed to the clothes-racks, where sable, ermine, beaver, chinchilla, monkey, raccoon and other fur coats were hanging in long rows. Fur coats were lying on the tables or simply in heaps on the floor. In open trunks lay dresses, underwear and boxes with shoes. Huge stocks of luxury goods seemed to have been concentrated here. The man in charge, indifferent to all this abundance, sat down on a box and yawned.

"Daria Dmitrievna, take anything you like, I'll carry it for you, and we'll go upstairs; you can change up there."

Whatever might be said of Dasha's complicated mental processes, she was first and foremost a woman. Her cheeks flushed with pleasure. A week earlier, when she was slowly withering at her window like a bunch of lilac without water, when it seemed to her that life was over and that there was nothing more to expect from it, she would probably have cared little for any sort of treasures. But now everything around her was in flux and all that she had regarded as finished and fixed within herself had likewise come into motion. She was in that strange state of mind when awakening hopes and desires are directed towards the restless fog of to-morrow while the present lies in ruins like an abandoned house.

She scarcely recognized her own voice and wondered at her reactions, at her behaviour, at the calm with which she accepted the fantastic swirl of events around her. Some until then dormant instinct of self-preservation whispered

to her that now she must throw everything overboard and drive on with all sails set.

Dasha stretched out her hand towards a long sable coat:

"This one, please."

Zhirov glanced at the man in charge. The man only blew out his cheeks. Zhirov took the coat and threw it over his shoulder. Dasha bent over an open trunk. For an instant she felt repelled by all these things belonging to other people, but then she plunged her hand to the elbow in the heaps of underwear.

"And what about slippers, Daria Dmitrievna? And you ought to take stronger shoes for rainy weather. The evening dresses are in the big wardrobe. Can I have the key, comrade? For an actress, dresses, you must understand, are means of production.

"What do I care? Take what you like," the man in charge said.

Dasha went up the stairs with Zhirov, who carried the things. On the second floor they entered a small room where there was a mirror pierced by a bullet. Through a spider's web of cracks in the dim glass Dasha saw some strange woman slowly pulling on a pair of silk stockings. Then she put on a gossamer chemise and a lace slip, and stepping out of her discarded things threw the much-mended dirty garments aside. Then she slipped the fur coat over her thin bare shoulders. *What are you now, my dear?* she said to herself. *A courtesan? Or a bandit's girl? Or a thief? Anyhow, you are very good-looking. What does it matter? It will all get sorted out in the end.*

The main restaurant at the Hôtel Metropole, damaged during the October bombardment, was not functioning, but in the *cabinets particuliers* food and drink could still be had, as part of the hotel was inhabited by foreigners, mostly Germans, and by such intrepid speculators as had succeeded in providing themselves with some sort of foreign passport—Lithuanian, Polish or Persian. People caroused in these *cabinets particuliers* like the people of Florence during the plague. But genuine Muscovites were also admitted, though only by the back door and only those who had connections—mostly actors who were convinced that the theatres of Moscow would not last even to the end of the season and that both theatres and actors were doomed. These actors drank like fish in their despair.

The soul of these nightly revelries was Mamont Dalski, an actor, tragedian, a man of uncontrolled passions, handsome, a gambler, a madman with a method, dangerous and cunning. During recent years he had rarely been seen on the stage, but often in gambling houses in both capital cities, in the south or in Siberia. There was much talk of his enormous losses. He was embittered and beginning to age. He said that he had given up the stage. Actually he had dabbled in all sorts of doubtful deals in connection with army contracts during the war. When the revolution began he appeared in Moscow. Instinctively feeling that this was a gigantic, tragic stage, he wanted to play a leading part on it. With all the persuasive force of an actor of genius he began to talk about 'divine anarchy' and 'absolute freedom', the relativity of all moral precepts and the right of every man to be his own self. When various groups of young people, reinforced by criminal elements, began to requisition private houses, Dalski united these individual Anarchist groups, occupied the premises of the Commercial Club by force and declared it to be the House of Anarchy. He confronted the Soviet Government with an accomplished fact. He did not as yet declare war on the Soviets but his imagination certainly reached out beyond the store-rooms of the Commercial Club and nightly revelries, when from a window of the club he addressed a crowd gathered in

the courtyard and when his Roman gestures were followed by trousers, boots, bolts of cloth and bottles of brandy flung to the audience below.

This was the man Dasha saw when she and Zhirov entered the *cabinet particulier* in the Metropole. She saw a dark face, as if cast in bronze, on which strong passions and the storms of life, like a great sculptor, had modelled folds and wrinkles, and drawn the decisive lines of the mouth, chin and neck—the latter circled by a soft and dirty collar.

At the open piano a fragile-looking, clean-shaven man, his head thrown back, a cigarette between his teeth and his eyelids down over his glazed eyes, was fingering sepulchral chords on the keyboard. Several men and women—all of them celebrities whose names were known throughout the world—were sitting at a table among a great number of empty bottles. One of them, a snub-nosed young man, with his chin propped on his fist and his soft face all wrinkled up, was singing in a little tenor voice a piece from the liturgy; the others—a character actor with a face like a jug; a gloomy comedian with a drooping lip; a juvenile lead with a three days' growth of beard and a sharp nose; a 'first lover', drunk to the verge of despair; a famous leading man with fiery brow and deeply-incised wrinkles, who seemed quite sober—all joined in the chorus when required.

An archdeacon from the cathedral of St. Saviour, a greying, handsome man wearing a pair of heavy gold spectacles (they weighed a pound and a half and had been given him by the merchants of Moscow), paced up and down along the carpet, swinging his arm to mark time as he intoned the chant and the cut-glass tumblers on the table tinkled in resonance with his strong, velvety bass. The *cabinet particulier* was draped with dark red silk—the curtains were of velvet and a triple folding screen hid the door.

Mamont Dalski was standing with his elbows on the top of one section of the screen, holding a pack of cards in one hand. He was dressed in a semi-military costume: an English tunic, check riding-breeches with a leather seat, and black knee-boots. When Dasha came in he was smiling grimly as he listened to the mock requiem.

"What a beauty! Enough to drive you mad!" the man at the piano said. Dasha paused. She was frightened. All the men except Dalski looked at her. The archdeacon said:

"A purely Russian beauty."

"Come to us, little girl," the first lover said in a velvety voice.

Zhirov whispered in Dasha's ear: "Come, sit down."

Dasha sat down at the table. The men came over to kiss hands with ceremonial bows, as if she were Mary Queen of Scots, and then went on with their singing. Zhirov put some caviare on her plate, and made her drink something sweet and fiery. The room was stuffy and full of smoke. After she had drunk the sticky liqueur, Dasha threw the fur off her shoulders and put her bare arms on the table. The solemn chords, the ancient words of the chant disturbed her. She could not take her eyes off Mamont. Zhirov had told her about him on the way. He was still standing apart, behind the screen, and was either very angry or else drunk to the brink of oblivion.

"Well, gentlemen," he said in a deep voice that filled the room. "No takers?"

"Nobody wants to play against you—we are having a good time as it is, cool off, please," the man with the puffy face said very quickly in a thin tenor squeak. "Come on, Yashenka, give us the seventh voice."

Yasha, at the piano, threw his head back even farther, screwed up his face and put his hands on the keys. Mamont spoke again:

"Not for money. . . . Damn your money, I don't want it. . . ."

"All the same we don't want to play. Lay off, Mamont."

"I want to play for shots."

There was a short silence after this. The juvenile lead with the sharp nose passed his hand over his forehead and hair, stood up and began to button his coat.

"I'll play you for shots."

The comedian silently took hold of him, brought his twenty-stone weight to bear and pushed him back into his chair.

"My stake is my life," the juvenile lead suddenly shouted. "That swine Mamont plays with marked cards. . . . I don't care. . . . Let him deal. . . . Let me go. . . ."

But he was already overpowered. The character actor with the face like a jug said softly:

"Look here, there isn't a drop of anything to drink. Mamont, my dear fellow, this is a disgrace. . . ."

At this Mamont Dalski threw his pack of cards and a huge automatic pistol on to the little table on which the telephone stood. His large clear-cut face was pale with fury.

"No one will leave this room," he said incisively. "We will play the way I want to. These cards are not marked."

He drew a sharp breath through distended nostrils and stuck out his chin. Everyone realized that a danger-point had been reached. Mamont swept a rapid glance over the faces of the company sitting at the table. At the piano Yasha picked out a trivial tune with one finger. Mamont's black eyebrows suddenly went up and a look of surprise flashed into his inscrutable eyes. He had caught sight of Dasha. Her heart grew cold under this glance. He walked up to her with a firm step, took the tips of her fingers in his hand and raised them to his dry lips but did not kiss them, just touched them lightly.

"You say there is nothing to drink. . . . There will be plenty presently."

Still with his eyes on Dasha, he rang the bell. A Tartar waiter came in and shrugged his shoulders: there wasn't a bottle left, everything had been drunk, the wine-cellar was locked, the manager had gone home. Mamont listened to all this and said: "All right. You can go," and walked to the telephone as if the eyes of a hundred spectators were on him. He called a number: "Yes. It is I, Dalski. Send a detachment. To the 'Metropole'. I am here. . . . Extra-special. . . . Yes. Four men will do."

He slowly replaced the receiver, leant against the wall and folded his arms over his chest. A quarter of an hour passed. Yasha, at the piano, was softly playing a piece by Skryabin. Dasha's head was reeling from these familiar sounds coming to her out of the past. Time vanished. The silver brocade of her dress rose and fell with her breathing and the blood rushed to her ears. Zhirov was whispering something to her, but she did not listen.

She was very excited, full of the joy of liberation, the lightness of youth. It seemed to her that she was flying away, like a released toy balloon, up and up to ever greater, dizzier heights. . . .

The first lover stroked her bare arm and said paternally in his velvet voice:

"Don't look at him so tenderly, my dear, he will dazzle your eyes. There is undoubtedly something satanic in this Mamont. . . ."

At that moment the door suddenly flew open and four heads under peaked caps, four arms in leather sleeves, and four hands with hand-grenades in them appeared over the screen and four Anarchists shouted threateningly: "Don't move! Hands up!"

"Cut it out, friends, it's all right!" Dalski said calmly. "Thanks, comrades." He walked across to them, leant over the screen and began to explain something to them in an undertone. They nodded and went away. A minute later voices were heard from a distance and then a suppressed cry. The dull crash of an explosion slightly shook the walls. Mamont said:

"These puppies can't do anything without showing off." He rang a bell. A waiter immediately came running, white as a sheet, with chattering teeth. "Clear everything away here and bring clean glasses for the wine!" Mamont ordered. "Yashka, stop tormenting my nerves, play something livelier."

Hardly had the waiters found time to put on a clean tablecloth when the Anarchists appeared again with a multitude of bottles. They set down bottles of brandy, whisky, liqueurs and champagne on the carpet and silently disappeared. Mamont explained:

"I told them to search the rooms and take away half of all the spirits they found, leaving the other half to the owners. You can have clear consciences, it's perfectly all right."

Yasha at the piano played a flourish. Champagne corks popped. Mamont sat down next to Dasha. In the bright light of the table lamp his face seemed to her even more statue-like and expressive. He asked:

"Who are you? I saw you in the Hôtel Luxe to-day. You were asleep."

She laughed. Her head was in a whirl. She said:

"I am nobody. Just a toy balloon."

He put his great warm hand on her bare shoulder and looked into her eyes. Dasha did not care, but her cool shoulder felt warm under the weight of his hand. She lifted a champagne glass by its delicate stem and drank the wine down in one gulp.

"You belong to nobody?" he asked.

"To nobody."

Then Mamont leant over to her ear and began to recite with the declamatory intonation of the tragedian:

"Live, my child, live with all the forces of your soul. It is your good fortune that you have met me. You need not be afraid—I will not sully your youth with love. Love is slavery. Free men neither love nor demand to be loved. Othello is a mediæval witch-burning, a Spanish Inquisition, a grimace of the devil. So is Romeo and Juliet. Oh, I know that in secret you are longing for such things. But that is all old rubbish—we are smashing everything from top to bottom. We will burn all books, destroy all museums. Mankind must forget its age-long past. Freedom lies only in divine anarchy, in the stupendous fireworks of passion. No, do not expect love and peace from me, my beauty. But I will liberate you—I will break the chains of innocence that bind you. I will give you everything you can think of between two embraces. Ask me—ask now—to-morrow I may have forgotten you . . ."

All through this torrent of words Dasha felt all over her skin the impact of the heavy passion seething at her side. She was terrified as one is in a dream when one is powerless to move while the glowing eyes of some monster approach out of the darkness, a monster coming to trample one down. What was even more terrifying was that she felt unfamiliar, searing, sultry desires rising within herself in response. . . . She was so beautiful at that moment in her agitation that the first lover held out his glass towards her, clinked glasses and said enviously to Mamont:

"Mamont, you are tormenting the child."

Dalski jumped up as if he had been shot and thumped the table with his fist.

"Touch that woman and I'll shoot you!"

He stretched out his hand to the table where his revolver was lying. Everyone jumped up. Dasha suddenly caught hold of Mamont's hand, the one that held the revolver, and looked up at him with pleading eyes. He took hold of her, putting his hands under her shoulder-blades, and lifted her off her feet, pressing his mouth on hers so hard that his teeth touched hers. Dasha moaned. At that instant the telephone rang. Dalski put Dasha into an arm-chair and took up the receiver.

"Yes. What do you want? I'm busy. Oh! Where? I shall be there in ten minutes."

He slipped the revolver into his pocket and came over to Dasha. He took her face between his hands, kissed her passionately several times and went out, making a farewell gesture with his outstretched hand, like a Roman.

Dasha passed the rest of the night in the 'Luxe'. She fell into a deep sleep, without even taking off her silver brocade dress. Zhirov was so afraid of Dalski that he went and slept in the bathroom. Next day she sat at the window until noon. She did not speak to Zhirov and did not reply to his questions. At about four o'clock she went out and waited until five on the boulevard in the little square near the long-nosed statue of Gogol where a few puny children were playing quietly, making mud-pies out of sand and dust.

Dasha was again wearing her old dress and her home-made hat. The sun warmed her back, shining on her poor little life. The tiny faces of the children looked old, aged by hunger. The world was quiet and empty. There was no rattling of wheels, no sound of voices. The wheels had all rolled away to the wars and passers-by were rare and taciturn.

Gogol sat in his granite arm-chair, round-shouldered under the weight of his cloak, befouled with the droppings of the sparrows. Two bearded men passed Dasha without noticing her; one of them was looking at the ground and the other at the tops of the trees. She caught fragments of their conversation:

"Complete disaster. . . . Terrible. . . . What next?"

"Still, Samara and Ufa have been taken. . . ."

"I don't believe anything any more. . . . We won't survive this winter. . . ."

"Still, Denikin is master of the Don. . . ."

"I don't believe it. Nothing can save us. Babylon perished, Rome perished, and we, too, shall perish . . ."

"Still, Savinkov is not arrested, Chernov is not arrested . . ."

"All that is no good. . . . Yes, there was a Russia once but it is finished now."

Then the same grey-haired lady went past, whom Dasha had seen the day before; again she showed underneath her shawl the banned books of Rosanov. Dasha turned her face away. The young man with the skull tie-pin now appeared, gave a rapid glance round, adjusted his pince-nez and sat down on the seat next to Dasha.

"You spent the night at the 'Metropole'?"

Dasha bent her head and only her lips replied "Yes."

"Very good. I have taken a room for you. You will move in this evening. Not a word to Zhirov. Now to business. Do you know Lenin by sight?"

"No."

The young man took out several photographs and pushed them into Dasha's handbag. Then he sat silent for a while, chewing his moustache. Finally he took Dasha's hand, lying lifeless on her knee, and squeezed it.

"The position is this: Bolshevism is Lenin. You must understand that. We may rout the Red Army, but as long as Lenin is in the Kremlin there is no victory for us. Is that clear? His theory and his force of character are the greatest dangers to the whole world, not only to ourselves. Think it over and answer me definitely: are you prepared to . . ."

"Kill him?" Dasha asked, looking at a half-naked baby waddling about on crooked, rickety legs. The young man started, looked about him, frowned at the children and again began to chew his moustache.

"Nobody said that. If you think of such a thing, don't say it out loud. You have been admitted into our organization. Didn't you understand what Savinkov was talking about?"

"Savinkov has never talked to me." The young man laughed. "Oh, so the man with the handkerchief was Savinkov."

"Hush, not so loud. Yes, that was Savinkov. He has extraordinary confidence in you. We are in need of fresh blood. There have been many arrests. You know, of course, that the Kazan mobilization plan has been discovered. The centre is being transferred to another locality. But we are leaving an organization here. Your task will be to keep a check on Lenin's platform appearances, to attend meetings, to go to factories. You will not have to work alone. You will be informed of his movements when he leaves the Kremlin and of his schedule of meetings. . . . It would be best if you could make contacts with Communists and apply for membership of the party. Read their papers and their literature. . . . You will receive further instructions to-morrow, this same place."

He then gave Dasha an address at which she was to report, a password and the key to her future quarters, and walked away towards the Arbat Gate. Dasha took the photographs out of her bag and looked at them for a long time. But when, instead of the face portrayed on the card, she began to see another face floating out from behind the purple curtains of the previous night, she angrily snapped the bag shut and went on her way frowning, with her lips tightly compressed. The bow-legged baby tried to toddle after her on its little crooked legs, but fell, hit the sand hard with its frail little body and began to cry bitterly.

Dasha's room was on the Sivtsev Vrazhek, at the back of a little old house which appeared to be deserted. Dasha had to knock a long time at the back entrance before the door was opened by a little dirty old woman with sore, red-rimmed eyes, probably an old nurse pensioned off by her former charges. Dasha could not make her understand what she wanted for some time, but at last she was admitted and taken to her room. The old woman began to relate a muddled story: "My bright falcons are gone, Yuri Yurich and Michail Yurich and Vassili Yurich, and he was only sixteen last St. Thomas' day . . . I am already praying for their souls. . . ."

Dasha refused tea, undressed, crept in under the cotton quilt and, burying her face in the pillow, began to cry.

Next morning she went to the Gogol statue and got fresh instructions. Her orders were to go to a factory the next day. She started for home, then changed her mind and went to the Café Bom. Zhirov met her, full of excitement, wanted to know where she had vanished to, why she had gone without her things. "I am expecting a telephone message from Mamont; what am I to tell him about you?" Dasha turned her face away to hide her blushing cheeks from him and thought, knowing all the time that she was deceiving herself: "After all, my instructions are to go on keeping in touch with them. . . ."

"I'll come and fetch my things and then we shall see," she said angrily.

When she returned home she was carrying a bundle containing the valuable fur coat, the underwear and the silver brocade dress. She unpacked the things, threw them out on the bed and looked at them; she began to tremble, her teeth chattered, her shoulders felt again the weight of *his* hand, her teeth the cold touch of his teeth. . . . Dasha knelt down in front of the bed and buried her face in the scented fur. "What is this! What on earth is this?" she repeated aimlessly to herself.

Next morning Dasha put on a dark dress and knotted a headcloth round her head, after the manner of working-class women. She had been instructed to do this and to say that she had been a maid in a rich man's house and had been raped by her master. She took a tram to the Goujon factory on the other side of the river.

She had no pass. The old doorman standing at the gate winked at her:

"Coming to the meeting, eh, lassie? Go along to the main building."

She walked along a path of half-rotten planks, past great heaps of rusty scrap and slag, past huge broken windows. There was emptiness all round, only the chimneys smoked gently in the cloudless sky.

Somebody indicated a small, dirty door in the wall. Dasha walked through it into a long hall of bare bricks. A dim light filtered in through the smoke-blackened glass roof. Everything was bleak and bare. The chains of cranes hung down from platforms perched high up in the air. Lower down, transmission shafts ran in every direction and transmission belts hung motionless on their pulleys. Dasha's eyes wandered in surprise over the unfamiliar black machines, at the squat, or lanky or twisted outlines of all the planers, lathes, milling machines, stamping presses and the great iron discs of the fly-wheels. On one side, under a wide arch, the lop-sided bulk of a great steam-hammer loomed in the semi-darkness. Here were made the machines and devices which out there beyond the gloomy walls of the factory filled life with light, warmth, movement, purpose and pleasure. But in here the air was filled with the smell of iron filings, machine oil, earth and cheap tobacco. A crowd was standing in front of a platform made of planks, many others were sitting on the frames of the machines and on the high window-sills.

Dasha made her way to a place near the platform. A tall young fellow glanced at her, and, opening his mouth in a broad grin that showed his white teeth against his grimy face, jerked his chin towards a lathe and stretched out his hand. Dasha climbed on to the lathe. She saw round her thousands of heads with frowning faces, wrinkled foreheads, tightly-closed mouths. She saw the same sort of faces every day in the streets and trams; the usual Russian faces, weary, with unfriendly, forbidding eyes. Once, before the war, during a Sunday walk on the islands, two law students accompanying Dasha had started a discussion about these very faces. "Take a Paris crowd, Daria Dmitrievna," one of them said; "a Paris crowd is gay and good-humoured, bubbling with fun. . . . But here everyone scowls sourly. Look at those two workmen coming this way. If I were to walk up to them and make a joke they would not understand and would feel insulted. Our Russians are so awkward and slow-witted. . . ." And now these Russians who disliked jokes were standing here so grimly tense, so concentratedly determined; the faces were the same, but darkened with hunger, the eyes were the same, but the look in them spoke of inner fires and impatience.

Dasha forgot why she had come. She was carried away by the fullness of life to which she had fled from that empty window in the avenue, like a bird

swept on by a hurricane. She drank in these new impressions with untainted sincerity. She was by no means lacking in intelligence, but like so many others, she had been entirely limited to herself, to her own tiny store of experience. But she was eager for the truth in all its aspects, as an individual, as a woman and as a human being among other human beings.

A speaker was dealing with the position at the front He had not much good news to give. The food blockade was being tightened; the Czechoslovaks were cutting off food supplies from Siberia and General Krasnov was doing the same from the Don region. The Germans were showing no mercy to the Ukrainian partisans. An interventionist fleet was menacing Kronstadt and Archangel. "But nevertheless the revolution must be victorious!" The speaker threw out his slogans, nailed them to the air with his fist, then grabbed his document case and ran down the steps of the platform. There was some applause, but not much; things were not going so well, there was little occasion for clapping. Men bent their heads and frowned at what they had heard.

The lad with the white teeth flashed another smile at Dasha as their eyes met.

"See, lass, what a mess we are in—they want to trap us like mice. What are we to do?"

"Are you frightened?" Dasha asked.

"Meaning me? I'm terrified!" People hissed angrily at the lad, 'Hush, you devil!' but he went on: "What's your name?"

Dasha looked at him—his black shirt was open on his muscular chest, his neck was thick like a bull's, his face and smile was gay, his hair lay in sweaty curls, his round eyes held an invitation, the whole man was black with the dirt of work.

"That's what you'd like to know," Dasha answered. "What are you grinning at?"

"Nothing. Just a habit of mine. Tell you what. Come with us, we are going to the front the day after to-morrow. Coming? You'll be lost in Moscow anyway. . . . We've got an accordion and all. . . ."

His words were drowned by a storm of applause. A new speaker had appeared on the platform, a short stocky man in a grey jacket and a crumpled waistcoat. He bent his bald bumpy head forward as he sorted out his notes. Slightly rolling his r-s he said, "Comrades!" and Dasha saw his careworn face and his eyes, screwed up as if from the sun. One hand was resting on the table, on the little pile of notes. When he said that his subject that day would be the great crisis which had overwhelmed all European countries and Russia most of all: that his subject would be the food shortage, three thousand men and women under the smoke-blackened roof held their breath.

He began with a general picture of the situation, speaking in an even voice, groping for contact with his audience. Several times he walked away from the table and then back again. He spoke of the world war which the two groups of robbers who had each other by the throat were neither able nor willing to end; of the atrocious weapon of starvation; he said that only a proletarian revolution could put an end to the war.

He spoke of two methods of fighting the famine: one was free trade, which only enriched the black marketeers; the other a state monopoly of foodstuffs. He took three paces away from the table, bent down towards the audience and put his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, throwing into sharp relief his big head and hands. Dasha saw that the index finger of his right hand was spotted with ink.

". . . We have stood and we will always stand shoulder to shoulder with

the class which took the field against war together with us, which helped us to overthrow the bourgeoisie and which is now bearing all the burden of the present crisis together with us. We must defend the grain monopoly to the end." The lad with the white teeth stifled a groan at this. "We must beat the famine or at least lessen its burden until the new harvest; we must maintain the grain monopoly and the rights of the Soviet state, of the proletarian state. All grain surplus must be gathered in by us and we must ensure that stocks are taken where they are most needed and distributed in the proper way. It amounts to this: we must keep our people alive and at the same time do a tremendous job of work which can be achieved by one means only: by a widespread and very great increase in our efforts."

In the breathless silence someone suddenly groaned aloud—some tormented soul balked at the icy heights to which this man in the grey coat was leading up. His great forehead loomed above the audience and from under its bulge his eyes looked fixedly and inexorably at them.

"We are faced squarely with the need to fulfil in practice this revolutionary socialist task, and we have come up against extraordinary difficulties. We are living in an epoch of embittered civil war. Only if we utterly defeat the counter-revolutionaries, only if we pursue a socialist policy in this matter of the famine, in this our struggle against the famine, shall we conquer both starvation and the counter-revolutionaries who are exploiting it."

His hand darted away from his chest, gripped and throttled something in the air and then stretched out over the audience.

"When workers, confused by black-marketeer slogans, talk of free trade for grain and demand that we import means of heavy transport, we answer that this would mean rushing to the assistance of the kulaks, and we shall never do that. . . . We will seek the support of those sections among the working population with whom we won the victory of October, and we will fight for our solution of the problem by establishing a proletarian discipline in all sections of the working people. We are faced with a historic task and we shall fulfil it. . . . The latest decrees have dealt with the basic problem—the problem of food supplies. They all embody three fundamental ideas. The first is the idea of centralization, in other words, the idea that we must all unite for one common job of work directed from one centre. Yes, we are told, but the grain monopoly is being infringed at every step by means of hoarding and black-marketeering. We are hearing with increasing frequency from the intellectuals that the black marketeers are doing them a service, that they are all fed by the black marketeers. . . . That is quite true. But the black marketeers are feeding them the kulak way, they are acting precisely in the way required to establish, strengthen and render permanent the power of the kulaks."

His hand moved again to sweep away this power of the kulaks, for good and all.

"Our second slogan is the unity of all workers. They will lead Russia out of this desperate, this prodigiously difficult situation. We will organize workers' detachments, organize the hungry people of the non-agricultural areas and appeal to them for help—our Commissariat of Agriculture will call upon them to join the crusade that is to bring us bread."

A peal of applause heavy with anger rang out. Dasha saw the speaker step back, put his hands in his pockets and throw back his shoulders. Red spots were burning on his cheeks, his eyelids fluttered, his forehead was moist:

"We are building a dictatorship. . . . We are establishing a rule of force to deal with the exploiters. . . ."

Again his words were drowned by applause. He waved his hand asking for silence. Then in the ensuing quiet he continued:

"Our third slogan is this: 'Unite, all representatives of the poor.' We are faced with a historic task: we must give a new historical class confidence in itself. . . . All over the world town workers, industrial workers have united almost man for man. But practically nowhere in the world have there been systematic, unreserved, selfless attempts to knit together those who live in the villages, on small agricultural holdings, in darkness and in remote corners, and whose senses are dulled by the conditions of their lives. Here we are faced with a task in the fulfilment of which the struggle against hunger is merged into one with the deeper and greater struggle for the building of socialism. Here we have before us a battle which deserves all our efforts, for which we must stake everything we have, for it is a battle for socialism, a battle for the best interests of the workers, of all those who are exploited."

He wiped his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"Here, around Moscow and in the neighbouring regions, in the provinces of Kursk, Orel and Tambov, we have even now, according to the conservative estimates of experts, up to ten million poods of surplus grain. Come, comrades, let us tackle the job with united forces. Only our joint efforts, only the unity of all those who suffer most in the hungry cities and the famished countryside can help us, and this is the road the Soviet government invites you to take: let the workers unite, let the poor unite and send their vanguards to appeal to the people of the provinces, to carry on a war for bread against the kulaks."

He passed his palm across his forehead with increasing frequency, his voice grew huskier—he had already said all he had to say. He took a sheet of paper from the table, glanced at it and gathered up the rest of the notes.

"Thus, comrades, if we accept this and if we do all this, we shall certainly win out in the end."

Suddenly a friendly, good-humoured smile lit up his face. And the whole audience understood that he was their very own. They shouted, they clapped, they stamped their feet. The speaker ran from the platform, his head drawn in between his shoulders. The toothy lad next to Dasha yelled with a voice like the roar of a bull:

"Long live Ilyich!"

Dasha could only say to herself that she had heard and seen 'something different'. When she got home from the meeting she sat down on the bed and stared with wide-open eyes at the pattern of the wallpaper. On her pillow lay a note from Zhirov: *Mamont is expecting you in the Hôtel Metropole at eleven o'clock.* On the floor inside the door lay another note: *Be at the Gogol statue to-day at 6 p.m.*

This 'something different' was in the first place something of a moral nature, something sublime. The talk had been of bread. Before this Dasha had known that bread could be bought or obtained in exchange and she knew its price: a pood of flour cost a pair of unpatched trousers. But it appeared now that the revolution was angrily rejecting this kind of bread. This kind of bread was unclean. Rather die than eat such bread. Three thousand hungry men and women had to-day renounced this unclean bread.

They had renounced it in the name of. . . . At this point Dasha's poor head got all muddled again. In the name of the humiliated and oppressed people. . . . That was what he said. To give all one's strength, to stake everything on one throw, life itself, for the cause of the working and exploited people. . . . So that was why they were so tragically stern and unsmiling.

Kulichok had told her that from every quarter of the globe hands were stretching out to lend aid—hands with bread in them. The only condition was the destruction of the Soviets. Destroy them and there would be plenty of bread. In the name of what? In the name of the salvation of Russia. Salvation from what? From the Russian people, it seemed. But the people did not want to be thus saved, she had seen that for herself. . . .

Poor, poor little Dasha. It was a bit late, little Dasha, to begin taking an interest in politics. "Stop," she said to herself. "Stop." She put her hands behind her back and began to pace up and down, staring at her feet.

What could be better than to give one's life for the humiliated and oppressed? But Kulichok said that the Bolsheviks were ruining Russia and all the others said the same. . . . Dasha closed her eyes with the effort of imagining this Russia which she ought to love above herself. She remembered a picture she had seen once: two horses on the slope of a hill, a bank of clouds in a sunset sky and a tousled roof of thatch. "No, that is only the painter's conception," Dasha said to herself, and saw in front of her closed eyes the gay, smiling face of the lad she had met in the factory. Dasha took another walk round the room. "What is this Russia then? Why is it being torn this way and that? I am a silly woman; I can't understand anything at all. . . . Oh, my God!" With her bunched fingers she began to beat her chest like a penitent. But that was no use either. "Run off to Lenin and ask him? No, confound it, I am in the other camp. . . ."

All these dreadful contradictions and this mental confusion ended up with Dasha pulling her little hat down on her eyes just before six o'clock and walking to the Gogol statue. The man with the tie-pin was already there, waiting:

"You are three minutes late. Well? Have you been to the meeting? Did you hear Lenin? Tell me just the gist of it. How did he arrive, who was with him, was there a guard on the platform?"

Dasha gave no answer; she was thinking. Then she said:

"Tell me, why do you want to kill him?"

"Who gave you that idea? Nobody has that in mind. Humph! So he has made an impression on you, I see. He would, of course. That is why he is so dangerous."

"But what he said was quite right."

The young man stretched his neck forward, coming quite close to her, and looked into her eyes. Then with a slimy, sickly smile he asked in an insinuating tone:

"Hadn't you better throw up the job, then?"

Dasha shrank back from him, but the young man's neck stretched out as if made of rubber, and his pince-nez glittered right under Dasha's eyes. She whispered:

"I don't know. I don't understand anything any more. I must be convinced. I must be convinced."

"Lenin is an agent of the German general staff," the man hissed. Then he spent over half an hour explaining to Dasha the devilish plot of the Germans: they were sending Bolsheviks, hired for enormous sums, to Russia in sealed trains; these Bolsheviks were breaking up the army, misleading the workers, and destroying Russia's industry and agriculture. After a few months the Germans would be able to conquer Russia with their bare hands. "At present the Bolsheviks are stirring up civil war; they rant about a food blockade, but at the same time they shoot the food traders who keep us from starvation. They are deliberately organizing a famine. To-day you saw for yourself several

thousand fools listening to Lenin as if to an oracle. It makes you want to bite your hands with rage. He is deceiving the masses, millions, the entire nation. On one plane, the physical, he is a monstrous *agent provocateur*. . . . On another plane"—he bent close to Dasha's ear and whispered: "he is the Antichrist! Do you remember the prophecy? In the fullness of time the north will make war on the south. The iron horsemen of death will appear: those are the tanks. The Polar Star will fall into the source of the waters: that is the five-pointed star of the Bolsheviks. . . . And he will speak to the people as Christ did, only it will be all the wrong way round. . . . To-day he tried to seduce you, but we won't let you go. I'll put you on to other work."

The third question was still unsolved when Dasha returned home and lay down on the bed, covering her eyes with her arm. She was suddenly sick and tired of all this thinking. "What the devil? Am I a hundred years old, or what? Am I as ugly as sin? I'll do just as I please. If I want to go to the Metropole I'll just go. For whom shall I keep myself hidden away—my body which does not want to be kept hidden away? Why should I stifle the voice of pleasure in myself? Why keep my knees pressed together so hard? For whose caresses am I waiting? You silly fool, you coward! Loosen up, plunge in, it makes no difference, to hell with love, to hell with yourself!"

She already knew that she would go to the Metropole. And if she was still pondering the matter, it was only because it was not yet time to go and it was dusk, the most insidious time for pondering. Somewhere in the house a clock slowly struck nine. Dasha quickly jumped up from her bed, undressed and ran out to the bathroom, which was full of firewood, trunks, and all sorts of lumber. She stood under the shower; the shock of the icy rain on her back almost choked her. She went back to her room dripping with water, took the sheet off her bed and dried herself, her teeth chattering.

Even at that moment she had not really decided; she looked at her old frock, lying on the floor, and then at the evening dress folded over the back of a chair. And then she realized that this was cowardice, that it was only postponing the inevitable. She began to dress. There was no mirror, thank God! She wrapped herself in the sable coat and stole out into the street like a thief. It was nearly dark by now. She walked along the boulevards. Men followed her with their eyes in amazement, and made remarks which were anything but reassuring. Two figures in military greatcoats appeared from the shadow of a tree and called out to her: "Hey, you parasite, where are you going in such a hurry?"

In Nikitskaya Square Dasha stopped to recover her breath; her heart was pounding furiously. A tramcar with a second car attached to it and blazing with lights was passing her, clanging its bell. People were hanging on the steps. One man was holding on to the brass hand-rail with one hand and grasping a crocodile-skin suitcase with the other. As he flashed past he turned his strong, clean-shaven face towards Dasha. It was Mamont Dalski. Dasha gasped and ran after the tram. Mamont caught sight of her. The hand that held the suitcase jerked upwards, he took his other hand from the handrail and jumped off. He staggered and fell backwards, vainly clutching at the air. One huge boot sole showed for a moment and then his body disappeared under the second tramcar. The crocodile-skin suitcase fell at Dasha's feet. She saw Dalski's knees lifted in a last convulsion, heard the scrunching of his bones; then his boots beat a tattoo on the cobbles, the brakes squealed and people poured out of the car.

A grey cloud rose in front of Dasha's eyes. The pavement seemed as soft as down as she fell in a dead faint, with her cheek and arms on the crocodile-skin suitcase.

CHAPTER IX

THE OFFENSIVE OF the Volunteer Army—the so-called second Kuban campaign—began with an attack on Torgovaya station. The capture of this railway junction was of extreme importance as its seizure completely cut off the Northern Caucasus from Russia proper. On the tenth of June an army of ten thousand bayonets and sabres, commanded by Denikin, advanced in four colums to surround Torgovaya.

Denikin himself was with Drozdovski's column. The tension was tremendous. Each man understood that the result of the first collision would decide the fate of the army. Drozdovski's men, covered by the fire of their single gun firing grapeshot, rushed to ford the little River Yegorlyk under the artillery fire of the enemy. Captain Turkul, commander of the regiment, was among the first to cross, and was floundering, spluttering and cursing in the water. The Reds offered a desperate resistance, but owing to their lack of experience they were unable to prevent their opponents from encircling them. Their pickets were overwhelmed from the south by Borovski's column and from the east by Erdeli's cavalry. The Red troops, thrown into confusion, abandoned Torgovaya and retreated towards the north, taking their enormous baggage-train with them. But near Shablievka their way was barred by Markov's column. The victory of the Whites was complete. Erdeli's Cossacks scoured the plain, cutting down fugitives, taking prisoners and capturing baggage carts.

It was getting late. The noise of battle was dying down. Denikin was pacing up and down the platform of Torgovaya station with his hand clasped behind his back and a frown on his red face. A group of cadets, laughing and joking as men do after the passing of a mortal danger, were filling sandbags and piling them up on the open platforms. They set up machine-guns in an improvised armoured train. From time to time the thud of gunfire shook the air; this was a Red armoured train firing to the north of Shablievka. The last shell it fired fell near the bridge over the Manych, just where General Markov was sitting on his grey pony. He had not slept, eaten, or smoked for the last forty-eight hours and he was irritated because the capture of Shablievka had not proceeded in accordance with his plans. The station had been defended by a strong force equipped with artillery and armoured cars. For two whole days Markov's surrounding column had fought stubbornly and unsuccessfully. Luck for once had been against him and his losses had been enormous. Not until the evening of the second day had the Bolsheviks occupying Shablievka retreated, and then only as a result of the general situation on the battlefield.

Leaning forward in his saddle Markov looked at the indistinct outlines of several dead bodies lying stiff in the positions in which death had overtaken them. These were his officers and each of them was worth a whole platoon in battle. And now, quite unnecessarily, several hundred of his best fighting men had been killed or wounded merely because of some momentary inadequacy of his mental reactions.

He heard a groan—it sounded like the hoarse sigh of a man just waking from a nightmare; then he saw an officer emerge from the trench in front of the bridge, and immediately sink back again, with his chest on the parapet. The officer moaned again, then raised himself on his hands, lifted his foot with an effort and climbed out. He stared at the sky, turned his head, groaned once more and staggered forward. Catching sight of Markov he saluted, then let his hand drop.

"I am wounded, Your Excellency!"

"So I see."

"I have been shot from behind."

"Too bad."

"I have been shot from behind, in the head, point-blank, with a revolver. Volunteer Valerian Onoli deliberately tried to kill me."

"What is your name?" Markov asked sharply.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Roshchin."

At that very moment the six-inch gun of the Red armoured train fired for the last time as it retreated towards the north. The shell rushed across the dark steppe with a savage wail. The general's grey pony pricked up its ears and shied. The shell fell and exploded ten feet from General Markov.

When the smoke and dust cleared away, Roshchin, who had been flung back by the blast, saw the grey pony struggling on the ground and beating the air with its hoofs; beside it a small body lay sprawling and motionless. Roshchin raised his head and shouted: "Stretcher-bearer! General Markov has been killed!"

Having occupied Torgovaya, the Volunteer Army turned north towards Velikoknyazheskaya with the two-fold object of helping Ataman Krassnov to clear the Salsk district of the Bolsheviks and of securing their own rear against any danger from Tsaritsyn. They took Velikoknyazheskaya without serious losses but were unable to exploit their success as Budenny's mounted detachments routed Erdeli's Cossacks in a night engagement and prevented them from crossing the Manych.

On the station itself the first White armoured train narrowly escaped destruction. Its crew saw an engine running under a white flag. Assuming that it was a flag of truce, they held their fire. The engine rushed on, whistling incessantly but not reducing speed. Only at the last moment did it occur to the crew of the armoured train to fire at the engine at point-blank range. It was too late—there was a collision, one of the trucks of the armoured train was smashed and the engine (which had been soaked in oil and filled with bombs) overturned. For a few minutes this scene out of an American film held the attention of the whole battlefield.

Denikin handed the district over to the army of the Don, left the work of dealing with the local Bolsheviks to the Cossacks and turned south again to capture the most important junction, the station of Tikhoretskaya, which linked the Don with the Kuban, the Black Sea with the Caspian. The enterprise was fraught with serious dangers. On the line of march lay two large villages, Peschanokopskoye and Byelaya Glina, both inhabited by new settlers, both hotbeds of Bolshevism. They were being hurriedly fortified by the Reds. Kalnin's army was digging in feverishly at Tikhoretskaya. Sorokin's army had by this time recovered from its panic and began to exercise pressure from the west. The Red detachments routed on the Manych had been reorganized and were coming back to the offensive. Many villages sent reinforcements.

The only thing Denikin could count on was the lack of co-ordination in the actions of his opponents. But this could change any day, and hence he was in a hurry. On occasions he was compelled to plead in person with his men, begging them to go on as they lay on the ground completely exhausted. The infantry was moved in carts. In advance of the army ran the same home-made armoured train.

At Peschanokopsk the whole population took part in the fighting together with the Red Army men. This was the first time the Volunteer Army had met

such bitter opposition. The steppe trembled with the thunder of the guns from morning to night. Borovski's and Drozdovski's regiments were twice thrown out of the village. Only when the Reds saw themselves surrounded from every side by an enemy whose numbers and strength they had no means of gauging, did they leave the village, taking their wounded with them. All the Red troops and the crowds of refugees now gathered at Byelaya Glina.

Here were the headquarters of Dmitri Shelest's Iron Division, reinforced by ten thousand village levies. Men of all ages had been called to arms. The approaches to the locality were fortified—for the first time in the war the Reds acted in an organized way and with tactical understanding. Meetings were held and the men exhorted to win or die.

But it was all in vain. The well-trained enemy could pit science against courage and despair; he took every detail into account and moved about as if on a chessboard, always turning up unexpectedly in the Red rear. True, the White attack was unsuccessful at first. Colonel Zhebrak, commanding Drozdovski's men, blundered on to a farm in the darkness where he was met by a withering fire from the advanced lines of the Reds. The colonel led a charge and was killed. His men withdrew and took cover. But at nine o'clock next morning General Kutepov penetrated into Byelaya Glina with a detachment of Kornilov's men, a cavalry regiment of Drozdovski's command and an armoured car. Borovski advanced from the direction of the captured railway station. Street fighting began. The Reds felt that they were surrounded and lost their heads. The armoured car drove into their midst. Thatched roofs went up in flames. Horses and cattle rushed about amidst the flames, the firing and the shouting.

Shelest's Iron Division retreated along the only road still open to them. On one side of the road, near a signalman's hut, Denikin was waiting on horseback. He shouted angrily, making a trumpet out of his hands, yelling to his men to cut off the path of retreat along which the remnants of the Iron Division, partisan groups and the entire civilian population were withdrawing. Erdeli's cavalry galloped after the fugitives. Even the escort of the Commander-in-Chief could not resist the urge to kill; they drew their sabres and spurred after the Reds. Staff officers fidgeted in their saddles and then, like a pack of hounds after their quarry, they, too, galloped away in the same direction, slashing at heads and backs. Denikin was left alone. He took off his cap and fanned his flushed face with it. This victory had opened the way for him to Tikhoretskaya and Yekaterinodar.

At dusk, short volleys rang out in the village and on the farms—Drozdovski's men were avenging the death of Zhebrak by shooting the captured Red Army men. Denikin was drinking tea in a peasant cottage crawling with flies. Despite the stuffiness, his close-fitting tunic with the red tabs was buttoned up to the neck. After each volley he turned his face towards the broken window and wiped his forehead and the sides of his nose with a crumpled handkerchief.

"Vassili Vassilyevich, my dear fellow," he said to his aide, "would you please ask Drozdovski to come here—after all, this is quite impermissible . . ."

The aide clicked his spurred heels, smartly raised his hand to the peak of his cap and as smartly jerked it away, turned on his heel and left the room. Denikin poured a fresh lot of boiling water from the samovar into the teapot. Another volley rang out, quite close this time—so close, in fact, that it shook the window-panes. Then a voice screamed in the darkness. Hot water and tea-leaves splashed out of the teapot. Denikin put the lid on and sighed deeply. The door flew suddenly open and a very pale young man came in. He had

on a crumpled tunic with the badges of a general on his soft, likewise crumpled shoulder-straps. The flame of the paraffin lamp was reflected dimly in the glasses of his pince-nez. His square cleft chin thrust its stubble forward, his sunken cheeks were twitching. He stopped near the door. Denikin heaved his bulk off the seat and stretched out his hand in welcome.

"Come, sit down, Mikhail Grigoryevich. A cup of tea?"

"Thank you, sir. No time."

This was Drozdovski, recently promoted to the rank of general. He knew why he had been summoned by the Commander-in-Chief and, as always when he expected a reprimand, he had the greatest difficulty in restraining his rage. He stood with bent head and did not look at Denikin.

"Mikhail Grigoryevich, I wanted to talk to you about these shootings. It won't do, you know, my dear fellow. . . ."

"I am unable to restrain my officers, sir," Drozdovski said in an unpleasantly shrill, hysterically unsteady voice, and grew even paler. "Your Excellency is well aware that Colonel Zhebrak has been bestially tortured to death by the Bolsheviks. . . . Thirty-five officers who came with me from Rumania have been tortured to death and mutilated. . . . The Bolsheviks are killing and torturing everyone. . . . Yes, everyone. . . ." Drozdovski choked with rage. "I cannot restrain my men. . . . I refuse. . . . If you object to me, have me court-martialled. . . . I shall be happy to serve on as a private. . . ."

"Come, Mikhail Grigoryevich, my dear fellow," Denikin said, "you really mustn't be so touchy. Why talk of courts martial? But can't you see, Mikhail Grigoryevich, that by shooting prisoners we increase the resistance of our opponents. . . . Rumours of these shootings will spread. Why should we do things that are harmful to our own army? Surely you agree? Surely I am right?" Drozdovski remained silent. "Kindly tell your officers this and see that such things do not occur again."

"Yes, sir!" Drozdovski turned on his heel and slammed the door.

Denikin sat over his cup of tea a long time, shaking his head. In the distance a last volley rang out and then silence fell.

The operation against Tikhoretskaya was based on a plan to deploy the army on a front ten miles in width. As a preliminary, the terrain had to be cleared of scattered Red units and partisan detachments. This work was entrusted to Borovski, another young general. He advanced sixty miles in two days, fighting all the way, and occupied a number of villages. This was the first raid to the rear of the opponent in the course of the civil war.

The Volunteer Army deployed in the territory thus gained. On the thirtieth of June Denikin issued a short order of the day. "To-morrow, the first of July, you will take the station of Tikhoretskaya and rout the enemy grouping in the sector of Ternovskaya-Tikhoretskaya." During the night the columns advanced to envelop Tikhoretskaya in a wide pincer movement. After a brief exchange of fire the Bolsheviks began to withdraw to prepared positions.

This was no longer the desperate resistance encountered by the Whites a week before. The fall of Byelaya Gina had had a discouraging effect. Sorokin's offensive was halted. All the sacrifices, all the thousands of lives lost in the bloody battles had been in vain. The Whites advanced with the precision of a machine. Rumour increased the number of the White volunteers tenfold. It was whispered that officers were flocking to join Denikin in great numbers—that the 'cadets' gave no mercy to anyone, and that as soon as they cleared a

region it was immediately occupied by the Germans. Kalnin, the commander of the Tikhoretskaya forces, sat as if paralysed in his train on Tikhoretskaya station, doing nothing. When he saw that great masses of Volunteers were approaching from four directions, he lost heart and gave the order to retreat.

By nine in the morning the fighting was over; the Red troops had withdrawn to fortified positions which surrounded Tikhoretskaya in a semi-circle. Kalnin locked himself in in his compartment and lay down to sleep, convinced that there would be no more fighting that day. The Volunteers, meanwhile, continued their wide enveloping movement, advancing across country in the tall wheat. By noon next day the extreme ends of the pincers met and attacked the Reds from the south, in their rear. The Kornilov regiment rushed the station of Tikhoretskaya and seized it without encountering resistance. The railwaymen scattered and hid. Kalnin disappeared—only his cap and boots were found in his coach. In the neighbouring compartment his chief of staff, Colonel Zveryev, formerly of the Imperial General Staff, was sprawling on the floor with a shattered skull and on the seat his wife, a bullet through her chest and her head covered with a shawl, was lying on her back still breathing.

After this the Volunteer columns could at their leisure close the pincers on the Red forces, now cut off from their bases and lines of communication and deprived of their leaders. Till evening, guns and machine-guns rained their fire on the Reds. A hurricane of lead cut them down from all directions. Maddened men rose from the trenches, rushed forward in bayonet charges and met death wherever they went. Towards evening, Kutepov barred the only remaining road, the one leading northward, and wiped out by fire and cold steel group after group of Reds trying to reach it. In the dusk both sides, White and Red, were mixed up with each other among the wheat. The commanders dashed about like quails in the wheatfields, rallied their officers and threw them into battle again and again. In one place a white rag was raised on a bayonet. Kutepov hurried to the spot with his officers and was met by a volley and furious curses. He galloped away, bent forward over his horse's neck. The Commander-in-Chief had given orders that prisoners must not be shot—but no one had said that any prisoners should be taken.

In the morning Denikin rode slowly over the battlefield. As far as the eye could see stretched the trampled and flattened wheatfields. Above them carrion crows circled in the bright azure of the sky. Denikin's glance swept along the line of trenches meandering across the fields, over ancient grave-mounds and ravines. They were full of corpses lying about like sacks, arms and legs sticking out stiffly, dead heads grinning. The general was in a lyrical mood and turning his head round to summon his aide, he said thoughtfully:

"Why, these are all Russians. How terrible. One cannot really rejoice, can one, Vassili Vassilyevich?"

Victory was complete. Kalnin's army of thirty thousand men was routed, much of it wiped out and the rest scattered. Only seven troop trains full of Reds succeeded in slipping away to Yekaterinodar. Sorokin's army was being cut off. The various groups of Red forces were finally split up—the eastern group in the Armavir region was separated from the Taman group based on the coast. The army of Denikin collected valuable booty: three armoured trains, several armoured cars, fifty guns, an aeroplane, truckloads of rifles, machine-guns, and ammunition and commissariat stores of every sort in large quantities.

This victory made a tremendous impression everywhere. By order of General Krassnov a solemn thanksgiving service was held in Novocherkassk cathedral,

after which the general addressed his troops and made a speech modelled on those of his friend the Kaiser. Although Denikin's army had lost a quarter of its strength in three weeks, its effectives had doubled by the middle of July. A constant stream of fresh recruits came from the Ukraine, from Novorossia, from Central Russia. Now for the first time captured Red Army men were being formed into units for the White Army.

After two days' rest Denikin split up his army into three columns and began a large-scale offensive on three fronts: against Sorokin in the west, against the Armavir group in the east, and against the remnants of Kalnin's army which were covering Yekaterinodar. The task was to clean up the entire rear before the assault on that key city. Every circumstance was taken into account and everything worked out according to the rules of military science. There was only one point that Denikin had left out of his calculations: that he was faced not with an enemy army the strength and armaments of which he could estimate, and make his arrangements accordingly—but with a people in arms, a force beyond his comprehension. He did not take into account that each of his victories had the result of increasing the hatred, determination and unity of this people in arms; that now the era of noisy meetings at which unpopular commanders were deposed and military operations decided by a majority of votes was past and that in its stead a new, as yet immature discipline had been established and was gathering strength daily as the civil war went on.

Everything seemed to promise a quick and easy victory. Denikin's scouts brought tidings of the panic flight of Sorokin's army towards Yekaterinodar and beyond the Kuban. But this was not quite true. The scouts were mistaken. Those who fled across the Kuban were deserters, small scattered groups and the wagon trains of refugees. Sorokin's army group of thirty thousand men was purging itself of undesirables and non-combatants and was growing fiercer and more soldierly. At Bataisk a firm front was established to oppose the German advance. The Reds were challenging Denikin to a pitched battle and it happened that the Volunteer Army, over-confident through victory and within reach of its goal, very nearly perished to the last man in a bloody encounter with Sorokin's men which was soon to be fought and which lasted ten days.

With Napoleonic insolence Sorokin had given this answer to a question addressed to him by Central Executive Committee of the Kuban-Black-Sea Soviets: "I have no need of any agitators. The bands of Denikin do all the agitation for me. The epic courage of my troops will overcome all efforts of the counter-revolution."

After the first few days of the attack made by Denikin's army, Sorokin stopped the panic flight of the Red troops. He haunted the front day and night, in his railway coach, on a railway trolley, or on horseback. He reviewed the troops, with his own hand shot down on parade two commanders for "lack of zeal in the execution of their duties"; he addressed his soldiers from horseback and said horrible things about the enemies of the people, cursed them foully with foam at the corners of his curling lips until the soldiers interrupted him with a roar like a herd of buffaloes tormented by gadflies. He spurred on his military tribunals and his counter-espionage service to greater activity, introduced the death penalty for lack of proper care of rifles, and issued orders of the day to the army in which he said:

"Fighting men! The workers of all the world look to you with hope and gratitude. With open eyes and strong bodies you are marching to meet the bloody sunrise of a new historical epoch. All parasites, crawling reptiles, Denikin bands, and all the counter-revolutionary vermin must be swept away by fire and lead. Peace to the exploited, death to the exploiters, up the world revolution!"

He wrote these orders of the day himself, in a fever of excitement. They were read aloud to each company. Ukrainian muzhiks, miners from the Don coalfields, front-line soldiers of the Caucasian army, Cossacks and settlers—the whole ragged, noisy, lawless, motley crowd of them listened spellbound to the stilted words.

Belyakov, Sorokin's chief-of-staff, a gifted and experienced officer, worked out a plan of attack, or rather a plan for the whole army of thirty thousand men to break through the surrounding enemy forces and to retreat beyond the River Kuban. That, at any rate, was the intention of the chief of staff, who had no reason to expect any mercy at the hands of Denikin.

The break-through was to begin near the railway station of Korenevskaya, between Tikhoretskaya and Yekaterinodar. Korenevskaya once occupied, it would not be difficult to deal with the columns of Drozdovski and Kazanovich thus cut off from the main White forces, then turn against Yekaterinodar and trust to luck and the devil. Such was the train of thought of the chief of staff. His position was one of extreme delicacy. Sleeping or waking he hated the Reds with all his heart, but an accursed fate had linked him with them. To fall into the hands of Denikin (to whom he looked up with uneasy and envious admiration) would mean certain death. To be suspected by Sorokin of insufficient revolutionary zeal, insufficient hatred of Denikin—would mean death again! His only hope—fantastic enough, but not more so than so many other events of the time—lay in the boundless ambition of Sorokin. Here was a game worth playing: do his damndest to make Sorokin dictator and then trust to luck and the devil!

At all events he certainly made efficient preparations for the offensive. Stocks of ammunition and forage were concentrated on Timashevskaya station, shells were unloaded, and the vast supply columns moved away into the steppe. The army, its front towards the south-east, deployed in the region of Timashevskaya with the intention of striking a simultaneous blow both at Korenevskaya and at Vyselki to the north of it.

On the fifteenth of July, at dawn, the field-guns opened a barrage on Korenevskaya and an hour later wave after wave of cavalry flooded the village and the railway station. The troopers sabred the 'cadets' or rode them down, and took prisoner only those who threw away their rifles in good time. The infantry marched all night and on reaching Korenevskaya entrenched themselves not in a semi-circle, as at Byelaya Glina, but in a complete oval.

A white sun rose in a cloud of dust and heat. The whole steppe was in motion: cavalry galloped about, foot regiments crawled, batteries thundered by with a rumbling of wheels; curses, blows, shots, the neighing of horses and hoarse shouts of command filled the air. The long snakes of the supply columns stretched to the very edge of the horizon. The day was as hot as an oven. Sorokin left his staff behind and rode with his men on a stallion white with foam. Orderlies and dispatch riders carried his orders to and fro, running like greyhounds.

Sorokin had lost his cap and had discarded his Circassian coat. The sleeves of his raspberry-red shirt were rolled up above the elbow and his blue cavalry breeches were tightly belted with a narrow silver-studded belt. He was here, there and everywhere, white teeth flashing in his face black with sweat and dust. He had changed his horse three times, inspected the positions of the

batteries and trenches, where the infantry were digging into the black earth like so many moles, galloped out to the concealed positions in the steppe, dashed back to the arriving supply columns and watched them unload; beckoned the commanders to his side with a jerk of his whip and listened to their reports, bending down to them from the saddle, a wild and terrible apparition with blazing eyes. Like the conductor of some gigantic orchestra weaving threads of music, Sorokin wove the fabric of the incipient battle. He left his winded horse at the railway station, hurried into the telegraph office, kicked aside a dead body lying across the threshold with officer's epaulettes on its shoulders and a skull split clean in two by a sabre-cut, read the tape running through the ticker and felt a furious, intoxicating thrill: Drozdovski and Kazanovich had left Dinskaya and were rapidly approaching with their forces from the south to give battle.

Drozdovski's men travelled in peasant carts—hundreds of such carts had raced across the steppe all day in clouds of hot dust. General Markov's force, now commanded by General Kazanovich, which had been entrained together with the artillery, had got ahead of them and at dawn on the sixteenth straight from their railway coaches, rushed to attack Korenevskaya.

General Kazanovich was standing on the rim of a well near a signalman's box and calmly watched the skilful movement of his officers who were advancing without firing a shot. His thin, delicate face with its long greying moustache and clipped beard (as worn by the Emperor Nicholas) bore an ironical but watchful expression, his fine eyes smiled coldly but with an almost feminine intensity. He was so confident of the result of the battle that he never thought of waiting for Drozdovski's division. There was a continuous rivalry for greater glory between him and Drozdovski, who was excessively vain, very cautious and often dilatory to a degree which was detrimental to the cause, while Kazanovich loved war for the wide scope it offered, for the music of battle and the loud fanfares of victory.

From behind the distant barrows of the steppe the sun rose huge and hot with all the fury of July, and its blinding light stabbed into the dazzled eyes of the Bolsheviks. The machine-guns began to chatter and artillery salvos tore the sultry silence. Kazanovich could see the enemy crowd out of their trenches in serried ranks. Markov's men ran forward; not one of them ducked his head to the bullets. Thousands of little figures ran out to meet them. Kazanovich raised his field-glasses to his eyes. He was surprised.

"Three salvos of shrapnel for the comrades!" he told his telephone operator, who was sitting close by him at the well. Two batteries, concealed behind the embankment, opened fire. Shrapnel burst like bunches of cotton wool low over the ranks of the enemy. The little figures rushed about, then reformed their ranks and came on again. By now the whole field was thundering with explosions. Then the batteries of the Bolsheviks at last added their roar to that of the other guns. Kazanovich laughed in a puzzled way and his slim hand began to tremble as it held the field-glasses. Markov's men lay down and began to dig hurriedly. Kazanovich went pale under his tan. He sprang from the rim of the well, sat down to the telephone and called General Timanovski.

"Our ranks are lying down," he shouted into the receiver. "Go quickly, smash up the enemy's left flank at all cost . . . every second counts. . . ."

The next moment Timanovski's reserves appeared from behind the permanent way, came down the embankment in a determined rush, group after group, rank after rank, and disappeared in the tall wheat that was already beginning to shed its grain. Timanovski himself, young, rosy-cheeked, always smiling,

his fur cap on one ear, his dirty canvas shirt displaying the badges of a general, gripped his sabre and ran after his men. Something incomprehensible was happening: the Bolsheviks were changed men—the moment for them to break had come and gone long ago and they had never faltered for an instant. Now the whole steppe was alive with their little advancing figures. The White machine-guns chattered madly—but still fresh waves of the enemy took the place of those who had fallen.

On the edge of the great wheatfield Timanovski's companies—one, no, two of them—were running forward with bayonets levelled. Kazanovich stood tense on the rim of the well. In the narrow field of vision of his field-glasses he had the determined backs of Markov's men. What tension! And they were falling! He followed the running ranks with his glasses and suddenly saw in their field of vision the open mouths, the broad faces, the sailor caps, the bare, bronzed chests of the Bolshevik sailors. . . . The two groups clashed and merged into a single group as bayonet met bayonet. A sickly smile froze on Kazanovich's delicately-outlined lips. The Markovs gave ground. The remnants of their first company ran into the wheat and lay down. Then the second company came running back and lay down likewise.

Kazanovich sprang from the well and ran lightly across the field. His men saw him and when he shouted: "Gentlemen, this is a disgrace! Get up!" they stood up. He made them charge a second time, but the fire was so fierce and men fell in such numbers that they lay down again. Was it possible that the battle was lost?

At nine o'clock in the morning Drozdovski's guns began to thunder in the west. An armoured car crawled along, wobbling over the steppe like a grey tortoise. The Whites were developing their offensive without haste, methodically. Kazanovich's men now went forward for the third charge. The Volunteer forces were attacking on a broad semi-circular front. They did not expect the Bolsheviks to hold their own against such an attack.

A horseman now appeared between the Bolshevik trenches. It was Sorokin himself galloping madly and waving a glittering sabre. Dashing up on to a hillock he reined back his horse on its haunches. He wore a purple shirt with the sleeves rolled up on his arms. He threw back his head, shouted something and flourished his sabre. Wave after wave of Red cavalry spurred forward against the ranks of the attacking Whites. Their vicious little ponies flattened out till their bellies almost touched the ground. The firing ceased. The swishing of slashing sabres, howls, and the hoof-beats of the horses could be heard from afar. A rider in a purple shirt dashed from the hillock, threw the reins on his horse's neck and spurred it forward. A black cloud of dust rose and enveloped the field of battle. The Whites could not stand up to the cavalry charge; they turned and ran. They stopped and dug themselves in on the far side of a brook.

Frowning and shivering with pain, Ivan Ilyich Telegin bandaged his head with the lint from his emergency dressing packet.

It was only a scratch, no bones were broken, but it hurt atrociously and his whole body felt as if gripped in a vice. He was so weakened by the effort that when he had finished bandaging himself he lay on his back in the wheat for a long time without moving.

It struck him as strange that the crickets were chirping peacefully, just as

if nothing had happened. Those crickets, well hidden in the cracks of the earth, then the large stars of the southern sky and a few long-bearded ears of wheat swaying gently between his eyes and the heavens—these were all that was left of the bloody flurry, the shouting, the iron thunder of the battle. A little while ago a wounded man had moaned somewhere near—but he was silent now.

Silence is a good thing—thought Telegin. The searing pain in his head abated and it seemed to him that it had been appeased by the majestic dignity of the night. But then vivid fragments of the day's impressions flashed through his memory—men torn to pieces by shells, hoarse yells issuing from mouths torn wide open by hatred—and then the running, running, seeing nothing but the point of your own bayonet and the face of a man who is shooting at you. These memories pierced his brain with such a pang that he groaned aloud: oh, if he could only think of something else, quickly. . . .

But of what else could he think? There were either these terrible fragments of events which transcended the imagination—the war and the revolution—or else the distant dream of happiness safely locked away in his heart. Dasha! He began to think of her—actually he never ceased to think of her—of how unprotected she was, how lonely, how inexperienced, how helpless, how prone to take her fantasies for realities. Of her eyes that were angry, and of her heart that was like a bird's: fluttering, timid and impulsive. Oh, she was a child, a mere child. . . .

Tears ran down from under Telegin's closed eyelids—his wound had weakened him. A cricket began to chirp right under his ear. The starlight threw a silver sheen over the bloody, trampled battlefield. The night covered everything. Telegin sat up, and clasped his hands round his knees. It was all like a dream, as if he were a child again. His heart was full of pity. He got up and began to walk, cautiously, so as not to jolt his head and start the pain again.

Korenovskaya was about three-quarters of a mile away. He could see the gleam of fires there; and nearer, by a little copse, a smokeless tongue of flame leapt and danced. He was hungry and thirsty, and he turned towards the fire. Dark figures were converging on it from every part of the battlefield—some slightly wounded, some stragglers from scattered units, some bringing in prisoners. They called out to each other, swore hoarsely, and laughed without mirth. Many men were lying round the fire, which had been built up with railway sleepers.

Ivan Ilyich smelt new bread, and saw that all those dust-covered men were munching. A cart was standing near the fire; on it there was bread, and a little barrel from which a haggard woman with a white kerchief on her head was serving out water.

Telegin drank his fill; then he was given a hunk of bread. He ate it, leaning against the cart and looking up at the stars. The men round the fire seemed to have quieted down, and many of them were asleep. But those who were only just coming in from the field were still boiling with rage. They cursed and growled threats in the dark, although no one paid any attention to them. The nurse kept serving out mugs of water and hunks of bread.

One man, black-bearded and naked to the waist, brought in a prisoner and flung him down on the ground close to the fire.

"Here he is, the son of a bitch, the parasite! Question him, lads!"

He kicked the prostrate figure on the ground and stepped back, pulling up his trousers. His sunken chest was heaving with emotion. Telegin recognized

Chertogonov and turned away. Several men bent over the prisoner lying on the ground:

"He's a volunteer. . . ." They tore off his shoulder-straps and threw them in the fire.

"He's only a boy, but a spiteful little viper!"

"Went out to fight for his dad's money. You can see he's rich all right."

"Look at the bastard, how his eyes flash!"

"Why look at him? Let me get at him!"

"No, he may have papers on him—take him to headquarters."

"Yes, take him along."

"No!" shouted Chertogonov. "He was lying wounded, I came along—for his boots, see—and he shot at me twice. I won't let him go." He shouted fiercely at the prisoner. "Take off those boots!"

Telegin looked again towards the fire. The prisoner's round, close-cropped, youthful head was gleaming in the firelight; he was showing his teeth in a snarl which wrinkled up his nose, and the pupils of his large eyes were shifting rapidly from face to face. He seemed to have completely lost his head. Suddenly he jumped up. His left arm hung limply in its torn, bloody sleeve. A low hiss came from between his teeth as he thrust his chin forward. Chertogonov stepped back, so terrible was this living picture of hate. . . .

"Oh-ho!" a husky voice said in the crowd. "I know the fellow—I worked for his father in the tobacco factory—it's Onoli, the son of the Rostov tobacco manufacturer."

"Yes, we know *him*!" several voices muttered.

Valerian Onoli lowered his head and looked round: then he shouted in a shrill, yet hoarse voice:

"You scum, you muck, you red rabble! What you need is the knout! You dogs, have too few of you been whipped and hanged? You want more? We'll hang the lot of you by the yards you filthy swine——!"

And beside himself with rage he seized Chertogonov by the beard and kicked him in the naked belly with his heavy boots.

Telegin turned away quickly. There was an ominous hum of voices, then a sharp cry cut into their rising anger. Valerian Onoli's sprawling, kicking figure appeared above the heads of the crowd, flew into the air and fell. . . . A pillar of sparks rose high above the fire. . . .

In the coolness that heralds dawn in the steppe, a few stray shots cracked like whips and the thunder of guns rolled solemnly. Drozdovski's and Borovski's columns were again attacking from beyond the brook Kirpeli, making a last desperate effort to turn the tide of battle in their favour.

The same night Sorokin received a telegram from Yekaterinodar, from the Central Executive Committee, now in permanent session, appointing him to be Commander-in-Chief of all Red forces in the Northern Caucasus.

The news of this was brought to Sorokin by Belyakov, his chief of staff, who came running with the tape of the telegram straight to Sorokin's coach, pushed the Commander-in-Chief's legs off the seat and read the telegram to him by the light of a petrol cigarette-lighter. Sorokin stared at him with eyes still glazed with sleep and turned over on the hot pillow. Belyakov began to shake him by the shoulder:

"Here, wake up, Your Excellency, Comrade Commander-in-Chief! You are master of the Caucasus now, understand! You are king and god here, understand!"

Suddenly Sorokin grasped the whole tremendous significance of the news,

his whole marvellous good luck printed there in dots and dashes on that narrow strip of paper curling around Belyakov's fingers. He quickly pulled up his breeches, put on his Circassian coat, buckled on his holster and sabre:

"Issue an order of the day to the army immediately—and get me a horse."

In the dawn, Telegin, freshly bandaged, made his way between the carts in search of his regiment. From the direction of the railway station a group of mounted men dashed along the road, their bashlyk flying out behind them. First came a trumpeter, and behind him Sorokin on a long-maned horse, and a Cossack carrying a lance with the pennon of the commander-in-chief. They flashed past like ghosts and vanished in a cloud of flying dust. From the dew-soaked carts men raised sleepy heads and tousled beards. Voices grunted hoarsely. From far away in the steppe came the trumpet call, telling the men that the Commander-in-Chief was there, close to them, in battle, under fire. "We shall beat them, ta-ta-ta," sang the trumpet. "Forward to victory and glory . . . heroes never die, their fame is eternal, ta-ta-ta."

Telegin found Gymza in a mud hut with broken windows. No one else was there from the regimental staff. Gymza was sitting hunched up on the bench, huge and glowering; his hand, holding a wooden spoon, hung down between his knees. On the table stood a pot of cabbage soup, and beside it the brief-case stuffed full of papers which constituted the entire machinery of the chief of the intelligence department.

Gymza seemed to be half asleep. He did not move, only turned his eyes towards Telegin.

"Wounded?"

"Just a scratch. I've been lying half the night in the wheat. I lost my men in the confusion. Where is the regiment?"

"Sit down," said Gymza. "Want something to eat?"

He raised his hand with an effort and gave Telegin the spoon. Telegin greedily attacked the pot of tepid soup. He ate in silence for a little while. Then he said:

"Our fellows fought well yesterday, Comrade Gymza. There was no need to urge them forward—they rushed to charge with the bayonet from three hundred, even four hundred yards."

"You've had enough," Gymza said. Telegin stopped eating. "Have you heard the order of the day?"

"No."

"Sorokin has been made Supreme Commander-in-Chief. See the point?"

"No. What's wrong with it? Did you see him yesterday? He dropped his reins and dashed into the thick of it—his purple shirt was everywhere. The men cheer whenever they catch sight of him. I don't know what would have happened yesterday but for him. He surprised us yesterday: he was a very Cæsar."

"That's just it," Gymza said. "Cæsar. Pity I can't shoot him."

Telegin put down the spoon.

"Are you joking?"

"No. This isn't a joke. You don't understand these things anyway." He gave Telegin a fixed, unblinking stare. "How about you? Will you betray us?" Telegin calmly returned the stare. "Well, here it is: I want to give you a difficult job, Comrade Telegin. I thought you would be the most suitable. You must go to the Volga . . ."

"All right."

"I will give you all the documents you need. And a letter to the Chief of the War Council. If you don't get through and deliver it, you had better desert to the Whites—don't show your face here again. Understand?"

"All right."

"Don't be caught alive. Hold the letter dearer than your life. If you do get caught by their counter-espionage, do your best, swallow the letter or something. Understand?" Gymza moved and thumped his fist on the table so that the soup-pot jumped. "I want you to know what is in the letter: I'm going to say that the army trusts Sorokin; he is a hero to them now, and they would follow him anywhere. Yet I demand that Sorokin be shot, now, immediately, before he can betray the revolution. Keep the words well in mind, Telegin—they may be the death of you. Understand?"

Gymza stopped. Telegin answered:

"All right. I'll do it."

"Well then, go, brother. I don't know what route . . . perhaps by way of Astrakhan—no, that's too far. Better go up the Don and make for Tsaritsyn. You might discover, by the way, what is going on in the White rear. . . . Take a pair of officers' shoulder-straps—what kind do you fancy, a captain's or a lieutenant-colonel's?"

He laughed, patted Telegin on the knee as one caresses a child, and said:

"Have a little nap while I write the letter."

CHAPTER X

VADIM PETROVICH ROSHCHIN had at last been given three weeks' leave. Ill, his nerves shattered, and torn by doubt, he was at that time one of the White garrison occupying the station of Velikoknyazheskaya. There was no serious fighting; the Red forces had been withdrawn farther south to fight the main body of Denikin's army. Occasional risings flared up here and there in the Cossack villages on the Manych and Sala, but punitive detachments of General Krasnov's Cossacks soon brought mutinous spirits to submission, sometimes by means of persuasion, sometimes by means of the knout and the gallows.

Roshchin, pretexting his injuries, took no part in these operations, and kept away from the drinking bouts with which his brother officers celebrated Denikin's victory. Strangely enough, here in the garrison, as he had been in the field, Roshchin was treated with distrust, if not with open hostility. Someone, somewhere, had set on foot a story that he was "wearing red drawers under his trousers", and the story stuck to him.

In the trenches near Shablievka, Onoli had tried to murder him. Roshchin well remembered the moment, the wail of the shell from the armoured train, the captain's shout: "Lie down!" the explosion and the belated revolver shot, the dull blow in the back of his head, and Onoli's dark eyes glittering with fierce delight.

There was only one man who would have taken Roshchin's word for this story, and that was General Markov. But General Markov was dead, and Roshchin decided not to make a charge against Onoli that would be difficult to prove.

He kept trying to think why Onoli hated him to such an extent. Was it

not obvious that Roshchin was sincere, had no axe of his own to grind, and that his actions were guided only by the desire to restore Russia's greatness? Surely no one could think that he had come to these terrible steppes in order to win a general's epaulettes?

Roshchin lacked the mercilessly clear vision required by the situation. His mind transformed world and events and made them into what he himself considered good or important. He averted his eyes from whatever did not fit in and he frowned if it persisted in intruding. The world seemed to him a system complete in itself. The origin of this attitude was in all probability due to his having been born a gentleman, descendant of a long line of comfortable landowners. This now extinct breed of men had considered that being comfortable was the greatest of all blessings. They had their peasants flogged in the stable, and—what of it? The muzhik would howl a bit and then be sorry for what he had done wrong; it was all for the best and the muzhik himself would be the happier once he had seen the errors of his ways. Bills went to protest and the estate to auction—what of it? Why not live in a cottage among the thistles and gooseberry bushes, without noisy amusements?—it might even be better, quieter in one's old age. No buffets of Fate could disconcert such a comfortable squire; the breed developed a special soft-focus vision, seeing only the best and noblest side of everything.

This lack of sharpness in judging men and their actions was characteristic of Vadim Petrovich. True, the events of the last few years had left him romantic ideas rather the worse for wear—perhaps it would be more accurate to say that only rags and tatters of them remained and that he was now forced to avert his eyes all the time. That was why he preferred to stay away from the officers' mess, for instance.

For, according to Roshchin's ideas, these men, this handful of officers and cadets, should have worn the white mantle of the Crusader: had they not drawn the sword against the mutinous rabble, against black-hearted ringleaders who were the servants of antichrist or of the Germans, he did not know exactly which. Such was the general trend of thought which had brought Roshchin to the Don.

But all that could be heard at the drinking bouts in the officers' mess was a noisy swashbuckling accompanied by the tinkling of glasses, and loud boasts of fratricidal acts of savagery. The young faces of these crusaders, faces not so long ago delicate and refined, were now distorted with the impatient desire to kill, to punish, to take revenge. As they stood, raising their glasses which contained ninety-five per cent of pure alcohol, they were singing the dirge of that man, that most insignificant of men, who had been shot and burned and whose ashes had been scattered to all the winds—and yet, if all the blood spilt by his feeble will could have been collected, the people could easily have drowned him in it, so deep a lake would it have formed.

It seemed—and this made Roshchin avert his eyes—that this dirge was the only idea left in the heads of his regimental comrades. All they thought of was to clear the Bolsheviks out of Russia, reach Moscow, listen to the pealing of the bells . . . Denikin to ride into the Kremlin on a white horse. . . . Yes, yes; all that was easy to understand. . . . But what was to come after that?—that was the main question. . . . It was, for instance, regarded as a breach of good manners so much as to mention a Constituent Assembly to these officers. So was all that remained this dirge sung for a dead man?

What then was driving these men to fight and to die? Roshchin averted his eyes. It no longer seemed heroic to him to expose oneself to the bullets

and then drink raw spirits in a cattle-truck. That was old stuff and cowards did it just as well as brave men. They had all got used to conquering the fear of death; life had become cheap.

Heroism was to give oneself up for the sake of faith and truth. But here was another occasion for the averting of eyes. What sort of truth did Roshchin's messmates have faith in? The great tragic history of Russia? But that was only reality, not truth. Truth lay in movement, in life—not in the dog-eared pages of dusty tomes, but in the wide flow of the future.

What was this truth (unless one counted as such the peals of the Moscow bells, Denikin's white horse, the flowers in the rifle barrels and the like) for the sake of which he was to kill Russian muzhiks? This problem gave Vadim Petrovich no peace—it quivered and drew circles in his mind, like a reflection on water into which a stone had been thrown. So the painful process of disintegration began. He was a stranger among his comrades-in-arms, he had "red drawers under his white trousers," he was "practically a Bolshevik".

More and more frequently he recalled his last conversation with Katia and his ears tingled with shame. He remembered how she had wrung her hands and breathed hard in her agitation—as if she had seen a precipice opening at Vadim Petrovich's feet! She had said then: "You must do something quite different. Oh, Vadim, Vadim!"

He found it difficult as yet to admit even to himself that Katia had been right, that he was getting hopelessly entangled, that he understood less and less the source of the strength of the 'mutinous rabble', a strength growing with nightmare rapidity; that the frivolous explanation that the people had been deceived by the Bolsheviks was utter nonsense because it was still a moot point whether the Bolsheviks had conjured up the revolution or the people the Bolsheviks; and that he could now no longer blame anyone except himself.

Katia had been right in everything. She had brought with her from the old life into these troubled times only one defence, one treasure—her love and her compassion. He remembered her plodding along the streets of Rostov with him, a little kerchief on her head, a little bundle in her hand, the gentle companion of his life. Dear, dear Katia! If he could only lay his head on her lap, press her dear hands to his face and say to her: "Katia, I cannot bear it any longer!" and nothing else. But a stupid pride held him back. When his tall figure appeared in the dusty village street, in the ranks or in the officers' mess, bolt upright, as if laced in an iron corselet, with his grey head proudly thrown back, the other officers said: "Look at the fellow, puts on side like a Life-Guardsman, the infantry scum!"

He had sent Katia two short letters, but no answer had come. He decided to write to Lieutenant-Colonel Tetkin, but then his leave had come through and Vadim Petrovich immediately left for Rostov.

He reached Rostov at noon, and took a droshky at the station. The city was changed beyond all recognition. The streets were swept clean, the trees were cut back, and well-dressed women, all in white, mirrored in the shop-windows, were walking on the shady side of the street.

Roshchin kept looking round, searching for Katia. What the devil was this? The women here were like figures from some forgotten dream—wearing hats with old-fashioned feathers, panamas, or white scarves. Their little white feet tripped over the pavement that had been washed clean by sullen doormen; and there was not a single spot of blood on those white stockings. So it was for this that Velikoknyazheskaya had to be held at all cost. It was for this that Denikin had been fighting against the Red bands for four long weeks. Here it

was, the simple truth of the war on the side of the Whites. Roshchin laughed bitterly. German sentries stood at the street corners in their sickeningly familiar grey-green uniforms, in their neat caps—they were at home here! He saw a German officer drop his monocle and bend to kiss the hand of a tall, beautiful woman in a white dress.

"Driver, faster, please!"

Lieutenant-Colonel Tetkin was standing at the door of his house. Roshchin drove up, and jumped out of the droshky. He saw Tetkin shrink back with bulging eyes, and raise his plump hand, as if in self-defence.

"Good morning, Lieutenant-Colonel! Don't you know me? I'm . . . oh, for God's sake, where is Katia? Is she in? Is she well? Why didn't she . . ."

"Good God! You're alive!" Tetkin shouted in a high-pitched voice. "My dear Vadim Petrovich!" He sprang forward, and put his arms round Roshchin; his cheek was wet with tears.

"What has happened? Tell me—everything!"

"I was sure that you were still alive! But poor Yekaterina Dmitrievna, it broke her heart!" Tetkin began to tell Roshchin a confused story about Katia; how she had been to see Onoli, and how Onoli, for some reason best known to himself, had assured her that Roshchin had been killed. He told Roshchin how Katia had grieved and how she had gone away.

"I see. And where did she go?" Roshchin said firmly, without raising his eyes from the ground.

Tetkin shrugged his shoulders; his good-natured face expressed a burning but impotent desire to be helpful.

"I remember that she said she was going to Yekaterinoslav—I think she wanted to get a job there in a cake shop or something—she was in such despair, she thought of a cake shop—I expected her to write—but no, not a word—as if the earth had swallowed her."

Roshchin declined the invitation to go in and have a cup of tea, and immediately returned to the station. The train for Yekaterinoslav was not due until the evening. He went into the first-class waiting-room and sat down on a hard oak seat. He covered his eyes with his hand and remained there, sitting motionless for several hours.

A man came and sat down beside him with a loud sigh of relief, obviously expecting to stay there a long time. Many people had come, sat down and gone away again, but this man began to jerk his legs so that it shook the whole seat. He did not go away, and kept jerking his legs. Without taking his hand from his eyes Roshchin said:

"Look here, couldn't you stop that fidgeting?"

The other man answered apologetically:

"I beg your pardon. It is a very bad habit." And after that he sat quite still.

The man's voice startled Roshchin, it was terribly familiar, linked with some pleasant memory of the distant past. Without taking his hand from his eyes, Roshchin squinted through his fingers at his neighbour. It was Telegin. His legs, in dirty boots, were stretched out in front of him. His hands were clasped over his stomach, and he seemed to be dozing, with his head resting on the high back of the bench. He was dressed in a close-fitting tunic, much too tight under the arms, with a lieutenant-colonel's rather new shoulder-straps. His lean, clean-shaven, bronzed face wore the rigid smile of a very weary man resting after tremendously fatiguing efforts.

Next to Katia, Telegin was the human being who had been nearest to Roshchin; he had been like a brother, his closest friend. The charm of the two sisters—Katia and Dasha—was associated with him in Roshchin's mind. He almost shouted with joy, almost fell on Telegin's neck. But Telegin did not open his eyes, did not move. An instant passed. Roshchin understood. He was facing an enemy. He had known for some months that Telegin was in the Red Army, that he had joined it of his own free will and that his standing there was good. He was wearing a uniform that was obviously not his—perhaps even taken from an officer he had himself killed—and displaying the shoulder-badges of a lieutenant-colonel, though he had never been more than a captain in the old army. Roshchin suddenly felt the clinging nausea which usually ended in a burst of furious hate. Telegin could be here only as a Bolshevik spy.

It was his duty to go immediately and report his presence to the authorities. Two months earlier Roshchin would not have hesitated an instant. But now he seemed rooted to the seat—he hadn't the strength to move. The nausea left him. Ivan Ilyich Telegin, a Red officer, was sitting here beside him, the same as ever, tired out and good-natured, just as he always used to be. He had not joined the Red Army for money or for personal advantage—what nonsense to think that! He was a quiet, sensible fellow, and if he had joined the Reds he had done it because he thought it his duty. "Just as I thought it my duty to join the Whites. Am I to betray him, Dasha's husband, my brother and Katia's, when I know that if I did, his dead body would be sprawling on some rubbish heap within the hour?"

A lump rose in Roshchin's throat. He shivered with horror. What was he to do? Get up and go away? But Telegin might recognize him, might lose his presence of mind, might call out to him. How could he save Telegin?

They continued to sit side by side on the oak seat, motionless as if asleep. The station was growing empty at that late hour. An attendant shut the doors leading to the platform. Then Telegin said, without opening his eyes:

"Thank you, Vadim."

Roshchin's hand began to tremble violently. Telegin got up and walked calmly towards the platform, without turning round. A minute later Roshchin ran after him. He walked round the open space in front of the station where dark-skinned vendors dozed by their bundles of smoked fish under a blazing sun that melted the asphalt of the pavement. The leaves on the trees were burnt by the heat and the air was full of the hot parched dust of cities.

"All I want is to shake him by the hand," Roshchin said to himself. Fiery rings of heat floated past his eyes. But Telegin had vanished as if the earth had swallowed him.

At the hour when the red light of the steppe sunset was fading and Roshchin climbed up into his berth and fell into a heavy sleep, lulled by the sound of the rattling wheels—at that very hour the woman for whom he was searching, the woman for whom his soul, sick with bloodshed and hate, was yearning—Katia, his wife—was being driven in a cart across the steppe. She was wrapped in a shawl and Matryona Krassilnikov was sitting by her side. The iron-bound wheels of the cart rattled and the horses snorted as they trotted along. They were in a long line of carts moving across the steppe through the darkness of the starry night.

Alexey Krassilnikov was on the box; the reins hung loosely in his hands.

Semyon was sitting beside him, his legs over the side of the cart, grass and clover lashing against his boots. The air smelt of horses and wormwood. Katia was thinking, half asleep. A faint wind was cooling her shoulders. The steppe was boundless, the roads were endless. Through the centuries horses had trotted and wheels had creaked here, and now once more they were moving across the steppe like the shades of the ancient nomads. Happiness, happiness—the end of the steppe, an azure sea, caressing waves, peace and plenty.

Matryona looked at Katia's face and laughed. Then once again there was only the beat of hoofs. The army was escaping from threatened encirclement. *Batko* Makhno had said that there was to be no noise. Alexey Krassilnikov's burly shoulders relaxed—he seemed to be dozing. Semyon said in a low voice:

"I am not deserting you. Why keep on with your 'Oh, Semyon, Semyon!'?" Matryona gave a short sigh and turned away, looking into the steppe. "I told Alexey long ago, in the spring it was, I said: 'It's not the sailors' ribbon I care about, it's the job that's got to be done!' " Alexey said nothing. "Whose is the fleet now? It's ours. What's to happen to it if we all run away? Aren't we all fighting for the same thing, you here and we there?"

"And what was it they wrote you?" Matryona asked.

"They wrote that I must come back to the destroyer, or else I'd be treated as a deserter, outlawed by the revolution."

Matryona shrugged her shoulders. She was furious, but she controlled herself and made no reply. After a while Alexey straightened up, listened, and then pointed into the darkness with his whip.

"That's the Yekaterinoslav express."

Katia looked but could not see the train which was carrying Vadim Petrovich, asleep on the upper berth of one of its compartments, away from her. She only heard a long, distant whistle, and her heart echoed it with piercing sadness.

Arrived in Yekaterinoslav Roshchin went straight from the station to make the round of all the cake-shops, asking for Katia everywhere. He went into stuffy cafés, where flies buzzed against the dirty windows and crawled on the cheese-cloth covering the cakes; he read calico signs such as 'Versailles', 'Eldorado', 'Cosy Nook', over the doors of doubtful restaurants, and looked into the bulging, bloodshot eyes of dark-skinned, whiskered innkeepers who looked as if they were ready at a moment's notice—if required—to make a *shashlyk* out of any meat that might come their way. Roshchin inquired of these as well. Then he began to ask in every shop, in turn.

The sun shone mercilessly down. Crowds of all sorts of people thronged the avenue of splendid maples along the Ekaterininski Prospekt. Dilapidated little tramcars rattled past, ringing their bells. Before the war the town had been developing into a new capital of the southern Ukraine. The war had checked its growth. And now, under the rule of the Hetman and the tutelage of the Germans, the town had come to life again—but it was a different kind of life. Instead of banks, offices and warehouses, there were gambling saloons, money-changing shops and soda fountains; the hum of business and the traffic of commerce had given place to the hysterical bustle of speculators in foreign currency.

With unshaven cheeks and caps pushed far back on their heads, these money-changers infested the street-corners and cafés, and their shouts mingled with the cries of the incomprehensibly great number of boot-blacks and sellers of boot-polish, the unpleasantly insistent begging of dangerous-looking tramps, the

wailing of orchestras in 'Cosy Nooks' and the senseless jostling of the idle crowds that lived by buying and selling counterfeit money and non-existent goods.

In despair after his fruitless search, Roshchin, dazed and exhausted, sat down on a bench under an acacia. The crowd swept endlessly past: women both well dressed and strange, women in dresses made of curtains, women in Ukrainian national costume, women with mascaraed eyes moist with heat and rivulets of sweat running down their painted cheeks; excited black-marketeers elbowing their way madly through this crowd of women; the Hetman's henchmen with the trident badge on their caps; fatuous, insolent officials busy with plans of financial manœuvres and devising new ways of stealing government funds; huge, broad-shouldered, thick-necked Hetman guards and whiskered policemen wearing huge fur caps with purple tops, sky-blue coats and vastly wide baggy Ukrainian trousers—that national costume around which the dreams of separatist schoolmasters and Galician romantics had centred for two hundred years. Here and there the sacrosanct person of a German officer was seen in the crowd, looking over the sea of heads with a contemptuous smile.

Roshchin took it all in and his heart swelled with anger. "Soak them all in paraffin and burn all this muck. . . ." He drank a glass of mineral water in a kiosk and continued his house-to-house search, although he was already beginning to understand the uselessness of such a quest. Katia, alone, without money or experience, timid and weighed down by her sorrow—terror gripped him as he recalled again and again the little bottle of poison in Katia's Moscow flat—Katia might be here in this half-crazy crowd! She might be exposed to the touch of the dirty hands of these speculators, procurers, shady café-keepers, to the gloating glances of infamous eyes. . . .

He felt suffocated, and elbowed his way through the crowd, taking no notice of the protests and curses. In the evening he took a room in a hotel at an enormous price—it was a dark hole with nothing in it but an iron bedstead with a thin mattress. He pulled off his boots, lay down, and burying his grey head in his hands, wept silently, without tears.

Having crossed the Don frontier on foot, Telegin put away his shoulder-badges in his kit-bag, travelled to Tsaritsyn by train and there boarded an enormous river-boat crammed from top deck to bottom hold with peasants, soldiers, deserters and refugees. In Saratov he presented his documents to the revolutionary committee, and continued his journey on a tug towards Syzran and the Czechoslovak front.

The Volga was as empty as in those legendary times when the horsemen of Genghis Khan rode down to its sandy banks to water their horses in the great River Ra. The broad, mirror-like stream flowed slowly past the edges of sandy cliffs, flooded meadows, and patches of bushy willows. The few villages seemed deserted. To the east the level steppe extended through rolling waves of heat that ended in a mirage. The reflections of the clouds swam slowly past. Only the fussy splashing of the paddle-wheels broke the silence as they drove through the azure water.

Telegin lay on the hot deck under the bridge; he was barefoot, and his cotton tunic was open; his cheeks were covered with golden stubble. Like a cat lying in the sun he was enjoying the quiet, the damp scent of swamp flowers from low-lying banks, the dry smell of the steppe grass and the endless expanse of light. He rested as he had never rested before.

The boat was carrying arms and ammunition for the partisans of the steppe district. The Red Army men escorting the cargo were drowsy with the fresh air; some of them were sleeping, others, having slept their fill, were singing songs or just looking at the water. Their commander, Comrade Khvedin, a Black Sea sailor, tried several times a day to rouse his men to greater class-consciousness, while they sat or lay around him, cupping their cheeks in their hands.

"Get this, my lads," he said in his husky voice. "It isn't General Denikin we are fighting, nor yet General Krassnov, nor yet the Czechoslovaks—we are fighting the whole bloody bourgeoisie of both hemispheres. We've got to hit this world bourgeoisie hard, before they can really get all their forces together. . . . We R-r-russians (he pronounced this word with special emphasis) have the sympathy of our blood brothers, the workers of all lands. They are expecting us to finish off our own parasites and then go and help them in their class struggle. That is simple enough to understand, brothers. There is no bolder soldier than the Russian soldier in this world—only the Black Sea sailors are, maybe, a bit bolder—so we have every chance of winning. That clear? It's all plain sailing. To-day the fighting is at Samara, but in a short while there will be battles on all continents." . . .

The men listened, never taking their eyes off Khvedin. Then one of them said quietly:

"Aye! We've started something! Something world-wide!"

The hills of Khvalinsk came into sight on the left. Comrade Khvedin looked through his field-glasses. The sleepy little town of Khvalinsk lay behind a thicket of trees. Here they were to stop for re-fuelling.

The captain, a grey-headed little man, was standing beside the man at the wheel. Shifting sandbanks divided the river here into three channels, and the course was tricky. Khvedin said to the captain:

"There's not a soul to be seen in the town. What can it mean?"

"We must re-fuel, whatever it means," the captain said.

"Well, if you must, you must, and there's no more to be said."

The boat passed so close to one of the islands that the poplar branches nearly touched the guard of her paddle-wheel; then she blew her hooter and began to turn. At that moment voices shouted desperately from the bushes on the island:

"Stop! Stop! Where are you going?"

Khvedin reached for his revolver. The crew drew back from the railings. The water boiled under the paddle-wheels.

"Stop! Hi, stop!" the voices shouted. The bushes rustled and men came running down to the bank—men with red, excited faces who waved their arms and pointed to the town. The noise was so great that the men on the boat could not catch a word. Khvedin finally gave it up and swore like a true sailor, but it soon grew clear what the excitement was about. Puffs of smoke appeared near the landing stage, and shots cracked all along the river. Khvalinsk had been taken by the Whites. The men on the island were the surviving remnants of the garrison, and local partisans. Some of them were armed, but they had no ammunition.

The men of the escort ran down to their quarters to fetch their rifles. Khvedin himself took over from the captain and swore at the whole vast expanse of water in language which immediately reassured the men on the island; broad grins appeared on their faces. Khvedin wanted to run the boat in and attack the town without delay, sending ashore a landing party to settle accounts with

the enemy. But Telegin stopped him. He explained that no attack should be made without preparation, that it was absolutely necessary to support any direct attack with a flanking movement, and that Khvedin did not know the enemy's strength—they might have guns.

Khvedin ground his teeth, but agreed. The boat backed downstream under enemy fire, and came up again on the western side of the island; on this side the town was hidden by trees. Here they made fast. The men from the island rushed out to the sandy bank—about fifty men, ragged and unkempt.

"Listen, you devils, to what we have to tell you!" they shouted.

"Zakharkin is coming to help us with his Pugachev partisans."

"We sent a messenger to him day before yesterday."

Then they told the story. Three days ago the local bourgeoisie had caught the Red forces napping, and had seized the Soviet buildings, the telegraph station and the post office by a sudden armed attack. The officers pinned on their shoulder-straps, overran the arsenal and took out the machine-guns. Schoolboys, shopboys and officials armed themselves; even the deacon from the cathedral chased about with a shot-gun. Nobody had been expecting anything of the sort, and it was all over before they could get their rifles.

"Our commanders all ran away—they sold us!"

"We ran about like sheep."

Khvedin only said in reply to all this: "You . . . you . . . you landlubbers!"

A general council of war was held on the bank, all the soldiers participating. Telegin was elected secretary of the meeting. The first question to be decided was whether they should take Khvalinsk away from the *burzhuys* or not. They decided that Khvalinsk should be taken. The second question was whether they should wait for the Pugachev partisans or whether they should take the town on their own. This point was hotly debated. Some thought they ought to wait, for the Pugachev partisans had a gun; others shouted that there was no time to be lost—White boats might come down from Samara any minute. Khvedin was bored by the discussion. He raised his hand:

"You've jawed long enough, comrades. The unanimous decision is that Khvalinsk must be ours by to-night. Put it in the minutes, Comrade Telegin."

Meanwhile mounted men had appeared on the top of a cliff over on the left bank. First there were only two, then four. Catching sight of the boat, they galloped away. Suddenly the whole bank was crowded with mounted men; their broad pikes, home-made out of scythes, flashed in the sun. The Khvalinsk men hailed them: "Hi, whose men might you be?"

The men from the other side replied:

"We are Zakharkin's group. Of the Pugachev peasant army."

Khvedin took the megaphone and roared so that his neck swelled with the effort:

"Brothers, we have brought you weapons, come along to the island—we're going to take Khvalinsk."

From the other side came the shout: "All right. We've got a gun—bring the boat over here."

The horsemen on the bank were a detachment of the peasant partisan army fighting in the steppes of Samara province against the villages which had accepted the rule of the provisional government set up in the city of Samara.

The army came into being soon after the Czechoslovaks occupied Samara. The town of Pugachevsk, formerly Nikolayevsk, formed its recruiting centre. Hither came all hotheads. all who liked to ride hard. all who had been done

out of their poor holding by the notorious land-buyer Sekhobalov, all who had difficulty in holding on to their land coveted by rich Ural Cossacks, all who, born in the freedom of the boundless steppe, felt their souls brim over.

The enemy was everywhere, like a mirage of the plains. At the village meetings well-to-do peasants, non-commissioned officers of the Tsarist army and propagandists from Samara disguised as peasants shouted their protest against a law which permitted poor men, day-labourers, landless tramps to run the parish and take the land from the rich peasants, the bread out of their mouths. Such meetings would send messengers to the neighbouring villages, calling on them to take arms. Whole parishes, whole boroughs rose, brought out their weapons from secret hiding-places, ploughed a furrow all round their boundaries and dug trenches dozens of miles long.

Some places proclaimed themselves republics affiliated to the government in Samara. The defence of the territory was entrusted to cavalry formations—the infantry was called upon to fight only in the event of a Red attack. The cavalry were armed with scythes bound lengthwise to shafts. Such kulak armies were formidable enough. They appeared suddenly out of the steppe haze and rushed the Red lines and machine-guns in a cloud of dust. Those who fought here were all kin: brother fought against brother, father against son, neighbour against neighbour—and this meant that they fought without fear and without mercy. If the cavalry routed a Red unit they armed themselves with rifles and machine-guns but still kept their scythes.

No annals, no military archives preserve the memory of this great peasant war fought in the steppes of Samara, which still remember the campaigns of Yemelyan Pugachev. All that happens is that, on the eve perhaps of some great holiday, father and son sitting at their wine recall the old battles, taxing each other with strategic mistakes.

"Remember, Yashka," the father might say, "how you started smashing us up with your guns at Koldybany? That must be my Yashka, I thought to myself, none other, that son-of-a-bitch. . . . Comes of not pulling his ears hard enough while the pulling was good. But we gave you a good scare that time. . . . Good job I didn't get my hands on you then."

"Bragging again! We won, didn't we?"

"Never mind—the time may come when we take different sides again."

"That's as may be. . . . You've always been a kulak and a kulak you'll always remain."

"Let's have a drink, son!"

"Here's how, dad!"

The boat approached the left bank. A plank was thrown out, and Zakharkin, the leader of the partisans, came on board. He had a hooked nose like a bird of prey, and was so strong and massive that the planks creaked loudly as he trod on them. His faded tunic was split under the arm-pits; a curved sabre banged against his high boots. His elder brothers, peasants of the Utebsk district, were already divisional commanders in the Red Army.

Six men, his junior officers, followed him on board. They were dressed in strange and picturesque outfits: in faded shirts stained with mud and tar and unbuttoned at the neck: felt boots with spurs, or bast sandals—but all were festooned with machine-gun belts, hand-grenades, flat German bayonets and sawn-off shot-guns.

Zakharkin and Khvedin met on the bridge and gripped each other's hand.

Then they offered each other cigarettes, and Khvedin briefly explained the military situation. Zakharkin said:

"I know who is making all the trouble in Khvalinsk; it's Kukushkin, the president of the Zemstvo administration. I'd like to take the swine alive."

"About that gun," Khvedin said. "What is it like? Does it work?"

"It shoots all right over open sights; there's no aiming device, we aim along the barrel. But on the other hand, if it hits it hits properly—steeples and waterworks tumble before you have time to say 'oh!' "

"Good. Now about a landing-party and a flanking movement. What do you think, Comrade Zakharkin?"

"We'll put the cavalry over on the other bank. Can the boat carry a hundred or so mounted men?"

"Easily. In two lots."

"That is all settled then. The moment it gets light we'll put over a mounted landing-party upstream from the town. The gun we'll bring aboard. Attack at sunrise."

Khvedin appointed Telegin to command a landing-party of snipers who were to go ashore for a frontal attack near the docks. At dusk the boat cautiously crept along the island in the far arm of the Volga. No lights were shown. In the silence the only sound to be heard was the low call of the sailor taking soundings.

The partisans followed the boat's course along the bank. The Khvalinsk men were given rifles, and lay down in the sand. Telegin walked up and down along the water's edge, making sure that no one smoked or showed a light. The river rippled almost inaudibly over the sand. There was a smell of swamp flowers. The mosquitoes droned. The men on the sand were very quiet.

The night grew darker, more velvety black. The sky was covered with stars. From the bank came the dry smell of steppe-grass, and the drowsy cry of quails. Telegin kept himself awake by pacing up and down along the water's edge.

Now the dawn was breaking. The sky had lost its velvety blackness, and the cocks were beginning to crow in the distance beyond the river. Telegin could hear paddles splashing softly in the water, over which a light mist was rising. The steamer came closer. Telegin made sure that his revolver was loaded, tightened his belt and passed along the row of sleepers, touching their feet with his stick:

"Wake up, comrades."

The men started up. Shivering, they scrambled to their feet, too dazed to remember at once what they were there for. Many went to have a drink, putting their heads down to the water. Telegin gave orders in a low voice. The men silently took off their shirts, filled them with sand and laid them down in rows along the rail. They all worked without a word—no one felt like cracking jokes.

It was growing light. The preparations were completed. The small gun—it was a rusty mountain gun—was brought into position in the bows. Fifty men went aboard and lay down behind the sandbags. Khvedin stood on the rail:

"Full steam ahead!"

The water boiled under the paddle-wheels. The steamer rapidly turned the point of the island into the main channel and took a straight course towards the town. Lights in the town were few and far between. Beyond the town the dim outlines of the hills were still covered with night. The crowing of the cocks was more audible now.

Telegin was standing beside the gun. He could not believe that within

the next minute they would have to fire into this eternal serenity. One of the men from Khvalinsk, summoned to lay the gun, a gentle little fellow who might have been a fisherman or a sexton, said in an ingratiating tone:

"Dear Comrade Commander, hadn't we better aim at the post office, bang into it? See, where the two little lights are shining yellow?"

"Target: the post office!" Khvedin's voice shouted into the megaphone. "Ready there! Gunners! Open sights!"

The gunner crouched down, and, looking along the barrel, trained the gun on the lights. Then he pushed in the shell and turned to Telegin:

"Dear comrade, move back a little, this contraption may burst, you know."

"Fire!" barked Khvedin.

The gun flashed and recoiled; its thunder rolled over the water and echoed in the hills. Near the place where the yellow lights shone there was the flare of an explosion and a second echo rumbled back from the hills.

"Fire! Fire!" Khvedin shouted. "Rapid fire from the port side! Volleys! Give the scoundrels volleys!"

He stamped and raged round the deck, swearing with supernatural profanity. A ragged volley rang out from the port side. The Khvalinsk shore was coming rapidly nearer. The gunner loaded carefully and fired a second time. They could see the splinters fly from some shed on shore. By now they could clearly discern the outlines of wooden houses, gardens and spires.

Down below, on the landing-stages, spurts of rifle fire darted out and a machine-gun began to chatter rapidly with a precise beat. This was what Telegin had been afraid of. He crouched down beside the gun and pointed out to the gunner a long building half-way up on the hill:

"Try and hit that corner, where the bushes are."

"H'm," said the gunner. "It's a nice little house, let's have a go."

The gun fired a third time. The machine-gun was silenced for a minute, then it began to rattle again from another spot higher up. The boat turned sharply and stopped alongside the landing-stage. A hail of bullets struck it, but high up, on the funnels and masts.

"Don't wait until we make fast, jump ashore!" Khvedin shouted. "Hurrah, boys!"

The planks of the landing-stage creaked and groaned. Telegin was the first to jump ashore; he turned back towards the Khvalinsk men clambering over the rail.

"Follow me!"

He ran up the steps to the bank. The men shouted and ran after him. They ran along, firing and stumbling. The shore was deserted. Shadowy figures seemed to vanish into the garden bushes. Here and there shots were fired from the roofs. The machine-gun was rattling intermittently from a great distance; it stopped for a time, and then fired twice more. The enemy was not going to make a stand.

Telegin found himself on an uneven open space. Panting, he looked round and called to his men. The soles of his bare feet were aching, he had cut them on the stony ground. The air smelt of dust. The wooden houses stood with their shutters tightly closed. Even the leaves of the lilacs and acacias were motionless. On the balcony of a house on the corner, a two-storey villa with a little tower, four pairs of drawers were hanging on a line. "Those will be pinched before long," Telegin thought. The town seemed to be fast asleep, and the battle, the fuss, the noise might have been only a dream.

Telegin asked where the post office, the telegraph station and the water-works were and sent ten men to each. The men were still on the alert; they started and brought their rifles up at every rustle. But no opponent was to be found. The thrushes were already beginning to sing and the pigeons to take off from the roofs.

Telegin occupied the headquarters of the Soviet with his own squad. It was a stone building with battered columns; the doors were wide open and weapons lay scattered about the entrance hall. Telegin went out to the balcony. Below him lay flowering gardens, roofs badly in need of repair, dusty, empty, narrow streets, and the quiet of small provincial towns. Suddenly the tocsin sounded in the distance: the alarmed, hurried, deep clang of bells filled the whole town. From the same direction as the bronze call for help came the sound of rapid firing, the explosions of hand-grenades, shouts, the heavy thud of horses' hoofs and the cry of horses in pain. The contingent landed by Zakharkin was barring the way of the retreating enemy. Mounted men galloped through the streets with a clatter. Then silence reigned again.

Telegin sauntered down to the boat and reported that the town was taken. Khvedin heard him out and said:

"Soviet power is re-established. Our work is finished here. We are going on." He gave the old captain, who was more dead than alive with fright, a friendly pat on the back:

"Well, so you've lived to smell powder, brother. Take over command. I am resigning."

Telegin slept until evening to the thud of the engines and the swish of the water. The sunset spread out over the river in an opalescent misty glow. On the poop the men were singing softly, and their voices drifted away into the vast, deserted distance. The vain beauty of the sunset lay over the banks and the river, and welled into their eyes and their hearts.

"Hey, brothers, why so sad? If you're going to sing, sing something cheerful!" Khvedin shouted. He also had slept his fill, drank a glass of spirits and was now walking up and down the deck, pulling up his trousers.

"What about taking Syzran after this? What do you think, Comrade Telegin? That would be something to crow about."

He chuckled, showing his white teeth. What did he care about danger, the melancholy of sunsets on the Volga, the deadly bullet waiting for him somewhere in battle or in an ambush? He was overflowing with vitality and strength. The deck creaked under his bare heels:

"Wait a little and we'll take Syzran and Samara too, the whole Volga will be ours. . . ."

The red of the sunset was fading into grey. The boat was running without lights. Night came down over the banks of the river and dissolved them into a blur. Not knowing what to do with himself now, Khvedin suggested a game of cards to Telegin.

"If you don't want to play for money, let's play for noses. But no favours, see?"

They sat down to play in the captain's cabin. Khvedin was quite carried away by the game. He played wildly and collected some three hundred 'noses', and almost revoked through excess of zeal, but Telegin was watching him, said: "No, brother, that won't do!" and won the game. Shifting to a comfortable position on his stool, Telegin started to administer the 'noses' with the greasy pack of cards. Soon Khvedin's nose was as red as a beet.

"Where did you learn this?" he asked.

"When I was a prisoner in German hands," Telegin answered. "Don't turn your beak away. That makes two hundred and ninety-seven. . . ."

"Look here, you . . . get on with it, don't take your time . . . or else."

"The rule is that the last three . . ."

"All right, hit me, you devil . . ."

But Telegin did not get his last three noses in after all. The captain came in, cap in hand, his teeth chattering, beads of sweat standing out on his bald head.

"If you please, gentlemen, comrades," he said forlornly, "I am ready for anything. But I am not taking the boat any farther. It's running into certain death."

Khvedin and Telegin threw down the cards and went on deck. The electric lights of Syzran gleamed like stars on the port bow. An enormous motor-ship, brilliantly lighted from stem to stern, was slowly moving along the bank; the huge St. Andrew's cross at the stern, the imposing outlines of guns and the figures of officers walking the deck, could be seen with the naked eye.

"I can't turn back, comrades. We must get through whatever happens," Khvedin whispered. "We must slip through to Batraki, where we can stop and unload."

He ordered the whole crew to get down into the hold and stand by for a fight. Then the tricolour flag was hoisted to the masthead. Regulation lights were lit. The motor-ship caught sight of the tug at last, and with short whistles ordered it to slow down. A deep voice shouted from it through a megaphone:

"What ship is that?"

"We are the tug *Kupets Kalashnikov*, bound for Samara," Khvedin answered.

"Why did you light up so late?"

"We were afraid of meeting Bolsheviks." Khvedin took the megaphone from his mouth and said to Telegin under his breath: "If we only had a mine! I wrote to Astrakhan several times asking them to send us some mines. The dawdling fools!"

After a short silence the motor-ship replied:

"You may proceed!"

The captain put on his cap again with a trembling hand. Khvedin grinned, screwed up his eyes and looked at the lights of the motor-ship for a while. Then he spat and went back to the cabin. He sat silently, smoking cigarette after cigarette, breaking match after match, lost in thought.

An hour later they had left Syzran behind them. Near Batraki Telegin landed in a dinghy. At Batraki he took the twelve o'clock train and at five in the afternoon was walking from the railway station in Samara towards Doctor Bulavin's flat. He was again wearing the crumpled, torn canvas tunic with the shoulder-straps of a lieutenant-colonel. Tapping his boot with a stick—the same stick that he had used to rouse the partisans at Khvalinsk—he read with lively curiosity the theatre advertisements, manifestos and announcements on the walls: it was something he had not seen for a long time—they were all written in two languages, in Russian, with the old orthography, and in Czech. . . .

Dmitri Stepanovich Bulavin stood up, raised his glass full of lemonade, pursed his lips in order to appear more dignified, and in a deep solemn voice, specially acquired recently as an appendage of his post as junior minister, began his speech with the words:

"Gentlemen, may I, too, be permitted . . ."

The dinner was being given to the members of the city council in celebration of the victorious advance towards the north of the army of the Constituent Assembly. Simbirsk and Kazan had been taken. The Bolsheviks had, it seemed, irretrievably lost the middle Volga. Near Melekes the remnants of the Red cavalry, about three thousand five hundred sabres in all, were fighting desperately to break out of the encircling ring drawn round them. The Czechs had taken Kazan by storm and had seized some four hundred tons of gold there, more than half of the total gold reserves of the empire. This fact was so improbable, so stupendous, that all its incalculable consequences were as yet not fully realized.

This gold was now on its way to Samara. No one had as yet definitely taken it into possession, but the Czechs appeared disposed to hand it over to the Samara Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly. The merchants of Samara had their own ideas regarding the destinies of this gold, but for the present refrained from expressing any opinion. At all events, the feelings of friendship towards the victorious Czechs were very deep indeed.

The dinner was very well attended and everyone was in an excellent humour. All the ladies of Samara society were there, among them such stars of the first magnitude as Arzhanova, Kurlina and Shekhobalova, owners of huge flour mills, grain elevators, steamship companies and whole provinces of best black-earth estates. The ladies, glittering with diamonds the size of cobnuts, wearing frocks which even if slightly outdated had certainly been imported in their time from Paris and Vienna—all this bright parquet of ladies was gathered around the hero of the day, Captain Chechek, commander of the Czech troops. Like all heroes, he was divinely simple and accessible. True, his rather stout body seemed the worse for the heat; the tight collar of his well-cut tunic cut into his purple neck, but his youthful, full-blooded face with the clipped reddish moustache and the bright eyes was certainly made to be kissed on both pink cheeks. An enchanting smile never left his face—he seemed to be renouncing all claims to fame, as if the society of ladies were a thousand times more agreeable than the thunder of victories and the taking of provincial capitals complete with railway trains full of gold.

Opposite Captain Chechek sat a stout middle-aged military man with white aiguillettes. His egg-shaped skull, massive as befitted a pillar of the State, was quite innocent of hair. The most striking feature in his fat shaven face was a row of huge teeth which never ceased chewing. From under knitted brows he kept a sharp look-out for the *hors-d'œuvres variés*, and the small liqueur-glasses seemed lost in his huge paw, obviously more used to tumblers for his strong drinks. He drank in short gulps, throwing back his head for each gulp. His shrewd blue eyes, small like a bear's, moved incessantly from face to face, as if he were very much on his guard here. Several military men addressed him with marked attention. This was a new arrival, the hero of the Ural Cossacks, General Dutov, Ataman of Orenburg.

Not far from him sat M. Jeannot, the French Ambassador, flanked by two charming ladies, one blonde and one dark. The Ambassador was wearing a light grey lounge suit and dazzling white linen. His tiny, sharp-nosed, luxuriously bewhiskered face was much the worse for wear. He chattered throatily, turning alternately towards the half-naked charms of the dark lady (who slapped his hand with her fan for it) and the pearly-pink shoulders of the blonde, who laughed as if the Frenchman were tickling her. Both ladies understood French only if spoken very slowly. It was obvious that their feminine

charms had turned the poor Frenchman's head, but this did not prevent him in the least from addressing himself from time to time to Mr. Brykin, an important flour-mill owner who had just arrived from Omsk, or from raising his glass to toast the brilliant military achievements of Ataman Dutov. The great interest shown by M. Jeannot for the flour of Siberia and the meat and butter of Orenburg was proof of his ardent devotion to the White cause; whenever the government experienced difficulties with the food supplies, the French Ambassador could always be relied on to produce a hundred or so railway trucks of flour and other foodstuffs. . . . True, there were sceptics here and there who suggested that it might be desirable to follow the custom of all decent governments and ask M. Jeannot to present his ambassadorial credentials, but the government preferred the more tactful approach of trusting an ally even without credentials.

There was another remarkable foreign guest present at the dinner—a certain Signor Piccolomini, dark, quick-eyed and asserting that Piccolomini was his real name. He represented—not without a certain vagueness—the Italian nation and the Italian people. His short, dark blue uniform coat was decorated with much gold braid; a pair of enormous epaulettes—a general's at least—dangled from his shoulders. His business in Samara was to form a special Italian battalion. The government shrugged their shoulders: where on earth would Signor Piccolomini find any Italians in Samara? The devil knew, he might at that—but he had money, and the Italians were allies after all. In bourgeois circles little importance was attached to him.

No members of the government had come to the dinner with the exception of the two who had no party affiliations: Dr. Bulavin and the deputy chief of the counter-espionage department, Semyon Semyonovich Govyadin, who had risen high in the official hierarchy. Gone were the days of mutual brotherlove and triumph, the halcyon days when the Bolsheviks were overthrown. The government of the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly—all hard-boiled Socialist-Revolutionaries—talked such unspeakable nonsense about the achievements of the revolution, that only the Czechs still believed them, and those only because they understood nothing at all of Russian affairs. Of course a Socialist-Revolutionary government had been perfectly all right, even excellent, at first, when the change-over was being made and the workers and peasants had to be kept quiet. The business men of Samara themselves were not above proclaiming Socialist-Revolutionary slogans in those days. But now the Volga was cleared of the Reds from Khvalinsk to Kazan, Denikin had conquered practically the whole of the northern Caucasus, Krassnov was approaching Tsaritsyn, Dutov had cleaned up the Urals, and in Siberia a new masterful White leader was emerging almost every day—and yet these tousle-headed ragamuffins, all these Volskis and Brushvits and Klimushkins and the rest were still sitting in the splendid palace of the Samara Marshal of Nobility, were still troubling the waters, and if they went on like this they might get that Constituent Assembly of theirs going after all. Damn! And the big business men began quite unmistakably to put forward other, simpler, stronger, more comprehensible slogans. . . .

Dmitri Stepanovich was addressing himself chiefly to the foreigners present:

"The poison fangs of the snake have been drawn. This phenomenal, epocn-making fact has been insufficiently appreciated. . . . I am speaking of the six hundred million roubles in gold now in our hands. (Monsieur Jeannot's whiskers stood on end when he heard this. He shouted "Bravo!" and raised his glass; Signor Piccolomini's eyes lit up with a truly diabolic fire.)

The golden fang of the Bolsheviks has been drawn, gentlemen. They can still bite, but their bite is no longer deadly. They may threaten, but their threats are not more terrifying than those of a lame beggar shaking his crutch. They have no gold any more—nothing but a printing press."

At these words Brykin, the flour-miller from Omsk, suddenly opened his mouth wide, burst into a loud guffaw, wiped his neck with his table-napkin and muttered: "Oh, what a funny business, gentlemen."

"I now address myself to the foreign representatives," Dr. Bulavin went on and his voice took on a stern ring not heard in it before, "to our Allies. . . Friendship is one thing, but money is another. . . . Up to yesterday we were almost a comic opera troupe in your eyes—a sort of temporary phenomenon, rather like a swelling that inevitably follows a blow. . . . (Chechek frowned, M. Jeannot and Signor Piccolomini made deprecatory gestures . . . Dr. Bulavin laughed sarcastically.) To-day the whole world is well aware that we are a solidly established government, guardians of State gold reserves. Now we can come to an understanding with the gentlemen representing the foreign powers. (He rapped the table angrily with his bony knuckles.) At present I am speaking as a private individual among other private individuals, in a setting of intimacy. But I do not lose sight of the serious nature of the problems raised by me just now. . . . I foresee the coming of ships with arms and manufactured goods to our Russian ports. I see gigantic white armies in the making. I see the sword of terrible retribution falling on the necks of the robber band now ravaging Russia. Six hundred millions will do it! And I say to the representatives of the foreign powers, that assistance, the widest, most generous assistance must now be given to the lawful representatives of the Russian people!"

He touched his lips to his glass and sat down, lowering his eyes and sniffing to hide his emotion. The company around the table applauded loudly. Brykin, the flour-miller, shouted: "Thank you, brother. . . . You've said it! That's the stuff—and no socialism!"

Then Chechek got up and jerked his belt tighter on his stomach. "I will make it short," he said. "We have given, and will continue to give, our lives for the happiness of our Russian blood-brothers. Long live a great and mighty Russia. Hurrah!"

At this the whole table literally shook with applause. The hands of the ladies, stretched out among the flowers, clapped furiously. Monsieur Jeannot was the next to rise. He threw back his head with dignity and his ample whiskers gave him a distinctly martial air:

"*Mesdames et messieurs!* We all knew that the noble Russian army was not forgetful of the glory of its fathers but had been cunningly deceived by a gang of Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks instilled unnatural ideas and superstitious instincts into the army, until it ceased to be an army. *Mesdames et messieurs,* I cannot deny that there have been times when French confidence in the sincerity of the Russian people was shaken. But this nightmare is now over. To-day we see that the Russian people is with us again. The army has already seen the errors of its ways. The Russian giant is again prepared to expose his breast to the bullets of our common foe. . . . I am supremely happy in this new confidence. . . ."

When the applause died down, Signor Piccolomini jumped up, shaking his epaulettes. But as no one among those present knew any Italian, they just believed him that he was 'for', and Brykin even tried to kiss the swarthy little man.

Followed the speeches of the representatives of big business. They expressed themselves in cloudy and stilted phrases and mostly hinted that Siberia was the place from where liberation would have to come. Finally they asked Ataman Dutov to say a few words. But he was coy: "Leave me alone, I'm a soldier, not an orator." Then he got up, after all, and in profound silence began: "Well, gentlemen, if the Allies help us, so much the better. If they don't, we'll still manage to get rid of the Bolsheviks on our own. . . . The only thing we need is money. . . . All we ask is to give us the funds, gentlemen . . ."

"Take it all, Ataman, take everything we've got and welcome," yelled Brykin, completely overcome with enthusiasm.

The dinner had been a great success. After the official part, foreign brandy and liqueurs were served with the black coffee. It was quite late when Dr. Bulavin took French leave and disappeared.

When he arrived at his house in his car and opened the front door, an officer quickly came up to him.

"Excuse me, are you Dr. Bulavin?"

Dmitri Stepanovich looked searchingly at the stranger. It was dark in the street, and all he could distinguish were the shoulder-straps of a lieutenant-colonel. The doctor mumbled:

"Yes, my name is Bulavin."

"I have something very, very important to say to you. I quite understand —the late hour—but I've been here several times—three times, in fact."

"To-morrow at the Ministry, after eleven o'clock . . ."

"I entreat you—to-night—I must leave by the night boat."

Dr. Bulavin paused. This stranger was very insistent and rather alarming. Finally he shrugged his shoulders:

"I must warn you that if you require financial assistance, that does not concern my department . . ."

"Oh, no, I don't want any assistance."

"Hm. Well, then, come in."

Dr. Bulavin led the way from the hall to his study, and immediately closed the door leading to the inner rooms. There was a light there; some member of the household was evidently still awake. The doctor sat down at his writing-table, waved his visitor to a chair opposite, glanced gloomily at the heap of documents waiting for his signature, and clasped his hands:

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

The officer pressed his cap to his chest and said softly, in a voice heart-rending in its tenderness:

"Where is Dasha?"

The doctor drew back his head so violently that it knocked against the back of his chair. For the first time he now looked into his visitor's face. Two years ago Dasha had sent him a snapshot of herself with her husband. This was Telegin. The doctor suddenly grew pale, and the bags under his eyes began to twitch. He asked hoarsely:

"Dasha?"

"Yes. I am Telegin."

He, too, grew pale as he looked into the doctor's eyes. Regaining control of himself, Dr. Bulavin, instead of doing the natural thing and welcoming his son-in-law, whom he was now meeting for the first time in his life, made a theatrical gesture and asked with an indefinite sound resembling a chuckle:

"So you are Telegin. Well, how are you?"

He did not even shake hands with Telegin—perhaps he was too surprised.

He put his pince-nez (not the old ones in the nickel frame with the cracked glass, but a new solid golden pair) on his nose and hurriedly began to pull out the drawers of his writing-table, which were crammed with papers.

Telegin was at a loss, and watched the doctor's search in astonishment. A minute ago he was quite prepared to tell him all about himself, as he would have told his own father. But now he thought: "Who knows?—he may guess—or I may be putting him in a difficult position: after all, he's a Minister." He lowered his head and said very softly:

"Dmitri Stepanovich, I have not seen Dasha for over six months, and my letters don't reach her. I don't know in the least what has become of her."

"She's alive. She's alive and well!" Dr. Bulavin bent down to get at the lower drawers.

"I am serving in the Volunteer army and have been fighting the Bolsheviks since March. . . . Now I am on my way north, on a secret mission."

Dr. Bulavin listened to him with a curious expression on his face, and suddenly, when he heard the word secret, a sneer showed under his moustache:

"Oh, yes? And what may your regiment be?"

"The Privates." Telegin felt the blood rise to his cheeks.

"Oh, yes? So there is such a regiment in the Volunteer Army? And how long are we to have the pleasure?"

"I must leave to-night."

"Very good. And where are you going? Oh, I beg your pardon, I shan't insist, that is a military secret of course. . . . In other words, it's on secret service business?"

There was such a strange note in Dr. Bulavin's voice that Telegin was startled and put on his guard despite his agitation. But the doctor had at last found what he had been searching for.

"Your wife is in good health. Here, read it—I got it last week. It concerns you too." Dr. Bulavin threw Telegin a few sheets of paper covered with Dasha's large handwriting. Those irregular, precious lines! They made Telegin's head swim. "Excuse me, I must go outside a minute. Sit down and make yourself comfortable."

The doctor went out in a hurry and closed the door. The last thing Telegin heard was his answer to a question put by some member of the household:

"Oh, nothing, just an applicant. . . ."

From the dining-room Dr. Bulavin went out into the dark little corridor where a telephone of ancient construction was attached to the wall. With his face to the wall he turned the handle of the telephone, asked under his breath for the number of the counter-espionage department, and put in a personal call for Semyon Semyonovich Govyadin.

Dasha's letter was written in copying pencil and the letters grew larger and larger and the lines more and more crooked page after page.

Papa, I don't know what will become of me. Everything is in such confusion. You are the only human being to whom I can write. I am in Kazan. It appears that I can leave here to-morrow, but I don't know whether I shall get through to you. I should like to see you. You will understand everything. I shall do what you advise me to do. It is by a miracle that I am still alive. I don't know, maybe it would have been better not to remain alive after all. All the things they told me, all the things they impressed on me were lies, foul, shameless villainy. Even Nikanor Yurevich Kulichok . . . I trusted him, I went to Moscow at his request. (I'll tell you all the details when I meet you.) Even he said this to me yesterday,

word for word: "People are being shot, shoved underground in batches, a rifle bullet is the price of a man, the world is drowning in blood and you still expect all sorts of frills. Others wouldn't stop to talk so much but just take you to bed!" But I resist them, Papa, believe me.

I can't just be a sort of refreshment a man takes after a drink of vodka. If I give up this last thing left to me, it would be the end—I might as well hang myself. I am trying to make myself useful. In Yaroslavl I worked as a nurse three days, under fire. At night I just fell into bed, my hands and dress still covered with blood, I was so tired. But one night I woke up—there was somebody pulling my skirt over my head. I jumped up and cried out. It was a boy, a young officer —I shall never forget his face. He was quite beside himself, like a beast, he said not a word, just pushed me and twisted my arm. Blackguard! Papa, I drew his revolver and fired at him—I don't understand how I did it. I think he fell—I didn't see it and can't remember. I ran out into the street. There was a red glare, the whole town was on fire, and shells bursting everywhere. I nearly went mad that night. Then I decided I would run away. I want you to understand me and to help. I want to leave Russia. I have a possibility. But you must help me to get rid of Kulichok. He is always after me; that is, he drags me about with him everywhere and every night he brings up the same old story. But even if he kills me, I won't. . . .

Telegin paused; drew a deep breath and slowly turned the page:

By chance I came into possession of some valuables of great price. Near the Nikitski gate a man was run over by a tram before my eyes. I know that I was the cause of his death. When I came to myself there was a little crocodile-leather case in my hand: somebody must have put it in my hand when I was helped up from the ground. I didn't open the case until next day: it was full of diamonds and pearls. That man had stolen them somewhere. He was coming to meet me. You understand? He had stolen them for me. Papa, I am not going to try and find out the rights of it. I have kept the things. These jewels are my only hope of salvation now. Even if you said that that makes me a thief, I should still keep them. After having seen so much of death, I want to live. I no longer believe that man is the image of God. These fine fellows with splendid words on their lips about saving their country—they are scoundrels and beasts. Oh, what sights I have seen! May they be accursed! This is what happened. Nikanor Yurevich Kulichok came to me late one night, unexpectedly. He came straight from Petersburg. He told me that I must leave Moscow with him. It turned out that their organization, the "League for the Defence of the Fatherland and of Liberty", had been discovered by the Cheka and that all the members in Moscow were being arrested. Savinkov and the whole of the central organization had fled to the Volga, and there, in Rybinsk, in Yaroslavl and Murom they were to organize a rising. They were in a great hurry about it because the French Ambassador would not give them any more money until they showed the strength of their organization in practice. They were hoping that all the peasants would take sides with them. Nikanor Yurevich assured me that the days of the Bolsheviks were numbered—the rising would spread to the whole North and the northern reaches of the Volga and would join hands with the Czechoslovaks. Kulichok said that my name had been found in the lists of the organization and that it was dangerous to stay in Moscow, so we went away to Yaroslavl together. There everything was already prepared: in the army, in the militia, in the arsenal —everywhere the chiefs were people from their organization. We arrived in the

evening and at dawn I was awakened by the sound of shots. I ran to the window. The window opened on to a yard; on the opposite side was the brick wall of a garage, a rubbish-heap and a few dogs barking at the door. There was no more shooting and everything was quiet; all I heard was the rattle and hooting of motor-cycles in the distance. Later, all the bells were rung in the whole town, in every church. In our yard the gate was opened and a group of officers came in, all with their rank badges on already. They were all terribly excited and flourished their weapons. They were escorting a huge, heavy, clean-shaven man in a grey jacket. He had no cap and no collar and his waistcoat was unbuttoned. His face was red and angry. They hit him in the back so that his head jerked, and he was dreadfully angry. Two stayed behind with him near the garage, holding him, and the others drew aside and discussed something. Then a man came out of the back entrance of our house; it was Colonel Perkhurov, the commander of all the armed forces of the rising. This was the first time I had seen him. The officers all saluted. Perkhurov looked very determined; dark eyes, a lean face, very straight and stiff, gloved hands, cane. . . . I immediately understood that this meant death for the man in the grey jacket. Perkhurov looked at him from under his eyebrows and I saw that he snarled at him. The other man went on cursing, threatening and demanding something. Perkhurov jerked his chin at him, gave an order and immediately went away. The two who had been holding the big man jumped away from him. He tore off his jacket, rolled it up and threw it at the officers standing in front of him, and hit one of them in the face with it. He grew quite purple in the face with cursing them. He shook his fists and stood there in his unbuttoned waistcoat, huge and furious. Then they fired at him. He shook all over, stretched out his hands in front of him, took a step forward and fell. The officers went on shooting at him as he lay there. The big man was Nachimson, the Bolshevik commissar. Papa, I had seen an execution! I shall never forget to my dying day how he clutched at the empty air. . . . Nikanor Yurevich assured me that it was a good thing; if they had not shot him, he would have shot them.

I can't remember very well what happened after that; everything that happened was a continuation of this execution, everything was full of the convulsions of that huge human body that did not want to die. I was told to go to a long yellow building with a portico and there I wrote orders and manifestos on the typewriter. Motor-cycles dashed about, raising clouds of dust. Excited people rushed in, got into a temper, and gave orders—there was an outcry about every little thing, they were either over-optimistic or in a panic all the time. The hubbub stopped only when Perkhurov came in with his stony face and his merciless eyes and said a few curt words.

The next day we could hear the thunder of guns in the town. The Bolsheviks were coming. There had been crowds both day and night in our office, but now everything was deserted. The town seemed dead. Only Perkhurov's car dashed about hooting, and armed detachments marched past. People expected aeroplanes with Frenchmen to come, expected troops from the north, boats with ammunition from Rybinsk. But none of these things happened. The town was surrounded by a ring of battle. Shells burst in the streets. Towers fell, houses collapsed, fires started everywhere and there was nobody to put them out, the sun was darkened by the smoke. Not even the dead were cleared away from the street. It turned out that Savinkov had started a similar rising in Rybinsk, where the artillery stores were kept, but the soldiers suppressed the rising; the peasants around Yaroslavl had not the slightest intention of coming to the rescue and the Yaroslavl workers refused to man the trenches and fight against the Bolsheviks. The most

terrible of it all was Perkhurov's face—I was constantly meeting him in those days. It was as if death itself were driving about in a motor-car among the ruins and everything that happened seemed only an incarnation of his will. For a few days Kulichok kept me in a cellar. But, papa, I felt that I was also to blame for it all. I should have gone mad in that cellar anyway. So I put on the head-dress with the red cross and worked as a nurse until that night when they tried to rape me.

The day before the fall of Yaroslavl, Nikanor Yurevich and I fled in a boat across the Volga. Then we walked a whole week, hiding from people by day and passing the nights in haystacks—we were lucky, the nights were warm. My shoes fell to pieces and my feet were all bloody. Nikanor Yurevich got me a pair of felt boots, probably he just stole them off a fence. One day, I can't remember which, we were crossing a birch wood when we caught sight of a man wearing a ragged peasant jacket, bark shoes and a shaggy fur cap. He was walking straight ahead very fast, scowling all the time and leaning on a staff. He looked like a madman. It was Perkhurov—he, too, had fled from Yaroslavl. He frightened me so much that I threw myself on my face in the grass. . . . Then we reached Kostroma and stayed in one of the suburbs with an official, a friend of Kulichok, until Kazan was taken by the Czechs.

Nikanor Yurevich looked after me all the time as if I were a child—I am grateful to him. But then it happened that in Kostroma he saw the precious stones, they were in a handkerchief in my handbag which he had been carrying for me all the time in the pocket of his coat. I had forgotten all about them. I had to tell him the whole story. I said that in my conscience I counted myself a criminal. He developed a whole system of philosophy about this; in the end, according to him, I was not a criminal but had drawn a winning ticket in the lottery of life. From that time onwards his attitude towards me changed and became most intricate. The fact that we lived quietly and cleanly in a provincial town, drank milk and ate gooseberries and raspberries, also had a certain influence. I felt much better. One day after sunset Kulichok began to talk to me about love in general and about my being made for love and then he began to kiss my hands and neck. I felt that he had not the slightest doubt that I would give myself to him in a minute on that bench under the acacia tree. After all that had happened, you understand, papa? In order not to explain everything I just said: "There can't be anything between us, I love Ivan Ilyich." And I was not lying, papa. . . .

Ivan Ilyich took out his handkerchief, wiped his face and eyes and went on reading.

I was not lying. I have not forgotten Ivan Ilyich. Things are not ended between him and me yet. You know, we parted in March, he went away to the Caucasus, to the Red Army. He has a very good standing there, he is a real Bolshevik, though not in the Party. We are out of touch now, but the past is a strong bond between us. I have not destroyed the past. But for Kulichok it was all so very simple: come, lie down. Ah, papa, what we used to call love was only self-preservation. We are afraid of being forgotten, being annihilated. That is why it is so terrible to meet the eyes of street-walkers at night. They are merely shadows of women. But I am alive, I want to be loved, to be remembered, I want to see myself mirrored in the eyes of a lover. I love life. If I felt like giving myself to a man just like that, on the spur of the moment, I would do so. But now I have only resentment, disgust and horror in me. Something has happened to me recently, to my face, to my figure. I am much better looking. And

I am as if I were naked now, I meet hungry eyes wherever I go. May beauty be accursed! Papa, I send you this letter in order that there should be no need to talk about it all when we meet. I am not broken yet, understand that.

Telegin raised his head. From beyond the door leading to the hall he heard the cautious footsteps of several men and a whispered conversation. The handle of the door began to turn. Telegin quickly jumped to his feet and glanced towards the window.

The windows of the doctor's flat were not very high above the ground and one of them was open. Telegin ran to it. On the asphalt lay a long human shadow, topped by another shadow, longer still—the shadow of a rifle.

All this happened in a fraction of a second. The handle of the door turned and two burly young men of the shop-boy type, in embroidered shirts and little peaked caps, came in, both at once, shoulder to shoulder. Govyadin's red beard and vegetarian mug hovered behind them. The first thing Telegin saw when they rushed into the room was three revolver barrels pointing straight at him.

In the next fraction of the second Telegin's experience as an old soldier told him that it was inexpedient to retreat before a strong and unbeaten opponent. Quickly transferring his revolver to his left hand, he tore from his belt the small hand grenade to which he had tied Gymza's letter; then he roared at the top of his voice, nearly bursting his vocal chords:

"Throw down your guns!"

This quite unequivocal order and Telegin's whole appearance were so terrifying that the two youths hesitated and drew back a little. The vegetarian mug dodged aside. Another second had been won. Telegin towered over them with the grenade raised high in his hand:

"Throw them down!"

Then something happened that none of them, least of all Telegin, could have expected. Immediately after his second shout a cry was heard from beyond the walnut door leading from the study to the other rooms; it was a woman's voice crying out in desperate anxiety. Then the walnut door opened and Telegin saw Dasha's horror-stricken eyes, her little fingers clutching the frame of the door, and her thin little face quivering with excitement.

"Ivan!"

Then the doctor came up behind her, caught her round the waist, drew her back and slammed the door. All this completely upset Telegin's offensive and defensive plans. He ran to the walnut door, set his shoulder against it with all his weight—something gave way, and he was in the dining-room, his deadly weapons still in his hands. Dasha was standing at the table, with her hands grasping the neck of her striped dressing-gown; her throat moved as if she was swallowing something. The doctor drew back—he looked embarrassed and terrified.

"Help! Govyadin!" he spluttered. Dasha quickly ran to the walnut door and turned the key.

"God, how awful!"

Ivan Ilyich mistook her meaning; he thought that it was indeed awful to rush in to Dasha with these things in his hands. He hastily stuffed the revolver and the hand grenade into his pockets. Dasha took him by the hand and said: "Come!" She pulled him along a dark corridor and from there into a narrow little room where a candle was burning on a chair. The room was bare except

for a nail from which Dasha's skirt hung suspended and an iron bedstead with crumpled sheets on it.

"Are you alone here?" Telegin asked in a whisper. "I have read your letter."

He looked round the room; his lips curving in a smile, were quivering. Dasha made no reply, but dragged him to the open window.

"Run! Run! Are you crazy?"

From the window he could see the vague outline of the yard, the shadows and roofs of the houses sloping to the river, and down below the lights of the landing-stage. A moist wind was blowing from the Volga laden with the sharp smell of rain. Dasha stood clinging to Telegin, her frightened face upturned, her mouth half open.

"Forgive me, forgive me, Ivan, run, get away quickly!" she murmured, looking into his eyes.

How could he tear himself away? The long cycle of their separation was closed. He had escaped a thousand deaths, and was now looking into the one face he loved. He bent down and kissed her. Her cold lips did not respond, but only trembled.

"I never was unfaithful to you. On my word of honour. We will meet again in better times—but now, run, run, I entreat you!"

Never, not even in those happy days in the Crimea, had he loved her so much. He held back his tears and looked into her face:

"Dasha, come with me! You understand—I shall wait for you on the other side of the river—to-morrow night."

She shook her head, and moaned in despair.

"No. I don't want to."

"You don't want to?"

"I can't."

"Very well," he said. "In that case I shall stay here." He moved over to the wall. Dasha moaned, and began to cry, then suddenly rushed at him furiously, seized his hand and again dragged him to the window. A wicket-gate creaked in the yard, and the sand crunched under cautious feet. In despair Dasha pressed her warm cheek to Telegin's hands.

"I read your letter," he said again. "I understood everything."

For one second she stopped trying to drag him to the window and put her arms round his neck, pressing her cheek to his.

"They are already in the yard. They will kill you, kill you!"

Her hair shone golden in the candlelight. To Telegin she looked a little girl, a mere child—just as he had seen her that night when he was lying wounded in the wheat with a clod of earth pressed tight in his fist, and had thought of her rebellious, restless, fragile heart.

"Why don't you want to come with me, Dasha? They are tormenting you here. You see what sort of people they are. Better any privations, but let us be together. My darling child! Whatever happens, you are with me in life and in death. While my heart is with me, so are you!"

He said this softly and hurriedly from his dark corner. Dasha threw back her head, still holding his hand, and tears welled up in her eyes.

"I will be faithful to you until death. Go now. Understand, I am not the woman you love. But I will be, I will be!"

He heard nothing more—her tears, her despairing voice, her words made him drunk with joy. He took her in his arms and pressed her tightly.

"All right. I understand everything. Good-bye!" he whispered. Then he bent over the window-sill, and in an instant slipped out of sight like a

shadow and there was only the faint thud of his boots on the wooden roof of the shed.

Dasha leant out of the window. She could see nothing but darkness and the yellow lights in the distance. She pressed both her hands to her breast, over her heart. There was not a sound outside. But then she saw two figures move forward from the shadows. They bent down and ran across the yard. Dasha screamed, and the scream was so piercing and horrible that the two figures stopped and turned round. They were looking at her window. And at that moment she saw Telegin climb over the ridge of a wooden roof down at the bottom of the yard.

Dasha threw herself on her bed with her face in the pillow and lay quite still. Then she jumped up impetuously, groped for one slipper that had fallen off, and rushed into the dining-room.

In the dining-room she found the doctor standing with a little nickel-plated revolver in his hand and Govyadin with an army revolver, both ready for battle. Both of them asked Dasha together: "Well? What happened?"

Dasha clenched her fist and looked furiously into Govyadin's reddish eyes:

"You scoundrel!" she said, shaking her clenched fist under his nose, "it won't be long before you're shot, you blackguard!"

Govyadin's long face twitched and grew even paler; his beard hung lifeless under his chin. The doctor tried to signal to him, but Govyadin was beside himself with rage and took no notice.

"Stop these little tricks, Daria Dmitrievna. I have not forgotten how you hit me once, with your shoe if I remember right. Take your fist away. And, in general, I must ask you to treat me with more respect."

"Semyon Semyonovich, you are losing time," the doctor interrupted, still making signs to him from behind Dasha's back.

"Don't worry, Dmitri Stepanovich. Telegin won't get away from us."

Dasha screamed and rushed at him.

"How dare you!"

Govyadin immediately took cover behind a chair.

"We'll see about that! I warn you, Daria Dmitrievna, that our security service is already very much interested in you personally. After to-night's incident I can guarantee nothing. We may have to trouble you."

"Come, come, Semyon Semyonovich, you are going too far," Dr. Bulavin said angrily. "This is too much!"

"It all depends on personal relationships, Dmitri Stepanovich. . . . You know my respect for you and my old liking for Daria Dmitrievna."

Dasha grew pale. Govyadin sneered; his face contorted as if reflected in a distorting mirror. He picked up his cap and walked out, holding himself bolt upright so as not to appear ridiculous from behind. The doctor sat down at the table and said:

"This Govyadin terrifies me."

Dasha was pacing up and down the room. Suddenly she stopped in front of her father:

"Where is my letter?"

The doctor was trying to open his silver cigarette-case, and hissed something in reply between his teeth; it took some time before he succeeded in extracting a cigarette; he did not light it but rolled it between his thick fingers, which were still trembling.

"In there—the devil knows where—in the study, on the carpet."

Dasha went out, came back with the letter, and again stopped in front of

Dr. Bulavin. He had struck a match at last, but the flame was dancing all round the end of the cigarette.

"I have only done my duty," he said, throwing the match on the floor. Dasha said nothing. "My dear, he is a Bolshevik, no, worse than that, a Bolshevik spy. Civil war is no joke, you know, and all of us must make sacrifices. That is why we have been given power, and the nation would never forgive us if we proved weak." As if lost in thought Dasha slowly began to tear up the letter into tiny pieces. "He came here, that's as clear as daylight, to find out what he wanted from me and then do for me at the very first opportunity. Did you see how he was armed? With a bomb. . . . In nineteen-six General Blok was blown to pieces by a bomb before my eyes. You should have seen what was left of him—just a torso and a bit of beard." The doctor's hands were trembling again; he threw away his stub and lit a fresh cigarette. "I never liked this Telegin of yours; you did quite right to break with him." Dasha said nothing even after this. "And he began with a most primitive ruse—just imagine, he wanted to know where you were."

"If Govyadin captures him . . ."

"There is not the slightest doubt about that; Govyadin has a very efficient personnel. Do you know, you are treating Govyadin rather too cavalierly. He's an important person. He is very well thought of by the Czechs and by the Staff. In such times we ought to sacrifice our personal preferences. For the good of our country—think of the classical examples. After all, you are my daughter. True, your head is full of fancies." He laughed and coughed. "But it is not a silly head."

"If Govyadin captures him," Dasha said hoarsely, "you will do everything you can to save Ivan Ilyich?"

Dr. Bulavin glanced hurriedly at his daughter and sniffed. She was crushing the torn pieces of the letter in her little fist.

"You will do this, papa!"

"No!" the doctor shouted, thumping the table with the flat of his hand. "No! What nonsense! In your own interest, no!"

"It will be hard for you, papa, but you will do it."

"You are a silly girl!" the doctor shouted. "Telegin is a scoundrel and a criminal, and will be shot by court martial."

Dasha raised her head and her grey eyes burned with such an intolerable fire that the doctor sniffed again and puckered his forehead. She raised her hand with the crumpled paper in it, in a threatening gesture.

"If all Bolsheviks are like Telegin," she said, "then the Bolsheviks are in the right."

"You fool! You fool!" The doctor jumped up, stamped his foot, grew crimson in the face and shook all over. "Your Bolsheviks, including Telegin, should all be hanged! One on each telegraph pole! They ought to be skinned alive!"

But Dasha's temper was quite a match for Dr. Bulavin's own. She grew very pale, walked up to her father and looked him straight in the face with those intolerably burning eyes:

"You unspeakable cur!" she said, "what are you raving about? You are no father of mine, you degraded, degenerate creature!"

And she flung the fragments of the letter full into his face.

That same night, in the small hours, the doctor was summoned to the telephone. A calm voice came through:

"Information has just been received that two dead bodies have been found behind the grain store near the aerodrome. The bodies are those of Govyadin, assistant chief of the security service, and of one of his agents. That is all."

The receiver was hung up at the other end. Doctor Bulavin opened his mouth, gasping for air. Then he collapsed by the telephone in a violent heart attack.

CHAPTER XI

HAVING ROUTED DROZDOVSKI's and Kazanovich's divisions, the best troops of the Volunteer Army, Sorokin changed his original plan of retreating beyond the Kuban river. Instead, he turned north near Korenevskaya and made an attack on Tikhoretskaya, where Denikin had his headquarters.

The merciless battle was in its tenth day. Encouraged by their first successes, the Bolsheviks swept away all obstacles that barred their way to Tikhoretsk. It seemed as if nothing could now stop their rapid progress. Denikin hurriedly concentrated his scattered forces. Feeling ran so high that every skirmish ended in hand-to-hand fighting.

But disintegration was progressing no less rapidly within Sorokin's army. Hostility between the Kuban and the Ukrainian regiments was growing fast. The Ukrainians and the old front-line soldiers razed the Kuban villages along the line of advance without stopping to ask whether they supported the Whites or the Reds.

The villagers dreaded the approach of Sorokin's hordes, heralded by clouds of dust rising on the edge of the steppe horizon. Denikin at least made some payment for supplies, but these Sorokin men stuck at nothing. So the young men mounted their horses and joined Denikin; while the old men, the women and children fled into the steppe and hid in ravines.

Whole villages rose against the Red Army. The Kuban regiments shouted: "We are sent to the slaughter, while strangers pillage our land. We won't stand it!" Belyakov, Sorokin's chief of staff, floundered helplessly in the whirlpool of events; hoping at best to keep his head unharmed on his shoulders. To the devil with strategy! The bayonet charge and the revolutionary fury behind it was all the tactics this army knew. The uncontrollable, instinctive movement of armed masses was a bad substitute for discipline. Sorokin, the Commander-in-Chief himself, was a terrifying sight; during these days he lived on spirits and cocaine. His eyes were inflamed, his face darkened, his voice hoarse. But still he drove the army on. Then the inevitable happened. Denikin's army had been defeated and was in retreat. But it was still held together by an iron discipline and still functioned as a machine directed by the will of a central leadership. Again and again it counter-attacked; it clung to every convenient ditch or hillock and coolly and skilfully sought out every weak spot in the enemy's line. At last, on the 25th of July, tenth and last day of the battle, the two armies stood face to face near Vyselki, about thirty miles from Tikhoretsk.

The position of Drozdovski's and Kazanovich's forces was even worse than it had been ten days earlier. The Reds had succeeded in breaking through to the White rear and the Volunteers were caught in a trap very like the trap in which the Bolsheviks had been caught some time ago at Byelaya Ghina. But Sorokin's army was no longer what it had been nine days before. The passionate tension had slackened off and the stubborn resistance of the enemy

evoked doubt, distrust and despair—when would the end come, the final victory that would give them rest?

Shortly after three o'clock the Reds attacked with a fierce thrust along the whole front. Guns thundered all round the horizon. The troops, tense, impatient, furious, charged in dense masses, not attempting to take cover.

It was the beginning of the end for Sorokin's army. The first wave of attackers was met with a withering fire and then wiped out in a hand-to-hand struggle. The following waves were thrown into disorder by the enemy fire and the sight of their own dead and wounded falling on every side. And then something happened—something no one could have foreseen or conceived or controlled; all the tension suddenly snapped, and there was no more strength, no more determination left.

But the dispassionate will of the enemy continued to deal well-aimed blows which increased the demoralization in the Red ranks. Markov's men and a cavalry unit from the north, Erdeli's cavalry from the south cut into the disorganized Red regiments. Armoured cars crept along, mowing down everything with their fire, and armoured trains of the Whites got up steam. Retreat turned into flight and flight into massacre. By four o'clock the steppe was swarming with Sorokin's retreating army; it had ceased to exist as an organized force.

Belyakin, the chief of staff, put Sorokin into a car by brute force. Sorokin's blood-shot eyes were swollen, there was froth at the corners of his mouth, and his blackened hand still grasped an empty revolver. The bullet-scarred, battered car rushed madly over a carpet of dead bodies and disappeared behind the hills.

The greater part of the defeated army retreated towards Yekaterinodar. This was likewise the goal of the western group of the Red forces, the so-called Taman army commanded by Kozhukh and retreating from the Taman peninsula. All along its route the villages were rising in arms and thousands of new settlers with their possessions and cattle were seeking refuge with the Taman army from the revenge of the Cossacks. The road was barred by White cavalry under General Pokrovski. Infuriated, the men of the Taman army routed and dispersed this force, but for all that is was now no longer possible to reach Yekaterinodar, and Kozhukh turned his army with its train of refugees sharply south into the deserted and impassable mountains, hoping thus to get through to Novorossisk, at that time occupied by the Black Sea fleet of the Reds.

Nothing could stop Denikin now. He cleared the way easily, threw all his forces against Yekaterinodar—held only by the broken remnants of the no longer existing North Caucasian army—and took the town by storm in one fierce assault. Thus ended the 'icy campaign', begun six months earlier by Kornilov and a handful of officers.

Yekaterinodar was made the capital of the White territory. The rich districts of the Black Sea coast were quickly cleared of all prowling rebels. The generals who only a short while before had been hunting lice in their shirts with their own hands, now remembered the traditions of a great empire.

The former rough-and-ready methods of warfare, when weapons and ammunition were won in battle or captured from enemy stores in raids, were naturally no longer suitable for the new ambitious plans. They required money, a constant flow of arms and munitions, the organization of an adequate supply service for a full-scale war and strong bases for an offensive into the very heart of Russia.

The purely domestic internecine struggle was at an end; and mighty forces now came into play from outside.

Denikin's first victories in June immediately confronted the German general staff with a peculiar and quite unexpected new danger. The Bolsheviks were an enemy bound hand and foot by the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. But Denikin, as an enemy, was an unknown quantity as yet. After the destruction of Sorokin's army, Denikin reached the Sea of Azov and Novorossisk, the port in which the entire Russian navy had been concentrated since the beginning of May.

The Germans had prepared no defences against any attack from the direction of the Black Sea. While the navy was in the hands of the Bolsheviks they had nothing to fear—any hostile action on the part of the navy would have brought the Germans across the Ukrainian frontier in strength. But fifteen destroyers and two battleships of the Dreadnought class in Denikin's hands seriously threatened to transform the Black Sea into a front of the World War.

On the ninth of June Germany presented the Soviet government with an ultimatum demanding that within nine days the entire Black Sea fleet be transferred from Novorossisk to Sevastopol, where a strong German garrison was stationed. In the event of a refusal, Germany threatened to attack Moscow.

At the same time the chief of staff of the Austrian forces of occupation in Odessa reported to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Vienna that Germany was pursuing very definite political and economic aims in the Ukraine and was intending to secure for all time a safe route to Mesopotamia and Arabia by way of Baku and Persia. He wrote:

The road to the East runs through Kiev, Yekaterinoslav and Sevastopol and thence by sea over Batum and Trebizond. To achieve her aims, Germany intends to turn the Crimea into a Germany colony in some form or other. Never again will she let the precious Crimean peninsula escape from her hands. Furthermore, she can make full use of this route only if she controls the railways, and as it would be impossible to supply the railways and her Black Sea shipping with coal from Germany, she would also have to obtain the greater part of the Donetz coalfield. Germany will secure all this by fair means or foul. . . .

When the German ultimatum reached Moscow on the ninth of June, Lenin —as usual without hesitation—found the answer to this difficult question which many regarded as insoluble. The decision was that it was impossible to fight the Germans now, but equally impossible to give them the fleet.

A representative of the Soviet government, Comrade Vakhrameyev, was sent from Moscow to Novorossisk. There, to a meeting of delegates from the Black Sea fleet and all naval commanders, he gave the only Bolshevik reply to the ultimatim: the Council of People's Commissars would send an order to the Black Sea fleet by open wireless, ordering it to proceed to Sevastopol and surrender to the Germans; but the Black Sea fleet was not to comply with this order, and was to scuttle itself in the Novorossisk roads.

The entire Soviet fleet—two battleships and fifteen destroyers, with several submarines and auxiliary ships, were in Novorossisk, having been immobilized by a clause in the treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

The delegates of the fleet came ashore and listened grimly to Vakhrameyev and his proposal of suicide for the fleet. But there was nothing else to do—the fleet had neither oil nor coal. Moscow was threatened by the Germans; Denikin was approaching from the east; the periscopes of German submarines were already drawing furrows of foam across the roads and German bombers

were droning in the blue expanse of the sky. The delegates debated long and passionately but found no other way out—the fleet would have to be scuttled. However, faced with this terrible task, the delegates decided to submit the fate of the fleet to the vote of its entire personnel.

Great meetings attended by thousands of seamen were held in Novorossisk harbour. The sailors looked at the steel-grey bulks of the giant battleships *Liberty* and *Free Russia*, at the fast destroyers covered with battle honours, at the intricate network of turrets and masts towering over the harbour, and found it difficult to understand and conceive that this formidable revolutionary force, this floating home of theirs, was to go down to the bottom of the sea without firing a single shot in its own defence.

It was not in the nature of the Black Sea sailors to accept self-destruction calmly. Many hard words were spoken, many singlets torn on tattooed chests, many beribboned caps trampled underfoot.

From morning to evening, when the sunset glow painted the waters of a no longer friendly, but now accursed sea a sinister purple, dense crowds of sailors, front-line soldiers and dockers surged along the waterfront.

The officers and captains of the ships took a different view of the matter: the majority of them were in secret more inclined to go to Sevastopol and surrender to the Germans; only a minority, headed by Lieutenant-Commander Kukel, commander of the destroyer *Kerch*, understood that the loss of the fleet was inevitable and that it had a tremendous significance for the future. They said: "We must commit suicide and so close the chronicle of the Black Sea fleet for a time without sullying its pages."

At the noisy, crowded meetings contradictory decisions were taken—if the ayes had it in the morning, the noes would prevail in the evening. The orators who got the most applause were those who bowed low to the audience and then said: "Comrades, what do we care about Moscow? Let them come and scuttle the ships if they like. But we won't abandon our fleet, not we! We will fight the Germans to the last shell!"

"Hurrah!" the men roared, and 'Rah!'—the echo rolled across the harbour.

The confusion grew even greater when, four days before the term set by the German ultimatum, Rubin, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Black Sea republic, arrived from Yekaterinodar in the company of Perebinos, the representative of the army—a seven-foot giant of fearsome aspect, with four revolvers in his belt. Both of these men—Rubin in a lenghty speech and Perebinos in a curt address accompanied by much rattling of weapons—argued that there was no need either to scuttle the fleet or to surrender it, that Moscow didn't know what it was talking about and that the Black Sea republic would supply the fleet with everything it required: oil and shells and food.

"Round our way," Perebinos said, dotting his speech with foul oaths, "the bloody situation on the front is so good that next week we'll drown the cur Denikin and his cadets in the Kuban river to the last man. Brothers, don't scuttle the ships, we need them. We want to feel that our front has a strong fleet in the rear. If you scuttle yourselves, brothers, then I declare in the name of the entire Kuban-Black-Sea revolutionary army that we will not put up with such treachery; we'll march against Novorossisk with all our forty thousand men and bayonet you all, brothers, to a man."

After this meeting chaos was complete—no one knew what to think. The crews began to desert their ships and disperse in every direction. Ugly customers began to frequent the crowds in ever greater numbers—by day they shouted louder than anyone: "Fight the Germans to the last round"; but at night

gangs of them would lurk near the short-handed destroyers, ready at the first opportunity to rush in, throw the crews into the water and loot the ships.

It was at this time that Semyon Krassilnikov returned to the destroyer *Kerch*.

Semyon was polishing the brass base of the compass. The whole crew had been hard at work from early morning, scrubbing, swabbing and polishing the destroyer which was moored close to one of the piers. A hot sun was rising over the scorched hills of the coast. The flags hung limply in the still air. Semyon kept his eyes on his work—he did not want to look towards the shore. The crew was giving the ship a last clean-up before the end.

In the harbour the giant funnels of the battleship *Liberty* were emitting dense clouds of smoke. Her guns were cleared for action and shone in the sunlight. The black smoke rose into the sky. The ship and the smoke and the brown hills and the cement factories at their foot were all reflected in the mirror-like waters of the bay.

Semyon was sitting on his bare heels and rubbing away at his brasses. He had been on watch that night and thought bitterly that it was a pity he had come back here. It would have been better if he had listened to Alexey and Matryona. Now they will laugh at him. "Aha!" they will say, "so that was how you fought the Germans? Ditched the whole fleet, did you? Nice work!" What could he say to that? All he could say was that he had cleaned, dressed, and sunk the *Kerch* with his own hands.

A motor-launch cast off from the *Liberty* and chugged from ship to ship, a signalman wig-wagging in the bows. The destroyer *Bold* slipped its moorings, took the *Unruly* in tow and slowly steamed out into the roads. The destroyers *Rapid*, *Lively*, *Eager*, and *Strident* followed the *Bold* at an even slower pace, crawling like sick things in her wake.

Now there was a pause. Eight destroyers were still in the bay. There was no sign of movement on their decks. All eyes were now directed towards the *Liberty*, a steel-grey giant with streaks of rust running down the sides. The sailors looked at the battleship, put down their swabs, brass rags, hose-nozzles. The flag of Commodore Tikhmenev, commander of the fleet, rose slowly to the masthead.

On board the destroyer *Kerch* the sailors were saying under their breath, with growing alarm:

"Look! The *Liberty* is going to Sevastopol . . ."

"Surely they wouldn't be so vile! Have they no revolutionary conscience at all?"

"Don't you know Tikhmenev? Our worst enemy, and a cunning fox too."

"They are under way! The traitors!"

Beyond the *Liberty*, her sister-ship the *Free Russia* was lying at anchor, apparently fast asleep, all guns under their awnings and not a soul visible on deck. Several boats were seen rowing towards her from the pier at top speed. Then suddenly, clearly heard across the windless bay, came the shrill roll of a boatswain's whistle, the capstan on the *Liberty* began to creak and wet chains and slimy anchors crept up her sides. The bows of the ship swung slowly round, the network of masts, funnels and turrets revolving against the background of whitish city roofs.

"They are under way! To the Germans! Hi, you there! Going to surrender? What are you doing?"

The commander of the destroyer *Kerch*, a man with a great peeling nose in a face burned black by the sun, came out on the bridge. His deep-seated

eyes followed the manœuvres of the *Liberty*. Then he bent forward on his bridge and shouted an order: "Make a signal!" "Ay, ay, sir!" the sailors answered cheerfully, rushing to the box holding the signal flags. Multi-coloured little flags ran up the mast of the *Kerch* and fluttered in the sky. They read: "To the ships making for Sevastopol! You are traitors, a disgrace to the fleet!"

The *Liberty* made no answering signal, as if the signal had not been seen. Deserted and disgraced, she glided past the ships which had remained faithful to their duty. "See that?" the sailors whispered suddenly to each other. The two enormous guns in the forward turret of the *Liberty* rose into the air, the turret revolved towards the destroyer *Kerch*. The commander of the *Kerch* gripped the rail of the bridge and stuck out his great peeling nose to meet death. But the guns wavered and settled into immobility.

The *Liberty* put on speed, rounded the pier, and soon her proud profile sunk under the horizon. Very many years later, disarmed, rusty, and for ever disgraced, she tied up in far-away Bizerta.

Tikhmenev, the commander of the fleet, insisted on obeying the formal orders of the Council of People's Commissars and so the battleship *Liberty* and six destroyers surrendered to the Germans in Sevastopol. Their officers and crews were given their discharge.

The sailors went their ways, most of them home, and said of course that they could not bring themselves to sink their own ships, but the truth was rather that they had been afraid of the forty thousand men of the Black Sea Red Army, said to be determined to bayonet all Novorossisk.

The battleship *Free Russia* and eight destroyers remained in the port of Novorossisk. The ultimatum was to expire one day later. German aeroplanes were circling high above the city. In the roads the periscopes of German submarines appeared among the leaping dolphins. It was said that a German landing had been made in Temryuk, not far away. In the docks of Novorossisk stormy meetings were in progress twenty-four hours in the day, meetings which never adjourned and at which certain individuals in civilian clothes shouted ever more insistently: "Brothers, don't destroy yourselves, don't scuttle the fleet!" "Only the officers want to sink the fleet, they have all been bribed by the Allies, every one of them!" "In Sevastopol, in December, you had the guts to throw all the officers overboard, and are you afraid to do it now? Kill the officers!"

A propagandist now climbed on to the platform, pushed the speaker away, tore open his jumper on his chest, and shouted:

"Comrades, don't listen to these *provocateurs*. If you give up the fleet to the Germans they'll come and bombard you out of these, our own, guns. . . . Don't give up our weapons to the imperialists. . . . Save the revolution!"

Whose advice was a man to follow now? Then, again a front-liner from Yekaterinodar took the floor after the propagandist—a soldier bristling with weapons who brought up the threat of forty thousand bayonets again. In the night of the eighteenth of June many crews did not return to their ships—they disappeared, ran away, hid themselves, took to the mountains. . . .

All night long the destroyer *Kerch* argued with the other ships by means of light signals. The battleship *Free Russia* replied that in theory she was prepared to scuttle herself, but less than a hundred men of her crew of two thousand were still in the ship and that was scarcely enough even to get up steam and leave the harbour.

The destroyer *Hadzhi-Bey* blinked a message saying that a stormy discussion

was still going on on board, that girls from the city had come with a lot of vodka; that they had obviously been sent there with ulterior aims and that the ship was in danger of being looted. The destroyer *Kaliakiria* said that only the commander and an engineer were left on board. The *Fidonisi* said she had only six men left. The same applied to the destroyers *Captain Baranov*, *Vigilant*, *Vigorous*, and *Watchful*. Full crews were present only in the *Kerch* and the *Lieutenant Shestakov*.

At midnight a boat approached the *Kerch* and an insolent voice hailed her. It said: "Comrade Sailors, this is the correspondent of the *Isvestia* of Moscow. A telegram has just been received from Admiral Sablin: the fleet is not to be sunk on any account, nor is it to go to Sevastopol; stay here and wait for further orders."

The sailors leaned over the rail and gazed silently into the darkness at the bobbing boat. The voice continued to argue and persuade. Lieutenant-Commander Kukel came out on to the bridge and interrupted the flow of words:

"Show me the telegram from Admiral Sablin."

"Sorry, comrade, I left it at home, I can go and fetch it straight away."

But Kukel said in a loud voice, stressing his words so that he could be heard very distinctly:

"Boat on the starboard bow to sheer off to half a cable's length. Come no nearer, or else . . ."

"Excuse me, comrade," the voice from the boat shouted boldly, "do you refuse to listen to orders transmitted from Moscow? I shall have to report you by telegraph."

". . . or else I shall sink the boat and take you on board. I accept no responsibility for any action of the crew with regard to you."

There was no answer to this from the boat. Then a cautious splashing of oars was heard and the outline of the boat merged into the darkness. The sailors laughed. The commander put his hands behind his back and paced to and fro on his bridge like a bear in a cage.

Few of the men slept that night. They lay on the dew-moistened deck. Now and then a head popped up and said something that drove the sleep from all eyes and started a discussion in undertones. The stars were already paling and the sun rose from behind the hills when Midshipman Annenski, commander of the *Lieutenant Shestakov*, came on board from ashore and said that not only were the crews deserting from the destroyers, harbour tugs and lighters, but not a man was left on the merchant ships either and he did not know how to get his ship out into the roads.

The commander of the *Kerch* said:

"Midshipman Annenski, this is our responsibility. We shall scuttle our ships at whatever cost."

Midshipman Annenski shook his head. There was a pause. Annenski turned and left the *Kerch*. When the sunrise flamed up above the horizon, the *Lieutenant Shestakov* slowly sheered off from the pier and towing the *Captain Barrow* behind her, steamed out towards the outer roads, where the ships were to be scuttled. The two destroyers displayed at their masthead the signal: "I go down, but will not surrender."

Soon the two destroyers disappeared in the morning mist. All the ships now appeared deserted. Gulls flew and mewed above the grey bulk of the *Free Russia*. Smoke was rising from the *Kerch*. Although it was very early yet, great crowds had gathered on the dockside, the pier was black with human

heads, swarming like flies. Near the ships a movement began in the crowd, men climbed on each other's shoulders and some dived into the water.

Semyon Krassilnikov was standing on guard at the gangway. At six o'clock a little man, red-faced with excitement, elbowed his way through the crowd. He had on a black reefer jacket without shoulder-straps and his step was firm as he walked up the gangway. Beads of sweat stood out on his apple-cheeked face and ran down both sides of his little puckered mouth.

"Is Lieutenant-Commander Kukel here?" he shouted at Semyon, staring with merry, round blue eyes at the sailor who barred the way with his bayonet. The new-comer tapped himself on the chest and ribs, found the right pocket at last and took out and presented credentials in the name of Comrade Shakhov, representing the central Soviet authorities. Semyon lowered his bayonet without a smile.

"Pass, Comrade Shakhov."

Kukel came out to meet Shakhov and began to tell him about the almost hopeless position. He spoke slowly and in detail. Shakhov's eyes wandered impatiently.

"Nonsense, worse things happen at sea! I have already spoken to the men, and their spirit is first-rate. . . . Now I'll get you a tug and everything else you need. . . . We'll call a meeting. . . . Everything will be all right."

He asked for the launch and went off to the *Free Russia*. From there he raced with the launch from vessel to vessel. Semyon saw his short torso dangle on the Jacob's-ladders of merchant ships, saw him jump out on to the quay and dive into the crowd, heard cries and saw hands being raised. In one place a thousand throats yelled 'hurrah!'

Several pinnaces full of sailors cast off from the pier and steered towards a corner of the harbour, to a small rusty steamer. Soon its funnel was emitting thick clouds of smoke, then it weighed anchor and ran in close to the *Free Russia*. Other men were hoisting sails on a schooner. The *Lieutenant Shestakov* was back and took a second destroyer in tow.

At nine o'clock the crowd was pressing close to the gangway of the *Kerch*. The atmosphere seemed to have deteriorated again. A few ragged tramps had pushed their way through the crowd; each of them had sausages, bread, bacon and such in their hands. They grinned and winked at the sailors, showing them bottles of vodka. At this Kukel had the gangway taken up and the *Kerch* cast off, steaming away from these hellish temptations to the middle of the harbour, from where she watched the destroyers being towed away.

The rusty steamer, which looked like an empty hulk, had after much puffing and smoking succeeded at last in moving the *Free Russia*, and the great battleship glided out majestically in front of a crowd of many thousands. Many men in the crowd took off their caps as if they were passing a hearse. The *Free Russia* left the boom and the harbour bar behind and was now outside in the roads. The expected German aeroplanes did not come. The sky and the sea were both undisturbed. Only the destroyer *Fidonisi* was still in the harbour.

There was a fresh commotion in the crowd on the dockside and the black caviare of heads turned towards the pier alongside which lay the *Fidonisi*. A motor-tug was approaching her, ready to take her in tow. Stones flew out of the crowd towards the tug and a few revolver shots were fired. A grey-haired man climbed the standard of a street lamp and yelled:

"Fratricides! You've sold out Russia! You sold the army! Brothers! Don't look on! Don't let them sell out our fleet!"

The crowd roared and began to tear up pavement-stones. Several men

jumped over the rail of the *Fidonisi*. But the *Kerch* raced towards the pier at speed, her bell rang 'action stations', her guns turned their mouths towards the crowd and the commander shouted through the megaphone:

"Back there! Get back! Or I shall open fire!"

The crowd gave ground and streamed back. Those who were trampled underfoot screamed in vain. A cloud of dust rose. Then the dockside was empty. The motor-tug made fast to the *Fidonisi* and towed her away.

The *Kerch* followed slowly. All vessels were now out in the roads, rocking in a gentle swell. Semyon looked at the gulls flying high above the bows and then shifted his eyes to the commander who stood on the bridge gripping the rail with both hands.

It was four o'clock. The *Kerch* took up her position on the starboard quarter of the *Fidonisi*, the commander spoke one word only and a torpedo slid out of its tube like a black shadow, a strip of foam ran along the swell, struck the *Fidonisi* amidships, lifting her bodily out of the water; the *Fidonisi* broke in two, a shaggy mountain of water and foam rose from the bottom of the bay, the heavy rumble of the explosion rolled away far out to sea. When the mountain of water subsided there was no *Fidonisi* on the surface, nothing but foam. So the sinking of the fleet began.

Demolition squads opened the sea-cocks, and removed the searchlights from the listing decks of the destroyers, then before jumping into the pinnace from the decks, now awash, they lit the fuses which would detonate the charges placed in the engine-room and blow up the turbines and boilers. The destroyers quickly disappeared under water, sinking to a depth of many fathoms. In twenty minutes the roads were empty.

The *Kerch* now approached the *Free Russia* at full speed and fired her torpedoes. The sailors slowly took off their caps. The first torpedo hit the battleship in the bows. She took on a list and water rushed in at her side. The second struck her amidships. Through the clouds of smoke, vapour and foam the men could see her heel over. The battleship fought like a living thing, and seemed even more majestic in the midst of the seething sea and the thunder of the explosions. Tears ran down the cheeks of the sailors. Semyon covered his face with his hands.

Lieutenant-Commander Kukel seemed leaner and dryer than ever as he stood with his huge nose pointing at the sinking ship. Now the last torpedo struck home and the *Free Russia* turned turtle; she seemed to make one more effort, her stern rose once more out of the water and then she went to the bottom in a whirlpool of foam.

From this scene of destruction the *Kerch* steamed towards Tuapse at top speed. In the morning the crew took to the boats. Now the *Kerch* sent out this message by wireless:

To all.—I perish, having sunk part of the ships of the Black Sea fleet, which preferred destruction to inglorious surrender. Destroyer Kerch.

The sea-cocks were now opened, the engines blown up and the *Kerch* went down in thirty fathoms of water.

On the dockside Semyon Krassilnikov took counsel with his messmates. What were they to do now? They argued this way and that and finally agreed to go to Astrakhan, on the Volga, where Shakhov was said to be forming a river fleet to carry on the fight against the Whites.

Relentlessly pursued by the Whites and surrounded by insurgent villages, the Taman army, commanded by Kozhukh, made its roundabout way over mountain paths and trackless wilderness to the upper reaches of the Kuban.

The road led through Novorossisk, occupied by the Germans after the destruction of the Black Sea fleet. The columns of the Taman army arrived unexpectedly and marched through the town singing songs. The German garrison, at a loss to understand their intentions, took to the warships lying in the harbour and from their guns bombarded the rearguard of the army and, incidentally, the drunken and furious Cossacks who were harassing the Taman rear.

With their habitual caution the Germans evacuated the town, and when Kozhukh withdrew from it, fighting a rearguard action, it was occupied by the Cossacks and later by regular White troops who looted and ravaged at will. Sailors, Red soldiers and even ordinary inhabitants were taken from their beds and hanged without trial on the nearest telegraph pole. The carters of Novorossisk carried three thousand corpses down to the sea in a few days. Novorossisk was now a White port.

The Taman army, burdened with a train of fifteen thousand refugees, marched along the hungry coast to Tuapse, and from there turned east, hotly pursued by Denikin's troops and harried by White insurgents who occupied every height and ravine. Each day developed into a bloody battle. Starving, battered and bleeding, the army crawled down the sides of ravines, and climbed up again to dizzy heights, dwindling in numbers, but marching grimly on.

One day General Pokrovski sent Kozhukh a letter through a captured Red Army man. The letter was written with military brevity:

You, you rogue, have disgraced all officers of the Russian army and navy by joining the ranks of the Bolsheviks, those thieves and vagabonds. Your end—and the end of all your ragamuffins—has come. We have a firm grip on you, you rogue, and will never let you go. If you hope for mercy, that is, if you want to atone for your crimes by a term in a disciplinary battalion, I hereby command you to lay down your arms this very day, and lead your gang, unarmed, to a point three miles to the west of Byelorechensk station. When this is done, report to me immediately at the fourth signalman's box on the railway track.

Kozhukh read the letter while he was drinking tea out of a tin can. He looked at the barefooted, unkempt Red Army man who was standing in front of him with a hang-dog air.

"You're a lousy cur, brother!" Kozhukh said. "How dare you bring me such letters? Get back to your unit."

That same night Kozhukh attacked General Pokrovski, completely routed his troops with a cavalry charge, entered Byelorechensk and broke out of the ring which had been drawn round him. By the end of September the Taman army reached Armavir, a town occupied by Denikin's forces, took it by storm and joined hands with the remnants of Sorokin's army.

Sorokin, having lost his influence over his troops after the disasters at Vyselki and Yekaterinodar and tasted the bitterness of defeat after the wine of military glory, was retreating farther and farther towards the east, tossed about like a chip of wood on a torrent of men who only a short time before had been part of organized divisions, brigades and regiments, but now were merely a rabble, running at the first shot of the enemy.

In their retreat they carried all before them. They had only one desire—to escape the death that was pursuing them; to get away never mind where. Endless crowds of deserters streamed across the steppe, along the ancient roads of the nations, now covered with wormwood and dotted with the grave-mounds of bygone ages.

From Yekaterinodar about two hundred thousand troops and refugees had escaped. Those who remained behind were sabred, hanged or tortured to death by the Cossacks. In every Cossack village dead bodies swung in the wind from the tall poplar trees. Reprisals against the Reds were merciless, no one feared any longer that they might return. The very name 'Bolshevik' was to be erased with fire and sword from the whole province.

Sorokin was a child of the revolution. With an animal instinct he understood the rise and fall of its tides. He did not attempt to control the retreat; that would have been useless. The human herd was running in a stampede towards the east and would only stop when the Whites slackened in their pursuit.

All he could do now was to look sullenly out of the window of his coach as it crawled slowly on through the scorched steppe past the grave-mounds of the ancient Pelasgi, Celts, Germans, Slavs and Khazars. . . . A personal escort guarded his coach because passing troops had shouted: "Brothers, our commanders have sold us out—kill your commanders, we have killed ours!"

Belyakov came into Sorokin's compartment, sighed, and cautiously began to hint at the impossibility of further struggle. "The revolution has its phases," he said again and again, stroking his big forehead with the palm of his hand, "the upsurge is past, and really elemental forces are rising against us. We are not fighting the officers only, we are fighting the whole nation. The conquests of the revolution must be saved while there is still time. It would be better to save them even by a compromise peace." And he went on to quote most convincing historical examples. But all Sorokin answered was: "What's this, you scoundrel, with whose money are you trying to bribe me?" Had Denikin fallen into his hands in those days, he would have eaten him up alive. But worse than anyone else he hated his own comrades, the members of the Central Executive Committee of the Black Sea Republic, who had fled from Yekaterinodar to Pyatigorsk. All they worried about was "to explore every avenue which could render harmless the dictatorial ambitions of Sorokin". They did not attend to the most urgent matters, interfered in everything, and with their old Marx wanted to pry into the innermost folds of the Commander-in-Chief's heart!

The blonde Zinka again made her appearance in Sorokin's coach; this was Belyakov's doing. Zinka was still as pink and as alluring as ever, only her voice was a bit hoarse and all her silk dresses and her guitar had been stolen from the baggage-truck. Her treatment of the Commander-in-Chief was now a shade less obsequious.

At night, when the blinds were pulled down in the coach and Sorokin fell into the dark ecstasy of drink, Zinka would strum on her balalaika and chatter about the same things as Belyakov: about the approaching end of the revolution, about the dazzling career of Napoleon who had known how to build a bridge from the terror of the Jacobins to an imperial throne. . . . Sorokin's eyes would light up, his heart would beat faster and drive the hot blood and the vodka to his brain in equal parts. He would tear off the blinds and stare out of the window into the darkness of the night where reflections of his feverish imagination danced before his eyes.

At last the pressure of the Whites relaxed. The Red Army dug itself in on the left bank of the upper Kuban. Then Dmitri Shelest, Commander of the Iron Division, brought thirty motor-lorries and two hundred thousand rounds of ammunition across the Kirghiz steppe to Sorokin. He also brought orders for the Caucasian troops to advance north to the relief of Tsaritsyn, hard pressed by the White Army under General Krassnov.

Sorokin roundly refused to comply with this order. But the Ukrainian troops had had enough of warfare in a strange country; they turned against Sorokin and left the front, heedless of his entreaties and threats. Only Shelest, himself a native of Poltava, succeeded in holding back some of the troops. He talked to them slowly and with common sense, muzhik fashion, first praising them and then praising himself. The Ukrainians saw that this was not just anybody, but a *batko*, a leader, and obeyed him. Dmitri Shelest then led them into action and routed a strong unit of officers. This was enough to make Sorokin hate him with a fierce hatred.

Having congratulated Shelest on this victory and appointed him commander of a section of the front, Sorokin that same day secretly gave orders to disarm his men and shoot Shelest himself and all his subordinate commanders. But Shelest heard of the secret order, and with his Iron Division, now reinforced by the Ukrainians, he left the front and in accordance with the orders of the Revolutionary War Council marched through the salt steppe and the quicksands towards Tsaritsyn. Thereupon Sorokin declared him an outlaw, to be shot on sight by any Red Army man, and forbade anyone to supply food and forage to the Iron Division.

But Shelest marched away, and not a hand was raised against him. When he needed food and forage on the way, he rode into a village, took off his Kuban cap and with tears in his eyes begged the village Soviet to give him hay, oats and bread, explaining that it was not he, Shelest, who was a traitor, but that it was Sorokin, the Commander-in-Chief, who was a traitor and a White-Guard bandit.

Soon there came yet another blow to Sorokin's vanity: Kozhukh, whom they had all given up for lost, arrived from beyond the mountains, took Armavir by storm and drove the Whites over the Kuban. The veterans of the Taman army were devoted to their own leader, and obeyed the Commander-in-Chief's orders with reluctance or not at all. The seasoned Taman army now formed the backbone of Sorokin's battered force, and entrenched itself on the line Armavir-Stavropol. It was autumn and a long and bloody battle was being fought for possession of the rich town of Stavropol. Everywhere the Tamans were foremost in the fight.

Denikin's army also received reinforcements in the person of the White partisan leader Shkuro, a cut-throat and desperado who had formed out of every sort of scum a troop he called the 'Wolf-pack'.

Sorokin transferred his headquarters to Pyatigorsk. He was no longer seen at the front. Things were changing rapidly. The power of Moscow had penetrated the Caucasus and was making itself felt more and more as the days went by. First the district committee of the Party decided to form a revolutionary war council, such as already existed in other localities. Sorokin could not start a feud with Moscow and had to submit. More and more members were co-opted to the council, and the functions of Commander-in-Chief were transferred to its executive. Sorokin understood that what was at stake was his own head, and he began to fight desperately.

At the meetings of the revolutionary war council he was taciturn and gloomy;

if he spoke, he fought hard over every syllable. He always got his own way, because he had concentrated in Pyatigorsk all the troops still faithful to him. He was feared, and with good reason. He was only waiting for an opportunity to show his power, and he soon found it. Martynov, commander of the second Taman army, declared at a meeting in Armavir that he would not obey the orders of the Commander-in-Chief. Sorokin came to the revolutionary war council and demanded Martynov's head. He threatened complete anarchy in the army. It was impossible to save Martynov. He was summoned to Pyatigorsk, arrested, and shot in the market-place in front of the troops. This created a storm among the Taman regiments, and they swore vengeance.

A new staff was formed for the Commander-in-Chief. Belyakov was removed, and Sorokin let him go. The ex-chief of staff handed over his documents and funds to his successor and, expecting some explanation, went to see his former friend in his quarters. Sorokin was pacing up and down the room with his hands behind his back. On the table stood a lamp, and beside it an untouched plate of food and a half-empty bottle of vodka. Outside the window the wooded Mashuk lay darkling in the dry sunset.

Sorokin glanced at his visitor and continued his pacing. Belyakov sat down near the table and hung his head. Sorokin stopped in front of him, shrugged his shoulders and asked:

"Do you want vodka? As a last good-bye?" He gave a hoarse laugh and quickly poured out two glasses, but did not drink, and again began to pace up and down.

"Your game is up, brother," he went on. "My advice is—get out of here as fast as your legs will carry you. I shall not speak for you. To-morrow we shall appoint a commission to go through your records. See the point? In all probability they will shoot you."

Belyakov raised his face to him. It was grey and drawn. He drew his palm across his forehead, then dropped his hand.

"You are a worthless, petty fellow, Sorokin," Belyakov said. "It was a mistake to be so devoted to you. You are a cur. Go through my records indeed! And I thought you would make a Napoleon, you louse!"

Sorokin took up the glass and drank; his teeth chattered against the rim. Then he paced up and down again, with his hands in his coat pockets. Suddenly he stopped.

"There will be no scrutiny of your records. Go to the devil! It was in acknowledgment of your services that I didn't shoot you just now. Remember that and appreciate it, see?" His nostrils quivered, he snorted, his lips turned blue and he trembled with the effort of holding himself in check.

Belyakov knew Sorokin's character only too well; without taking his eyes off him he walked backwards to the door, and quickly slammed it to behind him. He left the house through the back entrance and disappeared from Pyatigorsk that same night.

Sorokin spent the whole night drinking glass after glass of vodka and thinking heavy thoughts. His former friend had poisoned him with a drop of contempt, but the poison was strong and his suffering unbearable.

He covered his face with his hands. Belyakov was right, quite right. In June there had been a vigour worthy of Napoleon, but it all ended in sittings of the military committee and eternal squintings towards the party men in Moscow. What Belyakov had said was not his own opinion only. The same things were being said in the army and in the party. And Denikin, oh, Denikin! He remembered a little article in the White Guard newspaper of Yekaterinodar

and the memory stabbed him through and through. It was an account of an interview with Denikin, who said: "I thought I was facing a lion, but the lion proved to be a cowardly hound wrapped in a lion's hide. But that did not surprise me at all: Sorokin was, and remained, a common, ignorant Cossack officer of the rank of an ensign." Oh, Denikin! You wait—the day will come! You will be sorry!

Sorokin wrung his hands and ground his teeth. He wanted to rush to the front, carry the whole army with him, defeat, pursue, ride down the officers and set the Cossack villages alight on the four corners. Break into Yekaterinodar. . . . Give orders for Denikin to be brought to him . . . taken straight from bed in his underclothes. . . . "And was it you, Anton Ivanovich, who indulged in remarks to a newspaper reporter about a common illiterate Cossack ensign? Well, here I am, my dear sir. What next? Shall we cut straps from your back, or will a thousand lashes or so be enough for you?"

Sorokin groaned, driving away the insistent intrusion of such dreams. . . . Reality was dark, indistinct, alarming, humiliating. He had to make up his mind. His old friend and chief of staff had rendered him a last service to-day. Sorokin went to the window. A light breeze brought the dry, bitter scent of the steppe wormwood. The dark purple of the sunrise already lightened the gloomy sky and the lilac bulk of the Mashuk. Sorokin laughed: thanks, Belyakov, he said to himself. So be it; to the devil with hesitation and indecision. The same night Sorokin decided to stake everything on one throw.

After long hesitation the revolutionary war council of the Caucasian army at last decided to take the offensive. The army was concentrated at Nevinnomysskaya, from where it was to attack Stavropol and Astrakhan and effect a junction with the Tenth Army, now fighting near Tsaritsyn. This was, in fact, the plan that Shelest had brought with him from Tsaritsyn.

The assault on Stavropol was entrusted to the Taman army. Everything came into motion all at once—the rear was moved towards the north-east, the troop-trains towards the north-west. The political instructors and propagandists wore out their vocal chords, getting up enthusiasm among the troops, spreading stirring slogans. The commanders of the columns left for the front, leaving Pyatigorsk deserted. Only the government, the Central Executive Committee of the Black Sea Republic, remained behind—and Sorokin with his staff and his escort. In the bustle no one noticed that the government was, in effect, at the mercy of the Commander-in-Chief.

One evening Sorokin was returning home, accompanied by an orderly. He spurred his horse to a trot, and turning off at the municipal park towards the hills, he nearly rode down a round-shouldered, squarely-built man clad in a leather jacket. The man staggered, and his hand went to the holster on his hip. Sorokin frowned angrily. He recognized Gymza, the chief of the intelligence department of the third division—who should have been at the front. Gymza took his hand from his holster. He looked at Sorokin—and the look in his eyes was the same that Sorokin had seen in Belyakov's eyes at their last meeting. Then Gymza's dark, clean-shaven face lit up and his white teeth showed in a sarcastic smile. Sorokin's heart missed a beat—so this one, too, was laughing at him!

He pressed his knees into his horse's flank with such violence that the horse snorted, shied and carried the Commander-in-Chief over the ringing cobblestones into a stinking, bobbing, bleating herd of sheep returning from the pasture. This was in the evening of the thirtieth of October.

Sorokin sent for the commander of his personal escort, who told Sorokin

in a whisper, with his eye on the window, that Gymza had come to town that day and had suggested to the government that they should call back two companies from the front to serve as a guard for them.

"Any fool could see, Comrade Sorokin, against whom these measures are being taken."

When the autumn stars came out in all their beauty over the dark, sleeping town, over the dry plain and the stony heights of the mountains, the men of Sorokin's escort noiselessly entered the houses of five members of the government. They took them from their beds, led them out at the point of the bayonet to the far side of the railway embankment beyond the town, and shot them there without any explanation.

Meanwhile, Sorokin was standing on the platform of his railway carriage in Lermontovo station. He heard the shots, five of them, echoing in the silence of the night. Then he heard the hard breathing of a man, and the captain of his escort came up to him, licking his lips.

"Well?" Sorokin asked.

"Liquidated," the captain of the escort said, and he repeated the names of the victims.

The train steamed out of the station. The Commander-in-Chief was now flying to the front as if on wings. But the news of the unprecedented outrage flew even faster. Several Communists of the district party committee, warned the day before by Gymza, left Pyatigorsk by motor-car before Sorokin. Next day they convened a congress of soldiers' delegates. And while Sorokin was showing himself to the troops—majestic as an Oriental despot, surrounded by a hundred guards, with trumpets sounding the alert and with a standard-bearer galloping in front carrying the personal standard of the Commander-in-Chief—the congress unanimously declared Sorokin an outlaw. They gave orders that he should be immediately arrested and brought under escort to the village of Nevinnomysskaya for trial.

The Commander-in-Chief heard the news from soldiers of the Taman army, who shouted it out to him from their troop trains as they passed. Sorokin returned to the station and sent for his column commanders. Not one of them came. Sorokin waited in the station until dark. Then he asked for a horse and rode away into the steppe with the captain of his escort.

Great confusion reigned in the revolutionary war council. The Commander-in-Chief had disappeared into the steppe, and the army, instead of carrying out the plan of attack, was demanding Sorokin's trial and execution. But the human machine of a hundred and fifty thousand men continued to function and could not be stopped. On the twenty-third of October the Taman army advanced towards Stavropol. Five days later the commanders of all columns reported that they had insufficient ammunition, and that, if no supplies came the next day, there was no chance of a victory. The revolutionary war council replied that there was no ammunition to be had and that they should "take Stavropol at the point of the bayonet". The same night two shock columns were detailed for this operation.

Covered by the artillery, which was firing its last shells, they reached the village of Tatarskaya, ten miles from Stavropol, through which ran the White front line. A great copper moon rose over the steppe—this was the agreed signal as the army had no signal rockets. The guns ceased fire. The men of the Taman army reached the enemy trenches without firing a shot and rushed them. At that moment the horns of the military bands blared out, drums beat and dense waves of the two Taman assault columns charged and took the whole

main line of enemy defences with bands playing and music blaring in place of whining bullets and crashing grenades. The Whites withdrew to the hills, but the heights, too, were taken by the irresistible *élan* of the Red charge. The Whites fled to the city, but were met by troops of Red Cossacks. On the thirtieth of October the Taman army entered Stavropol.

The next day the soldiers saw their Commander-in-Chief riding along the main street of Stavropol accompanied by the captain of his escort. He was quite calm, but his face was pale and his eyes were on the ground.

Sorokin dismounted in front of the headquarters of the Soviet. The door of the building still bore the half-effaced inscription: "Staff headquarters of General Shkuro's division." He walked boldly up the stairs and asked the sentry where the meeting of the Soviet was being held. Then he went to the hall and, standing by the chairman's table, haughtily raised his head and began to address the astonished delegates:

"I am the Commander-in-Chief of the Eleventh Army. My troops routed Denikin's bands and have re-established Soviet power in the town and the surrounding district. An unauthorised meeting of army delegates in Nevinnomysskaya has impudently declared me an outlaw. Who gave that meeting such authority? I demand the appointment of a commission to examine my alleged crimes. Until the commission gives its report, I will continue to exercise the functions of Commander-in-Chief."

Then he left the hall, to ride away. But on the stairs six soldiers of the Third Taman Regiment suddenly seized him and twisted back his arms. Sorokin fought silently like a demon. The Commander of the Taman Regiment hit him on the head with the handle of his whip, shouting: "This is for the shooting of Martynov, you dog!" Sorokin was taken away to the jail. Next day he was brought up for examination; at the table set aside for the judge he saw Gymza, and realized that he was lost. Then for the last time all his satanic pride, his thirst for life rose in him; he banged the table with his fist and shouted:

"I will live to judge you, you bandits! You undermine discipline, you foster anarchy and counter-revolution in disguise. I'll deal with you as I dealt with that scoundrel Martynov."

The commander of Martynov's old regiment was sitting next to Gymza; his face was as white as a sheet. He put his hand to his hip, drew his pistol and emptied a full clip point-blank into Sorokin's body.

From Stavropol it was impossible to advance any farther towards the Volga. Shkuro's fierce cavalry fell on the rear of the Taman army and cut it off from its base in Nevinnomysskaya. Denikin gathered all his forces to complete the encirclement of Stavropol. He brought up from the Kuban the columns of Kazanovich, Drozdovski, Pokrovski, Ulagai's cavalry and the new Kuban mounted division commanded by a former mining engineer who had fought in the world war as a junior subaltern and was now General Wrangel.

The Taman army fought for twenty-eight days. Regiment after regiment perished in the iron grip of an enemy vastly superior in equipment. The rains came and there were no overcoats, no boots, no cartridges. All hope of aid was vain—the rest of the Caucasian army was cut off from Stavropol and was in full retreat towards the east.

The Taman army was struggling in a ring and its blows were terrible and bloody. Its commander, Kozhukh, was down with typhus. Most of the good commanders were dead or wounded. In the middle of November the army finally succeeded in breaking out of the encirclement. The pitiful remnants of this heroic army, ragged and unshod, left Stavropol and withdrew towards

Blagodatnoye to the north-east. There was no pursuit—the rains had begun and the autumn weather stopped the further advance of the Whites.

CHAPTER XII

A YEAR BEFORE, in October, the nations inhabiting Russia had demanded the end of the war. The groans of millions, their shouts, 'down with the war, down with the bourgeoisie, down with the endless war, down with the military caste waging the war, down with the landed gentry keeping up the war'—all these shouts and groans merged in one short and decisive blow, the shell fired by the cruiser *Aurora* at the Winter Palace.

When this shell landed on that much-hated building, piercing its roof decorated with leaden statues and black iron vases, when it burst in the empty bedroom of the Tsar where Kerenski spent hysterically sleepless nights in the Tsar's still warm bed—who could have then foreseen that this apparently final voice of the revolution, which proclaimed war on the palaces but peace for the cottages, would echo from end to end of our boundless country and, like an echo, would be strengthened and multiplied and finally grow into the roar of a hurricane.

Who expected that a country which had only just laid down its arms would take them up again in a struggle of class against class, of the poor against the rich? Who expected that the handful of Kornilov's officers would grow into the immense army of Denikin; that a mutiny of Czechoslovak prisoners of war would envelop a thousand versts of the Volga in the fogs of war, spread to Siberia and develop into the pseudo-monarchy of Admiral Kolchak; that a blockade would fold the land of the Soviets in its stifling embrace and that throughout the world all newly-published maps and globes would show one-sixth of the earth as an empty, colourless space without a name, surrounded by a thick black line?

Who expected that Central Russia, cut off from the seas, from the fertile districts, from the coal and oil, a Russia starving and poverty-stricken, burning with the fever of typhus, would not submit, would clench its teeth and again and again send its sons into fearful battles? A year before, the same men abandoned the fronts and fled. The country seemed transformed into a chaotic, anarchic swamp—but in fact this was not so. Mighty forces of unity emerged in the country and a dream of justice rose above the purely animal instinct of self-preservation. Extraordinary men and women emerged from the masses, men and women of a kind never seen before, and their deeds were discussed everywhere with fear and admiration.

In the interior the land of the Soviets was shaken by mutinies. There was an armed rising in Yaroslavl which spread to Murom, Arzamas, Rostov and Rybinsk at the same time as the "Left-wing Socialist-Revolutionaries" mutinied in Moscow. On the sixth of July two Socialist-Revolutionaries carrying documents with the forged signature of Felix Dzerzhinski, paid a visit to Count Mirbach, the German ambassador in Moscow, and while he was talking to them, fired at him and threw a bomb. The last bullet hit the ambassador in the nape of the neck and killed him as he was running out of his room to escape the assassins. In the evening of the same day armed sailors and Red Army men appeared around the Yauza boulevard and the Clear Ponds district, stopped all

cars and pedestrians, searched them, took away all their documents and money and hustled them off to the Morozov house nearby where the "Staff of the O.C. of the Insurgent Forces" had its headquarters. Feliz Dzerzhinski himself was already held captive in this house to which he had come of his own accord in search of the assassins of Count Mirbach. Further arrests were made by the rebels all through the evening and part of the night. They also seized the telegraph office, but lacked the courage to attack the Kremlin. There were about two thousand of them and they occupied a sort of front from the Yauza to the Clear Ponds.

The defence of the Kremlin at this time consisted of a few telephones and the ancient walls. The troops were away in camp on the Khodynski field and many of them were on leave for the harvest. The atmosphere in the Kremlin was tense. But by morning it was possible to get together about eight hundred men, three batteries of guns and a couple of armoured cars; at seven in the morning these forces attacked the Morozov house and demolished it by gun-fire. There was a lot of noise but very few victims—the 'army' of the Left-wing Socialist Revolutionaries ran away, escaping through back alleys to an unknown destination. The commander of the 'army', a thick-lipped young man with crazy eyes, by the name of Popov, disappeared from Moscow, turned up a year later as chief of Makhno's counter-espionage service and became notorious for his ruthless cruelty.

The rebellion was crushed in Moscow and on the Volga, but throughout the country rebellion was rife. Men rose against the Bolsheviks, against the Germans or against the Whites; the villages rose against the towns and looted them. Single towns overthrew Soviet power on their own. It was an epoch of independent republics which came into being and burst like puff-balls—some of them were so small that a horseman could gallop all round them between sunrise and sunset.

The Soviet government strained every nerve to conquer this anarchy. And at this time it suffered a terrible blow: on the thirtieth of August, after a meeting in the Michelson factory on the outskirts of Moscow, Fanny Kaplan, a "Right-wing Socialist-Revolutionary", and a member of the organization of the man with the skull tie-pin, shot and seriously wounded Lenin.

On the thirty-first, a group of men dressed from head to foot in black leather, were seen in the streets of Moscow—they marched in a column in the middle of the street, carrying a streamer on two poles with the one word 'Terror' written on it. Day and night meetings were held in the factories of Moscow and Petrograd. The workers demanded that the sharpest measures be taken immediately.

On the fifth of September the Moscow and Petrograd newspapers appeared with the ominous headline:

RED TERROR

All soviets are instructed to proceed immediately to arrest Right-wing Socialist-revolutionaries and representatives of the big bourgeoisie and the officer class and hold them as hostages. Should any attempt at escape or mutiny be made, mass shootings are to be resorted to without fail. . . . We must immediately and definitely render our rear secure from the attacks of White Guard scum. . . . There must be no hesitation in applying the measures of mass terror. . . .

In the towns and cities there was little artificial light available in those days and whole districts were quite dark. Now the inhabitants of the upper-class districts saw with fear in their hearts that the filaments in their electric bulbs began to glow with a reddish light. . . . Detachments of armed workers came to make house-to-house searches in the doomed districts.

The year eighteen was nearing its close after it had swept through all Russia like a whirlwind. Dark waters gathered in the sullen autumn clouds. Fronts were set up everywhere: in the far North and on the upper Volga at Kazan, on the lower Volga at Tsaritsyn, in the Northern Caucasus and along the fringe of the German occupation. A thousand miles of trenches, trenches, and more trenches. The approach of autumn did not gladden the hearts of the fighters; many of them, as they looked at the clouds coming down from the north, thought of their villages where the wind was tearing the thatch from the roofs, nettles were overrunning the gardens and the potatoes were rotting in the fields. And yet there was no end of the war in sight. Ahead of them lay impenetrable nights lit by ancient kindle-lights in the cottages of their births, where the women-folk, waiting impatiently and in vain for fathers, husbands and sons, listened to stories of such terrible happenings that the children began to cry in their beds on the top of the stove.

To counteract this autumn depression, the Central Committee of the party, after the mutinies had been dealt with, mobilized the steadiest Communists in Moscow, Petrograd and Ivanovo-Vosnesensk and sent them into the army. Trains carrying these Communists moved towards the fronts, breaking the deliberate or unintentional sabotage of the railwaymen on the way. The harsh régime of terror penetrated into the army. Bedraggled detachments were transformed into regiments subordinated to the single will of the Revolutionary War Council. Courage and daring were made obligatory and cowardice regarded as equal to treason. And then the Red front took the offensive. A sharp thrust took Kazan, and after Kazan, Samara. The White detachments fled in panic before the Red terror. At Tsaritsyn, where Stalin sat as a member of the Revolutionary War Council of the Tenth Army, a great and bloody battle was fought with the White Cossack army formally commanded by Ataman Krassnov, but equipped and inspired by the German general staff.

But all this was merely the beginning of the great struggle, only a deployment of forces before the decisive events of the year nineteen.

Ivan Ilyich Telegin had carried out the task which Gymza had set him. During the fight for Kazan he was appointed to the command of a regiment, and was one of the first to enter Samara.

On a hot autumn day he rode down the main street of Samara at the head of his regiment. They passed the square in which the statue of Alexander II was again being hurriedly covered up with planks. The second house from the corner—Telegin knew what he would see, and yet, when he saw it, his heart contracted with pain. All the windows of Dr. Bulavin's flat on the second floor were smashed. Telegin could see everything as he rode past: there was the walnut door at which Dasha had appeared like a dream; there was the study, with torn books lying on the floor, and the bookcase overturned; the portrait of Mendeleyev, hanging awry and covered with cobwebs, looked down from the wall. Where was Dasha? What had happened to her? No one here could answer that question, of course.

PART THREE

BLEAK MORNING

. . . to live as conquerers or die gloriously.—SVIATOSLAV.

CHAPTER I

A MAN AND a woman were sitting by a fire laid out in the open. A cold wind blowing out of a ravine in the steppe whipped their backs and whistled among the stalks of wheat which had long shed their grain. The woman tucked her legs under her skirt and hid her hands in the sleeves of her coat. From under a knitted scarf, pulled down over her eyes, one could see only a straight little nose and lips pressed obstinately together.

The fire was small and fed by dry dung-cakes which the man had gathered not long ago in a hollow where there was a watering-place for cattle. The rising of the wind did not improve matters.

"The beauty of Nature is undoubtedly much more enjoyable if perceived in the crackling of logs in a grate or in looking out of a window into this sad world. . . . But the steppe . . . yes, my God, it's dreary . . ."

The man spoke softly, but with a certain malicious relish. The woman turned her face towards him but said nothing. She was exhausted by the long journey, by the lack of food and the fact that this man talked a great deal and guessed her most secret thoughts with obvious enjoyment. She tipped her head back slightly and from under the scarf wrapped round her head looked at the dim sheen of the sunset behind scarcely distinguishable hills. The sunset glow was now a mere narrow slit in the dark sky and no longer shed any light on the deserted, empty steppe.

"We'll roast some potatoes presently, Daria Dmitrievna, for the delight of our bodies and our souls . . . Good Lord, what on earth would you have done without me?"

He bent down and selected the thickest dung-cakes, turning them this way and that before he carefully laid them on the live coals. He raked away some of the coals, took a few potatoes from the pocket of his short fur coat and began to bury them under the embers. He had a red face, with an incredibly cunning expression, a fleshy nose with a flattened tip, a scant beard, tousled whiskers, and a habit of smacking his lips.

"I think a lot of you, Daria Dmitrievna. There is little ferocity in you and not much toughness, and your civilization is a bit superficial, my dear . . . but you're a nice, sweet, red apple for all that, although not quite ripe yet . . ." he said, while he was attending to the potatoes. He had stolen them from a vegetable garden on the steppe hamlet they had passed not long ago. His fleshy nose was shiny from the heat of the fire and his nostrils twitched craftily. The man's name was Kuzma Kuzmich Nefedov. He got on Dasha's nerves terribly with his stilted talk and his uncanny divination of her thoughts.

They had made each other's acquaintance a few days before on a train which had dragged itself along on a fantastic route and according to a fantastic time-table and had finally been derailed by a White Cossack detachment.

The coach in which Dasha was travelling was the last of the train and did not leave the rails; but it got a burst of machine-gun fire and all its passengers fled into the steppe, as according to the custom of those days they could expect to be robbed of all they possessed and suffer ill-treatment and even death at the hands of the attackers.

Kuzma Kuzmich had already had an eye on Dasha while they were still in the train. He had taken a liking to her for some reason, although she showed no inclination at all for the sort of conversation he wanted. But then, alone at dawn in the vast empty steppe, Dasha had clutched at him of her own accord in her plight. And indeed the position was bad enough: from where the coaches of the train were lying at the foot of the embankment, came cries and the rattle of shots; then a flame rose up, causing the tall thistles and dry wormwood bushes covered with rime to throw grim shadows on the ground. Where was she to go in this trackless desert?

Then Kuzma Kuzmich had guided her away in a direction whence the smell of chimney-smoke came towards them out of the greenish dawn, and said:

"You are not only frightened, my beauty, you are also very unhappy, or so it seems to me. Whereas I, although I have had many troubles, have never known either unhappiness, or what is worse—boredom. I was a priest, but was unfrocked for free-thinking and cooped up in a monastery. But now I am a wanderer on the face of the earth, as they said in olden days. A man who can be happy only if he has a warm corner to himself, and a quiet lamp, and behind his back a shelf with books—such a man will never know happiness. For him happiness is always just round the corner until one evil day he finds himself without his warm nook and without any hope of another to-morrow. For such there is nothing but sighs and groans. . . . But I—I walk along in the steppe, my nostrils meet the smell of baking bread—that means that there is a farm over there; we shall soon hear the dogs barking. My God! Look how the sun comes up! Beside me walks a fellow-traveller who looks like an angel, provoking me to pity and mercy and rousing in me a desire to prance about like a giddy colt. What am I? Why, the happiest of men. I always have a little bag of salt in my pocket. I can always pinch some potatoes from a garden. What is beyond that? A motley world full of the clash of passions. I have thought a great deal, Daria Dmitrievna, a very great deal have I thought about the fate of our intelligentsia. An un-Russian lot they are, I must say. . . . And so, 'a wind blew and they were not'. Only an empty place is left in their stead; while I, the unfrocked priest, am as happy as a lark and have every intention of staying so a long time. . . ."

Without him Dasha would have perished. He, for his part, was fully equal to dealing with every contingency. At sunrise they reached a farm, planted there in the bare, treeless steppe, its horse-pound empty, and its roof burnt over its baked-clay walls. They were met at the well by a grim, grey-haired Cossack armed with a shotgun, who shouted at them: "Get out!" and darted them a fierce glance from his light eyes, under angrily contracted brows. Kuzma Kuzmich quickly enmeshed the old man: "So much the better, grandfather, at least we'll lie in our native earth. . . . We have fled night and day from the revolution, our feet are sore, our tongues are parched with thirst, we'll thank you to shoot us, we have nowhere to go." The old man proved quite tractable and even inclined to tears. His sons had been mobilized with Mamontov's corps, his two daughters-in-law had left the farm for the village. He had not ploughed this year. The Reds had come and 'mobilized' his horses.

The Whites had come and 'mobilized' his poultry. So here he was alone on the farm, with a crust of mouldy bread and a little of last year's tobacco. . . .

They rested there during the day and then moved on in the night in the direction of Tsaritsyn, from where it was easiest of all to get through to the south. They walked through the night and slept in the daytime, mostly in the fields, hiding in last year's haystacks. Kuzma Kuzmich avoided inhabited places. Looking down one day from a chalk hill on a village spreading its white cottages comfortably along both sides of a long pond, he said:

"People in the mass are apt to be dangerous nowadays, especially for those who don't know what they want. People who don't know what they want are incomprehensible and that makes other people suspicious of them. The Russians, Daria Dmitrievna, are a passionate, self-confident lot and they spend their strength freely, without counting the cost. If you set them tasks which may appear beyond their power but are worth while, they will thank you from their hearts. . . . But if you were to go down into that village, people would begin to ask questions. And what would you say in reply, my little intellectual? That you have not made up your mind about anything, about anything at all, about one single thing. . . ."

"Look here, leave me alone, will you?" Dasha said softly.

However hard she tried to resist him—out of pride and because she did not wish to think of all that—Kuzma Kuzmich soon succeeded in worming out of her nearly everything about her father, Dr. Bulavin, her husband, Ivan Ilyich Telegin, her sister, Katia, who was "so lovely, so gentle, so pure". Then one evening, at the end of a perfect day, during which she had slept soundly in a rick of straw, she went down to a brook nearby, washed herself, brushed her hair and re-arranged her knitted scarf, ate her fill, cheered up and suddenly began to talk of her own accord without any prompting from Kuzma Kuzmich:

". . . that's how it all came about . . . I could not stay with my father in Samara any longer. . . . You regard me as a parasite. But my own opinion of myself is much worse than yours can be. . . . And yet I cannot regard myself as an inferior being, as the basest of the base. . . ."

"I can imagine that," Kuzma Kuzmich said, and smacked his lips.

"No you can't . . ." Dasha screwed up her eyes to screen them from the glare of the fire. "My husband risked his life to see me for just a minute. He is a strong and brave man, a man of final decisions. And I? Was it worth while to risk his life for such a futile thing? After that visit of his I beat my head against the window-sill. I began to hate my father. Because it is he who is to blame for everything. What a ridiculous and futile creature he is! I decided to go to Yekaterinoslav to find my sister Katia—she would have understood and helped me; she is so sensible and so responsive, my Katia. Don't laugh, please. I want to do ordinary, necessary, fine things—that is all I want. But I don't even know how to begin. And please don't start preaching at me about the revolution . . ."

"No, my dear, I have no intention of preaching at you. I'm listening attentively and with the deepest sympathy."

"Oh, your sympathy is neither here nor there. Where was I? Oh, yes . . . at this time the Red Army was approaching Samara and the government ran away—it was a disgusting exhibition. . . . My father wanted me to go with him and we had a quarrel and told each other some home truths. My father sent for the police and said: 'I'll have you hanged for this, my dear!' But of course the police didn't come, they had all cleared out by then. My father rushed out into the street with nothing but a brief case and I shouted the last words I had to say through the window at his back. . . . You can never hate a stranger as much as you can your own father! Well, after that I lay down on the sofa, wrapped myself up in my shawl and howled! And that was the end of all my old life."

Thus they had travelled across the steppe, past villages and hamlets caught up in the turmoil of civil war, scarcely ever meeting other human beings and quite unaware of the bloody events developing in this region as the seventy-five thousand men of the Don Cossack army advanced for the second time to invest Tsaritsyn.

Kuzma Kuzmich dug in the ashes of the fire for potatoes and said:

"If you are very tired, Daria Dmitrievna, we can stay here to-night and rest—there is no particular hurry; only this is not a very good place for camping—the draught out of that ravine would keep us awake. Better walk on a bit farther under the stars. What a lovely world it is!" He turned his crafty red face up towards the sky as if he were making sure that everything was in order up there in the celestial household. "Isn't it a miracle, ducky: here we are, two little beetles crawling about in the universe, watching with curious minds a pageant of events, each more surprising than the other; drawing conclusions which are in no way binding, and satisfying our hunger and thirst without having to violate our conscience. . . . No, better not hurry to get to the end of our journey."

He pulled a little bag of salt from his pocket, picked up a potato, laid it on his palm, blew on his fingers, broke the potato in two and offered it to Dasha.

"I have read a tremendous number of books and this burden lay dormant in me without any system at all. The revolution released me from my monastery prison and drove me out into the world, none too kindly. A very clever man, the chief of the Saratov police, in whose district I spent a fortnight under arrest, issued an identity card to me which he wrote out in his own hand. It says: Profession: parasite; Education: pseudo-scientific; Opinions: total lack of principle. And yet, Daria Dmitrievna, when I found myself absolutely free, with nothing but a little bag of salt in my pocket, I understood the miracle of life. My useless studies, which had only been a burden on my memory, began to sprout, and many of them proved very useful indeed even from the point of view of exchange values. Take for example the study of the human palm, or chiromancy. It is to this science alone that I owe the permanent replenishment of my stocks of salt."

Dasha was not listening to him. She wanted to cry very much, perhaps because the wind was thinly whistling in the wheat stubble with such homeless dejection, and she turned round again and again to gaze at the darkening sunset. A bitter hopelessness flooded her as she contemplated the infinite distance she would have to traverse in search of Ivan Ilyich, of Katia, of her own self. In the past she would have certainly taken pleasure in this sharp pity of herself, of little Dasha, so helpless and forlorn in the cold vastness of the steppe. . . . But now, it was different! She took the potato from Kuzma Kuzmich and ate it, swallowing her tears together with the food. . . . She recalled the words in one of Katia's letters, received while she was still in Petrograd: "The past has perished, perished for ever, Dasha."

"Apart from being completely out of touch with real life, an aimless, bustling futility is one of the main vices of our intelligentsia, Daria Dmitrievna. . . . Have you ever observed the curious gait of professional men; how our Liberals

trip along almost on tiptoe, impatiently, as if they had a rash or something. Why? What for?"

The intolerable creature, how he talks and brags—thought Dasha.

"No, we must go on, of course—let's go," she said, and pulled the knitted shawl tighter round her neck. Kuzma Kuzmich looked at her questioningly. At that moment several flashes of fire cut through the dense shadows of the ravine and an instant later they heard the crackle of shots.

The sound of the first shots had hardly died down when the empty steppe, over which the last slit of the sunset in the distant clouds had just closed, was suddenly alive with men. Dasha, still holding on to the ends of her shawl, had not even found time to get to her feet. Kuzma Kuzmich hurriedly began to stamp out the fire, but the wind fanned it and blew the sparks in all directions. By their light Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich saw mounted men galloping across the steppe, bending low over their horses' necks and plying their whips as they tried to escape from the fusillade coming out of the ravine.

In a minute the riders were gone and everything was quiet again. Only Dasha's heart was still beating fast. Then there was shouting from the ravine and a swarm of armed men sprang out from it. They moved across the steppe in a wide sweep, cautiously feeling their way. The nearest of the men turned towards the fire and shouted in a strained but youthful voice: "Hey, who are you?" Kuzma Kuzmich raised his hands above his head, with fingers well apart. A youth in a military greatcoat came up to him. "What are you doing here?" he asked, turning a determined, dark-browed face towards the two at the fire. "Scouts? Whites?" Without waiting for an answer he pushed Kuzma Kuzmich with the butt of his rifle: "Come on, you can talk on the way . . ."

"But actually we——"

" 'Actually', is it! Can't you see we are in the middle of a battle?"

Kuzma Kuzmich made no further protest and together with Dasha they were marched away by their captor, almost at a run, so rapidly was the detachment moving. It was quite dark by the time they reached the thatched roofs grouped round a pond, where horses whinnied among unharnessed carts. A man shouted at the detachment. They stopped, surrounded him, and began to explain:

"We had to withdraw, there was nothing we could do. They had us outflanked, the vermin. . . . Quite near here, in a gully, we fetched up against their patrols."

"So you heroes ran away, eh?" the man who had stopped them said in a bantering tone. "Where's your commander?"

"Where's the commander? Hey, commander! Ivan! Hurry up, the regimental commander wants you," many voices cried all at once. A tall, stooping man came out of the darkness and said: "All present and correct, comrade regimental commander, no casualties."

"Post your sentries, feed your men, light no fires, come into the house afterwards."

The men dispersed. The farm seemed deserted, only whispered commands and the challenges of the sentries could be heard in the darkness; then even these sounds died away and only the wind rustled the thatch on the roof and whistled through the bare branches of the willows on the edge of the pond. The young Red Army man who had captured them now came up to Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich. In the light of the stars, now shining brightly over the farm, they could distinguish his lean, pale face with the dark brows. Looking

at him, Dasha thought, "*Why, it's a girl*". "Follow me," he said sternly, and led them to the house. "Wait in the porch, find yourself something to sit on," he said, opened the door, went in and closed it. They could hear the harsh, low-pitched voice of the detachment commander rumbling inside. It went on so long and so monotonously that Dasha leant her head against Kuzma Kuzmich's shoulder and closed her eyes. "Don't be afraid, we'll be all right," he whispered. The door opened and the Red Army man, groping for the two suspects, said again: "Follow me," led them outside, looked round for a place to confine the prisoners, and then pointed to a low lean-to with a thatched roof, the door of which was torn from its hinges. Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich went inside and the Red Army man sat down on the threshold, holding his rifle across his knees. Inside the lean-to there was a smell of flour and of mice. Dasha said in quiet despair:

"May I sit beside you? I am afraid of mice."

The Red Army man reluctantly made room for her and she sat down on the threshold. The Red Army man suddenly yawned with abandon, like a child, and looked askance at Dasha:

"Spies, eh?"

"Listen, comrade," Kuzma Kuzmich said out of darkness, and came nearer. "Let me explain——"

"You can explain later."

"We are peaceful inhabitants, refugees——"

"Aye, peaceful! What do you mean—peaceful? Where did you find peace?"

Dasha leant her head against the door-frame, looked at the dark-browed, handsome face of the Red Army man, at the delicate outline of the tip-tilted nose, at the small pouting mouth, the shapely chin, and asked suddenly: "What's your name?"

"My name has nothing to do with you."

"You are a woman?"

"That won't make any difference to you."

That would have been the end of their conversation, but Dasha could not take her eyes off that lovely face.

"Why do you talk to me as if I were an enemy?" she asked softly. "After all, you don't know me. Why assume from the start that I am an enemy? I am just such a Russian woman as yourself. . . . The only difference is that I may have suffered more than you——"

"Russian, eh? Burzhuy, you mean," the Red Army man said with a slight stutter, and frowned.

Dasha's lips parted. With a sudden impulse she moved closer to him and kissed him on his hot and velvety cheek. The Red Army man had expected anything but this; he blinked and looked at Dasha from under long lashes, got up, shifted the rifle in his hand, stepped back and slipped the sling of the rifle over his shoulder.

"Better stop that sort of thing, citizen," he said in a menacing tone. "It will do you no good——"

"But what, oh, what *will* do me good?" Dasha asked passionately. "You have found the right thing to do, and I . . . I can't find it . . . I have run away from that other life head over heels. I ran after my happiness. . . . And I envy you . . . I would like to be like you, with a rifle slung over a greatcoat!"

She was so agitated that she tossed the shawl off her head and gripped its ends with all her strength in her little fists.

"For you everything is clear and simple. . . . What is it you are fighting

for? That women may in future look up to these stars without tears. . . . I want the same—the same happiness——"

Dasha spoke and the Red Army man listened without trying to stop her, startled by this incomprehensible outbreak. The company commander now came out of the house and boomed:

"Come on, Agrippina, bring that vermin in here!"

The regimental commander, with bright, wide-spaced eyes, pipe in mouth, was sitting at a table in the room with the company commander, whose weather-beaten face was like the bark of a tree. They both wore military greatcoats and caps and sat with their elbows on the table on which a night-light was burning with a tiny flame. Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich stopped near the door but the commander ordered them to step forward.

"Why were you in the steppe in the operational zone of the troops?"

His eyes rested not just anywhere but looked them straight in the face. Dasha suddenly felt very weak under that glance and whispered with dry lips:

"He will tell you. May I sit down?"

She sat down, holding on to the edge of the wooden settee and stared at the little flame of the night-light swimming in its small clay pot. Kuzma Kuzmich smacked his lips, trod from one foot to the other and began to tell how he had found Daria Dmitrievna in the steppe and how they had moved along towards the Don, arguing mainly about exalted matters. Of this aspect of their journey he spoke in detail, stuttering in his haste for fear of being cut short.

"It is a great thing, citizen commanders, to think in broad categories. What I want to say is that we are grateful to the revolution for having divorced us from the dreary trivialities of life. Man, that creature equal to God, destined to fulfil sublime tasks, to bring stones to life like Orpheus with his lyre, and to pacify the fury of untamed Nature—this same man sat slobbering over bank-notes by the light of a smoking wick and used his reason to swindle his neighbour. We owe you thanks for breaking up that miserable way of life of unhappy memory. Nothing left to slobber over now, so, willy-nilly, we must change over to loftier subjects. . . . As proof of my sincerity—here (he pulled out his little bag of salt), is my only property, I need nothing more, everything else I beg or steal. Well, citizen commanders, I would like to debate with you. You are fighting for the happiness of mankind, but you often forget about men themselves—they get lost between the lines. Don't separate the revolution from man, don't turn it into a speculative philosophy, for all philosophy is mere smoke: it takes on beautiful shapes and disappears without a trace. . . . Here is the explanation of my interest in the fate of this woman: in her I turn the pages of a fascinating, poetic story—as by the way one may do with all human beings if one approaches them with eager curiosity. Why, here is a whole universe walking about in front of you in a torn fur coat and ragged shoes."

"Cunningly devised," said the regimental commander, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Let me see your identity papers," the company commander followed up his superior. He took Kuzma Kuzmich's and Dasha's passports, moved the light closer, bent low over the papers, wet his finger and carefully turned page after page of the passport booklets. The regimental commander sighed deeply from time to time and sucked at his well-worn pipe, which had been smoking under his whiskers all through five years of war.

"Who is your father?" the company commander asked Dasha.

"Dr. Bulavin."

"Wasn't he a minister in the former Samara government?"

"Yes."

The company commander glanced at the regimental commander and passed Dasha's passport on to him, then frowned and asked Kuzma Kuzmich:

"And you—a priest, aren't you?"

Kuzma Kuzmich seemed to have expected this question long ago. He shuffled his ragged boots and answered cheerfully:

"I was twice expelled from the seminary—once for complaining about the food and once for composing irreverent doggerel. My father was a priest in Saratov and he twice flogged the skin off my back with his own paternal hands. My further conduct sheet is attached to the passport."

The company commander was not listening to him but glancing sideways at Dasha.

"A bad business, yours. You will have to tell the whole truth." He frowned and cleared his throat as he turned the pages of the passport a second time. "That is the only thing that might save you. Yes, a bad business."

Dasha was looking at him in silence with wide-open eyes. At that moment Agrippina, who was standing near the door, said doggedly:

"Ivan, she can be trusted, I have talked with her."

The company commander jerked up his big nose and stared at Agrippina. The regimental commander laughed. Kuzma Kuzmich nodded rapidly with his red, merry face. The company commander said slowly:

"Where are we? At a sewing bee?" The regimental commander's curling whiskers twitched and his eyes narrowed in the effort to keep a straight face. "Private Chebrets, on what grounds are you interfering with the interrogation of a prisoner?"

Agrippina drew a deep breath. She was furious, and had it not been for the presence of the regimental commander she would have answered the company commander as peasant women do when they quarrel over the fence. But the regimental commander said in a deep voice: "Private Chebrets, leave the room."

Agrippina darted him a long look from her dark eyes, banged the butt of her rifle on the floor and left the room, her lips pressed tightly together. The company commander sniffed and put his hand into his pocket for a smoke.

"So you have already had time to spread your propaganda even here?"

Dasha bent her head and said softly:

"Please believe me. If you don't believe me there is no point in my saying anything at all. My father, Bulavin, is your enemy, but he is my enemy, too. He wanted to have me hanged; I escaped from Samara——"

The company commander made a gesture of perplexity:

"How can we believe you, citizen? You are telling us fairy tales."

At that moment the regimental commander took the pipe from his mouth, wiped it on his sleeve, and said stolidly:

"Keep cool, Gora; maybe she is telling the truth. Your name is Telegin?"

Dasha whispered faintly: "Yes."

"Can you remember your husband's first name?"

"Ivan Ilyich."

"Staff captain in the imperial service?"

"Yes, I think so."

"He was company commander in the Eleventh Red Army?"

"You know him?"

Dasha rushed to the table, her cheeks aflame. A minute ago she was torpid, more dead than alive; now she was like an open rose:

"I saw Ivan the last time when he escaped over the house-tops under fire. This is how it happened——"

"Come, be calm, sit down," the regimental commander said. "I know Ivan Ilyich, we were together in the German war and escaped together from the prison camp. My name is Melshin, Peter Nikolayevich, your husband may have mentioned me to you. He is well known in the Red Army, too." The regimental commander turned to the company commander: "Your wife has shown better judgment than you in this matter." Then he spoke to Dasha again. "You had better rest now, we'll talk to-morrow. You can stay here. The kitchen is on the other side of the porch. Sleep well."

Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich—both commanders seemed to have completely forgotten all about him—crossed the porch and entered the empty kitchen which was well heated. Kuzma Kuzmich advised Dasha to climb up on to the top of the stove. "You'll be nice and snug up there; you'll catch up on a week's sleep in one night. Here, let me give you a leg-up, ducky."

Dasha clambered up on to the stove with some difficulty, unwound her shawl, folded it for a pillow, put it under her head, covered herself up with her coat and drew up her legs. It was pleasant here—it smelt of warm bricks and baked bread. A cricket chirped and prevented Dasha from going to sleep immediately: her sleep was merely a thin veil covering her and the chirping of the cricket embroidered the veil with grey stitches of sound.

At one time she imagined it was a metronome ticking—she was sitting at the piano, but her hands were hanging down as if paralysed. Her heart was beating fast with expectation, but what she heard was not the footsteps of her beloved, only the chirping of the cricket, stitch after stitch.

"How restful it is here, how restful," a voice repeated inside her. "Poor Dasha has come home. But you have never known a home, Dasha. Oh, don't interrupt. It's the conductor of the orchestra, he is tapping his stand with his ivory baton . . . the music will begin in a minute." And again the cricket chirped.

Kuzma Kuzmich made a bed for himself on the wooden settee under the stove. He, too, found it difficult to sleep. He smacked his lips and muttered to himself:

"They have trusted us, trusted us. Simple hearts. In their place I would not have trusted us so easily. Why? We don't even know ourselves, man is an ignorant being. But they trusted us, believed us. Strong men are always simple. Therein lies their strength. So now we have been given a passport. They believe us. All right. Can you use a man with brains? Does the revolution need him? Yes. Well, here I am. Daria Dmitrievna, I ask you, does the revolution need men with brains?"

CHAPTER II

AFTER THE COMPLETION of military operations at Samara, Ivan Ilyich Telegin was given a new appointment.

The Ninth Red Army had used up all its scanty stock of munitions in the August fighting at Tsaritsyn. The Supreme Military Council of the Republic answered only with the greatest reluctance and delay all applications and demands that Tsaritsyn be supplied with the necessary materials, in view of the inevitably imminent fresh offensive of the Don army. But a comrade-in-arms of Voroshilov, commander of the Ninth Army, had been sent to Moscow with the special mission of pushing and breaking through the incomprehensible delays and red tape of the supply services of the Supreme Military Council. The result of his efforts was that a limited quantity of supplies was finally sent to the Tsaritsyn front.

Ivan Ilyich was ordered to go to Nizhni, load a river tug with ammunition cases and two guns and escort them to Tsaritsyn. Again, as once before that summer, again as many years before, he was floating down the slow, infinite, majestic, empty Volga. The low-built brown tug boat beat the still water noisily with its paddle-wheels. The bank ahead always looked as if the river ended there—but then a wide turn opened up a new distance, lying blue and bright under the autumn sun. In the last few months the Volga had been cleared of the Whites, but in spite of that the tug kept away from the banks wherever the darkened timber cottages of a big village spread themselves on the summit of the bluff or where a belfry from which it was convenient to fire a machine-gun showed between the golden foliage on some bald hillock.

Ten sailors of the Baltic Fleet were cracking jokes around the guns aft. Usually Ivan Ilyich also spent the time there, lying on his side and laughing at their jokes till he cried, or exclaiming with amazement at their tall yarns. He was a good listener, simple-minded and credulous, no sailor could ask for a better.

Every day the youngest of the seamen, Sharygin, a member of the Young Communist League, tall and deliberate, walked to the ship's bell and rang a summons for all hands to come on deck. The sailors sat down in a circle; even the engineer—a little old man who, it was said, had lost a lot of money in the revolution—climbed up the companion; a stoker, a surly, unfriendly fellow, stuck his head out through the hatch; and the cook, a woman, came from the galley, wiping her hands on her apron. Sharygin sat down on a coil of rope and began to speak in a confident manner. He was too young to have read much, but he had had time to understand all that mattered. His black hair lay in dense curls under his sailor cap, his eyes were light grey, and only the nose spoilt the picture—it was a small snub nose and looked as though it had strayed on to Sharygin's face from an entirely different countenance.

His job was not an easy one. The sailors were men who had long been torn from their peasant plough or Karelian fishing-boat and had their own ideas about the revolution. They had been through the gruelling experience of service in the imperial navy. When the time was ripe they seized their chance, threw their officers overboard and raised the banner of world revolution. They had seen the world, they had sailed the Seven Seas. The world was wide and the sailors understood it. In the old days all the sailor's property was in his sea-chest. Now there was not even a sea-chest. Now the sailor had only his rifle, his machine-gun cartridge belt—and the whole world for his own. If these had been the days of Stenka Razin, each of them would have tilted a red-topped cap on one ear and gone to roam the wide open spaces, free and untrammelled, leaving behind him the glow of fires painting the very skies. "Hey, you, serfs of the nobles, serfs of the Tsar, hey, you unfortunates, hey, you have-nots, come and divide up the land, divide up the gold, it's all yours to enjoy. . . ."

But the proletarian revolution demanded a less simple programme, and demanded that they control their emotional reactions.

"The revolution, comrades, is a science," Sharygin said. "You may be as clever as you please, but if you have not studied this science, you will always make mistakes. And what is a mistake? It would be better for you if you murdered your father and mother, for a mistake will lead you to take up a burzhuy point of view, as a mouse is lured into a trap; and once you're in the trap, all your previous services are brought to nought and you are regarded as an enemy."

The sailors took no exception to this. Without knowledge you could not even navigate a ship, much less defeat a counter-revolution. At most one or the other of them, clasping his huge tattooed hands over his knee, might ask:

"All right. Now answer me this question: without ability you can't even set a stove in the bath-house, without ability your wife can't even make the dough rise properly. So is ability wanted or isn't it?"

Sharygin answered him: "See, comrades, what Latugin is driving at? Ability is something peculiar to the individual, and hence it is dangerous because it can lead a man to bourgeois anarchism, to individualism."

"There you go." Latugin flapped his hand with a gesture of despair. "First chew up and swallow and digest these long words; then you can use them."

The stoker angrily growled from his hatch: "Ability, eh? We know your sort! Nails dyed with sandalwood, bell-bottomed trousers, gold chain round the neck. . . . Ability, indeed!"

The sailors took this sally in bad part. The stoker snorted; said: "What you need is ten years sweating in the stokehold," and withdrew into the engine-room out of the way of further trouble.

Sharygin calmly poured oil on the troubled waters. "He is quite right," he said, "we have men among us who dye their nails with sandalwood, but they are scum and will come to no good. There are also some who have been corrupted by the Socialist-Revolutionaries. But the great mass of our sailors have unreservedly devoted themselves to the revolution. Let's forget about ability, ability must be subordinated to other things. Afterwards we can have a good time—those of us who survive. As for me, I don't expect to survive."

Sharygin shook his curls and was silent. For a short time no one spoke. They listened to the gurgling of the water under the bows. The stern words had a good effect on the men. Russians like holidays and feasts of all kinds. And if they are out for a good time, let it be complete and never mind if you lose your hat. And if it's a fight, let it be fierce and merciless, without looking back. Death is terrible on weekdays, in dreary, rainy weather, but a hot fight fought for a good cause hardens the heart, and in one of these a Russian has no fear so long as he feels that life is vivid as on a holiday; and should an enemy bullet or a glittering blade pierce him, well—he just stumbles, flings his arms wide in the vast steppe and his head is turned for ever by the wine than which no stronger exists on earth.

The sailors liked Sharygin's saying that he did not expect to survive. So they pardoned him his long words and his callow cocksureness; even his funny snub nose seemed to them quite appropriate. He, for his part, told them about the grain monopoly, about the class war in the villages, about the world revolution. The grey-haired engineer half closed his eyes, put his hand on his belly and nodded approval, especially when Sharygin, losing the thread of his thoughts, began to express himself in a muddled way. Anissya Nazarova, the cook,

hired in Astrakhan during a previous voyage, never sat with the men but stood by herself a few paces away, looking out towards the banks that were slipping past. Her young face, gaunt with suffering under her bulging forehead and beautiful golden hair wound in a pleat round her head, was calm and dispassionate, though from time to time she swallowed as if to get rid of a lump in her throat.

Telegin also took part in these discussions or told stories about his military experiences, drawing the positions of the fronts on the deck with a piece of chalk.

"The counter-revolution, comrades, as you can see, works according to a unified plan. The idea is to surround Central Russia, cut it off from its food and fuel supplies and crush it. The counter-revolution raises its head in the outlying districts, the richest, most fertile regions. In the Kuban, for instance, there are a million and a half of Cossacks and just as many tenant-farmers. Between the Cossacks and the tenant-farmers there is mortal enmity. Denikin counted on this enmity and with a handful of volunteer officers boldly rushed into the fray and routed and destroyed an army of a hundred thousand men commanded by the scoundrel Sorokin, who ought to have been shot at the very start for anarchy and treason. Now Denikin is putting his rear on a solid basis by helping the Cossacks to massacre the Reds in the Kuban. Denikin is a shrewd and dangerous enemy."

The sailors looked at Telegin, their nostrils quivered and blue veins swelled under their bronzed skin. The engineer again nodded approval.

"General Krasnov's task is much narrower, because it is difficult to induce the Cossacks of the Don to fight outside the Don region. You know the saying:

'The Cossack is smooth and plump;
Because all he does is eat and sit on his rump.'

The Cossack is full of dash, but only if he is fighting for his own home. In spite of this the Krasnov brand of counter-revolution is at the present moment more dangerous than any other from our point of view. If we were to be thrown back from the Volga and were to lose Tsaritsyn, Krasnov and Denikin could join up with the forces of the Siberian counter-revolution. Fortunately for us, Krasnov and Denikin have not reached full agreement. The Don crowd call Denikin's Volunteers 'itinerant musicians', and the Volunteers call the Don Cossacks 'German whores'. But that is not something to rely on. Against the plans of the counter-revolution we must pit a comprehensive plan of our own, and the first step towards this is a proper organization of the Red Army, without all this partisan business on wheels."

Sharygin threw Telegin a jealous glance, and added:

"Yes, that's right. . . . So, comrades, we come back to what I said in the beginning about revolutionary discipline."

During one of these discussions Anissya Nazarova suddenly stretched out her hands in front of her as blind people do, and said in an even voice, but so full of meaning that all the men turned towards her to listen:

"Excuse me, comrades, but I must tell you. Listen to my story."

This was the story: One morning at first light, Anissya Nazarova went outside to milk the cow. But just as she opened the stable door and Burenka the cow mooed pleadingly out of the darkness, she heard shots in the steppe. Anissya put down the milk-pail and adjusted her head-cloth. Her heart beat

wildly, and as she approached the door opening into the village street her legs turned to water under her. Still, she managed to open the door and saw men running after a cart along the street and jumping into it. The shots were now closer and more frequent from the direction of the steppe and of the pond, from each end of the street. The cart with the comrades from the village soviet was held up and surrounded by mounted men. They milled around the cart like dogs tearing a strange dog, fired shots and slashed with their sabres.

Anissya closed the door, made the sign of the cross, and started to pick up the pail, but suddenly remembered the children and rushed to the room where her babies Vanya and Masha were sleeping. She woke them up, whispered in their ears, stroked their little heads, dressed them and took them out into the yard to the pile of dung-cakes behind the cowshed, stacked up to dry in the shape of a tall ant-heap with an empty space in the centre. Anissya took out a few dung-cakes and told the children to crawl inside the pile and stay there and be very quiet.

By now the whole street was alive with the beat of horses' hooves, shouts, and the rattle of arms. Soon the butt of a rifle crashed against Anissya's door: "Open up!" When Anissya opened the door two men, reeking of crude spirits, seized her. "Where is Senka Nazarov, your husband? Out with it, or we'll kill you on the spot." Anissya's husband was not a Cossack; he came from other parts and was in the Red Army—Anissya herself had no idea whether he was still alive. So she said that she did not know where her husband was—he had been taken away that summer by some men she did not know. The Cossacks stopped shaking Anissya, went into the house, turned everything upside down, broke everything, came out, seized Anissya again and dragged her along the street to the village soviet, which had been the ataman's house in the old days.

The sun was already high, but in the village shutters and doors were still closed as if no one was yet awake. Only in front of the soviet was there movement; a group of mounted Cossacks milled about at the gate and other Cossacks on foot were driving peasants and Cossacks up to the house, all with their hands bound and some covered with blood. It was later discovered that all those who had voted for Soviet power in the spring of that year were being thus taken.

In the ataman's house an officer, red-eyed with want of sleep and a skull-and-crossbones badge embroidered on his sleeve, was sitting at a table, and beside him sat Cornet Zmiyev, well known to everyone in the village, whence he had fled six months before. Everyone had forgotten him, and now here he was with his walrus moustache, fat, hale and hearty and with a face as red as copper. When Anissya was pushed into the room the Cornet was shouting at some prisoners, of whom there were more than fifty under guard by now:

"Well, you red-bellied bastards, has the Soviet government helped you, eh? Come on, tell us what you have learnt from the Moscow commissars."

The officer looked at his list as each man was pushed and dragged to the table and asked in a low voice:

"Do you admit that this is your name? Good. Do you sympathize with the Bolsheviks? No? Did you vote in May? No? So you are lying. Flog him. Next man. Cossack Rodionov?" He raised his pale eyes, spotted like those of a sheep: "Stand to attention! Look me in the eye! Were you a delegate at the peasant congress? No? Did you carry on propaganda in favour of the Soviet? Again no? So you are lying to a court martial. Left turn! Next man. . . ."

The Cossacks seized the prisoners, dragged and pushed them off the porch, threw them on the ground, pulled their trousers off and bared their buttocks; then one man sat down on the struggling man's legs, another pressed the head between his knees, and two more drew the ramrods out of their rifles and beat the prostrate man with all their strength, making the ramrods whistle through the air.

The officer could no longer speak in a low voice because of the dreadful screams of the tortured men outside. The execution was watched by a crowd of Cossacks of the raiding force, on horseback and on foot, and by those of the local Cossacks who had rushed out of their houses to meet the raiders with shouts of: "Christ has arisen!" They, too, were shouting and cursing and encouraging the torturers: "Beat them till the bones show! Beat them to the last drop of blood! That will teach them to want Soviet power!"

Finally, only Anissya and a young schoolmistress were left in the ataman's house. The schoolmistress had come to the village of her own accord and had done her best to enlighten the villagers: she had called the women together and read Pushkin and Leo Tolstoy to them and had taken the children out to catch beetles—as if these were the times to catch beetles!

Count Zmiyev shouted at her: "Stand up, you Jewish bitch!"

The schoolmistress stood up and her lips trembled for a while before she managed to speak a word:

"I am not a Jewess, as you know perfectly well, Zmiyev. But even if I was a Jewess, that is no crime——"

"How long have you been in the Communist Party?" the officer asked.

"I am not a Communist. I love children and consider it my duty to teach them to read and write. In this village ninety per cent of the people are illiterate, imagine that."

"Yes, I can imagine," the officer said. "And now we are going to whip you."

The schoolmistress went pale and drew back. The cornet roared at her: "Strip." Her pretty face twitched, she began to unbotton her checked cloth coat and took it off as if in a dream.

"Listen, listen!" she gasped, and made a helpless gesture towards the officer. "Think what you are doing!" At that moment a hoarse voice uttered a scream of unbearable horror outside. The cornet roared again: "Take off your knickers, you slut!"

"Blackguard!" the schoolmistress shouted at him. Her eyes were burning, her face blushed crimson with anger. "Shoot me, you beasts, you monsters! But you will pay for all this!"

Then the cornet seized her, lifted her off her feet and threw her on the floor. Two Cossacks pulled her skirts over her head and held down her feet and her head. The officer slowly came out from behind the table, took a whip from one of the Cossacks and a smile crept over his grey face. Raising the whip he brought it down heavily on the girl's buttocks; the cornet leant forward in his chair and said loudly: "One!" The officer continued beating the girl, who made no sound. "Twenty-five. That's enough for you," he said, and threw down the whip. "You can go now and complain of me to the district ataman." The girl lay as if dead.

The Cossacks lifted her and carried her out to the porch. Now it was Anissya's turn. The officer tightened his belt and jerked his chin towards the door. Anissya, beside herself with hate, tried to break away, and when the Cossacks seized her, she tore at their hair, twisted and turned, bit their hands

and kicked their shins. She tore herself away at last, and bareheaded and dishevelled, she furiously attacked the Cossacks and was knocked senseless by a blow on the head. They took the skin off her back with their ramrods and left her lying near the porch—probably in the belief that she was dead.

The punitive detachment under the command of Captain Nemeshayev reintroduced "law and order" in the village, appointed an ataman, loaded a few vehicles with bread, bacon, and other requisitioned goods and took itself off. All day the village was silent. No one made a fire, no one drove out the cattle. That night several of the immigrants' cottages caught fire, among them Anissya's house.

The neighbours were afraid to put out the fires because when the first house at the edge of the village went up in flames, mounted Cossacks were seen galloping towards it and shots were heard. Anissya's house burned to the ground. Only next morning did the neighbours remember the children. Anissya's children, Vanya and Masha, who had remained quietly in the dung-cake pile until evening, had been burned to death together with the cow, the sheep and the poultry.

Kind-hearted people picked up Anissya—who was lying unconscious and groaning near the porch of the ataman's house—put her to bed and nursed her back to life. When, a few weeks later, she began to understand things again, they told her about the children. There was nothing left to keep Anissya in the village, and so she told these kind people. It was autumn. There was no news of her husband. She did not want to live. She went away, tramping from village to village until she reached the railway and finally found herself in Astrakhan where she got this job as cook on the tug, because the last cook had gone ashore during a previous voyage and had never come back.

Having told this incident in her life, Anissya Nazarov said:

"Thank you, comrades; thank you that you have listened to my sorrows."

She wiped her eyes with her apron and went back to her galley. The sailors sat in silence for a long time, frowning and clasping their thick-veined hands over their knees. Ivan Ilyich left them and lay down by himself a little distance away. He restrained a sigh and thought: "There you are. You meet a human being and go past without noticing that you are face to face with a whole kingdom of smoking ruins."

Under the impression of the story told by this woman he imperceptibly drifted into thinking of his own grief which he had hidden away deep from everyone, and from himself in the first place. He had very little hope of ever seeing Dasha again. True, men were tough; no other animal could survive such wounds, such misfortunes. But where was he to look for Dasha in this immense space, among all the millions trekking eastward. And that old fool, Bulavin, may have even taken her abroad.

He shook his head and sighed with pity as he remembered Dasha's love for comfort, for refinement, and that cool passion of hers that was like the bubbling of iced wine. It was beyond her strength, all this. She was brought up in a hot-house and now she was out in this tremendous historic draught. Poor, poor Dasha, there in Petersburg, after the death of her child, refusing to live, slowly burning down in that cold twilight.

Of all that had happened to her after she left Petersburg, Ivan Ilyich knew only from that letter he had rapidly glanced through in Samara. Without a doubt Dasha had gone through much and come to understand much after Petersburg. How passionately she had pushed him towards the window in her eagerness to save him from his pursuers: "I shall be true to you to the death. Run, run!" Ivan Ilyich had not forgotten, and never would forget, the fragrance of her hair as she clung to him, his strange, wonderful, adorable girl. "Enough of this, no more reminiscences."

The weather began to deteriorate. The Volga grew dark, tier upon tier of grim, cold clouds drove down from the north and the wind whistled in the stays of the stocky mast. They steamed past Kamyshin without stopping. Kamyshin was an insignificant little town of wooden houses and stripped gardens on a bare knoll, but immediately after Kamyshin lay the edge of the Tsaritsyn front.

CHAPTER III

CLOUDS SATURATED WITH cold crept across the sky over Tsaritsyn, the wind whirled up the dust and slapped it in sudden gusts against the little wooden houses and factories crowded in straggling clusters on top of the crumbling bluff. Telegin climbed up a steep alley, the paving-stones in which had been washed aside by torrents of rain water. There was not a soul to be seen either on the creaking landing-stage or up in the town. Only in the market-place, where the grey pile of the cathedral was visible through a cloud of dust, did he meet an armed detachment. The men, young and old, were dressed in anything they could lay hands on, and marched along, stolidly turning their heads away from the wind and dust.

At their head strode a gaunt, grim old woman with a Red Army cap on her head and a rifle over her shoulder. When he came up to them, Telegin asked the old woman where he could find army headquarters. The old woman darted a fierce glance at him and gave no answer. The whole detachment quickened its pace and disappeared in the dust.

Telegin had to find army headquarters, report the arrival of the tug with its cargo of ammunition and hand over the bill of lading. But how was he to find it? He saw nothing but boarded-up shops, uncurtained windows and rattling shop-signs ready to crash down any minute. Then suddenly he ran against a man in military uniform, with one arm in a sling. The man drew in the air sharply between his teeth and swore under his breath with the pain. Telegin apologized and asked him where to look for army headquarters and then realized that he was speaking to Sergei Sergeyevich Sapozhkov, his former regimental commander.

"Here, what do you mean by dashing about like this?" Sapozhkov said. "How are you keeping?" Telegin wanted to embrace him but Sapozhkov drew back. "Leave that, and keep calm, will you. How did you get here?"

"I brought a ship down the river."

"Crazy devil. Look at him, alive and bursting with fat. Good old Russian breed! So you want headquarters. Well, this is it. Where are you staying? Nowhere, of course. All right, I'll wait for you."

He accompanied Telegin to the entrace of a stone house, such as merchants build, and told him army headquarters were on the second floor.

"I'll be waiting for you, Vanyka. Remember."

Telegin had seen the headquarters of Sorokin and of the armies on the southern front, where one could never find the department one wanted, where everyone gave wrong directions as if they had all agreed to mislead any visitor,

where the whole place was full of tobacco smoke, the frenzied clattering of typewriters and the constant slithering to and fro of haughty aides in enormously wide riding-breeches. But here it was quiet. Telegin immediately found the door he wanted. An orderly officer was sitting at a window so dusty as to admit hardly any light; he raised his bony face, yellow with malaria, and stared at Telegin without blinking his red-rimmed eyes:

"There is no one here—they have all gone to the front line."

"Can you connect me with the commander—I have to hand over some urgent supplies."

The orderly officer got up with the lightness of a man almost weightless with lack of sleep and looked out of the window. Someone had just driven up to the door.

"Wait, please," he said softly, and went on sorting into various heaps a number of reports, some of them scrawled in pencil in such handwriting that all that could be gathered of their contents was merely that they had been indited by some brave and simple soul.

Two men came in, one in a sheepskin jacket, with field-glasses hanging on his chest and a heavy cavalry sabre in a rawhide sword-belt at his side; the other, unarmed, in a long infantry greatcoat, on his head a warm winter cap with flaps such as Petersburg working-men wear. The faces of both were dark with dust. The orderly officer said: "The direct wire to Moscow is working again."

The man in the sheepskin jacket, youngish, with round, merry, brown eyes, stopped immediately and said: "That's fine!" The other man, the one in the long greatcoat stained with earth, took out a handkerchief, wiped his lean face, shook the dust off his black moustache as best he could, and looked at Telegin steadily out of bright dark eyes half covered by their lower lids.

"This comrade has a report for you," the orderly officer said.

Telegin saw these men for the first time; he did not know who they were and did not know what to say. The orderly officer spoke in his ear:

"Carry on, comrade, this is the military council of this front."

Telegin took out the papers and made his report. The two men exchanged glances when they heard that a steamer with ammunition for them had just tied up. The man in the long greatcoat took the bill of lading and the other man thirstily ran his eyes down the list; the lips of his small mouth moved as he repeated to himself the figures denoting the quantities of rifle cartridges, cannon shells and machine-gun ammunition belts.

"How many men have you with you on the steamer?" asked the man in the greatcoat.

"Ten sailors of the Baltic Fleet and two field-guns."

The sheepskin coat and the greatcoat again exchanged glances.

"Fill in a questionnaire," the greatcoat said, "and report here with all your men at seventeen hours. Hold yourself at the disposal of the army group commander." Unhurriedly he gave the dryly squeaking handle of the telephone a twist, was connected with someone, said a few words under his breath and hung up the receiver. "Comrade orderly, organize immediately the greatest possible number of transport vehicles. Mobilize the workers of the ordnance factory to unload the steamer. Supervise the execution of these orders and report to me."

The two men passed on into the next room. The orderly officer began to twist the handle of the telephone and spoke into it in a low voice: "Transport department . . . I want Comrade Ivanov. Not there? Killed? Then call somebody else. This is army group headquarters . . ." Telegin sat down to fill in the questionnaire. The position was clear: "report to the commander" meant that he was to go into battle straight away.

Telegin had been idling away the time on the steamer, and now, as he scratched away with a pen that was constantly getting stuck in the paper, he felt the familiar surge of will he had experienced so often in the last few years—when everything peaceful, warm, customary, everything that serves a man to preserve his little life and happiness, was thrust into the background and quite another Ivan Ilyich, a simpler, harder, more determined Ivan Ilyich, took charge.

There was plenty of time until five o'clock. Telegin handed over his questionnaire and went outside into the hall. Sapozhkov jumped up quickly from the wooden seat on which he had waited.

"Are you disengaged now? Let's go somewhere where we can talk."

He looked at Telegin with a smile. Sapozhkov was the same as ever; restless, tense, always seeming to know something no one else knew—but physically he was greatly altered. His pink cheeks had shrunk and he looked like a youngish old man. Telegin explained that he would have to hurry back to the landing-stage, get a crew together and unload some cases.

"Pity. Well, all right, let's go to the landing-stage. Listen, Vanya, I have had to hold my tongue for three long months. In the hospital I nearly started writing a book, *Memoirs of an Ex-Intellectual.* . . . And I don't drink any more, brother, I've even forgotten how."

The meeting with Telegin had obviously affected Sapozhkov greatly. They went outside. The wind blew at their backs along the street as they walked down to the darkening Volga, and whipped the surface of the river into white-topped, angry waves.

"Where is the regiment, Sergei Sergeyevich? How did you come to be separated from it?"

"Of our regiment only the head and claws were left. There is no longer such a regiment in the Eleventh Army."

Telegin looked at him sharply but said not a word. Sapozhkov put up his hand to shield his eyes from the dust and began to tell the story.

"Our end came at the farm of Bezpokoinoye. You have heard of the tragedy of the Eleventh Army, haven't you? Sorokin, the Commander-in-Chief, damn his black heart, did some things for which three deaths would have been insufficient atonement. The Revolutionary Military Council in Tsaritsyn had ordered us to break through and join the Tenth Army, but Sorokin kept this order from the troops. Only the Shelest division knew of it and carried it out by marching to Tsaritsyn, and that only because Sorokin wanted to shoot Dmitri Shelest and declared him an outlaw. Imagine the situation: we were cut off from Mineralnie Vody; we were cut off from Stavropol where the Taman army was being wiped out. Our ammunition had been left behind at Tikhoretskaya that day when Sorokin panicked. From the right we were attacked by Shkuro's cavalry and from the left by Wrangel's cavalry. And so we withdrew into the waterless steppe. All that was left of my regiment was one company. We slept on our feet, and never stopped in order to get away from our pursuers; we hid in ravines; we had nothing to eat; there was no water, only an icy wind blowing all the time. That damned steppe! There were cases when a man and his horse froze stiff and the wind covered them both with sand—they looked like some Scythian grave-mound. At last we reached Bezpokoinoye farm—not a soul, not a chicken, the Cossacks had

taken even the dogs. And the cottages not locked or anything, all the doors wide open. . . . There was some milk though and the lads began to drink it. Then they fell down and writhed on the floor. By that time it was too late; only about thirty men were left alive. Then in the morning the Whites came as planned, surrounded us and shot us up with machine-guns."

Telegin listened to all this, walking faster and faster until he stumbled.

"Well, and you?"

"The devil knows. I was unlucky. I was wounded at the very start, in the hand. Some nerve or something was injured and I lost consciousness. I have been thinking a lot about it since. While I was lying on my back, the men apparently bandaged my hand, took me away to a haystack and covered me with hay. Think of that—in that tight spot they took all that trouble. I declare that we don't know, and never did know, our people. Ivan Bunin says that they are wild beasts; Merezhkovski says they are brutes, sons of Ham —and marching against us on top of that. Remember how we talked in the railway coach? I was drunk, but I haven't forgotten any of it. Where was the mistake? Is philosophy, is logic corrected by a deeper comprehension of the conflicts of life, as one corrects the aim of a gun by means of a visible target? A revolution is something Immanuel Kant didn't provide for."

"Sergei Sergeyevich, what happened then?"

"What happened then? I crawled out of the hay during the night. They were bawling songs at the farm—that meant the victors were already drunk. I stumbled over one mutilated body, then another—it was obvious what had happened. I caught a pony and rode into the steppe, where I spent a few unpleasant days and was picked up by a mounted detachment under one Budenny—there is such a unit in the Salsk steppe. They took me to Kuberle, and from there I came here and am in hospital. My pay book, all my identity papers remained behind in the haystack, in my coat. Remember my coat? There isn't one to match it nowadays."

"What about Gymza? Is he gone too?"

"We lost Gymza long ago, together with the supply column; he was terribly sick with typhus."

"I'm very sorry about Gymza."

"I'm sorry about them all, Ivan. No, I'm not, it isn't true; this is not just being sorry. I got used to the regiment, it's very awkward somehow to be the only one left alive. I don't know what to do with myself. I went to headquarters, asked them to give me a company at least. I can see their point —after all, I am a complete stranger to them, all I have is my soldier's ticket. Could you speak for me at headquarters, Ivan Ilyich?"

"Of course, Sergei Sergeyevich."

"Perhaps it would be even better if you could take me into your unit. As your second-in-command, or as telephone operator or whatever you like. You see how fate brings us together every time. Remember how we wrote poetry in your flat and tried to frighten the bourgeoisie? Nothing is without effect, everything has consequences. We played about and then forgot it—and here we are together again, standing in front of a picture so magnificent that our very hair stands on end. Remember how I found you in the barn when the Germans captured you? That was a charge, that was a rush! I broke my sabre there. It's fine that we are together again. You are so incorruptibly healthy, Ivan. I am very fond of you. But I say, where is your wife?"

Their conversation was interrupted by the rumble of the transport vehicles which overtook them and dashed past them on their way to the docks.

An enormous, sinister sunset broke through the clouds of dust above the house-tops, saturating the wind-driven clouds with its bloody tints. A light snowfall enveloped the Volga in grey. The carts had been loaded long ago and had gone, escorted by armed workers. The dockside was deserted. The steamboat left the landing-stage, floated downstream some distance without lights, and tied up again.

The sailors were sitting in the lee of the landing-stage, jumpers belted, hand-grenades in belts, rifles in hand, kit-bags at their feet. No one smoked or talked. From the stories of the workmen they already knew what was going on in this empty town, lighted only by the muddy-red glare of the sunset. Things here were serious enough.

Telegin was waiting in the landing-stage office for gun-teams to take away the guns just unloaded from the boat. He looked anxiously at his watch several times and tried repeatedly to ring up headquarters. He was told that the teams had already left and that he and his detachment were to go with the guns to the railway station and entrain. Overcoming the pressure of the wind on the door he went outside and nearly collided with Anissya Nazarova.

"Why are you here, Anissya?" he asked.

She said nothing, but pressed her lips tightly together. As he looked at her she bent her head. Her old, much-patched shawl—obviously her only defence against the cold—was tied across her shoulders and she carried a canvas bag on her back.

"No, no," Telegin said, "go back to the boat, Anissya. I don't want you in the detachment."

While the guns were being dragged down into the sand and the teams harnessed to them, the clouds had darkened and the river merged with the blackness of the banks. The detachment set out for the town, urging on the ponies harnessed to the guns. Sharygin came up to Telegin and said in an undertone:

"What are we to do with Anissya? The comrades want her to stay with the detachment."

At that moment Latugin came up to Telegin from the other side.

"Comrade commander, she is like a mother to us. Bringing us things, mending, washing shirts and things. . . . She seems quiet, but she is quite warlike really. She begs and begs like a little dog; what can a man do. . .?"

Anissya, it appeared, was there too, behind Telegin, marching with the detachment. She stood there with her head bent, as before. Sharygin said:

"We can make her a nurse, untrained, it will be quite easy."

Telegin nodded. "Very well. I wanted to let her stay, anyway."

Latugin returned to his place at the wheel of a limber, seized the wheel, clicked his tongue at the ponies straining with all their might to pull the gun up the slope. "Giddap, giddap there!" The sand the wheels had loosened swept down on the detachment and whirled like mad. At last the wheels rolled on pavement-stones. Not a single window in the scarcely discernible houses showed a light. The wires on the telegraph-poles wailed eerily and the signs creaked ominously on their brackets.

Telegin walked along and smiled to himself: "There's a lesson for you, commander. They showed you nicely that you don't pay enough attention to your men. And they are right, too. From Nizhni to Tsaritsyn all I did was lie on my ear, and I never bothered to find out what sort of fellows these sailors were. All I knew was that they walk queerly and that the wind blows the ribbons on their caps. How is it that all of them, without preliminary discussion, suddenly tied up Anissya's great sorrow and sad fate with their own destiny,

and did so in this hour when they are about to leave the easy life on board the tug and go through icy winds and sandstorms to some foggy, unknown distance, there to fight and die? And yet, these sailors are no outstanding heroes, just quite ordinary fellows. Yes, my dear Ivan Ilyich, as a commander you are not much good. A mediocrity, that's what you are. A good commander is a man who even in the most difficult circumstances keeps in mind the intricate processes that go on in the soul of every man entrusted to his care."

His recent conversation with Sapozhkov and the apparently insignificant incident with Anissya greatly disturbed Telegin. He blamed himself for everything, reproached himself with egoism, clumsiness, and lack of tact, consideration and insight. And even Sapozhkov had noticed how fat he had grown—and that at such a time of stress. Thinking such thoughts, Telegin caught himself in one more little idea; he went hot all over and his heart filled with joy, but only for a second—he realized that in all this heart-searching there was a secret object—to regain Dasha's one-time love. He snorted as a gust of wind, sweeping round a corner, filled his mouth with dust and chased away all such inopportune thoughts.

At the railway station Telegin was handed an order to entrain with his guns and proceed to occupy the artillery positions near Voronovo. The order was handed to him by the officer in charge of the station, a huge fellow with coal-black, terrifying eyes and a luxurious growth of mutton-chop whiskers. Telegin was somewhat startled and began to explain that he was no gunner, but an infantryman, and could not undertake the responsibility of commanding a battery. The station officer said softly, but in a menacing tone:

"Comrade, did you understand the order?"

"Yes, but I am explaining to you, comrade . . ."

"At the present moment the command has no need of your explanations. Do you intend to obey the order?"

'Well, I'll be damned! What a funny way to talk!' Telegin thought as he involuntarily threw up his hand to the peak of his cap. "Certainly," he said, turned on his heel and went to the train.

This town was run on altogether different lines from other towns, he thought. The station, for instance; in some places on the railway stations a man had to step over disguised bourgeois, deserters, peasants and their wives with sacks and bags and baskets from which the tail of a cock or the snout of a sucking pig might stick out, all sitting and lying all over the place. But here the station was empty, even swept clean, although the dust which the wind blew in through the broken windows lay thick on the posters hanging on the walls and even thicker on the buffet counter, long abandoned by its attendant. Even the way they talked here was peculiar: crisply, curtly, with a note of warning, as if ever keeping a finger on the trigger, so to speak.

Without unnecessary fuss and shouting Telegin got his engine and his way-bill. He rang up headquarters about Sapozhkov and got permission to take him along on his own responsibility. His unit was already loading the guns into two open trucks under the swinging lamps. Telegin stood and scrutinized the faces of the sailors. There was Gagin, from Novgorod, his hard face furrowed with deep wrinkles, his black hair falling over his forehead down to his eyebrows under the edge of his peakless sailor cap with the inscription *Remorseless*; there was Baikov, from Karelia, his broad dusty beard so much at variance with his little face that it looked as if stuck on, his head round and hard as a nut—a wag and drunkard. The nine men all gripped the spokes of the wheels and pushed the gun up the steep incline of the planks, but Baikov did nothing except urge the others on: "One more push, lads, she's going, shove her up!" until somebody pushed him away with his knee: "Give a hand yourself then, you sea-monster!" There was Latugin, from the forests of Novgorod, with broad, bold face, and a hawk's beak for a nose, broken in some fight; squarely built, strong, shrewd, dangerous in a scrap, and very much of a ladies' man. There was Zaduiviter. . . .

"Ivan Ilyich," asked Sharygin, "do you know where this Voroponovo is?"

"I have no idea."

"Well, it's just here, next door, a bit below Tsaritsyn, and the front is here, too. They say the Whites are battering away at it with a lot of guns and tanks and aeroplanes. And about a hundred thousand marauding Cossacks are following the troops in carts."

Sharygin was speaking softly, but he was visibly disturbed; his eyes gleamed and his well-shaped mouth twitched as he smiled.

Telegin frowned. "Have you never been in any serious fighting yet, Sharygin?"

Sharygin blushed scarlet, the colour flooded even his little button of a nose, and so he remained, all red in the face.

"I suggest that you should not listen so much to all sorts of rumours. All this is just panic-mongering. . . . Have you seen to the food supplies for the unit?"

"Aye, aye!" Sharygin raised his hand to his cap, a thing he did not usually do. His face beamed. *A good lad, a bit too impressionable perhaps, but never mind, he'll season well,* thought Telegin, and walked over to the goods truck to which the open truck with the guns was being coupled. Sapozhkov came running along the platform breathless, his kit-bag and sabre clutched under his arm.

"Ivan, have you fixed me up?"

"Yes, it's all right, Sergei Sergeyevich; you can entrain!"

Sapozhkov got into the goods truck. Anissya was already there, sitting in a corner on the seamen's kitbags.

Not far from Voroponovo—a station on the Western Railway—the guns were unloaded before dawn and put at the disposal of one of the artillery divisions there. Here Telegin and his unit heard that the position on this front was very serious indeed. A line of fortifications was being constructed near Voroponovo; it ran in the shape of a half-horseshoe only about six miles from Tsaritsyn, beginning at Gumrak in the north and ending at Sarepta to the south of Tsaritsyn. This arc of fortifications was the last defence position. To the rear of it rose a range of low hills, and beyond them, in a flat plain, lay the city. There was no way of retreat except into the icy waters of the Volga.

Last night's wind had scattered the clouds and driven them into the impenetrable darkness beyond the rim of the steppe. The sun came out, but gave no heat. The flat, dark-brown plain was aswarm with men; some dug up the earth, others drove stakes and slung barbed wire, others again filled and stacked sandbags. Goods trains arrived from Tsaritsyn, disgorging ever more men who dispersed and disappeared underground. Other men climbed out of slits in the earth and crawled wearily towards the station. It looked as if the whole population of the city capable of wielding a spade had been mobilized willy-nilly to work here.

One such working-party consisting of about fifteen citizens of both sexes,

and all sorts and conditions approached the site of Telegin's battery; they were led by a little elderly man in the uniform of a military engineer.

"Citizens," he shouted in a hoarse voice, raising his grey whiskers out of a camel-hair muffler wound tightly round his neck, "your job is simple! I need a two-foot parapet here; take the earth for it from here and throw it up here until you reach the mark on this stake here. Now, leave an interval of one pace between every two of you and start work!"

He encouragingly clapped his little hands, which were blue with cold, and briskly climbed out of the trench. The citizens followed him with glances that bespoke their indignation. One of the women shook her round face at his receding back: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Grigori Grigoryevich!"

The others remained standing and holding their shovels in their hands with an air as if these very shovels were the despicable instruments of proletarian dictatorship. Only one of them—a thick-lipped young man with a double chin who was thrilled by the fact that he was in the front line—began to shovel some earth, but the others immediately went for him:

"Shame on you, Petya; stop shovelling this minute!" Then all of them began to chatter at once, addressing themselves to a man with a pale, yellow-tinged face who up to now had stood there with closed eyes, swaying slightly; he was wearing the uniform of the Ministry of Education and his greatcoat was belted with a piece of rope, obviously as a demonstration.

"Why don't you say something, Stepan Alexeyevich? We elected you. We expect you to . . ."

Stepan Alexeyevich turned up his eyes like a martyr and his cheek twitched with a nervous tic.

"I will speak in good time, ladies and gentlemen, but not with Grigori Grigoryevich. We should all put on mourning for our Grigori Grigoryevich."

At that moment a few clods of earth flew from the parapet, then a horse's mouth appeared above the trench with the bit between its teeth, and a broad-faced, apple-cheeked, bearded horseman with a Kuban cap on his head bent forward over the citizens from his saddle. He screwed up his eyes and said in a bantering tone:

"What is it, citizens, can't you agree whether you're going to work or not?"

Then the nervous Stepan Alexeyevich, he with the rope-belted greatcoat, stepped forward a pace and, raising his head to the horseman, answered him in that soft, convincing tone which schoolmasters use to their pupils during lessons:

"Comrade, so far as I can gather, you are the person in supreme authority here. . . ." The horseman nodded assent and patted his dancing horse on the neck with his gloved hand. "Comrade, in the name of our group, who were forcibly mobilized during the night on the basis of some sort of lists of which no one has ever heard, we express our categorical protest against . . ."

"Hum," the bearded horseman said, and there was a threatening note in his voice.

"Yes, we protest!" Stepan Alexeyevich's voice grew shrill. "You compel people unfitted for physical labour to dig trenches for you. Why, that is the worst sort of despotism! You are violating——"

Both Stepan Alexeyevich's cheeks were twitching now; he closed his eyes because he thought he had said a bit too much and shook his upraised yellow face. The horseman looked at him and screwed up his eyes; his wide nostrils quivered and his mouth closed into a grim, straight slit. He dismounted,

jumped into the trench, dusted his riding-breeches with a flick of his hand and said:

"That's right! We are forcing you to defend Tsaritsyn, if you don't wish to do so of your own free will. Why does that annoy you so? Here, give me a shovel, somebody."

Without looking, he held out his big, brown-gloved hand and the same plump, round-faced woman who had spoken before, hastily handed him a shovel, never taking her amazed eyes off his face for an instant.

"Why should we quarrel—the whole thing is just a little misunderstanding," he said, and raising a shovelful of earth he threw it up on to the parapet with a vigorous fling. "We do the fighting and you help us against the common enemy. The Cossacks have no mercy on anyone—they would skin me alive, and as for you, they would flog some of you and sabre the rest . . ."

He spread an atmosphere of health and strength as a fire radiates heat. Having thrown up a few shovelfuls he quickly ran his eye over the group. "Come on," he patted the young man with the double chin and another lad, good-looking, but with a stupid expression and straw-coloured eyelashes, "come on, let's show them how to work." They smiled with an embarrassed air and began to dig and shovel; several others shrugged their shoulders and followed suit. The round-faced lady said: "Well, let me have a try too," and stumbled over her shovel. The bearded commander caught her before she could fall, and must have squeezed her affectionately, for the lady blushed and her temper improved visibly. Stepan Alexeyevich, however, stuck to his guns.

"But excuse me," he said in his shrill voice, "a revolution and violence don't go together. A revolution, above everything else, is opposed to all violence."

"The revolution?" the bearded commander said incisively. "The revolution applies violence to the enemies of the workers and is accomplished by violence. Can you understand that?"

"But excuse me—that is most immoral——"

"The proletariat is applying force to you only in order to liberate the whole world from the need for violence."

"But excuse me, excuse me——"

"No," the commander said decisively; "no, I won't excuse you. You are making trouble. That is sabotage. Take your shovel. Comrades, I can see that I can trust you to have the parapet ready by eleven o'clock. Good luck and good-bye. . . ."

The sailors who had been listening to this conversation from a distance were choking with laughter. When the bearded man—he was the commander of the artillery division of the Tenth Army—rode away, they joined the intellectuals, just to see that their enthusiasm did not cool.

CHAPTER IV

PETER NIKOLAYEVICH MELSHIN'S regiment, together with the whole division, was retreating along the left bank of the Don, incessantly beating off day and night attacks by the vanguard of the second column of the White Don army, a well-equipped and well-organized regular force. The men of Melshin's

regiment were exhausted by the fighting and the night marches without hot food, sleep or rest. Krasnov's Cossacks knew every ravine, every dry ditch of this region, and drove their opponents into positions favouring the attackers. At dawn their riflemen opened fire, creating a diversion, while the mounted squadrons outflanked Melshin's men and then suddenly fell on them furiously, yelling and shouting like mad.

Melshin said to his men: "Steady, comrades, sit tight, that's the main thing. Our strength is in our unity. These skirmishes can't frighten us. We know what we are fighting for and death has no terrors for us. But the Cossacks are greedy, although they are bold enough—what they want is loot, but they don't want to die nor do they want to lose their horses."

Ivan Gora's company brought up the rear, covering the supply column, every wagon of which was carrying wounded men. They could not be left behind—the Cossacks took no prisoners and all men wearing a red star and left alive after a battle would be stripped naked and sabred; gorged with slaughter, the Cossacks would ride away, looking back at the horribly mutilated corpses, and wiping their bloody sabres on their horses' manes.

Never at any time had such savage hatred been known on the Don as the hatred which enveloped the rich Cossack villages of Veshchenskaya, Kurmoyarskaya, Yesaulovskaya, Potemkinskaya, Nizhne-Chirskaya, Ust-Medvedinskaya. These were visited by propagandists from Novocherkassk, while General Krasnov in person visited other Cossack settlements. The bells rang to summon the "League for the Salvation of the Don", and envoys of the ataman called upon the Cossacks to sharpen their sabres and put their feet in the stirrup. With heads bared and bowing low, as the old custom demanded, the speakers said: "The hour has come. Arise, free men of the Don. Like a dark thundercloud shall we move against Tsaritsyn, destroy the accursed brood of Communists, sweep the Red plague from the banks of the Don. They do not want the men of the Don to live in gaiety and plenty. They want to drive away our horses and cattle, give our land to intruders, to muzhiks from Tula and Orel; they want to tumble our wives in their beds and send you, Cossacks of the Don, you heroes, you salt of the earth, to toil in the mines to the end of your days. Don't let them defile the churches of the Lord: defend the altar of our native country. Take no thought for your safety and the Ataman of the glorious Cossack army of the Don will deliver up Tsaritsyn to you for three days and three nights to loot at will."

Company-commander Ivan Gora, tall, lean and stooping, his face seamed with sleepless nights, had got used to seeing the silhouettes of mounted Cossacks on the skyline during these days, had grown familiar with their habits and did not dig in without reason, just told his men to go on without looking back.

In front of them was the supply column, close-crowded axle to axle, and behind it the company of ragged, haggard, and weary men marched with heavy tread. Ivan Gora himself brought up the rear. He looked a sick man. Six months ago he had been a mighty man; but he had been wounded in the head that summer during the collection of the bread tax—he had been hit on the head with an axe in a barn and had also suffered contusions in the battle near Likhaya. At times he was wide awake, at others found himself dozing on his feet; pleasant memories rose in front of his dimmed eyes—people sitting on a log in the summer dusk with bats flitting over their heads, or a patch of green grass, on it a gingham cushion, on it his wife Agrippina wreathed in smiles. . . . He chased these dreams away, halted for an instant, adjusted the strap of his rifle on his shoulder, raised his heavy eyelids and ran his eyes

over his marching men, over the swaying carts jolting with the wounded over the level, sun-scorched steppe. It entered into his very soul, that rolling plain without a tree, without a telegraph pole, stretching away in a dark, colourless, melancholy infinity. He stumbled and sniffed. How he would like to walk behind a cart, put his hand on the side of it and take a nap, still moving his feet along.

There it was again! Tiny horsemen on the edge of the horizon, the cracking of shots, the whistling of bullets.

"Attention, comrades! Wake up! And you, supply column, look sharp!"

Agrippina, his wife, was with the supply column. She had been wounded in the hand. Likewise with the supply column were Dasha and Kuzma Kuzmich, riding in the same cart.

There were long-drawn shouts in the darkness and the supply column halted. Dasha immediately pressed herself against the side of the cart and laid her head on her hands. Half asleep, she heard Ivan Gora come up to the cart and speak to Agrippina in undertones.

"I need a smoke. I'm all in."

"Why are we stopping?"

"We're resting until five o'clock."

"Who told you that?"

"A dispatch-rider came and told us."

"Come, Vanya, put your head on my shoulder, sleep a little."

"Fat chance. Will *they* sleep, too? Our lads just dropped where they stood, they're so weary. Why aren't you asleep, Gapa? Your hand hurting?"

"It hurts plenty."

The cart creaked slightly as Gora put his arm round his wife and pressed her to him, heaving a deep sigh like a tired horse.

"The dispatch-rider said Krasnov's forces were crossing the Don too, at Kalach and at Nizhnechirskaya! At the heels of the troops go the priests with church banners and barrels of vodka. The Cossacks ride into the charge as drunk as lords and spare no man. . . ."

"Here's a bit of bread for you, Vanyusha."

He took the bread and slowly chewed it. He had some difficulty in swallowing and said, with his mouth full:

"We are quite near the Don. There should be a ferry near here—the Cossacks have taken the ferry-boat over to the other bank—that might be the reason why we have to wait here."

The cart tipped slightly to one side as Ivan Gora stepped back from it and walked away with his heavy stride. It was very quiet now—neither men nor horses stirred. Dasha buried her face in her sleeve. She would have given everything for such a moment of austere love-making with the man of her choice. Oh jealous, envious heart. What had she been thinking of? What had she been waiting for? Her beloved, her darling had been at her side and she let him go and now he was for ever lost to her. Now she could cry as much as she liked, "Ivan Ilyich, Vanya, Vanyusha!"—he would not come.

Dasha was lying under the cart, wrapped in her shawl, when Kuzma Kuzmich woke her. She heard the crackle of shots. It was dawn, an iron dawn. It was so cold that Dasha's teeth chattered and she blew her nails to warm her hands.

"Daria Dmitrievna, bring your case, there are wounded to attend to."

The shots came from downstream and resounded dully in the morning quiet. Dasha struggled to her feet, quite dazed still from her short sleep on the cold

earth. Kuzma Kuzmich adjusted the strap of the first-aid kit on her shoulder, ran forward and came back again.

"Step out, my dear, our men are here somewhere, quite near. Can't you hear them groaning?"

He hurried along, then stopped and listened with neck stretched forward, and looked around. Dasha paid no attention to his fussing, only thought it disgusting that he was such a coward . . .

"Bend down, my dear, can't you hear the bullets whistling?"

But the groans of the wounded and whistling of bullets all existed only in his imagination. The sunrise was now aflame in the sky and in front of them lay a white veil, as if the river had overflown its banks—a thick, low-lying autumn mist which covered the river and the bare willows on its edge. In it stood Ivan Gora, looking as if plunged into milk up to his middle. Farther away they saw another soldier in a high fur cap, then another and another, all hidden up to their belts by the fog. They were looking towards the opposite, higher bank of the Don which was above the line of the mist, and saw the smoke of countless fires rising beyond the black undergrowth in the still air.

Kuzma Kuzmich also saw the smoke and closed his eyes as if overcome by enthusiasm.

"Look! Look! Daria Dmitrievna, look at that! Why, there must be a hundred thousand carts there, all following the army for loot! Like the hordes of Batu Khan, like the Huns, like the Polovtses! Look, look at them, carts and unharnessed horses . . . and the men lying round the fires, bearded men with knives stuck into the shafts of their boots. . . . Please take a good look, Daria Dmitrievna, you don't come across such a sight more than once in a lifetime."

Dasha saw neither the carts nor the horses, nor the Cossacks lying around their fires—and she felt uneasy. Ivan Gora turned round and indicated by a gesture that they should crouch down to conceal themselves in the mist. Kuzma Kuzmich murmured, as if deep in the pages of some astonishing chronicle:

"This is what we ought to show our intellectuals. Eh? It's like a dream. And our intellectuals wanted a constitution! Wanted to rule the Russian people. . . . Tsck-tsck! Invented all sorts of stories about the Russian people—that it was patient, and sleepy, and that it was seeking God. . . . Tsck-tsck! And here it is, our Russian people—look at it, standing in a fog up to the middle, shrewd and terrible, understanding its destiny to the depths and gazing across the river at the Tartar hordes. . . . Here they stand, with girded loins and mailed fist and their strength is greater than any history has ever described . . ."

In the distance the rifle and machine-gun fire suddenly broke off. Kuzma Kuzmich stopped the flow of his speech in the middle of a word. Ivan Gora in front of them turned his head. From downstream came the sound of two dull explosions and soon after a turbid brownish-purple glow spread over the murky sky. Then they heard shouting and then again the quick rattle of shots.

"By God, our men have burned the ferry on the other bank," Kuzma Kuzmich said, raising his head out of the curtain of fog; "there must be a terrible slaughter there now, terrible slaughter!"

Ivan Gora and the line of his men ran stooping to the bank and disappeared in the undergrowth. The whole horizon was now alight with the sunrise. The fog was thinning and hung in wisps between the leafless branches of the willows. Then suddenly such horrible screams came from the river-bank from under the veil of mist, that Dasha pressed her hands to her ears and Kuzma Kuzmich lay down flat on his belly.

The sound of blows, the rattle of arms, shots, shouts, the splashing of water and the bursting of hand-grenades.

Then Ivan Gora emerged from the undergrowth, breathing hard. He had no cap on his head but he carried two Cossack caps piped with red in his hand. He went up to Dasha and said:

"I'll send some stretchers down. Go down to the water, please; two comrades need bandaging."

He glanced at the two Cossack caps, threw one of them away and set the other on his own head, pulling it well down on to his eyes.

"They wanted to outflank us in boats, the swine. Go, don't be afraid, they're all dead down there——"

CHAPTER V

THERE WAS MUCH noise on the banks of the Don between the Cossack villages Kalch and Nizhechirskaya. The regiments of the great Don Cossack army, horse and foot, were crossing the river on three pontoon bridges, by ferry and in boats. The cavalry rode in marching array, in brand-new uniforms, peakless caps over one ear, the traditional tuft of hair sticking out from under their caps in the manner much praised in song. The little flags on their lances fluttered merrily, the water splashed up between the planks of the landing-stage under the hoofs of the young and mettlesome horses that squinted anxiously at the grey expanse of the Don.

Long boats full of infantrymen were afloat in the middle of the river. Most of the infantrymen were beardless youngsters and they gaped open-mouthed at the wonderful assembly of Cossacks, horses and carts; they jumped out of the boats, climbed up the steep bank, lined up with grounded rifles, snatched off their caps; the long-haired deacons roared rather than sang, and swung their censers with a clatter as the priests, looking like golden bells in their shiny robes decorated with great roses, ceremoniously blessed the assembled warriors.

From the top of a grave-mound General Mamontov, with his regimental commanders, his escort and his standard-bearer, was watching the crossing of the troops under his command. All his men could see him well. He was dressed in a close-fitting black Cossack coat and mounted on a silver-grey horse that pawed the earth of the mound with its hoof. The troops marched past singing, their bands playing, the horse-tails of the *bunchuks* flying in the wind. From the east, out of the dark steppe screened by the dust of an army in motion, came the low thunder of guns.

General Mamontov raised his hand to protect his eyes from the sun and watched the aeroplanes gliding through the air on wings sloping slightly backward; he counted them and followed them with his gaze until they came down low and disappeared beyond the horizon. Heavy mortars just unloaded from a steamer rumbled past the mound, their shields and barrels painted with broken lines; the teams of ill-matched, hairy-legged, low-built, shaggy horses dashed past in a heavy gallop, their bearded drivers urging them on and beating them with knouts. Before the dust had settled came tanks, enormous

bulks of riveted steel with caterpillar tracks, their noses raised into the air. General Mamontov counted them: there were ten steel monsters to crush the Red scum in the streets of Tsaritsyn. He rode from the mound and galloped along the river bank, his standard-bearer half a length after him, the flying cloth of the black-and-grey flag waving over his head.

More troops arrived and embarked in the boats. The ferries crossed again and again, loaded with hay and all sorts of supplies. Near the ferry stood carts, buggys, great farm wagons such as are used to bring in the harvest from the fields, and around them lounged calmly, waiting their turn to be ferried over, the elders of the Cossack villages; others were sitting around the fires and eating their food. These were the emissaries sent by the villages to accompany their units, and attend to the economic side of the war: they looked after the loot, be it in the shape of money, cattle, grain, fodder, or any other useful things such as clothes, blankets, feather-beds, mirrors or weapons; out of the proceeds of this loot they supplied the units with food and forage, and even with clothes and arms if required; the rest of the loot was then inventoried, loaded on to carts and sent back to the villages under the escort of boys or women.

Mamontov rode through the hamlet of Rychkov, where half the houses were burnt and the threshing-floors were black with ashes, then turned off along the permanent way to wait for the armoured train which was to come over from the right bank of the Don.

The Army of the Don, numbering twelve cavalry and eight infantry divisions, was advancing in five columns.

All five columns were moving in forced marches towards the last line of fortifications defending Tsaritsyn. The Tenth Red Army, having lost contact with the Red forces to the north and south, was withdrawing and concentrating on an ever-shortening front. Its five divisions, with greatly reduced numbers, were using up their last rounds of ammunition and their last reserves of strength.

The Supreme Military Council of the Republic which ought to have given effective aid to the Tenth Army in these days of trial, was paralysed by secret and well-concealed treachery which found expression in the extreme slowness of its every action and in the fact that it described the Tsaritsyn position as being of secondary importance and the attitude of the Tsaritsyn revolutionary war council as being dictated by panic.

Tsaritsyn was left to beat off the Cossacks as best it could with the forces already available there.

The revolutionary military council of Tsaritsyn issued two orders in those days: one was to move all steamers, barges, boats and ferries from Tsaritsyn up the Volga, in order that no question might arise of a retreat to the left bank of the river; and the other an order to the army not to leave their positions unless ordered to do so; all those who retreated would be shot.

On Telegin's gun-site the first half of the day passed without incident. The plain was empty although gunfire was heard in the distance. The sailors made dug-outs. Anissya went off without a word to anyone, and returned three hours later with two sacks so heavy she could scarcely carry them. They were full of bread and water-melons. She laid the empty sacks on the ground between the guns to serve as a tablecloth, sliced the bread, cut each water-melon into four quarters and called the men: "Here's your dinner." She herself

stood aside, shy and pleased, and watched the hungry men put away the melons. The sailors ate, and with the juice of the melons running down their cheeks, they praised Anissya:

"Good girl, Anissya."

"Where would we be without her."

"You could sail the Seven Seas and not find the like of her."

Sharygin, always stern and ready to put in his oar on every occasion, said: "She has initiative, that is the main thing." The sailors raised their heads from their melons and all together burst out laughing. Sharygin frowned, stood up and took a shovel. "I suggest, comrades, that we should dig a special shelter for Anissya, a comrade such as she deserves consideration," he said.

The sailors laughed their fill and then, in a little ravine behind the gun-site, made a small dug-out for Anissya, where she could take shelter in the event of a bombardment. There was nothing else to do after that. Hundreds of shells unloaded from the boat were neatly stacked around the guns. The rifles were cleaned. Sapozhkov had established contact with the divisional post of command. The sailors lay down in the hollow and sunned themselves, as if to say: you can come now, General Mamontov, we shall be delighted to see you.

Ivan Ilyich Telegin was sitting on a gun and twisting and turning a dry stalk of straw in his hands. He was not engaged in any far-reaching thoughts —he only thought how dear to him was this little world of men gathered from every corner of the land, who were so unlike each other and yet had so single-heartedly linked their destinies together. There was Sergey Sergeyevich—one might have thought no sort of glue could make him stick together with others, Sergey Sergeyevich ever bristling with his own thoughts—and yet he had immediately made himself indispensable to everybody, had immediately found his place, had established himself, and was taking a hand everywhere. There was Sharygin, ambitious, not very clever, but persistent, a transparent soul, without any half-tints; there he was, sleeping quietly on his side, his fist under his cheek for a pillow. Zaduiviter was different. He was sprawling magnificently on the sand, letting the sun shine on his coarse-hewn face; this was a true *muzhik*, cunning, daring and calculating; if he survived, he would return home as master of his fate. Then that other big fellow, Latugin, the one from the forests of Kerzhen, snoring loudly under the sailor cap covering his face—he was much more complicated, though without all guile—guile would be no use to him. Not even Latugin himself knew towards what heights he was striving—with a knout and a hand-grenade in his hands.

Twelve men had entrusted Ivan Ilyich with their lives. The Revolutionary Military Council had entrusted him with a battery at such a decisive moment. True, he had some idea of mathematics, but still he should have declared firmly that he ought not to be put in command of a battery.

"Listen, Gagin, does one of you know how to calculate these angles of fire? We have no range-finder here."

Gagin was standing on the fire-step from which he was looking out into the steppe over the parapet. He turned round:

"Range-finder?" he asked moodily, and stared at Telegin with a scowl. "What do you want a range-finder for? The post of command will give us the range and the angle and everything over the telephone."

"Yes, of course."

"Angles and sights and range-finders—we know all about them, Comrade Telegin, but that's not the point. This battle will be fierce, without any range-finders, to the knife. Hold your guts in with one hand and fire with the other,

to the last shell, that's what you should be thinking of. Come here and I'll show you."

Telegin stepped up to the ledge and stood beside him. The artillery duel was increasing in volume and seemed to be coming nearer; the horizon to the west and to the south was enveloped in smoke and haze. Following Gagin's pointing finger Telegin could distinguish groups of men and long lines of wagons crawling across the plain from the north.

"Our side are running away," Gagin said, and jerked his chin at a huge column of smoke rising up and mushrooming out in the direction of Sarepta to the south. "I've been watching for a long time—thousands, many thousands have fled that way. See the explosions? There were none a while ago. Those are the heavies firing. We can expect the general to be here by morning."

Telegin went to inspect the battery once more. He counted the shells and cartridges, of which they had only two clips for each rifle. He was especially worried that the battery had no infantry cover. About five hundred yards from the battery there was a freshly dug line of trenches, but they seemed to be empty and the Red forces were much farther away than these trenches. Telegin sat down beside Sapozhkov, who was asleep, his face puckered in a frown as if his dreams, too, were none of the easiest.

"Sergey Sergeyevich, sorry to wake you up . . . please connect me with the divisional commander."

Sapozhkov opened his eyes, dull with sleep.

"What for?" he asked. "The orders are clear—not to shoot. When fresh orders are wanted, we'll get them. What's eating you?" He yawned and stretched himself, but his indifference was obviously feigned. "Better lie down and have a nap. Best thing to do."

Telegin returned to the fire-step and stood motionless for a long time, steadying himself against the parapet. An immense orange-coloured sun was sinking into the dark haze raised somewhere below the horizon by the hoofs of countless Cossack cavalry regiments. The shades of night were falling on the plain and it was no longer possible to discern the movements of troops across its expanse. Under a bright evening star the sunset sky took on the aspect of a fantastic landscape on a green shore. Clouds grew up into Chinese pagodas and one of them floated away from the rest, turned into a horse with two heads, then into a woman wringing her hands. . . . It seemed to Telegin that he could just climb out of the hollow and, moving his legs as in a dream, fly off to that divine country—after all there must be some reason why he saw such sights, they must hold some meaning for him in this hour of mortal battle.

"Come off it," said Sergey Sergeyevich Sapozhkov, and put his hand on Telegin's shoulder; "why, this is pure idealism, Vanka, to goggle at the pictures in the clouds like this. Want a smoke? I pinched some tobacco from the hospital and kept it all this time—to smoke before I conk out."

He spoke in a bantering tone as usual, but the bitter folds at the corners of his lips, his lustreless eyes told of a hidden heart-ache. They rolled cigarettes and smoked—Telegin without swallowing the smoke, but Sapozhkov drawing it down with relish.

"Why so mournful?" Telegin asked softly.

"It seems I've started to fear death. I'm afraid of a bullet in the head; in any other place it wouldn't kill me, but I'm scared of one in the head. Don't like my head to be a practice target—seems a pity to smash all the ideas in it."

"We are all afraid, Sergey Sergeyevich, only one shouldn't think of it."

"What do you know about my thoughts? Sapozhkov is an anarchist; Sapozhkov drinks like a fish, that's all you know! I can see through you as if you were made of glass, to the last little wrinkle, and if you died I could give all your messages to those who were left alive. But what message could you give from me, eh? None. And that's a pity. . . . Yes, Vanka, I envy you."

"What am I to be envied for?"

"Because you're so simple. Duty, devotion, self-criticism. Because you're a fine chap and a good soldier. Because your wife will adore you when she comes to her senses. And because life is easy for you, because you are an old-fashioned type."

"Thanks a lot for the testimonial."

"But I—Vanka, I'm sorry Gymza didn't shoot me that time in the summer. Look at us! How we longed for the revolution, how we trembled with impatience! We threw out a heap of ideas into the world, we announced that the golden age of philosophy, of a higher freedom was coming. And then—the catastrophe came, the most terrible catastrophe, damn and blast your soul . . ."

He slapped himself on the forehead so hard that the cap slipped down to the nape of his neck.

"On this point I wanted to make an announcement to the whole human race—a smaller audience wouldn't do—a purely pernicious announcement, without any pretension to usefulness, all out of spite. But I haven't written it yet, there's no manuscript of it yet, I am sorry to say."

It was now quite dark. The light of fires showed up against the horizon, their smoky purple glow rising higher and wider, especially from the south, from the direction of Sarepta. Hamlets and farms were burning there, lighting the way of the rapidly advancing enemy. Telegin was listening to Sapozhkin with only one ear. In the distance, due west, bunches of three green rockets at a time were going up, like fiery serpents raising their heads above the horizon.

Sergey Sergeyevich, stubbornly pretending not to notice all this illumination, was rambling on in a shaky voice which got on Telegin's nerves.

"Or do we live only in order that we may eat? In that case let a bullet spill my brains—and my brain, which I quite wrongly considered great enough to take in the universe, will burst like a soap bubble. Life, my boy, is just a carbon cycle plus a nitrogen cycle plus some other similar muck. Simple molecules combine into complex molecules, very complex molecules, finally terribly complex molecules. Then bang—carbon, nitrogen and the rest of the muck begin to disintegrate to their primitive state. And that is the end of it. The end, Vanka! So what has the revolution to do with it all?"

"Don't talk such rot, Sergey Sergeyevich. The revolution is what lifts a human being above the trivialities of life."

"Leave me alone! I am not talking to *you* at all. What do you know about the revolution? The revolution is over and done with, trampled down. Just look in front of you. Soviet Russia is already shorn down to the boundaries of Russ before Ivan the Terrible's reign. Soon all the roads will be white with our bones. And the cycles of carbon and nitrogen—the ones that will be coming here in the morning on horseback—will triumph again."

Telegin said nothing. He stood there, straight as a ramrod, his hands behind his back; Sapozhkov could not discern the expression on his face, though it was reddened by the glare.

"Ivan. . . . Life is worth living only for the sake of a fantastic future, a great and final freedom, in which no one and nothing would prevent any man from

regarding himself the equal of all the universe. How many evenings did we spend in discussions with my men! The stars above us were the same that shone on the great Homer. The fires that burned were just like all other fires that lighted the way of men through the centuries. The men listened to me speaking about the future and believed me; the stars were reflected in their eyes and their bayonets threw back the flames of the fire. Now those lads are all lying dead in the steppe. I did not lead my regiment to victory—in other words, I deceived them!"

At that moment they heard the challenge of a sentry about a hundred paces away to the right and the murmur of voices. Telegin turned towards the sound and listened—obviously someone had come up to Gagin, who was keeping watch on the other side.

"Ivan, what if this future is just another fairy-tale, told to lighten the gloom of the Russian steppe? What if that future never comes? If it doesn't, the world will sink into an abyss. The abyss is already there, but no one as yet believes that it has come. It is there, waiting, measuring itself against the forces of resistance. Four years of slaughter are child's play to what is in store. The revolution is to be wiped out in our country and everywhere else, that is the main object—and after that universal conscription of every individual without exception. Shaven heads and chained wrists. And a bloated horror sitting in triumph above the grey ashes of the world. So I think it would be better for me to perish quickly from the searing slash of a Cossack sabre."

"Sergey Sergeyevich, you ought to have a rest and look after your health a bit," Telegin said.

"I never expected any different answer from you!"

Gagin was coming down into the hollow with a tall, stooping man in uniform. Telegin was inexpressibly relieved to be able to end the intolerably oppressive conversation with Sapozhkov. The new-comer was covered with mud, his greatcoat was torn, and for some reason best known to himself he wore a Cossack cap. He said in a voice as husky as if he had spent a week up to the neck in a swamp:

"Good evening, comrade commander, how are you getting on here, have you got any shells?"

"Good evening," Telegin answered. "And who are you?"

"We are a company of the Kachalin regiment, ordered to occupy that trench in front of you. I am the company commander."

"Glad to see you. I was rather worried already—the trenches were dug, but there was no cover for us."

"Well, here we are. We have some wounded with us, we are just entraining them. I tried to get some bread from the station commandant, but he said he had none left, there would be nothing until to-morrow morning. It's easy to say 'to-morrow morning', but my company has had nothing to eat for three days. Have you got something? If it's only a slice of bread for each man, so they can get the smell of it at least. We'd return it to-morrow—or we could give you a cow."

"Ivan Ilyich," said a voice. Telegin turned round. Anissya had come up, as noiseless as a shadow and had been listening. "I laid in bread for three days, we can let them have some. To-morrow I can get some more."

Telegin smiled.

"Very good. Give the comrade company commander four loaves," he said.

The company commander had not expected to get bread so easily. "Why, thank you very much," he said, clutched the loaves of bread brought by Anissya firmly under both arms and prepared to go off with them without delay. Meanwhile the sailors had gathered round, wriggling their shoulders with sleep and staring at this muddy and ragged fellow. He began to tell them about the exploits of his regiment, which had extricated itself from an encirclement by an operation lasting ten days, without losing a single gun, or a single cart full of wounded—but told it in a manner so confused and incoherent, that some of the sailors made a gesture of disgust and left him.

Latugin looked at him coldly and said: "Tell us again when you have slept your fill. By the way, do you know what all those fireworks mean?" He stretched out his hand in the direction of Sarepta.

"Yes, I know," Ivan Gora answered; "at the station I met a man who had just come from there. General Denisov is storming Sarepta. The man said there was no such bombardment even in the German war. The artillery is sweeping everything away. Then waves of Cossacks come out of the ravines —their very beards are flecked with foam, they are so wild. . . . No prisoners are taken, it's murder. Not more than half of the Morosov division are left alive. The Whites are trying to reach the Volga between Sarepta and Chapurniki and, if they do, it's good-bye for us."

He nodded at the sailors and climbed out of the hollow. Telegin asked him:

"Who is your regimental commander?"

Ivan Gora replied out of the darkness:

"Melshin, Peter Nikolayevich, is his name."

CHAPTER VI

ALL THROUGH THE night and the following day Morosov's division, under pressure from the fifth column of the White army, slowly retreated towards Sarepta and the lakeside village of Chapurniki. Hundreds of corpses dotted the plain. General Denisov gave the Reds no respite. Every attack they beat off was immediately followed by a fresh assault. Shrapnel screamed and burst over the trenches; explosions shook the ground, and the soldiers were buried under fountains of earth. Whenever the Cossacks' guns grew silent the men stuck their blood-smeared faces, distorted by pain and fury, out of the trenches.

Now flocks of horsemen came swarming from beyond the hills and out of the ravines and spread out into waves at the gallop, the dust smoking under their horses' hoofs. They brandished their sabres and uttered high-pitched yells according to the old Tartar custom. Were only one man in the trenches to flinch and run in terror from the advancing wave of broad-chested brown horses with their black riders stretching forward eagerly over the horses' necks, the sooner to quench their thirsty sabres in hot enemy blood—the line of the Reds would be broken, cut to pieces, ridden down.

The flanks of the Morosov division, pressed against the gardens of Sarepta and the threshing-floors of Chapurniki village, held out stubbornly; but the centre was bulging out towards the Volga as irresistibly as the muscles of a flexed hand unbend under a weight surpassing their strength. The divisional commander, with the political commissar, the adjutant and the dispatch-

riders—the latter crouching behind their horses lying on the ground—were with the troops on the central sector, well to the front. The commander made good the losses in dead and wounded by an ever thinning trickle of reinforcements taken from the flanks, but he did not ask for reinforcements from the army command—he knew there were no reserves left in Tsaritsyn.

In Tsaritsyn itself that morning there had been an unfortunate incident in the forward lines: two units, the First and Second Peasant regiments—consisting of peasants mobilized in the neighbouring hamlets and villages—suddenly climbed out of their trenches, raised their rifles over their heads and went forward to surrender to the Whites. At the headquarters of the First regiment several sub-unit commanders gathered round the field kitchen, surrounded the regimental commissar and other Communists and shot them down. At the same time the commander, the commissar and several Communists were shot at the headquarters of the Second regiment. Only two companies remained loyal in the face of this provocation, and opened fire on the traitors as they hoisted white flags and marched into captivity. The lines of Mamontov's men, seeing the advancing crowd of traitors from afar, mistook them for an attacking force and met them with a withering fire. The remnants of the two Peasant regiments threw away their weapons and ran back in confusion. They were surrounded and taken away. But a five-verst sector of the front was now left entirely undefended.

In Tsaritsyn the sirens began to wail in the ordnance factory, the engineering works and all the sawmills. Communists sent by the Revolutionary Military Council went into the workshops and told the workers:

"Comrades, stop work, get your weapons, we've got to save the front."

The workers—and they were all elderly, or unfit, or mere boys—stopped work, put away their tools, switched off the machines, put out the furnaces and hurried to the store-rooms where their personal issue of arms was kept. They fell in outside the gates and marched to the railway station.

Their wives and mothers came running out of their cottages on the outskirts of the city and pushed little packets of food into the hands if their menfolk. Some of the women accompanied the raggedly marching detachments to the station and others went with their men even farther, to the very positions. There, mothers and wives remained standing a long time until the army commander himself came and, pressing his hand to his chest in supplication, begged them insistently to go home because here they were not wanted and were even in the way, and also offered a splendid target for the gun-layers of Mamontov's artillery.

Before the day was out three thousand working men of Tsaritsyn had come to seal up the breach in the front into which the White were already beginning to penetrate, and at cost of heavy losses to themselves, threw the Whites back.

This happened while the Morosov division was fighting off a desperately heavy attack of the White cavalry and infantry. The centre of the division was pressed back almost to the bank of the Volga. Shells were already bursting in the streets of Sarepta. The village of Chapurniki was taken; its thatched roofs went up in flames and the fires spread to the reeds around the banks of the flat steppe lake.

The divisional commander watched the plain through his field-glasses. The sun was already sinking towards the west. He saw the Cossack troops gather and disperse, regrouping themselves with a provocative lack of concealment. His experienced eye could tell by the liveliness of the horses that these were fresh troops preparing for the last charge. It was clear that by the time the sun had set, the whole Morosov division, together with its divisional commander, would have started on its stern march across the fields of history.

The divisional commander dropped his field-glasses, took out a blackened little pipe, filled it slowly with a pinch of Saratov *makhorka*, and began to pat the pockets of his greatcoat in a search for matches. There were no matches. He looked right and left—a few paces in front of him his men lay behind thrown-up mounds of earth. He saw that the back of one of them was wet with sweat, showing like a spreading black spot through the cloth tunic; another was grunting to himself and rubbing his cheek against the butt of his rifle.

The commander let the pipe drop to the ground and roll away into the wormwood bushes. He raised the field-glasses to his eyes again and his hands trembled slightly.

To the south-west fresh large forces of cavalry could be seen—they had come on the scene while the commander was filling his pipe. Many thousand horsemen came riding from behind the hills, stirring up a cloud of dust lit by the slanting rays of the setting sun. *Such a force is enough to crush us at a single thrust*, thought the divisional commander, and took the glasses from his eyes. In the trenches the men were very still and very much on the alert; many were standing upright, their rifles clutched tight in their hands. The commander opened his mouth to say something encouraging, but the thunder of a sudden burst of gunfire stopped him. He looked through his field-glasses again. What the devil! Two dozen shells exploded in the plain near the gathering Cossack force, who quickly deployed into formation. In their midst the banner of the Ataman was raised. The Cossacks turned to face the horsemen galloping down at them from the hills and in dense waves bristling with pikes spurred their horses forward until the two forces, the White Cossacks and the horsemen racing towards them from the hills, met in a clash which sent up an enormous cloud of dust and screened them from view.

The divisional commander focused his glasses to a nearer plane and saw the files of Cossack infantry spring up in panic from their positions. . . .

"Oho!" the commander said to himself, "so that was why the Revolutionary Military Council was so insistent over the telephone that we must hold out here to the last. That must be Shelest's Iron Division arrived at last. . . ."

In the wake of the cavalry which had attacked the Cossacks so fiercely, the fusiliers of the Iron Division pressed forward in dense masses. Farther away, on the very edge of the horizon, the commander could already distinguish through the dust the camels, carts and crowds of men forming the immense baggage train of the Iron Division. It was soon found that the train included dozens of tons of grain, vodka by the barrel, hundreds of refugees and whole herds of cattle and sheep.

Many Cossacks fell in the battle. The routed White cavalry withdrew towards the west; but the infantry, caught between the lines of the Iron Division and the Morozovs, were wiped out or captured. When it was all over—the battle lasted about an hour—the divisional commander mounted his horse and rode slowly over the plain dotted with fallen men and horses. Smoke was still rising from the ground here and there and wounded men groaned as they waited to be picked up by stretcher-bearers. A group of horsemen rode out to meet the divisional commander. Their leader, in Kuban dress with cartridge-loops on his chest, a great dagger in his belt and a *bashlyk* over his shoulders, spurred on his horse, galloped up to the commander, sharply reined in his mount and said in a peremptory tone:

"Good evening, comrade, who is this I am speaking to?"

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"You are speaking to the commander of the Morozov-Don division. Good evening, comrade, and who might you be?"

"Who might I be?" the other answered with a smile. "Take a good look. I am the same fellow whom the commander of the Eleventh Army declared an outlaw and wanted to shoot. But I, as you see, have come to Tsaritsyn for all that, and just in the nick of time, too, or so it seems."

The divisional commander did not like this long and boastful speech very much; he frowned and said:

"So you would be Dmitri Shelest, is that it?"

"That's what I have been called up to now. Come on, tell me where I can speak to the military council here."

"No need for that. The military council knows all about you."

"I don't care what they know and what they don't. Let them hear what I have got to say," Dmitri Shelest answered haughtily, and spurred his horse so hard that the black stallion dashed forward like mad.

CHAPTER VII

THE SAME NIGHT Telegin sent Colonel Melshin a note.

"Peter Nikolayevich, I am here, I should like to see you very much."

Melshin sent this reply by the same messenger:

"I am very glad. After I have done here, I'll come to you; there are lots of things to tell. By the way, we have here . . ."

But there his pencil had broken its point or he had written the words in the dark—at all events, Telegin could not make out the last words of the message although he used up several matches in the attempt.

Melshin never came, however. After midnight the steppe was alive with bursting rockets and the battery was ordered to stand by.

"Well, comrades, this is it, it seems," Ivan Ilyich told his gun-crews. "Let's see that no shell is wasted. And another thing—I suppose you know the instructions of the army command: there is to be no retreat without special orders. Now all sorts of things can happen in a battle. In the year nineteen-fifteen the generals had machine-guns posted behind us—they did not think our little *muzhiks* wanted to shed their blood for the Little Father. Though I must say, much as they cursed Nikolashka in the trenches, the *muzhiks* stood up for Russia just the same. And there was nothing more terrible in that war than a Russian bayonet charge."

"Commander, what are you trying to say?" Latugin suddenly asked in a grating voice. "What is it? Out with it."

Telegin pretended not to hear him.

"Nowadays there are no machine-guns behind our backs. All of us are less afraid of death than of playing the revolution false merely for the sake of keeping our own skins whole. This is how we are to understand the orders of the army command: that we must not weaken at the decisive moment when the very earth begins to seethe under our feet. It is said that there are men who know no fear. That is nonsense. The fear is there and it raises its head—when it does, you have to wring its neck, that's all. Disgrace is stronger than fear. And I am saying all this, Comrade Latugin, because we have among us comrades who have not yet had an opportunity of testing themselves in serious battles. And there are also comrades with sick nerves. It even happens sometimes that a most experienced comrade suddenly loses his head. So what I mean is this—should I, the commander, weaken and leave the battery—my orders are to shoot me on the spot . . . and I for my part would shoot any man who tried to run away. Well, that will be all. No smoking during darkness."

He cleared his throat and paced up and down for a while behind the guns. He would have liked to say a lot more, but the words would not come.

"There is no ban on talking, comrades."

"Comrade Telegin." This was Latugin again. Telegin went up to him and put his hand on Latugin's shoulder. "I was living on my own long before I joined the army. I worked at the docks as a labourer and cut wood for the shopkeepers and scrubbed latrines, and served as groom in a priest's house. I had a row with his reverence, too, because of the lousy food. At one time I ran with a gang of thieves. Yes, I've been around. And what a fool I was—a fighting fool, so I got beaten up plenty, mostly when I was drunk . . ."

"Because of some skirt, I suppose," said Baikov. A bursting rocket lit up his little white teeth glinting in his thick beard.

"Yes, I was beaten for that too; but that's neither here nor there. What I want to say is this: you, Comrade Telegin, just talked all round the point and didn't get down to brass tacks. This about our revolutionary duty is all very well. But why have we taken this duty upon us of our own free will? Answer me that. You can't? You can't because you were fed on different food from us. But we've been boiled in three lyes; we've had the soul shaken out of us—no beast could have been treated so and live. And if you had been in our place, you'd have knuckled under long ago and been broken to the collar. Wait, don't feel hurt, we are just talking like one man to another. Why had my mother to spend her whole life as a drudge for other people? Why is she worse than the Queen of Greece?"

"There he goes!" Baikov interrupted again. "We saw the Queen of Greece in Athens in the year thirteen. What do you want with her?"

"Why did my father have to live like a pig? Why could the field guards make a cripple of him, and mock him into the bargain? Why was my name always 'you son-of-a-bitch'?"

"This won't do," said Sharygin, sitting up straight in his place beside the shells. "Latugin, you talk in a disorganized way. What has 'son-of-a-bitch' and the Queen of Greece to do with this? All that is just superstructure. The gist is the class war. You must make up your mind what you are: a proletarian or just riff-raff."

"Go to the devil!" shouted Latugin. "I am the king of creation! Can you understand that—or are you too young? I read a book once—it said that man was the king of creation. That's why I stand beside this gun. Because we are the kings of creation. You with your duty and your fear! I'd fire a burst at God Almighty any day—not only at General Mamontov! There's a superstructure for you! I'd bite their gizzards through with my teeth as soon as not . . ."

"Quiet, comrades!" Sergey Sergeyevich shouted from his dug-out, where he sat with his field telephone. "We have had a great success at Sarepta. Two

regiments of cavalry and one regiment of foot Cossacks have been routed, fifteen hundred dead and eight hundred prisoners . . ."

The news of the victory at Sarepta ran like wildfire along the front. One of the units of the Tenth Army, the cavalry brigade commanded by Budenny, which had previously been cut off by the offensive of the fifth column, was meanwhile fighting its way through to Tsaritsyn from the Salsk steppe. It was a hard campaign and horses and men were weary. But at one of the railway halts they succeeded by pure chance in getting through by telephone to the headquarters of the Morosov division and a jolly voice barked into the receiver with an abundant intersprinkling of juicy imagery: "Are you boys asleep or what? Don't you know that at Sarepta we cut up two cavalry divisions of the vermin into cat's meat? You can come along and help to count the prisoners. . . ." When they heard of such a fine exploit, even though much exaggerated in the telling, the brigade left its supply column behind under guard and in a sixty-mile march northward moved to meet the 'vermin' of General Denisov.

But for all that the successful action at Sarepta was of merely local significance and the position of the main Tsaritsyn defences was aggravated rather than eased as a result. Mamontov quickly exploited the stroke of luck that had come his way by the surrender of the two peasant regiments; he regrouped his assault columns during the same night and by dawn had shifted the whole weight of his thrust to this most vulnerable sector of the front, only sparsely manned by the detachments of the workers from the Tsaritsyn factories.

The plain across which the flower of the Don armies were advancing was intersected by two ravines, very wide and deep and running east and west. They cut across the front, reaching right up to the outskirts of Tsaritsyn itself. Along this ravine the Cossack cavalry was making its way close up to the line of Red trenches. The whole plain was covered with little mounds of earth like ant heaps; this was the infantry working its way forward. Enormous tanks crawled along on caterpillar tracks in front of the infantry; aeroplanes circled over the batteries and over the long strings of the supply columns moving towards and from Tsaritsyn across the steppe. The planes dropped small pear-shaped bombs which exploded with terrific force.

Mamontov's armoured train was smoking in the distance; to the right and left of it the whole steppe was filled with the carts of the Cossack camp-followers moving close-packed in the wake of the troops. The Cossack delegates, men reeking of tar, lard and smoke, could already see the cupolas and factory chimneys of the city and the smoke of fires rising in the suburbs; and their eyes gleamed under their bushy eyebrows.

Shells hurtled through the air above the steppe, burst with the noise of thunder and surrounded the Red positions with a belt of rising and falling fountains of earth. The cavalry dashed yelling out of the deep ravines and, looking neither right nor left, rode through the barbed wire with such drunken fury that many a man already hit by a bullet, with the darkness of death already closing on him, still galloped on, slashing the air with his sabre until he lost his seat, threw up his hands as if with hellish mirth and tumbled from his wildly rearing horse.

Waves of infantry crept on and then rushed to the attack. Cavalry and infantry mingled in the hand-to-hand fighting in the Red trenches. Mamontov had that day ordered all his Cossacks to tie a white ribbon round their caps, to guard against their fighting each other in the confusion. The struggle was all the fiercer, all the more stubborn because Russians were fighting Russians,

the one side for a yet unknown new way of life, the other in order that the old way of life might be preserved for ever.

But every time the attacking waves were thrown back by the Red armoured trainettes. These were miniature armoured trains hurriedly put together in the Tsaritsyn engineering factories out of two petrol cisterns or two goods trucks with an engine in the middle. They steamed to and fro along the siding that ran partly in front of and partly behind the lines. With their machine-guns and cannon they at times cut into the very thick of the fight. Squeezing the last ounce of power out of their ancient engines, they rushed along the faulty rails with clouds of steam escaping from the bullet-riddled sides of the old boilers and carried water, food and ammunition to the trenches.

"Duck!"

A shell exploded nearby with such force that the men's eyes darkened and their chests tightened; then falling clods of earth came pelting down on their heads which they protected with their hands as best they could.

"To your guns!" shouted Telegin, and saw indistinctly through the dust one of the guns half overturned, with one wheel in the air and the crew furiously straining to right it. "All unhurt here? Latugin, Baikov, Gagin, Zaduiviter, where's Sharygin? Oh, here he is, unhurt. Gun Number Two, all correct. Pechenkin, Vlasov, Ivanov, what's wrong with Ivanov?"

"To the left, six eighteen, angle six nought, battery, fire!" Saphozhkov croaked, sticking his head, with the telephone receiver, out of the collapsed dug-out.

Coughing from the dust, Telegin repeated the order. Sharygin threw Baikov a shell; Baikov examined the detonator and threw the shell to Gagin, the loader; Zeduiviter opened the breech, Latugin laid the gun and raised his hand:

"Fire!"

The barrels of the guns jerked back and the shells were on their way. The men, a minute ago in rapid movement, now froze into immobility as on a stationary motion picture film. Then another threatening shadow flitted past, and lightning flashed into the ground quite close.

"Duck!"

Again and again it came: the thunder, the cascades of earth, the stifling blast. The men were livid with rage. But what could they do, when the other side had shells in profusion while they had to count every round and that blind idiot at the divisional observation point could not get the range of the heavy enemy battery.

This time Latugin was injured and he sat there grinding his teeth, while Anissya moved softly and self-effacingly around him. No one knew from what hiding-place she had emerged; but she was there, deftly pulling off his jumper and singlet and bandaging his shoulder. "Come, little father," she said, squatting on her heels in front of him, "come, I'll take you to the dressing-station." He, naked to the waist, blood-streaked, his teeth bared as if he had really bitten through somebody's gizzard, pushed Anissya away and sprang back to his gun.

Then something happened—something that their fury had impatiently been waiting for all through the long hours since the beginning of this unequal artillery duel. Sapozhkov had just answered an inquiry by the divisional commander as to how many shells they had left and was waiting for a reply. Dirty tears from his inflamed eyes crept slowly down his face. From time to

time he unhooked the receiver from his ear and blew into it. Something had suddenly happened, something was in the air. It was so quiet that the silence buzzed in the men's ear-drums. Telegin, alarmed, swung himself on to the parapet and lay on his belly looking out. He was not a moment too soon. The decisive all-out attack was under way. He could distinguish even without glasses dark masses of Cossack cavalry and infantry, with here and there the golden gleam of church banners where priests, brought up to the front in motor-cars, were blessing the arms of the troops in the open field, in full view of the Red batteries.

The sailors also hitched themselves up on to the parapet. They were breathing hard. Baikov said, intending to make the others laugh: "Might let the angels have it over open sights, eh?"

But no one laughed. Latugin said crisply and peremptorily:

"Commander, let's bring out the guns into the open—we are like rats in a hole here."

"We can't do it without a gun-team."

"Yes we can."

"How dare you, how dare you argue with the commander in the middle of a battle, this is anarchy!" Sharygin shouted so suddenly and unpleasantly, with such childish petulance that the sailors turned and glowered at him. He stooped, scooped up sand in both hands and began to scrub his face with it as hard as he could. Then he went back to his place at the gun and stood there motionless; only his long eyelashes quivered about his flayed cheeks.

Telegin slipped off the parapet, went over to the gun and put his hand on the wheel.

"Comrades, Latugin has made a correct suggestion. At all events, let us open up a passage for the gun just here."

The sailors who until then had followed his every movement with their eyes, now grabbed their spades without a word and began to shovel away the edge of the hollow at the spot where it would be easiest to drag the gun out into the open.

"Telegin," Sapozhkov yelled, straining his vocal chords to the utmost, "Telegin, the commander wants to know whether you could manhandle the guns out into the open."

"Tell him, yes, we can."

Telegin said this calmly and confidently. Latugin was shovelling hard, although his injured shoulder ached and burned and the blood was seeping through the bandage. He nudged Baikov with his elbow:

"I love these intellectuals, don't you?"

Baikov answered:

"They'll have learned to carry water in a sieve before we've done with them. Learning fast, they are."

Suddenly the silence was broken by the thunder of a barrage. Telegin sprang up to the fire-step. The plain was filling with troops on the move. From the right the armoured trainettes of Alyabyev, a commander who distinguished himself greatly that day, were coming out to meet them and cut them off; they steamed along, whistles screaming, emitting dense clouds of smoke and little rust-coloured puffs of vapour. Telegin's attention was focused on the nearest positions, those of the Kachalin regiment who were lying outside the wire; they had no proper trenches but only small foxholes. A barrel of water had just arrived for them, but the horse shied, turned round, upset the barrel and galloped away with the cart. Telegin caught sight of yesterday's

queer customer, Ivan Gora, sliding in a crouching position along the line of positions, apparently distributing cartridges—one last clip for each rifleman.

To the left of the positions of Gora's company and Telegin's battery, less than five hundred yards away, ran the great ravine which cut across the front and stretched right to the city boundaries. This ravine had been under fire all day and the Cossack waves had burst out of the ravine at a considerable distance. But now Telegin understood as he watched the restless alertness among Ivan Gora's men that the Cossacks would undoubtedly advance along the bottom of the ravine and attack the trenches from the rear and the battery from the flank, a most unpleasant prospect.

His surmise proved correct: suddenly a group of horsemen dashed out of the ravine quite close to the positions and split up into two groups. One section swung round to envelop Ivan Gora, the other made straight for the battery. Telegin sprang to the gun which the sailors, sniffing and swearing, were dragging out of the hollow on to a mound; the wheels of the gun were axle-deep in sand.

"Cossacks!" Telegin said as calmly as he could. "Haul away, lads!" and he himself caught hold of a wheel and gave it such a boost that he felt the muscles in his back crack. "Hurry up! Grapeshot!"

The men could already hear the savage Cossack war-cry—like the screaming of a man being flayed alive. Gagin crawled under the limber and lifted it up with his shoulders: "Come on, all together now!" The gun came out of the sand and stood on the mound leaning over on one side, muzzle to the ground. Gagin took a shell in his huge hands and fed it into the gun without any semblance of haste. About thirty horsemen were galloping towards the battery, bending over their horses' necks and brandishing their sabres. Then a long flame shot out to meet them and the horses heard the whine of the grapeshot; some of them shied, others turned tail, but a dozen horsemen, unable to control their horses, continued their course and reached the mound.

The long-contained fury of the gun-crew found vent at last. Latugin, naked to the waist, shouted hoarsely, raised his long, curved Caucasian dagger and drove it to the hilt into a black Cossack coat, below the silver-inlaid belt. Zaduiviter found himself under a horse, plunged his cutlass into its belly and before the rider could slide to the ground, stabbed him, too, with the cutlass. Gagin dodged a sabre-stroke, grappled with a big Cossack sergeant—a man of Novgorod against a man of the Don—dragged him from his horse, threw him and held him in a deadly grip. The other men of the crew fired their carbines from behind the cover of the gun. Telegin, slowly and calmly as ever on such occasions (all emotions came later, after it was all over), released the safety catch of his revolver and pressed the trigger. The clash was short. Four Cossacks lay dead on the hill; two others, dismounted, attempted to flee, and fell pierced by bullets.

The last attack was beaten off as all others had been that day. The Whites had failed to break through the Red front—only in one most vulnerable place had the foot Cossacks been able to drive a deep wedge between two Red divisions. It was evening. The barrels of the guns were red hot, the horses were weary, the fury of the cavalry abated, and the infantry was ever slower in going over the top. The battle was ending. The firing died down over the deserted plain where only the stretcher-bearers were busy picking up the wounded.

Water-casks on wheels and carts with bread and water-melons brought their load to the trenches and took the wounded back with them on the return

journey. The losses of all units of the Tenth Army were enormous. But worse than the losses was the fact that all reserves had been used up that day and the city had nothing more to give after this.

The commander of the Tenth Army returned to the passenger coach on a siding behind the station of Vodoponovo which served him as his headquarters. He slowly dismounted and looked at the two men who hurried to meet him: one was the artillery chief of his army, the same tall, apple-cheeked, bearded man who had talked to the trench-digging intellectuals near Telegin's battery, and the other, Alyabyev, the commander of the armoured trains, who looked like a student just returned from some street barricade. Both men smiled as their chief looked at them; they were glad to see him back safe from the forward positions where the army commander had taken part in several bayonet charges during the day. His short fur coat was pierced by a bullet-hole and the butt of the carbine hanging from his shoulder had been smashed.

The commander boarded the coach and asked for water. He drank several mugs of it and then asked for a cigarette. He lit up, his dry eyes clouded, then he laid down the cigarette on the edge of the table, drew the sheaf of reports lying on it closer to himself and bent over them. Yes, the losses were very heavy, much too heavy; and very little ammunition, desperately little, was left for use the next day. The commander unfolded a map and the three men bent over it. The commander slowly followed the line of the front on the map with the stub of a pencil—the line had not been broken that day except for some unimportant little sectors, and at Sarepta it had even been bent far forward into the White lines; but on the sector where the unpleasantness with the peasant regiments had occurred the day before, the line of the front made a sharp turn towards Tsaritsyn. The commander's pencil moved ever slower. "Well," he said at last, "let's check up once more." The reports were precise enough. The pencil stopped at a point about four miles from Tsaritsyn, in the bed of the ravine, and then turned again, no less sharply, towards the west. The result was a wedge. The commander threw his pencil on to the map and slapped the flat of his hand down on this wedge.

"This decides everything."

The artillery chief drew down his eyebrows and said obdurately, with averted eyes:

"I'll undertake to chew off that wedge, but get me shells during the night."

The chief of the armoured trains said:

"The spirit of the troops is excellent. Once they get a bite to eat and an hour or so of sleep, they'll hold out."

"Holding out is not enough," the army commander replied; "we must smash them, and the present line of the front is unsuitable for that. Is an engine ready? All right, I'm going." He remained sitting another minute, stiff with weariness, then stood up and put his arms round the shoulders of the other two men:

"Good luck and good-bye."

The chief of the artillery and the chief of the armoured trains returned to the observation post. It was a solitary railway water-tower which had been under fire all day from the ground and from the air. They went up to the top, where the telephones were placed. Here they found dinner prepared for them: two chunks of stale bread and half an unripe water-melon between the two of them. The gunner was a full-blooded hearty fellow and such poor rations pained him.

"This water-melon is muck," he said, standing in an opening broken into the brick wall. "If a water-melon is cut with a knife, it isn't a real water-melon any more. A water-melon should be broken with a blow of the fist." He ate, spitting out the pips, and looked out with puckered eyes into the plain which lay open below them under the sinking sun. "A bowl of hot dumplings, that's what I'd like now. What do you think, Vassili? Doesn't it look as if we could expect the order to retreat during the night?"

"What do you mean? Retreat? Give up the railway? Are you in your right mind?"

"And were you in your right mind when you let the enemy breach the front? Where were your armoured trains?"

While he was talking, the gunnery chief kept raising two spread fingers to his eyes or holding out a box of matches in his extended hand, and determining angles and ranges with a margin of error under fifty paces.

"But they had special sappers following the waves of infantry and they blew up the permanent way in a dozen places."

"You ought not to have allowed such a wedge to be driven in for all that," the gunner repeated obstinately. "I say, look at that, can you see what I see?"

Only a sharp, practised eye could have perceived that the brown plain stretching out towards the west was no longer quiet and deserted and that some cautious move was in progress on it. All the little inequalities of the ground, all the little mounds, like thousands of ant heaps, threw long shadows, and some of these shadows were slowly shifting.

"Reliefs coming up," the gunnery chief said. "Look at them crawling. Take the field-glasses. . . . Can you see those little glittering strips?"

"Quite clearly. . . . They are officers' shoulder-straps."

"Obviously officers' shoulder-straps do glitter. Ugh, look at them, creeping like spiders. Lord! What a lot of officers' shoulder-straps! Seems to be nothing else but officers."

"Yes; queer, isn't it."

"Stalin warned us day before yesterday to expect something of the sort. . . . This seems to be it."

Alyabyev glanced at the gunner, took off his cap and passed his hand over his head, mussing up the hair sticky with sweat. His grey eyes lost their lustre and he hung his head.

"Yes," he said; "I see. So that was why they broke it off so early this evening. It was to be expected, but it's going to be difficult."

He quickly sat down to the telephone and began to call up other stations. Then he put on his cap and ran down the winding stair.

The gunner kept on watching the plain until the sun had set. Then he rang up the military council and said softly and distinctly into the receiver:

"Comrade Stalin, a brigade of officers is relieving the foot Cossacks at the front."

"I know. Expect a message soon," he heard in reply.

In fact, the clatter of a motor-cycle followed soon after, footsteps approached over the creaking stairs and a man dressed all in black leather climbed through the trap-door. He could scarcely squeeze through, so big was he. The gunnery chief was no dwarf, but this motor-cyclist towered over him.

"Where is the chief of the artillery of this army?" he asked.

At the answer: "Here I am," the dispatch-rider asked for proof of identity,

struck a match and read the identity card while the match burned down to his nails. Only then were his suspicions allayed—he handed over his dispatch and thudded down the stairs.

The dispatch was a scrap of coarse yellow paper and on it was written in the hand of the chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council:

My orders to you are that during the night, before dawn, you concentrate all (the 'all' was underscored) *available artillery and ammunition on the three-mile sector Voroponovo-Sadovaya. The movement is to be carried out unnoticed by the enemy as far as possible.*

The gunnery chief read and re-read this surprising and terrible order. The manœuvre was more than risky and its execution incredibly difficult. It meant that on a tiny sector around the breach in the line all the twenty-seven batteries, every one of the two hundred guns, were to be bunched all together. Should the enemy fail to attack precisely at this point, but ever so slightly to the right or left of it—or what would be even worse, should make an outflanking thrust towards Sarepta and Gumrak—the army would be encircled and annihilated.

The gunnery chief was greatly perturbed. He sat down to the telephones and began to call up the commanders of each division, instructing them where to proceed, what roads to use and to what points to shift the whole immense mass of men, horses, carts, tents, supplies. All this had to be loaded, despatched, unloaded, set up again, the guns dug in, the wires strung, and all of it within the few hours left before dawn.

Without leaving his telephones, he shouted downstairs for a lamp to be brought and for all dispatch-riders to be told to keep their horses ready. He unbuttoned the collar of his woollen shirt, and rubbing his shaven head with his hand, he dictated curt orders. The dispatch-riders took the orders, slid down the stairs, sprang into their saddles and galloped away into the night. The gunnery chief was cunning—he gave orders that after the guns were gone, fires should be lit on the gun emplacements—not too large fires, just big enough to look natural and make the enemy believe that the Reds were still warming their bare feet there in this cold night.

Re-reading his orders once again he decided that it would not do to leave the flanks entirely bare and made up his mind to leave thirty guns at Sarepta and Gumrak, after all. When the divisional commanders reported that all was in readiness, the teams harnessed, the ammunition and other supplies loaded and the fires started, the gunnery chief got into his ancient motor-car—it ran on a mixture of alcohol and paraffin and groaned and rattled like a gipsy cart—and drove off to headquarters in Tsaritsyn.

He rumbled through the dark and deserted city, stopped in front of a house, once the private residence of a merchant, ran up the unlighted stairs to the second floor and entered a large room with Gothic windows and an oak-panelled ceiling. The room was lighted by two candles only; one stood on a table piled with papers, the other was held high in the hand of the army commander who was standing near the wall in front of a large wall map. Beside him the chairman of the Military Council was marking with coloured pencils the positions of the troops on the map in preparation for to-morrow's battle.

Although the room was empty except for these two senior comrades, who were also his friends, the gunnery chief stepped forward with military precision, stood to attention, saluted, and reported formally that the order he had received

had been carried out. The commander of the army lowered the candle and turned to the artillery chief. The chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council left the map and sat down at the table.

"Twenty batteries will have been moved to the frontal sector before dawn," the artillery chief said, "and seven batteries I left on the flanks at Sarepta and Gumrak."

The chairman of the Military Council, who had lit a pipe, fanned the smoke of it from before his face and asked softly and sternly:

"Flanks? What flanks? Sarepta and Gumrak have nothing to do with it. There was not a word about flanks in the orders. You misunderstood your orders."

"Not at all. I understood the orders well enough."

"The orders said"—here the lower lids of the chairman twitched and his eyes narrowed—"the orders said very clearly: 'all the artillery, to the very last gun, is to be concentrated on the frontal sector'."

The artillery chief glanced at the army commander, but he, too, was looking at the gunner with a serious warning in his eyes.

"Comrades," the artillery chief began heatedly, "but surely this order was a gamble, a desperate chance."

"Yes," said the chairman.

"Yes," said the army commander.

"But what good is it to us if we concentrate a mighty punch on the frontal sector and leave both flanks bare? What guarantee have we that the enemy will attack precisely in that frontal sector? And what if they hit us somewhere else? The infantry alone would not hold the thrust, the infantry is exhausted after to-day's fighting. And it would be too late to regroup our batteries a second time. That is what I am afraid of. The armoured trains can't help us any more; we shall have to pull back the infantry from the railway in any case. That is what I am afraid of."

"Well, stop being afraid." The chairman of the Military Council tapped the table with his finger once and then once again. "Don't be afraid! Don't hesitate. It is perfectly clear that to-morrow the Whites will have to throw all their forces against the frontal sector and no other. This move is relentlessly dictated by the whole course of yesterday's operations. Take their serious reverse at Sarepta—on no account will they want to make another attempt there—they are fully aware of the movement of Budenny's brigade to the rear of the fifth column. Then take their success yesterday on the central sector where they drove a wedge into our front. Then consider the advantages of the terrain between Voroponovo and Sadovaya, all those ravines quite close to Tsaritsyn. You told me yourself that the foot Cossacks there had been relieved by a brigade of officers. Draw your own conclusions from this. The officers' brigade consists of twelve thousand volunteers, all regular officers who know how to fight. Mamontov would never use such a corps for a mere demonstration. No; we have every reason to be certain that the attack will come on the frontal sector."

"Yesterday's reports confirm this," the army commander said. "The Whites have withdrawn fourteen out of fifteen regiments from the northern and southern wings and are bringing them here along the ravines. That is in addition to the officers' brigade."

"By this," the chairman of the Military Council continued, "the enemy is himself creating the circumstances in which, provided we are sufficiently bold and resolute, he will offer us a chance of annihilating his main forces. Our

task to-morrow is not to beat off an attack, but to destroy the very core of the Army of the Don."

The gunnery chief grinned broadly, sat down to the table, and smacked his thigh with his fist.

"A good bluff!" he said. "A very good bluff! There's no more to be said. I'll give them such a reception, they'll run right back to the Don without stopping."

The chairman of the Military Council again raised the candle to the three-inch map and the gunnery chief began to explain where he was going to put his batteries—quite close together, axle to axle, and arranged in several tiers.

"Don't dig pits," the army commander said; "site your guns on mounds in the open. We'll move the infantry up close to the batteries. Go, ring up the commanders."

A few minutes later a swift and silent movement began all along the forty versts of the frontal sector. Under the starry sky in which the Milky Way stood out as it rarely does in autumn nights, horse teams pulling guns and howitzers galloped across the dark plain. Heavy ordnance drawn by eight horses crawled along and wagons and two-wheeled carts raced past them at breakneck speed. Infantry units left their positions, withdrew unnoticed by the enemy, and reassembled in the narrower semicircle of the new defence line.

The plain was white with a hoar frost when the trumpeters sounded the reveille rousing the Cossack regiments to battle. The sun rolled out of the Volga steppe. Guns thudded in the distance. Machine-guns chattered. The Red front was silent. It lay in complete shadow, against the sun. All batteries had been told to wait for the signal—four high bursts of shrapnel.

The White attack started with hurricane fire from the edge of the horizon. All live creatures lay prone, cowering behind any clod of earth, any depression that could serve as cover. From time to time a wild scream was heard above the thunder of the guns and a cartwheel or a smoking military greatcoat flew into the air together with a fountain of earth. The artillery preparation lasted forty-five minutes. When the men could at last raise their heads the whole plain was already swarming with troops in movement. Rank after rank of officers marched forward with levelled bayonets, upright and unhurried; behind them came more officer battalions in twelve columns, keeping their intervals as if on parade. Two regimental banners fluttered in the wind high above their heads. The drums beat a quick roll, the fifes wailed. Behind the infantry the black mass of countless Cossack squadrons bobbed up and down.

"Ivan Ilyich! Here they are, the class enemies! This is the real stuff!"

"Well dressed! Well shod! Well fed!"

"Pity to tear all those fine clothes."

"Comrades, stop clowning, keep a sharp look-out."

"We were only chattering for fear, comrade Telegin."

The first ranks quickened their pace. They were only fifty paces away now; one could already see their faces—may no one ever see such faces again: sunken eyes dim with hate, skin drawn over cheekbones, muscles flexed for the mouths to open and yell 'hurrah!'

The gunnery chief leant out of the hole in the brick wall of the water-tower and stretched out one hand behind to give the telephonist the signal: 'four rounds of shrapnel!' He waited another few seconds: the White lines and

columns swinging along in measured tread with drums beating and fifes wailing were to be allowed to cross the railway track first. . . . Another minute now. . . . If only the devils don't start to run forward.

"Comrade company commander . . . I can't carry on any longer . . . by God——"

"Get back to the trench, you son-of-a-bitch!"

"I'm sick . . . I only want to . . ."

"I'll kill you, you yellow cur."

"Comrade Ivan Gora . . . don't; don't, please."

"Take your rifle!"

The gunnery chief was saying to himself: "when those first ones reach that post". The front rank was already bending, wavering and falling out of step. The gunnery chief could clearly distinguish the post, slanting to one side with a fragment of barbed-wire hanging from it. He knew that he was the man who would decide the fate of the whole attack, the fate of to-day's battle, the fate of Tsaritsyn, even the fate of the revolution itself, as near as dammit! There, that fellow in the yellow boots, he's the first to pass the post. The gunnery chief opened the fist he had held clenched behind his back, drew back from the hole in the wall and barked at the telephone operator: "Signal!"

Four shrapnel shells burst like little cotton wool clouds in the clear sky high above the marching columns. A crash such as no man had ever heard shook the air. The brick water-tower swayed with the blast. The telephone operator dropped the receiver and put his hands to his ears. The gunnery chief stamped his feet as if dancing and his hands moved as if he was conducting an orchestra.

The plain across which just now the grey-green battalions had been moving in ordered and menacing array now resembled the smoking, seething crater of a giant volcano. Through the dust and smoke the stricken attackers could be seen lying down, their rear ranks swirling in confusion. Then from the north, along the railway line they had failed to occupy, the armoured trains of the Reds came rushing to cut off their rear. Red infantry rose from the trenches and threw itself into a counter-attack. The gunnery chief snatched the receiver from the telephone operator and shouted: "Shift your fire farther to the rear!" A barrage of fire cut off the White line of retreat. Red armoured cars, machine-guns blazing, cut into the thick of the enemy troops and the slaughter began.

CHAPTER VIII

DASHA WAS SITTING on a box labelled "Medical Supplies" in the courtyard of a house; her hands, just washed and red from contact with the cold water, rested on her knees; she closed her eyes and let the autumn sun shine on her face. A swarm of sparrows with full crops were preening their feathers, cleaning themselves and twittering in the boastful manner of sparrows on the bare branches of an acacia just beyond where the edge of the shadow thrown by the roof kept the sun off the tree. The sparrows had just been in the street where in front of the single-storey white house they found spilt oats and horse-dung to their hearts' content. They had been frightened by a passing cart and had fled to the

tree. To Dasha the twittering of the birds seemed an inexpressible sweet music with the theme: *we go on living our lives whatever happens.*

She was wearing a white overall soiled with blood, and a nurse's head-dress tightly tied round her head and coming down to her eyebrows. In the city the windows were no longer shaking with the cannonade and there were no more dull explosions of bombs dropped from aeroplanes. The horrors of the last two days had ended in the twittering of sparrows. Coming to think of it this was quite insulting, this contempt the little feathered creatures with the full crops had for men and their affairs. *Chick-chirick*—they seemed to say—*sparrows are small but brainy; pick up the oats in the dung, hop from twig to twig across your lady sparrow, chirp a farewell to the setting sun and then sleep till sunrise—there's all the wisdom of the ages for you.*

Dasha heard carts stopping in front of the gates. More wounded had arrived and were being brought into the house. She was so tired that she could not even raise her eyelids through which the light shone tinged with rose-colour. She knew that the doctor would call her if she was wanted. The doctor was kind; he would shout at her with pretended rudeness and look at her with gentle eyes.

"Get out of here this very minute, Daria Dmitrievna," he would say. "You're no earthly use to me; go outside, sit down a bit somewhere out there. I'll wake you when I want you." What a lot of wonderful people there were in the world after all. Dasha thought that she would like the doctor to come out for a smoke so she could tell him about her observations on sparrow life which seemed to her extremely profound. And why should it be wrong that the doctor seemed to have a crush on her? Dasha sighed and then sighed a second time, but the second sigh was one of grief. *One can put up with everything, even the unthinkable,* she thought, *if only one's eyes meet kind, friendly eyes. Even if it is only a fleeting glance, it rouses one's mental forces, one's belief in oneself. And so one lives again. Little sparrows, little sparrows, this is something you can never understand.*

But instead of the doctor a citizen with a sallow, nervous face and tragic eyes crawled out of the cellar where the kitchen had been set up. He was dressed in the uniform greatcoat of the Ministry of Education, but this time he had no rope for a belt. Coming a few steps up the brick stairs he stretched out his long neck and listened. But only the sparrows twittered.

"How terrible!" he said. "A nightmare! A delirium!"

He put his hands over his ears but immediately took them away again. The westering sun threw a side-light on his face, on his thin cartilaginous nose and his pouting lips.

"There's no end to it, my God! Have you ever had an acoustic nightmare?" he suddenly asked Dasha. "Excuse me, we have not been introduced, but I know you, I saw you in Petersburg before the war, at the meetings of the Philosophical Society. You were younger then, but now you are more beautiful and more significant as a personality. An acoustic nightmare begins with a distant avalanche, which is as yet soundless, but which approaches with terrifying speed. Then comes a dissonant buzzing, such as does not exist anywhere in nature. It fills your ears and brain. You know that it is all unreal and that all this noise is in you. Your whole soul is tensed—you feel that you cannot bear these trumpets of Jericho any longer and then you lose consciousness and are saved. I ask, when will all this end?"

He was standing in front of Dasha, against the light, wringing his thin hands and cracking his finger-joints.

"I must dig up some clay somewhere, knead it through and mend the stove, because we have been evicted and relegated to the cellar as 'non-working elements'. My father was headmaster of the secondary school here to the end of his life and built this house out of his savings. Go, tell them that. There are some charred bricks in the cellar and two windows that give on to the pavement and are so dusty that they let no light whatever through. My books are thrown into a corner in a heap. My mother has heart trouble, she is fifty-five years old; my sister has malaria and her legs are paralysed. And now winter is coming on. Oh, my God!"

Dasha thought that if he went on like this a little longer he would break off his ten fingers, like the Spirit of Sugar in the *Blue Bird* she had seen in the Arts Theatre.

"Who does not work, shall not eat! I have graduated from the historical and philosophical faculty of the university, have almost completed my thesis for a doctor's degree, have taught three years in the secondary school for girls in this same fateful town, this hopeless hole, where I am chained hand and foot by the illness of my mother and sister. And then the end of it all is this 'who does not work shall not eat!' They put a shovel in my hand, they drive me by force to dig trenches and demand with menaces that I should admire the revolution. Rape of liberty! Triumph of the calloused hand! An affront to science! I am not a gentleman, not a bourgeois, not a reactionary; I still bear the scar of a stone thrown at me during a student demonstration. But I have no intention of bowing low to a revolution which has driven me into a cellar. I did not educate and refine my brain in order that I should look through the dusty window of a cellar at the feet of the victors who walk the pavements. I am debarred from ending my own life—I have a mother and a sister. Even in my dreams I have nowhere to go, no escape whatever——"

He said all this with incredible speed and his eyes wandered while he spoke. Dasha listened to him without surprise but without sympathy, as if this nervous man who had suddenly popped up out of a basement kitchen were just an inevitable realization of the horror of those days of the barrage, the fires, the groans of the wounded.

"What made you join them?" he suddenly asked in an ordinary, everyday, petulant tone. "Ignorance? Fear? Hunger? You must know that I have been watching you these two days. I remembered the 'Philosophical Evenings' in Petersburg and how I silently admired you without venturing to approach you and get acquainted. You were almost Blok's 'unknown lady' to me. (Dasha immediately thought *why 'almost'*.) A princess who used to embroider golden screens—and now she lugs wounded men about, wears a dirty overall, has red hands. Horrible, horrible! Such is the face of the revolution."

Dasha abruptly flew into so violent a rage that she clenched her teeth, said not a word to this pale, yellow neurotic and walked into the house. After the fresh air outside the heavy smell of antiseptics and suffering humanity almost took her breath away.

All the rooms were full of wounded lying in closely-spaced bunks made of unplaned boards. She found the doctor in the operating theatre, the same room in which the schoolmaster from the girls' school had been writing his thesis before he was evicted. The doctor was wiping his bare hairy arms on a towel and when he caught sight of Dasha he winked one brown eye at her.

"Well, have you had a nice nap? Meanwhile, I have had an interesting operation here—I cut out about six inches of a fellow's guts and in four weeks' time I'll be drinking vodka with him. Then there's a serious case of shock just come

in—a commander. I gave him a shot of camphor; the heart is all right, but he has not come round yet. Watch his pulse; if it gets weaker, give him another shot of camphor."

He threw his towel over his shoulder and walked with Dasha to one of the board bunks. On it Ivan Ilyich Telegin lay stretched on his back. His eyes were screwed up tightly as if a blinding light were beating down upon them. His lips were drawn and pressed tightly together. His left hand was lying on his chest. The doctor took it, felt the pulse and shook it gently:

"See, it's relaxed and a minute ago it was clenched as if in a cramp. Shock sometimes presents the most extraordinary pictures, my dear. We know much too little about it. The mechanics of it are the same as in the fits of infants: the central nervous system is unable to set up a defence against some sudden attack——"

The doctor stopped in the middle of the sentence because he himself now experienced an unexpected shock to a minor degree. Daria Dmitrievna had gently sunk to her knees by the side of the bunk and was pressing her cheek against the sick man's hand which the doctor had just released.

CHAPTER IX

VADIM PETROVICH ROSHCHIN woke up late in his shabby hotel room, the dirty window of which was curtained by a yellowed sheet of newspaper. The bed was too short and the blanket too thin. The next train was not due until late that night. Roshchin had an empty day to pass somehow. Only one cigarette was left in his cigarette-case. He took it out, lit it and stared at his own lean, blue-veined hand that was covered with goose-flesh. His search for Katia had been unsuccessful. He had not found her. His leave was running out, he would have to return to the Kuban and to his regiment.

Two days hence he would be getting out of a train, getting into a *brichka* and driving over the steppe without talking to the private on the box. In the wide village street the wheels of the *brichka* would sink into the ruts full of the infertile rainwater of November. He would get out into the mud, order the man to carry his luggage into the house and walk to headquarters to report to Major-General Shwede, commander of his regiment.

He would find this well-groomed idiot reading poetry; verses of the symbolists such as the "Fiery Ring" of Sologub or Gumilev's "Pearls". Vadim Petrovich would report and take over his platoon. He might even get a company. The same monotony would begin again: parades, visits to the officers' club where he would be questioned about women and about the good times he had had, where they would joke about his leanness, his grey hairs and his gloomy looks. In the evenings he would pace up and down in his room. At ten his batman would come and pull off his boots without a word. Such was the one possibility—the other would be that the regiment was at the front, in battle.

He saw in his mind's eye the dead steppe with banks of lowering clouds over it, chimneys visible among the flames, carts with their load of wounded men stuck in the mud, and on the edge of the steppe the trenches full of men lying there among human filth and bloody rags. He saw himself as a professional optimist, as a legendary fatalist setting an example of cold-blooded hatred,

which he did not feel, which he had not felt for a long time. All he felt was a queasiness and nausea when he thought of these men.

He sat up in bed, tried to fasten up a button on his shirt, stretched out his hand to search for tobacco in the pockets of his trousers which had slipped to the floor, then lay back again and put his hands under his head.

"Really, such a state of mind is impossible," he said softly. The sound of his own voice seemed strange to him and he disliked it; he was sickened by the way in which he had said this. "Impossible? Why impossible? Everything is possible! It is even possible to take one's belt, fasten one end to the handle of the door and the other to one's own neck. . . . Come on, Roshchin, be frank. . . . Why should you be so squeamish? You're just the same sort of scum as all the others."

In vengeful anger he began to recall all the encounters he had had here in Yekaterinoslav. Women with the traces of many evacuations in their faces, wrapped in the pitiful remnants of their former inaccessibility, wandering from hotel to hotel and offering for sale all sorts of knick-knacks, of 'sentimental value' to no one but themselves; generals who patted you on the back and called you 'little father'; blue-jowled, robust experts in the sale and purchase of bills of lading for government goods; loud-voiced country squires scared away from their manors and now crowding into furnished rooms together with their inane wives and long-legged, freckled, disillusioned daughters, scraping money together as best they could, eating big meals in restaurants where they taught the chefs how to cook all sorts of unheard-of dishes, calling the revolution 'this muddle' and in general passing the time in the rosiest of hopes, clinging to their country ways even in the most difficult of times. He recalled the vestibule of the hotel with its crowd of all sorts of people who had with incredible rapidity lost their social standing; only the buttons on their uniform caps betrayed that this seedy man buttonholing a lucky profiteer and trying to persuade him to buy a broken watch had been a public prosecutor; or this other, grey-haired and coughing, carrying a cane, who had obviously already sold all his valuables and was now enviously watching all these juicy deals, all these hands passing banknotes to and fro, had been a director of the inland revenue.

Slippery black-marketeers in well-cut suits rushed in through the main door, gesticulated with hands and eyes, gathered in bunches, discussed something in nervous whispers and rushed away again like winged Mercurys, gods of commerce and success. In the vestibule one could learn all about the movements of government supplies, about a tank of machine-oil lost in transit, about the exchange rate of the dollar which jumped up and down several times a day in immediate connection with the French or German counter-attacks on the Western front. But these are matters for the great. The smaller fry of the black market in the vestibule make way, and their eyes, flickering with excitement, are fixed on the figure of the "big pot".

He comes in slowly and with dignity. He invariably wears a very long overcoat and a little cap or a velour hat; he carries an umbrella and his beard is smoothed down to his neck. The beard is perfectly inviolable—only in moments of greatest intellectual concentration does he separate a single hair from it and twirl it. The eyes reflect the tenseness of a mental life divorced from all paltry matters, for this is a thinker; he ascertains and brings into a system the categories which condition the rise or fall of the essence of world energy, i.e. of the stable foreign currencies.

Here, in the vestibule and in the streets around the hotel, everybody gambles.

Officially it is all banned by the Hetman's government and the German occupation authorities. The gamblers are in perpetual motion on the pavements between the hotel entrance and the nearest side-turning. They buy and sell by meaning glances, gestures and very few words. None of them carry any foreign currency—it is all hidden away and no one knows how much of it is actually to be found in the city. The gambling is on margins, and settlements are made in the local *karbovanets*, the money issued by the hetman. Fortunes are made in the course of minutes and rich men turned into beggars in the batting of an eye. The lucky man goes to a café with his hangers-on to drink coffee made of acorns; the unlucky one wanders along the boulevard in despair, and the November wind that sweeps along the fallen leaves and torn bits of paper tugs at the dusty skirts of his long coat.

The people who resided at the hotel, who crowded the pavements, the tobacconists' shops, the cafés, the chop-houses, who made deals and cheated each other are all part of the noisy, greedy herd which bleated and roared in every city captured from the revolutionary forces, where they were not prevented from eating, drinking, copulating, swindling and profiteering at will. It was this herd that had to be protected by bayonets and guns; it was for them that more cities had to be captured; it was for them that Russia, cleansed of the Bolshevik taint, had to be re-established in all her greatness, one and indivisible.

"Cheap trash and lies!" Vadim Petrovich said aloud. "Why not desert and have done with it?"

He began to play with the thought, for the first time in his life relinquishing the reins of moral restraint. With keen pleasure he discovered in himself deposits of paltriness and dishonesty. He even laughed at it—between clenched teeth. His thoughts were as surprisingly creative as a first sin.

"What were those holy things for the sake of which you drove through life with tightened reins? You regarded yourself as a decent fellow, you belonged to decent society—you even left the regiment for the university to extend your intellectual horizon. In your youth you thought you were like Andrey Bolkonski in *War and Peace*. Moral impulses satisfied you; they sufficed for you and you felt that you were clean. You turned up your nose at everything doubtful and unclean, as if it were a cesspool. You had only three *affaires* in all with married women and you broke it off with these women at the very height of your extremely refined relations, just when passionate curiosity began to give way to juicily habitual kisses. Well, the general conclusion is: where did your irreproachable life, your proudly raised head get you? Into a fire! Only the charred chimney is left of the whole man!"

Having come to this conclusion, Vadim Petrovich began to consider in methodic fashion the possibilities of desertion. Escape abroad? But the whole world was in the throes of war. Everywhere sleuths were searching for suspect foreigners, and suspect foreigners were thrown into prison and even hanged. In the whole world cheerful lads were being loaded into troop-trains and transports. "Tru-la-la," the lads sang, "soon we'll beat those swine of Germans and get back to our sweethearts." Then they were torpedoed in mid-ocean and the cheerful lads struggled in the icy water in a patch of oil. In Europe column after column of young men dressed in campaign uniforms cut like shrouds marched in serried ranks, and in hopeless despair, marched obediently to meet machine-guns, trench mortars, mine-throwers, flame-throwers—fire in front of them and fire behind them. No; a trip abroad was washed out. Another possibility was to get through to Odessa,

obtain a fake passport and take a job as a waiter in a chop-house. Yes; but someone might come in and be surprised. "Why, isn't this Roshchin? What are you doing here, my dear chap?" Do a bit of black-marketeering on a small scale? Or take to thieving? That needed considerable stores of *joie de vivre*. Pimp? Too old for that. Very good. Suppose I managed to survive until final victory; all the Socialists have been hanged, all the *muzhiks* flogged, the English have forgiven us, we shamefacedly begin to recruit another army beyond the Volga to smash up the Germans. We distribute arms to the soldiers and then one fine day the soldiers go for the officers and the whole thing starts all over again. My poor dear Katia, whom I failed to find, lying somewhere, on a railway station with broken windows, among a crowd of sleeping, delirious or dead strangers, will call for the last time: "Vadim! Vadim!" So there is only one possibility left: to hang myself without delay. Afraid? No. But it is disgusting to make such an effort merely for one's own sake."

His hands were icy—he felt the cold of them on the nape of his neck. He could come to no decision. As if little men, crawling all over him like flies, were carrying away his will and his soul. At dusk he would get up, pull on his trousers, walk to the station, and would probably even bother to buy cigarettes on the way. And he would live—such men as he, no sabre would cut them, no bullets pierce them, no typhus louse bite them.

In the next room, on the other side of the door barricaded with a chest of drawers, two angry male voices had long been hastily quarrelling. One began every sentence with a "Listen, Mister Paprikaki, if I were God. . . ." But the other never let him finish the sentence: "Listen, Gabel, you are not God; you are an imbecile! It's enough to drive a man crazy: buying shares in the Krupp Steelworks half an hour before the papers come out!" "Listen, after all, I am not God!" "Listen, Gabel, if you haven't enough to make good my losses, you're dead."

These phrases forced themselves irresistibly on Roshchin's ears. "Damn it all," he thought, "I'd like to fire through that door." Then beyond the other door, the one leading into the passage, he heard much coming and going and excited voices saying "A doctor! Call a doctor!" "What good would a doctor be? He's stiffening already." "What's this? How did it happen?" "It happened as it happened. What concern is it of yours?"

The voices subsided. Roshchin heard the jingling of spurs.

"Excuse me, Inspector—is it true that he was a nephew of the Emperor of Austria?"

"Yes, quite true; everything is true. Kindly clear this passage, gentlemen!"

Then two other voices spoke in an undertone quite close to Roshchin's door.

"That wasn't suicide. His own aide shot him. The aide was a Bolshevik."

"How can that be? An Austrian officer a Bolshevik?"

"What do you think? They are everywhere. Not only Vienna, Berlin itself is in their hands since yesterday."

"Oh my God. This is too much for my poor head!"

"Yes, sir. It's time to clear out."

"Where to?"

"God knows. Some islands perhaps."

"That's right. Somebody said yesterday that in the Netherlands Indies

there were islands where the bread grows on trees. No clothes needed either. But how can one get there?"

Suddenly the boy serving the hotel as boots—a snub-nosed urchin with a broad grin—burst into the room without knocking.

"Special edition. Revolution in Germany. Passenger, pay three *karbovanets*." He threw a newspaper on to Roshchin's chest, never noticing the wide-open, blazing eyes of this 'passenger', nor the deadly pallor of his face. "I'm taking the money off the window-sill. Read the paper, passenger."

With that, he burst out of the room again. Vadim Petrovich's heart pounded frantically, but the newspaper lay on his chest a long time untouched. Revolution in Germany! Soldiers on the tops of railway coaches, smashed railway stations, crowds singing wildly, speakers shouting from the plinths of statues, punching the air with their fists and yelling "Liberty! Liberty!" As if liberty could take the place of bread, of a country, of a sense of duty and of the measured calm of a state machinery developed in the course of centuries. The revolution! Litter-strewn cities, dishevelled wenches on the boulevards! And melancholy—the melancholy of looking out of a window on to the bleached roofs of a town in which there were no secrets left and even the sun rose to inaccessible heights. The melancholy of a man who had made so great an effort to carry himself, his independence, his pride and his sorrow intact through life, and all in vain.

Vadim Petrovich suddenly realized that he was talking to himself. It was like a nightmare without sleep. He unfolded the newspaper. A banner headline splashed across the page gave the news of an incipient revolution in Germany. It had broken out during the armistice negotiations in the forest of Compiègne, when the German representatives waited on General Weygand in his train on an artillery siding.

They asked to hear the French conditions. The general did not invite them to be seated, did not shake hands with them and answered with cold fury: "I have no proposals to make. Germany must be forced to her knees."

The same day the rulers who had led Germany into infamy were overthrown. A soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies was formed in Berlin. The Kaiser secretly left his headquarters in Spa and fled to Holland, surrendering his sword on the Dutch frontier to a lieutenant of the Netherlands army.

A few minutes later Vadim Petrovich, dressed and overcoated, his belt tightly drawn and his cap on his head, read the newspaper once again as he stood near the window. Then he stuffed a bundle of crumpled paper money into his pocket and went out into the street.

As he left the hotel he saw a stout man walking past the entrance—he looked as if he had just come out of a diving-suit after a deep dive. The man's face was purple and puffy, his eyes starting out of his head; his thick lips were parched and moving as he whispered again and again: "I sell Krupp Steelworks, I sell, I sell. . . ." As he walked along he turned his eyes towards the passer-by with the crazy hope of finding an even greater fool than he himself had been.

He was jostled and pushed out of the way by some Austrian soldiers sauntering along in disorderly groups, their rifles slung across their shoulders barrel downwards. This was one of the symptoms of the revolution—the barrel pointing earthward symbolized that from the very first day the revolution

renounced the slaughtering of men. Alongside of this crowd of soldiers a slim little officer was walking on the pavement. The officer was very young, with a tiny, youthfully silky moustache; his delicate face, with a painfully tense expression on it was proudly raised. On his left shoulder-strap he had a red ribbon. This youngster, graduating from his training school in war time, had had little time to strut about in his new uniform, dragging the metal scabbard of his sword along the pavements of gay Vienna, where the ladies were so charmingly care-free. Because he was so young and so good-natured, it had been his fate to be elected to the soldiers' committee and he was now leading his platoon to the station amidst the crossfire of malicious, mocking looks, to entrain with them for a Vienna where workmen were building barricades amidst chaos and hunger.

Roshchin followed these supercilious Westerners with his eyes for a long time. He, too, felt a malicious pleasure at their discomfiture. "So Brest-Litovsk turned out to be not so good, eh? You didn't stay long in the Ukraine, eating geese and bacon"; but he immediately checked himself. "And what is that to you? Moscow will be pleased—but you can go back to your stinking trenches, to your counter-revolutionary pals. . . ." He frowned, because this was the first time that he had so calmly and cynically pronounced this word. It was in that very word that the cause of his internal dissensions lay. Katia had been more discerning than he when in the hour of their fierce quarrel in Rostov she had said: "If you believe with heart and soul in the justice of your cause, then you can go and kill." According to all the traditional notions of decent self-respecting intellectuals 'counter-revolutionary' was tantamount to 'blackguard'. How was he to carry on with such thoughts in his mind?

Roshchin stuck his hands in the pockets of his great-coat and wandered down the broad boulevard. Even his gait was that of a blackguard, he thought, shuffling and shambling. Passing a barber's shop he involuntarily glanced at himself in the narrow mirror that flanked the door; his own face, corpse-like in its pallor, sneered at him from the mirror with a malicious, twisted grin. He walked in, sat down in the chair without taking off his great-coat and said "Shave". Here, too, everything disgusted him: the low-ceilinged, overheated room with its cheap wallpaper that was peeling off the walls, and the barber himself, a comb stuck into a head of hair full of dandruff, his dirty, nimble hands reeking with the sweet fulsome smell of bad scent.

In no hurry to soap Roshchin's cheeks; and beating up his lather as he talked, the barber began to chatter:

"When the goodwife hasn't enough trouble, she gets herself a pig. We have been fighting for four years and now we have a revolution. Why they didn't ask me I can't conceive." He opened the razor and began to strop it savagely. "There's a lot of policy in this quiet little business of ours—I want you to see the difference. . . ." Here he began to soap Roshchin's cheeks with hot foam. "You are my first customer to-day. People are going out of their minds. Because the Kaiser has fled to Holland, nobody wants to shave any more in our town. Shall I tell you why? Because they are all afraid of the Bolsheviks, they are afraid of Makhno, so they all want to let their bristles grow, so as to look like proletarians." He drew the blade across Roshchin's cheeks with a swish. "Excuse me, do you dislike the barber to take hold of the end of your nose? Some customers specially ask for it. I learnt the trade in Kursk; our master was a bit old-fashioned, he stuck his finger into the customers' mouths—or if it was a gentleman, he used a cucumber instead

of his finger. The price was ten kopecks with finger and twelve kopecks with cucumber—quite good money it was at the time. I'll shave you over again—there's plenty of time. Just before you came in there was a lunatic here, Paprikaki. Do you know him? He's our big pot in finance. His nerves are all to pieces, it's impossible to shave him; he's got a rash on his cheeks that hurts terribly if you so much as touch it with the shaving-brush. To-day the rash came out all over his body, thank God. He told me the Germans were about to evacuate the Ukraine, the Bolsheviks were already on the offensive near Byelgorod, and in Byelaya Tserkov a new Ukrainian government had just been set up, they call it a Directorium. Well, we've had a Rada, we've had the Soviets, but we haven't had a Directorium yet. The chiefs of it are Petlyura and Vinnichenko, they were both my customers in 1916 when I was in Kiev. Petlyura is a bookkeeper, he had a job in the Zemstvo federation. Vinnichenko is an author—we used to go to his plays, but they were nothing much, stories like this: a woman is unfaithful to a painter, the painter makes a scene, then the lover arrives and the lady takes a furnished room next to his. The painter for some reason can't go in to them, he doesn't want to get between them or leave the hussy, so he starts chewing up his wrist, the idea is to bite through his sinews, be an invalid—just to spite the woman, see? I shaved Vinnichenko often—his face is flabby, with big pores. Paprikaki said that the Directorium has issued an appeal, calling upon the peasants to overthrow Hetman Skoropadski. As if the Hetman hadn't enough troubles already!" Having shaved Roshchin's cheeks a second time, the barber squinted with disapproval at his far too long grey hair. "May I cut it *à la boxe?* And if you like, I have some foreign hair dye left—black as the raven's wing. Who wants this sort of grey mop? ('Shave the head' Roshchin snarled between clenched teeth). Certainly, sir." He snipped the air with his scissors, as if to gather speed. "You know, Captain, there is one thing I dream of: some quiet little place somewhere on earth, however remote, where they still use paraffin lamps. How much does a man need? Perhaps a dozen customers. Finish work, light a pipe, sit in front of your door. Peace and quiet. Quiet, peaceful old men go past, you stand up and bow to them and they in turn bow to you. But nowadays, Captain, no one bothers about us unimportant people—no one takes us into account. But if fellows like us aren't available, gentlemen like yourself must let your hair grow too long. Look at yourself and compare what sort of figure you cut when you came in and what a perfect picture I've made of you."

Roshchin looked at himself in the mirror. His gleaming skull was shapely and capacious, well suited to harbour high and noble thoughts. His face was narrow with a delicate transition from the slightly prominent cheekbones to the not too prominent but yet not weak chin. His dark eyebrows, drawn together above the bridge of the nose, curled capriciously on the temples, softening the severity of the intelligent eyes, the wide pupils of which made them appear almost black. A pity to have to cover such a face with your hand for shame! But the mouth, ah, the mouth spoilt everything. Eyes can lie, eyes are untruthful and secretive, but the mouth does not lend itself to concealment—it is all movement, has no shape of its own, like a mollusc. Like nothing on earth! You're not of the stuff to make a Faust, dear Vadim Petrovich. Roshchin stood up, pulled his dirty, bullet-pierced field cap down over one ear, paid the barber generously and left the shop. . . . He had not taken any definite decision as yet, but he no longer dragged his feet and no longer stumbled over the cobblestones at every step. Curious what a visit

to the barber can do to a man. A drop of self-love had filtered into the turbid despair of his heart.

Lights were just beginning to show in the windows. The wind whistled in the bare poplars, the tops of which were already lost in darkness. On the other side of the street, between the trunks of the trees, a bright little lamp flared up impudently over the painted door of a cabaret-restaurant. The name of this restaurant was "Bi-Ba-Bo" and it was famed for its excellent *shashlyks*. At the thought of food Roshchin's stomach contracted painfully —he had not eaten at all since the previous day. It was a mighty, manly feeling of hunger and it immediately overshadowed all psychological subtleties. Roshchin resolutely turned towards the illuminated door. A creature in a white skirt darted out from beside a tree, and attempting to bar his way, whined entreatingly at his back: "Nice boy, I'll give you a good time. . . ."

The restaurant was a long low room which had been quite recently re-decorated by Valiet, the famous left-wing painter who had fled from Petrograd. The ceiling of "Bi-Ba-Bo" was black and scattered over it were large stars made of silver paper. The walls, too, were black, and over them yellow, orange and brick-coloured ghosts with waving arms and legs, angular, abstract images of men and women seemed to rush as if blown by a hurricane. This alfresco art was far too serious for a tavern of this sort: the naked herd on the walls was driven by terror and not by sensuality at all. The capitalist who had invested money in this enterprise—the same Paprikaki again—said one day: "You can do what you please with me if I understand this daub; it makes me puke, honestly it does, but the public likes it. . . ."

Roshchin dined and drank some wine. His train did not leave until four in the morning and he decided to stay where he was until three and after that he would see. He was feeling warm and his head was buzzing slightly.

The waiter, a Tartar from the Moscow 'Yar'—now for ever gone—and an old acquaintance of Roshchin, came to the table again and again, took the bottle from the ice-bucket, poured out some wine and said, bending over Roshchin:

"Excuse me, Vadim Petrovich, if I am bothering you, but you make me think of Moscow. Ah! You can see for yourself how we are living here. Even in my sleep I dream of this riff-raff. . . ."

Despite the state of alarm in the city, where shots could be heard in the suburbs and dark alleys through the night—shots which the Hetman guards pretended not to hear as they rode towards the governor's palace and despite the panic on the black market earlier that day, the restaurant was crowded. The cabaret had not yet begun. A long-legged young man with a thin, craning neck and a halo of fuzzy negro hair far back towards its nape was sitting on the tiny stage and playing a potpourri of comic-opera music on a small upright piano.

Roshchin's table was surrounded by noisy, drunken people. Some of the country squires, unable to stand any longer the boredom of their hotel rooms among their disappointed spinster daughters, were getting tight here to cheer themselves up.

"I assure you, sir," shouted one of them, "the Germans are done for now. An English expeditionary corps will be in Moscow by New Year's Day. Then we shall drink Scotch whisky. Every cloud has a silver lining." He showed his excellent teeth in a wide grin, then went off in a shriek of laughter. "Ha-ha. In the end we'll have to shout hurrah for the German revolution!"

Another gentleman, very thin and dainty, with eyes gleaming sarcastically out of ashen hollows, raised his hand to enjoin silence and said:

"The Lord Chancellor, as everybody knows, sits on a woolsack in the House of Lords—on a simple sack stuffed with wool. But our Simbirsk gentlemen were proud of the marble column which stood in the courtyard of their house of assembly as a confirmation of the fact that nothing unpleasant could ever happen in this world to a gentleman of breeding. And therefore they slumbered in the shadow of their burdocks without a care in the world. And so the history of the Russian gentry has come to an end—for want of a woolsack. And so has the history of our little mother Russia come to an end, gentlemen. . . . The saga of the town of Glupov has been read through and the book thrown into a corner. And all this happened, not amid storms and tempests, as a very wise man had predicted, but on an ordinary Monday. God simply spat and blew out the candle. I sold my land back in 1914 and since then I have been a citizen of the universe—it's safer that way."

"All very well for you, little father, you studied at the University of Oxford, but what the devil am I to do with my three daughters? What, I ask?" The red-cheeked, good-natured gentleman sniffed, and stretched out his hand towards the bottle. "And so far as the end of Russia is concerned, I don't agree with that either, you're only belching up your English education. . . . I may take a job as a clerk, or as a foreman, or settle on three acres and do my own ploughing, but I still believe in Russia." He poured himself another glass and immediately turned towards the third man at the table: "What on earth am I to do with them? Here they are, tall and thin as hop-poles, tearful, flat-breasted, freckled—real Turgenevian young ladies, in times like these! Their mother is to blame for it all, and I myself am likewise to blame. The eldest wanted to study medicine, but we dissuaded her, it was easy because she's lazy. The younger was stage-struck and would have made a good actress, I assure you. We were foolish enough to dissuade her too, we even threatened her. In a word, I played the heavy father—in the twentieth century! And all because of a lack of understanding. That Englishman sitting on his woolsack can foresee the right thing to do three years in advance, but we seem to have thought only in accordance with the change of the seasons, so to speak." He drank, blew out his cheeks and unexpectedly added, "In general, however, we'll be all right."

The third man at the table was so drunk by this time that he only ground his teeth and ate flower after flower of the asters which stood in a vase on the table. He was not listening to anything that was being said and never took his lack-lustre eyes off the neighbouring table where a very pretty young girl with a great naïve bun of ash-blonde hair and a large young man in a semi-military tunic were sitting. The young man was resting his chin on his hand and weeping silently, utterly oblivious of his surroundings, as if all the crowd there were merely ghosts. The girl, her round, blue-eyed face wrinkled in an expression of pain and pity, was stroking his hand, then took it and kissed it, bending close to him and whispering hurriedly. She seemed very frightened. The young man rocked his big face slowly to and fro. Roshchin heard his dull, lifeless voice, the sort of voice in which a man mutters in his sleep. He said: "Leave me alone, Zina, let me be . . . I don't want anything any more, neither you, nor myself. . . ."

There was no need for him to say anything more. It was obvious, anyway, how this would end for the young man. The girl reminded Roshchin somehow of Katia, although there was no resemblance, except in the gentle tenderness

of her gestures. This one, too, might end her life somewhere among a batch of typhus-stricken strangers on some country railway station.

But now two oafish young men sat down quickly at an empty table and hid the young couple from view. Both of them wore their hair in a pony fringe cut straight across over the eyebrows, both had rotten teeth and diamond rings on dirty fingers. "I hit her with this iron stick," one of them bragged, "and trampled on her, so that I could hear the bitch's bones scrunch. . . ."

"Would the captain permit me to sit at his table?"

Roshchin nodded without a word. The man who sat down at his table wore nickel-framed spectacles. He tucked his big feet carefully under the chair as he sat down. He had on a green-grey tunic, very tight over the chest —the uniform of a German territorial. He had some difficulty in pronouncing the Russian words as he said to the waiter:

"Please, something eat, no eaten very long and beer, much beer!"

He blew out his lean cheeks to show how he would fill himself with beer, laughed, and then gave the grim Roshchin a surprised glance out of his blue, placid eyes:

"Does the captain speak German?"

"Yes."

"If I am inconveniencing you, I can easily find another table."

"No inconvenience."

This time Roshchin spoke less harshly. The German territorial had one of those truly German faces—narrow, with a small, puckered mouth—which preserve their childish expression and tender bloom even in old age. The nose was tip-tilted as if animated by a benevolent curiosity towards all men.

"In the old days we privates were not allowed to visit restaurants, but since yesterday German discipline has become more reasonable."

Roshchin smiled wryly. The territorial hurriedly proceeded to define his exact meaning, raising his thick-nailed finger in a professorial gesture:

"Discipline should be reasonable; only thus is it a form of social order and an indispensable condition of progress. Such a reasonable discipline is born of profound social movements. But if discipline is not reasonable, if it is merely one of the instruments of compulsion, then it ought not to be called discipline."

He nodded his head cheerfully as he concluded this somewhat unclear train of thought.

"Are you being evacuated to Germany?" Roshchin asked.

"Yes. Our unit elected a committee, the committee passed a resolution, which although it was the result of a struggle, is fortunately purely one of principle."

"Well, as we say in Russia, we're not keeping you if you want to go."

"I have been quite successful in my studies of Russian and I know that what you mean is, go to the devil."

"If you want to put it that way, yes. You seem to be a sensible fellow; why should we dissemble? Enemies we have been, enemies we remain."

"That is so," the German said thoughtfully, after a short pause, and nodded; "it would be useless and even tactless of me to try to deny it."

He smiled again as if to indicate that this subject, too, was now done with. His food and beer had arrived meanwhile. He excused himself for dropping out of the conversation for a short time and attacked the *shashlyk* without haste, chewing the scraps of meat, the wheat bread and the grilled tomatoes with an air almost of reverence.

"Very tasty," he said, feeling that Roshchin was watching him out of dark, angry eyes. He ate everything to the last crumb, mopped up the plate with a crust of bread and then put the crust in his mouth. Then he gulped down a large glass of cold beer in one breath, half closing his eyes as he drank.

"Germans take eating very seriously. The Germans have starved a great deal and are destined to starve a great deal more in future before the problem of food can be finally solved."

Again he raised a long finger.

"In the dawn of history, when the human race passed from the primitive collecting of the gifts of Nature to the forcible invasion of Nature's domain, food became the result of the difficult and dangerous process of food production. Eating became a sacred rite. To eat means to master some other being's life and strength. This is the origin of all ideas of casting a spell on Nature, i.e. of all magic. Some magic ritual of eating is the foundation of all mystic cults. The body of God is eaten. I have here some notes I wrote down about an interesting talk I had with a Russian scholar about the origin of pancakes. The carnival is the festival of the eating of the sun. A spell was laid on the sun by means of dancing and singing, and then an image of the sun—the pancake—was eaten. As you see, the Slavs always aimed very high in their philosophies."

He laughed, unbuttoned his tunic and pulled out a fat notebook in a shabby leather binding—the same notebook he had taken out two months before in a railway carriage for the purpose of reading a passage out of Ammianus Marcellinus to Katia Roshchin. Putting the notebook down on the table he carefully turned the pages filled with notes, quotations and addresses in a tiny handwriting.

"Here it is," he said, and laid his finger on a page. But Roshchin was looking, not at the line he indicated, but at something else written there in Katia's handwriting: "Yekaterina Dmitrievna Roshchin, Yekaterinoslav, to be called for."

"Where did you get this address?" he asked, his voice hoarse with excitement. The blood rushed to his face and he eased the collar of his tunic with his hand. The territorial thought this Russian officer would pull a pistol on him with his other hand the next instant—such things often happened in this war. But the officer's wide-open eyes expressed nothing but suffering and pleading. The territorial said as gently as he could:

"It is obvious that you know this lady well. I can tell you something about her."

"Yes, I know her."

"I am afraid it is rather a sad story. . ."

"Why sad? Is the lady dead?"

"I could not say for certain. I hope it isn't as bad as that. During this war I have found that human beings are extraordinarily tenacious creatures, in spite of the fact that they are so easy to injure and so sensitive to all pain. The reason for this is . . ." the German said, and was already in the act of raising his finger again, when he glanced at Roshchin's face, and saw that it was distorted with violent emotion.

"Tell me, where did you see her, what happened to her?"

"We met in a railway carriage. Yekaterina Dmitrievna had just lost her greatly beloved husband. . . ."

"That was a lie! I am alive, as you see. . . ."

The German jerked himself upright in his chair, his little round mouth and his round blue eyes opened wide and he smacked the table with the palm of his hand:

"I come into this restaurant, where I have never been before, sit down at a table, take out my notebook—and the dead come alive again! You are the husband of this lady? She told me a lot about you and I imagined you to be exactly as you are. Oh, no, Kamerad Roshchin, you mustn't, really you mustn't."

Words failed him, he pressed his thin lips together and over his spectacles he looked severely and searchingly into Vadim Petrovich's eyes which were full of tears. Little beads of sweat appeared on the German's nose.

"I got out before the train reached Yekaterinoslav and your wife wrote down this address for me. I insisted on it, I did not want to lose sight of her, as if she were a bird flying past. I think I succeeded in cheering her up a little on the way. She is a very intelligent woman. Her clear but insufficiently developed mind is thirsting for good and exalted thoughts. I said to her: 'Sorrow is the portion of millions of women in our time—sorrow and suffering should be converted into a social force. . . . May your sorrow lend you strength.' 'What do I want strength for?' she asked. 'I don't want to live any longer.' 'No,' I said, 'you do want to live. There is nothing more important than the will to live. If all around us we see only sorrow, misfortune, and death, we must understand that we ourselves are to blame for not having yet done away with the causes of such a state of affairs and turned the earth into a happy and peaceful habitation for such a splendid phenomenon as the human race. Eternal silence lies behind us and in front of us, and we have only a short little snippet of time which we must live through in such a way as to fill all this infinity of empty silence with the happiness of that short instant of time. . . . I told her this in order to console her. . . . Well, after that I got out and rejoined my unit. That night we heard that the train in which the lady your wife was travelling had been stopped by a band of Makhno men, looted, and all the passengers taken away to an unknown destination. That is all I know, Kamerad Roshchin."

The cabaret was just beginning. The piano and the musician with the fuzzy hair were pushed back off the scene, and the *conférencier*, Don Limonado, came in. He was a famous Moscow cabaret star, good-looking, with mascaraed eyes, of uncertain age, wearing a smoking jacket and a straw boater tilted forward towards his nose.

"My congratulations to you, ladies and gentlemen, on the German revolution!" he began, and heartily shook hands with himself. "I've just been to the railway station, 'Hallo!' I said to a German *Oberleutnant*, 'how do you do?' 'Very well, thank you,' he says; 'and how are you?' 'Fine,' say I; 'it's November now, a straw hat doesn't keep my head warm and I left my warm hat in Moscow—so now I don't know when I can get it again.' 'Well,' he says, 'why don't you buy another warm hat?' 'I've saved a thousand marks for a hat,' say I, 'and to-day I got five *karbovantsy* for them.' 'Tut-tut-tut,' he says. 'Tut-tut-tut,' say I. So we chatted with each other about this, that, and the other while his soldiers were climbing up to the top of the coaches. 'Going away?' I ask. 'Yes, going away,' he says. 'Altogether?' I ask. 'Altogether,' he says. 'What a pity,' say I. 'Can't be helped,' says he. 'In what sense is it a pity?' say I. 'In the sense that there is no sense to it,' says he. 'Tut-tut,' say I; 'and we had hoped that it couldn't happen to you.' But then the soldiers on the tops of the coaches began to sing 'Yablochko' and I went off. It was dark all round, the wind whistled, and

in the side-streets there was shooting, and I was due for my turn; I was late, I was all in a sweat. So I started to sing." The piano now began to play off stage. The *conférencier* jumped into the air, clicked his heels and sang:

Hi, little apple
Dark is the night
Where can I go
In such a fright?

Roshchin, his back to the stage, was looking into the eyes of this strange German as he asked: "Could you give me any idea in which district Makhno is now operating?"

"According to the latest reports Makhno has now begun seriously to harrass the retreating Austrian and in some places the German forces. His headquarters at present are in Gulyay-Polye."

CHAPTER X

AT THE BEGINNING of November the Kachalin regiment was in reserve for a rest and reinforcement. When the fighting ended, only three hundred men were left on its strength. To his own great surprise, Peter Nikolayevich Melshin was appointed to the command of a brigade. On his submission the Revolutionary Military Council appointed Telegin, now recovering in hospital, to be commander of the regiment, with Sapozhkov as his second-in-command and Ivan Gora his regimental political commissar. Telegin's battery was incorporated in the regimental artillery.

The weather was wet and the village smelled of chimney smoke and wet fur. Water dripped from the roofs dark with moisture, the earth softened into mire, and the soldiers returning from parade dragged great clumps of mud along on their boots. But the mood was one of jubilation. The terrible ordeal was over: the Don army was thrown back far beyond the right bank of the river. It was rumoured that Ataman Krassnov in Novocherkassk had knocked his head against the wall in his grief at this second fearful disaster to his forces at Tsaritsyn.

When the day of battle training, political education and "illiteracy elimination" was ended, the soldiers, shivering a little with the light frost, scattered about the village in the twilight; some went to visit friends, others to newly acquired in-laws, and those who had neither just strolled about singing or else, finding some dry spot to sit in, tried to lure the girls with talk and laughter. Often jests and laughter ended in disputes and quarrels, even serious ones, because everyone's nerves were on edge.

Of the ten sailors in Telegin's battery three had been killed and two seriously wounded. Five men were left. They were billeted in the house of a well-to-do Cossack, who had fled and abandoned it. Anissya, now formally enrolled on the strength as a non-combatant, was living with them, and participated with the others in drill, rifle practice and political education. She was wearing a neat Red Army uniform; but she had refused to cut off her lovely wavy hair. Having seen so much suffering and death, she had, in this

October ordeal, passed through her own incurable sorrow as one fords a river up to the neck in water. Wrinkles no longer deformed her rejuvenated, roughened face; the good food in the rest billets had put colour in her cheeks, straightened her back and lightened her step. She was as clean and neat as a new pin. In the night when the sailors snored mightily in the heated cottage, she washed, darned and mended their things in secret; sometimes the trumpet, sounding the réveillé in the grey dawn found her still engaged in such work.

Kuzma Kuzmich Nefedov had also remained with the regiment as a supernumerary clerk. During the worst two days of the battle, on the sixteenth and seventeenth, he had shown not merely courage but a kind of desperate daring in bringing back wounded men under fire. This fact had been noted by all. Nor did he remain behind later, when the remnants of the regiments made their counter-attack, or when the regiment, after crossing the Don, was relieved and sent to the rear for a rest.

Ivan Gora met him one day at the regimental kitchen—he was wet, dirty, thin, but eager—and beckoned to him:

"What shall I do with you, Nefedov? I can't make you out. What sort of a man are you? An unfrocked priest, and not so young either. Why do you trail around with us?"

Kuzma Kuzmich shook his head because the rain was dripping down his nose and looked at Ivan Gora with his red-rimmed, laughing eyes.

"It's my affectionate nature, Ivan Stepanovich, I get so fond of people. Where shall I go? Where else shall I look for human companionship? After all, I have a head on my shoulders. . . ."

"But that's not the point. Look here. . . ."

"If it's the rations you're worrying about," Kuzma Kuzmich said, pointing at the pot full to the brim, "I have honestly earned this gruel and bacon by risking my skin often enough. My trousers and boots I obtained from the enemy on the field of battle. I am asking for nothing and shall not be a burden to you in any way—in fact I hope to be useful to you in future as I have been in the past. Does the revolution need people with heads on their shoulders? Yes, it does. You haven't a single clerk in the regiment who can read and write. And I can write even Latin and Greek. And there are plenty of other ways in which I can be of use."

Ivan Gora thought this over. 'After all, why not? Why should one not make use of a man who has a head on his shoulders and wants to do some work?'

"Yes," he said, "but your origins worry me a bit. What if you start putting ideas in the men's heads?"

"True, there was a time when I was lured by mirages, why should I deny it?" Kuzma Kuzmich said. "I was deceived. But you needn't be afraid of any propaganda of mine. I am on bad terms with God now. . . ."

"On bad terms?" asked Ivan Gora. "Is that so? Well, all right, come to my billet this evening, we'll have a chat."

In the evening Kuzma Kuzmich went to see the commissar in his billet. Ivan Gora was sitting near the window in great-coat and forage cap, reading the paper. His lips moved as he read. When Kuzma Kuzmich came in, he put down the paper, stood up and closed the door.

"Sit down," he said. "There is a matter here which is not very pleasant. Can you keep your mouth shut? Although, of course, it will be the worse for you if you talk too much: I know everything, even which of the men has been dreaming during the night and what."

He tore a narrow strip off the white edge of the newspaper, twisted it with his thick, stiff fingers and cleared his throat.

"The harvest is in, the grain is in the mill, although a bit late because of the military situation. But the people trust us, that is the main thing—they want to believe that Soviet power has come to stay. Very good. But soon it is October 1st, the Feast of Intercession."

Ivan Gora quickly glanced at Kuzma Kuzmich and his big nose twitched with embarrassment.

"Soon it is October 1st. Superstitions are still very much alive in the people. You can't abolish them by decree from one day to the other. You want a bit of time for that. Very good. But the girls are dissatisfied, Intercession is coming round, but no one is sending out go-betweens. I was in Spasskoye yesterday. The women stopped my *brichka* and began to weep and curse me and laugh all in the same breath. They are very Soviet-minded, but they've got this Intercession business on the brain. The village is rich, there is plenty of grain about, but they haven't paid in their grain quota yet. We must approach them tactfully so they give us the grain of their own accord. But how can you persuade them, when the women snatched the reins from my hand and shouted at me: 'Bring us a priest'. I tried to make them see reason. Didn't you see' I said, 'how your priests swung their censers before General Mamontov?' 'Yes,' they said; 'so what about it. Those were White priests and we ourselves drove them out of the village, but you must bring us a Red priest. We must have our weddings, our girls are getting stale and on top of that,' they said, 'we've got about fifty babies screaming in their cradles unbaptised.' Phew, my head is still aching with it, these women got me down to such an extent. Where the devil shall I get them a priest? And yet we must find a solution. If we don't, they'll wait awhile and then they'll send to Novocherkassk and bring back their old priest. And that would mean trouble all round. You, Kuzma Kuzmich, know all about these matters. Give us a hand. Take my *brichka*, drive down to the village, talk to these women. Only leave me out of it. I've seen the village girls, they frightened me, they were like stone." Ivan Gora indicated his chest. "It's only human nature, I suppose. Will you go?"

"Glad to," Kuzma Kuzmich answered, and pursed his lips.

"You're talking rot, Sharygin, there's such a muddle in your head it's enough to drive a man crazy."

Latugin picked up his cap, pulled it on with the peak towards his ear and shifted his seat on the bench, but did not stand up, only glanced at Anissya and turned up his eyes.

Anissya was sitting there, a frown of tense attention on her face, staring as she always did during the hours of instruction, at some insignificant object, a nail in the wall or the like. Her untutored brain had difficulty in absorbing abstract notions—like words of a strange tongue, they penetrated to her live emotions only in parts, in sparks as it were. The word 'Socialism' evoked in her the image of something dryly rustling, like a red ribbon being pulled through rough, callous hands. She dreamed about such a ribbon. 'Imperialism' reminded her of King Nebuchadnezzar as she had seen him on an old fly-blown woodcut: with a crown on his head and a royal mantle daubed with purple, dropping his sceptre and orb at the sight of the hand writing *mene. tekel, upharsin* on the wall.

But Anissya liked hard work and painstakingly overcame these unsatisfactory ideas within herself.

She felt Latugin's eyes on her but kept staring at the nail in the wall; only slowly pressed her knees together.

"What's wrong with what I'm saying, Latugin? The article we are analysing was printed in *Isvestia.* Is that what you don't like?" asked Sharygin. "If you are a soldier of the revolution, you must have a precise conception of our general aims as well as the present situation every time you load your rifle."

Having said this, Sharygin gave Anissya a languid glance out of his fine blue eyes, but she was still looking at the nail. Baikov now said in a thin voice, but quite seriously: "What good is a waistcoat to a wolf? Science only bores the boor."

"Slick" Latugin immediately answered, likewise seriously. "But not so very true. No; it's not science that bores the boor. I am all for science but only if something comes of it. What bores the boor is when a fellow doesn't know which end of the elephant is its head and which its tail. Better stop annoying me. A true word is like a woman—it embraces you and sears you so that you would run after it barefoot over live coals. That's the kind of word I want to hear from you, Sharygin. But you just go on like a parrot about 'the world proletariat and Socialism'. I've risked my life for them and I want to be told, in words which I can listen to and believe in, which tree I am to chop down first with my axe in order to fell the timber for this our house. I want to be told in what meadows I shall go walking in a silk shirt when the work is done. What you need is to be hit on the head with the terrestrial globe, so you can learn how to talk about the 'world revolution'."

Anissya looked at his strong, broad face, at his eyes, wide-spaced like those of a pedigree bull; looked again and thought sadly that it would be better for her to be struck blind than to look too much at that face.

Neither Gagin, nor Zaduiviter, nor Baikov approved of Latugin's attitude. They talked calmly, pleasantly, in keeping with the gentle rustling of the rain on the thatch of the roof. True, Sharygin was very young and not very learned yet, and so he was often difficult to understand, being afraid of simple words as if he feared they might get him into trouble. He felt more at his ease with long, foreign, well-tried words. But in spite of that Latugin shouldn't have held a good comrade up to ridicule without the slightest provocation, and they all knew that he had done it of course for a totally different reason—a reason of which they likewise disapproved.

"Our commissar is forming a food-collecting detachment. You had better go and volunteer for it," Gagin said to Latugin. "You are getting bored here without anything to do, and nothing good can come of it. You've let yourself get stale, friend."

Baikov shook his head and laughed. Zaduiviter also understood the hint, opened his mouth, showing a row of strong teeth, and roared with laughter. But Anissya blushed a fiery red and her eyes filled with tears. She picked up her great-coat, turned away while she put it on, pulled the belt tight round her waist and left the room. They all felt that something was wrong. Sharygin smiled and slowly folded up the newspaper.

"Come, we'll have a talk," he said to Latugin.

Latugin narrowed his eyes. "All right. Let's talk," he said.

They both went outside into the dark. The light rain tickled their cheeks. Sharygin felt that the smiling Latugin was only waiting for him to begin the

conversation in order to give a stinging, insolent answer to anything he might say. Sharygin wanted merely to point out quite calmly that Latugin had infringed the rules of comradely discipline, and tell him how he could overcome within himself the rotten heritage of the bourgeois era. But instead of this he drew the damp night air in deeply through quivering nostrils and said:

"You leave Anissya alone. It's wrong. It's rotten. You're just playing with her."

He said nothing more. Latugin, who had expected anything rather than such an approach, stood motionless in front of him, unable to find the right answer. Nothing would do: neither this: 'You snot-nose, you male virgin, you governess, I haven't asked you to hold a candle for me'; nor: 'plenty of people have said such things to me but few got away with a whole skin'. Whatever way he looked at it, it turned out that he, Latugin, was a dirty fellow. His feelings were profoundly hurt. In the old days this would have been the occasion for a fight. He narrowed his eyes and gritted his teeth, but he knew that a fight would not do here.

"Ay," he said, "so that's it? So I have shed my blood in vain—a tramp I was, a bandit and son-of-a-bitch, and that is what I still am. Well, thanks for telling me, Kostia."

He went to the gate and thrust it open with a furious blow of his fist.

Life was slowly returning to Ivan Ilyich Telegin. In addition to the blast shock he had been wounded in many places by tiny metal splinters from the exploding bomb. At first he had been unconscious. Then he just slept, with short periods of waking while he was being fed. After that he found himself in a blissful state of repose. His eyes were covered with a bandage. He was lying in a room by himself, with closely curtained windows. Sometimes he heard soft footsteps and low whisperings—never louder than the rustling of leaves in a light breeze—the jingling of a spoon, the swish of a skirt. A clock was ticking near his head all the time, sometimes very distinctly and sometimes scarcely audibly. These were all the impressions he received from the outer world, beside the unseen presence of some gentle, cautious being. If he merely sighed, there was immediately a slight movement of the air and this being bent over him; he even felt the fresh, delicate scent of it.

From time to time another coarser being, smelling of strong sweat and even more of tobacco, intruded on his consciousness.

"Well, how's the pulse?"

The delicate being whispered something in reply. Then the coarse being would say cheerfully:

"Fine! Stout fellow! The main thing is that he must have absolute quiet. See to it that he is not disturbed by any external irritant."

Ivan Ilyich slowly said to himself in his own mind: "You are an external irritant yourself—— Go away, don't buzz around me here. . . . And you, the solicitous one, come, bend over me, adjust my pillow, or what is even better, stroke my hand. . . . Aha, I only thought it and she knew. Who is this nurse? Where did they find such a nice one?"

He was not allowed to talk; but they could not stop him from thinking whatever he liked. For many years now he had not had such a chance—a chance to be alone with himself without worries or pangs of conscience. It was a great reward for all his hard years of honest service. He had never

done anything dishonest and his conscience was dozing quietly like a tabby cat on a rainy day. His thoughts wandered about in a world only half real. More often than anything else he remembered the summer sunlight of the North, the sort he had known in Petrograd, when on a cold day the sun pours out its light on the bluish asphalt of pavements swept by a light breeze. Inside his closed lids rose the image of a little window in a wooden cottage, the sun shining dully on the bubbly glass, and beyond the glass he seemed to see. . . . But here the memory faded and blurred, leaving only the sadness of its fleeting touch behind.

Then the long-forgotten words of a song came into his mind and he could not drive them away. He had heard the song somewhere, he could not remember where, perhaps it had been during a holiday in a village, on the river Krestovka. In the bluish twilight of the northern night a lean gipsy girl had sung it under her breath while she strummed on her guitar:

You can turn left and right,
In the passage without light,
Through the door and up behind
What you seek you'll never find.

She sang it to the men sitting silently on chairs in front of her—that song of an eternal longing without which life would not be life. Go and seek up there—maybe it's there. Oh, you silly men, whom are you seeking? You walk along the long street at the sinking of the Northern sun, the breeze chasing the dust under your feet, and search for the little window with its bubbly glass. Where is it? And is not the sweetest girl on earth sitting on the wide window-sill in a little gingham dress, with her knees drawn up? She is reading a book all about you, who is coming and searching for her. Oh, that's all nonsense, what we all seek is our own self.

In the darkness and silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock, Ivan Ilyich was half asleep while his mind wandered. With his slow return to life his love of himself—a feeling he carefully hid away in the depth of his mind and condemned on principle—was waking up. In the unreal fantastic world in which he found himself now he was garnering all his best, his most innocent, most affectionate memories—all the memories men drop on their way through life and often never find again. His love for himself came back to him together with his health. He even relished his food now and stretched his limbs luxuriously when the nurse couldn't see it.

One day, after he had slept soundly all night, eaten his porridge and settled himself comfortably on his pillow, he suddenly said out loud:

"Nurse, could I have a little chat with you, just a chat about nothing at all?"

The nurse quickly bent over him.

"Hush," she whispered in a frightened voice, and closed his lips with her finger. "Hush!" But when she took her hand away he said again, this time clearly teasing her:

"Well, then you tell me something. . . . D'you know that you have a very pleasant little hand. How old are you? What's your name?"

She sighed several times, as if she were sobbing or gasping for breath. She was queer somehow. But what he wanted to say was really this: "I woke up and it suddenly occurred to me: if a man does not love himself, he cannot love anyone else either, and what good is he then? For instance, rogues,

blackguards, shameless men, have no love for themselves. They sleep badly; everything irritates them; they itch all over; they are always either furious or terrified. A man should love himself; he should love in himself what another human being might love in him, especially a woman—his woman."

But Ivan Ilyich said nothing of all this. The nurse left the room and soon came back with the doctor, the foe of external irritants, who now began to buzz worse than ever:

"What's this, friend? Getting above yourself a bit, eh? Nothing doing. I can allow you a few words, only what are absolutely necessary. It's my duty to send you back to your regiment in proper shape. And your duty, big boy, is to get well again in the shortest possible time. Give him a soporific, nurse."

"Stop, brother; I'm getting out here. I'll walk the rest of the way to the village," said Kuzma Kuzmich.

"Why walk?"

"Leave that to me. I'll arrive in the village as a wanderer. See the point?"

"Can't say I do, but it's up to you," Latugin said, as he pulled up the artillery horses on the rutted road near the dam with its already leafless pollard willows. The village of Spasskoye was on the far side of the flat pond. A threshing-floor with trusses of fresh straw ran down to its edge. Smoke curled up from the chimneys of the reed-thatched, low-roofed, whitewashed cottages.

"The whole village is distilling illicit spirits." Latugin heaved a deep sigh and looked at the fat, white geese marching with dignity along the dam. The leading gander, seeing the stationary cart and the two men, stopped with an air of disapproval and half a hundred geese followed his example. They cackled a bit among themselves, obviously taking counsel, then they waddled on and, sliding down on their bellies, they slipped off the slope of the dam into the water and swam away, as if driven by a breath of air, into the darker water of the swamp.

"A goose like that would weigh fifteen pounds at least, the devil," Latugin said. "Ought to be roasted, they did."

"Better get going, friend." Kuzma Kuzmich hurriedly shook hands. "Tell the commissar that I must have a look round here to start with and get about a bit. In about a week's time or so you may come along with your food detachment. Everything will be all right by then."

"Look out, Kuzma, don't get too drunk."

"I never so much as look at liquor. Now take yourself off, or somebody will see us together."

Latugin turned the cart, angrily smacked the horse on the rump with the bundle of brushwood that did duty for a whip, and drove away without looking back. Kuzma Kuzmich, for his part, walked along the dam towards the village. His coat of shabby black, turned green with age, cut a long time ago out of his old cassock, was belted with a cotton handkerchief; on his back he carried a canvas bag such as the Red Army men used as kit-bags; on his head he wore a tall fur cap of the sort worn by the soldiers in the imperialist war of evil memory. In a word, he looked just right.

It is dull in the villages in late autumn. The cherry trees and apple trees have dropped their leaves, and the leaves, wet with nightly rime, litter the empty vegetable beds in the gardens. In place of the bright sunflowers which lure the sun into the tiny windows of the cottage, only rotting stems now stick out of the earth. The whole world is full of mud—mud reaching

to the very thresholds of the houses. The sun-bleached shutters creak and clatter as the cold wind blows on them. There is little pleasure in looking out of the window—there is nothing to be seen except perhaps a crow sitting on the wattle fence and waiting for some housewife to throw out something eatable.

"They live as if they were asleep; all they do is hum and haw and scratch their heads. Their passions slumber, their desires lack imagination. And yet each of them is created in the image of Aristotle or Pushkin. They have the same two eyes to see the wonders of the world with, those wonders to which it is impossible to get accustomed. They have the same sort of heads, greatest of all wonders, on their shoulders." Kuzma Kuzmich shook his head in the tall hat. "If one were to juxtapose such a head and the universe, the head would seem as nothing. But on the other hand the whole universe can be contained in such a head—the human head can penetrate secrets of which even the God of the Bible had no idea. So why should people do nothing but look at the crows in front of their windows?"

Kuzma Kuzmich smacked his lips with pleasure as he thought such thoughts and walked past the low wattle fences and cottages crouching under their thatched roofs. A girl was coming from the opposite direction—a girl in high boots and a sheepskin coat, carrying two buckets of water on a yoke. She was tall and stately and stern.

"Your name is Nadezhda, unless I'm much mistaken. Good day to you."

The girl stopped and slowly turned her broad face towards Kuzma Kuzmich.

"Yes, I'm Nedezhda. How did you know?"

"I could see it. I'm a seer."

"There are no such about nowadays. Go your ways."

"So I'm not wanted here?" said Kuzma Kuzmich. "Good. I'll go back into the steppe to count the grave-mounds. It's a long road for a lonely man. My God, how far it is!"

The girl opened her lips as if to speak, then made a movement as if to go on, but stopped again and gazed at the smiling, incredibly cunning face of the stranger. Kuzma Kuzmich stretched out his hands, palm upwards, in an explanatory gesture.

"If I want to sleep I can always find a haystack; if I want to eat I steal something. That's not what I'm after, my dear. The prophets walked barefoot over sharp stones and spoke their prophecies. The saints stood on the top of pillars and fed on locusts. Do you know what locusts are? Grasshoppers. For the sake of what did they suffer so? Answer me. That makes you think, eh?" Kuzma Kuzmich moved closer to the girl. "Because they loved all men. Every man is a marvel, but you, Nadezhda, are a twofold marvel. But what do I see? You've threshed the corn, you've distilled the vodka, there's a smell of smoked pork about your houses . . . there's plenty of everything—and yet there is no gladness of heart here, no light."

"Is it paraffin you are selling?" the girl now asked, but already with less assurance.

"I am not selling anything, nor do I ask charity. I came to you to gladden my own heart and to gladden yours."

The girl said nothing for a moment, only stared at Kuzma Kuzmich with her long, cloud-grey eyes. Then she stooped, set the buckets on the ground and put the yoke across their tops.

"Our village is gloomy, you can't cheer us up nohow. What did you think of doing to cheer us up?"

"I know what to do, don't you worry. If I say I'll do it, I'll do it. I'm an unfrocked priest."

The girl opened her mouth. It was so fresh and showed such a row of even white teeth that Kuzma Kuzmich jumped and stamped his feet with glee. Her stern expression vanished as if the wind had blown it off her face.

"Oh," she said, putting her hand on her breast, over which the fur coat had grown too tight to be buttoned. "Oh!" she repeated, and took a step forward, "come, let's go to our house. My father will speak to you; he has the keys of the church."

"No," said Kuzma Kuzmich, "I won't go. You'll have to come to me. Good-bye, black-browed beauty."

He winked broadly at her, shrugged his shoulders and walked along the street searching for the poorest dwelling on it.

The day came at last when the bandages were taken from Ivan Ilyich's eyes. This happened at dusk. The nurse was saying something to the doctor in a frightened whisper. "Nonsense," said the doctor, "the fellow isn't an orchid; just you do as I said." The nurse came back to the bed, bent down so that the fine threads of her hair tickled Telegin's nose, took off the bandage and he now heard her voice for the first time, instead of mere rustlings and whispers. The voice was low and hesitating as it said:

"Patient, you are to lie quiet and get used to the light."

It was with some trepidation that he opened his eyes after the long, long spell of darkness. The room lay in a half-light—only from one corner of the window had the blanket which curtained it been drawn back. At the foot of the bed the nurse was sitting at a little table, but he could not see her face because she was bending down and doing something to a lint bandage strip.

Ivan Ilyich lay there and smiled. Above his head he saw a sloping ceiling—that meant of course that there was a staircase leading to the attic—and over there was the little window with the bubbly glass. He couldn't have found a better place. And then immediately, as if tearing the new scab off a wound, the memory burst in on him of another place, a place full of smoke and uproar, with the earth all churned up, when the dazzling yellow explosion flamed up in front of him. "No, no! I don't want to remember." Ivan Ilyich fought off the memories which were on the point of flooding his brain. . . . Now he again heard the ticking of the clock, as it gently and painlessly tore off uniform little sections of his life.

"Nurse," called Ivan Ilyich, "I can't see you well enough."

But the nurse shook her head. The roll of lint slipped from her knees and unrolled itself. She began to roll it up again. Her movements were easy. *She must be quite young*, thought Ivan Ilyich. And yet how experienced she was! But however great were the efforts Ivan Ilyich made to get a good view of her, the room was getting steadily darker and now he could only dimly distinguish her white coat and the head-dress which covered her shoulders —a head-dress like that of the sphinx.

"Obvious, obvious," Ivan Ilyich said to himself. "The poor thing is probably pock-marked or in some other way exceptionally ugly. She feels, of course, how grateful I am to her." Ivan Ilyich sighed. How many there were of these women, tender, devoted, helpmates in life and in death. And this one was surely clever—the ugly ones always were. They were the ones a man should marry, they were the ones who should be loved. But the men fell

over themselves to get some smooth baby-face with long eyelashes to lie beside them on the pillow and chatter all sorts of silly nonsense. Dasha was different, of course, she was beautiful, but he had not loved her for her beauty. Ivan Ilyich closed his eyes and put his fist under his cheek. Liar, he said to himself —of course you loved her for her rare beauty. But she didn't want it that way.

The nurse stood up without a sound, thinking that he had fallen asleep, and left the room. She did not come back for a long time; then the door creaked softly as she came in and a dim yellow light appeared. Ivan Ilyich did not move, only opened his eyes a little. He saw Dasha coming towards him in a white coat and head-dress. She held a small tin lamp in her hand and shielded the flame with a translucent pink palm. Ivan Ilyich was not at all surprised to see Dasha—only he did not believe that it was she.

She set the lamp down on the table, turned the flame lower, sat down and watched Ivan Ilyich. Her face was thin, like the face of a little girl recovering from typhus. There was a small wrinkle in each corner of the slightly pouting mouth. Only one cheek was in the light, and one eye, calm and very big, with a pin-point of light in the pupil reflecting the flame of the lamp. Settling down for a long vigil, she propped her elbow on her knee and rested her cheek on her little fist. Only Dasha could sit in just that pose.

That evening in Petrograd, when she visited the "Central Station for the Struggle against Tradition" in Telegin's flat, when he first saw her, she had appeared to him as beautiful as the Spring. Her cheeks had been aflame—she was too warm in her black cloth dress. The delicious scent of her perfume had filled the room in which the poets participating in the "magnificent blasphemies" were sitting on planks supported by blocks of wood. As she listened to the stilted poetry, she had rested her chin on her little fist and touched her slightly pouting, capricious lips with her middle finger. Afterwards he had taken the chair on which she had been sitting away to his own room.

All this flashed through his memory between two beats of his heart. Ivan Ilyich's heart was pounding against his chest louder and louder, like a night watchman at midnight coming to wake a heavy sleeper. But this woman sitting on the stool at the foot of the bed couldn't possibly be Dasha! Ivan Ilyich did not move and looked at her thirstily from between half-closed lids. The nurse must have noticed this, for she started forward. "Nurse!" he called "Nurse!" opened his eyes wide and sat up in bed. Dasha leapt to meet him with a feeble cry of joy and alarm. He put his arms round her as if he feared that the vision would fade. It was Dasha, thin, fragile, but alive! He pressed her face to his and felt her lips quiver, her whole body tremble. He took her face between both hands and held it away from himself, so that he could look into her beloved, ever new, ever unexpectedly lovely face. She closed her eyes and said again and again:

"I'm with you. Everything is all right now."

He kissed her mouth, the corners of her lips, where suffering had drawn two little folds, her closed eyes.

"Don't be so excited, Ivan dear," she whispered; "I'm not going anywhere. I'm staying with you for ever and ever."

By evening the whole village knew that in the cottage of Anna Triokhzhilnaya, who was the widow of a labourer, there was a man, a stranger, who had

met Nadka Vlassov in the street and had said to her: "I have come to gladden your hearts. I am a priest on the Red side." All the women, old and young, believed that this was so. Nadka's tongue wearied of telling the story again and again; how she had carried the buckets and how she had had some sort of premonition and how he had called out to her "Nadezhda!" ('But good God,' the listeners here always interrupted, 'how could he know?') "That's just it—he's a seer. . . ." And his face was a Russian face, as red as raw meat, his hair reached to his shoulders, he was very badly dressed, but he wasn't hungry; he was very cheerful and talked mostly in riddles and parables.

The men heard the women cackle and laughed: "Be careful that your seer doesn't set fire to the village on all four corners. If he was a real priest, he would have gone to the richest house first of all . . . in the Widow Triokhzhilnaya's cottage even the blackbeetles go hungry. No, my dears, he'll have to come to the village soviet and show his identity papers. Perhaps he's just a scout for the bandits? We've got to be careful about that."

"Shut up you, don't make yourself a laughing-stock," a man's wife would answer to such talk of her husband and the other women would second her vigorously. "We obeyed you until the revolution," shouted one of the wives, her eyes glittering fearlessly, "but what you told us to do wasn't much good." With that she put her fists on her mighty hips. "We have just as much sense as you, and a bit more. Here, my dears," she turned to the other women, "look at my Nadka. Why, her blouse is just bursting over her breast . . . she looks in her mirror and says to me, 'Mummy, why must I go on like this?' And what am I to tell her? Wait until next Intercession?" She turned to her husband again: "Why didn't he come to your house and gorge himself with pork? Did Christ visit only the rich? The reason why he went to this poor devil of an Anka is that he is a Red priest; he doesn't want your roast pork—what he's concerned with is our sorrows and troubles."

What could a man say to this, except flap his hand in resignation and leave the women to it. That evening the women gathered in a crowd around Anka's cottage and sent in a delegation. Before entering the cottage, the delegates found out from the neighbour's little daughter that Anna Triokhzhilnaya had lit a fire in the bathhouse early that morning (in the old bathhouse at the back, down by the lake), and the priest had washed himself there and Anna had given him a clean shirt that had belonged to her late husband. Now, after his bath, the priest was just about to drink sage tea with Anka. (The villagers used this herb instead of tea).

The priest, in a faded blue shirt, was sitting on the wooden settee, with his hands on the table. Nadka had told the truth: his face was so red as to frighten anyone and his lips were pursed in a sweetish expression, just like a bear's. The widow was frying eggs on a fire of chips; a blue flame roared in the samovar and through the battered sheet-iron pipe connecting the samovar with the oven.

The three delegates came in, bowed, said "Good health to you," and sat down on the settee nearest the door. They said nothing but took in everything.

"Tell us what you want," Kuzma Kuzmich suddenly asked in a loud voice. The delegates looked at each other. Then Nadezhda's mother answered in an ingratiating tone:

"The old customs are abolished, people say. But we are for the old customs, reverend. Life is long and there's only one wedding in it, isn't there."

"Who lives long can gather many good things," Kuzma Kuzmich replied. "What is the trouble then?"

"You needn't be afraid of us, we're for the Soviets. We elected a village Soviet and voted for Soviet power. We put seals on the church and decided to send the priest to the regional cheka for illegal possession of a machine-gun."

"Oho," said Kuzma Kuzmich. "So your priest was a serious fellow."

"Oh yes, he threatened us always. 'You antichrists', he used to say, 'I'll sprinkle your meetings out of a Maxim gun, from my window. . . .' That's how he tried to frighten us. Our marriageable girls of course voted with all the rest, but when Intercession came round they wanted to get married in church. They made up their minds about it, got together—and you know what girls are when they get together in a bunch—they'll stick tighter than glue. So we want you to tell us what to do. They say you're an unfrocked priest."

"That is so," Kuzma Kuzmich answered.

"Why was that?"

"Because I was a freethinker—I quarrelled with God."

The delegates exchanged alarmed glances. Nadezhia's mother whispered in the ears of the two others and they in turn whispered in hers. Then she said, this time in a sterner tone:

"So you couldn't marry anyone properly?"

"Why not, if the girls want to get married? I'll marry them and write it down in the book—not even a universal synod could unmarry them again. I'll put the crown on them so they'll look just like the Queen of Hearts, and I'll lead them round the altar and ask all the questions that must be asked, and say all the things that must be said, and then we can all make merry without sinning and without stint. What else could you want?"

Another delegate said:

"We have a lot of babies unchristened and without names."

"How many?"

"A lot. We can count them if you like."

"Well, and do they suck less greedily because they aren't christened?"

The delegates again exchanged glances and shrugged their shoulders. . . . The widow put the frying-pan on the table, then returned to her corner and gloomily watched Kuzma Kuzmich avidly ladle out the eggs, screwing up his face in his hurry.

"But would it be a proper christening?" the third delegate asked.

"As if Saint Vladimir had done it himself."

"How can you conduct the service without a deacon and choir?"

"What use are they to me? I do it all myself—in different voices."

At that moment Nadezhda's mother walked up to Kuzma Kuzmich, sat down next to him and slapped the table with the palm of her hand.

"Are you asking a lot of money for it?"

Kuzma Kuzmich did not answer immediately. Nadezhda's mother heaved a deep sigh and her hand quivered on the table; the other delegates, who were sitting near the door, stretched out their necks in suspense.

"Not a kopeck would I take from you. I didn't come here for money. All you need pay is the fee for the marriage certificates to the clerk of the village soviet."

The offer made by this man seemed tempting from every aspect, but it was also alarming: he might turn out to be some sort of renegade or something. About six weeks before, when the village was still under the rule of Ataman

Mamontov, another such man had come, wearing goloshes on his bare feet and a beard growing up to his very eyes. He approached a cottage where people were sitting about after work, stood there until they got used to him and then sat down next to old Grandfather Akim. Perhaps he hoped that they would offer him a smoke, but nobody did. He crossed his legs after a while and bent over to whisper in Grandfather Akim's ear: "Do you recognize me, old soldier?" "No," said Akim. Then the other whispered even lower: "Well, then, know that I am the Emperor Nikolai the Second. It was not I who was put to death in Yekaterinburg, and now I am walking the earth in secret until the time comes for me to reveal myself. . . ." Grandfather Akim was a bit hard of hearing, did not get it all straight, and made a fuss. The people of Spasskoye are no fools—they immediately grabbed this emperor and dragged him to the dam to drown him—all that saved him was that he shouted all the time: "I was only joking; let me go, friends, it was a joke."

"You don't seem touched in the head, besides, there aren't any such about now," Nadezhda's mother said, and unbuttoned her coat, so hot did she feel. "So why don't you want to take any money? What's in your mind? How can we trust you?"

"Well, I like salt. Each house that has a wedding or a christening can give me a pinch of salt." Kuzma Kuzmich put down his spoon and turned to the widow. "Put the samovar on the table! See!" He indicated Anna, thin, dark-faced, narrow-chested, wearing a much-patched skirt with the hem tucked into her belt, "she believed in me; she would follow me anywhere. But you, fat and smooth that you are, you do nothing but search for evil in a man, try to make out he's a fraud. Kulaks is what you are. I don't like your company; I might easily lose my temper with you and go away at dawn to seek gladness in some other place."

Anna set the samovar on the table and the delegates saw her smile; her wan, drawn, ugly face was radiant with happiness. Nadezhda's mother swept a hawk-eyed glance over her and said:

"All right!" She held out her hard, callous palm to Kuzma Kuzmich. "Don't lose your temper. No need for you to go any further; you'll find everything you need here."

Next morning Kuzma Kuzmich climbed up into the belfry and rang the great bell. The bronze clangor rolled over the village and the old men and women stuck their heads out of their windows. Kuzma Kuzmich pulled the bell-rope a second time, and a third, then took hold of the strings of the smaller bells and began to ring a quick staccato peal and then again—boom—he jerked the big twelve-thousand-pounder. Hardly could the old people raise their fingers to their foreheads for the sign of the cross, when the unfrocked priest was already ringing a quick jig, tinga-linga-ling like a dancing tune.

Some of the respectable village elders came out of their houses and sent looks of disapproval up to the belfry.

"The priest is playing tricks."

"Pull him out of there by his hair and send him about his business."

"He's more likely to send you about yours."

"But he can ring a good peal, no denying that. And if the girls are pleased and the women are pleased, why shouldn't he amuse them a bit."

The whole village, invited or uninvited, was preparing to celebrate the weddings. The day was misty; there was a frost on the grass and the village smelled of freshly baked bread and smoked pork. In some of the houses

there was much running about, cries of distress came from fowls of all sorts, and a flurry of geese and chickens escaped over the fences. In one of the houses a bridegroom, freshly shaved and dressed in his Sunday best, was sitting disconsolate on the settee in the parlour corner; he had neither eaten nor smoked that day. In another house a bride was being dressed and a bunch of old women who felt that this was their hour, were teaching her the proper way to weep and wail.

Oh 'tis not a duck that quacks on the shore;
'Tis the beautiful bride that weeps so sore

sang one of the grannies in a sepulchral tone and another took it up, mournfully cradling her wrinkled cheek in the palm of her hand.

Good-bye, good-bye, oh you shining sun,
My beloved father who provided for me
And my dear mother who gave birth to me;
I have been married, I have been sold,
I have been sold for a drink and go I must
Far away to a distant land.

But none of the brides felt disposed to weep and wail and some of them were even annoyed: "That was long ago, granny, in your time, when girls were sold for a drink to a distant land. Nowadays there's only one land, the land of the Soviets."

Everywhere the women were cooking and baking and rushing about with pails and brooms. The go-betweens were going from house to house and a strong smell of spirits already emanated from them. The young people were gathering in front of the church and two accordion players were fingering their keys.

Meanwhile the chairman of the village Soviet, Stepan Petrovich Nedoyeshkashi, holder of the St. George's Cross with three bars, arrived back from a drive to the post office. Paying no attention to the ringing of the bells, as if he had not even heard it, he unlocked the door of the village Soviet, went in, and a little later came out again holding a hammer and a sheet of paper in his hands. With four nails he nailed the paper to the door, took a rubber stamp wrapped in a piece of newspaper out of his pocket, breathed on it and set the stamp on his signature. On the sheet of paper was written:

Citizens of the village of Spasskoye, on the occasion of the revolution which has occurred in Germany, I herewith appoint a meeting to be held to-day at eleven o'clock.

The people all hurried to the village Soviet. Kuzma Kuzmich, seeing from the bell-tower that the place in front of the church had emptied, ceased his ringing and came down from the tower. Nadezhda's father, a church elder, dressed in a braided blue *kaftan*, slammed the lid of the candle-box angrily and said:

"Stepka Nedoyeshkashi, that son of a bitch, gave me no peace last year, followed me about a whole week begging me to give him two hundred roubles for a new roof to his house. I didn't give it to him, so now he is getting his own back, the one-legged devil! He's spoilt the wedding."

"What's happened?"

"Some sort of revolution in Germany or something. . . . There's to be

a meeting, he can't live without politics for an hour! And what a fool he is at that, my God!"

In the porch of the village Soviet Stepan Petrovich was making a speech to the crowd. He beat the air with his fists and tapped the floor with his wooden leg. His face was fleshy, his mouth loose, his moustache drooping.

"The international situation is taking a favourable turn for Soviet power," he was shouting when Kuzma Kuzmich elbowed his way closer to the porch. "The German toilers are stretching out their hands towards us. That means great help for our revolution, comrades. I know the Germans; I've even been in Germany. I can say only this: they live in straitened circumstances, every mouthful has to be counted, and yet they live better than we do. That gives one furiously to think, comrades. In a village such as ours, say, they have a piped water supply, a proper sewage system, which supplies manure to the vegetable gardens, telephones, gas in every house, a barber's shop, a public-house with a billiard-table, not to mention the school, nor the fact that they can all read and write. . . . There's a bicycle in every house, a gramophone. . . ."

There was a murmur in the crowd and a few people clapped; then all the others followed suit.

"My lower extremity was blown away by a German shell in East Prussia. But at the given moment I am able to rise above personal considerations. . . ."

"Speak plainly!" a youthful voice shouted desperately.

"This miserable mutilation of mine I lay not at the door of the German people—it is not the German people who are to blame but international imperialism. It's the international imperialists who must be taken by throat in the most determined fashion. We Russians did not understand this before, but now even the Germans have discovered it at last. And so we, comrades, assembled in this meeting, throw out this slogan to both peoples: up the world revolution!"

"Hurrah!" shouted a youthful voice and the meeting clapped again.

"I now pass on to local affairs. The roof of the schoolhouse is as full of holes as a sieve and a decision was taken about it some time ago. I ask now: has the money for the roof been collected, has the timber been bought? No! But there is plenty of money available for weddings. You have also found the money for a priest. The peal annoyed people for six miles around. Is it for such things that the German toilers stretch out their hands towards us? I move this resolution: until the money is collected for repairs to the schoolhouse, for the salary of a school teacher, for copybooks and pencils, making a grand total of four thousand nine hundred, seven roubles and seven kopecks, there are to be no weddings and no ringing of bells."

The chairman's speech certainly made an impression—chiefly it made people feel ashamed. Several other speakers followed the chairman and all of them repeated what he had said, adding only that as everything was already prepared for the weddings, there was no point in putting things off; the money must be found without delay, but not by means of equal contributions from all—no; let the sixteen well-to-do families who are having wedding celebrations do the paying. A resolution to that effect was adopted by the meeting.

The brides made such a fuss when they heard of the resolution and said such things to their parents that the fathers unbuttoned their pockets and paid in the required sum to the village Soviet. Stepan Petrovich gave them a receipt and said only: "All right, carry on."

It was getting towards evening when the brides were at last conducted to

the church. People were dumbfounded when they saw them, so dressed-up were they. Fur coats, fur collars, shawls with gold and silver fringes, shoes with four-inch heels, so that the brides walked as if on tiptoe. And when they took off their things in the vestry—holy smoke! What a get-up! What clothes, such as no one had ever seen before, of various colours, tight over the buttocks so they almost burst, and wide at the hem; with nothing on the shoulders. Nadka Vlassov even had her arms bare to the armpits.

"Look! Look! Can that be Olga Golokhvastov?" "Just look at Steshka!" "Where on earth did they get it?" "In Novocherkassk, of course. She and her father went there five times, took flour and bacon there in an ox-cart. . . . They got it in barter from the ladies in Novocherkassk."

Some experienced people said:

"I've seen dances given by the governor, but even there I saw nothing like this!"

"Dances indeed! At the tercentenary of the Romanovs, in Novocherkassk when the ladies all gathered in the cathedral—they all came in coaches and walked along the red carpet, but even they were nothing to this!"

Kuzma Kuzmich came out without robes, in a plain surplice and a greasy skull-cap to cover the bald spot on his head. (The former priest not only escaped from arrest, but also found time to rob the vestiary.) Kuzma Kuzmich mustered the brides: beauties, full-bosomed, rosy-cheeked. The bridegrooms stood with frightened faces and seemed dwarfed by the brides. Kuzma Kuzmich was pleased. He cleared his throat, rubbed his chilly hands and began the ceremony. He spoke the words rapidly and gaily, sometimes muttering quickly under his breath, sometimes booming the responses as deacon, sometimes chanting instead of the choir, but all quite properly, word for word, letter for letter, as prescribed.

After the ceremony he told the newly-weds to kiss each other and then addressed them in these words:

"In the old days you were told parables; now I will tell you a true story. Some fifteen years before the revolution I was priest in a remote little village. I was at that time already living in a great muddle, my dear fellow-citizens. I am a Russian, a restless man, nothing could please me, everything was wrong, everything hurt me, everything was my business—I was seeking justice. And then something happened that put an end to my hesitations. One day an old man came to my house. He was very, very old and blind and had a boy with him to lead him. From one of his shoes he pulled out a three-rouble note, as old perhaps as he himself, unfolded it, smoothed it down, put it in front of me and said: "This is for you, for a forty-day prayer for my old woman; pray for the peace of her soul." "Grandfather," I said to him, "take back your money, I'll pray for your old woman without it." And have you come from far away?" "From very far; I walked ten days to get here." "How old are you?" "I've lost count, but it must be more than a hundred." "Any children?" "No, they're all dead; only my old woman was left—sixty years we had together—we got used to each other, she was good to me and I loved her and then she died. . . ." "So now you go begging." "That's it. But do me a favour, take the three roubles, serve a forty-day prayer for her." "Never mind the money," I said, "just tell me her name." "Whose name?" "Your old woman's." He stared at me with his sightless eyes: "Her name? I don't know. I've forgotten. When she was young I called her sweetheart, then I called her mother, and later just old woman—that's all I called her." "But how can I pray for her if I don't know her name?" The old man stood

for a long time, leaning on his staff. "Yes," he said at last, "I've forgotten the name. It's because we were so poor. Life was hard. I'll go back, try to find out. Perhaps somebody will remember." This old man came back again, it was late autumn then, and took the same three-rouble note out of his shoe. "I've found out," he said; "one man in the village could still remember: her name was Petrovna."

The sixteen brides stood with their eyes on the ground. The young husbands, red in the face through the pressure of their over-tight collars, stood beside them without stirring. Everybody was very quiet: they were all listening.

"Russian people lived like wild weeds, not remembering even their own names. The gentry played the gentlefolk, the merchants hoarded money, our own sort swung their censers, and you, my pretties, would have faded like flowers among the weeds without reaching full blossom." Kuzma Kuzmich paused as if reflecting, took off his skull-cap and scratched his bald head. Nadezhda Vlassov asked in an undertone:

"Can we go now?"

"No, wait a bit. Now it has been my good fortune to come face to face with true justice in my declining years. But that justice is not at all like the justice Nekrassov wrote about. You've read him, eh? Nor is it like what I myself dreamt of in the past, sitting by the brook of an evening fishing all by myself, or sitting by a fire in the open and slapping the mosquitoes on my neck. This justice is militant, stern, inexorable. There is no denying that I was often frightened of it. When the machine-guns begin to chatter and the troopers come galloping with drawn sabres, you have other things to think of than philosophy. (A suppressed chuckle ran through the crowd.) You will not find justice there"—he pointed to the church—"nor anywhere around you. Justice is inside you, within you, intrepid man. Aspire and dare! Why are you staring at me like that? Am I saying things you can't understand? I came here to teach you to make merry. You, Olya, Nadya, Stesha, Katerina" —he pointed to each with his finger—"you will dance to-day until the floor-joists creak and the eyes of Mikolay, Fyodor, Ivan burn like fire. That is all. The sermon is finished."

Kuzma Kuzmich turned his back on the gathering and disappeared in the vestry.

. . . . . .

Regimental Commissar Ivan Gora came back from Tsaritsyn where he had been told that the food detachments sent from Moscow and Petrograd were not coping with their task any too well. The men in them were often inexperienced, infuriated by hunger, prone to lose their tempers when they saw the villagers gorging themselves on roast goose. One such detachment had disappeared without leaving a trace; another detachment of three Petrograd factory workers was discovered on Voronezh station in a sealed goods van—all three had their bellies slit open and stuffed with grain and a paper was found nailed to the forehead of one of them saying "Eat your fill."

Ivan Gora promised to help the Tsaritsyn comrades. After his return to the regiment he arranged for men to be formed into detachments after a preliminary talk explaining the nature of the task before them. Latugin, Baikov and Zaduiviter were to be sent to the village of Spasskoye. Gora summoned them to his quarters, which had formerly been cold and bare but which now, since the return of Agrippina from the hospital, were swept clean

and had a mat lying inside the threshold and an embroidered cloth on the table. The room no longer smelled of stale tobacco but of newly-baked bread. Ivan Gora asked the men to be sure to wipe their feet thoroughly.

"Sit down, men. What's the news?"

"We're waiting to hear it from you."

"Well, I've heard that the lads don't like this job of collecting food very much."

"What does it matter whether they like it or not. It's got to be done, hasn't it? Whether or no. So it'll be done."

"Yes, but it's a ticklish business."

Ivan Gora, sitting with his back to the window, now addressed Zaduiviter, who was sullenly drumming on the table with his nails.

"Well, you son of the soil, what's your idea about it?"

"How much grain do you want from Spasskoye?"

"Quite a lot. There are a hundred and sixty holdings—that should give us about ninety tons, on the basis of class discrimination, of course."

"They will hardly give us that much."

"That's why I am sending you, to persuade them. You are going unarmed, comrades."

"We don't want arms anyway," muttered Latugin.

"Without arms we'll take much greater pains to be persuasive," Baikov said, and winked. "We're not going among enemies, we're going among friends."

"To friends and enemies both," Ivan Gora said sternly.

"Listen, commisar," Zaduiviter said, "I am not trying to get out of this, mind—but is this really our job, this sticking our noses into other people's larders?"

"What do you think, Latugin?"

"Don't you try to cross-examine me, Ivan. We'll bring you the grain and that's all you need know."

"What about you, Baikov?"

"Oh, I come from Pomorye, I'm used to teamwork."

"Well, comrades, this is what I asked you to come here for." Ivan Gora put his big hands on the table and spoke in a low voice, like a father to his sons. "The grain monopoly is the mainstay of the revolution. Were the monopoly to be lifted now, the *kulaks* would remain the masters on the land, however much of our blood and sweat we might shed for it. And this *kulak* is no longer the old type of village shopkeeper with his samovar—this is a different *kulak*, cunning, up to every trick, hard as nails."

"But who is a *kulak* and who isn't. Explain," cried Zaduiviter. "I have two cows at home. What am I?"

"It's not the cows that matter. What matters is who is to have power in the village. That's all the village *kulaks* think of night and day. They have sacked their labourers, they have even slaughtered their cows, they don't plough up their land in the autumn, they shout at meetings and vote for the Soviets. They're as elusive as fleas."

"Very good, Ivan. And if, when I go home, I buy another cow or a team of oxen—what then?"

"Did you join the Red Army of your own free will or under compulsion?"

"Of my own free will."

"Then you won't buy any teams of oxen."

"Why not? I don't see why I shouldn't buy them."

"Because your interests should be broader. After all, it's not for a couple of oxen that you took up a rifle."

"Let him buy his oxen and leave him alone," said Latugin. "Come on, Give us the rest of it."

Ivan Gora shook his head and laughed.

"I don't want to argue. I want to trust you fellows. All right. So what is the game the *kulaks* are playing? The *kulaks* want to get their hands on the grain trade. The revolution has opened their eyes. What they see in their dreams now are no longer little village shops or inns—what they want are grain elevators and steamships. If they succeed in harnessing the revolution, they'll have you, Zaduiviter, working for them until you drop, and your oxen will be their oxen. They want to turn even the grain monopoly to their own ends. I'll tell you about one incident. We came to a village with a food detachment, but whatever we did was no use; the villagers were against us, nothing could move them. The local blood-sucker, Babulin, was there, in a ragged coat, in worn bast sandals, as friendly and obliging as you please. Only thing was, he kept chewing his beard. 'What's this?' I said to myself; something wrong here'. We went to his barns—not a grain to be seen. Of course we dug everywhere—nothing at all. In the stable only a mangy old jade, and two cowhides hung up on a beam. What do you think he did, the old devil? He had heard we were coming, the son-of-a-gun, and said to the *muzhiks*: "Dear me, you poor fellows, the Tsar's policemen never tormented you as much as this Soviet power is tormenting you. It makes no difference to me," he says, "I can go away to the town to my daughter; my daughter is married to the chairman of the Soviet; but you, poor fellows, however are you going to live through this winter? The Bolsheviks will take everything for the Red Army, even the straw from your roof-thatch. God loves the charitable; come, brothers, to my barns, take all the grain, and some day you can pay me if we're alive." Of course he took receipts from all of them, but still they thought him their benefactor. He gave us nothing, and trust him to get his corn back from the *muzhiks*, two grains for each one grain he gave. The *kulak* is small, but he is everywhere and there are so many of him. It isn't easy to get the better of him. For a thousand years he has been sitting on the *muzhik's* neck—he knows all the answers. Yes, lads, the grain monopoly is a great, a far-reaching thing. It's difficult, no use denying that. But what is easy, tell me? It is always difficult to plough virgin soil. Only playing the balalaika is easy. If the peasants don't understand this great political move, you have only yourselves to blame. Go to the well-to-do, tell them to open their barns. Each grain is like a tear to them. But each grain should be sacred to you, dedicated to a sacred cause."

"Where are the keys of the village Soviet?"

"The chairman has them."

"And where's the chairman?"

"At the wedding."

Latugin, Baikov and Zaduiviter got out of their cart and did not know what to do next. The man they had questioned had gone. For a long time they watched him waddle along the street. Then they sat down on the porch of the village Soviet, rolled cigarettes and smoked. A cold wind that drove the clouds across the sky blew in their faces; sharp sleet beat down in slanting

stabs and the dark ruts in the road instantly filled up with snow. The outlook was gloomy.

"While I listened to the commisar, my hand itched for the hilt of my sabre," Zaduiviter said; "but now we're here, this is just a village like every other. Where are those enemies he talked about? Did you see how well the autumn sowings were coming up?"

Some distance away—there were about ten houses in between—they could see a group of people in the street, obviously those who had not been invited into the house or who could not get in because of lack of space. The sound of accordion music and the stamp of dancing feet came from that direction.

"What you would like is to wet no more than the tips of your toes, dear comrade, but what is needed is to dive right down to the bottom," Latugin said. "The revolution demands deepening—that is what the commissar was talking about."

"Deepening, deepening! Yes, but how far? We are turning everything upside down, and meanwhile people must live, they must sow grain, they must beget and bear children."

"Don't ask me, how far. How should I know?"

Latugin was angrily chewing a straw. Zaduiviter, frowning with the effort, was still thinking hard, without let-up and without side-issues, peasant fashion, about the things the commissar had said the day before. Baikov said:

"Well, lads, this won't get us anywhere. Better go and find the chairman of the Soviet."

He stood up, but Latugin said:

"Stay where you are."

"What do you mean? Why?"

"I don't see why I should explain."

Zaduiviter now intervened and said decisively: "If we are to go, we'll all go together. Now for the chairman."

"I'm not going."

"It's your duty."

"Enough of this, Latugin," Baikov said in a conciliatory tone, "don't worry, we won't go near a table, we won't drink so much as a drop, we'll call the chairman from outside the door."

The three men went in search of the chairman. Stepan Petrovich Nedoyeshkashi had stood on his dignity for two days, but on the third day he thought that if he persisted in this attitude he might alienate the village. So he scraped the mud off his wooden leg, put on his best black trousers, waxed his moustache and went on a stroll round the village.

"Thank God, here you are, Stepan Petrovich, come in, please." The householders put their arms round him; some of them shook him heartily by the hand. "The place of honour for our chairman!" They made him sit in the place of honour. The marriage-broker brought him a saucer of well-salted gruel and held him to ransom. He ransomed himself with a rouble —he never gave more than that—and then accepted a glass of vodka and ate some smoked fish. But he had been mistaken in supposing that on this third day the celebrations were approaching their close. The real thing did not begin until the third day; now it was all dancing, singing, embraces, heart-to-heart talks, quarrels and reconciliations.

God knows they were tough, these villagers. They had suffered much in the last few years. There had been the mobilization by the Tsar's government in which men up to fifty-four were taken away and the women had to do all the

ploughing. Theirs was not the one-horse plough of the North—a woman could cope with that, at need. Here the black earth was ploughed with heavy ploughs drawn by two and sometimes three pairs of oxen. The women remembered that autumn to this day. Then a lot of people died of the Spanish influenza. The village was burned down twice. Hardly had the men come back from the world war when the mobilization began again, this time to Krassnov's army; then heavy levies and the billeting of Cossack troops. And everyone knows how light-fingered the Cossacks are! One might think 'they're Cossacks, our own people, they're all right'; but once the Cossack is in the saddle, he wouldn't be a real Cossack if he didn't pick up with the point of his lance any luckless piglet crossing his path as he rode along the village street. But all that was water under the bridge. Now they had a government of their own sort, the old tax arrears were cancelled, the villagers had received more land—and so the people wanted to celebrate without thinking of the past.

Stepan Petrovich spent just enough time in each house to comply with the proprieties and give no offence to the host, and then passed on to the next house where celebrations were going on. Seated in the place of honour, he carried on well-reasoned conversations with the parents of the young couple about the civil war in progress to the north of the Don, near Voronezh and Kamyshin, where Krassnov was badly mauling the Eighth and Tenth Red Armies. '. . . and so, dear friends, this is no time for dozing, unless we want to be caught napping; no, we must go to the aid of the Soviet government. . . .' He also spoke of domestic affairs, of this and that, and the villagers were amazed to see how well-informed Stepan Petrovich was, how precisely he knew how much grain each householder had in his barn, how many head stood in his stables, sheds and styes, and how much each man had hidden away.

Stepan Petrovich was finding it more and more difficult to drag himself from house to house with his wooden leg and begin the same play over and over again: greet the hosts, sit down, talk. In one place he suddenly took the traditional saucer of gruel—it was almost pure salt—and ate it, salt and all, then plunged his hand into the pocket of his military great-coat, dragged out some soiled and crumpled paper money—all he had left—put it into the hostess's hand, gulped down a large glass of home-distilled spirits and then shouted at the bride, who had been dancing in the stuffy heat almost without pause for three days and was now dancing a ten-couple *quadrille:*

"Hey, Stepanida, put some life into it!"

It was at this moment that he was told three Red Army men were asking for him. "Bring them here!"

"We've asked them, they won't come."

Stepan Petrovich put his hands on the table, let his head sink on his chest and stood for a short time, then he got out from behind the table, pushed his way through the crowd and went outside, where he found that the news was true: three men of serious aspect were, in fact, standing there.

"Who are you?" he asked in a firm voice.

"Food-collecting detachment!"

Latugin said this in a threatening tone, expecting the chairman to be startled, to say the least. But Stepan Petrovich—who gave off so strong and pleasant a smell of spirits that Baikov moved closer to him—was not at all startled:

"You couldn't have come at a better time! I've been expecting you for a long time. Hi, you!" Stepan Petrovich yelled towards the half-open door from which came a confusion of voices, noises and the sound of dancing feet, "stop that music for a bit." This time he swayed so violently that Baikov took him in tow. "Comrades! You have come, not to any old place, but to the village Soviet of Spasskoye!" He grabbed the lintel of the door to steady himself and shouted in an even more peremptory tone:

"Citizens! Come to a meeting, all of you!"

He came off the porch into the yard, where three elderly peasants were leaning against an unharnessed cart and singing a Cossack song in three voices; two others were arguing about something with their arms around each other's shoulders; another was groping for the door in an unsuccessful attempt to go home. Here, and again outside the gates, where people were dancing to the music of accordions, Stepan Petrovich repeated his summons to come to the village Soviet at once.

He marched along in the same direction, resolutely stamping with his wooden leg over the frozen ground and talking as he marched:

"A wedding is one thing and business is another. All the lists are ready, all the stocks are known to us. You can send a telegram to Tsaritsyn telling them that we have delivered our full quota." When Zaduiviter and Baikov tried to persuade him to put off the meeting at least until to-morrow, when people would be sober again, he only said: "He who is wise even when drunk is twice wise. Don't you try to teach me my business. It would be worse to-morrow; better not give them time for second thoughts."

While the villagers were gathered around the village Soviet, Stepan Petrovich spread out his lists and schedules in front of the three food detachment men and began to explain in an excited whisper:

"There are three *kulak* households in the village. The first is Krivousuchki, a bandit, who robbed the mails in 1907, killed the postman and hid the money away for ten years, then when it was all forgotten he built a stone barn and a shop and made a lot more money in the war supplying cowhides to the army. In Spasskoye alone he slaughtered more than half the cattle. Now he is trying to get a fake co-operative society going which would take over his shop. I shall soon know all about this new game of his. He says that he is ill with consumption and sees some mysterious light of nights. A dangerous fellow. Then there is Milovidov; he was a sub-contractor in the mines, came back to the village before the war and started a secret vodka-shop and pawnshop. He's a spider, an usurer, a swine—he has picked the bones of the whole village clean. We found out that it was he sent a man here who said of himself that he was the Emperor Nicholas II—a sort of try-on. The third *kulak* is Mikitenko—the Mikitenkos have been cattle-dealers for generations; they ran their own barges on the Don. In addition to these three, their kin and connections make another ten households. Then there are a few cautious *muzhiks* who say: 'Who knows where all this will end, who'll be in power later? Better keep on good terms with everybody'. So much for the enemy front. But these here are all on our side, these and these and these. . . ." Stepan Petrovich drew his thick finger down along the list. "The situation in the village is tense. Either it will be me who gets killed or it will be they who get their claws clipped."

The villagers had by now surrounded the village soviet in a crowd. Some of them were drunk, some sober. People jostled each other, milled about and muttered. Baikov looked out of the window and repeated in an undertone the sailor rhyme:

Oh the gulls are on the sand,
Seamen, trouble is at hand;
Until the gulls are o'er the sea,
Seamen all should wary be.

Then he said aloud to his comrades:

"Come, let's go out into the porch straight away, there might be trouble."

The neighbours' little daughter, a freckle-faced, blue-eyed know-all, rushed into the widow's cottage and said all in one breath:

"Oh my God, you should see what is going on at the village Soviet. The men are already pulling the fence-posts out of the ground!"

She flashed a look round out of unblinking eyes and took in everything at that one glance: that Anna had on her claret-coloured dress which she had worn only once while her husband was alive; that she had on white stockings and elastic-sided boots and was sitting on the edge of the bed with her hair uncovered; that the unfrocked one was lying on the same bed with his knees drawn up; that Anna had given him another clean shirt, the one with black polka dots, and that he was holding Anna's hand. . . .

"How dare you rush in like that?" Anna scolded to cover her embarrassment and the girl rushed out again, too frightened to finish what she had to say. But what she had said had been enough to rouse Kuzma Kuzmich. He was tired out after the effort of the last few days; he had drunk a lot and talked even more. The peasants had not missed a single word of his sermon; some of it they had not understood, but these obscure passages only enhanced the significance of the rest. In every cottage Kuzma Kuzmich had to argue with them mainly about the point which had touched them most of all: the subject of justice. When only the older and more respected men were left around the table, one of them, whose thoughts were loosened by liquor, would sweep the bones and scraps of food off the table with his sleeve and begin:

"Kuzma Kuzmich, you have hurt our feelings. . . . You said there was no justice. How could that be? Why, we might as well be living in the wilderness if that is so."

Another would interrupt the speaker.

"Our young people"—and he would nod towards the other end of the room where skirts and pigtails and ribbons were flying and flushed faces turning in the dance—"there is no getting on with them now. They say that now everything is allowed that there is no God and no Tsar, that their fathers and mothers are fools and that all this is as it should be. . . . By what ties can we bind our children now? Where can we find a backbone for our life? And now you say that there is no justice in the world."

A third bearded peasant joined in the talk:

"If justice is made by man, then he who is stronger, he who gets on top will also be the one to determine what is justice and what isn't. And then we will again be as the felled tree."

"Are you a strong man?" Kuzma Kuzmich asked.

"Yes, I'm strong enough, but the rouble is stronger—the rouble has beaten me all my life."

"And did you complain of that to anyone?"

"To whom could I have complained?"

"Did you go on pilgrimage to the holy relics in the Kievo-Pecherski monastery?"

"No."

"So there is no justice then?"

"Why not? I got very angry. I had brought my rifle home from the war; I went out on to the common, I said 'so you thought I was killed, did you? Allot me my twenty-five acres and look sharp about it!'"

"And did you get your twenty-five acres?"

"Of course I did."

"Well, so there is justice after all?"

"What sort of justice was that? The people were scared of my rifle, that was all. No, brother, I don't want to wrong anyone, but let no one wrong me either. Look at Grandfather Akim there. He is all alone, and he can't work any more. So he has to live on the charity of other folk and a bitter crust it is. Where has all his labour got to? He had a little cottage, but Milovidov took it for debt. And where will my labour get to? In my fifty years I have worked enough to build four stone houses, and look at me—my elbows are out of my coat. My labours fly away from me like pigeons and roost on any man's roof but mine. You said it well: 'Justice is within yourself, intrepid man'. Kuzma Kuzmich, I am not afraid of death, I can still carry three hundred pounds on my back, but I can't get justice. Justice would be to count men not according to their roubles but according to their labours. How can we get that? If the Soviet could give us that, we'd be truly grateful."

"Why, you crazy fellow, that is just what the Soviets have made law!"

"Well, if they have it has not reached us here yet."

Kuzma Kuzmich regretted that with all his cunning there was nothing he could say to such a man. It was much easier to talk to the intellectuals than to these peasants. In all these table-talks he sensed both satisfaction and discontent, both disappointment and expectation. It seemed that these people were vaguely expecting the revolution to bring them some fundamental change and were urging the revolution forward.

On the second day, or rather night, he dragged himself to Anna's hut in a deplorable condition. He sat down on the floor alongside the settle, buried his face in his hand, laughed and repeated again and again: "I am getting feeble, Annushka. I am getting old, Annushka."

Without a word Anna led him down to the bath-house on the edge of the lake. She washed him and made steam for him with her own hands. Kuzma Kuzmich's face was old but his body was white and smooth and Anna's heart melted with tenderness when she saw him wriggle on the shelf as she rubbed him with the swab.

After the bath he calmed down and slept until the late morning, breathing evenly and quietly. When he woke, he drank some milk and said: "Please forgive me, Annushka, I have a bit of a headache," and went to sleep again, so that when the neighbours' little girl woke him with her news he was again his old cheerful self.

"What did the little girl come for?" he asked Anna.

"Just to say that there was a meeting. Red Army men have come for bread and there is trouble."

"Good God! Those must be our lads!"

Kuzma Kuzmich was dressing hurriedly with Anna watching him in silence from under knitted brows, when the door flew open and the neighbours' little girl stuck her head inside again with more news:

"They're fighting! Vlassov has been beaten up; his wife just took him home, she is shouting and cursing you in the street. Mitrofan Krivosuchka tried to harness a horse but they wouldn't let him—they dragged him out of the stable and began to beat him, and how!"

She was off again. Kuzma Kuzmich made to follow her, but Anna barred his way and cried in a shrill voice:

"I won't let you go!"

Kuzma Kuzmich squeezed her hand heartily and said:

"Don't be a fool, Anna! Here, let me have that poker. Keep calm, will you. I'll be back soon and bring the comrades to dinner. Make us some pancakes, d'you hear? Stop that, now!"

Anna answered with difficulty through clenched teeth:

"Very good, little father!"

The neighbours' little girl would have liked things to be much more terrible than the things she had really seen as she ran to the village Soviet and back to the houses, spreading the news. Still, the meeting had been noisy enough. The request for the delivery of grain had not given rise to much discussion. The peasants said: 'If it must be, it must,' and left it at that. The chairman then read the list of contributions. They heard him out in silence and asked him to read it a second time. Then some cross-talk and movement began in the crowd; some of those present pushed their way nearer to the exit while others bore left towards the neighbouring orchard which had a picket fence.

"I disagree," boomed the powerful voice of Mikitenko, well-known to them all. "But *we* agree, we agree!" answered many voices. A bearded man with his coat out at the elbows now came up to the porch, threw his cap on the ground and began to bring up old grievances:

"Where has all my labour gone? There he is! He's got the fruits of all my toil! And am I now to go begging to him for a crust of bread? Is that what Soviet power is for?"

Another man pushed him aside—a man pale with fury, who began to say even more terrible things. At his words the part of the crowd nearest the fence pulled out stakes from it and attacked the meeting from the rear. Latugin, Zaduiviter and Baikov dived off the porch into the crowd and snatched the stakes out of the men's hands shouting: "No panic! It's all right! Damn your guts! The meeting goes on!"

The clash was short and the attackers proved not very numerous. Some of them escaped, others were pursued along the street, A few men remained lying in the roadway covered with fine powdery snow.

Kuzma Kuzmich took a short cut through the breaks in the hedges across the orchards, lost his way and found himself at the back of a house where several women were standing. One of them was complaining and the others listening to her. When they saw Kuzma Kuzmich they exchanged glances and remarks, and Varvara Vlassov, Nadezhda's mother, angrily began to turn up the sleeves of her coat as she walked up to Kuzma Kuzmich, closely followed by the other women.

"So this was why you took no money from us, unfrocked priest!" Varvara said, and turned to the woman. "And we silly fools trusted him. He's turned the heads of the whole village. He's spied out everything and now he's stirred up all the fools against us. He's sold us to the Communists. What are you staring at him for? Beat the devil; beat him to death."

"You can't beat me," answered Kuzma Kuzmich, and drew back, "or you would be sorry if you did. Don't you touch me!"

"Did you spare us, then?"

The women, now much incensed, threw off their kerchiefs and all shouting at once accused the unfrocked priest of being the author of the unjust assessment for the grain tax and of the fight in front of the village Soviet; they blamed him for the fact that now a thrifty farmer had no place in the village; they even blamed him for the number of geese and piglets eaten during the last few days—he was responsible for it all. The women were pressing Kuzma Kuzmich to the hedge and it was in vain that he tried to charm them again, in vain that he forced himself to smile, in vain that he muttered: "Come now, you've had your say; now let's talk it over nice and quietly." Varvara Vlassov was the first to get her hands in his hair on both sides of his ears; other fists played a tattoo on his back. He decided that it would be best to lie down and cover his head with his hands. He felt his ribs crack and thought, 'if only no one thinks of hitting me with some blunt instrument'. At that moment he heard a furious voice say: "A stake for him, the heathen!" He tried to jump up, but the world went dark in front of his eyes. Then suddenly he was released. He heard himself groaning and made an effort to check himself. He was lifted up and helped to his feet. He opened his eyes, which were full of snow and chaff—and saw Anna, saw the neighbours' little girl peeping out from behind Anna's skirts with an expression of rapture on her face, and saw Latugin, Zaduiviter and Baikov.

"Alive?" asked Latugin. "Here, somebody, bring him a glass of vodka quick. Well, Kuzma, you've certainly not been idle here. The meeting decided to pass a vote of thanks to you for your successful anti-religious propaganda."

"You have no idea, Dasha, what a drab and uninspired person I was all this time, since we parted and I left Petrograd. Yes, I was, believe me. There is a sort of half-conscious life in us that torments us like a disease and makes us roast on a slow fire. The explanation is simple of course. . . . You fell out of love with me and I . . ."

Dasha quickly turned her head towards him and her moist grey eyes showed that he was mistaken—that she had never ceased to love him. The look in Dasha's eyes first struck Telegin dumb, but then his mouth widened in a smile which, while none too intelligent, was at all events a happy one. Dasha went on with her packing—she was putting into a small basket all the things Telegin had that morning received as a ration in kind, not without considerable trouble and visits to a dozen offices.

The ration in kind included some necessary and useful things such as stockings; several pieces of material which could be made into dresses; some very fine lawn underwear, unfortunately meant for a girl in her teens, but Dasha was now so brittle and slender that she could well pass for a young girl; there was even a pair of shoes, an acquisition of which Telegin was as proud as if he had taken an enemy battery. There were also other things which made one wonder whether they could be put to any use in the campaign conditions awaiting them. In one place where Telegin had asked for some sheets he was given a china cat and dog, leather hair-curlers, a dozen picture postcards of the Crimea and a pair of stays of the very best material, well whaleboned and so large that Dasha could easily wrap them twice round herself.

"Dashenka, I am thinking of our farewell at the railway station, when you said to me something like: 'Good-bye for ever'. Or perhaps I only thought I

heard you say it—I was pretty depressed at the time myself. You were very pale, almost green, very distant, very much out of love."

"What nonsense," Dasha said without turning round. She was wrapping the china cat in a thick stocking so it should not be broken on the journey. She had always been careless about things, but these two china ornaments, a pretty kitten and a sleeping, long-eared dog, had for some reason caught her fancy. It seemed as if they had come of their own accord to provide for Dasha a little microcosm of innocent smiles in that wider and terribly disorganized life over which hung the thunderclouds of ideas and passions.

"At all events that was the picture of you I took away with me from Petrograd. I took it with me and lived with it. You were with me as my heart is with me, and I had made up my mind that I would live my life alone—a bachelor life."

He was careful to move about the room in such a way as always to have Dasha in the centre of his movements. She had discarded her white head-cloth, and her wavy ash-blonde hair was tied at the nape of the neck with a scarlet silk ribbon (such ribbons were issued by the stores of the artillery command). She was either bending over the basket placed on a stool or standing upright, hands on hips, deep in thought. She was wearing a nurse's white overall, more charming than any elaborate dress could be, and she had, in addition, caught it in a belt round the waist—this, just like the red ribbon, was not merely by chance.

"Isn't it strange, Dashenka, that before this danger and death seemed a matter of indifference to me—if I got killed, that would be that. I didn't care. In war that does not in the least mean that you are a brave man, only that you are a sad one. But now I sometimes feel a belated fear. Now I want to live a thousand years so that I can touch you like this, look at you."

"A nice sight I should be in a thousand years' time. Listen, Ivan, what on earth am I to do with this?" Dasha again unrolled the stays and put them against her body. "There's ample room for three women in it. Perhaps I'd better leave it behind?"

"Well, you might put on weight and then it would come in useful."

"I never wear stays; you must be crazy. I have an idea—if we take out the whalebone and unpick it, it might make a nice waistcoat for you."

Telegin took advantage of the fact that both Dasha's hands were busy. He came up to her from behind and tenderly drew her to himself.

"So it's true. Say it again."

"Of course it's true. You are the only man in the world for me. Without you I am nothing. So I went in search of you. Ivan, you really must remember." She wriggled out of his grip and drew back a little. "You must remember how strong you are, or one day you'll simply break me in two. Do you know what we've forgotten? Though it's too late now. . . ."

"I'll go and get it this minute, whatever it is."

"I'd like a sponge."

"A sponge? Here it is!"

Telegin rushed to his great-coat and pulled a sponge and several other nondescript objects out of the pocket.

"Here you are. But this thing here, Dasha . . . no one could explain what it was for, but I grabbed it just the same."

"Why, Ivan, this is a luxury—a rubber roller for face massage. Oh, you dear old thing, it's just what I wanted. . . ."

When she had finished packing the basket, Dasha went up to Telegin (who was sitting on the edge of his cot ready to jump to his feet and hug her on the slightest provocation), put her hand under his chin, raised his face to hers and looked into his eyes.

"I have promised myself that in this new life of mine I will not wait for anything. I am no Solveig, I don't want to gaze into any sea-fogs any more. I want to love and I want to do things. You must take me as I am. For better or for worse I am your faithful wife. We'll begin all over again. . . ."

But at this point the doctor rushed in, as usual without knocking. He waved a fresh newspaper in his hand and began to give them the latest war news in a voice of thunder.

"This same Admiral Kolchak, who broke up the Directorium in Omsk and massacred the workers there, has now been proclaimed neither more nor less than the 'Supreme Ruler' of Russia! The French and English have recognized him. How do you like that? He has an army of six hundred thousand men and he is going to cede our Far Eastern provinces to the Japanese, if you please. Now listen to this: a joint Anglo-French fleet has appeared in the roads off Sevastopol and Novorossisk. Our allies! Why, damn them, who was it we helped to win the war with our blood?" The doctor was beside himself. "Intervention, that's what it is, without even the slightest attempt at concealment. Daria Dmitrievna, don't stare at me so fiercely. Take your better half and let's go to my place to eat some borshch. Remember the chap we had here with bayonet wounds? He's sent me a sack of cabbage, a goose and a piglet. Yes, Ivan Ilyich, it's a pity, a great pity that you should snatch my best nurse away under my very nose. At all events, we'll drink vodka together to-day, you and I, to the confusion of all interventionists."

CHAPTER XI

VADIM PETROVICH ROSHCHIN needed very little to put an end to his indecision and that little was given by the trace of Katia he had found. Thus the print on the sand of a bare female foot might stimulate some men to imagine a whole story of the beautiful lady who had walked here listening to the roar of great breakers. A jealous tormenting passion rose in him and drove away his forlorn thoughts, his irresolute depression. Everything was now simple and obvious to him again.

The same night, after his meeting with the German territorial, he set out on his quest again. He left his luggage at the hotel, taking only a change of underwear and his haversack with him. No sooner was he in the train than he took off his officer's shoulder-straps, removed the badge from his cap, tore the flashes off his left sleeve and threw everything out of the window. With all this rubbish went everything that, until the night in the 'Bi-Ba-Bo', he had considered indispensable to his self-respect. And yet a fierce joy flooded his whole being as he sat in the almost empty dark carriage, his hands stuck in his leather belt, his feet stretched out wide apart. He was free! The train was taking him to Katia. Whatever had happened to her there, he would fight his way through to her at whatever cost.

The station-master at Yekaterinoslav had warned the passengers that midway between Yekaterinoslav and Rostov the railway was again infested by bandits.

that this was the last train towards the east and that it was still uncertain whether it would pass through Gulyay-Polye or through Yuzovka. At the station the senior guard had told the passengers who crowded round him all sorts of stories about the bandits; how they roamed the steppe with their carts and *brichkas* in search of booty; how they burnt the manors which their owners had not had sense enough to abandon; how they boldly raided military stores and vodka distilleries; how they haunted the cities.

"It would all amount to nothing," said the senior guard, "if the lesser atamans had no leader. But now they've found a *batko*, an ataman over all the atamans. His name is Makhno, and he is a popular chap. He lords it over a whole kingdom and his capital city is Gulyay-Polye. He is not a man to bother about trifles. He lets the trains go through unhindered, though of course they search every train and take some people off the train and shoot them on the spot. On my last trip we were drawing up to the platform and there stood Makhno under the station bell smoking a cigar. I jumped off the train, went up to him, saluted. He said in a hard sort of voice: 'Take your hand from your cap, I'm not a Tsar, nor yet God. Got any Communists on the train?' 'No, none at all,' says I. 'Got any White Guards aboard?' 'No, only local passengers.' 'Carrying any money?' My heart jumped in my breast at that. 'Come, convince yourself,' I said, 'the mail van and the luggage van are both empty.' 'All right,' he said, 'you can take your train on.'"

The worst were the stops at country halts: the silence after the rattling of the wheels, the lack of movement, the painful expectation all tormented the passengers. Roshchin got out of the train; the platform was dark and not a soul was about on platform or track. Only from a small window in the station building did the yellow dim sheen of a night-light—a bit of rag in a little oil—show two figures sitting with their noses in their collars: the telegraph operator and a guard, all set to spend the whole night sitting in the same pose. There was no point in waking them and asking them questions—the train could not go on until the 'all clear' was given from the next station—and it was quite on the cards that no one was left alive there.

Roshchin drew in the cold air and his whole body tensed. In the windy November fog, somewhere in the infinite emptiness of Russia, there was a living speck, an atom of warm flesh which he loved hungrily. How could he have been so blind that merely to satisfy a hateful desire for revenge and punishment he tore himself away from Katia's desperately clinging hands and left her cruelly alone in a strange city? How could he be so sure that he would be forgiven once he had found her again and thrown himself without a word (that was how it would have to be, without a word) at her feet and kissed her little feet in their torn stockings—which she would probably not even be able to darn for lack of thread? It was not so easy to forgive such a betrayal as his.

While Roshchin was thus dreaming alone on the platform, scowling and muttering angrily to himself, the guard came out of the station building and stood by the carriage, utterly indifferent to any overcoming of space. Roshchin asked if they would have to wait much longer. The guard did not even bother to shrug his shoulders. The smoky lantern which he held in his hand swung in the wind, throwing a dim light on the flapping skirts of his black uniform coat. Suddenly the feeble glim in the station window went out, a door slammed and the telegraph clerk came out. He and the guard stood for a long time looking in the direction of the semaphore.

"Put the light out," the telegraph clerk whispered.

The guard raised the lantern to his bewhiskered, puffy face, blew on the

smoking little flame and then both he and the clerk got into the train and opened the doors giving on to the other side of the track.

"Clear out," the guard said to Roshchin, hurriedly scrambled out and ran.

Roshchin jumped down after him. He stumbled over rails, bumped against a pile of sleepers and found himself in an open field where it was somewhat less dark and where he could distinguish two human figures moving away. He overtook them. The telegraph clerk said: "Damn this darkness. There are some pits here somewhere, sand-pits. That's where I always hide."

The sand-pits were not far away, a little to the left. Following his guides, Roshchin slid down into a hole in the ground. Soon two more men appeared—the engine-driver and his fireman. They cursed a bit, and then they, too, sat down in the hole. The guard heaved a deep sigh: "I'm getting out of this job. I've had enough. Nice railway service this is!"

"Hush," said the telegraph clerk, "they're coming, the devils."

Now they could all hear the beat of horses' hoofs and the creaking of cartwheels approaching from the steppe.

"Who is it this time, I wonder?" said the guard to the telegraph clerk. "The Death Jockey, maybe?"

"No, he's in Dibrivsk forest just now. It might be Marussya, perhaps. No; it can't be Marussya, she always carries torches. Must be some local little man. . . ."

"You're both wrong," said the engine-driver; "that's Maksyuta, one of Makhno's men, damn him."

The guard heaved another sigh: "I've got a little Jew-boy riding in the third coach, with luggage too, and I never warned him. What a pity. . . ."

The sound of hoofbeats came closer, like a wind before a thunderstorm. The wheels were already clattering over the cobblestones near the station. There were shouts, the jingle of glass, a shot, a short cry of pain, the clanging of iron. The guard began to blow on his nails:

"It's what they always do—break every window in the coaches, the drunken beasts."

All this confusion did not last long. There was a loud shout: "To horse!" Horses whinnied, cartwheels creaked and rumbled as the robbers hurriedly took themselves off. The men climbed out of the sand-pit, slowly went back to the dark train and took up their positions again. The telegraph clerk lit his little oil-lamp and tried to get through to the neighbouring station; the engine-driver and the fireman examined the engine to see that the bandits had not stolen some essential part; Roshchin went back to his coach, and the guard, crunching over the broken glass in the corridor, grumbled: "There you are. They've killed the poor devil. Why couldn't they just take his luggage? No, they absolutely must shed blood."

After much further delay for various indefinite reasons, the guard finally gave a short whistle, the engine let out an indignant howl into the empty steppe and the train began to move in the direction of Gulyay-Polye.

Roshchin put his elbows on the folding table, buried his face in his hands and returned to the riddle which had been tormenting him all this time. Katia had left Rostov the very next day after that blackguard Onoli had told her that he was dead. Hence it was two days later that she met the German in the train. Admittedly the German tried to cheer her up without any ulterior motives. Admittedly she was in great need of consolation at the time. But two days after the loss of the man she loved to write her name and address so accurately into the notebook of a stranger, without forgetting so much as the

punctuation marks—here was a riddle! Her world had collapsed around her, her beloved husband was a piece of carrion sprawling somewhere by the roadside. It would have been only natural for her to be in a state of hopeless despair the first few days at least. Yet here she was, giving her address 'to be called for'. So she must have found some break in the clouds after all. What was it? That was the riddle.

"Citizen, kindly show your identity papers." It was the guard, sitting down opposite Roshchin and putting his smoky lantern down at his feet. "Once we are past Gulyay-Polye you can sleep undisturbed."

"But I am getting out at Gulyay-Polye."

"That so? Well then all the more reason why I must see your papers. It's me they'll ask whom I have brought in the train."

"I have no identity papers whatsoever."

"What, no papers?"

"No, I tore them up and threw them away."

"Then I must make a report about you."

"If you must, you must, and the devil take you."

"Why mention the devil at such a time as this? An officer, aren't you?" Roshchin, his senses sharpened and tense, replied through clenched teeth:

"No, an Anarchist."

"I see. I've had a lot of them in my train, coming from Yekaterinoslav." The guard shifted his lantern, holding it between his feet, and looked out a long while at the bright sparks from the engine floating past the dark window. "I can see that you are an intelligent man," he said softly. "Can you tell me what to do? On the last run I had a talk with an Anarchist, too. He was a serious chap, grey-haired, tousled. He said to me: 'We don't need your railways, we'll smash them up so that no one will so much as remember them. It's the railways bring all this slavery and capitalism. We,' he says, 'will divide up everything equally between people; people ought to live in freedom, without any government, like the animals.' Thank you very much. I've been with the railway thirty years, I've saved up and have got a little house in Taganrog where my old woman lives. That and a goat and two plum-trees are all I've got of this capital he talked about. What do I want their freedom for? To herd my goat on the hillside? Tell me, did we have law and order in the old days? Of course there was also exploitation, I wouldn't deny that. Take a first-class carriage—the passengers there were quiet and polite; some smoked cigars, some dozed in a dignified way. You could feel that they were exploiters, but there never was any bad language or anything. God forbid. You just saluted and passed through the carriage very quietly. In the third class, of course, people were squeezed in, all huddled together one on top of the other and you didn't stand on ceremony yourself there. All this was so, it's true. But there was also roast chicken for you, and ham, and eggs and bread, and heavens, can you remember the cakes and things?" He paused and watched the sparks through the windows. "There you are, the luggage-van is running hot again. No grease. Even without Anarchists it'll be all up with transport soon. Tell me, please: what next? We exchanged the Tsar for the *rada*, then the *rada* for a *hetman*, and what will we exchange the *hetman* for? Makhno perhaps? A fool once started to forge a ploughshare, he heated the iron, but burned half of it; then he tried to forge an axe, again burned half the iron, so it would make only an awl; he hit that with the hammer and all he had was a larding needle. Same with us now. There's no order, no discipline, no master. When you get to Gulyay-Polye you'll see how they live there in their 'free Anarchist order'. All I can say is they lead a gay life; never have I seen such high living! The whole district has been declared a 'wine district'. How many prostitutes have travelled there with me in this train! Yes. As an old man I tell you, if you'll excuse me, Mister Anarchist: Russia is done for. . . ."

Many of the better husbandmen among the peasants who had fled to join the band of some ataman in the summer were now thinking of returning home. They loaded their carts with all the loot which had fallen to their share in honest division after successful raids, exchanged various kinds of local money for the old banknotes of the Tsar, pinned them safely into their pockets, tied the cooking-pot to the back axle, harnessed their horses and drove away to their villages, hamlets and farms, now freed from the German occupation. Some departed in secret, others openly taking leave from their leader thus: "Good-bye, I am no longer your man." "Why not?" "I'm homesick; can't eat or drink or sleep. If you need us again, call us and we'll come."

Alexey Krassilnikov, too, was turning such thoughts over in his mind. He discussed it with his brother's wife, Matryona, and even with Katia Roshchin. Wasn't it time to go home? Perhaps it was too early yet? You couldn't very well appear in Vladimirskoye unnoticed, and then he might still be called to account for the killing of the German corporal. The Germans were serious folk. On the other hand the Krassilnikovs would come back to a burned house and would have to build everything afresh, and that would have to be done now, in the autumn.

Five young strong horses, with three cartloads of textiles and various household goods were the Krassilnikov share of the loot of Makhno's army. All this had been acquired by Matryona rather than by Alexey. Boldly she attended the meetings where the atamans of the detachments or Makhno himself divided the spoils. She was always beautiful, always neat and trim, always angry, and she always got everything she wanted. Occasionally a man would try to dispute her claim to some part of the booty, but the others would only laugh if she tore a shawl, a fur coat, a bolt of good cloth out of his hands, saying: "I'm a woman, I need these things more than you, you bandit; anyway, you would only sell it for a drink or bring it to me one night. . . ." She also engaged in barter and trading, keeping a barrel of vodka on tap in a cart for this purpose.

Alexey hesitated and could not make up his mind, until one day the joyful news was received that Skoropadski, abandoned by the Germans and by his own troops, had renounced the dignity of *hetman*; Petlyura's *sicheviks* had entered Kiev and there established a "democratic Ukrainian republic". At the same time a Ukrainian Red Army was moving forward from the Soviet frontier. This was altogether good news.

Without saying a word to anyone, Alexey stole out one foggy night, drove his horses in from the steppe, roused Matryona and Katia and told them to prepare breakfast while he harnessed the horses; having eaten their fill before the long journey, they set out in the dark for home, for Vladimirskoye.

It would have been difficult to recognize in the Katia Roshchin sitting on the cart in short fur coat and top-boots, with cheeks as pink as a peach, the former delicate lady utterly incapable of coping with the vicissitudes of life. Half-lying on the hay she flicked the horse with the whip to make it keep up with the leading *troika* driven by Alexey, who sometimes gave the mettlesome

young horses their head. The last cart was driven by Matryona, who would not have trusted any man alive with it.

The steppe was deserted. Here and there snow blown down by the autumn winds from the chalk plateau lay white in the folds of the ravines. Here and there the rusty pyramids of slag-heaps rose above the skyline. Life had not yet returned to the regions abandoned by the invaders. Many workers had left the pits and factories to join the Red detachments and were now fighting at Tsaritsyn. Many others had fled to the north where units of a new Ukrainian Red Army were being formed on the Soviet frontier. The roads were overgrown with weeds, the abandoned fields were full of thistle and burdock, among which the skeleton of some animal showed yellow here and there. Human dwellings were rare in this part of the world.

Matryona's maxim was to keep away from human beings and expect no good from them. Alexey laughed at this: "Look what a spitfire she is—and she used to be as sweet as honey. A money-grabber, that's what you have become, my dear Matryona."

Katia now had plenty of leisure to think things over. She rattled along in the cart, sucking a straw. She was perfectly well aware that she was being taken to Vladimirskoye as a part of Alexey Ivanovich's spoils of war—possibly the most precious for him of all the contents of the three carts. What was she other than a prisoner of war from a world which had gone to pieces? Alexey Ivanovich would build a fine new house on the ashes of the old, would surround it with a strong fence to keep people away, would hide all his treasures in his cellar and then say firmly: "Well, Katerina Dmitrievna, now there is only one more thing to be done, the last—and now it's up to you."

Her whole life seemed to her like a city burned up in the fires of war—a mere heap of ashes with only a few charred chimneys still standing. All those she loved were dead, her nearest and dearest lost to her. Recently Matryona had received a letter from Semyon, her husband. He wrote from Samara and said among other things that he had been to the address given by Katia on the former Dvoryanskaya street, but had found no Dr. Bulavin there nor anyone who knew where he and his daughter had gone. Katia now had only two people who loved and pitied her as they might a stray kitten: Alexey and Matryona. Was it possible for her to refuse them anything?

Having lived through these years, as long and as full of events as a century, she ought long since to have become an old woman with eyes dimmed by tears. But the cold wind had only reddened her cheeks and under the sheepskin coat her blood ran warm as in her youth. This feeling of unfading youth actually saddened her—she felt that her soul was old just the same. Or was that not true either?

Matryona often told Katia that God had brought them together and only God could part them again. Alexey never forced such talk on her. But several times he had run grave risks to save Katia from some serious danger: he acted as a man acts towards a woman he regards as his own; Katia could not have refused him—she would not have found words to justify such ingratitude. But she wanted to put off the decision as long as possible. Alexey Ivanovich was attractive; his rough-hewn open face always seemed lit up as if by sunshine; he was strong and imperturbable; his back was straight and his chest broad; he had a dense head of hair; he was both bold and resourceful in the face of danger and he was invariably considerate and kind to Katia.

But when she thought that a day would come when she would have to live in intimacy with him, Katia had to close her eyes and her whole body shrank away from the thought.

One day at dinner-time they turned off the road to a brook which widened here into a little pond hemmed in by reeds and in which were the broken stumps of a decayed water-mill. Matryona went to gather wood for the fire, and Katia went down to the brook to wash the cooking-pot. Soon Alexey followed her there. He threw his cap and gloves on the grass and sat down near Katia at the water's edge. He washed his face and dried it on the skirts of his coat.

"You'll chill your hands in the cold water."

Katia put down the pot on the grass and got up from her knees. Her hands were painfully cold—she shook the water off them and began to wipe them on her sheepskin coat just as Alexey had done.

"In the old days men used to kiss your hands, I suppose," Alexey said in a tense, unfriendly, challenging tone.

Katia looked at him as if asking whatever had put that in his head? She had never been aware of the power of her beauty; she naïvely thought of herself as nice-looking, sometimes even very nice-looking; she liked to be liked, like a little bird preening its feathers when a rosy sun rising between the tree-trunks begins to glitter in the grey dewdrops at dawn. But of the nature of her beauty, of the thing that now caused Alexey Ivanovich to turn away his eyes burning with a dry fire, she was quite unaware.

"What I mean is that you ought to look after your hands—I've got a bottle of sunflower-oil in the cart—you'll get chilblains else."

His lips under his stiff, curly little moustache smiled as usual and Katia sighed with relief, although she had not really understood how close she had been this time to the thing she so emphatically did not want to happen. For hardly had Matryona gone to fetch wood when Alexey began to look fixedly at Katia crouching at the water's edge. Perhaps it was the result of the long sleepy jolting in the cart, perhaps the effect of the great peace of the steppe. He stole down to the water like a village lad who suddenly hears the noise of clothes being beaten on the washing-blocks in the brook, where some wench from next door shows her white calves under the skirt tucked into her belt as she rinses the washing, while the young man secretly makes his way towards her through the thistles and nettles, greedily drawing into his nostrils all the smells which now unexpectedly make his head reel. But when Alexey Ivanovich got there he paused—not because he was afraid, he was not easily frightened—but because the look in Katia's calm and beautiful eyes told him that it would be wrong, that it would not do.

His self-control had been perfect on far more important occasions, but now his hands were trembling as if he had lifted a millstone. He picked up the pot from the grass:

"Well, let's go cook the dinner." They walked back to the camp. "Yekaterina Dmitrievna, you have had two husbands, why haven't you any children?"

"The times were not right for children. My first husband did not want any and I was silly."

"And the late Vadim Petrovich? Didn't he want any either?"

Katia frowned, turned her head away and said nothing.

"I've been wanting to ask you for a long time. You've had a lot of experience. How did these things start with you? Did your intended and your

husbands kiss your hands? Talk all round the main thing? Was that the way? How do the gentry manage these affairs?"

They reached the camp. Alexey flung the harness lying in the cart on the ground with all his strength, took the collar from under it, propped up the pole with the collar and hung up the pot at the end of the pole.

"You come from the top, from the gentry, and I was born on the top of a peasant stove. You met me on a very narrow path. There is no way back for you, that is certain. What we have not yet unwound to the end, we'll soon unwind. You have no place to go to, except to a new husband."

"Alexey Ivanovich, what have I done to offend you?"

"Nothing. It's I who want to offend you, but I can't find the words to do it. I'm just a fool of a *muzhik*. And what a fool. I can see well enough that all you are waiting for is a chance to get away. To go abroad—that would be the thing for you."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Alexey Ivanovich. Have I done anything to deserve such suspicions? I owe my life to you and I shall never forget it."

"Oh yes you will. Have you seen how Matryona is afraid of people? I don't trust people either. Ever since nineteen fourteen I have been wallowing in blood. Men have become beasts now; or perhaps they were beasts all the time, only we didn't know it. Every man's hand is against every man—all they do is to wait for the first opportunity. I am a beast too, can't you see that, you innocent little bird you. But I want my children to live in a stone house and speak French better than you do, *pardon, merci.*"

Matryona came back with an armful of brushwood and splinters, threw them under the pot hanging on the end of the cart-pole and looked attentively at Alexey and Katia.

"You oughtn't to worry her, Alexey," she said softly. "Have you watered the horses?"

Alexey turned on his heel and went to the horses. Matryona began to feed the fire under the pot.

"He's in love with you. Many's the girl I've suggested to him; he won't have any of them. I don't know how this is going to end for you both—it's hard on the pair of you," she said, and waited for Katia to make some reply. But Katia said nothing. Without a word she got out the porridge and the bacon, spread a cloth on the ground and began to cut slices off the loaf.

"Why don't you say something?"

Katia was cutting a piece of bread. She bent her head even lower and tears ran down her cheeks and dropped to the ground.

The fertile steppe of the Yekaterinoslav region, running down to the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, was a new land. This was the same wild steppe which in olden times had been crossed by squat, fat, long-haired Scythians on ponies shoulder-high in the grass; by well-guarded Greek merchants trading between Olvia and Tanais; by the Goths and their herds, wandering in vast processions from sea to sea; after them from the northern borders of China, like a cloud of locusts, came the many-tongued hordes of the Huns, spreading such terror that the steppe emptied of its inhabitants and remained deserted for centuries; here the Khazars pitched their striped Aramaic tents, coming from Derbent to conquer Russia on the Dnieper; the Polovtses roamed here with great herds of horses and camels, with silken tents from Bokhara, halting

only at the wall of Sviatoslav; later, this same steppe was trampled by the light-footed horsemen of the Tartar hordes gathering here to raid Moscow.

Waves of men came and went, leaving only grave-mounds behind and here and there stone idols with flat faces and tiny hands folded over their bellies. The steppe around Yekaterinoslav began to be settled by Ukrainian and Russian tillers, by Cossack emigrants from the Don and Kuban, by colonists from Germany. Everything was new here: the giant villages and countless homesteads without ancestral customs, without ancient songs, without opulent gardens and waterways. It was a land of wheat and of businesslike landowners who were perfectly well-informed regarding the price of wheat in the international market. New, too, was Gulyay-Polye—a dull little township straggling along the little river Gaichur, which was for ever either in flood or down to a trickle.

From the railway station to Gulyay-Poley it was seven miles across the steppe. Roshchin hired a *phaeton* which took him to the great open-air bazaar. He began to bargain for a roasted chicken with an insolent peasant woman sitting astride a wagon full of village stuff brought in for sale. The woman was inexperienced and excited: one moment she pushed her wares under the customers' noses, the next she snatched them out of their hands, cursing them shrilly and turning her head from side to side fearing that something would be stolen from her wagon. For her roast chicken she first wanted five *karbovantsy*, but immediately thought better of it and would not sell it for money, only barter it for a reel of sewing cotton.

"Take the money, you silly woman," Roshchin told her; "you can buy the cotton yourself, there's a hawker over there selling some."

"I can't leave the cart, put your money away and leave the goods alone."

After that Roshchin pushed his way through to a bewhiskered soldier hung about with every kind of weapon, who wandered about the bazaar shaking two reels of cotton on his open palm. He gazed at Roshchin out of dim eyes and muttered between swollen lips:

"No. Want to exchange them for liquor."

Thus Roshchin failed after all to buy his chicken. Trade in the bazaar was chiefly barter on quite barbarous lines: values were determined solely by need; for a couple of sewing needles people gave a piglet and something more on top of that, and for a pair of unpatched cloth trousers the seller would ask a perfectly preposterous price in kind. Hundreds of people were bargaining, shouting, cursing and jostling each other among a crowd of wagons; here, on a stool, or simply on a cart-wheel, barbers plied their trade; photographers with a camera and laboratory on a tripod delivered a rough print to the customer within five minutes; blind fiddlers gathered a circle of listeners round them and were not too particular about picking the pockets of the gaping suckers. All these people were ready at an instant's notice to leave their pitches and scurry to cover if any serious shooting started, shooting being a feature without which no market-day was ever held in Gulyay-Polye.

Threading his way between the wagons, Roshchin found himself in an idle crowd gathered round a merry-go-round; whiskered men in hussar tunics, sailor jumpers or cavalry dolmans, festooned with hand-grenades and every sort of firearms and cold steel, were riding with an important air the prancing, arched-necked wooden horses of the merry-go-round. "Faster! Faster!" repeated one of them in a menacing bass. Two ragamuffins were turning the merry-go-round by hand with all their strength. Two accordion-players were playing a popular song hit, pulling out their bellows as furiously as if they were

drawing into them all the boldness and greatness of heart of the Makhno freebooters. "Enough, come off it!" shouted those who were waiting their turn! "Faster!" roared those who were riding the wooden horses. But already one man had thrown his cap on the ground, another had drawn his sabre and was flourishing it as if to slash at some imagined monster. Now those standing around the merry-go-round closed in and pulled the riders off the wooden horses; there was turmoil, much whistling, the thud of fists and soon the merry-go-round was turning again with a new lot of riders, hands on hips, sitting the scarlet-nostrilled horses.

Roshchin passed on, finding no one here whom he might ask any sensible questions. He bought a piece of cheese cake from a street vendor and chewed it as he walked along the wide cobbled street. He would have to find a place to spend the night. He had little money left and considering how much he had to pay for the cake he would run out of money inside a week. He stared absent-mindedly at the two-storeyed brick houses, the shops, the painted signs; and his thinking, too, was absent-minded—after his leap into freedom the lesser troubles of life did not worry him overmuch.

As he walked along, a man came from the opposite direction riding a bicycle inexpertly and wobbling the front wheel. Behind him were two cavalrymen on horseback in black Caucasian coats and tilted sheepskin hats. The man on the bicycle was small and slight; he wore grey trousers and a school uniform coat; his long hair hung almost to his shoulders under a blue schoolboy cap piped with white. As Roshchin came up with this man, he saw with amazement that he had a haggard face and no eyebrows. The man darted Roshchin a piercing glance, his front wheel wobbled again and, righting it with an effort so great that it wrinkled his yellow, unhealthy face, he rode on.

A minute later one of the troopers turned his horse, rode back to Roshchin at a short trot, bent down in his saddle and scrutinized him with searching eyes.

"What do you want?" asked Roshchin.

"Who are you? Where from?"

"Who I am?" Roshchin turned his face away from the powerful smell of onion and raw spirits. "I am a free man. I am from Yekaterinoslav."

"From Yekaterinoslav?" the trooper asked in a menacing tone. "And what do you want here?"

"I am looking for my wife."

"Looking for your wife, are you? And why did you cut off your shoulder-straps?"

Trembling with fury, Roshchin answered as calmly as he could:

"Because I wanted to. What business is it of yours?"

"That's a bold answer."

"Well, don't try to frighten me. I don't frighten easily."

The trooper again scanned Roshchin's face as if searching for a suitable reply, then suddenly straightened up, his twisted asymmetrical face widened in a grin, he put spurs to his horse and galloped after the cyclist. Roshchin walked on; he was so excited by this encounter that he stumbled again and again.

Very soon he was overtaken by the same three men. The cyclist with the schoolboy cap cried in a shrill voice that pierced the ear:

"If he won't tell us, he'll tell Levka. . . ."

The troopers laughed coarsely and hemmed Roshchin in with their horses from either side. The cyclist rode on, treading his pedals with all the energy

of a drunken man. "Come on, hurry up," said the troopers, forcing Roshchin almost to run between their horses. There was little point in making a protest or trying to escape. They stopped on the same street in front of a brick house with a garden and trampled flower-beds. The windows were whitewashed, a black flag hung over the door and under the flag was a plywood sign: "Cultural and Educational Department of Batko Makhno's National-Revolutionary Army."

Roshchin was so angry that he hardly felt them hustle him into the house and lead him along dark corridors into a dirty room, the floor of which was dotted with spittle and the sour smell of which took his breath away. Immediately afterwards a fat, shiny, smiling man waddled in. He was wearing a short tight jacket such as affected by provincial comic-opera lions and music-hall comedians.

"What is it?" he asked, and sat down at a wobbly little table from which he first swept the cigarette stubs.

"The *batko* said to find out all about this fellow," said the twisted-faced man who had brought in Roshchin.

"All right, you can go, Comrade Karetnik." Karetnik left the room. "Sit down, you."

"Listen," said Roshchin nervously to the smiling fat man, "I am quite aware that I am in the counter-espionage department. I am quite willing to explain who I am, and why I am here. I came here to . . ."

"Take a good look at me," said the fat man, without paying any attention to what Roshchin was saying. "I am Lev Zadov; you needn't spin me any yarn. I'll ask you questions and you give me the answers."

Levka Zadov's name was as well known in the south as that of *Batko* Makhno himself. Levka was Makhno's hangman, a man of such incredible cruelty that Makhno himself, it was said, was on the point of killing him more than once, but always spared him because of Levka's devotion to himself. Roshchin had heard of the man, like everyone else. For the first time he felt a twinge of fear. He was standing in front of the table, behind which sat Levka, fat, curly-headed, red-cheeked, enjoying his power over the other man and the fear he inspired.

"Well, let's have a chat. Are you a Denikin officer?"

"I was."

"You were, eh? Hm. Where did you come from?"

"From Yekaterinoslav to Gulyay-Polye. I was just telling you. . . ."

"Come, come. Why tell me you came from Yekaterinoslav when I know you came from Rostov?"

"No; I came from Yekaterinoslav."

Roshchin hastily began to grope in his pockets for his railway ticket and grew cold at the thought that he might have thrown it away. But the ticket was in the pocket of his tunic together with a faded and crumpled photograph of Katia. He gave Levka the ticket. Levka turned and twisted it about for a long time and held it up to the light. The ticket was perfectly in order and this somewhat annoyed Levka, who had already obviously quite made up his mind about everything—including the sentence. Now this ticket altered the whole picture. Levka stopped smiling and his thick lips quivered as he asked:

"Then why, if you carry dispatches to Denikin, did you get out at Gulyay-Polye?"

"I am not carrying dispatches. I left the army two months ago. I am

no longer a serving officer. I tore up my military papers. I came here as a free man."

Levka's black eyes never left Roshchin's face. Under those eyes, in which there was nothing human or reasonable, Roshchin made every effort to control his excitement and give sensible answers. He was just beginning to explain in a simplified form the reasons which induced him to desert, when Levka interrupted him.

"You son-of-a-bitch, if you go on telling me lies," he said softly, "I'll do things to you that not even Sodom did to Gomorra."

With a rapid, pick-pocket-like movement he snatched Katia's photograph from Roshchin's hand. He looked at it with the smile of a man who appreciated feminine charms, then flicked his fingers at it:

"And who is this tart?"

"My wife. It is because of her that I came. Give me back the photograph."

"We'll put it on your bloody corpse," said Levka, and covered the photograph with his thick puffy hand. "Well, let me hear your information."

"Not another word will I tell you," shouted Roshchin.

"Oh yes you will. Everybody talks to me." Levka rose slightly and struck Roshchin in the face. The blow was badly aimed, it hit Roshchin on the temple and he fell down unconscious.

The enemies of the Soviet republic imagined that it was doomed to fall under their blows in a very short time. But the republic mobilized all the moral and material resources of the nation, all the refinements of learning and science for the offensive against its enemies. The military plan of the Bolsheviks consisted in this: while they subordinated everything to defence, they never for an instant relaxed the carrying out of profound social changes, fearlessly putting into practice principles, the realization of which seemed outside the possibilities of the present day; further, their aim was to create a Red Army of three million men, fight a holding war in the North, attack in Siberia and in the southern Urals but direct the main thrust of the offensive against Krassnov's Cossacks on the Don and against Denikin in the northern Caucasus.

The Russian Soviet Republic, assailed on all sides by White armies, had created a front more than a thousand miles long; to this was now added the intricate and confused Ukrainian front.

The civil war flamed up with particular bitterness in the rich Ukrainian countryside. At this time its population was profoundly disunited through the recent German occupation, the *Hetman's* régime and the vindictive restoration of the landowners. The industrial and mining district of the Donets basin, the smallholding peasantry and the landless agricultural labourers favoured Soviet power; the rich peasants and the middle class, fearing the revolutionary committees, the poor peasants' committees, the Soviet executive committees, the commissars and the grain tax, sided with the *samostiinist* directorium and its head, *Batko* Petlyura. Petlyura also found support among the section of the intellectuals whose attitude towards the whole immense problem of the Soviet revolution could be expressed in the words: "We won't have anything to do with the damned Muscovites." The old nationalist romanticism of the wide trousers, the Black Sea, Ukrainian hair-locks, Cossack jackets and curved sabres screened the mournful historical truth that the Ukrainian people had vainly struggled for its independence during three centuries at the cost of heavy and bloody sacrifices.

Petlyura overthrew the *Hetman*, settled in Kiev with his directorium, proclaimed the Ukraine an independent republic and began a hopeless struggle against the proletarian revolution. He had a few divisions consisting of some of the *Hetman's* troops which had gone over to his side, of a number of reliable, disciplined Galicians who believed that their old dream of union with a free Ukraine would now come true at last, and finally of all sorts of desperadoes, the scum of the earth, who lived by looting. But he was not shrewd or not cunning enough to offer the Ukrainian peasants, disunited and restless as they were, anything more tangible than *Universals* couched in stilted language. And he had no reserves.

In December an underground Soviet government of the Ukraine was formed in the little town of Sudzha in the Poltava district. The chairman of the Tsaritsyn military council sent Voroshilov, commander of the Tenth Army, to Sudzha with instructions to join the new government. A revolutionary military council was also set up in Sudzha.

By this time the regular Ukrainian Red Army, formed near Kursk long before these events, consisting mainly of Ukrainian peasants escaping from persecution and numbering about two divisions, had begun its offensive toward the west with Kiev as its objective, and towards the south with Kharkov and Yekaterinoslav as its goal. Two divisions were obviously insufficient for these tasks, but it was hoped to gain the support of partisan groups, the strongest of which was the army of *Batko* Makhno.

Meanwhile Makhno was giving himself a good time. In his schoolboy uniform, part of the booty gained in the raid on Berdyansk, he rode his bicycle about the town, or staggered along the street with his aide, Karetnik, shouting songs to the accompaniment of an accordion; sometimes he turned up in the market, pale and evil, looking for trouble. On these occasions everyone ran and hid from him, knowing how easily a gun would leap out of his trousers pocket. Husky freebooters of his own bands, who feared neither God nor devil, got off their wooden horses and slunk away if they caught sight of him near the merry-go-round. There was nothing for the *batko* but to make a twosome of it with Karetnik on the merry-go-round until his head swam.

All Gulyay-Polye was full of rumours that the *batko* had been drinking too much recently and might drink his army away. Only very few guessed that he was playing a game. He was cunning, secretive and tough—like a hunted beast.

Makhno was playing for time. He was due to make a great decision very soon. The Germans and the *Hetman* with his *sicheviks*, all those against whom Makhno had been fighting, had gone from the district of Yekaterinoslav. The landowners had run away. The small towns had been looted to the limit. And now fresh enemies were moving against him from three directions: Denikin's Volunteers from the Crimea and Kuban; the Bolsheviks from the north; from the Dnieper Petlyura's men, who had just taken Yekaterinoslav. Which of these was most to be feared? Against which of them should he turn his machine-guns? A quick decision was imperative. The army was dwindling and showing signs of disintegration. Men of peasant stock began to say: "Good job the Bolsheviks are coming to the Ukraine; now we can go home, and anyone who wants to go on fighting can stick a red star in his cap." The core of the army—it styled itself 'Kropotkin's Black Company'—consisted of adventurers who had long lost the habit of work and had grown used to a life of unbridled license on horseback. They shouted such things as: "If the *batko* wants to sell out to the Bolsheviks, we'll cut him to pieces in front of the army

and that will be that. Petlyura has taken Yekaterinoslav and all we do is wait. We've eaten everything up; we've got no boots or clothes; soon we can go and howl with the wolves in the steppe. . . . Brothers, let's go and take Yekaterinoslav!".

Chugay, a sailor who was the delegate sent by the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Red Army, was in Gulyay-Polye. He had arrived three days before and had waited imperturbably for Makhno to sleep off his liquor and talk things over with him. At the same time another visitor had arrived from Kharkov to talk to the *batko*. This was a famous philosopher and a member of the secretariat of the Anarchist Federation. Meanwhile, the local Anarchists, members of Makhno's military-political council and his closest advisers, were always at the *batko's* heels and jealously warned him to listen to no one and preserve the "supreme freedom of his personality".

Makhno understood well enough that if he failed to take a firm decision now, and a decision acceptable to his army, that would be the end of his cause and of his glory. His choice was limited to two alternatives. One was to submit to the Bolsheviks, obey the orders of the commander-in-chief and carry on until in the end he would be shot for indiscipline. The other was to kill the delegate Chugay and raise the flag of a peasant rebellion against all government in the Ukraine. But was the time suitable for this? He was afraid of making a mistake.

His thoughts were so secret that it would have been dangerous to express them even to those faithful dogs Levka and Karetnik. Makhno felt oppressed by these his own thoughts. Meanwhile the army was waiting. Chugay, the delegate, and the little old man, the famous Anarchist from Kharkov, waited likewise. Makhno drank—but he drank warily; his carousing was a bluff, his eye remained sharp, his ear on the alert; he saw everything, knew everything, and was inwardly seething with fury.

Soon after he had given the order to arrest and take to Levka the man in the officer's greatcoat who said he came from Yekaterinoslav, Makhno himself arrived at the Cultural and Educational Department on his bicycle, which he rode straight into the examination room. Levka Zadov, after having hit Roshchin so unfortunately, was sitting at the table, propping up his chin with both fists placed one on top of the other. Makhno glanced at the man lying unconscious on the floor, leant the bicycle against the wall and asked:

"What have you done to him?"

"Just patted him on the head," Levka said.

"Fool! Have you killed him?"

"How should I know? I'm not a doctor."

"Did you question him?" Levka only shrugged his shoulders. "Is he from Yekaterinoslav? What did he say? Is he a Denikin scout?"

Makhno looked at Levka, and the look was so piercing, so unbearable, that Levka turned his eyes up under his eyelids to escape it.

"He must have some information. Where is it? You're playing with your life, Levka."

"But I had only just started, Nestor Ivanovich. I haven't found out anything yet. Damn the son-of-a-bitch, he's so delicate."

At this moment Roshchin groaned and drew up his knees. Levka was glad and said:

"There you are. He's coming to."

Makhno had taken his bicycle again when he saw Katia's photograph lying on the table. He seized it, looked at it and asked:

"Who is it? His wife?"

Like all self-centred, suspicious men of great will-power and much experience of life, Makhno had an excellent memory. He immediately recalled Katia's first appearance in Gulyay-Polye, when he wanted her to manicure his nails, remembered how Alexey Krassilnikov had intervened on her behalf and all the information he had been given about this beautiful woman. He slipped the photograph into his pocket and stopped near Roshchin as he wheeled his bicycle past him. Roshchin's face was regaining colour, his mouth was slightly open.

"Bring him to me, I'll question him myself."

During these days of debauch one thing had firmly impressed itself on Makhno's mind: that he would have to lead the army against Yekaterinoslav, take the city by storm and hoist the black flag of Anarchy over the town hall. Such a success would satisfy the army and restore morale. Yekaterinoslav was rich; there were enough textiles and all sorts of other goods for the whole district; it would be possible to fling bolts of cloth and gingham from wagons and carts in every village and hamlet, scatter sugar by the shovelful, throw ribbons, braids, stockings and shoes to the girls and shout: "Here are presents for you from *Batko* Makhno! Here's the free way of life, without governments, landowners, *burzhuys*, soviets or chekas!"

All the rest had been still undecided. But just now, as he looked at Katia's photograph, he had suddenly found the solution; it had jumped up in his mind like a jack-in-the-box. He gave no sign, although his heart leapt with joy. He mounted his bicycle and rode along the street to a long house with large windows, flanked by bare poplar trees. This was the school, now his headquarters, where he and his aides lived.

An hour later Roshchin was brought to him. First came Levka, then Roshchin; a Makhno man wearing a marten cap made of a priest's collar and adorned with a black ribbon, brought up the rear and pushed Roshchin forward with the barrel of a revolver digging into the small of his back. Makhno was sitting on a chintz-covered sofa which showed its springs.

"What's this?" he shouted in his shrill high voice. "Playing Tsarist policemen, are you? Put away that gun! Get out!" He jerked his chin at the guard, who ran out of the room as fast as his legs could carry him after one look at Makhno's yellow, haggard face. Makhno got up from the sofa, clenched his fist and struck Levka in the face, on the mouth, on the nose.

"Hangman!" he shrilled. "Drunkard! Syphilitic! You befoul our ideals! You befoul me!"

Levka Zadov knew the *batko* very well; he did not wait for his anger to unfold fully, but drawing his head in between his fleshy shoulders and fending off the blows with his hands, he beat a hasty retreat, slipped through the door and closed it from outside.

Makhno took off his cap—his forehead was moist. He sat down again on his sofa. He looked more than ever like a sectarian priest.

"Sit down, please," he said, and indicated a chair with his long thin hand. "We may have to shoot you, but it is a disgrace just the same not to respect your human dignity. Have a cigarette. You are a spy?"

"No," Roshchin replied in an expressionless voice, smiled wryly and took a cigarette.

"You are a Volunteer officer?"

"I was, but I deserted. I had enough of it. But what's the point in my telling you these things; you won't believe me, anyway."

"No one lies to me," Makhno said in his high-pitched voice with the peculiar tone which it would have been very difficult to translate into notes, and which seemed to Roshchin to resemble the clucking of a hen. "No one lies to me," he repeated, and indeed his dry, unblinking eyes expressed such a force of will that men found it difficult to look into them. Those who tried to resist that gaze often burst into tears. But Roshchin did not flinch under those eyes. His head was splitting after the recent blow, but he conquered the pain and gathered all his strength for this last encounter.

"If you want information on the Volunteer Army, ask me questions. But my information is stale; I left the army on leave two months ago. This spring I made a false step and the price I must pay is life. You intend to shoot me. But I wouldn't escape a bullet for my mistake in any case, now or at some later date."

A spark of mirth glinted in Makhno's eyes for an instant. Roshchin thought: *he doesn't believe me.* He drew in the smoke of his cigarette deeply, put down the stub on the edge of the table, stuck his hands in his belt and thought: *wait, I'll show you. . . .*

"First of all: how did I come to be in the White camp? I just rolled into it like an apple rolls downhill. How? Well, we were the Russian *intelligentsia*, the salt of the earth, of course; we read Mikhailovski, Kant, Kropotkin and even Bebel, apart from other consoling books. I remember spending many a sleepless night with Alexey Borovy in just such discussions." As he expected, the mention of this name made an impression on Makhno; his eyes flickered, but only for an instant, not more. Roshchin continued: "We were full of great expectations. And then—the February revolution! Our expectations left a sour taste in the mouth. Instead of a splendid festival there were only the dirty boulevards littered with the husks of sunflower seeds, and the common sailors and the common soldiers—it was not a great country any longer, only a sort of dough, a sour dough without salt."

Makhno was fidgeting on the sofa and suddenly, without being aware of it, he pulled up his legs and clasped his hands around his bony knees, as men sit on the ground at a picnic. An expression of dog-like attention crept into his eyes.

"The *intelligentsia* found itself pushed aside. And then in October—they just took us by the scruff of the neck like kittens and put us down the drain. Actually that is the whole story. The Volunteer Army is just an all-Russian sewer. There is, and can be, nothing constructive or even reconstructive in it. But it can do a great deal of harm, serious harm. It's a pity I did not understand this until it was too late. But still, I am glad I understand it at last. So there you are, Nestor Ivanovich (somehow it seemed natural for Roshchin to call Makhno by his first name), I ought not to go on living, nor do I want to particularly. But there is somebody, a person dearer to me than all the philosophies in the world, dearer to me than my conscience. That's what kept me alive."

"She?" Makhno asked suddenly, and showed the photograph.

"Yes."

"Take it; I don't want it."

Roshchin put Katia's photograph in the pocket of his tunic, picked up the stub of his cigarette and drew at it. His hands were steady. He had not lost the thread of his story. . . .

"So I tore up my pay-book and came here, following her trail. And once I have taken a fresh grip on life, I must have a philosophy, an ideology—we are not just tradesmen, after all. The only thing that is acceptable to me, quite abstractly, of course, quite abstractly—is absolute freedom, wild freedom, even if it is crazy or impossible. If one must die, it should be for something reaching out beyond the bounds of the imagination."

"Still, you had better give me those dispatches. Where have you hidden them?" Makhno said softly.

Roshchin stopped in the middle of a word, turned away, and made a weak hopeless gesture with his hand. For a long while Makhno sat motionless on his sofa. Then he suddenly jumped up and began to dig into a pile of things heaped up in one corner of the room and including weapons, saddles, harness, rolls of paper, until he found what he wanted. He fished out several tins, two bottles of vodka, put it all on the table and began to open a tin of sardines, assiduously turning the key.

"I'll take you on to my staff," he said. "Your wife is in the sixth company, in the hamlet of Prokhladnoye, with Krassilnikov. A delegate from the Bolsheviks will be coming presently. Let him think that I am negotiating with the Volunteers. Your job will be to give him that impression. Get that? Do you play cards?"

This time Roshchin was really disconcerted. He only blinked and gave up trying to understand why the whole situation had changed so completely and what it all meant. Makhno had broken the key of the sardine tin; he pulled out of his pocket a knife with a handle of mother-of-pearl and a hundred blades and went on opening tins of pineapple, *pâté-de-foie-gras*, and lobster, which spread a sharp smell through the room.

"There is always time enough to shoot you, but I want to make use of you," Makhno said, as if he were answering Roshchin's thoughts. "Are you a field officer or a staff man?"

"In the World War I was chief of staff to General Ewert."

"Well, now you will be on the staff of *Batko* Makhno. When I was a convict in the time of the Tsar, the screws picked me up by the head and by the feet and threw me down on the brick floor. That is how leaders of the people are tempered. Can you understand that?"

The telephone rang in a yellow box standing on the floor among all the muddle. Makhno sat on his heels and shouted into the receiver with his clucking voice:

"Yes, I'm expecting you."

The Bolshevik delegate Chugay was a slow-moving, very strong man, in a worn but very neat sailor jumper and a peakless sailor cap pushed to the back of his head. He sat holding his cards in a way which made it impossible for others to look over them and watched Makhno's every movement with his bright, widely-spaced eyes. His broad face with the high cheekbones and little black moustache was impassive and expressionless. Only the bentwood chair creaked now and then under his weight. He could have been taken just as he was, with only his legs (now sheathed in bell-bottomed trousers and wide, short leggings) bent under him and put him cross-legged to sit on seven bronze snakes with open mouths; he would have made a perfect heathen idol.

They were playing 'Goat'—a game invented at the front in order to forget wounds and alarms over its jokes and laughter. As soon as the guests had arrived, Makhno immediately suggested the game without even getting up from his seat or shaking hands. He dealt the hands so quickly that the eye could not follow his movements, threw a thousand-*karbovanets* note on the table

and covered it with a lobster tin. But Chugay took his two cards and put them under the same tin.

"Afraid?" asked Makhno.

Chugay answered:

"No; but this is the way I play."

Makhno, who was holding his cards under the table, sat leaning back in his chair with his back to the door and an empty space behind him—a circumstance which did not escape Chugay. On his left he had Roshchin and on his right Leon Cherny, the celebrity from Kharkov, a tousled little man of indeterminate age, very thin, without any lungs in his narrow chest, one of those people who seem to live by the spirit alone. His crumpled jacket was littered with dandruff and grey hairs and he absent-mindedly held his cards so that everyone could see them.

On his way there he had prepared for a hard battle with Chugay, who intended to usurp Makhno and his army—a prospect fraught with unlimited possibilities. Leon Cherny's thoughts were concentrated, like dynamite in a can. Somewhat taken aback by the fact that instead of fighting a pitched battle against the Bolshevik, he had to play 'goat' with him, he played the wrong cards or dropped them under the table and had already been the 'goat' four times in succession. "Ba-a-a, ba-a-a, stinker!" Makhno had shouted at him, laughing with his mouth, but not with his eyes.

After each game Makhno stretched out his hand to the bottle with an ape-like gesture and poured out vodka into cups and glasses, taking good care that all should drink equal quantities. The conversation round the table was of the most trivial kind, as if in truth a group of friends had gathered to while away the time on a dismal evening with the rain lashing at the windows and the wind in the bare poplars flanking the house bending them and whistling and shrieking like a soul in torment.

Makhno was playing a waiting game. Chugay, too, was waiting, prepared for all eventualities, especially since he had gathered from various hints dropped by his host that the taciturn, courteous, grey-haired man with dark rings around his eyes who was the fourth at the table, was an officer of Denikin's army. It was obvious that the first to break the spell would be Leon Cherny; he had already taken out a dirty handkerchief, rolled it nervously into a little lump and was raising it to his eyes and nose after each glass of vodka he drank. Now he started the ball rolling.

"Back in Paris I already started an argument with you Bolsheviks," he said in an aggrieved tone, gesturing with his hand of cards towards Chugay. "The argument is not decided yet and no one has yet proved that Lenin is right. A workers' and peasants' state instead of a feudal-bourgeois state is still a state. It's just one government in place of another. Just taking off the broadcloth coat and putting on one of fustian. And they think they'll establish classless society!"

He gave a short laugh and pressed his handkerchief to his dry lips. Chugay's face showed no expression, he merely stared at the tin of lobster, drew it closer to him and helped himself to the biggest piece his fork could hold.

"What is your suggestion then, I'd like to hear. Anarchy, the mother of order?"

"Destruction!" Leon Cherny croaked in a voice hoarse with drinking, and the matted strands of his grizzled beard bristled with fury. "Destruction of this whole criminal society! Merciless destruction! Leave not a stone standing, level it all down to the bare earth! So that no new states, governments, cities, towns, factories, Capital can ever be reborn from the accursed seed. . . ."

"And who is going to live on your bare earth?"

"The people!"

"The people!" exclaimed Makhno, and leant over towards Chugay. "The free people!"

"Why start with shouting?" said Chugay. "If you do that you must finish with shooting." He took the bottle and poured out for everyone. Leon Cherny pushed his glass away and spilled the liquor. "To go and smash things up is quite easy. But how do you propose to live after that?"

Leon Cherny got his answer in first, before Makhno could say a word.

"Our task is destruction: terrible, complete, merciless destruction. All the energies, all the passions of our generation will be expended in this. You are a prisoner, sailor, prisoner of an earthbound, cowardly way of thinking. How are the people to live once the state is destroyed? Ha-ha, how they are to live?'

Makhno cut in quickly: "Here I disagree, comrade Cherny. I don't propose to destroy small enterprises, or co-operative societies, or peasant small-holdings."

"So you are just as much of a coward as this Bolshevik?"

"Come now, you can't charge Nestor Ivanovich with cowardice," said Chugay, with a glance of approval at Makhno, whose haggard face was as red as if it had been near a fire. "Nestor Ivanovich did not spare his blood, everybody knows that. We're not going to let you have him just like that. We're going to fight for him."

"Fight? All right, begin. Try it," Leon Cherny said with unexpected calm. Even his beard was no longer bristling. He attacked a pie with absent-minded greed. Chugay looked askance at Roshchin, but Roshchin was smoking with an air of indifference, his eyes on the ceiling. Nestor Ivanovich was showing his big yellow teeth in a voiceless laugh. '*Oho, a put-up job,*' Chugay thought to himself. The chair creaked under him as he shifted in his seat. Apart from the necessity of carrying out the instructions of the commander-in-chief, which were to induce Makhno to take joint action with the Soviets, in the first place against Yekaterinoslav, Chugay had every reason to fear serious consequences of an organizational nature in the event of an unsuccessful debate with this Anarchist who had probably read hundreds of fat books. Nor did he like the taciturn Denikin officer—he could see by his dial that he was an intellectual. Not for a moment did Chugay believe, of course, that he was a member of Makhno's staff.

He pushed his cap further back on his head and began:

"I'll ask you a question."

Leon Cherny, his mouth full of pie, answered: "Go ahead."

"Comrade Lenin said that in six months there will be three million men in the Red Army. Could you, Leon Cherny, mobilize three million Anarchists in that time?"

"I am sure I could."

"Am I to understand that you have the necessary machinery for this?"

"There is my machinery," said Leon Cherny, pointing at Makhno with his fork.

"Very good. Let's keep that in mind. So you will supply Nestor Ivanovich with arms and supplies sufficient for three million combatants, that is to say with ammunition and food for men and animals. Such an army would need

about half a million horses alone. Am I to understand that you have all this?"

Leon Cherny pushed the empty tin away. His forehead was drawn into a multitude of small wrinkles.

"Listen, sailor, you can't frighten me with a lot of figures. Behind your figures there is nothing but emptiness, vain attempts to darn with a rotten thread this Russia which is falling apart into a thousand shreds. This is just another form of nationalism! Three million soldiers in the Red Army! Do you think you're scaring me? Mobilize thirty million if you like. The sacred revolution, the real one, will pass your millions of peasants with red star badges by just the same. Our army," here he struck the table with his little fist, "is the whole human race, our ammunition is the sacred wrath of the nations which are no longer willing to tolerate any state, or capitalism or dictatorship of the proletariat. The sun, the earth and man is enough! Burn all books from Aristotle to Marx! An army! Five hundred thousand horses! Your imagination cannot rise above a pair of sergeant-major's moustaches. You can have them. We shall arm a milliard and a half of men, and if we have only our teeth and nails and the stones at our feet, we shall overthrow your armies, and turn into a heap of ruins the whole of civilization, everything you are clinging to so desperately, sailor."

The old chap's easy, thought Chugay as he watched Makhno who, at first tensely attentive, was now slumping in his chair, the colour fading from his sunken cheeks; he had ceased to understand Cherny and felt that his teacher was overstepping the bounds of common sense.

Chugay now said:

"I have a second question for you, Leon Cherny."

"Let's have it."

"I understand from you that you have made no preparations for a general mobilization. But every device needs something to set it off—a bomb needs a fuse, a fire needs a match. What sort of a setting-off are you counting on? Where are your cadres? Only *Batko* Makhno?"

Leon Cherny's eyes were straying—he was searching for the trap. Chugay went on:

"Nestor Ivanovich's army is good, that's true, but the percentage of Anarchists in it is not very great. It is not your army."

He squinted towards Makhno to see whether the *batko* was putting his hand in his pocket for his gun, but Makhno was sitting quietly. Leon Cherny smiled contemptuously:

"Our conversation has come to a point where I must teach you the most elementary things, sailor."

"Glad to learn them."

"The bandit world—there's our fuse, there are our cadres! Robbery is the most honourable expression of the people's soul. That must be kept in mind. The robber is the inexorable enemy of all state organization, including your Socialism, my dear man. Robbery is the touchstone of the vitality of a people. The robber is irrepressible and irreconcilable, he destroys for the sake of destruction—he is the true, the elementary genius of the people. Open your eyes."

While this passionate explosion of ideas was taking place, Makhno had tiptoed to the door, opened it a little, looked out into the passage and then returned to the table. Roshchin was by now watching the fantastic old man with some curiosity—he could not make out whether he was in earnest or merely fooling.

"I see that you are already blinking, sailor—you are shocked, your virtue is outraged!" shouted Leon Cherny. "Well, know that we have broken our pens and poured the ink out of our inkpots. Let blood flow now! The time has come! The word is being transmuted into action. And whoever in this hour fails to understand the profound necessity of robbery as an elementary movement, who does not sympathize with it, is thereby revealed as an enemy of the revolution."

Makhno was biting his nails and screwing up his eyes. Roshchin thought: *No, the old man knows very well what he is saying.* Chugay bent forward, put his elbow on the table and raised his forefinger as if to give Leon Cherny something to concentrate upon.

"Now for my third question," Chugay said. "Very good. You have mobilized your cadres; you have done your work. But this whole mess must come to an end some time, mustn't it? Of course it must. Your robbers—we call them bandits—are a spoilt lot, they don't want to work. Why should they, if they can take whatever they like wherever they find it? So what? Will somebody again have to work for them? No? But when nothing more is left to loot and destroy? What will you do then? Drive all these bandits into a ravine and kill them off? Yes or no? Answer me this question, please."

It was very quiet now in the room, as if everyone in it had concentrated all their attention on Chugay's raised forefinger and its crooked nail. Leon Cherny stood up—he was very small and looked much taller when he sat.

"Shoot him," he said, turning to Makhno and extending his hand towards Chugay. "Shoot him. He is an *agent provocateur*."

At these words Makhno jumped back towards the door; Chugay quickly put his hand to the holster he wore under his jumper; Roshchin stepped back from the table, but stumbled and sat down heavily on the sofa. But no one pulled a gun; they all knew that once weapons were drawn a shooting affray would be inevitable. Makhno's eyes were bright with tension. Chugay said in an admonitory tone: "Come, come, old 'un, this isn't fair. You make use of cheap tricks instead of arguments. As for the *provocateur*, for that I ought to give you a taste of this." He raised a fist so formidable that Leon Cherny's face twitched painfully. "But taking into consideration your weak chest, I'll pass that over. But you should be more careful with your words, old 'un."

Again Makhno made no attempt to intervene in defence of his teacher. Leon Cherny bent his head as if to hide his face in his beard, took his coat—it had a shabby fur collar which might have been beaver once—his no less ancient velvet cap, put them on and left the room, boldly carrying off his defeat.

"Well, what next?" said Makhno, returning to the table and picking up the bottle. "Comrade Roshchin, you had better see the orderly and tell him to show you where you bunk."

Roshchin saluted and left the room. As he closed the door he heard Makhno saying to Chugay:

"This one says 'Hey, you *Batko* Makhno'; the other one says 'Hey, you *Batko* Makhno'—let's hear what *you* have to say to *Batko* Makhno."

CHAPTER XII

ONLY WHEN HE had reached Vladimirskoye and his home, when he had walked over the ashes of his house, now covered with snow; when he had drawn into his nostrils the smoke of his neighbours' chimneys and watched the fat geese spread their wings proudly and run half-flying over the frosty meadow—did Alexey Krassilnikov fully realize how utterly sick he had been of life among the bandits.

This gadding about in carts in the steppe among burning homesteads was not the thing for a farmer. A farmer's business was to think out carefully what to do with the land and then to work it. Mother Earth will give you all you need if you are not lazy. Everything gladdened Alexey Ivanovich's heart—the thoughts of husbandry to which he had become unaccustomed during his time with Makhno, the soft grey light, the slowly falling rare snowflakes, the village quiet and the smoke of the home fires. As he strolled about among the ashes of his home he would pick up a bit of rusty sheet-iron here, a nail or a bit of iron there among the cinders and throw them into one heap. Not the booty he had brought home in three wagons was dear to him, but the fact that now he would be able to build a house and equip his farm without having to consider every rouble. From the time the first stake would be driven into the ashes to the day when Matryona would take the first bread baked from their own grain out of the oven ('a new oven', she would say, 'and yet how well it bakes') there would be work to do, more than Alexey could conceive or calculate, and this prospect pleased him—never mind the work, the farmer's sweat gives good returns.

As he dug into the ashes with the toe of his boot he found an axehead on a burnt haft. He looked at it for a long time, smiling and shaking his head—why, it was that very same axe! The starting-point of it all. He recalled how his brother Semyon, hearing Matryona's cry for help, had rushed furiously from the house. Alexey had stuck the axe into the chopping-block near the door—had he not done this, had not Semyon's eye fallen on it perhaps nothing of all this would have happened.

"Ah, Semyon, Semyon," Alexey sighed, as he threw the axehead on the heap of scrap-iron, "what a fine job we two could make of it together. Yes, brother, I've sown my wild oats, I've had enough."

He walked along, his eyes on the ground. In the letter which had reached him at Gulyay-Polye, Semyon had written: "Tell my Matryona that she should look after herself and not forget the decencies; she's not that sort and this is not the time for such things. If I get killed, she would be free to do as she thinks best. The times are such that we must all clench our teeth and carry on. I think of you only in my dreams. Don't expect me back soon—the end of the civil war is not in sight yet."

Alexey shook himself—why bother about the war? A man could not see beyond his nose anyway. Again he looked at the smoke rising gently over the hedgerows, the bare gardens and the cottages muffled up in straw and reeds. The villagers were preparing to keep warm that winter. Well, they were right. The Red Army would be here, if not this week then the next. How could anyone think that the end of the civil war was not yet in sight? What was Semyon talking about! No one would want to stick his nose into such

a place as this. Of course Semyon couldn't know. He was in a destroyer on the Caspian, and the mist of blood veiled his eyes.

And yet Alexey was not happy about it all. He pulled his tobacco-pouch from his pocket to roll a cigarette and found he had no paper. That summer a medical orderly had told him that there were a lot of nerve cases in Makhno's army—fellows who looked in the best of health, who could eat half a *pood* of porridge at one go, but whose nerves were as tense as the catgut strings on a fiddle. "What, nerves?" muttered Alexey, "no one ever heard of them before." He walked up to a scorched chimney left standing alone and tried to move it to find out whether it was still firm. He pushed against it with his shoulder and the chimney swayed slightly. *Nerves, that's what it is*, he thought.

Alexey, Katia and Matryona were lodging with a relative of Alexey, a widow. It was inconvenient and there was not enough room. Matryona whitewashed the stove, smeared the earth floor with grey clay and hung lace curtains on the dim windows. Alexey bought flour, potatoes and enough feed for his horses, buying in small quantities from various people. He never bargained, was free with his money and if asked insistently would even throw in a little salt, more precious than gold in those days. He knew that the villagers thought his money easily come by and also that they would not forgive his three cartloads of booty and five horses for a long time.

Much more difficult was the job of overcoming the opposition of the villagers to Alexey's house-building plans. He planned to pull down an outhouse of the great manor-house, standing ruined and deserted on a hill behind the bare trees of the park. The manor-house was empty, yawning with glassless window-frames between the battered columns of a colonnade, but the outhouse in which the bailiff had lived was in better shape and it would have been easy to pull it down and rebuild it on the site of Alexey's burned house.

But the *muzhiks* were still afraid of something. There was no authority of any sort in the village—the officials of the *hetman* had been driven out, the Petlyura government maintained a precarious hold in the towns and cities only, and the Red administration had not arrived yet. It was a bit uncanny, this having no one over you; the peasants were not used to it and were afraid that they would have to answer for it later. So they decided to elect a headman. But no one wanted to be headman. The rich and shrewd only waved their hands in refusal: "What's the idea? Why should I bother?" On the other hand, no one wanted to entrust the job to some landless labourer who had nothing to lose. From the Soviet boundary came rumours about such labourers—that once in office they ceased to be humble and became ever so aggressive.

It was the women who found a suitable candidate. One woman told the other and soon it was whispered in the whole village that it was God's own will that Grandfather Afanassi should be elected headman. The old man, whose two sons had been killed in the German war, was living with his daughters-in-law; he did no work in the fields, only looked after the poultry and the house in general and nagged at his daughters-in-law. The old man was meddlesome and given to making mountains out of molehills. At one time, very long ago, he had served under General Skobelev.

Grandfather Afanassi immediately agreed to take on the headmanship. "Thank you for doing me the honour, but stick to your bargain when I make you do as I say," was all he said. He strolled about the village, leaning on a tall hazel staff, his grey beard combed into two prongs like General Skobelev's, his leather jerkin belted low on his hips, for ever looking about him to find something to meddle with.

Every time Alexey met the old man he took off his cap to him and bowed respectfully. Grandfather Afanassi drew his bushy eyebrows down over his eyes and said: "Well, what do you want?"

"Nothing, Afanassi Afanassevich, thank you just the same. I'm still worrying about the same thing."

"So you still haven't been able to arrange it with the *muzhiks?*"

"No, Afanassi Afanassevich, all my hope is in you now. Come round and see me one day."

"Wouldn't that be too much honour for you, my lad?"

In the end Alexey succeeded in luring Afanassi Afanassevich to his house: he sent Matryona to Afanassi's daughters-in-law to buy a fat goose and to say that they were celebrating a birthday to-morrow; they would not invite anyone formally but would be glad of any good friends who chose to come. Apart from the goose, Grandfather Afanassi was as curious as a cat. Hardly had the winter twilight enveloped the village when he came to the birthday celebration held in the well-heated cottage which even had a strip of carpet running from the threshold to the richly laid table. In all other houses people used kindle-lights or oil rags in tin cans—but here a paraffin lamp burned above the table.

Grandfather Afanassi entered with a stern air, as befits authority, took off his cap and looked at Matryona, handsome, her lips compressed, her black eyes unkind; then he looked at the other woman, whose birthday it was, and about whom all sorts of rumours were current in the village. This woman was handsome too. Both she and Matryona were dressed in town clothes, one of them in red and the other in black. Grandfather Afanassi unwrapped his scarf, took off his sheepskin coat and with a rapid gesture smoothed the fork of his beard with both hands.

Flattered by his reception he said, "Well, my best respects to the present pleasant company."

The four of them sat down to the table. Alexey got out a bottle of old vodka from under the table. An exchange of courtesies now began.

"Afanassi Afanassevich, this is my intended—it is her birthday. I recommend her to your kindness."

"Certainly, certainly. Women need kindness. And who is she?"

"The widow of an officer. I was orderly to her late husband."

"I see." Grandfather Afanassi was delighted—there would be plenty to tell the women afterwards—and was tempted to brag a bit himself. "When I got my George Cross at Plevna, General Skobelev took me to himself as orderly. He sent me to brave cannon-balls and bullets often enough. He used to say: 'Ride fast, Afonka!' He liked me, the General did! So your betrothed is of the quality, eh? Farm work will be hard for her, won't it?"

"She won't need to do farm work, Afanassi Afanassevich. Thank God, we'll find other hands to do the work."

"Of course. Well then, let's drink to the bride-to-be, a bitter to the sweet." Afanassi drank, cleared his throat and deftly wiped his yellowish moustaches with the palm of his hand. "My daughters-in-law can carry five-pood sacks now, but at first, when their husbands were taken to the wars and they had to do a man's work, they did nothing but groan 'oh, my back is broken, oh, my hands, oh, my feet'. I nearly split my sides with laughing at them." Afanassi laughed inanely. "But I always got on well with the womenfolk. General Skobelev knew it too—he always called me 'Afonka, the lady-killer'."

Matryona got up hurriedly, hiding her laughter, and went to the stove to

fetch the roast goose. Katia sat without raising her eyes, without saying a word. Alexey poured out more vodka and said in a tone indicating that he was taking Afanassi into his confidence: "That isn't where our troubles lie, Afanassi Afanassevich. We could get married to-morrow; but how can I make a home for a young wife in such a hovel? She and Matryona have to manage with a narrow cot between them and I have to sleep on the bare ground. We feel hurt that the village treats us as if we were strangers. Why are they so pig-headed? That outhouse is just going to ruin there to no purpose. It's only by chance that it wasn't burnt down. Who wants it? Are they expecting the prince to come back here and thank them for it?"

"Yes, that is one way of looking at it," said Grandfather Afanassi, breaking off a leg of the goose at the joint.

"The devil will return here sooner than the prince. But let it go at that. I'm willing to buy the outhouse from the community and I'll take the responsibility for everything." Matryona looked meaningly at Alexey, but he stamped his foot and continued: "Yes, I'll buy it. I am a man of little patience. By the way—to mark the occasion: Matryona, go get me a little parcel wrapped in a kerchief under my pillow." Matryona frowned and shook her head. "Go on, get it, don't begrudge it. There's nothing more precious than life."

Matryona brought the parcel. Alexey unfolded the kerchief and revealed a gun-metal watch on a steel chain. He shook the watch and put it to his ear.

"I got it by chance, as if I had known for whom I was getting it. Wear it in good health, Afanassi Afanassevich."

"Are you trying to give me a bribe?" Grandfather Afanassi asked sternly, but his hand trembled for all that when Alexey laid the watch on his palm.

"Don't hurt our feelings, Afanassi Afanassevich, we give it to you with all our hearts. I have more than two dozen of these things; Matryona got them all in exchange for vodka. This particular one has the advantage that it strikes the hours. Why should you have to listen to the cocks crowing of a morning? Just press this spring and it'll strike the time and you can pull on your boots and go tend the cattle."

"Yes," said Grandfather Afanassi, and opened his mouth in a grin disclosing his few teeth. "I'll know when to wake my womenfolk. After this they won't oversleep, the fat sluts."

Grandfather Afanassi wrapped his scarf round his scraggy neck, put on his sheepskin coat and went his ways, reeling slightly as he walked. Matryona turned down the flame of the lamp and with Katia's help cleared the table. Alexey remained sitting at the table.

"Is it this old vodka, was it too strong, or is it that I haven't drunk for a long time?" he said in a dull voice; and then: "Matryona, you had better go look after the cattle."

Matryona did not answer and, as if she had not heard him, she looked at Katia and laughed.

"I can't make you out," Alexey went on, "either we are not good enough for you—or you are quite nit-witted."

Matryona flashed a look at Katia, enjoining her give no answer, though her cheeks were flaming red.

"If you would only cry or something. I never saw anyone like you, by God! If at least you had choked when I said it. But she just sits with her eyes on the ground. Neither meat nor fish—more like a mermaid, on my word. Matryona!" he called, "she doesn't understand that even the little children point their fingers at her. She's 'the one Alexey brought home with the loot;'

'the one he won from Makhno at cards'. That's what people say. But she doesn't mind. So why should I?" he shouted furiously. "Let them all know now that she's my intended!"

Katia grew pale, took a plate and a napkin and made a movement as if to go outside, but Matryona gripped her shoulder and held her back.

"We know now from which end to take hold of life," Alexey continued. "I killed my first man back in 1914." He gave a short laugh. "I was sitting there, a German came crawling; as soon as he popped up I pulled the trigger and he fell back. I waited to see whether his soul would fly out. I've killed many a man, but I never saw the soul of any of them. Well, that's enough. . . . Thanks for the lesson. But there was no need for you to treat me so, Yekaterina Dmitrievna. I am not keeping you here by force. If you don't like me, if I disgust you—you can go your ways when you please. Betrothed, eh? Much pleasure I can expect from my betrothal."

Matryona put her lips to Katia's cheek and said into her ear: "He's drunk, the fool; don't listen to him." Katia hung up the cloth on a clothes-line strung across a corner of the room and disappeared behind the curtain. Alexey was sitting sideways at the table with his legs crossed, his huge hands hanging limply down, his sunken eyes staring after Katia. She came back and sat down on a stool opposite him. Alexey's gaze was not that of a drunken man, it was firm and steady and Katia dropped her own before it.

"We ought to have talked it all over long ago, Alexey Ivanovich. I regard you as a good man. All through our campaigning life I've met with nothing but kindness from you and I've become attached to you. What you said to-day did not surprise me, I've been expecting it for a long time. But since we came here something has happened to you, Alexey Ivanovich. You are a different man here. . . ."

Alexey cleared his throat and asked: "What do you mean, 'a different man'? For thirty years I have been the same man and now I am supposed to be different all at once?"

"My life, Alexey Ivanovich, has been like a dream without an awakening. I was a useless domestic pet. Of course, some men loved me—there was a little despair and a little disgust and that was all. Only when we were hemmed in by the war was there an awakening: death, destruction, suffering, refugees, hunger, and all that. There was nothing left then for a useless domestic pet except to die. And I should have died—but Vadim saved me. He said that our love was all the meaning of life, and I believed him. But he wanted only revenge, only destruction. And yet he was good and kind. I can't make it out. . . ." She raised her head and looked into the tiny flame of the tin lamp over the table. "Vadim perished. And then you picked me up."

"Picked you up!" Alexey laughed, never taking his eyes off her. "Are you a stray kitten?"

"I was, Alexey Ivanovich; but now I don't want to be one any longer. I was neither good nor bad, neither Russian nor foreign, a mermaid, as you said." The corners of her mouth lifted archly and Alexey frowned. "But it turned out that I am just an ordinary Russian woman after all, and I am sticking to that for good. While I have been with you I have seen many grievous and terrible things. I stuck it and did not whine. I remember one evening. The carts were being unhitched and some men came riding up. Noisy, excited men gathered around the bubbling cauldron . . ."

"D'you hear that, Matryona? She remembers that!"

"More and more of them gathered round. Each man told stories of mighty

blows, how they slashed off a man's head and slashed again and overreached themselves. No doubt they invented much of it. And yet there was something great and strong in it all."

"Matryona, look what she is talking of—the battle with the Germans at Verkhny. It was a hot fight."

"I remember how you leapt out of your cart. I was afraid to go near you." Katia paused and stared into space with dilated pupils. "Yes, these things happened. When we were on our way here I thought that a wide new life was opening for me. Not on a tiny spot of earth, not here where there are only pig and poultry and potatoes and beyond them a fence and grey days without a gleam of brightness." Katia wrinkled her forehead—her poor brain was struggling to express the great revelation which had come to her in the steppe, but she could not put it into words. "When we got here it was as if we had come home from a holiday. To-day you announced that I was your intended, announced it with a purpose. And so it is all over. What comes next? Child-bearing; you will build a house; soon you will be well-to-do, and later rich. All this is familiar, but I thought I had left it behind. I had it all in Petersburg, I had it in Moscow, I had it in Paris, and now it all begins again in the village of Vladimirskoye."

There was such sorrow in the dropping of her hands to her knees, in the bending of her head with its neat parting in the warm brown of her hair, that Alexey closed his eyes tightly to shut out the sight of it. The bird was eluding his grasp and flying away.

"You are very stupid, Yekaterina Dmitrievna," he said softly. "You are all muddled up—like my brother Semyon, you, too, want to wash yourself clean in blood perhaps? You have surprised me with this talk; but I am not letting you go, for all that."

CHAPTER XIII

IVAN ILYICH AND DASHA came back to the regiment and billeted themselves in a whitewashed room on a farm. Telegin's office with telephones, the regimental cash-box and the regimental colours in their sheath were next door, across a passage. In the room, however, Dasha reigned supreme—there was a great stove which was not used for cooking but in which Dasha washed herself as she had learnt to do from the Cossack women, getting right inside and spreading straw in the huge oven for a bath mat. There was also a bed with two hard pillows and one thin blanket; Ivan Ilyich used his great-coat instead of a blanket. There was a table, with a clean cloth for eating; a little mirror on the wall; a broom behind the door; and in a recess of the great stove, the china cat and dog.

Two years before, Dasha and Telegin had set up house in the same way together, very much in love, and as playful as kittens. Dasha never forgot that first evening in the new flat with windows opening on the rain-moist street. She had felt virginally clear and calm, but Ivan Ilyich had sat near the window in the dusk and she had seen that he was painfully embarrassed, and so she had been the first to make up her mind. Knowing that by so doing she could give him great pleasure she had said: "Let's go to bed, Ivan." They had both gone into the bedroom, where a huge bunch of sweetly-smelling mimosa had stood on the floor in a tub. Dasha had opened the door of the cupboard, had undressed

behind it, had run barefoot across the room, slipped under the bedclothes and asked quickly: "Ivan, do you love me?"

Dasha had known little about love-making although she had been unduly preoccupied with it for some time. The thing that happened between her and Ivan Ilyich that night had disillusioned her. This was not the thing for the sake of which so many poems and novels, so much music had been written; this was not the magic power bringing forth tears and ecstasy which Dasha had experienced at times when she sat at the black Steinway in Katia's empty flat. Then she would stop playing, stand up and clasp her hands together, and if at such times her body had not been as cold and transparent as glass, the emotions which seethed and whirled in her would have surely choked her.

Soon Dasha had become pregnant. She loved Ivan Ilyich dearly, and yet she had kept him at arm's length after that. Then the terrible autumn months had come with their hunger and Petersburg fogs, with the dreadful adventure at the Swan Canal which had ended with a premature confinement, the death of her child and the desire not to live any more. And after that they had parted.

Now they were making a fresh start. Their feeling for each other was less simple and deeper than the former vague passion in which everything appeared enigmatic, like a brightly-coloured magic box containing an unknown gift. Since then they had both been through the mill, but they had not yet had the opportunity of telling each other about it. Now their love—especially for Dasha—was as full and tangible as the air of early winter, when the November storms are past and in the frosty quiet the first snow smells like freshly-cut water-melon. Ivan Ilyich knew everything, could do everything, could find an answer to everything and dispel any doubt. The brightly-coloured magic box was again before Dasha's eyes, but now it no longer contained only self-sufficient emotions, riddles and enigmas—now there were real gifts in it, the joys and sorrows of their austere lives.

There was one thing in Ivan Ilyich which Dasha failed to understand and which even began to trouble her—his abstinence. Every evening at bedtime Ivan Ilyich seemed worried. He ceased to look at Dasha and sat on the settle long after he had taken off his boots. Sometimes he would say to Dasha: "Dashenka, darling, sleep, my sweet," and go out barefoot across the cold passage to his office; he would come back on tiptoes, lie down on the bed, taking great care not to make it creak and go to sleep on the spot with his head under his great-coat.

But by day he was cheerful, full of life, apple-cheeked. He would come and go, kiss Dasha on the cheek or on her sweet, warm, fair hair, say jocularly:

"Good morning again. And how is the commander's lady? How are things going with you?"

This was a question he asked thirty times a day. Ivan Gora, the commissar, had suggested that Dasha should organize theatrical shows for the regiment with the local forces available.

Dasha was so startled by this proposal that at first she tried to refuse: "My God, I know nothing whatever about theatricals."

But Ivan Gora patted her hand and said: "You'll manage, my dear, you'll learn by your own mistakes—we've managed a lot of far harder things. We've got to get out of this rut, the men are bored. Give them something revolutionary, something emotional, make their eyes water."

The commissar was very keen on this theatre idea. The Kachalin regiment had been reinforced, issued with new uniforms out of the scant resources of the Tsaritsyn commissariat and was preparing soon to take the field again. Despite

the tiring battle-training and the two hours of daily political education, the men, boisterous with good living on the farm, were becoming restless. A meeting was now called with Sapozhkov as speaker.

Sergey Sergeyevich Sapozhkov eagerly seized the opportunity of opening his mouth at last after years of silence and throwing out into the world a heap of ideas that were troubling him. He spoke of the revolutionary break in theatrical tradition, of the disappearance of all boundaries separating the spectators from the stage, of the theatre of the future in the open air or in immense stadia holding fifty thousand spectators, of shows in which whole regiments would participate, cannon would be fired, balloons would rise into the air, real waterfalls would come down, and the heroes of the plays would no longer be individual actors but the masses themselves.

"Where are you, playwrights of the future?" Sapozhkov asked the Red Army men who were cheerfully listening, although much of what he said was not clear to them and he spoke too fast for them to follow. "Where are you, playwrights of our great epoch? Where is a new Shakespeare? A new Sophocles stepping down from his marble plinth to share with us in a feast of creative art? Was there ever a time such as this, when man lay so open in front of your eyes? Has history ever thrown out such a luxurious growth of ideas before?"

Needless to say Dasha was absolutely terrified by this oration. But all paths of retreat were cut off.

She went to Tsaritsyn with Sapozhkov to get books, canvas and paint. Sapozhkov gave her much useful and even more utterly crazy advice. It was decided to cut the cackle, pick out a cast and immediately start rehearsals for Schiller's *Robbers*.

Telegin was delighted, less at the prospect of seeing the *Robbers* than at the fact that Dasha had at last found something to do, was immersed in her work, chased about and bustled all day, talked to the Red Army men, lost her temper, sometimes even wept with annoyance and, as it seemed to him in the simplicity of his soul, would now never again return to that tense concentration on her own personal emotions.

By a regimental order of the day Agrippina, Anissya, Latugin (who had specially asked the commissar not to omit him), Kuzma Kuzmich, Baikov and a few other Red Army men who could sing or play the accordion or balalaika, were detailed for participation in the theatrical troupe.

One evening Dasha read the play to the cast in a shed lighted only by a kindle-light. In the murk the faces of the actors were scarcely visible through the vapour of their breath. The rising wind blew snow through the cracks in the door. Dasha read aloud in her clear, well-modulated voice, imitating as well as she could from memory Bessonov's manner of reading. She remembered how he used to stand with one hand on the lapel of his black frock-coat, his lifeless voice dropping the words like lumps of ice, thirstily swallowed by panting literary ladies sitting round him in their easy chairs. . . .

Half-way through her reading Dasha already knew that the cast did not like the play even though a lot of it had been left out. Towards the end Dasha began to read quite fast. When she had finished there was a heavy silence. She said:

"Well, that was Schiller's *Robbers* and we are to play it."

The men now lighted their cigarettes and Latugin said softly:

"Seems all right to me."

At this point Kuzma Kuzmich took a candle-end out of his pocket, lit it and sat down next to Dasha.

"Comrades, Daria Dmitrievna has acquainted you with the play and now I will read it to you again."

He took the book from Dasha and began to read in a loud voice, indicating by tone and facial expression the paternal grief of the old Count von Moor; then wrinkling his nose and squinting, he hissed: "'I would be a contemptible numbskull if I were unable to oust the favourite son from our father's heart even if he were attached to it by iron chains. . . . Oh, conscience! Excellent scarecrow for sparrows. . . . Let him who can swim and he who cannot, drown. . . .'"

The listeners could almost see the creeping reptile, Franz Moor. But now Kuzma Kuzmich's voice grew stronger, he rumpled his hair with his hand to make it stand up over his bald patch, his lips were drawn down in a menacing line and his eyes sparkled with a noble anger: "'Oh men, men! Lying, deceiving brood of crocodiles! On your lips a kiss, in your hands a dagger to plunge into my heart. Hell and a thousand devils! Burn away, patience of a noble soul; turn into a tiger, you patient sheep!'"

Anissya Nazarova sighed softly; Latugin was bending forward towards the light which shone on the magic book and on Kuzma Kuzmich's nails sliding along the lines of print. Karl Moor himself thundered in the dark shed—rebellious man, close to the heart of the excited listeners. Look what words he found to tell them of his wrong! Here was a play! It went down, right down to the roots!

When the candle-end had burned down and Kuzma Kuzmich in a sepulchral voice spoke the last words of Karl Moor, who in going to a horrible death at the hands of the executioner, had not forgotten the poor labourer—Anissya and Agrippina were wiping their eyes with the sleeves of their great-coats.

"Straightforward stuff," said Latugin. They all agreed that it was a pity that Karl in his rage had killed his beloved Amalia; he should have admitted her to his band and re-educated her. In this respect Schiller would have to be edited, otherwise the Red Army men might not like the play; although it was a mere trifle, it might have a harmful effect on the men. They decided there and then that Karl was not to stab Amalia, but to say to her: "Get you home, unhappy woman," and she would burst into tears and go.

Anissya was chosen to play Amalia, and Latugin volunteered to play Karl. First they wanted Baikov to play the villainous reptile, Franz, but they were afraid that he would make the audience laugh—the men would go off in shrieks of laughter as soon as they saw his beard. It was therefore decided that Franz should be played by Kuzma Kuzmich; in order that he should appear more youthful, he was to shave off his beard. The part of old Count Maximilian von Moor was given to Vanin, a Red Army man with a deep bass voice. The rest of the parts were shared out between Agrippina and a few young Red Army men. Someone brought in some tow and paraffin and made a torch and the shed was soon bright and smoky with the light of it. The whole cast remained there and the first rehearsal began.

Dasha did not get home until the small hours of the morning and told Ivan Ilyich all about the rehearsal while he sat on the bed barefoot, his great-coat over his shoulders, and laughed till he cried.

"What, Latugin is to play Karl Moor?" asked Telegin, and went off in another fit of laughter. "Oh dear, how funny. Do you know why Latugin volunteered to play Karl Moor, the rogue? Because he is courting Anissya. And Sharygin promised him that he would tear out his liver. . . . And Kuzma Kuzmich? Playing Franz? He can do that all right. But what will they wear—

surely they won't act in army tunics? I'll send the commissariat chap to find that lawyer from Petrograd who got stuck here on one of the farms with all his luggage. We'll get some frock-coats and tails from him."

"You make such a noise with your horse-laughs that I simply don't want to tell you anything more. Let me go." Dasha got into bed, lay down nearest the wall and turned her back on her husband. When he carefully tucked her in and covered her feet with a great-coat as the fire was already out and it was cold in the room, Dasha said, half-asleep already: "Everything will be all right."

In the regiment the show was the sole topic of conversation now. Sapozhkov gave the men a lecture on German literature of the period of 'Storm and Stress', comparing the stormy geniuses Schiller, Goethe and Klinger with young eagles awakened by the approaching lightning flashes of the French revolution. The audience asked so many questions after this lecture that Sapozhkov had to arrange a series of talks dealing with the history of the end of the eighteenth century. He spent night after night jotting down notes by the light of an oil-lamp, squeezing them out of his memory, as he had no books of reference—nothing but the smoke of his *makhorka*. At each lecture questions came like an avalanche—the men wanted to know simply everything. Whenever he mentioned anything, they wanted to know all the details. Once, by a slip of the tongue, he brought in the Decembrists—and they wanted to know all about them as well.

They listened to him for hours on end, conquering their fatigue. Some of them dozed off, but soon woke again. They were fascinated by the stories of days gone by, of a strange country where men such as they themselves had raised the red cap on the end of a pike and had boldly challenged the whole world. Hungry and barefoot they invented new military tactics in order to win —and won. Then, having won, they were bound hand and foot by those whose heads they had failed to cut off in good time.

"Oh, Maximilian Robespierre, Maximilian Robespierre!" Sapozhlov exclaimed with a voice hoarse from too much talking, "you might have won out, you might have saved the revolution! It was a fateful day when you tore the black flag of the Commune from the Paris town hall. . . ."

The cocks were already crowing in the farmyards when Ivan Gora the commissar came and rumbled: "Comrades, it's only three hours to reveille."

Dasha, who was prompting, interrupted the show: "Stop! Comrade Vanin, you are playing some sort of dead man. There is no need for you to cough all the time—where on earth did you pick up this disgusting naturalism? More passion, put more soul into it. Begin all over again."

Among the books brought from Tsaritsyn Dasha had found a theatrical journal with an article by Kugel entitled: "IF YOU HAVE NO STAMPED PAPER WRITE ON PLAIN", and full of criticism of the Moscow Arts Theatre. The author recalled the names of great Russian tragedians who had shaken the minds and hearts of their audiences with their exuberant genius. In those days the theatre was a heathen temple and the curtain the mysterious veil of Tanita, moon goddess of the ancient Huns. Alas, the race of great tragedians was extinct, the last of them, Mamont Dalski, had exchanged his buskins for a pack of cards. The place of the great soul-stirring tragedians had been taken by the producer, a learned gentleman who, instead of showing the human soul crucified in front of the audience, offered the public only moods, undulating curtains, doors with genuine lintels and the genuine buzzing of flies. "No," exclaimed the author, "the true theatre is a shaggy monster of passions!"

Dasha underlined a number of practical hints given in the article—they helped her with her rehearsals.

Latugin and Anissya were sitting apart from the others, waiting for the end of the rehearsal. In the last few days Anissya's face had narrowed—it was not easy to worm oneself into another person's being. She had lost her appetite—the very thought of food sickened her. She pondered day and night how she could come to believe in Amalia. Finally she found a way after having seen a picture of Amalia in the book—of a sorrowing Amalia in a hoop skirt, her cheek resting on her hand. Anissya looked at the picture for a long time, and heaved deep sighs. She thought: in those days, in my far greater sorrow, when I wandered stumbling from village to village, blinded by my own tears and stretched out my hand for a crust of coarse bread, I . . . No, the picture was all wrong. If Amalia's sorrow were anything like Anissya's she would, for all her silks and velvets, wring her hands in the lace-edged short sleeves like this and turn up her eyes like this.

Thus Amalia von Edelreif, the beloved of Karl Moor, slowly merged into Anissya. Last night at the rehearsal the whole cast had listened in rapt silence when, having taken off the tall army cap with the red cloth star and having smoothed down her tousled hair, Anissya had sat down on the stool and spoken in a voice which was like a hand gripping your heart:

"Oh, for the love of God! For mercy's sake! I no longer ask for love. All I ask now is death. Abandoned, abandoned! Can you fathom the terrible sound of this word: 'Abandoned'?"

That morning on parade the squad commander had put Anissya on extra fatigue duty for complete lack of attention: only the intervention of the commissar persuaded him to change the punishment to a severe reprimand. Now she was sitting quietly beside Latugin, with a dreamy look in her large blue eyes and her lips—smiling and quivering in turn—were whispering soundlessly.

"There was a little girl in our village, Sasha, with bright eyes," Latugin was saying to her in an undertone; "I was fourteen then and she seventeen. It may have been something in her gait that made her different from all the others when the girls came in from the fields and she with them, with her little shawl and her canary-yellow bodice, a pitchfork over her shoulder and a caressing way with her. Her father made her marry an old man and my Sasha wilted like a flower without water. And then you want to know why fellows like myself are restless." While he was speaking the colour slowly came into Anissya's cheeks as if he was caressing her. "We are seeking a life such as has never been, such as no man ever attempted, my dear Anissya. And all the time we are thinking of one woman, such a woman as no one has ever seen in a dream."

"Such women don't exist."

"How do you know? On a coral island in the Pacific Ocean one might find them."

Anissya looked at his face, into his eyes, wide-spaced like a bull's. She felt something trembling within her and a hot, moist wave of tenderness ran through her body. But this was no longer a submissive, womanly feeling—she had had enough of that, this was different—now she laughed and said:

"How do you know? Been there?"

"No; but what of that. I've read about them in the pilot book."

"What pilot book?"

"A sea-book about various wonders."

"Really, Latugin, the nonsense you talk! It makes one's head ache."

"Never mind. Just you listen and I'll talk. Here's the truth for you, Anissya: I had evil designs on you, but a man spoke to me about it—he rubbed my nose in the dirt as you do with a cat that's made a mess. Very good. Man is the king of Nature. Thanks for the lesson."

Anissya glanced at him again, this time with surprise. Latugin had raised his voice so much that Dasha rapped the table with her pencil and said: "Comrades, you are disturbing the rehearsal."

"In Kerzhenets, in our district, there is a settlement of *skopzy*," Latugin continued in a whisper. "They geld themselves because they can't master themselves otherwise. One of them told me: 'I dream so much—I see the firebird in my dreams, but when I open my eyes there is nothing there but grey misery.' They live evil lives and beat their wives within an inch of their lives. Then they go to the farrier—he too is a 'white dove' as these *skopzy* call themselves—and say to him: 'Save my soul!' and he puts them out like candles and says 'Go now, oh gelding, and live happily; God be with you.' No, Anissya, we'll wash ourselves in blood, we'll boil ourselves in three lyes, we'll catch the bright bird even if it flies away to the edge of life."

Dasha rapped with her pencil:

"Comrades, Karl and Amalia, last scene, prepare the stage."

When the raspberry-coloured frosty dawn broke beyond the smoke of the farm, a mounted messenger sprang from his horse in front of regimental headquarters, and without so much as tying up his rime-covered mount, began to knock frenziedly on the door. Telegin himself came to open it and the messenger handed him a dispatch. The same day means of transport were mobilized in the surrounding farms and the regiment took the field.

For the third time since August the Army of the Don was investing Tsaritsyn. This time General Mamontov attacked Tsaritsyn from the flanks in a pincer movement. About thirty-five miles north of the city General Tatarkin's three cavalry regiments broke through the front by a sudden thrust and reached the Volga near the village of Dubovka.

A day later General Postovski's cavalry began another attack in the south near Sarepta, defended by Dmitri Shelest's Iron Division. Shelest himself was not there any longer; he had quarrelled with the military council which had forbidden him to live off the country and did not let him do as he pleased. Fearing arrest, he had rushed to Moscow to complain. The Iron Division was restless, and all sorts of rumours were current; some said *batko* Shelest would return to the command of an army instead of a division, others said that the *batko* had been arrested and that the thing to do was for the whole division to march to Tsaritsyn to rescue him, but most of the men believed the rumour that the *batko* had fled to Astrakhan and was recruiting volunteers there. About fifteen hundred horsemen of the Iron Division left the front, crossed the Volga and made for Astrakhan along the western bank of the river. The Iron Division got a bad mauling, General Postovski occupied Sarepta and invested Tsaritsyn from the south.

Foreseeing these flank attacks, the military council of the Tenth Army had begun a week before to concentrate a shock group consisting of two cavalry brigades. But the two cavalry brigades—the Don-Stavropol brigade and Budenny's brigade—had not yet effected their junction when the front was breached and the whole weight of the blow fell on the Don-Stavropol

brigade, while Budenny was still riding hell-for-leather night and day to come to their assistance.

The Kachalin regiment was now thrown in to hold the sector on which the shock group was to have concentrated. All the rest of the day, and after a short pause all through the following night, the regiment, enveloped in a frosty fog, moved in the direction of a dim glow in the sky. It outshone the light of the dawn—the sun rose to the right of it, showing itself only for a short time between the tiered clouds that glowed like copper.

Telegin, Ivan Gora and Sapozhkov rode in front; behind them long rows of gun-carriages, guns, supply carts and wagons full of troops stretched far into the snowy plain. The two commanders and the commissar heard with some surprise the angry barking of gun-fire coming from not too great a distance. They urged their horses forward at a gallop, leaving the regiment far behind; then they halted, took out their maps and discussed their position. The point the regiment had been ordered to reach was still far away, but the loudness of the gunfire showed that the front had now come closer. They were not in touch with any higher command either by telephone or by relayed mounted messengers. The situation was by no means clear and such uncertainty might easily lead to the destruction of the whole regiment.

"Damn this steppe. We crawl about on it like beetles on a tablecloth," said Ivan Gora. "We can count ourselves lucky if the Cossacks haven't spotted us yet."

"Of course they know all about us," said Telegin. "They've got their own grapevine; they get all the news about us from the farmers."

Sapozhkov pulled down his cap on his eyes and rode forward to the advance guard.

The first wagons with their panting, sweating horses were coming up. Telegin ordered the Red Army men who jumped out of them to run, wave their arms and shout to those behind that they should make haste and close their ranks. As he was making his way through the rows of wagons he saw Kuzma Kuzmich, his head bound up with a cloth, driving a one-horse van loaded with theatrical scenery; Dasha was perched on top of the piled-up load, her face peeping out of a Balaclava helmet. She was dressed in a white sheep-skin coat and her face was pink and sleepy-looking like a little girl's. Her eyes were screwed up to shield them from the snowy glare; she shouted something at Telegin, but he could not make out what it was because of the loud creaking of wheels and the noisy talk. He saw Agrippina too; she was sitting with three Red Army men on a cart, and she too shouted something at Telegin and seemed to point at something in the sky with her mitten. What could she want with the sky? Telegin threw back his head to look and clearly saw an aeroplane flying like a little black bird below the streaky clouds under which the rays of the sun spread in a warm haze.

Everyone had seen the plane by now. Telegin spurred his horse in between the wagons and shouted: "Scatter!" Huge Ivan Gora rose in his stirrups and roared: "Fire at the plane!" A wagon galloped past Telegin; on it was Dasha, her eyes wide with fear, and Kuzma Kuzmich, lashing the horse with the reins. There was a ragged fusillade and the plane, its engines roaring fiercely, banked and dived into the clouds. A stick of bombs came tumbling out of its belly, rushed earthwards with a whistle, and exploded on the ground, throwing up black clouds of smoke.

Many of the Red Army men were seeing such a fearful sight for the first time, and several wagons dashed away far into the steppe. The trumpets blew to rally the scattered ranks. Many a young recruit anxiously eyed the clouds for a long time afterwards.

There was every reason now to expect a Cossack attack soon. The wagons moved axle to axle, in close formation. The covers were taken off the guns which crawled along inside a long rectangle. Towards evening they saw the purple outline of some settlement in front of them. Sapozhkov with two scouts came riding back at a gallop. He rode up to Telegin and Ivan Gora, took off his fur hat, rumpled his hair and said, excited and pleased:

"It's all right, there is no one on the farm except women and children. A little farther on, about three miles, there is a village occupied by Cossacks."

"Cossacks, eh? Fine news you bring us," Ivan Gora said testily. "And where are our people?"

"I don't know. . . . Our fellows have withdrawn from the village and they never even reached the farm. . . ."

"We must occupy the farm," said Telegin, "and until we can get in touch with headquarters, I will not go a step farther than that farm."

At dusk they occupied the farm, which stretched along a long ravine full of water. The men knocked on the shutters and shouted menacingly, "Hi, come out!" and then entered the dark, warm cottages. Only in a few of them did they find here a woman with a baby, there a frightened, muttering old grandmother behind the stove. The entire male population had fled to the village. Telegin gave orders to dig in. The road was barricaded by a barrier of wagons. Before it was quite dark Telegin sent out Sapozhkov with a few volunteers on distant patrol in order to make contact with the front line during the night.

The regiment had little rest that night. Although the Cossacks were not as a rule much given to night fighting, any dirty trick could be expected of them all the time. Telegin and Ivan Gora made the rounds of the farm and crossed the water-filled ravine over the still unsafe ice. Visibility was bad. The gunfire from the north-east had died down. A moist wind rose, the frost abated and the snow no longer crunched underfoot.

"It's a mousetrap, a complete mousetrap," grumbled Ivan Gora, grimly striding along beside Telegin. "It's a disgrace that we could not get the regiment to the spot. We are looking for the others; the others are looking for us; the whole thing is a muddle. Who is to blame? Who?"

"Shut up! No one is to blame!"

"But who will be the first to be blamed? I, and that is as it should be. The commissar lost himself in the steppe with his whole regiment! What a mess!"

A single shot rang out. Ivan Gora stopped dead. Telegin could hear the beating of his heart. A short burst of firing followed, ending as suddenly as it had begun. All that could now be heard was the voices of the men who had come rushing out of their billets at the sound of firing.

"The boys are a bit nervous," said Telegin; "they're young and inexperienced. Let's have a smoke."

Just before dawn he went to his billet, picking his way carefully between the sleeping men. In the cottage he groped his way to the stove. In the darkness he felt Dasha's hand seek him and stroke his face. He pressed her warm palm to his lips.

"Why aren't you asleep?" he asked.

"Ivan, you know what I was thinking? If we stay here on the farm a long time we can, if the worst comes to the worst, play the *Robbers* in the open, in our ordinary clothes; costumes are not essential. . . ."

"Of course, Dashenka."

"Everybody is so enthusiastic about it, it would be a pity to drop it now. . . ."

"That's right. I'll see about it to-morrow—perhaps we can find some shed or barn. Now you go to sleep, my dear. . . ."

He went outside again and took a deep breath of the moist wind. After so many years of longing for happiness, Ivan Ilyich found it difficult to get used to the idea that it was there, only a few paces away, in a little low-ceilinged room, on a warm stove, under a little sheepskin coat.

"She isn't asleep, she is worrying. But not a word of complaint. She was pleased to see me, stretched out her little paw to me. What a wonderful woman she is. . . ."

That she had sought him out in the darkness, had stroked his face and pressed her hand to his lips caused such a turmoil in Ivan Ilyich that his cheeks burned despite the cold wind. Could he be mistaken after all? "No, my friend, none of that; what a hope. Friendly? Oh yes. Faithful? Oh yes. You can count yourself lucky to have even this much."

He had never been able to forget those dark evenings in Petrograd when he used to come running home with some prize, a piece of cake, or a sweet for Dasha—and evoked only horror and revulsion in her. Obviously there had been something revolting in him and that something was still there. But God!—how he loved this woman, how he desired her!

Ivan Gora came up to him in the dark, hands thrust deep into his jacket pockets.

"What if they have caught Sapozhkov?"

"Quite possible. I'll send out a second patrol as soon as it gets a bit lighter."

"We ought to have done all this sooner, much sooner!" Ivan Gora took his hands from his pockets and tapped his forehead with his fist. "I'm a fine Communist, I am. I've failed to justify the confidence put in me. Even if we get out of this affair with whole skins, I shall never forgive myself. What I would do with such a commissar as I am would be to take him out just beyond that barn there and then—good-bye, comrade, it was nice to know you."

"Come, Ivan Stepanovich, I was just as much to blame as you if it comes to that."

"Never mind about that. Come, let's have a smoke."

All that night Sergey Sergeyevich Sapozhkov and his five volunteers roamed the steppe hoping to find some traces of the front line. But the steppe was silent and impenetrable. They lit matches and got their bearings by compass. The horses were hungry and tired and the one that had been carrying the machine-gun went lame and dragged on the rein. Sapozhkov gave the order to dismount, take off headstalls and loosen girths. The men got wheat grain from their saddlebags, filled their hats with it and, holding their horses with their backs to the wind, began to feed them.

"Comrade commander, I have found the explanation why we have not been able to get in touch with the front," said Sharygin, carefully choosing his words as usual. "The front has been shortened. . . ." He shivered with the cold and had some difficulty in moving his lips for the chattering of his teeth. "We pulled in our flanks towards the battle sector and the Cossacks have done the same. Would you think that was possible?"

"Oh, Cossacks, Cossacks! Lying, deceiving brood of crocodiles! Hell and a thousand devils!" Latugin said with serious mien. Three young Red Army men, mobilized from Cossack farms, roared with laughter. Sharygin immediately answered:

"Jokes are sometimes out of place, Comrade Latugin. This is a serious business and you should keep your impudence in check."

Sapozhkov said softly:

"That will do, boys; this is no time for quarrels."

The horses were jingling their bits as they crunched their feed. The wind whistled in the barrels of the rifles behind the men's backs.

"Eat, don't fiddle about with your food, you nuisance!" shouted Latugin, when his horse took its mouth out of the hat and began to nuzzle him.

A short while ago Sergey Sergeyevich had come to the well in the farmyard where the Red Army men had gathered and called for volunteers to go on night patrol. The first to say "I'll go" was Sharygin, immediately adding: "Don't think, comrade commander, that I am just wanting to show off—but as a Komsomol it is up to me to go, so to speak. . . ."

Latugin, who had brought an artillery team to be watered at the well and was exchanging banter with the Red Army men, heard this; he saw Sharygin's flushed, excited face and thought, *no, you snub-nosed devil, you won't outdo me;* he shrugged his shoulders and said to Sapozhkov:

"If you have any use for me, Sergey Sergeyevich, I'll step down to the battery and ask permission to go."

All the way he had poked fun at Sharygin, making the men laugh. Now Sharygin had called him impudent, and the commander, too, had reproved him. He didn't mind, not he! Latugin shook the last few grains of wheat out of the hat into his palm, and thrust them at the horse's mouth.

"What we want is a prisoner. There's no point in wandering about the steppe in circles. Take a prisoner, then we'll know where the front line is. . . ."

"That's right," said Sharygin. "That's a sensible idea."

"Well, comrades, to horse!"

Sapozhkov put on his hat, pushed the bit between his horse's teeth, drew his saddle-girth tighter and sprang into the saddle. It was getting lighter and there was a frosty nip in the air; the greenish sheen of the false dawn outlined the woolly edges of the clouds. The patrol rode along at a trot.

"Halt! There they are!" Latugin dragged his carbine forward over his head, knocking off his cap in the process. "There are six of them! No, seven!" In the greenish mist only his seaman's eyes could distinguish something moving in the distance. "No, damn it," he hissed at the scattering men of the patrol, "not that way! This is where they are, you can scarcely see them."

While the machine-gun was hastily being uncovered, they could hear the hoofbeat of horses and see the vague, exaggerated outlines of mounted men.

"Hey, mates, throw down your arms, give yourselves up!" Latugin shouted wildly, struck his horse with the barrel of his carbine and dashed forward, with Sharygin close behind. "Come back! Back!" Sapozhkov yelled after them at the top of his voice. The Cossacks, who had stopped—obviously they too were on patrol—now turned their horses and rode away. Latugin fired several times from the saddle; the horse under the last Cossack—the others were scarcely visible by now—swerved sharply and fell. In a flash Latugin and Sharygin were on the rider who had leapt clear. "Come on, comrades," called Latugin, struggling with the man beside the fallen horse. When the others ran up, he was already sitting astride the Cossack on the ground and

twisting his arms. "He isn't big, but he's strong," he said. The Cossack was lying on his face with his cheek in the snow, panting and screwing up his eyes.

They ordered him to get up, pushed him and turned him over on his back. The Cossack began to curse them with racy and elaborate curses, as if trying to goad them into killing him on the spot. Sapozhkov went pale, struck him with the scabbard of his sabre and said: "Get up, you!" The Cossack raised his head, darted him a fierce look and stood up, teetering on his feet. He was slight of build, with sloping shoulders and a broad beard full of snow.

"A plague on your tongue, you blasphemer, you chicken-thief!" Sapozhkov shouted at him. "You are speaking to a regimental commander. Answer my questions!"

The Cossack wriggled his arms, which they had tied behind his back with a strap. His round yellow eyes scrutinized the men surrounding him; then he suddenly licked his lips.

"I know you," he said to one of the Red Army men, an apple-cheeked, sprightly lad. "You are Kurkin's sister's son! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"I know you too, Yakov Vassilyevich, and I'm not."

"Ah, Yakov Vassilyevich, how do you do?" said Latugin, and the sprightly Red Army man again burst out laughing. "You bearded monster, we have been searching for you all night. Your regiment? Your army corps?"

Sapozhkov waved Latugin away, got out his map and began to question the Cossack, who at first was reluctant to answer but later obviously arrived at the conclusion that all this talk would help him to gain time, during which the Reds would calm down and he would have a better chance of escaping with his life. They learned from him that General Tatarkin had broken through the front, that the further exploitation of the initial success had been left to the Don-Stavropol group, and that at the moment a bloody battle was being fought near Dubovka, a spot towards which both White and Red forces were converging.

The end of the thread was found at last. They decided to send the Cossack back to the regiment with an escort of one, while the others were to ride towards Dubovka, not sparing their horses, in order to report the arrival of the Kachalin regiment to the commander. Only now did they realize that Sharygin was missing.

"Mishka!" Latugin called. "Are you asleep there with the horses?"

But Latugin's horse stood abandoned, treading on its reins. Under the belly of the other horse they could see Sharygin's legs, strangely twisted. He was gripping the cantle of his saddle and pressing his face against the flap.

"Mishka!" Latugin shouted in alarm, seized him by the shoulders and drew him towards himself. "What's wrong, brother?"

Sharygin staggered and collapsed in a heap. His face was livid. His great-coat was swollen with blood from the chest to the sabretache. Latugin laid him gently down on the snow, bared his white belly, and pressed his palm on the bleeding stabbed wound.

"So you ran him through, Yakov? A bad job, Yakov!" Latugin tore off his own great-coat and tunic, ripped off his shirt, twisted it into a rope and rapidly and skilfully bandaged Sharygin's wound.

"Sergey Sergeyevich, he's got to be taken back to the farm."

"But how can we?"

"How? I'll take him and the prisoner too, single-handed."

Sharygin's deathly pale face was covered with sweat, his sunken eyes

opened, he was regaining consciousness and with it came surprise and terror at what had happened to him: his young, strong, healthy body had been broken.

"Comrades, what am I to do now?"

"Here, take some snow, it'll do you good." Latugin scooped up a handful of snow and cooled Sharygin's lips with it.

While they were busying themselves with Sharygin and transferring the machine-gun to another horse instead of the one that had gone lame, it had grown quite light. Across the sky the wind was driving low ragged clouds dripping a rare icy rain. The patrol were so engrossed in their troubles that they had not noticed great concentrations of cavalry moving up from the south together with the wisps of morning mist.

The whole steppe was now thundering with their hoofbeats as swarming column after column of horsemen, gun-carriages and wagons went by. The patrol watched them, holding their horses by the reins. It was too late to get away.

They saw about two dozen horsemen detach themselves from the head of the passing columns and gallop towards them. Looking round, Sapozhkov saw Latugin, his face pale and serious, slowly drawing his sabre; the sprightly young Red Army man aimlessly clicked the breech of his rifle, screwing up his face as if in pain.

The first of the horsemen riding towards them wore a tilted sheepskin cap and a broad-shouldered black Caucasian cape which covered his pony to the tail. He shouted something and pointed to the patrol. Sapozhkov fired. Latugin threw himself on him from the saddle and seized his hand:

"Don't shoot. They're ours."

The riders came on at a gallop, and surrounded the patrol. The tall man in the Caucasian cape rushed at Sapozhkov, seized him by the breast of his tunic and shook him so fiercely that Sapozhkov lost both stirrups.

"Are you blind? Who are you? What unit?"

The rider's black eyes swept round, his whiskers bristled, he had difficulty in restraining himself from prodding the frightened Sapozhkov with the hilt of his sabre.

"We belong to the Kachalin rifle regiment. We are trying to get in touch with the front."

"Trying to get in touch, are you? Well, the front is right here on top of you," the whiskered man answered, somewhat mollified, and slammed his sabre home in its scabbard. "Mount and ride with us."

"We have a wounded man with us. . . ."

"Good lord, is your whole regiment as thick-headed? Put the wounded man on a horse—there, that sound man can take him," he said, and indicated Latugin. "And who's that fellow there?"

"We've taken a prisoner."

"Let me have him."

Sapozhkov started to explain that the prisoner must be sent back to the regiment.

"Look, I can't discuss that with you. The chief of staff of the brigade will do that. You might have more sense." The whiskered man wriggled his shoulders to settle his cape and sent his horse forward at a lively pace, the animal dancing under him, and throwing up the snow with glittering hoofs. All the others followed him, including Latugin, who supported Sharygin in front of him in the saddle, and the Cossack prisoner, whose hands had been unbound and who was scowling with shame and grief.

The cavalrymen were greatly surprised when Sergey Sergeyevich asked what sort of cavalry this was, riding so fast in campaign columns, now already vaguely visible through the mist and rain.

"What sort of cavalry? Why, this is the brigade of Semyon Mikhailovich Budenny."

"Have you had a nice little rest, Daria Dmitrievna? Why that worried look? Had nothing to eat since this morning? A pity, that. And I had a whole pailful of milk I wanted to bring you, on my word, but the soldiers drank it all. We crumbled bread into it and filled our bellies."

Kuzma Kuzmich was simply overflowing with excessive vitality. Dasha could not bear to look at his clean-shaven face—the fussy little chin and the bare mouth seemed indecent to her, seemed to ask to be covered up. Dasha had wakened late and there was nobody about either in the house or in the yard. The air smelt of thaw, of pigsty and cowshed. Wisps of mist hung in the thatched roofs of the cottages. Kuzma Kuzmich had caught sight of her from a neighbouring yard, had climbed briskly over the fence and begun to fuss over her, rubbing his small dirty hands.

"First of all: everything is all right, Daria Dmitrievna. Your husband is on the other side of the pond. You slept so soundly that you heard nothing, but there was a bit of a skirmish this morning. The Cossacks tried to put out feelers, but we slapped them down so hard that they ran back to their villages. For the present we are digging in. I've been down to the battery—Karl Moor is not back yet from patrol. Anissya drove past with a water-cask, she looked ill, her lips were compressed, her nose sharp, she refused to speak to me. That's a summary of external events. So far as you are concerned, go find a pail, pour some warm water from the pot into a jug and come with me, we're going to milk a cow. There is nothing more soothing to the body and the soul—especially for an intellectual given to dreaming—than contact with the udder of a cow."

Dasha laughed. But Kuzma Kuzmich insisted:

"Schiller is all right as far he goes, but the people of this house have run away and left the cattle unwatered, unfed and unmilked. That won't do. Go, get the pail."

"But I don't know how to milk, Kuzma Kuzmich."

"There's a typical answer for you. You didn't know how to do anything, Daria Dmitrievna; you didn't know how to hold a needle, and you almost lost your husband for ever because you didn't know how to hold *him*. Now we'll go and get some milk and I'll teach you how to make milk pancakes and fry scrambled eggs over a kindle-light. Ivan Ilyich will be here presently and he'll be as hungry as a wolf. And his beautiful wife will serve him with a frying-pan with bacon sizzling in it like billy-o; he'll gobble it up and then there will be pancakes for him! You'll sit down opposite him and watch him with a calm smile which he will think as mysterious as the smile of Mona Lisa. That's the sort of wife a Red commander needs!"

Kuzma Kuzmich got his own way. Once he took something into his head, it was always best to humour him. In the twilight of the cowshed Dasha gathered her skirts round her and sat down under the cow which did not shove or kick when Dasha washed her udder with warm water and began to pull at her rustling teats as she had been taught by Kuzma Kuzmich, sitting behind her. She was afraid that the teats would come off, but he repeated: "Come on, pull harder, don't be afraid." The broad-backed cow turned her head and gave a loud snort, enveloping Dasha in her good warm breath. Thin jets of milk that smelt of childhood hissed tinkling into the pail. This was that unargumentative, humble, good world of which Dasha had had no idea up to now. She said as much to Kuzma Kuzmich—in a whisper. He answered behind her back, also in a whisper:

"Only you mustn't tell anyone about this. They would laugh at you: Daria Dmitrievna has discovered a new world in the cowshed. Your fingers tired yet?"

"Yes, dreadfully."

"Let me do it then." He took her place on the stool. "This is how it should be done, just like this. There we have our Russian *intelligentsia*. They went out to seek eternal truths and found—a cow."

"Listen, what about yourself?"

"Me?" Kuzma Kuzmich was so indignant that he stopped milking.

"You are sitting under the cow and philosophizing, aren't you?"

"My dear lady, you had better not start arguing with a former priest."

He took the pail and went back to the house with Dasha. There he began to split pine splinters for kindle-lights.

"Philosophizing is mere idle romancing. Johann Georg Hamann, known as 'the wizard of the North', said: 'Our own existence and the existence of objects outside us cannot be proven by any means, and demand merely faith.' So if there is no faith, there is no outside world either? No you and no me? And this is not a pine splinter, but a nothing. Are we going to fry an omelet on nothing?"

He put down the pine splinters on the hearth, raked a few living coals from the fire and began to blow on them.

"But the philosophy of life, Daria Dmitrievna, is quite another thing. One must study life, come to know and master it. Without the intervention of reason at its best, life is diverted into evil channels. My existence is a quite indisputable fact and a fact of the greatest importance for me. And as I am both curious and communicative, I want to see and understand everything. I shall soon understand much of what is going on around us and is happening to us because this is not something spontaneous, but is governed by human intelligence and reason. I'm sorry I haven't been able to have a good talk with our commissar. But what I should really like would be to chat for an hour with a man in a civilian coat, but with our commissar's head on his shoulders. Oh, Daria Dmitrievna, please go outside into the yard, you'll see a little shed there at the back, I've had my eye on it for some time and have even broken the lock just in case—there is flour in there, go and bring some, about two handfuls."

Breakfast was soon ready. But instead of Telegin, whom Dasha was expecting any minute, a Red Army man with rifle and packed haversack burst into the room:

"The commander says hitch up the wagons, pack up and make ready to go!" He sniffed, pushed his cap to the back of his head, took a fresh grip on his rifle, went up to the stove, scraped up as many hot pancakes from the frying-pan as he could hold and slipped back to the door. He would have gone, but Dasha called to him:

"Comrade! What has happened?"

"Don't you know? Look outside!"

At that moment a shell burst so close and with such violence that the glass flew out of the two little windows of the room.

The plan of the December offensive against Tsaritsyn had been worked out by military experts on Denikin's staff. One of the youngest generals, a certain Baron Wrangel, was the first to point out the exceptional importance attaching to the capture of that city. The plan was immediately accepted by General Krassnov and reinforcements were sent to the Don Army in the shape of a division commanded by May-Mayevski, available after it had wiped out the Reds in the Northern Caucasus and strengthened by the best units of Kornilov's, Markov's, and Drozdovski's followers. May-Mayevski advanced across the Donbas in order to protect the rear of the Don Army which was open to attack from the west, *i.e.*, from the Ukraine, and which had left only a strong holding force on its northern boundaries. Fifty thousand crack troops of the Don Army were marching against Tsaritsyn.

Meanwhile a plan for a counter-offensive was being worked out by the staff of the Supreme Command of the Red Army of the republic. The Eighth and Ninth Red Armies, standing on the northern frontier of the Don region, were to advance along both banks of the Don river, pushing Krassnov's White Cossacks against the bayonets of the Tenth Army and conjointly wearing down the Don Army in the Tsaritsyn steppe. After the destruction of that army the Red forces would face about at an angle of 180 degrees and move west towards the Dnieper, with the aim of clearing Petlyura and his men out of the Ukraine.

This plan failed to take into account what was most important of all: the fact that behind the lines and contours of the military maps, under the network of symbols and figures a class war was raging, a war with laws and opportunities of its own. There were two qualitatively different kinds of lines and points: one sort could infuse fresh forces into the Red regiments, brigades and divisions; the other sort could fatally weaken them.

In following the plan of the Supreme Command the Red armies were not moving in the direction dictated by the requirements of the higher strategy of the civil war. Their march from the north towards the south-east along the Don, Khopra, and Medveditsa, took them into hostile Cossack territory, weakened their offensive drive, made them lose time and thus gave the enemy the chance to manœuvre and regroup their forces.

The Supreme Military Council of the Republic accepted the faulty plan of the Supreme Command for execution. Stealthy, secret treason was at work again. A matter that at the first glance appeared a scarcely perceptible mistake developed in the course of six months into a mortal peril.

The December counter-offensive of the Red armies was under way. It started far to the east of the Donbas, where the factory workers and miners were impatiently waiting for the coming of the Red Army to give the signal for armed insurrection. But instead of the Red Army in was May-Mayevski who came into the region with floggings and hangings. The right flank of the Red thrust was in danger. The offensive was held up. For the third time since the month of August the Tenth Army was exposed to the full fury of the enemy blows.

The enemy troops were superior in numbers, armament and equipment. They were filled with a furious offensive spirit. The inequality of forces proved too great. Tsaritsyn sent its last reserves to the front, the result of a last effort, five thousand factory workers. The creative spirit of the revolution itself rose to help the fighting men.

In 1792 the hungry, barefooted French people, armed with home-made pikes, faced with the necessity of defeating the trained armies of the European coalition, invented hurricane artillery fire and, contrary to all the rules of warfare made successful mass infantry charges against the famous squares of the King of Prussia.

The Russian people, in its extremity, created new forms of organization for fighting cavalry units. Such a unit was Semyon Budenny's brigade which appeared suddenly out of the Salsk steppe. Its strength was not in its courage alone. The White Cossacks were as good swordsmen as Budenny's troopers. But the Budenny brigade, from the bearded old service corps man to the standard-bearer with whiskers a foot long, was forged together by bonds of fidelity and discipline. Its sub-units were formed of men of the same village. The troopers who now rode knee to knee had caught beetles together in the steppe as little boys. Sons and nephews rode in the fighting line, fathers and uncles drove the supply columns. From the very first day when Semyon Budenny led his band of three hundred sabres out of the Cossack village of Platovskaya, there had never been a single case of desertion in the brigade. For where could such a deserter have gone? Never again home—nothing but condemnation and disgrace would have awaited him in his village.

According to custom—an unwritten law not to be found in the regulations—there were two kinds of tribunals in the brigade: the official courts-martial and the comradely courts. A man whose courage had failed in battle, who disobeyed an order or lifted a hand against another man's property, was judged by court-martial. But in special cases the men judged the culprit themselves, whatever the court-martial might have decided. They would meet somewhere in secret, in the twilight, and hold their own court. Sometimes when a court-martial found extenuating circumstances and acquitted a man, the comradely court returned a severer verdict, the accused disappeared and no inquiry could ever throw any light on his fate.

New rules, these again not to be found written down in any regulations, also determined the battle order of the brigade. The squadrons charged in two waves. In the first rode heavy-handed, experienced swordsmen, mostly ex-troopers of the old army, who could slash so mightily that many a time their enemy's horse carried away on its back only the lower half of its master's body. Behind these rode sharpshooters with pistols and carbines, each protecting his man in battle. The front rank, screened by the fire of their comrades, boldly cut into the enemy ranks with their sabres, and there was not one single instance on record of enemy cavalry, even twice or three times greater in numbers, standing up to such a concentrated charge of Budenny's men, a charge forged into a concerted whole out of several co-ordinated links.

The farm was ablaze at several points. Smoke curled among the huddled roofs, flames sprang up and threw clusters of sparks and wisps of burning straw up towards the low-flying clouds. Pigeons circled and fell into the fire. The cattle lowed in the stables. A pedigree bull broke loose, trampled down a fence and charged bellowing down the road. Women with children in their arms rushed out of burning cottages, seeking escape. From the direction of the village beyond the hills, the Cossack artillery fired salvo after salvo.

Towards noon the first foot Cossacks appeared from that direction, tiny scattered dots over a vast field. They obviously intended to surround the burning farm and drive the Kachalin regiment into the fire. The regiment occupied hastily dug trenches which began near the blacksmith's shop on the edge of the settlement, ran along the banks of the pond—on which the ice had

been broken by hand-grenades—and turned off towards the windmill on the knoll.

Telegin and Ivan Gora were riding on horseback along the line of trenches followed by Agrippina, the commissar's orderly. Agrippina wore her sheepskin cap tilted over one ear, a fashion she had copied from the Cossacks. They stopped near a platoon who were sitting up to the waist in narrow ditches and shivering in the inclement weather, and then near a machine-gun crew. Ivan Telegin was apple-cheeked and cheerful as ever, but Ivan Gora's dark face showed traces of the night's worries, though it was calm now that the situation was clear. Telegin shifted in the saddle, raised his gloved hand to his lips as if to wipe the smile off them and said, pausing for quiet spells between explosions:

"Comrades, you have the opportunity here of inflicting a bloody defeat on the enemy. Fire without panic, calmly and carefully, using one bullet for each enemy, not more. That is the kind of shooting the commissar and I expect of you. When we counter-attack, your bayonet charge should be co-ordinated and furious. There is to be no retreat in any circumstances. That is an order."

Ivan Gora, the commissar, nodded his head at this and then cried:

"Long live Comrade Lenin! Perish world capitalism!"

Having said their say they rode on to the next group of fighting men, until they reached the end of the line near the windmill, and here they dismounted. By this time scouts had established that a large Cossack force had entered the village during the night. The enemy's hasty measures showed that the occupation of the farm by the Kachalin regiment had taken them unawares while they were engaged in some other operation and that they had obviously decided to wipe out the Red force in their stride by a single blow.

The wind whistled under the roof of the windmill, wooden axles creaked with the turning of the sails and inside the mill there was a homely smell of mice and flour. Ivan Gora sighed and leaned out so far through an opening provided by tearing away a few boards that he almost fell out, so eagerly did he watch the brown steppe to the east for any sign of Sergey Sergeyevich. Telegin, who had been shouting into a telephone downstairs, now came running up the crazy stairs.

"We are repeating the Tsaritsyn operation," he cried excitedly, and raised his field-glasses to his eyes.

"Operation fiddlesticks, we are surrounded like a herd of sheep. . . . I tell you they've killed him . . . it's more than two hours now. . . ."

"Sergey Sergeyevich is not an easy man to kill. . . ."

"You're damned cheerful. Why?"

Smoke from burning straw on the threshing-floor floated low over the ground towards the attacking force. They could now distinguish individual leap-frogging figures. The outposts fired on them and then withdrew into the trenches. The entire front of the Kachalin regiment, surrounding the burning farm in the shape of an irregular horseshoe, had now taken cover.

"Aha! They are lying down!" shouted Telegin. "They can't take it, the greenhorns! Look! They're lying down! Ivan Stepanovich, run down to the lads, tell them they are not to fire on any account, impress it on them: for the love of God, not a single shot without orders from me!"

"The commissar!" Ivan Baikov shouted, with mock fright. "Gun-crew! Take posts!"

The crew of the first gun jumped up and took up their posts. They were Baikov, Zaduiviter, Gagin and Anissya. Ivan Gora, with Agrippina one pace behind him, came out from behind the clay wall of the burned cottage. They

were going to the detachment covering the battery. While Ivan Gora spoke to the men, Agrippina stood to attention beside him as stiff as a ramrod, holding an automatic in her hand.

"Without special orders . . . absolutely . . . not a single shot . . ." came fragments of Ivan Gora's insistent voice. "Comrades, I warn you . . . disobedience . . . will be shot on the spot. . . ."

Baikov shook his beard, which was quite grey with raindrops:

"Brothers, you'd better keep clear of this lass with the gun—she'd shoot you as soon as not, without batting an eyelid."

Anissya answered him: "Why make fun of her? Agrippina is a proper comrade."

Ivan Gora now came back to the gun and he looked so grave that the crew fell silent. Agrippina walked behind her husband step for step as if she were tied to him. The first gun stood on a strange contraption of planks and cart-wheels, with hatchets and saws and chips lying about around it. Ivan Gora saw amid a litter of chips the curious gadget, blinked at it and asked:

"What's that thing?"

"Our own invention, comrade commissar," answered Baikov. "It's meant to act like a naval revolving gun-turret."

"Why the cart-wheels?"

"For turning the gun round quicker. It works all right."

"I see." Ivan Gora went on with Agrippina at his heels. Baikov winked at her and said:

"I'm in the same dramatic circle with her, but I'm much more scared of her than of the commissar. She has round eyes, like a mouse and not a glint of mercy in them. Oh, these women! Is that what we are fighting for?"

"I took it to him, Daria Dmitrievna. They didn't allow me inside the mill, but he looked out of the window, waved at me, and asked: 'Did Dashenka really make them for me herself?' 'Her very self,' I said; 'only it's a pity they are cold.' 'But I like cold pancakes best of all,' he said. 'Give her my love and a thousand kisses.' "

"You're only making all this up."

"So help me God, it's gospel truth. Have you heard the latest? Our Ivanov, you know, the doctor, got cold feet to such an extent that he developed a belly-ache and began to puke. The commissar lost his temper: 'I'll cure his nerves for him!' he said. He had him stripped and soused at the well. Can you hear him yell? They're pouring the third bucket over him. It's really funny. Though I'm a coward myself, Daria Dmitrievna, as you must know."

Dasha was pacing up and down the room like an animal in a cage. She had all her bandages ready and the smell of disinfectant was already filling the house. But Kuzma Kuzmich left her no peace.

"There's a dream I can't get away from—I have it almost every night: I am holding a rifle in my hand, my heart is all a-quiver like an aspen-leaf and I am shooting, squeezing that blessed trigger with all my might and feeling as if I wanted to crawl right into that damned rifle. . . . But the rifle doesn't shoot, the firing-pin slides forward limply, a languid little wisp of smoke creeps out of the barrel and the other fellow, the one I'm shooting at—he has no face, I never see a face—comes nearer and nearer and grows broader and broader. . . . Phew, what a dream!"

"Why is it so quiet outside?" Dasha asked, stopping at the window with her hands tightly clasped. Dusk was falling, the fires were dying down and

they could no longer hear the bursting and whistling of shells. The fire flier had ceased likewise. The Cossack lines sprang to life and crept forward—they had almost surrounded the farm by now. Dasha left the window and resumed her pacing. "There will be many wounded. How shall we manage?"

"The commissar will lend us Agrippina, she's a great help. I also asked for Anissya. I said a gun was no place for her; it was purely a romantic fad on her part, this business with the gun. But what do you think about my dream?"

"Tell me the truth, please. Is Ivan Ilyich all right? Is everything all right?"

"Well, he stuck his head out of a hole in the wall and grinned so his mouth touched his ears. He's quite sure we'll win."

"Oh!" Dasha sighed and shook her head. She must not think of those thousands of men creeping towards them like wild beasts. One could not understand such things anyhow. With all her strength she dragged her imagination like a fabulous monster caught on a string back to the trivial objects spread out on the table, to the bandages, bottles, surgical instruments. . . . There was not enough iodine, it was too bad! Her imagination submitted obediently but soon crept imperceptibly back to the same problem by some mysterious path of its own. Why are these men so determined to kill all innocent, kind, beloved beings? Hate—what could be more terrible in men than hate? Hate was surrounding Dasha, advancing against her inexorably; biding its time until it could thrust at her with the bayonet, that bayonet which the victim grips convulsively.

"No; it's simply shameless to talk like this," she said, and the fierce look in her wide-open eyes frightened Kuzma Kuzmich. "Why do you stare at me like that? I'm scared too, understand, just like the doctor; I, too, want to vomit. I can't bear this hate. Gently nurtured, you say? Well, say it and may it choke you."

She began aimlessly to shift the little bottles and packages on the table.

"Another thing I can't understand is why you started telling me about this dream of yours."

"Aha, Daria Dmitrievna, the dream is to the point. There is a hate that purifies like love. There is a hatred like a morning star on a lofty brow. But there is also another hatred, a stony hatred that comes from the guts, and this hatred you are right to fear. I remember how horrified I was in 1914 when I heard this story: when Russians who were caught abroad by the mobilization rushed to catch the last train home, German guards crushed the hands of little children by slamming the coach doors on them. And so far as my dream is concerned, I wouldn't tell it to the commissar, I would tell it to no one except you, and even to you only at such a critical moment. I am powerless, my earthly pilgrimage is done." Suddenly he caught his breath in a sob. "My rifle will not shoot, it merely hisses."

"I hate them," Dasha cried suddenly, and she tapped herself on the chest with bunched fingers. "I've seen them; I know their faces, those faces of frustrated murderers, those cheeks pimply with lust, those receding chins. . . . Filthy scum. . . . Ignorant oafs. . . . There is no room for such men on this earth!"

"Don't get so excited, Daria Dmitrievna. We'd better see whether the water is boiling in the pot yet."

Dasha quickly went to the window and looked out. Red Army men were running past in the dusk, bending down and holding their rifles pointed forward as if about to charge. She could even distinguish their tense faces. One of them stumbled, nearly fell, ran forward, threw up his arms to regain his balance and turned round with a grin that showed his teeth.

A rocket rose in the steppe, scattering greenish, poisonous sparks. Slowly falling the sparks lit up the bent grey backs in the trenches and closer, not more than four hundred yards away, the figures of the foot Cossacks just jumping up from the ground. Among them ran a man brandishing a sabre above his head. The lights faded out. In the instantaneous black darkness the shout of "Hurrah!" rose and grew stronger like a stormwind.

Telegin took off his cap and passed his hand over his damp hair. Everything he could think of, foresee and do—all had been done. Now the battle was on. The enemy was at least four times superior in numbers, to judge by the concentration of reserves scarcely distinguishable even with field-glasses.

He leant far out of the hole in the roof and watched. Suddenly he saw the farm ringed in a circle of rifle fire. For an instant the world grew dim before his eyes. Then he saw little groups of men gather here and there near the trenches. He looked round for his cap. "Oh, damn it," he thought. "I must have dropped that good hat!" He slid down the stairs and ran down the knoll towards the trenches.

The first Cossack charge was beaten back everywhere; only near the blacksmith's shop did they come to close quarters just as Telegin had presumed. There was hand-to-hand fighting there, savage cries, and the bursting of grenades. Telegin ran up to the clay wall of the shed where the reserves were supposed to be—but there was no one to be found there. The men had not waited, but of their own initiative had rushed to the assistance of their hard-pressed comrades near the blacksmith's shop. Ivan Gora was also running in that direction, bending low under the weight of a sack full of hand-grenades.

"Commissar!" shouted Telegin, "what is going on here? This is disorder! This is impermissible!"

Ivan Gora said nothing, only turned a fiercely pugnacious nose towards him from under the sack. Two paces further Telegin saw Dasha disappear in a doorway, supporting a wounded soldier who hopped along on one foot. Ivan Ilyich stopped and raised his hand with fingers wide apart. "That's it," he said, "that is what I came for." He turned round and ran back to the battery.

"Everything all right here?"

"As right as rain, sir. Good evening to you."

"Comrades, shrapnel fire at the enemy reserves."

Telegin climbed on to the roof of a nearby cottage and stood with eyes glued to his field-glasses. The reserves which he had seen a short while ago from the mill were now moving up in dense masses. He shouted from his perch: "Rapid fire!"

In the leaden twilight bursts of shrapnel flared up brightly in rapid succession. The ranks of the attackers wavered but then came on again. Shrapnel burst closer and closer over their heads but still they came. A rocket rose and hung in the air over the heads of the little leaden soldiers like a fiery-headed snake, lighting up their daring exploit as if to urge them on: "now's your time, boys, to drink Bolshevik blood." And as soon as the rocket faded out three other rockets shot up one after the other in the east

dissolving into ominous muddy red fires spanning the whole sky. Telegin shouted:

"Answer with three red rockets one after the other!"

It was now that Budenny's men, having approached in the dusk along the bed of a shallow ravine, unexpectedly threw themselves on the left flank of the attackers with such fury that the ranks of the foot Cossacks were instantly overwhelmed and there began that which infantry troops fear most in meeting cavalry: a sabre attack of mounted men on fleeing foot soldiers. The rockets rising from the farm lit up the steppe, but everywhere there was only death from slashing, whistling sabres. Men threw away their weapons as they ran and covered their heads with their arms as the black shadow of a horse and rider fell on them and a Budenny trooper rose in his stirrups, leant over to the left, slashed downward with the full swing of shoulder and arm—and a dead Cossack rolled under the horses' hoofs.

When Budenny saw that the Cossack masses were routed and in flight over the whole battlefield he reined in his horse and raised his sabre, shouting: "To me!" With the half-troop that immediately gathered round him he turned and galloped towards the farm. The horse under him was a spirited beast. Budenny rode leaning back in the saddle, letting his sabre hang downwards to rest his arm, his silvery lambskin cap pushed well back to the back of his head so that the wind could cool his sweating face and blow freely through his whiskers. The cavalrymen had to give their horses the spur in order to keep up with him. They galloped along the edge of the pond where the falling stars of the rockets were reflected in the gleaming ice. Men ran from the riders and lay down flat on the ground. Paying no attention to them, Semyon Mikhailovich pointed with his sabre in the direction of the blacksmith's shop, where the foot Cossacks and the Kachalin regiment were still locked in a desperate struggle; now one side, now the other made bayonet charges, drew back, lay down and then came on again.

Budenny's half-troop scattered into open order and with their eyes fixed on the silver-grey cap bobbing in front, charged hell-for-leather downhill from the pond. Neither machine-gun fire, nor rifle shots, nor fixed bayonets could stop the snorting horses. Whoever came within reach of the slashing sabres was cut down. Budenny did not rein in his horse until he had reached the farm road.

Telegin hurriedly came up to him, but Budenny first wiped the blade of his sabre with a handkerchief, threw the handkerchief away, returned the great brass-hilted cavalry sabre to its scabbard, raised his right hand to his forehead and said:

"Good evening, comrade, who are you? Commander of this regiment? I am brigade commander Budenny, acting group commander. Your orders are to leave one company to guard the supplies and the wounded, and with the rest of your forces, including the artillery, to attack the village immediately, occupy it and clear it of all White Cossacks."

"I understand. It will be done."

"Just a moment, comrade. . . ."

He sprang from his horse, pushed his hand in under the girth, slapped the lips of the horse which was nuzzling his sleeve and held out his hand to Telegin.

"Losses been heavy?"

"Not at all."

"Good. . . . Do you think you could have held out alone without our help?"

"Oh, we would have held out all right; we had plenty of ammunition."

"Good. Well, you'd better start now."

"The pain in the region of the abdomen is definitely gone, Anissya Konstantinovna—I scarcely feel where my belly is. The whole thing is very inefficiently built—such important organs should not be left so entirely unprotected. The sabre did not go in more than about an inch and yet it did so much mischief. Give me some water, please."

Anissya, tired and taciturn, was sitting by the bed. The hospital was in the village now, in a brick house two stories high. Only the slightly wounded and those who could not be moved remained here, all the others had been evacuated to Tsaritsyn several days before. Sharygin was dying. He was so unwilling to die, he was so attached to life that Anissya suffered with him. She no longer tried to console him, just sat by his bedside and listened to him.

She stood up to dip water from the pail into a mug and give it to Sharygin. His face was burning and his large blue child-like eyes followed Anissya's every movement. She was dressed in a white overall and her fair hair—which he often saw in his dreams—was coiled round her head in a plait. He was afraid she would go away and then there would be nothing left for him to do but to bury his head in the pillow, grit his teeth and listen to the irregular pulsing of the blood in his temples. He talked without pause. His thoughts flared up like the flame of a dying candle that shoots up brightly and then sinks down in smoke.

"You were not at all good-looking then, Anissya Konstantinovna, and you looked much older than you do now. You sat with your cheek propped up on your hand and looked without seeing, your eyes dark with suffering. Of course I am not tender-hearted; that is something I have uprooted in myself. Tender-hearted people are the most cruel. Pity is something one should feel once in a lifetime and then switch it off for good. One should put one's heart on the anvil, and then into the fire again and then again under the sledge-hammer. That's what Komsomols should be like. At that time, on the boat, I called a confidential meeting and explained to the comrades that it was unworthy of fighters for the revolution to touch you. It was then that Latugin made those remarks about scullions. Yes, Latugin! Anissya Konstantinovna, keep away from him. The revolution has gathered you up and filled you with beauty—but not for him. That would be just a blind alley. It's a matter that must be dealt with, a matter that must be fought out. . . ."

He passed his dry tongue over his lips. Anissya put the mug of water to his mouth. He went on:

"I know what I am dying for, I have no doubts about that. . . . But I want you to remember me. I come from Petrograd, from Vassilyevski Island. My old man is a joiner; I learnt the trade and worked with him. He pushed a plane and I pushed a plane and neither of us ever said a word, not ever. So I went away to work in the Baltic shipyards. There I found out the most important thing—the reason why I exist. I became impatient, had a sort of fever of thinking. I was drawn to the heights, I could not stay in the depths any longer. And then the war came. I was called up to the navy. I wore down my teeth, I ground them so hard in my rage. . . . You must understand,

Anissya Konstantinovna, how at last I came to see the image of a human being we ourselves had conceived, had fought for, had created. How can I let you wander off again with bent head? Why a revolution then? No, it mustn't happen. You must be an actress. Every evening I stood about near that barn, I saw and heard you: 'Oh, for the love of God! Oh, for mercy's sake! Abandoned, deserted!' You'll shake them on every front! And when the civil war is over, you'll be a world-famous actress. That is the road you must take. Being weak is not your way. *He'll* sing you a song, but don't you listen to him, Anissya Konstantinovna. I want to prove to you that you have no right to live only your personal life. My dear! Why turn away? I'll have a little rest, pick up a bit, and then I'll tell you some more. . . . I've forgotten something, something important. . . ."

His head tossed on the pillow—then he quieted down and was silent so long that Anissya bent over him in alarm. She could not see his pupils through his half-open eyelids. It was not his words so much as those piteously upturned eyes that touched Anissya's heart. Suddenly she understood everything he wanted to tell her with his feverish, muddled talk. Her two little ones must have called to her just like this when they sat, closely huddled together in their hiding-place and frightened by the fire roaring around them. Ever since that day Anissya had never once recalled the faces of her children—she had been afraid to do that—but now they appeared before her as if alive, her four-year-old Petrusha and Anyuta, her youngest, curly-haired, apple-cheeked, snub-nosed and laughing. And now there was another, a third, calling out to her. But to this one she would say good-bye, this one she would keep company to the last.

Anissya gently stroked his matted hair. His eyelids quivered, and she saw purple patches appear on his temples.

CHAPTER XIV

GENERAL DENIKIN, THE Commander-in-Chief, played whist every Friday evening at the house of Yekaterina Alexeyevna Kvashnin, a distant connection on his mother's side. This whist-playing began back in the 'nineties of the last century, when Anton Ivanovich Denikin was a student at the Academy and occupied a furnished room in Yekaterina Alexeyevna's St. Petersburg flat in the Fifth Line on Vassilyevski Island. It was on the upper ground floor and very neat and clean, Petersburg fashion. Now, of the four permanent partners only they two were left, cast up by the stormy times in Yekaterinodar, where it had pleased God to put Anton Ivanovich in command of all White armed forces, and where Yekaterina Alexeyevna, who had fled from Petrograd in the beginning of 1918, was living quietly with her daughter, Yekaterina Alexeyevna the younger.

The Commander-in-Chief had often offered her financial assistance on various pretexts but she always replied: "Better not let such things come between us, Alexey Ivanovich; money always spoils friendships." She preferred to read proofs for a publisher, keeping for a rainy day the few valuable trifles which still remained to her and her daughter.

The Friday nights were sacred. No one, not even General Romanovski, the chief of staff, dared disturb the Commander-in-Chief at his traditional game of whist. At twenty hours precisely a one-horse carriage with raised

leather hood stopped in front of an insignificant little wooden house in the distant outskirts of the city. The Commander-in-Chief told the bearded, be-medalled coachman to come back for him at midnight, opened the gate softly and walked up to the porch, where the front door was already opening for him.

The sleuths sent here every Friday by the counter-espionage service did their best not to be seen by the Commander-in-Chief. One of them, posted on the roof, hid behind a chimney-stack; another behind a tall poplar across the road and two more in the yard behind the dustbin. Denikin, soldier fashion, hated spies of any kind. One day, while he was being dealt a hand, he told a story about the late Emperor in connection with this unpleasant necessity. Nicholas II liked to go on solitary walks in the park of Tsarskoye Selo. Spies were posted from early morning behind bushes and hedges along the paths the Emperor might take. In winter these spies were snowed under and quite invisible. Taking his exercise one day the Emperor heard a hoarse whisper behind his back, coming from under a bush: "Number Seven just passed". Nicholas II was greatly annoyed at being described by the spies as "Number Seven" and sacked the chief of the guard, after which he was always called "Number One".

In the tiny hall lit by a candle, Denikin took off his brass-heeled leather goloshes—he always did this himself, without any assistance—slipped out of his ample, red-lined greatcoat made of coarse regulation cloth, smoothed down his thinning lead-coloured hair which he wore combed back from his forehead, and kissed Yekaterina Alexeyevna's hand, amiably patted Yekaterina Alexeyevna the younger's frail little paw and greeted the other two partners with a short but friendly "Good evening, gentlemen." The other two partners were the Commander-in-Chief's own aide, Count Lobanov-Rostovski, and Vassili Vassilyevich Strupe, formerly head of a department in one of the ministries, an old Petersburger and a charming fellow.

In the drawing-room a table was already prepared with two candles and with the cards spread fanwise on green cloth. Even the chalk and the little round brushes were traditional—they were like those used in those happy years on Vassilyevski Island.

Yekaterina Alexeyevna was always cheerful. A tiny woman, disproportionately large about the hips, she was dressed in a much-worn black dress. She tripped on short legs to the table, her round face wreathed in smiles. She had a homely lisp. The old bent-wood chair on which she sat creaked incessantly because she fidgeted all the time. A footstool was set under the chair. Before she cut for partners she tried to guess what card she would draw and every time her partner turned out to be the Commander-in-Chief. Every time she joyfully clapped her plump little hands and said:

"You see, gentlemen, I guessed right. Katia, we're with Anton Ivanovich again."

"Splendid!" said Vassili Vassilyevich Strupe in a sepulchral tone as he sat down and picked out a chalk and a little brush for himself.

Vassili Vassilyevich was a cold-blooded, omniscient, witty sceptic with a lean, severe, prematurely old face. He was a dangerous opponent at cards and like all true Petersburgers took the game seriously and played it with artistry.

"Splendid, as the titular councillor said when he lost all his trumps" he repeated, and his well-manicured hands began rapidly to shuffle the pack of cards.

Prince Lobanov-Rostovski, the fourth, was an equally fine player. His duties as an aide were limited to this game and certain personal services to the Commander-in-Chief. Other men, of more up-to-date ideas were available for operational duties. Like all Lobanov-Rostovskis, the Prince was ugly. He had a longish bald head with a high forehead and insignificant features. Apart from one little blemish—a habit he had of jerking his long legs under the table as though in urgent need of going to the lavatory—his manners were impeccable. He never expressed an opinion; if asked about anything he gave an unexpectedly silly answer because he knew quite well that no one would approach him with any serious question; he was courteous without being servile, and before he was wounded and discharged that summer, he had shown great courage in battle.

They played as though performing a religious ceremony. In this house, at these hours, politics and the war were never mentioned. All that was said was "Spades. . . . Clubs. . . . No trumps. . . ." The candles sputtered, cigarettes sent up spirals of smoke from the edges of glass ashtrays. Then, at last:

"Well, Yekaterina Alexeyevna, do we let them have it?"

"It's an awful pity, Anton Ivanovich, isn't it?"

Yekaterina Alexeyevna the younger was sitting all this time on a little plush-covered sofa, knitting and smiling to herself without once raising her head. Her face, eyes and hair were colourless, but in the curve of her slender neck and in her beautiful hands one could divine an unquenched thirst for tenderness. Yekaterina Alexeyevna the younger fell in love very easily; she was twenty-six and all her sentimental affairs had ended badly. Sometimes *he* hastily said good-bye and left for the front; sometimes *he* suddenly discovered that he loved somebody else and mercilessly told Yekaterina Alexeyevna so. At present she was in love with the ugly but "terribly charming" Lobanov-Rostovski, who playfully courted her and by so doing pleased the Commander-in-Chief who regarded Yekaterina Alexeyevna almost as his own daughter. She, for her part, dreamed old-fashioned day-dreams about him—one day he would forget his cigar-case in their house; next morning he would turn up on horseback in the absence of Yekaterina Alexeyevna the elder; he would come into the little house jingling his spurs, would greet her (she would be wearing a black woollen dress with white collar and cuffs) and apologize—and then one of his little jokes would die on his lips—he would look into her face and understand. They would go into the drawing-room; both would be much agitated. Suddenly he would seize her arm above the elbow and draw her close to himself: "I never knew you," he would say, "I never knew you, you are quite different, you are like a fragrance. . . ." At this word Yekaterina Alexeyevna's flight of fancy broke off. She knitted and smiled without raising her eyes to the Prince who was sitting between two candles; it was enough for her that he was there and she could smell the scent of his expensive tobacco.

Such was the little world, a fragment of old Russia, in which General Denikin, the Commander-in-Chief, rested from his heavy cares every Friday evening.

This particular Friday the Commander-in-Chief, contrary to his custom, had arrived late; he was worried and preoccupied. In taking off his goloshes he trod on the paw of the cat that was weaving around his legs. The cat howled horribly. Lobanov-Rostovski picked it up and took it away to the kitchen. Yekaterina Alexeyevna the elder laughed. Vassili Vassilyevich said: "These tomcats are unbearable sometimes." Everyone expected Denikin to go on into the drawing-room. But he hung up his greatcoat pensively and still stood there fingering his little wedge-shaped grey beard. All made serious faces at this, and the alarming pause continued until the Prince, returning from the kitchen, brought the news that the cat was all right.

"Aha!" said Denikin, "so much the better. . . . We shan't lose any time."

He played worse than usual that evening; led the wrong cards more than once and kept on turning his face towards the windows, although the shutters on them were closed. Yekaterina Alexeyevna the younger got up quietly, threw a coat over her shoulders and went out into the courtyard to see whether the guards were at their posts. The detective sitting in the lee of the chimney on the roof with a biting wind whistling round him and the dim crescent of the moon, diving like some crazy thing in and out of the clouds over his head, shouted from up there between chattering teeth:

"Lady, for God's sake, bring me out a glass of vodka."

Round about ten o'clock a motor-car drove up to the house. The Commander-in-Chief put down his cards and a gleam came into his tense eyes. General Romanovski, arrogant, tall, red-cheeked, dressed in an officer's great-coat with the ends of his *bashlyk* tied crosswise over his chest, came into the room. He took off his cap, clicked his spurs, included the whole company in a single bow.

"Anton Ivanovich, I have come for you."

"So it has happened?"

"Yes, Anton Ivanovich."

Denikin got up hurriedly:

"I'll be back presently, please excuse me, urgent duties. . . ." In the hall he failed to find the sleeve of his great-coat with his arm at the first attempt. To Lobanov-Rostovski he said: "You stay here, Prince; play a rubber three-handed. I am not saying good-night, Yekaterina Alexeyevna."

The remaining players returned to the drawing-room, but no one felt like playing. Yekaterina Alexeyevna the elder let out a restrained sigh. Vassili Vassilyevich knitted his thick eyebrows and drew little gallows and devils on the green cloth with a bit of chalk. The Prince sat down on the divan beside Yekaterina Alexeyevna junior, who blossomed out at this and put down her knitting. Jerking his leg in the way he had, he began to tell her that he had discovered a remarkable fortune-teller in the city and wanted Denikin to consult her.

"She takes a hair from your head, burns it in a candle and then she foams at the mouth."

"What did she tell you?"

"She predicted a journey on horseback, fancy that, and that I shall be wounded three times and that it will all end with a happy wedding."

Jerking both his legs at once and swaying to and fro as though he was being shaken by the shoulders, the Prince almost choked with laughter. Yekaterina Alexeyevna's slender neck and tiny ears flushed.

"Everything is so alarming, really," said Yekaterina Alexeyevna the elder, and wiped her eyes. "Everyone's nerves are on edge. Oh God, we never thought we should have to live like this. . . ."

"Yes, we didn't think any too much," answered Vassili Vassilyevich, and drew a block and a headsman's axe. "Russia is a funny country."

The Commander-in-Chief kept his promise: when the English clock in its

little case thinly struck eleven, a motor-car hooted under the window and the next moment there was Anton Ivanovich again, pulling off his goloshes and saying:

"I knew, Yekaterina Alexeyevna, I knew perfectly well that you would have turkey with chestnuts for supper to-night. Hence, my dear Prince, would you be so kind as to fetch the bottle of champagne out of my car?"

He was in high spirits, rubbed his hands gleefully but rejected the suggestion that they should finish the rubber.

"Leave me alone! Yekaterina Alexeyevna and I are ready to capitulate; all we want to save is our honour." He even accepted a cigarette out of Vassili Vassilyevich's golden cigarette-case and smoked it—something he very rarely did. The supper was a hurried affair. They all went into the little dining-room where two candles threw a soft, old-world light on the cheap wallpaper and on the table with its home-made pies and hors-d'œuvres on chipped plates. The only thing lacking was Anton Ivanovich's favourite dish: lampreys with mustard sauce. Nor was there the usual peace of mind, and the usual mild arguments about the game at the supper-table: "But I assure you, you should have discarded the spade . . ." or "but, my dear lady, I knew perfectly well that he had the ace, king, queen. You simply pushed me under the table. . . ."

The Prince felt the tension and self-sacrificingly captured the attention of the company with a story about a porter in Petrograd who had the mysterious power of charming away toothache, heartburn and St. Anthony's fire; he had also foretold the German war after examining coffee grounds in a saucer. The mention of the war sounded a little out of place. Vassili Vassilyevich immediately reached for the carafe and poured out some vodka:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I give you: may there be no more miraculous porters in Russia. . . ."

The turkey was now brought in. The Commander-in-Chief leaned back in his chair and watched, with a severe expression on his face, the dish being placed on the overcrowded table. The steam from the roast rose towards the flames of the candles and they flickered a little.

"Only in Russia are there such turkeys," he said, as he helped himself to a wing. The Prince stood up, noiselessly uncorked the bottle of champagne and poured out the wine into tea glasses. Anton Ivanovich slowly removed the corner of the napkin tucked into his collar, raised his glass, stood up with his hand on the back of his chair and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I can no longer refrain from giving you the good news. This morning French troops made a landing in Odessa, Greek troops have occupied Kherson and Nikolayev. The long-expected aid of the Allies is here at last. . . ."

One day a passenger landed in Yekaterinodar from a British aeroplane. He was such a queer customer that the administration and influential circles did not know what to think. Was he a secret agent sent by Clemenceau? Or just a humbug? Or a bird to be taken seriously? His name was French: Giraud; his patronymic Peter Petrovich; he spoke Russian fluently with a Southern accent, his passport made him out to be a citizen of Uruguay—this last circumstance being proof of slickness rather than of nationality. He had come from Paris in a steamer unloading rifles, cartridges and other armaments in Novorossisk. The credentials he presented to the military commander of the city were in the most perfect order. They were a letter of introduction from various M.P.s, a letter from the Ministry of Education, and another letter

from a French princess with an unpronounceable name, a Press card identifying him as a correspondent of *The Petit Parisien*; and finally business propositions from various firms which in those days sprang into existence like toadstools growing on the gigantic dumps of all sorts of commodities and perishable goods brought to France from every quarter of the globe. There was no getting away from the fact: coming from Paris to this battle-scarred backwoods city of Yekaterinodar a man had fallen from the sky, a man beautifully dressed, a European from his hair to his heels, in a fur coat with a skunk collar, a dazzling muffler a yard wide, two new trunks, a camera slung across his shoulders, and yellow shoes of unprecedented beauty with hand-sewn welts so thick that even the military governor himself could hardly keep his eyes off them, to say nothing of the general public in the street, along which Peter Petrovich Giraud walked behind a Cossack carrying his bags, his head gaily thrown back under a daringly perched light-grey trilby hat.

The stranger was given an apartment *de luxe* in the best hotel—after the speculator Paprikaki, who had just arrived with his mistress, had been thrown out of it. Next day Giraud paid a visit to General Denikin.

Anton Ivanovich was somewhat embarrassed and sent out General Romanovski with an apology, saying that the Commander-in-Chief was somewhat indisposed but was glad to welcome such an interesting guest to the city.

Giraud also called on Professor Kologrivov, one of the pillars of the Duma, who was engaged in creating an atmosphere of statesmanlike thought around Denikin, and had formed a group called "The National Centre". Professor Kologrivov knew Paris well and loved it. He kept Giraud several hours, enthusiastically recalling meals in little Paris restaurants and nocturnal revels on the Montmartre. He recalled the smell of the boulevards, and despite his flabby paunch and untidy beard badly in need of a trim, screwed up his face into a youthfully waggish grimace.

"And oh, *cher ami*, that peculiar, inimitable fragrance of Parisian women! I would gladly kiss the pavement-stones on the streets of Paris. Yes, yes, you needn't think this strange—in every Russian you can find an ardent French patriot. . . . That is what you should write about for your paper!"

It was decided to invite a limited number of members of the "National Centre" to lunch in a private house where M. Giraud would give a lecture on the international situation.

"*Cher ami!*" cried Professor Kologrivov, twisting the buttons on his guest's coat in a friendly manner, "you will meet people who realized sooner than you in Europe did what a monstrous danger this Red mincing-machine is. Bolshevism is the destructive fury of the dregs, the running amok of the scum of the earth. You people, even the best and shrewdest among you, are prone to truckle to Socialism. That is all nonsense! Tomfoolery, sir! There is such a thing as Socialism, but there are no Socialists, because Socialism is incapable of being put into practice. We'll prove that to your satisfaction! History has destined Russia to be the barrier against which the eternal waves of anarchy break in vain. Thus we give European civilization the chance to develop undisturbed at our expense. We stretch out our hands towards you and ask you to help us save Europe and the whole world from the Red menace. We are prepared to accept any compromise, Russia will make any sacrifice for this. That is what you must write about for your paper."

The lunch caused many a headache. How could one obtain anything refined in Yekaterinodar? There was nothing to be had but bacon, goose and pork. After all, one could not ask a Parisian to eat dumplings! Von

Liese, a member of the "National Centre" and a well-known gourmand, suggested the following menu: Clear soup, *piroshki*, a *matelote* of sturgeon in red wine, chicken boiled without water in the bladder of a pig. A decent wine was supplied by Paprikaki the black marketeer. Punctually at one o'clock six people, including Peter Petrovich Giraud, foregathered in the flat of Shulgin, member of the Duma and publisher-editor of the newspaper *Our Native Land*. The lunch was really excellent. When coffee—made from roasted barley—was served, Giraud made this statement:

"A few words about Paris, gentlemen. You knew Paris well. Every year foreigners left more than four milliard gold francs in Paris. No wonder the vapour of its streets turned the heads even of those dreamers who looked down on the stream of shiny motor-cars from the height of an attic window. But alas, there are no more dreamers in Paris; their dead bodies are polluting the air and rotting on the Somme, in the Champagne, in the Ardennes. Paris is no longer the gay city where people dance in the streets and laugh at the long beard of King Leopold or the amorous misadventures of some Russian grand duke. Paris and France are a million and a half men short—the men who have been killed. Paris is swarming with boys who make their living by homosexual practices. The terraces of the cafés are full of melancholy old men who cannot interest even the twenty-franc tarts. Taxicabs, worn out on the Marne, rattle over the broken paving-stones. The *chic* restaurants and cafés still admit American soldiers with the temperament of stud stallions. And the women! Oh, the women are always equal to the situation—they have cut their skirts off at the knees and have dispensed with underwear."

"Explain that, please," said several voices round the table.

"In the evening, in theatres and restaurants the women cover up only what is unessential; to be more exact, their entire clothing consists of two narrow strips of material which hold up a short skirt. It is *chic* to show one's legs—the Parisiennes have charming legs. Why wear anything under your clothes? After all, it is not for nothing that the men have suffered all those privations in the trenches, damn it! But all these things are mere trifles. Paris to-day is a conquering city. It is dark, it needs sweeping, but it is full of restless and ambiguous talk. Paris has won the world war and is now preparing to win the world counter-revolution."

Three of the men round the table softly said: "Bravo!" The fourth refrained from comment, being busy rolling breadcrumbs into a ball. The fifth shrugged his shoulders inconclusively with a non-committal smile.

"Paris to-day is the lair of a furious tiger. Clémenceau is thirsting for revenge. Before the Peace Treaty is signed—and that will take some time—Germany will experience all the horrors of a starvation blockade. Her teeth will be drawn and her claws clipped for ever. In a private conversation Clémenceau said: 'I will kill the very hope in the Germans that they can ever be anything but a third-class nation. They have enough peas and potatoes to keep them from starving outright.' But, gentlemen, fifty years ago Clémenceau experienced not only the humiliation of the disgrace of Sedan but also the humiliation of being afraid of the Paris Commune. One day at a Press luncheon he indulged in reminiscences and told them what his feelings had been when he saw in the Place Vendôme the fragments of Napoleon's column, overturned by the Communards with the aid of much rope and tackle: 'I was shaken, less by the fact of this destruction itself than by the ideas which induced French workmen to wreak it. A mortal peril is threatening civilization. It may be warded off, but it is approaching and it will be here on the day when arms

are put in the hands of the common people. That will be the day of revenge for Sedan, but it will be a day on which we shall have to fight on two fronts.' Gentlemen, Clémenceau was right: demobilized men are pouring into Paris. They survived the horrors of Verdun and the Somme, and building barricades and fighting in the streets is mere child's play to them. They are shouting at the counter of every *bistro* that they have been cheated, and they are finding plenty of listeners. They are saying that those who fought were given badges, medals, crosses and artificial limbs while those for whom they fought pocketed milliards in hard cash. . . . The bourgeois, ruined by inflation, click glasses with the rabble-rousers. The suburbs of Paris are in a state of unrest. The factories are at a standstill. The troops of the Paris garrison give nothing away. In Germany there is a chaotic revolution the pressure of which the Social-Democrats are barely able to withstand. In Hungary the proclamation of a Soviet republic is expected any day. England is struggling in a paralysis of strikes and all Lloyd George's government can do is to try and pick a course between the reefs. All eyes are now directed towards Clémenceau. He alone understand that it is in your country, in Moscow, that a mortal blow must be struck at the European revolution. Thus the Italian fishermen when they catch an octopus, burst its air-bladder with their teeth and at once all its arms with their monstrous suckers are made powerless."

The men at the table stirred, passed fingers through their hair, took off misty spectacles and when Giraud paused in order to bite the end off a fresh cigar, questions came thick and fast:

"How many French divisions have been sent to Odessa?"

"Do the French intend to advance into the interior?"

"Does Paris know of the recent reverses suffered by Krassnov in his attack on Tsaritsyn? Will Krassnov be sent help?"

"Have spheres of influence already been established in Russia? In particular, who is going to give the Volunteer Army serious assistance?"

Giraud slowly blew out a little cloud of blue-grey smoke.

"Gentlemen, you question me as though I was Clémenceau himself. I am only a newspaperman. Several papers are interested in the Russian question and they have sent me here. The problem of immediate military aid is a complicated business. Lloyd George doesn't want to put anybody's back up. If he sends as much as two battalions of British infantry to Russia, he stands to lose two dozen votes in Parliament at by-elections. According to my latest information Lloyd George rushed to Paris by air—he preferred this means of transport to the possibility of being blown up in the air, as the Channel is full of drifting mines after the recent storms—and expressed the following opinions in the Council of Ten: hopes of a rapid fall of the Bolshevik government had not been realized as according to latest reports the Bolsheviks were stronger now than ever before and their influence over the people was increasing; even the peasants were supporting the Bolsheviks now. Taking into account the fact that Bolshevik Russia had now been driven back within her natural boundaries, as established in the days of the Susdal-Muscovite kingdom in the fifteenth century, and no longer constituted a serious menace to anyone, the thing to do was to call on the Moscow government to come to Paris and present itself to the Council of Ten in the same way as the Roman Empire used to summon the rulers of distant regions subject to Rome to give an account of themselves. . . . Well, gentlemen, that is the position so far as the Western powers are concerned. All this happened quite recently. Any further questions?"

A few days after this luncheon (recorded by Professor Kologrivov in the

annals of the "National Centre") the military governor of Yekaterinodar reported to the Commander-in-Chief:

"Immediately opposite the Hôtel Savoy, Your Excellency, a shop has just been opened for the purchase of diamonds and gold. Payment is by Don paper money and the prices are high, too high if you ask me. There is some doubt as to whether the money is genuine—all the notes are brand new. . . ."

"Oh, Vitali Vitalyevich, you always doubt everything and everybody," Denikin said testily, running his eye over the sheets of an operational report. "You've again been and had some Jew-boy flogged without my knowledge and now I find that it wasn't a Jew at all but a landowner from the Orel region. Plenty of dark-haired people in that area, some of them even look like gipsies. Really, Vitali Vitalyevich!"

"Sorry, Your Excellency, it was an unfortunate error. But about this shop, sir—the licence for it was issued to the notorious black marketeer Paprikaki of Yekaterinoslav, but we have found out that the real owner who is financing the enterprise with money of doubtful quality (here the military governor bent towards Denikin's ear as far as his *embonpoint* would permit) is the Frenchman, Peter Petrovich Giraud. . . ."

Denikin threw the operational reports on the table:

"Listen, Colonel, apparently you want to ruin my relations with France because of some paltry chains and rings! What have you done about that shop?"

"We've put seals on the safe. . . ."

"Go this instant, take them off and apologize. . . . And don't let it happen again. . . ."

"Yes, Your Excellency."

The military governor took his *embonpoint* out of the presence on tiptoes. The Commander-in-Chief drummed with his fingers on the operational reports for a long time and his grey whiskers twitched angrily.

"Rogues, all of them!" he said, and it was not clear whether he meant his own men or the French.

CHAPTER XV

A FRESH DISAPPOINTMENT awaited Vadim Petrovich Roshchin at Prokhladnoye. The house where Katia had lived with the Krassilnikovs stood empty with wide-open doors; a fresh fall of snow had covered every trace of them and lay in a fluffy heap dotted with the drip on the threshold of the deserted cottage.

No one would tell Vadim Petrovich where Alexey Krassilnikov had gone with the two women. That there had been such a Krassilnikov here was not denied; but where he came from, what village—who could know that, so many people from all parts came to join the *batko*.

The inside of the cottage smelled of cold stove, the floor was littered with rubbish, snow had blown in through the broken window. Two bare bunks stood against the wall. Not even a shadow of Katia remained on the peeling walls. She was gone. After so many efforts their paths crossed again at last—but too late.

Vadim Petrovich sat down on one of the rough bunks. Which of the two had been the marital couch? Alexey was a handsome, bold fellow. "You've had a good cry, now wipe your eyes," he would have said to her; not rudely, oh no, he had sense enough not to be rude to a gently nurtured lady; he would have said it cheerfully and categorically. And his little puss would have submitted, obediently and without complaints. Remaining chaste and pure, she would have let him do what he liked with her, without dashing her head against the wall. Without passion, quite passively, she would have wound herself around such a strong tree—poor little twining plant that she was—and put out bitter little flowers in his shadow.

Vadim Petrovich marched up and down the room, trampling on empty preserve tins. No, his licentious, prurient imagination was a liar. Katia would have fought; she would not have submitted, she would have remained faithful and pure. Oh, coward, oh, contemptible cad that he was! But why should she be faithful and true? Had he left such a bright memory in her mind? Say, rather, you would have killed them both on that creaking bunk if you could. Or you would have watched them from the threshold, looked into Katia's eyes and seen your lost world. "Excuse me," you would have said, "I seem to be redundant here," There it is, the test of pain, a fearful test at last. You cannot stand any more? Oh yes, you can, you can! You will go in search of Katia; search, and search, and search.

Karetnik, he of the twisted face who had escorted Roshchin, was waiting in the cart. Roshchin came out of the house, got into the cart, and turned up the collar of his great-coat against the wind. Makhno's personal driver and bodyguard, who also carried out in his stride the curt sentences pronounced by the *batko*, was nicknamed the Great Mute. He was a long-legged taciturn fellow with a twisted lower jaw which made him look like an image in a distorting mirror. Now he drove the four-in-hand so recklessly that it was all Roshchin could do to stay in the cart by holding on with both hands.

Karetnik, jolting with the motion of the cart, said in a familiar tone:

"Stop worrying, you bloody fool. If the *batko* says so, we'll find your wife for you wherever she is. Holy mother, why make such a fuss about her? Females are painted on the outside only, they're all the same underneath, the same plague. Better give up yours; she won't leave him, don't you think it; Alyoshka Krassilnikov has stolen three cartloads of stuff for her—he was the champion looter in the whole outfit. He cleared out just in the nick of time or else. . . ." Roshchin, hiding his face to the eyebrows in the turned-up collar of his coat, repeated to himself again and again: "You can stand it, you must stand it. This is only the beginning of your ordeal!"

They dashed over the cobble-stones of Gulyay-Polye without abating their pace until the Great Mute pulled up his four sweating horses in front of Makhno's headquarters. Roshchin was expected and was immediately summoned to the *batko*, who was holding a full-dress council of war in the unheated schoolroom, in which his commanders were uncomfortably seated on small forms. Nestor Ivanovich Makhno, in a black tunic cross-belted with yellow leather straps, was striding up and down between the forms like a jaguar. He was sober now and his face was even more haggard than when he was drunk. He held his hands behind his back, the right hand clutching his left, which in its turn clutched a whip. He stood Roshchin's unblinking stare for almost a minute.

"You will go to Yekaterinoslav," he said in a penetrating voice; "you will present a mandate from me to the revolutionary committee and inspect the plan of the rising as a representative of my staff. Go."

Roshchin saluted smartly, turned on his heel and left the room. Levka Zadov was waiting for him in the corridor.

"Everything is all right. I've got the credentials."

He put his arm round Roshchin's shoulder and steered him down the passage, pushing him with his thigh towards one of the doors. "You'll have to leave off that shabby great-coat. I'll make you a present of a fur jacket." Without taking his arm off Roshchin's shoulder he unlocked the door with three different keys. "I'll give you one of my own, a classy affair. It's worth while to be on good terms with Levka. Whoever is Levka's friend is sitting pretty, let me tell you. . . ."

He took Roshchin into a room in which there was the same sour smell as in the "Department of Culture", bragging all the time about himself and his possessions with which the room was crammed. He picked a fur jacket for Roshchin—a really fine thing, except for the slight blemish of bullet-holes in the front and back. Not without difficulty, for he was very corpulent, he dragged a bundle of hats from under the bed, picked out one of fine lambskin with a purple top and threw it across the room to Roshchin, expecting him to catch it in the air. Then for good measure he snatched a Caucasian silver-mounted sabre from the wall where it had been hanging. "Here, have this as well—belonged to a guardsman once." He began to equip himself, too; he strapped gold watches on both wrists, buckled on a belt with two Mauser pistols and a sabre in a shabby scabbard, first trying its edge with his finger, saying: "This is my working sabre." He stuck his feet into high rubber goloshes and put on a sheepskin coat with the skin side out.

"Let's go, pal. I'm coming with you."

The Great Mute drove them to the station. Levka said of him, taking good care not to be overheard:

"A tremendously strong chap; he was a convict. The *batko* and he escaped together from a convict prison in Tsarist times. Be careful with him—he dislikes being stared at, the brute. . . . Even I am a bit afraid of him. . . ."

Levka lolled back in the carriage with a self-satisfied air:

"You are a lucky fellow, Roshchin. I don't know why, but I like you. I like aristocrats. Quite recently I had to write off three princes, three brothers Golitsin. It was a pleasure to see the way they behaved."

In the railway carriage Levka continued the conversation in the same style. He had vodka and snacks brought into the compartment from the station buffet, took off his coat and loosened his belt.

"What I can't understand," he said, cutting himself a thick slice of bacon, "what I can't understand is that you've never heard of me before. Why, I was a popular idol in Odessa! I had plenty of money and plenty of women. A man had to be a man of my virility to cope with them. Ah, I was young then! All the newspapers featured me: 'Zadov, the poet and humorist.' Is it possible that you don't remember me? My biography is very interesting. I passed my matric with the highest honours—I got a gold medal. My father was only a simple carter in Peresyp and suddenly here I was, covered with glory. Small wonder: I was divinely handsome—I didn't have this paunch then—I was bold, insolent, had a marvellous voice, a high baritone. I produced cascades of witty couplets. It was I who started the fashion of short jerkins and patent leather knee-boots: a Russian warrior's dress! All Odessa was covered with posters about me. But has Zadov any regrets? Not on your life! Anarchy—that's the ticket! To rush headlong in a hurricane of blood! Why don't you say something, chum? Be a bit more friendly with old Levka. Or are you still angry? I want you to like me. Many people change colour when I speak to them. But those I befriend are devoted to me to the grave. Yes, I am much beloved, very much."

Roshchin's head was reeling. After the shock he had had that morning he would have liked to howl as dogs howl in deserted places under a leaden moon. The unexpected mission on which he was sent by such a curt vague order was a fresh trial of strength. He was well aware that for any false or suspect step he would pay with his life and that Levka was accompanying him for just this purpose. What was this "revolutionary military committee" which he was to inspect? What plan of what rising? Whose rising against whom? Levka knew it all, of course. Roshchin attempted several times to ask him leading questions, but Levka only lifted his eyebrows, his eyes took on a glassy look and he chattered on as though he had heard nothing. He ate noisily and without wiping his mouth, went very red in the face and unbuttoned the collar of his embroidered shirt.

Roshchin also drank a glass of vodka and listlessly chewed a piece of bacon. He made a desperate effort to suppress his loathing of this terrible, ridiculous and monstrous creature. Never had he so much as read of any such being even in fiction. And the fellow had even invented a motto for himself: "To rush headlong in a hurricane of blood!" The liquor spread through Roshchin's blood and loosened the pincers which compressed his brain; a confident, careless mood took the place of the former dogged, almost automatic, determination to go through with it.

"Look here," he said to Levka, "stop playing the goat. The *batko* gave me definite instructions. I'm a soldier and I dislike mysteries. Tell me what all this is about."

The smile on Levka's face grew fixed and his plump hand, covered with coarse pores, froze as it held the bottle over the glass in the act of pouring out.

"I'd advise you to ask fewer questions and show less curiosity. Everything has been arranged."

"In other words, I am not being trusted? But then—what the hell?"

"I trust no one. Not even the *batko* himself. Let's have another drink."

Opening his mouth so wide that the edge of the glass touched his teeth, Levka slowly poured the liquor down his throat. He exhaled a sweetish smell of decay, a smell like that of raw meat and sugar. He shook his great mop of electricity-laden hair and broke a leg of chicken in two:

"In your place I shouldn't have accepted this mission, whatever the *batko* may have said. The *batko* likes to play the goat. You'll get yourself into a mess, brother, if you carry on."

"So you would advise me to withdraw? Perhaps you think I ought to go to the lavatory and jump out right now? What do you say, friend?"

"Nothing. I've given you the tip; you can draw your own conclusions."

"A cheap excuse. What d'you think—that I am afraid to die?"

"Why should I think things when I can see right through you, you creeping reptile? Don't show your teeth, or I'll draw them. Pour out another glass."

Roshchin breathed with difficulty. He heaved a deep sigh:

"So you think you know me? No, Zadov; you don't know me. Now if you were to be put against a wall—why you, you cur, would start squealing like a pig."

Levka, who was about to bite into the leg of chicken, snapped his mouth closed so that his teeth clicked. His sweating face sagged.

"So far it seems to have been the other way round," he said surlily. "So

far it's been the other fellows who did the squealing. Are you thinking of doing me in perhaps?"

"Well, if our paths had crossed three months ago. . . ."

"Don't beat about the bush, White officer you, tell me straight."

"Impatient, are you, you butcher?"

"Go on, say it, I'm waiting."

Both were speaking hurriedly and breathing hard, legs under the seat, eyes tensely boring into each other. The candle, stuck to the folding table, sputtered, and its flame began to shrink. Roshchin noticed that Levka's purple face was paling. Levka said in a toneless voice:

"Come, let's go outside. You go first."

"No."

"Go, I say."

"Say what you like. I'm not going."

Only a tiny bluish flame was now left at the end of the candle wick. Levka obviously understood that inside the narrow compartment all the advantages were on the side of the sinewy, tough Roshchin, should it come to a struggle in the darkness. He roared like a bull:

"Get up! Get out into the corridor!"

At that moment there was a wrench at the door of the compartment, the flame of the candle blinked and flared up and Chugay came in.

"Good evening, you chaps." He smiled under his toothbrush moustache, his prominent eyes briskly ran over Levka and Roshchin. "I was searching the whole train for you."

He sat down next to Roshchin, facing Levka. He took the empty bottle, shook it, sniffed at it and put it down again.

"Why so gloomy, both of you?"

"We don't hit it off well together," said Levka, turning his face away from Chugay's quizzical glance.

"You're acting as a sort of commissar to him, aren't you?"

"Not sort of, a bit better than that. But anyway, what business is it of yours?"

"Well, I want to know on what sort of responsible mission you are escorting this comrade. You ought to control yourself a bit more. You can go outside now, brother, I want to talk to this comrade alone."

Chugay was sitting squarely in his seat, his hands crossed on his belly, his legs firmly planted wide apart. In the light of the candle his face had a pink tinge as if made of china; his boyish sailor cap with the long ribbons sat on the back of his head as if only a miracle kept it there. He waited calmly for Levka to swallow this humiliation and submit.

Levka went purple in the face, sniffed, puffed himself up, gave Roshchin a threatening look and went outside, his polished leggings glinting in the doorway. Chugay closed the door.

"What was the trouble between you two?"

"Oh, nothing," Roshchin answered; "we just got drunk, that's all."

"Right. A proper answer. But look here, brother. You are now under my direct command and you must answer my questions truthfully."

Chugay changed to the seat opposite Roshchin and unfolded a sheet of paper signed by Makhno. He held the paper near the candle. It was an order, typed on a faulty typewriter, with many grammatical errors and no puncutation whatever, and it said that Roshchin was detailed to hold himself at the disposal of the military revolutionary staff of the Yekaterinoslav region.

"That all right with you?" Roshchin nodded. "Very good. Tell me what brought you into such company?"

"Is this a formal examination?"

"Yes, a formal examination; you've guessed it. I can't trust a man without knowing him, can I, especially in such important work? Agreed?" Roshchin nodded again. "Of course I did make some inquiries about you. They were not very encouraging. You're an enemy, brother, and a formidable one."

Roshchin sighed and lay back on the seat. Outside the window which reflected the light of the candle a night as black as eternity was rushing past. He was calm. His body rocked softly with the motion of the train. In three days and three nights, during which time he had had almost no sleep at all, this was the third cross-examination and apparently it would be the last. After all, what could he say of himself? What truth could he tell? Only a muddled, complicated story of a man driven from his old home by strangers, banished from the street in which he was born, exiled from his kingdom. But would that be the truth? Had he not taken himself by the scruff of the neck and chucked himself into a cesspool? What, after all, had he been frightened of? What, after all, had he hated so fiercely? Was the old house, his old comfortable kingdom, so indispensable to his happiness as all that? Were they not simply figments of his unhealthy imagination? Now he came to think of it, he could find no sense in his conduct during the past year and no excuse for it either. Here in this compartment was no tribunal with a jury in the box and an eloquent counsel for the defence shaking a romantic wig. Here the almost impossible had to be achieved between himself and that other; he had to tell the truth, not about the actions of an insignificant little man—in this situation that was of no importance—but of that greater man within himself. Here he was judge and accused at the same time. Not even the practical outcome of this interview was of any importance, once that greater man within himself was the topic.

"Why mutter to yourself?" said Chugay. "Speak up, man."

"No, I am not an enemy. That would be too simple," Roshchin said slowly, pressing the back of his head against the back of the seat. "An enemy has an objective, he is full of malice and wiles. . . . I want to ask you a question. . . ."

"Fire away."

"Have you any use for me as a military expert?"

Chugay said nothing, only scrutinized Roshchin's face with its dark shadows in hollow cheeks.

"What do you think of it yourself?"

"I think I might be useful, especially to you, not to the *batko*."

"The *batko* said that you had been mobilized into the Volunteer Army, that you were a convinced Anarchist and even your origins were of the right sort."

"All lies. My origins are of the most unsuitable sort imaginable. I joined the Volunteer Army of my own accord—and left it of my own accord."

"Your conscience pricked you?"

"No; don't you put words into my mouth. I'm not clutching at straws. I reached bottom long ago. If I could only believe in retribution for our sins. But I have not even that consolation."

"Committed many atrocities, have you?"

"Yes, some. All my life I demanded decency of myself and my decency turned out to be indecent. Everything has turned upside down, from white to black. . . ."

"Give me the story of your life, brother, just as a routine matter."

"I graduated from Petersburg University. I studied law. Oh, sorry, you want to know my origins first. Country squire, small estate. After the death of my mother I sold the last remnants of the estate: the house, the garden and the family burial-ground. I left the regiment. What else? Oh, yes, I was a Liberal, of course, like everybody with the least trace of decency." Vadim Petrovich frowned in disgust. "Of course I sympathized with the coming revolution; during the great strikes, in 1913 I think it was, I even opened the window and shouted at the mounted police that came riding up: 'Hangmen! Bloodhounds!' That's about the limit of my revolutionary activities. Why hurry, when I was perfectly comfortable as I was?" This time it was Chugay's moustache that twitched. "No, wait before you are disgusted with me. I am speaking sincerely. After all, there were things I didn't do: I didn't go to banquets and raise a glass full of champagne to toast the suffering Russian people. And in the year seventeen I went mad with shame and disgust. I spent two years and a half in the trenches, didn't ask for another posting and didn't wear silk shirts to keep the lice away."

"That was fine of you."

"Don't sneer at me. Cut it out." Vadim Petrovich frowned and his lean face was blotched with deep shadows. "Tell me, what is your country to you? A June day in childhood, bees humming on the lime-trees and you feel happiness flow through you like a stream of honey. A Russian sky over Russian earth. D'you think I didn't love all that? D'you think I wasn't fond of the millions of grey great-coats as they detrained and went into the line of fire and of death? I was prepared for death and did not expect to come back from the war. And my country was I myself, a big, proud man. . . . Then it turned out that my country was something else. It was not I—it was *they*. . . . Now you tell me: what is my country? What is it to you? You give no answer? I know what you will say. A man asks such a question only once in a lifetime, only when he has lost his country. Oh, I don't mean I've lost my flat in Petrograd, or my career as a lawyer. I lost that greater man within myself and I don't want to be a small one. Shoot me if any of my words, a single one of them, offends you. The grey great-coats arranged matters their own way. What was left to me? I began to hate them. I put a leaden band round my brain. Only avengers, bloody hooligans mad with rage join the Volunteer Army."

"So you've found that out, have you?" said Chugay, and the tense look in his bulging eyes softened into a twinkle. "What an experience it is to chat with you intellectuals. Where on earth do you get such a muddle in your heads? You're Russian after all, and Russians have some sense. It must be your middle-class education. You've lost yourself, you say. Now it's here, now it isn't, like a conjurer's trick. Oh, these Denikinists! Well, you've put me in a good humour. So what are we to do with you now? Will you work for us, not for your life but for your conscience's sake?"

"If you put it that way, I will."

"But not willingly?"

"If I say I will, I mean I will."

Chugay again picked up the empty bottle and shook it; looked under the folding table and glanced up at the luggage rack.

"Well, we can have your stuffed cat in now." He opened the door and called: "Hi, commissar, where did you hide the liquor?" He winked at Roshchin significantly. "You treat him rough, the rougher the better. Pull a gun on him if he doesn't behave. He's one of the worst of the *batko's* men."

Roshchin, Chugay and Levka, the last rather the worse for the night, got out at the last stop, before the bridge. A mist rising from the Dnieper veiled Yekaterinoslav, lying on the far bank of the river. The three of them said little. It was very cold and they were shivering. The train started again at last and crawled with creaking buffers over the bridge. When it was gone, a woman wrapped in a woollen shawl which showed only her quick bright eyes, came walking towards them over the duckboard platform. She passed them, came back, passed again, and when she passed the third time at a slower pace, Chugay said, not to her but to the world at large:

"I wonder where we could get a cup of tea?"

She stopped immediately.

"I could show you where," she said, "but we have no sugar."

"We carry our own."

At that she threw the woollen shawl back from her face. It was an astonishingly charming face, young, with a dimple on each rounded cheek and a tiny pouting mouth.

"Where from, comrades?"

"All right, all right, from *there*. Enough of your underground monkeying. Show us the way," Levka said angrily.

The girl raised her eyebrows in surprise, but Chugay told her that they were "the people she had been sent to meet". She sprang off the platform and led them across a siding full of damaged trucks. They didn't meet a living soul as they clambered over braking platforms or dived under trucks. Then the girl knocked on the side of a cattle-truck and said:

"It is I, Marussya. I've brought them."

The doors of the truck cautiously moved apart and a bony, stern, pale face with coal-black eyes looked out.

"Hop in, quick," the man said softly; "you're letting the cold in."

The three of them, followed by Marussya, got into the truck. The man pulled the doors shut. Inside it was warm. There was a little iron stove, and a tiny flame swimming in the lid of what had been a tin of boot-polish lit up the inscrutable face of the chief of the revolutionary military committee and two dim figures in the background.

Chugay presented his credentials and Levka also showed some papers. The chief crouched down by the light and scrutinized them for a long time.

"Right," he said, and stood up. "We've been expecting you any time these last three nights. Sit down." He squinted at Levka's shiny leggings. "Batko Makhno is in no hurry, it seems."

Levka was the first to sit down, on the only stool drawn up to a little table made of boards. Chugay sat down on a block of wood and Roshchin remained standing with his back to the wall. So this was the headquarters of the Bolshevik staff: a bare cattle-truck and the stern faces of the usual run of taciturn, cautious railwaymen.

The chief was speaking in a level tone:

"We are ready. The people are on their toes. We must strike soon. There are rumours that the Petlyura gang have got wind of something. A heavy battery was unloaded in the city yesterday. Troops are being expected from Kiev. We have no traitors among us; that means the information must have come to them from Gulyay-Polye."

Levka said in a threatening tone:

"Easy there, mind what you say!"

The two dim figures in the background immediately moved closer. The chief continued in the same level tone:

"Your people can't hold their tongues. We can't have this sort of thing, comrades. Arrests are being made all over Yekaterinoslav. For the time being they are just random shots, but already one of our comrades has been taken."

"Mishka Krivomaz, a member of the Komsomol," Marussya said aloud with a break in her voice. She had thrown the shawl off her shoulders and was standing beside Roshchin.

"He was questioned by Naregorodtsev, the head of their Intelligence. That shows that they are on their guard."

"They beat Mishka Krivomas on the forehead with a rubber truncheon. His eyes popped out of his head, poor lad," Marussya said quickly, and sniffed. "They cut off two of his fingers and slit his belly, but he gave nothing away."

Levka stood his sabre up between his knees and said contemptuously:

"Cheap stuff. Naregorodtsev, you say? We'll remember him. And who is prosecutor here? Who is chief of police?"

"We'll give you the names and addresses."

The chief cut Marussya short:

"Let's have some order, comrades. Fedyuk here will give us a report on the enemy forces." He indicated a square-built man with one empty sleeve of his greasy short jacket stuck in his belt. "I'll give the report on the work of the revolutionary committee. You will have the floor to report on Makhno. The fourth question is about the Mensheviks, Anarchists and Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. The sons-of-bitches have smelt a rat and are preparing to fight like hell for seats on the Soviet. Your turn, Fedyuk."

In a firm voice Fedyuk began his story. He started with the bloodthirsty plans of the world *bourgeoisie*, but the chief immediately cut him short: "You're not addressing a meeting now, give us the bare facts." The bare facts proved to be of a very serious nature indeed: there were about two thousand Petlyura infantrymen in Yekaterinoslav, with sixteen guns, four of them heavies. Apart from this there were volunteer bands consisting of officers and other '*bourgeois* elements' with many machine-guns. On top of it all, Kiev was preparing to send reinforcements.

According to the second report, the military revolutionary committee could count on three thousand five hundred workers who would unhesitatingly follow the lead of the Bolshevik organization, and on an influx of young peasants from the surrounding villages. But arms were scarce: "We can say that we can arm one-tenth of our people, the rest will have to fight with their bare hands."

Seeing that Chugay was fidgeting and that Levka's jaw dropped with dismay, the chief, his eyes gleaming like a piece of coal, raised his voice:

"We won't insist. If the *batko* is afraid to attack the city, let him stay in his Gulyay-Polye. All we want is arms and ammunition."

Levka flushed and stamped his sabre on the floor:

"Don't hand me that sort of talk, comrade. We don't sell arms. The *batko* will sweep away the Petlyura scum like flies, with a sweep of his hand."

Chugay now said:

"Comrade Leva, keep cool, and keep quiet a moment. This is the position, comrades. We have come to this agreement with *batko* Makhno: the *batko* puts himself under the orders of the Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief. The *batko's* People's Army is now the Fifth division and it will take the field against Yekaterinoslav as soon as the order is given. An order of the Commander-in-Chief to that effect is in my pocket. Let's work out operations now. We have a military expert with us. Comrade Roshchin, come closer, please."

The same night Chugay left again for Gulyay-Polye, taking Levka with him. He didn't want the workers to look askance at Levka's fat face, shiny leggings and high goloshes, nor did he want to leave such a fool alone with Roshchin.

Marussya was attached to Roshchin as orderly and observer. The military plan drawn up by the revolutionary committee was no good at all. Roshchin said so quite bluntly the very first evening. The revolutionary committee suggested that he should study the position in the city for himself and submit a plan of his own. Every morning he and Marussya put over the misty Dnieper in a boat among the floating ice-floes. They landed on the right bank in Mandyrovka, a suburb of Yekaterinoslav, and asked some peasant driving to market to give them a lift to the railway station. From there they could reach the centre of the city on foot or by tram.

The railway station, with the railway bridge, was situated in the southern part of the city; from there a wide avenue flanked with acacia trees and tall poplars, the Yekaterininski Prospekt, ran across the whole city. On both sides of it stood new, solid buildings with plate-glass windows: banks, hotels, the post office, the town hall. The avenue rose steeply towards the old city that spread itself around the cathedral close and contained the barracks.

Roshchin taught Marussya to count paces, to determine angles at sight and to remember particularly important lines of fire. From time to time they went into a café and made rough sketches on a sheet of paper. This sheet of paper, folded small, Marussya carried in her clenched fist, ready to put it in her mouth and swallow it if they were stopped by the police. But no one paid the slightest attantion to them, although pretty Marussya with her colourful kerchief tied Ukrainian fashion and Roshchin with his crimson-topped cap would have caught any man's eye. But here everyone was much too busy. The Petlyura authorities, having declared themselves to be republican and democratic, were struggling in the meshes of a net of committees, Socialists, Zionists, Anarchists, Nationalists, Constitutionalists, Socialist-Revolutionaries, National Socialists, Polish Socialists, Moderates and Not-so-moderates, with or without platforms; all these parasites demanded to be legalized, to be given premises and money; they all threatened to withdraw 'public confidence' from the authorities if their demands were not satisfied. The muddle was made even greater by the Town Council, presided over by Paprikaki the Younger. (Paprikaki the Elder, being more intelligent than his brother, had fled to Denikin.) The Town Council, for its part, adopted a policy of duplicating the government and even insisted on establishing a special regiment of its own, which was to be named after a past mayor, now dead, a certain Chayim Solomonovich Gistori. Small wonder that the Petlyura authorities had only one field of activity left to them: that of arresting Communists in their houses in the middle of the night—and even so they could only get those who lived on the right bank of the river.

After a day of tramping through the city Roshchin and Marussya returned to the left bank by the shortest way, across the bridge and made their way to a little whitewashed cottage on the bluff above the Dnieper.

In the cottage the stove was always well heated and there was a homely, sour, special smell of dungcake fuel coming from it. Marussya's mother came in, carrying a fat candle of the sort used on the railways in her hand (Marussya's father was a railwayman), put the flat of her hand on the stove and asked softly:

"Is it warm enough?"

"Yes, mother."

"Will you have supper?"

"We're as hungry as wolves, mother."

Marussya's mother sighed and said:

"We've had ours, your father and I. Go and eat, young people are always hungry."

Slowly, as if her thoughts were occupied with something indescribably sad, she went to the stove and got the huge cast-iron pot of soup out of the oven. The father sat on the bed in an uncomfortable position, smoking his pipe. Both he and his wife did their best not to appear to see Roshchin (between themselves they called him 'the secret one'), but when he asked for something, a jug of water or some matches, Marussya's father would hurriedly jump up from the bed and Marussya's mother would bustle about to get it for him.

Roshchin and Marussya ate soup, ladling it from the pot into chipped plates, Marussya talking all the time. The impressions of the day were reflected in minutest detail in the limpid mirror of her memory.

"For the love of God, eat sensibly," her mother said from where she stood by the stove. "You can't enjoy your food if you talk all the time."

"Oh, mother, I had to hold my tongue all day." Marussya looked at Roshchin with wide-open, bright-blue eyes. "I am terribly fond of talking, you know, that is why they wouldn't have me in the Komsomol. It's bad for underground work if you are talkative. So I had to pass a test, not speak at all for seven days."

After supper Marussya wrapped herself in a warm shawl and hurried to a party meeting. Roshchin thanked his hosts for the meal and went off behind a partition to a little narrow room with a ceiling so low that he could reach it with his hand. There he paced from the little shuttered window to Marussya's deal chest of drawers and back again, his hands stuck in his belt. Then he took off his belt and tunic and sat down near the window, listening through the shutters to the dull soft rustling of the ice on the Dnieper far below. The people on the other side of the partition had gone to bed. In the quiet of the tiny cottage only the contracting lining of the stove crackled and a cricket, snug on the hearth, chirped as if drawing a tiny saw across a tiny piece of wood. Vadim Petrovich felt unexpectedly happy and calm and only simple everyday thoughts flitted through his mind.

He did not want to go to bed before Marussya came back and he got up and paced up and down to keep awake. He liked the tiny whitewashed room very much. Marussya had few things in it; a skirt hung on a nail, a comb lay on the chest of drawers with a pocket mirror and a few books from the library. A short iron bedstead stood against the wall. Marussya had given it up to Roshchin and she herself slept on a felt mattress on the floor.

The front door closed and the kitchen door creaked softly. Marussya came in, pink with the cold. She unwrapped herself and said:

"Good thing you waited up for me. Have you heard the news? Makhno will be here in three days. To-morrow you will have to present your plan. And what a night it is! All quiet and a sky full of stars!"

Marussya was so engrossed by important matters and by the impressions crowding in on her, and she was so artless, that having made her bed on the floor she undressed in front of Roshchin without the slightest embarrassment. Carelessly she threw down her skirt, blouse and stockings and sat down on the felt with her arms clasped round her knees.

"Oh, but I'm tired." She sighed, punched the pillow with her fist and settled down, pulling the quilted cover over her head. But her face immediately popped out again, with its dimples, its pink flush, its short little nose. She freed her naked arms from under the quilt:

"Isn't it hot? Listen! You're awake, aren't you?"

"Yes, Marussya."

"Is it true that you've been a White officer?"

"Yes, Marussya."

"And I said no to-day. Some of our comrades don't trust you. There are such people among us, you know, bitter people. They would suspect their own mothers. How can you distrust somebody you feel you can trust? I'd rather make a mistake now and then than think ill of everyone. With whom are you going to make the revolution, I asked them, if everybody all round you is a reptile? And we want to make a world revolution. A revolution, I said, is a special force. Can't you understand that? What would I be doing without the revolution? I'd have smeared glue on paper twelve hours a day in a cardboard box factory. My one pleasure would have been to sit on the boulevard on a Sunday and chew sunflower seeds. Perhaps I might have been able to buy a pair of high-heeled shoes as the limit of happiness. 'So why don't you trust him, comrades?' I said, 'he's an intellectual, he made a mistake. All right, he served his own class, but he is still a human being for all that. The revolution has caught up worse men than him. Is it possible for him to exchange his lousy class for our world-embracing cause? Of course it is. He came to us of his own accord, to fight for our working-class cause. You must be bitter indeed if you can't believe that.' A lot of them changed their minds about you after that."

Roshchin lay curled up on the short cot and looked at Marussya. She made sweeping gestures with her bare arms and then passionately clenched her fists as she spoke. The little cubicle seemed full of her virginal freshness, as if someone had brought in a branch of white lilac.

"Of course intellectuals must be re-educated, no question about that. Are you listening? We will re-educate you, too. What are you laughing at?"

"I am not laughing, Marussya. For many, many years I have not felt able to do a good job of work for a good cause. Do you know what I was thinking: I am going with the first detachment that is to occupy the bridge."

"Yes? Are you really going?"

Marussya slipped out from under the quilt and sat down on the edge of the cot:

"Now I believe that you are really on our side. Because for all my shouting and arguing about you, I had no proof after all that I was right, you know."

On the twenty-sixth of the month a half-troop of Petlyura cavalry thundered at a gallop over the iron plates of the Dnieper bridge, charged the goods station, cut down the railwaymen guarding a train of four trucks protected by sandbags, and scattered all over the sidings, firing into the trucks, all in a very great hurry and rather nervously. The attack was to have been directed against the headquarters of the revolutionary committee; but Petlyura's men were afraid of an ambush in the narrow space between trains; they got out into the open as soon as they could and rode back to where they had come from.

Machine-guns were now posted on the other side of the bridge and all those who crossed had to show their identity papers. The tension grew. News of mass searches came from the city. Peasants from the surrounding

villages came in that day not singly but in dozens, without any baggage but with tightly-belted short coats. The revolutionary committee formed them into a special regiment. The formalities were simple. Each man was asked:

"Why did you come?"

"I came because I want to be armed."

"What do you want to be armed for?"

"We must establish Soviets, else there will be trouble again."

"Do you accept Soviet power without conditions?"

"What conditions? I make no conditions."

"All right. Second company's yours."

But the position was bad so far as arms were concerned until Chugay unexpectedly arrived at mid-day on an engine with one truck, bringing three hundred Austrian rifles and ammunition. This eased the situation a little. Finally in the late evening the steppe resounded with the noise of many men—*batko* Makhno's long-expected army was approaching at last.

The first to enter the settlement were a mounted troop styling themselves "Kropotkin Guards", great hulking oafs all the same size. They immediately occupied the school, flung out all the books, forms and the schoolmistress, and set out to knock imperiously on the doors of the houses. After this gang came two hundred carts and wagons with infantry. Lastly a large travelling coach, to all appearances an archiepiscopal conveyance, drawn by four horses harnessed side by side and with the Great Mute on the box, drove up to the schoolhouse and Makhno, accompanied by Levka and Karetnik, alighted from it with an air of importance.

The *batko* immediately demanded that the general staff of the revolutionary committee should come to him for a council of war. In the meantime quite a number of angry workers had already gathered around the truck housing the revolutionary committee. They shouted at the head of the committee:

"Miron Ivanovich, come out and see for yourself! These are no Soviet troops, these are bandits! Listen to Auntie Gapka, she'll tell you what they did to her."

Auntie Gapka burst into tears.

"Miron Ivanovich, you know how I live. Two men came into my cottage. 'Give us milk, give us bacon'. Two great big hungry louts they were. Come on, they said, show us where the pig is and the poultry. They took everything, may it burn their guts, the damned bandits."

The chief of the revolutionary committee had to explain sternly that once the deed was done and Makhno and his troops called in, it was too late to withdraw; now there was only one thing to do and that was to take the city by storm as soon as possible and put the Soviets in power. Then suddenly he shouted at Auntie Gapka:

"We'll give you two pigs, or a whole herd of pigs later, but stop stirring up the people with your nonsense."

At the council of war Makhno behaved very strangely—he was both insolent and cowardly. He demanded that he be appointed commander-in-chief of the entire force and threatened to withdraw his army if this was not done. He said again and again that the Soviet government had no other fighting unit which could compare with his force and that such a unit must be husbanded and not wasted in ill-planned operations. He bit his nails and plunged his hand in under his coat to scratch himself. It turned out that he was frightened of the sixteen guns Petlyura's men had in the city. At last Chugay said to him:

"All right. If you are scared of those guns, I'll go to town to-night and see the artillery commander about them."

"What d'you mean, see him about them?"

"Leave that to me."

"Empty talk."

"No it isn't. Who is their artillery commander? Martynenko, one of our lads, from the Baltic fleet, bosun's mate in the battleship *Gangut*, a man from my own village, perhaps even a kinsman. He won't shoot at us."

"Empty talk!" Makhno said a second time, and seized him by the sleeve; then he seemed to change his mind about believing Chugay, for he suddenly calmed down and said pompously:

"Well, let's have your plan of action."

The revolutionary committee presented this plan: a group of workers armed with grenades would cross the river in the night, each man independently. They would meet near the railway bridge at dawn, attack the machine-gun emplacements at the bridge-head, seize the machine-guns and keep all roads leading to the bridge under fire. When the explosions of grenades were heard, a four-truck armoured train manned by armed workers and a unit of the recently formed peasant regiment would cross the bridge and attack the railway station. Meanwhile the revolutionary committee would get in touch with the Bolshevik party branch committees in the city by messenger and telephone at addresses known only to them. The branch committees would start a rising in the city. The rallying point would be at the station, where arms brought by the armoured train would be distributed. Headquarters would also be transferred there in the meantime. Makhno's cavalry was to charge into the city over the footbridge while infantry would cross the river above and below the bridge in two columns, re-unite at a certain spot on the Yekaterininski Prospect and from there advance up the road to seize the town hall and the barracks. The success of the enterprise would depend on the speed and unexpectedness of the attack, and hence it would have to be undertaken that very night.

"But my men are tired after the march and the horses need shoeing," said Makhno.

The chairman of the revolutionary committee answered to this:

"Your men will rest when the city is taken and your horses can be shod with Soviet shoes."

Chugay said:

"Have you set up your camp in full view of the city in order to have a nice rest? They'd give you some rest to-morrow out of their six-inch guns! Either attack to-night or get out—take your choice."

That night the Dnieper froze solid, but the ice was still unreliable. The workers were busy all night dragging planks, gates, whole board fences down to the river to make a crossing. All the members of the revolutionary committee, including the chairman, worked with them.

Only the *batko's* lads, festooned all over with weapons, merely strolled along the river bank, saving their sweat and watching with greedy eyes the city lights on the other side. Yekaterinoslav was a great and wealthy city!

Two hours before dawn twenty-four men went out on the ice. They were led by Roshchin. Everything had been explained to them well beforehand. The ice creaked dangerously at the joins between ice-floes; in some places they had to put down planks which they carried with them. Only once did they see a flash on the bank near the vague black bulk of the latticed bridge and

hear the crack of a single shot. They all lay down at that, and all crawled forward on their bellies, diverging as far as possible from each other.

Roshchin climbed up the bank at a spot he had picked in advance, near a half-submerged barge. From there a narrow alley ran towards the city. He walked along it and turned to the back yard of the house—an empty warehouse —which was their rallying-point. The lights of the railway station shed a dim glimmer over it. The city was fast asleep. Roshchin paced to and fro along the boundary fence with a light step, humming softly to himself. He looked up with satisfaction at the top of the fence knowing that he could fling his light body over it with the greatest ease. His men arrived one after the other, singly, like shadows. He told each of them to jump the fence into the yard and gather near the gate. Then he continued his pacing.

Of the twenty-four men twenty-three had arrived. One had either gone astray or been taken by a patrol. Roshchin sprang into the air, drew himself up by his arms, slid the tips of his boots along the boards and flung himself over to the other side, but not as easily as he had expected. He landed on a heap of broken bricks.

The men were standing near the gate; they looked silently at Roshchin. Some were sitting on the ground, their heads resting on their bent knees. There was not much time left before dawn. These last minutes of waiting were decisive—they were also the most difficult, especially for men going into battle for the first time. Roshchin could vaguely distinguish the lips closely compressed with determination, the dry glitter of unblinking eyes. A bunch of honest lads, trustful, simple, plain-thinking Russian men. Of their own free will they undertook this devilish dangerous job. For the sake of the world revolution, as Marussya had said in the little whitewashed room by candle-light. Roshchin felt a rush of exultation and the same sense of lightness; a lump rose in his throat.

All this was something he had never experienced before, something quite unlike anything he had known.

"Comrades," he said, knitting his brows, "if we pull this job off quietly, everything else will go well. The success of the rising depends on us." The men who had been sitting on the ground stood up and came nearer. "I repeat once more, there is nothing to this business; but it needs speed and calm. What the enemy fears most are not weapons, but us, the men behind them. For example, comrade," Roshchin went on—glancing up at a tall young lad whose open shirt revealed a strong bare neck—"if you, comrade, for example," Roshchin, obeying an irresistible urge, put his hand on the lad's shoulder, touching his warm neck, "if you, as I said, feel a little cold spot under your heart, the enemy also feels the same thing. And so the man who is straighter, wins."

The lad nodded and laughed:

"That's right. We'll see who gets the better of the other. They are fools but we have sense. We know what we are doing it for." He suddenly jerked his thick neck and his shapely mouth set hard. "We know what we are dying for," he concluded.

Another man elbowed his way forward and asked:

"I want to know what to do once I've thrown my grenades. What can I do without arms?"

Someone answered him in a loud whisper:

"And your hands, what are they for? Silly fool!"

"Comrades, I will repeat the whole operation to you once more," Roshchin said. "We divide into two groups. . . ."

While he was speaking he watched the sky—when would the glow of dawn rise at last out of the impenetrable darkness beyond the Dnieper. Thick cloud still obscured his view. But it was unwise to keep the men waiting any longer.

"Time's up, men," said Roshchin, tightening his belt. "Squads divide up. Open the gates."

They opened the gates cautiously, slipped through one by one and crept along to the end of the fence. From there they could see the bridge clearly as it loomed against the backcloth of frozen river. In front of it they could distinguish less clearly the parapet of the bridgehead trenches with their machine-guns and their apparently sleeping garrison. A second, similar line of trenches ran along the other side of the railway embankment.

The twenty-three men started to run all at once, silently and at full speed; half of them made straight for the bridgehead; the remaining thirteen turned right towards the railway. Roshchin was anxious to keep up with the men. He saw long shadows in belted short coats leap high across the railway embankment. He turned in the same direction and followed them. He realized that a mistake had been made, that they would not reach the second trench before the alarm was given. He heard an explosion behind his back, fierce shouts and more and more grenade-bursts. The first trench was taken. Without turning round, Roshchin clambered up the embankment, drawing in the sharp, cutting air with his open mouth. The thirteen men in front of him were rushing on with giant leaps. Now they were reaching their objective. The flame of a machine-gun danced out to meet them like a demented butterfly. A wind seemed to blow past over Roshchin's head. "My God, perform a miracle; they sometimes happen . . ." he said to himself, "otherwise they're all done for." He saw the tall lad with the bare neck throw a grenade without bothering to bend down and then the thirteen men, all alive still, leapt into the trench. Roshchin saw a tangle of struggling, panting bodies. One man, with a large beard and officer's shoulder-straps, shook his assailants off, scrambled to his feet and slashed madly with his sabre at those who tried to seize him. Roshchin fired, the bearded man shuddered, and his head dropped on his chest. Immediately another man in an officer's great-coat emerged from the dug-out shouting and hitting out right and left. Roshchin grabbed him, but the officer broke loose and got his hands on Roshchin's throat and grunted, "You bastard". Then suddenly he let go and said: "Roshchin! You?"

Roshchin had no idea who it was—someone from Ewert's staff most likely —he made no answer and struck the officer over the head with the butt of his revolver.

This trench, too, was taken. The men turned the machine-guns round. The steam whistle of an engine hooted on the other side of the Dnieper and the armoured train crawled rattling across the bridge to attack the railway station.

. . . . . .

The sun had risen long ago; it shone without giving warmth. The armoured train was again crawling over the bridge vomiting black smoke; it was bringing men and arms to the captured railway station. The men in the trenches cheered it on its way. Things were going well. Makhno's infantry had crossed the river over the ice long ago, had swarmed up the bank like ants, overrun the police barriers and scattered along the streets. Shots were still cracking with the same intensity, sometimes near and sometimes far away.

"Sashko, go to the station, find the Commander-in-Chief, tell him we've been sitting here since five this morning, and we're cold and hungry and ask to be relieved," Roshchin said to the tall lad with the bare neck, whose beardless

face shaded with an incipient curly down—a face that was at the same time manly and childlike—was covered with bloody scratches. The burly machine-gunner he had killed had been loath to part with life.

Sashko was chilled through in his light short coat and ran swiftly across the open ground which was under rifle fire. Men shouted after him: "You'll get it, you fool!" or "Sashko, bring back some fags!" He was soon back; he crouched down in front of the trench, threw his comrades a packet of cigarettes and handed Roshchin a note with a smeary rubber stamp. It said: "Wait, I'll send a relief. Makhno."

"Marussya sent you her regards," Sashko said to Roshchin.

Roshchin was so amazed that he opened his mouth and stared at the crouching Sashko from his trench for more than a minute.

"Comrade Roshchin, she's a fine girl, you're a lucky man. . . ."

"Where did you see her?"

"At the station. She's the life and soul of the party there. I'd never have got through to Makhno without her. You don't know what's going on there; the workers are crowding in, our fellows can hardly cope with the job of distributing arms. Yekaterinoslav is ours!"

Makhno's headquarters were at the railway station. The *batko* was sitting in the first-class refreshment room behind the counter decorated with artificial palm-trees, from which all the glass rubbish had been removed by sweeping it off on to the floor. He was writing orders. Karetnik was at his shoulder, ready to dab a rubber stamp on each order. Runners took them and rushed away as fast as their legs could carry them. Excited men were constantly crowding in and demanding ammunition, reinforcements, field kitchens, cigarettes, bread, ambulances and what-not. A commander, furious because having reached the very doors of the Trade and Commercial Bank he could get no farther and had to take cover with his men because he had run out of ammunition, bit the earth in his rage, then went up to the *batko*, took a grenade from his belt, threw it on to the counter with a crash for greater emphasis and roared:

"What the hell are you doing here? Praying to God?—your soul!—your mother! Send those . . . cartridges along!"

The *batko* issued orders only to those who asked for them. Waggling his chin for effect, he pretended to conduct operations, but in actual fact he was completely at a loss and in an indescribably muddled state. He put little crosses on the map of the city, to mark the advance or withdrawal of his forces —and tore the paper as he did so. In reality it was the very devil of a city, permitting of no development of forces; there was no elbow-room anywhere and the enemy was everywhere; above, in front, right and left, and behind. Eyes crawling over his map, the *batko* had no conception of the streets and houses it represented. He had completely lost all orientation, and the struggle went on blindly. No wonder that he always said that towns were evil things, the crowning plague of all plagues.

On top of it all he was worried about the uncertain position about Martynenko. Chugay had said that Martynenko would be unwilling to fire on his own flesh and blood. Whether Chugay had seen him during the night or had come to an arrangement with him earlier mattered little; one thing was certain, all was quiet in the artillery positions; half the gun-crews had deserted and Martynenko himself, perhaps to ease his conscience, had got as drunk as a lord. Of all his artillery only two field guns stood near the station abandoned by their Petlyurist crews. Makhno was very pleased; he had never

captured any guns before. He gave orders for the guns to be moved to the main avenue and pulled the firing cord with his own hands. His face wrinkled up into a mask of laughter when the gun barked; people crouched down in fright and the shell flew out whining over the tall poplars.

The staff of the revolutionary committee had established itself on the square in front of the station. Fires were lit here and workers arriving from every quarter were standing round them in groups. The members of the revolutionary committee knew nearly every one of them by sight and knew where they had come from. They called the men by factories and workshops: engineers, millers, leather-workers, spinners and weavers, the workers left the fires and fell in, forming squads of fifty men. If there was a suitable man among the fifty, he would be appointed commander; if not, one of the members of the revolutionary committee took command of the squad. The men were issued with rifles, and those who did not know how to handle them were taught on the spot. Each squad was given an operational task. The commander raised his rifle, shook it in the air and shouted:

"Forward, comrades!"

The workers also raised the precious rifles, theirs at last, and cried:

"For Soviet power!"

The squads moved off towards the Yekateriniski Prospect and into battle.

Roshchin pushed his way through to the Commander-in-Chief and gave him a detailed report on the capture of the bridgehead positions and the losses of four men wounded and one killed. Makhno chewed his pencil and looked at Roshchin's brown, haggard face with a stare so hard as to be insolent, and with almost demented eyes.

"Good. You will receive a silver watch as a reward," he said, and moved the map of the city lying before him to the edge of the counter. "Look at this." He drew a pencil line to connect the little crosses marked on the map. "Our offensive is being held up. This is as far as we have got, this street, this crooked alley and this boulevard. But further on, look how the crosses run. I want to know why we are marking time and not getting a move on," he cried out sharply in a voice like the cry of a bird. "Go and find out". He scratched a few words on a scrap of paper and Karetnik at his elbow breathed on the rubber stanp and clapped it on the signature. "You may shoot cowards; I give you the right."

Roshchin went out into the square where worker squads were still lining up in irregular ranks; he heard orders being shouted and men cheering. The smoke of the fires, on which food was already being cooked in large pots, made his head reel and a picture rose in his memory of a familiar iron pot with soup and Marussya taking it from her mother, and Marussya's teeth biting into a chunk of fragrant bread. But never mind that now!

Sashko and two other men of his command followed Roshchin. They were armed with rifles. One of them was a pock-marked, jolly, stocky little fellow whose name was Chizh, and the other a handsome smiling youngster with a cruel face and a black eye which he concealed behind the vizor of his little black cap pulled well down. He was a plumber and he called himself Robert. They made their way along the Yekateriniski Prospect, taking cover behind the projecting façades of the houses and running from doorway to doorway, with bullets singing past their ears. The boulevard was deserted, but curious faces appeared and disappeared again at every window behind the mattresses which protected them. In the entrance to a jeweller's shop a man dressed in a sheepskin coat was sitting alone; his tiny face, wasted by

privations, was thrown back as if he were raising it with its grey beard to the ancient Jewish heaven, asking his God: "Oh, Lord, what is all this?"

"What are you doing here?" asked Chizh.

"What am I doing?" the man answered sadly. "I am waiting to be killed."

"Better go home."

"Why should I go home? Mister Paprikaki would say: what is more precious, your lousy life or my shop. So I'll rather die near the shop."

Before they had time to go, the watchman stuck his beard out from behind the doorway:

"Young gentlemen, don't go on there; people are being killed there."

When they got to the corner a burst of machine-gun fire cut into the wall above their heads. They bent down and ran up a side street and flattened themselves against a deep doorway. Breathing heavily, they looked and saw seven dead bodies and abandoned rifles lying on the pavement at the crossing of the roads. One of the workers' squads had been ambushed there. Robert grinned with fury and said—dropping each word separately out of his mouth:

"They are firing from the attic of the Astoria Hotel. I suggest we mop up that firing-point."

The suggestion was accepted as feasible. The Astoria Hotel, in which Roshchin had stayed two months, was on the other side of the boulevard and could be approached only under fire. Roshchin spread out his arms and pressed his men to the door:

"One by one, comrades, at intervals, run like hell and there is no risk."

Bending so low that he nearly fell, he ran to the crossing and lay down, using a dead body as cover. Two shots were fired from the attic of the Astoria. Roshchin sprang up and ran, zigzagging like a hare towards the poplars in the middle of the boulevard. A hurried burst of fire came belatedly from the attic, but Roshchin was already in the dead zone. Pressing close to the trunk of a poplar he took off his cap, wiped his face with it, drew a deep breath and shouted:

"Sashko, your turn now."

They had to knock on the plate-glass door of the hotel with hand-grenades. Only then was a chest-of-drawers dragged away by someone inside and the door opened. Robert pushed aside the big commissionaire, who had started to say: "Romka, you bastard, where are you going?" and rushed forward with a hand-grenade held high. The lounge was full of guests who had come down from their rooms, but when they saw the romantic-minded youth with his hand-grenade, and behind him three other armed men, they silently began to vanish up the stairs, panting and keeping close to the wall. Roshchin recognized several of them and was recognized himself; if looks could kill he would have dropped dead a hundred times. Only the naïve country squire, burdened with three maiden daughters, who had just come out of his room after a cold snack instead of a meal, almost fell on Roshchin's neck, exhaling an odour of wine:

"Vadim Petrovich, my dear fellow, so it's you, and my silly girls have been chattering something about the Bolsheviks breaking in."

But the words died on his lips when he saw the giant Sashko with the bloody scratches on his cheeks, the plumber with his black eye behind the vizor of his cap and the jolly, pink Chizh who also appeared little inclined for any sort of class collaboration.

The plumber knew every nook and corner of the hotel. When they reached the third floor he showed them the way up the back stairs to the attic. The iron door leading to the attic was ajar. "Here they are," he whispered; he kicked open the door and rushed in with such fury as if he had waited all his life for this moment. When Roshchin, bending down in the half darkness to pass under the beams, reached the attic window, Robert was still stabbing his bayonet into the body of a man in a fur coat lying on his face beside the machine-gun.

"I said so, didn't I? It's the boss himself!"

As they were going down the stairs from the attic, the boy suddenly went limp, his lips trembled, he sat down on the stairs and pulled his cap down over his face. Sashko snatched his rifle out of his hand and said roughly: "Maybe we should wait for you!" and Chizh said, "Well, well, and you call yourself Robert!" The boy sprang up, snatched back his rifle from Sashko and ran down the stairs three at a time. Roshchin left him and Chizh to guard the hotel, sent Sashko to headquarters with a report asking for a detachment to come and occupy the Astoria Hotel, and himself went out on the boulevard again.

The day was nearly over. Workers' squads had occupied the post office, the town hall and the treasury. Roshchin made rounds of all these positions and sent messengers from each to headquarters. To all appearances the battle was dragging on. Makhno's infantry had exhausted their first desperate impetus and were beginning to chafe under the unaccustomed weight of street fighting. Had the battle been fought in the open country, they would by now have divided the booty long ago, would be cooking their food at the fires, and, gathering in a circle, would have been watching their best dancers dance the *gopak* in fine boots taken off the feet of dead men. The Petlyura side, on the other hand, had recovered from their first surprise and after having retreated half-way up the avenue had now dug in and were preparing a counter-attack.

It was dusk by the time Roshchin got back to the railway station, but he found Makhno was no longer there; he had shifted his headquarters to the Astoria Hotel. Roshchin went to the Astoria. He had not eaten since the day before and had drunk only a mug of water. His ankles were turning under him with weariness, and his coat hung leaden on his shoulders.

At the Astoria he found he could not get in. Two machine-guns stood at the entrance and the *batko's* guards patrolled the pavement, their long hair combed forward on to their foreheads in the approved Gulyay-Polye style. In order not to catch cold, one of them wore a mink coat on top of his cavalry sheepskin and the other had a sable scarf wrapped round his neck. The guards demanded Roshchin's identity papers but they were both illiterate and threatened to shoot him on the spot if he insisted on going in. "You can stick your *batko* you know where," Roshchin said wearily, and went back to the railway station. In the refreshment room, which was lit only by the glare of the fires reflected through the tall windows, he lay down on an oak settle and immediately fell into a doze despite the noise, the shouting, the shooting and the piercing whistles of the engines. Confused fragments of the day's events still floated on the surface of his utter weariness He had done well that day. Or had he? Not quite. Why had he struck that man on the head, that officer who had surrendered. Did he want to cover up his past? Yes, that was it. And suddenly he saw: cards on the table, glasses of punch, and the officer he had knocked on the head, Captain Vedenyapin, was there too, that careerist with the rotten teeth and the moist lips that looked like a hen's behind and were pursed as though always ready to kiss the boots of General Ewert, also sitting there and playing *preference*. Damn the fellow, he needed killing.

The restless beating of Roshchin's heart fought off the drowsiness. He opened his eyes and looked straight into a calm, lovely face lit up by the reddish glare from the windows. He sighed and was wide awake. Marussya was sitting beside him, holding a mug of hot water and a slice of bread on her knee.

"Here, eat!" she said.

That night Chugay and the chairman of the revolutionary committee entered the artillery park, now guarded only by their own adherents; they roused Martynenko and Chugay said to him:

"We have come to stir up your black conscience, comrade. What you are doing is the worst ever. Either you make up your mind to join Petlyura, and then you don't get out of here alive, or else have your guns hitched up right now. . . ."

"Why not?" said Martynenko. "I'll bring the guns over to you early in the morning. . . ."

"Oh no, straight away, not in the morning. You'd miss even the kingdom of heaven, Martynenko, you're so fond of your sleep."

"All right, if you say so, that's the way it is."

The next day all the windows in Yekaterinoslav shook with the thunder of gunfire. Paving-stones, poplar branches and bits of street kiosks were blown about the avenue. Stimulated by this stern music, the workers' squads, the peasant regiment and Makhno's infantry attacked Petlyura's men and pushed them back to the foot of the hill. After that, representatives of various party and non-party organizations, and Paprikaki the Younger, carrying white flags on sticks, sought out the revolutionary committee and offered to serve as intermediaries for the negotiation of an armistice and the cessation of civil war.

Miron Ivanovich, dressed in a shabby overcoat without buttons, and a greasy cap, was sitting round-shouldered at a table in the vestibule of the Astoria, he was chewing a piece of stale bread. He said to the delegates:

"We ourselves have no wish to destroy the city. We make this offer, as an ultimatum: by three this afternoon all Petlyura forces lay down their arms and the counter-revolutionary snipers stop shooting from the house-tops, or else at one minute past three our artillery will open chessboard pattern fire on the city."

The chairman spoke slowly and chewed even more slowly. His face was black with soot. The delegates were crestfallen. They whispered together for a long time and wanted to argue. But at that moment a group of men in motley, colourful attire came down the stairs to the vestibule. The first two were carrying Lewis guns in their arms; behind them came a dozen bold lads bristling with weapons and in their midst a long-haired little man with blazing eyes.

As soon as the delegates saw him, they snatched the ultimatum out of the chairman's hands and dashed out into the street, into the fresh air and into the hail of bullets.

The commanders of Petlyura's forces rejected the ultimatum. At one minute past three Makhno made a scene, hammering with his revolver on the table around which the revolutionary military council was in session and demanding that the city be demolished without mercy by bombardment. The members of the revolutionary military council, however, were local men, born and bred in the city, and they did not want to destroy it. Still, it would not do to show weakness, and therefore it was decided to give the *bourgeois* a good scare. Martynenko's fourteen guns barked after all, even though a little late. Splinters of brick and stucco were knocked out of the walls of some of the big houses

rising tier on tier up the slope. The representatives of the various committees rushed to and fro like mice between the Petlyura forces and the revolutionary military committee. The workers' squads were still attacking. The Petlyurists began to retreat to the end of the avenue, on the top of the hill.

On the eve of the fourth day of the rising the revolutionary military council proclaimed Soviet rule in Yekaterinoslav.

The revolutionary committee was busy all night forming a government. As Miron Ivanovich had foreseen that first time in the railway truck, the Anarchists and left-wing Socialist-Revolutionaries made common cause with Makhno, gate-crashed the meeting under his protection and fought fiercely for every place. The left Socialist-Revolutionaries were, for some reason, all little men, but they were strong; they had spent no sleepless nights like the Bolsheviks and it was difficult to get the better of them in an argument.

As each one of them got up to speak he addressed himself in the first place to Makhno and flattered him outrageously: he, Makhno, was the true representative of the popular masses; he was the legendary leader and mighty strategist; he was the cleansing fire and the iron broom. And what fine fellows his lads were, what bold dare-devils!

The *batko* pressed his pale lips together, listened, and only nodded his haggard face. The irrepressible Socialist-Revolutionary raised his voice until it could be heard outside the closed doors and in the passage, which was full of Makhno's men and of all sorts of people who had seeped into the hotel, God knows how.

"Comrades, Bolsheviks, why should we squabble when you are for the Soviets and we are for the Soviets? Our divergences are of a purely tactical nature. We have inherited the *bourgeois* machinery of city administration. You want to turn it into a Soviet administration in a day, while we know that the city machine will not co-operate with the Communists. Sabotage is certain, hunger and disorganization are foregone conclusions. But with us they are quite prepared to co-operate—the town council has passed a resolution to that effect. That is why we are putting forward the candidature of Comrade Volin for Commissar of Food. I move that the debate be closed and a vote taken."

The Anarchists, who until then had preserved a mysterious and even contemptuous silence, now suddenly played a card that made even the *batko* shake his head on his chicken-like neck.

Their representative—a student wearing a poppy-red fez—proposed Paprikaki the Younger for Commissar of Finance:

"We shall support this candidature with every means at our command. . . . Paprikaki the Younger is of our way of thinking, he is an Anarchist of the theoretical type, an expert on finance, and in our hands he will be an obedient and useful instrument of the insurgent free people. I move that a vote be taken by a show of hands without debate."

Marussya and Roshchin were sitting there, too; they had one chair between them, a chair placed against the wall. Marussya was in a state of extreme indignation, she wrung her hands in exasperation and jumped up every now and then to shout in a high, breaking voice: "Disgusting!" or: "Where were you, then, while we were fighting?" Then she sat down again, her cheeks aflame. She had only a consultative vote.

She had lost weight in the last few days and her skin was roughened by exposure. She felt hot in her sheepskin coat although it was unbuttoned; her hair was dishevelled. In the intervals between speeches she hastily told Roshchin

about her adventures. At first she had worked in a committee formed to supply hot water and bread to the workers' squads. Then she was transferred to a first-aid detachment, and finally was made a messenger. She had chased all over the city and had been under fire "hundreds of times". She showed Roshchin the hem of her skirt with bullet-holes in it.

"If I hadn't been quick, I'd have been done for by now. Somebody shouted 'Marusska!' I jumped, and there was a bomb on the very spot where I was a minute before; as it burst, I got behind a tree. . . . I was so frightened, my knees are like water even now. . . ."

But Marussya's vitality was such that it would have sufficed for a dozen insurrections. While she was chattering away to Roshchin, Sashko's much-scratched face appeared in the door. He beckoned to Marussya. She ran to him, and he whispered something in her ear, something that made Marussya throw up her hands.

Chugay was on his feet, rejecting the freak candidates:

"Comrades, we have not met for a debate, we have not met for an argument, we have met to take control, and control belongs to those who have the power," he boomed.

Marussya could hardly contain herself until he had finished the sentence, then she ran to the table and announced:

"The city is being looted from end to end. Listen to what our comrades here have to say. They can't get in, they are being kept out by force; they've been manhandled!"

There was the sound of a scuffle at the door and the babble of excited voices. Sashko, followed by several workers armed with rifles, pushed into the room and all started talking at once:

"What's this? You put up a guard here, a police force, eh? You'd better go outside and see what's going on there. The whole Boulevard is surrounded by the *batko's* lads; they're breaking open the shops, taking away the loot in cartloads."

Makhno's lips contorted as if he were about to bite. He got up from the table and went outside. His men, standing about in the passage and the vestibule, made way for him when they saw that the *batko's* teeth, yellow as an old dog's, were bared in a snarl. He had not far to go: on the opposite side of the avenue vague shadows were at work near the windows of a department store. Scarcely had he set foot beyond the threshold of the hotel when Levka appeared at his elbow.

"What's the matter? Why come out?" Levka asked, but he shrank back when he saw the *batko's* face.

"Where have you been, you swine?"

"Where have I been? I've been blunting my sabre. . . . Thirty-six I killed with my own hand. Thirty-six!"

"What I want of you is order in this city," Makhno shouted. He gave Levka a violent push in the chest and ran across the avenue to the store, followed by Levka and a few of his guardsmen. But the looters had already smelled a rat; the shadows at the windows vanished, and all that could be seen was a few men running heavily in the distance with bundles on their backs.

In the end the guardsmen managed to unearth in the store a much-bewhiskered Makhno warrior who had tarried too long. He whined, and swore that he had come only to see how the damned *burzhuys* drank the poor man's blood. Makhno looked at him and shuddered; then, as more curious spectators came running from the hotel, he threw out his hand towards him in an accusing gesture:

"I know this fellow, he is a well-known counter-revolutionary agent. This is the end of you! Cut him down!"

The bewhiskered one squealed: "No! Don't!" but Levka drew his sabre, grunted and struck the man on the neck with a swing.

"Thirty-seven!" he said proudly, and stepped back from his victim.

Makhno kicked the body as it lay on the pavement in a spreading puddle of blood.

"Let this be a lesson to the others. The orgy of looting is finished." He turned on his heel to face the onlookers who gave way before him in terror. "You can go home quietly now."

Marussya unexpectedly fell asleep on the chair, leaning against Roshchin's shoulder, and her tousled head slowly slipped down to rest on his chest. It was seven in the morning. A surly old servant, who after the establishment of Soviet power had exchanged his tails for a worn housecoat with frogs, brought them tea and large chunks of white bread. The government had been formed, but many urgent problems had yet to be dealt with. Thus the railwaymen wanted to know who was going to pay their wages and how much. Makhno, seconded by the Anarchists, suggested that the railwaymen should themselves determine the fares, collect them and pay their own wages out of the proceeds.

But there was no time for a debate to develop. A sudden explosion shook the windows of the room in which the air was grey with tobacco smoke. A dull thud was heard. Martynenko, who was sleeping on a divan, groaned in his sleep. Again the windows shook. Martynenko woke up and grunted: "What the devil are they up to now?" and hurriedly pulled his tall fur cap on his shaven head. A third heavy thud followed. Chugay and Miron Ivanovich put down their chunks of bread and exchanged alarmed glances. The door flew open and Levka rushed in with a trooper, who shook his bare head like a bear:

"We're done for," said the trooper, and flapped his hand next to his ear; "the whole troop is gone."

"Near Dievka!" shouted Levka, shaking his flabby cheeks. "You still jawing, *batko*? Colonel Samokish is coming with six regiments and shelling the station from heavy guns!"

With undisguised malicious pleasure, no longer hiding behind mattresses, the residents of the Yekaterininski Prospect watched out of every window the retreat of Makhno's army. Horsemen dashed to and fro, slashing right and left with their knouts. The fur coats, *burkas*, hussar dolmans, silk quilts on their backs billowed in the wind. Their horses, heavily burdened with bundles tied behind the saddles, stumbled along the roadway slippery with ice and many a horse and rider and bundle of loot fell and rolled under the hoofs of those that followed. "Aha! There goes another one!" the onlookers shouted gleefully from the windows. Carts piled high with plunder tore along at breakneck speed and great wains drawn by four horses raced forward, sweeping every other vehicle aside, sparks flying from the iron tyres of their wheels. Infantrymen who had been too late to find a place on one of the carts ran madly in the effort to keep up.

With savage yells, rattling and rumbling, the whole procession made for the upper end of the avenue, because Colonel Samokish had already seized the railway bridge and the station. *Batko* Makhno himself, having hurried out of the meeting-room of the revolutionary committee, had stamped his feet in impotent rage; had wept, so it was said, and jumped into his carriage which Levka had driven up to the hotel; he had covered himself with his coat, head and all—perhaps because he was ashamed or perhaps because he did not wish to be recognized—and vanished in an unknown direction from this accursed city.

The *batko's* army, as it fled without firing a shot, suddenly came upon a force of Petlyura's men barring the roads out of the city. Seized by panic, the army turned its horses towards the Dnieper and certain destruction. The bank was very steep here. Breaking heedlessly through hedges and undergrowth, men, vehicles and horses tumbled head over heels down the bank on to the ice. But the ice was still thin; it bent and crackled and then the men and the horses and the vehicles were struggling in the black water between the ice-floes. Only a fraction of Makhno's army, only a miserable remnant, reached the other bank of the river.

That night many of the workers in the squads had asked for leave—to go home, to get warm, to change their boots, to have a warm meal. Only patrols and the men of the peasant regiment had remained under arms, the latter because they had nowhere to go. This peasant regiment thus had to face alone, in an unequal struggle, the whole weight of Colonel Samokish's thrust. The regiment was surrounded near the railway station and almost entirely wiped out in a hand-to-hand struggle. Only a few of them succeeded in getting away through back alleys to take to the villages the terrible tale of the end of three hundred good men and true who had gone to Yekaterinoslav to set up Soviet power.

The members of the revolutionary committee with Miron Ivanovich and Chugay rushed to rally the workers' squads and recall patrols. They had no hope of maintaining their hold on the city—their object was to enable all those who had taken part in the rising to escape across the footbridge to the left bank. The squads who answered the call took up positions at street corners, behind barricades of paving-stones, and drove the attackers back by machine-gun fire, while hundreds of workers with their wives and children ran from all directions towards the bridge and across it to the other side. Some carried in their hands their pitiful belongings, which they might well have thrown away without regrets. They were fired on from the roof-tops and from below, from the river bank.

Chugay, Miron Ivanovich, Roshchin, Marussya, Sashko, Chizh with a dozen comrades were the last to go. Dragging a machine-gun with them, they ran from street corner to street corner, from cover to cover. The grey fur caps of Samokish's men peeped out ever more often at them from near-by doorways. Now the most difficult point had been reached. Now they had to cross the bridge on which they could find no other cover than the dead bodies and abandoned bundles that lay on it. Chugay turned the machine-gun towards the pursuers, lay down behind the shield and keeping only Sashko with him, shouted to the others: "Hurry up! Run!" As the machine-gun began to chatter and scatter lead, they all ran.

As they got to the middle of the bridge, Marussya stumbled and walked on with a heavy, uncertain step. Roshchin overtook her, and put his arm round her to support her; she gave him a surprised look, wanted to say something,

but then only looked at him again. Roshchin stooped and picked her up in his arms as one carries a child. Marussya snuggled closer to him. But at the end of the bridge Roshchin felt a blow strike his thigh—as if an iron rod had hit him. He made an effort to keep his feet and not drop or hurt Marussya. Chugay came running up from behind and Roshchin said to him: "Take her or I'll drop her." He had scarcely spoken when something knocked the cap from his head and the world went dark before his eyes. The last thing he heard was Chugay saying:

"Give a hand, Sashko; we can't leave him here."

CHAPTER XVI

The Robbers was not performed until February, when the Kachalin regiment was given a short rest. Long marches in frosts and snowstorms when, instead of a warm night's rest, there was only an ominous glow in the cloudy sky and the snowy steppe yielded not a twig for a fire to warm their frozen bodies; protracted battles, morning alarms, short but furious skirmishes with the Cossacks—all that they had now left behind them. Mamontov with the remnants of his badly mauled regiments was far away on the other side of the Don and his army was fast melting away. No one believed in him any longer; he had lost many thousand men, the flower of the Don army, in three attacks on Tsaritsyn and had achieved nothing.

The Kachalins, having occupied a large, now friendly, Cossack village without firing a shot, recovered their spirits fast. They were eating their fill and sleeping in warm quarters. Ahead of them was the spring and with it perhaps the end of the long, weary war.

Six weeks of arduous campaigning had taken it out of Dasha and she never even thought of resuming preparations for the show. The props were lost, several members of the cast had been wounded and the very book containing the script had disappeared. What Dasha wanted was to spend at least a few warm evenings with Ivan Ilyich, to sit beside him without speaking, without thinking even, and enjoy the peace and quiet of the dusk, listening to the sleepy song of the little cricket under the stove.

Then there was the washing and darning to do. Ivan Ilyich's felt boots needed mending. She herself could do with a little smartening; her husband, everybody, even she herself had almost forgotten by now that she was a woman. The very first evening Dasha and Agrippina walked home from the baths over frozen puddles, with a light frosty breeze fanning their hot cheeks. This was happiness! Ivan Ilyich and Ivan Gora were also back from the baths and they sat down to eat, the four of them, the men grunting with pleasure as the *schi* exhaled its appetizing odour and the samovar steamed and spread a fragrance of tea. Ivan Gora said:

"See, Ivan Ilyich, now we rest from our labours."

But there was no rest for Dasha. On the second day, just before the hour when Ivan Ilyich was due home, Anissya came and brought the book, Schiller's works. She was serious, even grave and said, raising her dreamy eyes to Dasha's:

"I am very unhappy, Daria Dmitrievna. Perhaps I am wicked. Other people are just people, but I am different, I must be wicked. I was like that even

as a child. But afterwards, of course, we—I got married early—had children. . . . And then my great misfortune happened. I am twenty-four years old, Daria Dmitrievna. When the war is over, where can I go? Shall I live with a *muzhik* in a cottage and stare into the empty steppe? After all I have seen and heard—I want something different."

Anissya's chest heaved under her great-coat and the eyelids came down over her eyes.

"I have read this book from start to finish, I never parted from it even in battle. Perhaps I am ignorant, illiterate, uneducated, but that can be mended. Daria Dmitrievna, there are many voices living in me. I don't know anything about myself, but I know about other people. The tears choke me when I think how I could tell the story of this same Countess Amalia—she would come to life out of the book, believe me. Poor Sharygin said the same thing to me before he died. Daria Dmitrievna, we found a place to-day, the school hall, it will hold three hundred people. There are plenty of carpenters here, and timber, and canvas. Why should we not perform *The Robbers* here? We all remember our parts. The boys mentioned it to-day; they would like a show."

Telegin came home and was delighted of course: "A marvellous idea! We shall be staying here at least a week. It will be a fine treat for the lads!" Ivan Ilyich was a remarkable man—nothing could damp his vitality; once Dasha was by his side, that was all he needed to rush full steam ahead towards happiness, as in those distant, windy, blue June days on the Volga steamer.

Thus it was not vouchsafed Dasha to listen in the dusk to the heart-beat of her beloved and to steal cautiously, on velvet paws, like a cat, into his secret thoughts. But had he any secret thoughts? And if he had, what would Dasha want with them? Ivan Ilyich was simply a generous soul, glad to give everything he had, for her to take. Even his face, roughened by wind and frost, was as simple as the sun. Ah, everything would be different, if in Dasha, in the tender darkness of her thin little body a new good life were conceived, flesh of his flesh. . . .

The troupe began to rehearse again. And what a wretched business it was! Dasha wept soundlessly and the actors were ashamed to look each other in the face. They had been coarsened and hardened by the campaign and their voices were hoarse. Sapozhkov helped a bit by giving them a lecture on the origins of the drama, showing that play-acting was in the nature even of certain birds and beasts. He quoted the fox as an instance; a vixen would catch a mouse and give the little fox-cubs a show with it, she would leap into the air and roll on her back, and walk on tiptoe and twirl her tail and all. . . . The cast cheered up and things went a little better after the lecture. A stage was put up in the schoolroom and a backdrop painted. A row of oil-lamps served as footlights. The frock-coats and tails lost during the campaign—the stuff Telegin had commandeered from a lawyer passing through the farmstead long ago—suddenly turned up among the baggage.

At last the day had come. The sun had scarcely set when a Red Army man mounted on a grey artillery horse rode through the village, blew a flourish on a brass trumpet (this had been Telegin's idea) and shouted: "Citizens and comrades! A presentation of Schiller's play, *The Robbers*, is about to begin!"

The whole village made a concerted rush to the school hall. The porch and the entrance to the hall was stormed so furiously that the people who did manage to squeeze in got in with their eyes starting out of their heads and their hats and buttons gone. But those who failed to get in soon consoled themselves.

A young moon shone down on the village out of a deep prevernal sky. Accordions struck up outside the school—Red Army men regaled the so very recently hostile Cossack girls with their favourite songs, made friends, jested and flirted.

The audience inside the hall was at first inclined to laugh as they recognized in the ancient with the grease-painted face, the oakum locks and the doublet fashioned out of an old cassock, their comrade Private Vanin. "Look at him!" they yelled. "Let 'em have it, Vanin; don't be shy!" And when a man dressed in a queer coat with two tails and long stockings like a woman's came slithering out from behind the scenes, grinning and squinting, and hissed like a snake: "Here I am, dear father, your faithful son Franz," the audience immediately recognized Kuzma Kuzmich and nearly burst their sides with laughter.

Dasha, tense behind the scenes, put both hands to her temples in a gesture of despair and said to Sapozhkov again and again:

"This is the end! A dreadful failure, just as I expected. . . ."

But the players soon overcame the hilarious mood of the audience. Having recognized them all, the spectators began to listen seriously. Latugin came forward to the smoking oil-lamps that served as footlights and lit up from below his powerful face with the stuck-on beard of lambswool and the crazily zig-zagging eyebrows, folded his arms on his chest so impetuously that the black coat commandeered from the lawyer cracked ominously at the seams and said in a resonant voice:

"Oh, if I could prevail upon all nature, on the air, the earth and the ocean to rise and take arms against this vile brood of jackals. . . ."

At this the audience quietened down completely, understanding the ideas that underlay the play.

The scenery and stage setting was not changed; before the beginning of each scene Sergey Sergeyevich put his head through the curtain and smiled knowingly as if he had something special to impart and said:

"Scene Three: Imagine you see the luxurious castle of Count Maximilian von Moor. The scent of flowers comes in at the window from the garden. The beautiful Amalia is sitting in her room. . . .

Saposhkov's face, lit up by the oil-lamps, disappeared again. The curtain was drawn back. No one had the least desire to recognize Anissya Nazarov of the Second Company in this angry beauty dressed in an ample skirt, with a bright shawl tied crosswise over her bosom, red-cheeked, curly-haired, with eyes so large as to take up her whole face.

She began to speak in a low vibrant voice, and struck the table with her little fist as she said to Franz: "Begone, villain!" From then onwards the play went like a fairy tale heard in childhood on a winter night, told by an old granny to the children listening big-eyed from the stove-top.

There was one passage Kuzma Kuzmich was afraid of—when Amalia boxes his ears. For all her dreaminess, Anissya's hand was none of the lightest. Kuzma Kuzmich was about to whisper: "Not so hard"—but already she exclaimed "Oh shameless traducer!" swung as if all the burdens of her old life were weighting her hand and struck him so hard that Kuzma Kuzmich staggered into the wings. But no one laughed now. There were shouts of "Serve him right!" from the audience, and they all applauded because they would all have liked to strike the villain themselves.

Then she tore the necklace from her neck, threw it on the ground and stamped on it:

"Wear gold and silver as much as you like, oh you rich! Eat your fill at

your luxurious table, rest your limbs on soft voluptuous couches! Karl! Karl! I love you."

Then Sergey Sergeyevich brought the curtain forward, smiled and said significantly:

"Interval."

Anissya went up to Dasha behind the scenes, embraced her and hid her face on her shoulder, shivering with emotion.

"Don't praise me, please, please, Daria Dmitrievna."

After this the show went on more or less extempore. The actors sweated, their tensed muscles relaxed, their overstrained voices tired and became quite human; they no longer cared if they missed some of the whispered prompting of Sergey Sergeyevich—they gagged brazenly and glibly and their dialogue was thus certainly better suited to the occasion than Schiller's.

The audience was delighted with the show. Telegin, sitting in the first row with the commissar, was moved to tears several times; Ivan Gora, being a commissar whom it befitted to keep his emotions under control, merely sniffed aloud just as he used to do while conducting some successful military operation. The actors were as pleased as everyone else; they felt reluctant to take off their costumes and grease-paint and would have willingly given a second performance on the spot despite the fact that the cocks were already crowing all over the village.

The celebrations were over. The accordions and songs were silenced, only here and there could the slamming of some gate be heard. The cocks had crowed their fill and the village slept. Anissya was slowly walking along the village street with Latugin, who was wearing his great-coat over one shoulder, so hot did he still feel.

"Yes, Anissya, it was fine. Here you are walking along in this husk of yours, this shabby great-coat, and yet I can see you right through it. Everyday words won't do, and I don't want to say just everyday words to you now."

They came to the end of the village, where the distant steppe merged with the darkness. The moon rode high in the black sky. But Anissya still saw the footlights burning before her eyes, and beyond them every one of her words found a strong echo in the hot, breathing darkness; there was something elemental, something deeply and peculiarly feminine in this power of hers. She found it pleasant to listen to Latugin.

"I have known many women, my queen! To hell with them all! But never have I met one like you. I'm done for, and that's the truth. You can listen to me or not, just as you like."

He stopped and Anissya stopped too. He put his arm round her and the great-coat slipped off his shoulder on to the snow. He kissed Anissya's cold lips. It was a long and ardent kiss. Then he held her at arm's length and looked at her seemingly indifferent face and her cheeks, reddened with beetroot juice. She did not look at him but raised her mascaraed eyes to the moon.

He picked up his great-coat and they walked on.

Dasha, too, slept little that night. Propping herself up on the pillow she said:

"I quite understand that it isn't feasible at present, but listen: we have Anissya, we have Latugin. And Kuzma Kuzmich, why he is Iago in person. We will produce *Othello*. We must get a bigger cast. To-morrow you must issue a regimental order of the day. They'll ask us to stage a show for the division, and the army corps too, see if they don't. But we absolutely must keep our scenery intact. The commissar must give us special conveyances! Please ask him to-morrow. How they listened! They were like a vast sponge soaking it up."

"Yes, of course. Yes, that's right," Telegin answered at intervals, as he walked up and down the room with his hands behind his back, his shirt unbelted, his feet in comfortable soft slippers, a present Dasha had bought for him from a Cossack woman. As he paced to and fro his great black body obscured the light burning on the table each time he passed Dasha, and this annoyed her for some reason. But every time he reached the window and turned round and the light fell on his strong, bronzed, ruddy, smiling face, Dasha's heart began to beat tumultuously.

"Yes, you're quite right. Russians love the theatre. Russians have a special hankering for art. A queer longing, a thirst for it. These men now—they've had six weeks of fighting, they are worn out, nothing but skin and bone, even a dog wouldn't stand it. What do they want with Schiller? And yet to-day it was like a first night at the Moscow Arts Theatre. Or take Anissya! I simply can't get over it! The woman's a natural-born actress. What grace of movement! What passion! And how beautiful she is!"

As he gestured with his hands he obscured the light again and Dasha said:

"Ivan, could you possibly stop walking up and down?"

Her voice held an irritation he had not heard for a long time. She was half-sitting on the pillow and looking at him fixedly with shadowy eyes. Telegin stopped in his tracks, then came up to the bed and sat down on its edge. He was obviously alarmed.

"Ivan," Dasha said, and sat up in the bed. "Ivan, there is something I have wanted to ask you for a long time." She quickly brushed her fingers over her face. "It is a very difficult thing to ask, but I can't go on like this any longer."

By the expression on his face she saw that he knew what the question would be, but she asked it for all that, the question she had repeated to herself a thousand times:

"Ivan, don't you regard me as a woman at all any more?"

Telegin's shoulders heaved; he muttered something indistinctly and put his hand to his head. Dasha gave him a sharp look; so there was some hope still. . . . Or was this to be the end?

"Dasha, Dasha, don't you understand? You should be more generous."

"Generous?" So it was to be the end after all.

"Dasha, I love you so. You may hate me, though come to think of it I don't know why you should. Or you may have an instinctive repugnance. I could understand that very well. But I have fallen in love with you for all time, and whether I am happy or unhappy doesn't matter at all, believe me. As my heart is always with me, so are you always with me. Don't worry, just live and please yourself."

Dasha listened and shook her head. He frowned and said, with an effort:

"For some reason I always thought of your poor little feet—how far they have walked in search of happiness and all in vain, all in vain."

Dasha stretched her thin bare feet out from under the blanket, jumped out of bed on to the cold clay floor, ran to the table and put out the light.

Ivan Gora, having returned from the show with Agrippina, lit the candle and looked through the papers that had accumulated during the day. It was a habit with him never to go to bed before he had dealt with all outstanding

matters. Agrippina sat down on the settle near the door without so much as taking off her great-coat.

"You did pretty well, too," he said, yawning and scratching his neck. "I didn't hear very well what you were chirping about, the part was too small—but that Anissya, whew!" He was smiling and turning over the papers with his face close to the candle. "Perhaps she flirted her skirts a little too much, as the saying goes; she wants a man, no doubt. We must look after her, keep her out of trouble. Plenty of such talents have been developed in people by the revolution. That is just the point. Everything rests on that. The people are not oafs; oh no, the people are rich in talent. Trouble is, we fight with such tremendous wastage. What we need is more machines. Read this!" He spread one of the papers out before her. "We have seized a tank with our bare hands. Barbarous business, isn't it? If I had a son, I'd burn into his skin the words: 'Remember! Never forget to whom you owe your good luck, whose bones are bleaching among the nettles."

Agrippina was leaning against the wall. Her eyes were closed. She bit her lip and thought of the saddest things she could remember—how Ivan Gora lay in the steppe one night and did not move or breathe and how she did not care any more whether he was still alive or already dead. She had one last cartridge for her rifle and she did not want to go away with all the others and leave him alone in the steppe in the night. It was a pity that *her* bones were not bleaching among the nettles since that night.

"Why don't you go to bed, Gapa?"

Ivan Gora shaded the candle with his hand and looked at his wife. Tears were flowing from Agrippina's narrowed eyes and dripping from her long eyelashes under her raised black eyebrows. Ivan Gora swept the papers into his haversack, crossed over to Agrippina and squatted down in front of her.

"What is it, silly? Are you tired?"

"Burn him, burn his skin, teach him that thing about the bleaching bones. . . ."

"Gapa, what's this you're talking about?"

She answered in a voice like that of a little girl in distress:

"I'm two months gone. You're as blind as a bat. All you see is Anissya."

Ivan Gora sat down on the floor at Agrippina's feet. His mouth opened wide and he gaped like an idiot.

"Gapa, is it true? Oh, Gapa, it's great! You're with child? Gapa, my sweet, my darling, my little Gapa."

When he said this she answered and her voice was now low and feminine:

"That's enough from you, get out of here," but leant towards him, put her arms round him and, still sobbing, hid her head on his shoulder, but each of her sobs was shorter and weaker than the last.

The third rout of General Krassnov at Tsaritsyn evoked a revival of the fighting all along the southern front where three armies, the Eighth, the Ninth and the Thirteenth, were facing the Don and the Donets basin. The hostile Cossacks seemed to be ready to bury the hatchet, hang up their saddles in the sheds for the pigeons to mess on, wrap up their rifles in greased rags and bury them, the deeper the better. Who the devil had spread the story that life under the Bolsheviks was not worth living? The land was still there, steaming under the Spring sun, the Cossacks still had a pair of hands each, and horses ready for harness, oxen ready for the yoke.

The Supreme Command in Serpukhovo was pressing for an offensive. Its original faulty plan had been changed. The armies were regrouped in their stride and instead of moving to the south-east, towards the Don, through a region of thaw and roadless mud, the Red Armies turned south-west, towards the Donets. But the move had been made too late: the high-road of the revolution, the proletarian Donets basin, was tightly sewn up; during the two months while they had been marking time, May-Mayevski's division had broken into the Donets basin and was there reinforced by strong Volunteer units withdrawn from the Northern Caucasus after the destruction of the Eleventh Red Army in the sandy Astrakhan steppe. Thus a force of fifty thousand crack White troops, commanded by May-Mayevski, Pokrovski and Shkuro, was now concentrated along the right bank of the Donets.

Spring came on suddenly. Under the shaggy sun the snow melted quickly, the steppe ravines filled with blue water, the Donets swelled and flooded its banks. All railway lines here ran north and south and the regrouping of the Red armies had to be carried out by road across the flooded countryside. The supply trains floundered in the bottomless mud and lost contact with their units. All this hindered operations and slowed them down. Meanwhile all crossings over the swollen Donets had been occupied by the Whites. The offensive petered out into desultory but protracted fighting. At the same time a stubborn and bloody Cossack insurrection, organized by Denikin agents, broke out suddenly in the rear of the Reds. White aeroplanes brought propagandists, money and arms to the insurgents.

Of the Red armies only the Tenth, operating on the left wing of the Red forces, continued to move southward along the main railway line, forcing back or wiping out the remnants of Krassnov's troops.

The Tenth Army was going to meet its end.

At noon it hurt the eyes to look into the steppe; the sun blazed in puddles, in rivulets, in dewponds, from which a sweet-scented breeze was blowing.

Dasha, Agrippina and Anissya often sat together now on the back platform of their railway carriage, enjoying the sun and wind. The troop train was moving south and the spring was flying to meet them. The men were already discarding their tunics and unbuttoning the collars of their shirts. Sometimes they heard the crackle of shots and the thunder of guns far in front of them, coming from below the skyline—the advance forces of the Ninth Army were mopping up the last Cossack bands. Velikoknyazheskaya was taken without much trouble. Having passed the station, the Kachalins detrained on the bank of the river Manych and took up positions in the front line.

The Salsk steppe, through which, in the spring, the Manych rolls its turbid waters over tall reeds, is empty and flat like a frozen, green stretch of water. Here, along the Manych, arrows flew from bank to bank since time immemorial; here Asiatic nomads fought the Scythians, Alans and Goths; from here the Huns set out and turned into a desert all the land from here to the Northern Caucasus; here the Kalmyks sat in their felt *yurtas* and listened to the ancient stories about the daring deeds of Manas. In spring the steppe was lush—the water-saturated earth was covered with grass and flowers; the moist sunset glow painted the sky red; enormous stars blazed low on the horizon and then a fierce sun, like a round Persian shield, rolled out of the Caspian Sea.

The Kachalin regiment established its headquarters in the only habitable structure to be found in this desert. This was a reed-thatched dug-out in an abandoned horse-pound. There was no sign of the enemy anywhere near,

although mounted patrols ranged far and wide, to Tikhoretskaya in the south and Rostov in the west. It was difficult to make the men understand that they had not come here to stun fish in the Manych with hand-grenades or waste precious cartridges on wild-ducks in the dusk, but to fight; that the army was far to the rear of the enemy, that the enemy were experienced and seasoned troops, and that the fighting would be heavy.

One day Ivan Gora came back from a visit to divisional headquarters, called Ivan Ilyich, and silently walked out with him along the water. They sat down and smoked in silence while the flat red sun sank lower, veiling itself with the vapours of the steaming earth, and the frogs began their insolent clamour all along the riverside.

"They're randy, the devils," said Ivan Gora.

"Well, what did you find out?"

"The same old things. They're all worried and they all understand, but there's nothing they can do. The orders of the Supreme Command are definite: Tikhoretskaya must be attacked. What do you think of all this?"

"Thinking is not for me, Ivan Stepanovich; my job is to obey orders."

"I am asking you what you think of all this in your own mind?"

"What I think? Perhaps you're going to shoot me, eh ?"

"Silly idiot, of course not. But that's the sort of answer I get from everyone. Bloody cowards, that's what you are, all of you."

Ivan Gora pushed his cap to the back of his head and scratched his head; then he scratched his ribs; a clod of earth loosened by his feet rolled down the bank and fell into the turbid whirlpool with a gentle splash. The frogs croaked with lustful vigour, as if about to populate the whole earth with their slimy brood.

"So you consider the orders of the Supreme Command correct?"

"No, I don't," Telegin answered softly but with determination.

"Oh, so you don't, eh? Very good. And why not?"

"Because, even here, we are almost completely cut off from our reserves and supply bases; if the enemy severs the thin thread that links us with Tsaritsyn we are done for. All this is most unsatisfactory."

"Go on. I'm listening."

"To advance even further towards the south to attack Tikhoretskaya would put us in the position of a cat crawling head first into a boot. Nothing good can come of it. Such a manœuvre might serve some purpose only if our army had been sent here for a diversion, with the idea of drawing the forces of the Whites away from the Donets basin at all cost."

"Yes, go on."

"But this would be much too expensive a game—to sacrifice a whole army for a demonstration."

"So what is your conclusion?"

Telegin puffed out his cheeks, threw the butt of his cigarette into the water, and said:

"Sorry, I have drawn no conclusions, Ivan Stepanovich."

"That's a lie, brother, and a big one. All right, don't say it. It's all quite clear as it is. Remember, Ivan, you once told me how your commissar Gymza sent you to the Supreme Command with a secret report about the traitor Sorokin? Well (Ivan Gora looked around and lowered his voice), now I myself would like to go, not to the Supreme Command in Serpukhovo, but to Moscow, straight to Moscow. There is a swine sitting somewhere, in the Supreme Command or in the Supreme Military Council, who knows. I

couldn't be otherwise, of course. After all, there's a war on. That being so, we are far too trustful. Our fellows are honest, clean-thinking, open-hearted, and they think everybody else is the same, the *bourgeois* excepted. They think the whole world is all right; all you need do is hit out honestly right and left. I once watched Lenin in Petrograd—he's got a real Russian eye, cunningly puckered. He's an enthusiast, a thinker; he put his hands under his coat behind his back, walks up and down, wrinkles his forehead—then suddenly looks at a man and understands everything. That's what we want. I am watching you, your every movement, your every word. But you don't watch me, you trust me blindly. If I were to give you a harmful order, you would hold your tongue and carry it out."

"Oh no I wouldn't."

"But you've just said arguing about orders is not your job. So what would you do?"

"I'd try to convince you, to change your mind."

"Convince me! Intellectual that you are! Shoot me, that's what you ought to do."

Ivan Gora grasped his head with his big hands, bent forward and propped his elbows on his knees. He had not told Telegin the main thing. This was that the evening before a party meeting had been held at divisional headquarters, and that at this meeting a telegram just received from the chairman of the Supreme Military Council of the Republic had been read. The telegram was the answer to an uneasy inquiry of the Tenth Army commander; it was couched in haughty and threatening terms and categorically confirmed the orders previously received.

"Here is the latest news for you," said Ivan Gora. "On our left flank General Pokrovski is concentrating four divisions coming from the Donets basin; in front of us General Kutepov is moving to meet us and has already cut us off from Tikhoretskaya—he must have guessed what the Supreme Command was going to do—and on our left flank General Ulagai is bringing up his cavalry. Behind us are four hundred *verst* of desert."

"That decides everything," Telegin said. "If you want my opinion, we should immediately evacuate all sick and wounded, and send everything not absolutely essential back to the rear. We won't be able to hold the Manych line."

Ivan Gora said nothing for a while. Then he spat angrily into the river:

"For conversations such as this we ought to be court-martialled, both of us. If you are told to die on the Manych, you'll die?"

"I have never refused to take a chance on that and I never will."

On the second day of May mounted patrols of Kutepov's corps were sighted on the far bank of the river. At first there were only small groups of wary horsemen roaming the steppe, sometimes standing still, sometimes galloping at breakneck speed through the glistening puddles, with bullets whistling past their ears. But their numbers increased quickly, they approached the river more boldly, dismounted, hobbled their horses and fired on the defenders of the first-line positions.

On the third of May the main body of Kutepov's forces arrived with a thunder of gun-fire. They established themselves on the railway and proceeded confidently to attack the banks of the river in successive waves. Observation planes—neither Russian nor German in appearance—flew over the positions. Lorries carrying pontoons dashed up, throwing up fountains of mud and water.

The same day an assault group of Kutepov's corps forced the river, and broke into the positions of the Morozov division, but were wiped out in hand-to-hand fighting.

At nightfall the attackers withdrew and dug in. The firing died down and night fell over the steppe, as quiet and moist and flower-scented as ever. Bold bullfrog choirs struck up as if nothing special had happened. Only a man here and there, sleeping with his ears to the ground, fancied that he heard the soft swishing of grass as it split the inky darkness with its tender yet strong blades.

In Telegin's dug-out command post a council of war was in session all through the night. They were waiting impatiently for divisional headquarters to give the signal for attack. It was obvious to them all that such an enemy ought not to be given time to deploy unhindered and then strike wherever he pleased along the thin front of the Tenth Army, a front stretched out to a length of nearly thirty miles and with its rear and flanks open to attack. The commanders reported that their men were restless and did not sleep; there was whispering in the trenches and if this had been 1918 the whole regiment would doubtless have called a meeting and threatened to tear the commander to pieces unless he immediately gave the order to advance.

Moshkin, one of the company commanders, now came into the dug-out. He had just crossed the Manych, up to the chin in water, from the other bank of the river where one platoon of his company had dug in. Moshkin was an engineer from Tsaritsyn and loved war with all the passion of the hunter.

"Nice smell you've got here, comrades," he said, screwing up his eyes in the tobacco smoke which almost obscured the light of the candle. Hopping first on one leg, then on the other, he pulled off his boots and emptied the water out of them. "My boys shot a cadet. I wanted to bring him along, but he died, more's the pity. Just a snot-nose he was, but as fierce as you make them. 'Scum' he shouted, 'vermin!' My boys were amazed. And his get-up! Fine cloth, boots, leather straps and all. The Cossacks are nothing to these fellows. The Cossack is a fool; our *muzhiks* are the same, we give them a shove, they give us a shove and then it's 'as you were'. But these fine gentlemen, whew! No mercy from them. The whole platoon is made up of officers only—the platoon commander's a colonel. Every one of them has a watch on his wrist. I had to tell my boys "hey, you tramps, forget those watches; don't let me catch you crawling up to White sentries for watches or I'll knock your teeth down your throats."

Moshkin laughed, showing a row of fine teeth and his ugly, pock-marked, intelligent face beamed with good nature.

"The position is this, comrades: there is a hell of a row going on in the steppe, we've been hearing it ever since dusk. I sent out a scout, Stepka Shchavelev—he's a wizard, that man. He crawled away, crawled back, and told me that the enemy artillery had arrived, and infantry in road vehicles, he thought. Better get ready, comrades."

Telegin, his head reeling with the smoke, left the dug-out to get some fresh air. The piercingly bright sickle of the moon stood out sharply among the paling stars. Nearby three women were sitting on a stile. Telegin went up to them.

"The orders are that no one should spend the night outside the trenches. Why are you here?"

"We couldn't sleep," said Dasha, bending down towards him from her perch.

Dasha, Anissya and Agrippina all seemed to him to be very thin and wide-eyed and, in general, somehow different. He couldn't make out whether they were smiling at him or just puckering up their faces in a queer way.

"We are waiting here until you finish," said Agrippina.

"May I stay with them, comrade regimental commander?" asked Anissya.

"Get down on the ground at least; don't roost up there like hens. Can't you hear the bullets whistling?"

"The ground is full of dung and fleas, and up here there's a nice breath of air," Dasha said.

"Those aren't bullets, those are beetles flying; you can't fool us," said Agrippina.

Dasha again bent down towards Telegin.

"The frogs are going crazy and we like to listen to them," she said.

Telegin turned to the river. Only now did he notice these sighs, these rhythmic moans of longing and expectation, Just then a soloist, a four-inch giant with a big mouth and bulging green eyes, intoned a song of victory and sang it full-throated, firmly convinced that all the universe up to the very stars were listening to his pæan of life.

"Bravo, well sung," said Telegin, and laughed. "All right, girls, sit where you like, only if something starts, take cover immediately." He drew Dasha to him and whispered in her ear: "Everything's fine, isn't it? And you are perfectly lovely."

He waved his hand in farewell and returned to the dug-out. When the women were alone again, Anissya said softly:

"I'd like to sit here like this for ever."

Agrippina said:

"Happiness is won by blood. That is why it is so precious."

Dasha said:

"I've seen many things in my life, but everything passed me by without touching me. I was always waiting for something special, something unprecedented. My heart foolishly tormented me and tormented others. It is better to love like this, even if it is only for a single night. To understand everything, to fill yourself to the brim, in one night to live a million years.

She leant her head against Anissya's shoulder. Agrippina looked at her and then she, too, leant against Anissya from the other side. They sat thus for a long time afterwards on the stile, with their backs to the stars.

The fire of Kutepov's artillery was directed by some new biplanes. They circled over the shell-bursts, dropped a few bombs on the Reds, then glided like hawks above the steppe towards the horizon, back to the White batteries which had begun a violent bombardment of the Manych line at dawn.

In order to discourage the enemy, Red divisional headquarters sent up the only plane still capable of getting off the ground. It was an ancient machine, very slow, which had served its term in the imperialist war and had been crudely repaired at Tsaritsyn.

It was a fearsome thing to look at as it flew, contrary to all the laws of aerodynamics, over the men's heads, its wooden fuselage creaking, its wings much patched and its engine coughing. It was piloted by Valka Cherdakov, well known to the whole Southern front and to the White pilots; a little monkey-like man, with a game leg, with one shoulder higher than the other and hardly a whole bone in his body; a patched-up job like his own plane. If he was asked: "Valka, is it true that you brought down a German ace in 1916 and then

flew to Germany and dropped a wreath on his grave," he would answer in his thin piping voice, "What if I did?" One of his tricks, if he ran out of ammunition, was to dive on his opponent and ram his machine. "Valka, how is it you don't smash yourself up too?" "What if I do? It's all in the day's work," he would say.

The sight of his machine flying low over the steppe cheered the Kachalins greatly, although their position was unenviable enough. High-explosive shells burst at short intervals on both banks of the Manych, forcing the men to take cover in the trenches. At least six White batteries thundered ceaselessly while the Reds had only one. The enemy were coming forward in swift rushes, boldly and irresistibly.

Valka Cherdakov waggled his wings, made a landing close by, climbed out of his machine and limped round it in a circle. Red soldiers came running up to him. His whole face was smeared with machine oil.

"Well, what are you staring at?" he said angrily, dragging a case with instruments and spare parts out of the fuselage. "Chase the enemy planes off me. I've got work to do."

But the Whites had seen him and three of their planes began to circle over him, flying too high for the rifle fire of the Red Army men to reach them. Bomb after bomb dropped and churned up the earth. Valka never batted an eyelid but went on with the job of repairing the oil feed. One bomb burst so close that Valka's plane swayed on its under-carriage and clods of earth rattled on its wings. At that Valka looked up at the planes and shook his finger at them. When the job was finished, he shouted at the soldiers:

"Come on, give a hand, swing that propeller." He climbed into the machine, settled himself in his seat. "Comrades, d'you call that swinging? You're not tickling a woman's tail now! Don't be afraid to take hold!"

The engine sneezed, knocked deafeningly and finally roared into action; the men jumped away, the machine swayed and lurched away far into the steppe and it seemed that it would never rise. Then all at once it was airborne. Valka gained height, banked, dived and climbed again. This was the way to get the foul combination of petrol and spirit well mixed in the fuel tank. He flew a wide loop and then pounced on the enemy planes. But the three biplanes refused combat and fled.

Having flown over the front as long as he thought fit, Valka Cherdakov made another landing and sent Telegin this note:

"I saw eight new passenger cars. Denikin is at the front with some foreigners. This is a fact, take it into account. Two of the enemy guns are smashed. I have shot up an enemy column. Am flying to base to refuel."

It was true that Denikin was at the front. Little more than a year ago the general, suffering from bronchitis and wrapped up in a tiger rug, had been dragging himself in a supply wagon in the wake of the seven thousand Volunteers commanded by Kornilov, who were fighting their bloody way into Yekaterinodar. Now General Denikin was the undisputed master of the Lower Don, the rich Kuban, Terek and Northern Caucasus.

Denikin had invited the British and French military agents to accompany him on this trip to General Kutepov's section of the front because he wanted to make them feel embarrassed and ashamed at the disgraceful defection of the Allies who had abandoned Odessa, Kherson and Nikolayev to the Bolsheviks. If it had at least been regular Red Army troops that had driven the French and Greeks out! But that mere *muzhiks*, mere partisans should

have cut up a whole Greek brigade in Nikolayev in full view of the French destroyer fleet! Were the French victors of the World War so afraid of the Russian *muzhiks* that they retreated and shamefully gave up Kherson and evacuated two divisions from Odessa? Absurd! Proposterous! Or were they frightened of the Moscow commune? Denikin made up his mind to show these famous Europeans that *his* army could smash the Communists.

There was one more thing rankling secretly in Denikin's mind. This was that the Council of Ten in Paris had appointed Admiral Kolchak and not General Denikin to be "Supreme Ruler" of all the Russias. What on earth did they want with this Kolchak? When in 1917 Kolchak had wrenched off his golden sword and thrown it in the Black Sea from the bridge of his flagship, his action had been reported in the papers of practically every country in the world. At that time he, Denikin, was imprisoned in Bykhov gaol—but *that* fact was not mentioned in any paper. In 1918 Kolchak fled to the United States and served in their navy as a torpedo expert; the newspaper printed his picture along with the portraits of film stars. At that time, he, General Denikin, had escaped from prison, had taken part in the Icy Campaign; standing beside the dead body of Kornilov he had assumed the heavy burden of command and had captured a territory greater than all France. But only some third-rate little Paris newspaper had printed a few lines about it, with a fantastic photograph of God knows whom with mutton-chop whiskers captioned 'General Denikine'. And, to crown it all, the Allies had now appointed not Denikin, but Kolchak, that megalomaniac, that hysterical blower of his own trumpet with a taste for cocaine!

Denikin had no confidence in the success of Kolchak's arms. In December a certain Pepelyaev, one of Kolchak's home-made generals, had very nearly captured Perm, and the entire foreign Press had shouted: 'An iron fist has been raised over the Bolsheviks in Moscow'. Even Denikin himself had believed this for an instant and Pepelyaev's success had given him some unpleasant hours. But Moscow sent Commissar Stalin to the Kama (this was reported by the secret service); the same man who had twice smashed Krassnov at Tsaritsyn in the autumn. Stalin quickly and ruthlessly organized the defence and gave the famous Pepelyaev such a shove that he reeled back non-stop from Perm to the Urals. Kolchak's present offensive against the Volga would doubtless come to the same end, for it was carried on without thorough preparation, mainly for show, with incredible boosting on the part of the foreign Press and amid the delighted cheering of the drunken Siberian merchants.

"Our tactics differ somewhat from the methods used by yourselves and us and the Germans in the world war. Our lines are less closely manned and there are far greater intervals between units. Each platoon is given independent tasks," said Denikin, standing in a new, smart Fiat touring car and pointing with his white-gloved hand to the precise parade-ground movements of Major-General Teplov's deploying rifle brigade.

Beside the commander-in-chief in the car stood a French officer in sky-blue tunic and riding-breeches; on his small head a gold-braided velvet képi sat at a rakish angle; silky moustaches peeped out from under the field-glasses he was holding to his eyes; on his hip dangled an aluminium flask full of brandy. Never was there a more comfortable Frenchman! On the running-board of the car stood an Englishman, also with a pair of binoculars; he was less exquisite than the Frenchman and dressed more simply in a khaki tunic with enormous pockets full of reels of film, tins of tobacco, and various pipes

and lighters; his flat pancake hat was tilted forward over his nose, a circumstance which served as a subject of much discussion among Denikin's Russian suite, who were standing at a respectful distance from the car.

"You can say what you like, no Englishman knows how to wear uniform. Look at that hat! Compare it with the bonnet of the Chevalier Guards! Remember how the Hussars of His Majesty's escort wore their shakos? And then look at that clumsy fellow!"

Kutepov, mounted on a Kalmyk stallion, was waiting with a sullen air near the car. He was a stocky man with grizzled hair and red-rimmed eyes. He wore his short sheepskin coat unbuttoned and had put on gloves and strapped on spurs for this parade. He had been battering at that damned Manych for five days and knew perfectly well that the deployment of Teplov's brigade under the eyes of these foreign popinjays was merely a show which would cost the brigade dear.

"A characteristic feature of this sort of war is its great mobility," Denikin was explaining. "Hence the great importance of cavalry, an arm in which I have a decisive superiority: the Terek, the Kuban and the Don can give me a hundred thousand regular troopers."

"Oh-la-la," the Frenchman answered carelessly, still keeping the field-glasses to his eyes.

"The Reds have no cavalry and have no material out of which to create any, except Budenny's brigade which gave poor ex-Ataman Krassnov so much trouble."

"A hundred thousand saddles and bridles take some getting," the Englishman said between his teeth; he, too, kept the glasses to his eyes.

"Yes, that's the whole point," Denikin said dryly. He was keeping a firm hold on his tongue although he would have liked nothing better than to have told these allies the whole truth on the spot, right here among his troops, amid the thunder of the guns (the car was standing only half a mile from the batteries). He would have given a lot to be able to tell them that they were narrow-minded shopkeepers, that their policy was shortsighted, cowardly and penny-wise-pound-foolish. Had it not been proved to them as surely as twice two makes four that the Bolsheviks were a greater menace to them than two hundred and fifty German divisions? So, why don't you send me arms, gentlemen, as much as I need, if you are afraid to send your own troops to Russia?

"If I haven't enough saddles, I'll make the Cossacks ride bareback," Denikin said, unable to control himself any longer. He said it not too sharply but in not too friendly a tone either, and then turned to the interpreter.

The interpreter, a nauseatingly servile young man of a Southern cast of countenance, suddenly gasped with horror, instead of translating the general's words. At the same instant Kutepov jerked up his horse's head, gave it the spurs and shouted:

"Take cover under the car, gentlemen!"

The noise of battle had covered the approach of a clumsy yellow aeroplane which was now flying straight at the car. No one even had time to shoot at it as it roared past. Leaning out of his seat the pilot, Valka Cherdakov, flung down two pineapples—hand-grenades—one of which fell straight on to the hood of the magnificent Fiat, and the other close beside it. Then, showing a row of white teeth in a wide grin, Valka climbed steeply into the sky.

General Denikin, the Englishman and the Frenchman had succeeded in sheltering under the car, although Denikin had experienced some difficulty as he crawled under because of his paunch and his thick great-coat. Still, they got away with only a fright. The officers of the general's *suite* had scattered in all directions and General Kutepov also managed to get out of harm's way.

The Volunteers pressed on with unprecedented fury. True, many of them were pinned down on the level steppe with their noses to the ground. But still ever fresh waves of them came moving towards the Manych. Under a curtain of fire from light machine-guns they sprang up at scattered points, dashed forward, and gathered on the far bank of the river. Telegin gave the order to bring the regimental colours from the dug-out and strip off the sheath.

The decisive moment had come. The White artillery was now shelling the reserves of the Kachalins, churning the earth up into an uninterrupted wall, while a hail of lead rained on them from just across the Manych. The last waves of the Volunteers ran forward and no longer paused between rushes. The machine-gun fire ceased suddenly and hundreds of men threw themselves into the river so furiously that the water splashed up high above their heads. Holding their rifles up at arms' length they waded in up to their chests, then up to their necks, then began to swim. Some of them were hit by bullets; they threw up their hands, struggled, and went under—but fresh and ever fresh waves of men followed after. The width of the river was not more than two hundred feet. No machine-gun fire could now stop these maddened men, yelling with rage. But Major-General Teplov, who stood in the reeds on the river-bank brandishing his sword and shouting: "Forward! Forward!" was mistaken in his assumption that such a terrifyingly savage attack would cause the Reds to panic and fly.

The Kachalins had been waiting for just this all day, and those whose hearts had at first failed them had by now overcome their weakness and hardened in angry tension. When the attack began, the commanders and the Communists had to grab the men by their shirts or trousers to hold them back and make them fire at the Whites, so eager were they to get to grips with the enemy. But by now, although the men swore dreadfully, they had settled down to firing steadily.

"Look at the vermin! Look at the reptiles!" Anger was hammering in their hearts. Then Latugin came to the end of his patience. "Let me get at them, blast you!!!" he shouted, and, fixing his bayonet, he sprang out of the trench with a savage yell. The others poured after him down the steep bank of the river to meet the attackers. They shouted "Hurrah" and the 'vermin' shouted in answer, "Hurrah!" But the bayonet charge of the Kachalins was irresistible in its fury. It carried off their feet those of the Whites who had already reached the bank; the Kachalins rushed after them into the river; they were soon fighting half-way across, hitting out with their rifle-butts, flinging grenades, even wrestling with the enemy. How could officers, with their pampered bodies, hold out against these ploughboys, Donets colliers, Volga dockers and lumberjacks who grappled with them in the water? The water of the Manych was reddened with blood and the air was full of shouting, the rattle of arms and the crash of bursting grenades. The Whites were being pressed back and many of them were already climbing up the far bank. Major-General Teplov threw in new reinforcements. Ivan Gora, the commissar, now took the regimental colours from the hands of the standard-bearer—they were of cherry-coloured silk with a gold star and there were many bullet-holes in them—raised them high over his head and, with all the Communists round him, ran on heavy feet to the Manych.

Well before the attack had begun Telegin had placed his reserves under the command of Sapozhkov at a spot farther upstream, where the water was shallower, so that the tops of the riverside reeds showed above the level of the

flood. When he saw Ivan Gora take the flag, Telegin left his dug-out, jumped on his horse and rode through the shallows into the reeds to where the Red Army men had been lying in the mud like pigs for the last six hours. He called:

"Comrades, the enemy is on the run, don't let him get his second wind."

One hundred and fifty men, carrying heavy machine-guns by hand, their boots sinking into the sticky slime, crossed the river under cover of the reeds, took the Whites in the flank and struck hard. This decided the fate of the battle. The Whites retreated from the river and under the cross-fire of machine-guns and rifles, began an orderly withdrawal which, however, soon turned into flight. Far on their right flank troopers of a cavalry squadron, sent to the aid of the Kachalins from a neighbouring section of the front, spread out in a thin line across the steppe to cut them off.

The remnants of Teplov's brigade broke through the encirclement. Only a few straggling groups of Whites fell under the bayonets of the Red Army men. It would have been dangerous to carry the pursuit too far. Telegin told Sapozhkov to straighten the front and dig in; he himself galloped off towards where he saw the regimental colours moving slowly in the steppe half a mile away. He had followed the standard with his eyes all the time; had seen it cross the river, move forward, stop and suddenly wilt, then rise anew and sway forward again.

The setting sun hid behind fluffy clouds and it grew rapidly dark in the steppe. The flashes from Kutepov's guns still darted out from the horizon a little while; a few shells whined past, flying God knows where, then it was quiet and night veiled the battlefield.

While there was still light enough, Telegin rode on in search of Ivan Gora. The Red Army men he met gave him varied tidings of the commissar. All had seen him cross the Manych with the flag. But afterwards it was Company Commissar Moshkin who had carried the colours. Then Moshkin, too, was wounded. Finally the colours were in the hands of a stout lad, a private. Latugin and Gagin came up to Telegin. They were the sole survivors of the gun-crew; a shell had at last smashed their gun, which had done such yeoman service that day.

Latugin said between clenched teeth:

"Ivan Ilyich, that was a horrible business—it makes one's blood run cold to think of it."

"It's dangerous to go near some of the boys even now," said the usually taciturn Gagin in the same low voice. "They are still breathing hard; you must be careful lest they stick their bayonet into you."

"Ivan Ilyich, you are looking for Ivan Stepanovich, aren't you?" asked Latugin.

"Yes. Have you seen him?"

"Come with me."

They walked along the river picking their way among the dead. They heard moans and muttering somewhere in the darkness. Stretcher-bearers were calling to each other as they searched for the wounded. Telegin could distinguish Kuzma Kuzmich's sibilant whispering. Latugin, who was walking in front, suddenly stopped and crouched down.

Ivan Gora was lying on his face. A bullet had pierced his heart and he had fallen, spreading his arms as if to embrace the earth which he refused to give up to the enemy even in death.

The veteran Kachalins—those who had known Ivan Gora first as a common Red Army man and later as company commander—met that night in the open field and decided to bury the commissar in a conspicuous and memorable spot, the high grave-mound on the bank of the Manych.

There were plenty of grave-mounds here, but this one was higher than all the others. Perhaps in ancient days the mound had been raised to take a Khan's *yurta*, so that from that eminence he might see his great herds of horses grazing in the steppe. Perhaps in even more ancient days Scythians had buried their chief here with his charger and his favourite wife, and on top had laid rows of cut canes and planted a giant bronze sword with its point to the sky, a symbol of the god of fertility and good fortune.

They carried Commissar Ivan Gora across the river on their shoulders, laid him in the spring grass on top of the grave-mound, smoothed his hair and covered his gaunt body with the regimental colours.

The night was still and there was a bright moon. At the feet of the commissar stood Telegin, with his sabre drawn; at his head, Babushkin, commissar of A company, a Petrograd Communist. The men filed past the body and each man as he passed presented arms.

"Good-bye, comrade," each man said.

After all the men had taken leave of him and the time had come to lay the commissar in his grave, Latugin came running back to the top of the mound.

"To-day," he shouted, "to-day our mortal enemies killed our best comrade. He taught us why these rifles have been given into our hands. To fight for truth and justice, that is what he gave me this rifle for. And he himself was a true and just man, a man who belonged to us with all his heart. He taught us that once our mothers had borne us into this world, once we had uttered our first cry in this world, there was nothing for us to do but to fight for the truth. I request the commander of this regiment and Commissar Babushkin to accept my application to be admitted to the Communist Party. I say this with all my heart, standing over this dead body, over this flag."

They buried Ivan Gora. Late that night Dasha went to call Telegin from his dug-out and said, wringing her hands:

"You go to her, please; try and get her away from there."

She led Ivan Ilyich to the grave-mound. The night was black with the darkness that precedes the dawn, the moon had set and a steppe breeze was whistling in their ears.

"Anissya and I have done everything we could, but she won't listen to us."

Agrippina was sitting on the grave-mound beside Ivan Gora's grave. Her head was stubbornly lowered and her cap and rifle lay beside her. Anissya was sitting a little distance away from her.

"She is as though turned to stone. We must break the spell, get her away from here," whispered Dasha, and went up to Agrippina. "Look, Agrippina, the regimental commander himself is asking you to come away."

Agrippina did not so much as look up. Human words flew past her ears as did the steppe breezes blowing over the grave. Anissya, still sitting a short distance away, laid her head on her knees. Telegin cleared his throat and then said:

"This won't do, Agrippina. Soon it will be light; we shall all move over to the other side of the river. You'd be left here all by yourself. That wouldn't be right."

Without raising her head, Agrippina muttered:

"I did not leave him *that time*, I shan't leave him now either. Where should I go?"

Dasha again whispered into Telegin's ear, pointing at her own forehead: "D'you see? She's out of her mind."

"Look, Gapa, let's talk this over." Telegin sat down beside Agrippina. "You say, Gapa, that you don't want to leave him. But is this grave all that is left of Ivan Stepanovich? He will live in our memory, he will go on inspiring us. Understand this, Gapa: you are his wife and in you his living seed is still ripening."

Agrippina raised her hands, clasped them in front of her face and dropped them again.

"You are doubly dear to us now, Agrippina. The regiment will adopt your child. Remember what a responsibility you are bearing now." He stroked her hair. "Pick up your rifle and come with me."

Agrippina stood up, nodded her head towards the place where she had been sitting all night, picked up her cap and rifle and left the mound.

The bloody battles along the Manych continued until the middle of May and then died down. Denikin, disappointed with Kutepov's vain efforts to break through the front of the Tenth Army and with the excessive losses suffered in course of them, summoned Kutepov to Yekaterinodar. In his study, in the presence of the arrogant, contemptuous Romanovski, Denikin raised his voice, and unjustly reproached Kutepov:

"Are we fighting a war or are we putting up a circus performance for the amusement of our most exalted allies?" He threw his thick pencil on to the table with a gesture of petulance. "We are not gladiators, Excellency. Why such reckless adventures? It's nothing less than scandalous. Utterly uncivilized operations! We are soldiers, sir, not partisans!"

Kutepov knew Denikin very well and understood why he was in such a passion. He said nothing and looked sullenly out of the corner of his eye at the little bunch of flowers on the table next to the inkstand.

"Here you are, read it and much pleasure may it give you." Denikin picked up the top sheet of a bundle of papers. "The front of the Ninth Red Army has been breached with trifling losses on our side. We have entered an area of Cossack insurrection. In a few days we shall have occupied Beshenskaya. But the operations on the Donets might have by now have been developed into a large-scale offensive if we had not tied up so many of our forces here on the Manych. Gentlemen, I am ashamed of our strategy. The whole world is watching us, and they are very impressionable out there, you can be assured of that. Kindly come over here."

He searched for his pince-nez among the papers and then, accompanied by Kutepov and Romanovski, crossed over to another table covered with military maps.

His plan was this: Generals Pokrovski and Ulagai, who had completed the concentration of large cavalry forces on the flanks of the Tenth Army, were to break through to its rear, smash the field cavalry of the Bolsheviks, seize the station of Velikoknyazheskaya and within four or five days close the ring round the Reds fighting on the Manych.

Denikin took a clean linen handkerchief, scented with eau-de-Cologne, out of the side-pocket of his tunic and began to wipe his glasses; his short fingers, covered with shiny dry skin, trembled slightly.

"The Volunteer Army is now deciding the trend of world politics. After the fall of Odessa, Kherson and Nikolayev the Western powers are beginning to understand this. We must strike lightning-swift, crushing blows. Applause in this war is expressed not by the clapping of hands but in terms of arms shipments. I always warned against all sorts of adventures. I don't like gambles. Nor do I like to lose. If our successes in the Donets basin fail to develop into a general offensive that will carry us into the heart of the country and bring us to Moscow, I shall put a bullet through my brain, gentlemen."

The handsome Romanovski smiled his usual conceited know-all smile and tapped a cigarette on his silver cigarette-case. Squinting at him from under his wrinkled low forehead, General Kutepov perceived the source of General Denikin's sudden breadth of ideas. "Aha," he thought, "they must be twisting the old man's tail here pretty thoroughly." But Kutepov was a fighting general, not a staff brass hat; the problems of higher strategy he considered far too muddled and tiring. His job was to fly at the enemy's throat on the battle-field.

"We'll do everything we can, Excellency," he said. "If you give orders to take Moscow this autumn, we'll take Moscow."

For the last three days and three nights the Kachalins were fighting their way forward towards the railway without a bite of food, without a sip of water. The order to retreat had been given on the twenty-first of May. The Tenth Army fell back from the Manych in a northerly direction, towards Tsaritsyn, breaking through the encirclement at the cost of tremendous efforts and losses. A dry wind was blowing over the steppe, making the grass lie flat on the ground; the steppe was grey, the distance hazy and in it Ulagai's troopers were gathering like packs of wolves.

The horses of the supply column were exhausted and many fell. The sick and wounded were loaded on to already overloaded wagons and the slightly wounded and the nurses stumbled in their wake as best they could. Thirst made their lips first swell, then split; their inflamed eyes, screwed up against the biting eastern wind, vainly searched the horizon for the outline of some railway water-tower. There was no trace of moisture in the broad steppe ravines, although a short time ago the Kachalins had waded through them up to the waist in water. If they had only a few drops of all that water to moisten their blackened lips!

In one of these ravines they met with an ambush: as their wagons rolled down the grassy slope, shots were fired at short range, and Cossacks, sure of an easy prey, rode from some hiding-place straight at the column. About fifty bearded marauders galloped down the slopes, but dashed back just as quickly when they came under fire from every wagon. All the wounded had retained their rifles and even Dasha fired at the Cossacks, screwing up one eye as hard as she could.

The Cossacks fled, but one of them fell down together with his horse. The men of the column ran to him, hoping to find a full flask of water. The Cossack had silver epaulettes. He was pulled out from under his dead horse. "I surrender, I surrender," he repeated in terror, "I'll give all the information you want, take me to the commander."

His flask of water was taken from him and two more were found in his saddlebags.

"Bring him here alive!" shouted Moshkin, who was sitting in a wagon with a bandaged head and wounded arm.

The captive officer stood to attention in front of Moshkin. His flaccid face with its loose mouth and lacklustre eyes was an unpleasant sight.

"What are you? Regulars or partisans?" Moshkin asked.

"Irregular auxiliaries, sir."

"Organizing risings in our rear, eh?"

"By order of General Ulagai, sir, we are mobilizing levies."

The column moved on and the officer walked along beside Moshkin's wagon. He answered questions readily, politely and precisely. It was obvious that he was an experienced counter-espionage man and knew how to buy his life from his captors. Some of the men walked beside him in order to hear what he was saying, and they began to exchange glances when the captive spoke of the retreat of the Ninth Red Army from the Donets and how General Sekretev had pushed into the breach between the Ninth and Eighth Armies with his cavalry corps and harried the Red rear with his raids.

"That's a lie! All lies," Moshkin said, but without conviction and without looking at the officer.

"Oh no, sir; it's quite true. I have a copy of the Supreme Command report, here it is, sir."

Anissya Nazarova had alighted from a wagon and was walking along by the side of the prisoner with other Red Army men. Moshkin was reading the report. The wind rustled the pages in his hand. All were waiting to hear what he would say. Anissya pushed through the crowd, getting ever closer to the prisoner until some of the men grumbled at her: "What's eating you? Never seen the likes of him before?"

Anissya's feet were as heavy as lead, her head was aching, her eyes seemed full of gritty sand. Unable to get through the crowd, she ran forward, stumbled, snatched the reins of the wagon and stopped it. The men didn't understand at first what she was doing. But Anissya strained forward and stared at the prisoner, her eyes wide in her dark, distorted face.

"I know this man!" she said. "Comrades, this man burnt my children alive. He had me flogged and left for dead. He flogged twenty-nine of our village to death."

The officer laughed uneasily and shrugged his shoulders. The Red Army men drew closer all at once and their eyes wandered from the prisoner to Anissya and back again. Moshkin said:

"All right, all right, we'll take that up later. You go back to your wagon; go and lie down a bit, my dear."

Anissya repeated as if talking in her sleep:

"Comrades, he can't be left alive, I'd rather have you tear out my heart than leave him alive. Search him. His name is Nemeshayev, he remembers me. Look, he has recognized me!" she cried joyfully and pointed at the prisoner.

A dozen hands reached out, the officer's sweat-stained Cossack coat and shirt were torn from his back, his pockets were turned inside out and a paybook found, just as Anissya had said, making the man out to be Captain Nikolai Nikolayevich Nemeshayev.

"I know nothing about it, I can't understand this at all," he repeated sullenly. "This woman is lying, or raving, she has typhus perhaps."

The men knew Anissya's story and made way in silence when she took a rifle from one of them, walked up to Nemeshayev, touched him on the shoulder and said:

"Come with me."

Nemeshayev cast a terrified glance around at the stony faces of the men, swallowed hard, tried to say something to Moshkin who turned away from him and went on reading the report; then he clung to the side of the wagon as if he could save himself that way. The men tore him away from the wagon, shoved him in the back:

"Go, go along with her."

At that he walked out into the steppe, drawing his head in between his shoulders and stumbling like a blind man. Anissya followed ten paces behind. A little distance away she raised the heavy rifle, pressed its butt to her shoulder.

"Turn round," she said to the prisoner.

Nemeshayev turned round, ready to leap at her. Anissya fired into his face and, without looking round at him, walked back to the others who were watching, sternly and witho moving, the execution of a just sentence.

"Whose rifle is it? Take it," she said, and walked back to the hindmost wagon, got in, lay down and covered herself with the tarpaulin.

CHAPTER XVII

KATIA WAS CORRECTING a dictation in the exercise books. These exercise books, which had been made by cutting up and sewing together various wallpapers (one could only write on their reverse side) were a great achievement in her poor little life. To get them she had travelled all the way to Kiev on her own. It had been easy to gain admission to the People's Commissar for Education. The Commissar, when he was told who she was and why she had come, took her arm and put her in an armchair; he poured her a cup of carrot tea out of a sooty kettle standing on the magnificent hardwood table. He paced to and fro over the carpet in his clumsy felt boots, a fur coat thrown over his shoulders, and developed a vast programme of public education that made Katia's head reel.

"In ten to fifteen years we shall be an enlightened nation. The cultural treasures of every nation will be made accessible to the broad masses," he said, smiling fanatically and fingering his beard. "We have a tremendous job of work to do in getting rid of illiteracy. This disgrace must be washed off—that is a point of honour for every educated man or woman. The entire younger generation must be caught up in a network of education from *crêche* to university. No one and nothing can prevent us Bolsheviks from turning into reality all the things the best representatives of our intelligentsia could only dream of."

The People's Commissar for Education promised Katia ten thousand copybooks, schoolbooks, literature, pencils and slates. When she left the Commissar she walked down the marble staircase as in a dream. But afterwards all sorts of difficulties and snags began to appear. The closer Katia approached the actual copybooks and schoolbooks, the further they seemed to recede into unreality and the more ambiguous, cynical or surly became the people who were supposed to exchange her vouchers for exercise books and schoolbooks. In her hotel, in an unheated room where there was not even a mattress on the bed and where the electric bulb scarcely glowed at all, Katia had a fit of despair as she sat wrapped in her coat shivering on the lumpy sofa.

One day a big man in a shaggy fur hat and belted coat came into her room without knocking and without preamble asked in a deep voice:

"You are still here? I know your case. Show me the papers you've got."

Standing under the red-glowing bulb he read the papers. Katia trustfully watched his strong handsome face that wore a quizzical expression.

"Scoundrels," he said; "Saboteurs, rogues. Come to my office at the city committee to-morrow morning early and we'll see what we can do. Good-bye."

With the assistance of this man Katia was given wallpaper, and pencils from the stores and a library in bulk, just as it had been requisitioned from a bibliophile sugar manufacturer—the only trouble was that most of the books were French novels. The worst part of the whole thing was perhaps the journey home with all these treasures, in a cattle-truck. At every station bearded, terrifying *muzhiks* with huge bundles and excited peasant women as broad as cows from the contraband food hidden under their coats and skirts, burst into the truck.

But Katia found that she had acquired quite a bit of strength and was no longer a helpless kitten with a soft back and pretty eyes, purring on other people's beds.

This her new strength had begun to grow that evening when she had been so inopportunely introduced as Alexey's intended. Katia had that day cast a glance into the future that was in store for her—the comfortable future of a village trader's wife—and she shrank back as a man might shrink back from an open grave. Alexey's eyes—her husband's, her master's—gleaming with vodka and desire of her, were as a grave to her. Katia's whole being revolted against it, and this surprised and gladdened her like the feeling of recovered strength after a long illness. No less unexpectedly for herself she firmly made up her mind to escape to Moscow as soon as the weather turned warmer. She was even wily enough to conceal all this from everyone. Alexey and Matryona saw only that she was more cheerful and sang as she worked.

At mealtimes (those were the only times they saw him at home) Alexey now used to wink at Matryona as if to say: "Our little bride is getting used to it." He too was more cheerful now; the village council had agreed to his proposal at last; he was breaking up the outhouse on the Prince's estate and was shifting the timber and bricks to his own holding.

In the beginning of January, when the Red Army had taken Kiev, one of its units passed through Vladimirskoye, and Alexey was the first to raise a cheer for the Soviets. But soon matters took a different turn. A certain comrade Jacob turned up in the village. He requisitioned the village priest's well-built house, turning the priest and his wife out to shelter in the bath-house. He called a meeting in the village, at which he said: "Religion is the opium of the people. Those who are opposed to the closing of the church are enemies of Soviet power. . . ." Then he took the vote without permitting any discussion and put seals on the church door. After this he began to pick out the labourers and the poorest peasants from among all the rest of the villagers. There were about forty of these labourers and poorest smallholders and Jacob formed them into a "poor peasants' committee". He called a meeting of them in the priest's house and said with malevolent insistence:

"The Russian *muzhik* is an ignorant brute. He has lived on a dung-heap for a thousand years. There is and there can be nothing in his heart except a stupid spite and greed. We don't trust the *muzhiks* and shall never trust them. We are treating them with some consideration just now, while they are 'fellow-travellers', but we shall soon stop doing that. You, the village proletariat must firmly take power here and help us to clip the wings of the *muzhiks*."

Jacob intimidated the whole village, including the members of his "poor peasants' committee". Every word spoken in a village is soon known to everybody and the whisper ran from cottage to cottage:

"Why does he talk like that? Why are we brutes? We're Russian people, we're living in our own country—why shouldn't we be trusted all at once? And what's that about clipping everybody's wings? They can clip Alexey Krassilnikov's—he's a bandit. They can clip Kondratenko's and Nichiporov's; they are bloodsuckers, as we all know. That would be quite right. But why should my wings be clipped? Because my shirt is salt with sweat? No, there must be something wrong here." Others again said: "Good God, so this is what Soviet power is like."

When Jacob walked abroad on his unholy business he was unwashed and unshaven, and he wore a shabby military great-coat and a cap with a torn vizor. But the boots on his feet were good and people said he had good clothes on under his dirty great-coat. As he walked along the street he was watched from every window and the *muzhiks* shook their heads anxiously and waited in fear to see what would happen next.

In March when folks had just started carting the manure out into the fields, Jacob called a meeting and demanded that a census of all horses be taken immediately, as all surplus horses were to be requisitioned at once and a communal farm set up without delay on the Prince's estate, else they would all be prosecuted for counter-revolutionary activities.

This completely disorganized the manuring of the fields and the early ploughing. The peasants cursed the 'unwashed devil'.

Soon afterwards a food requisitioning detachment arrived in the village. Jacob supplied them with such a list of surplus grain stocks that the food collectors themselves raised their hands in surprise. Jacob himself went round the cottages chalking on every door the quantity to be delivered by each household.

"But I haven't seen so much grain in all my life!" a peasant shouted and attempted to rub the chalk-marks off his door with his sleeve. Jacob said to the food collectors: "Dig in his cellar." The peasant was afraid to make the sign of the cross in front of Jacob; he rent his clothes in tears and wailed: "There is nothing there, God is my witness". Or else Jacob would say: "Break up his stove, the stuff is hidden underneath."

Through his efforts the village was completely cleaned out, even the seed wheat was taken away. With Alexey Krassilnikov Jacob took a different line; he summoned him to his office one day, locked the door (which had the portrait of the President of the Supreme Military Council of the Republic nailed to it), put a revolver on the table near his hand and smiled mockingly at the frowning Alexey.

"Well, shall we have a chat? Have you got grain?"

"How could I have grain? I didn't plough or sow yet."

"And where did you put your horses?"

"They're scattered among the farms, my friends are using them."

"And where did you hide the money?"

"What money?"

"The looted money."

Alexey was sitting with his head lowered—only the fingers of his right hand clenched and unclenched themselves, gripped and let go again and again.

"That seems pretty stiff," he said. "I can understand taxes, a tax is a tax, but this . . .! This is robbery! What d'you want—my shirt?"

"Just as you like. But I shall have to arrest you and send you to the *cheka*."

"Who said I won't bring the money? What must be, must. I'll go and get it."

When he got home, Alexey rushed to the cellar and began to drag out travelling bags, sacks and rolls of cloth. One bag was full of old Tsarist roubles and Don currency—these he stuffed into his pockets and his shirt. The other bag, full of useless Kerenski currency, he gave to Matryona:

"Here, take this to Jacob, tell him this is all we had. If he doesn't believe you and comes here to search, don't make any objection. Drop the watches and chains down the well. Put the cloth and stuff in the wagon, cover it with hay, take a horse from Grandfather Afanasi in the night and drive the wagon to the Dementyev farm; I'll be waiting there."

"Alexey, where are you going?"

"I don't know. I shan't come back for a while, but when I do, you'll know about it."

Matryona drew her knitted shawl down over her eyes, tucked the bag with Kerenski money under her arm and went out. Alexey bolted the door and with blazing eyes and flaming nostrils turned towards Katia who was standing near the stove.

"Put on your warmest things, Yekaterina Dmitrievna. . . The fur coat and woollen stockings and warm underwear. But hurry, we haven't much time."

He stared at Katia with wide-open eyes; his dilated pupils seemed to throw off sparks, his moustache bristled over his bared teeth. Katia answered:

"I am not going anywhere with you."

"Is that your answer? Have you no other answer for me?"

"I am not going."

Alexey moved closer to her and his flaring nostrils grew white.

"I am not leaving you behind, don't you believe it. You little bitch, I didn't feed you with the best of everything only to leave you behind for another man to lay. A fine lady, are you? I haven't touched you yet; you'll groan and whine, you slut, when I get my hands on you."

He seized Katia with his iron fingers and grunted when she warded him off, pressing with both hands against his neck. He lifted her off the ground and carried her to the bed in two strides. Katia struggled with unexpected violence, twisted in his arms, screamed: "No, no, let me go, you brute!" and wriggled out of his grip, but he caught her again. He was hot in the fur coat full of paper money and in his blind rage he beat Katia ruthlessly. She covered her head with her arms and said between her clenched teeth, in a tone of passionate hate: "Kill me! Kill me, you brute!"

Then the door rattled and Matryona's voice shouted from outside: "Open the door, Alexey!" Alexey stepped back from the bed and put his hand to his face. Matryona knocked loudly a second time before he opened the door. She came in and said:

"You fool, get out! They are on their way here!"

Alexey stared at her for a moment before he grasped the import of her words, then his face lost its savage expression; he picked up the rolls of cloth and the sacks and went out of the room. Taking the only horse left him, he rode away by the back, through the gaps in the hedges, trotted down to the stream, crossed it and, once on the other bank, he spurred the horse into a gallop and disappeared among the trees.

A little later Matryona got out a bodice and skirt from her chest and threw them on the bed where Katia was still lying, her clothes torn from her.

"Put these on and go away, I am ashamed to look at you."

Jacob and his assistants searched Alexey's house from the attic to the cellar

but did not find the things Matryona had hidden in the wagon. That night Matryona brought a horse and drove away to the farm. All through the night Katia sat huddled in her fur coat in the cold dark room, waiting for the dawn. She had to consider everything quite calmly. She would go away as soon as it was light. But where? She propped her elbows on the table, put her head between her hands and began to cry. Presently she went to the door, where the water-pail stood, and drank a mugful. To Moscow, of course. But who would be left there of her old friends? None, they would all be gone. She fell asleep with her head on the table and when she woke up with a violent start it was already light. Matryona had not come back. Katia adjusted her shawl on her head and glanced into the mirror on the wall. She looked terrible! She went out to the committee office.

She had to wait for a long time at the back door before anyone was astir in the priest's house. At last Jacob came out with the slop-pail, emptied it on to a heap of dirty snow and said to Katia: "I was just going to send for you. Come in." He showed Katia into the house, offered her a seat and then groped for something in the table-drawer.

"As for your husband or whatever he was to you, we shall shoot him."

"He is not my husband. He is nothing to me," Katia answered quickly. "All I ask is to give me the opportunity of going away from here. I want to go to Moscow."

"I want to go to Moscow," Jacob repeated after her in a mocking tone. "And *I* want to save you from being shot."

Katia sat in Jacob's room until evening, and told him all about herself and her relations with Alexey. From time to time Jacob went away for long spells; when he came back he would sprawl in a chair and smoke cigarette after cigarette.

"The instructions of the People's Commissariat for Education are that we must set up a school in this village," he said at last. "You are not too suitable, but we'll have to try you out. Your second job will be to tell me about everything that is going on in the village. We'll discuss the details later. I warn you that if you talk about this you will be punished most severely. And I advise you to forget all about Moscow for the present."

And so Katia sudden found herself turned schoolmistress. She was given a small empty cottage next door to the school. The old schoolmaster who had lived there had died of pneumonia last November; the Petlyura bands who had billeted themselves in the school for a time, had used up all the books, copybooks and even the wall map for rolling cigarettes. Katia did not know what to start on; she wanted to ask Jacob's advice. But Jacob was no longer in the village, he had gone away in response to an urgent telegram as suddenly as he had come. He had had only time enough to tell Grandfather Afanasi, who, fearing to lose his influence, was now forever hanging around the "Poor Peasants' Committee":

"Tell the comrades not to let up on the *muzhiks* on any account. I'll come back and check up on you."

It was very quiet in the village after Jacob's departure. The *muzhiks* came to the priest's house to sit on the porch and said to the members of the "Poor Peasants' Committee":

"A nice mess you've made of things, comrades, and now you'll have to answer for it. Bad job."

The members of the committee knew well enough that it was a bad job and that the apparent quiet in the village was merely on the surface. Jacob

did not come back. There was a rumour that Alexey Krassilnikov had recruited a band in the district and had gone to join Grigoryev's forces. Soon the whole village was talking of this Grigoryev, who called himself *Ataman*, had issued a proclamation and was now advancing to raid Soviet towns. Once again the people of Vladimirskoye anticipated changes.

The village Soviet had promised Katia to repair the stove and put glass in the windows of the cottage. Katia herself scrubbed the floor and cleaned the windows in the schoolroom and arranged the damaged forms in rows. She was a conscientious woman, and alone in her tiny cottage of an evening she wept because she was ashamed to deceive the children. How could she teach them anything without so much as a book or copybook? How could she explain to them, when she herself was so much at odds with all rules? Then early one morning she heard the merry chattering of little boys and girls outside the school. Summoning all her self-control she smoothed back her hair and tied it into a tight knot at the back of her head, washed her hands with scrupulous care, opened the schoolroom door and said to the little boys and girls who turned their little snub noses up to her:

"Good morning, children."

"Good morning, Yekaterina Dmitrievna," the children shouted, so loudly, so clearly, so cheerfully, that Katia felt her heart grow young again. She seated the children on the forms, took her own seat on the platform, raised her index finger and said:

"Children, as long as we have no books, no copybooks and nothing to write with, I shall tell you stories, and if you don't understand something, you must ask me to explain. To-day we shall start with Rurik, Sineus and Truvor."

Katia's housekeeping was of the scantiest. She did not want to take anything from Alexey's house, nor did she want to meet the now grim and haggard Matryona. A broom standing in the corner nearest the door, two earthen pots on a shelf and in the passage an old wooden tub for water was all Katia's wealth. The little garden gave her great pleasure; it had a wattle fence, two cherry trees, an apple tree and some gooseberry bushes. Beyond the fence lay the open fields.

When the cherries burst into bloom, Katia felt as if she was seventeen again.

She prepared her school work in the garden, read French novels taken from the sugar manufacturer's library and often thought of a Paris veiled in the blue haze of past years. In those days, in 1914, she had been living in a suburb of Paris, in a little attic flat with a balcony giving on to a quiet, narrow little street and looking on to the roof of a small house in which Balzac had lived once upon a time. The windows of his rooms had opened, not on to the street, but on to the gardens sloping down to the Seine. In Balzac's time this was a remote retreat. When his creditors appeared from the street, Balzac quietly slipped away through the gardens to the Seine. Now the gardens belonged to some rich American woman and peacocks had screamed sharply there when Katia sat in lonely grief on the balcony, having come to Paris after her separation from her husband, thinking that life was already over for her.

The children liked Katia and listened attentively when she told them stories from the history of Russia, which were like fairy-tales. Arithmetic, the multiplication table and spelling were much more difficult, of course, both for the children and for Katia, but as the result of a co-operative effort they did quite well. Katia's standing in the village was much better now; everyone knew that Alexey had nearly killed her. The women brought her milk, eggs and bread. What they happened to bring was all that Katia had to eat.

One day Katia was correcting exercise books under the crabbed old apple tree. A little boy was whimpering from outside the low fence:

"Auntie Katia, I won't do it again."

"It's no use, Ivan Gavrikov, I am very cross with you, and I am not going to speak to you for two whole days."

For all his innocent blue eyes Ivan Gavrikov was a very naughty boy. During lessons he would pull the girls' pigtails; when being scolded for this, he would pretend to fall asleep and fall under the form—impossible to describe all his misdeeds.

"No, no, Gavrikov, I can see quite well that you are not really sorry but just came here because you have nothing better to do."

"Cross my heart so help me God, I won't do it again."

Just then someone came in from the street and Matryona's voice called Katia's name.

What could she want? Katia quickly forgave Gavrikov and went into the house. Matryona met her with a stony, unfriendly stare.

"Have you heard? Alexey is coming. Katerina, I have had enough of this, I don't want to have anything more to do with you. If he finds you here, he'll kill you. He has become a brute, a bloodthirsty beast, and it's all your fault! A man told me just now that Alexey is on the way here with his men. Katerina, go away from here. I'll give you a horse and cart and money too."

Vadim Petrovich Roshchin had plenty of time to think things over while he was lying in hospital in Kharkov. He now found himself on the other side of the fiery boundary. The new world was not very attractive to look at: unheated wards, wet snow falling outside the windows, vile food consisting of some grey soup with fish heads in it, and the uninspiring conversation of the patients about the food, the *makhorka*, their temperatures and the doctor. Not a word was said about the bright future towards which Russia was striving, of the events which were shaking her, of the endless bloody struggle, the participants in which—these sick and wounded men with shaven heads, in dirty flannel dressing-gowns—either slept all day, played draughts on their cots with a self-made board and pieces, or sang slow, melancholy songs.

They did not exactly shun Roshchin, but neither did they accept him as one of themselves. This suited him, for he wanted to commune with himself. Too many undecided and undigested things had accumulated in his mind, too many memories had been broken off suddenly; it was as though a page had been torn out of a book at the most thrilling passage. Roshchin had accepted his new world without hesitation because it was all happening to *his* country. But now it had become imperative for him to think things over and understand what it was that was happening.

One day the doctor brought him some Moscow newspapers. He read them now with quite different eyes, not contemptuously ridiculing everything in advance, as he used to before the change. The Russian revolution was spreading to Hungary, to Germany, to Italy. The lines of print radiated confidence, daring, optimism. Russia, ravaged by war, torn by fratricidal strife, divided up in advance between the great powers, was now taking the lead in international politics and growing into a mighty power.

Roshchin began to understand the matter-of-fact assurance of his grey-gowned comrades in the hospital. They knew what a task had been accom-

plished and they knew they had done their jobs. Their heavy-handed, heavy-footed, immemorial thoughtful calm had withstood the storms of five centuries; and God knows there had been storms enough. The history of the Russian people and the Russian State is a strange and peculiar history. Vast formless ideas haunted it from century to century, ideas of world-embracing greatness and of a righteous life. Here daring, unprecedented ventures were undertaken, such as dumbfounded the European world, and Europe watched with fear and anger how this eastern wonderland, both weak and mighty, both poor and immeasurably rich, brought forth from her dark entrails great bursts of ideas, vast enterprises of world-wide scope. And finally Russia, this Russia and no other, had found a new road unexplored by any others and from the first step along it the sound of her footfall was heard throughout the world.

With such ideas in his head, Roshchin cared little about the dirty runnels into which the March snow was melting in the streets, where sullen and discontented Soviet officials were slouching along with shopping bags and paraffin cans in their hands, and badly worn shoes on their feet, to some meeting in one of the innumerable offices; he did not care what soup he ate and whether there were fish heads in it or not. He was impatient to lend a hand himself as soon as possible in the great work now being accomplished.

The Ukraine was being cleared of Petlyura's bands. Yekaterinoslav had been captured by the Red Army. Petlyura had held out for a while in Byelaya Tserkov but was soon driven out of that last stronghold and fled to Galicia with the remnants of his followers. In advance of the Red Army's attacking forces rolled a broad wave of partisan risings. Their extent was difficult to assess and their operations difficult to direct. They flared up like fires in the villages and districts; a savage war of the poor peasants against the strongly entrenched *kulaks*. Both sides recruited foot and mounted forces and clashed in fierce and bloody battles. And everywhere were secret agents sent by Petlyura, by Denikin, by the Poles and other even more sinister and hidden organizations, to create confusion and provoke bloodshed. Soviet power was well established in the cities and along the main railway lines, but beyond them, within a gunshot from the armoured trains, there was bloody war.

Roshchin had at last received the long-awaited appointment to the staff of a brigade, of which Chugay was the commissar. In the middle of March he was discharged from hospital, and still limping slightly and walking with a stick, he left for Kiev to join his unit.

Under the leadership of a man known as Zeleny, a band which had split off Grigoryev's hordes was raiding village Soviets, and hunting Communists. With hundreds of carts and wagons they had boldly driven up to the very gates of Kiev itself. On the roads along Zeleny's trail were found men flayed alive or impaled on split stakes; members of local committees Zeleny burned alive; Jews he nailed to gates or slit their bellies and sewed live cats into the cavity. The plan for wiping out this band was worked out by the staff of the People's Commissar for War in the Ukraine with Roshchin's assistance. Few men were available for the operation. The People's Commissar himself left Kiev in a steamer to supervise operations on the spot.

The Dnieper was still in spate. The steamer's paddle-wheels splashed in the clear water, disturbed only by slow eddies here and there. Neither the splash of wheels nor the voices of the men could stifle the song of nightingales. The banks were fluffy with sweet-smelling and sticky fresh buds and shoots,

some green, some yellow like day-old chicks. The sun rising above the flood-water scorched the deck. Roshchin was standing at the rail and looking down at the glittering water.

He had seen many springs, but never before had the wine of life fermented so vigorously in him, nor at such an unsuitable and inopportune moment. His head was swimming with vague forebodings. He felt for a cigarette in his pocket and frowned, but it was no use—no serious, business-like thoughts he could summon could shake off the spell that was falling on him. A haze of spring was rising from the flood waters, from the little islands, and the half-submerged cottages overhung by the huge disc of the sun. Its rays glided gently over the water, over the trees and their pale and trembling reflections, over the backs of cows up to their knees in water, over a grassy knoll from which a young bull was gazing into the unknown miracle of spring he now saw for the first time.

It was strange that ever since Yekaterinoslav, Roshchin had thought very little of Katia, as though she, too, had faded away with his past, being too closely linked with the old life he now condemned so passionately. When his thoughts returned to Katia he was also returning to the Roshchin he had *that* day seen in the barber's mirror when his disgust had not been strong enough to shoot or at least to spit at his own reflection; Roshchin as he was now would have done so in the same circumstances.

Only two springs ago his love for Katia seemed to fill the universe—the universe that lay within the puckered forehead of a mortally hurt, confused Roshchin. At that time he had needed Katia's love and especially had he needed it in that lonely hour in the Yekaterinoslav hotel when he had eyed the door-handle with the thought that it would do to hang himself on by his belt. And now? Did he no longer need Katia's love? Was that true? Had he betrayed Katia twice, once in Rostov and a second time in Yekaterinoslav?

He stared at the river bank sliding past, drew his lungs full of the sweet moist air and felt neither remorse nor pangs of conscience. No, there had been no second betrayal in Yekaterinoslav. There he had settled his accounts with the past. Then there had been Marussya, who had sung her short, innocent, passionate little song about the new life—about such a spring flood and an immeasurable, unknown happiness.

The bull on the grassy knoll bellowed and the men in the bows of the steamer laughed and bellowed likewise, aping the bull in fun. Roshchin closed his eyes. He was glad. Was death a thing without hope? Marussya's death had been glad. It had been like a farewell word spoken by one who goes away to those who remain behind: "love life, live it passionately, and form happiness out of it."

Roshchin had never ceased to search for Katia. At his request the military authorities had made inquiries about the whereabouts of Alexey Krassilnikov, but without results. There had been nothing more Roshchin could do at the time—these few hours on the steamer's deck were the first hours of leisure he had had in the last six weeks, during which he had been working eighteen hours a day.

Chugay and the Ukrainian People's Commissar for War now came up to him. The Commissar was a lean, sun-tanned man in a canvas blouse, with eyes that were moist like the eyes of a drunk, although he never drank and hated drunkenness so much that one day he nearly shot a brigade commissar, a good man, because he found him drinking *samogon*. Now he pointed to a high bluff on which stood a white bell-tower, and said:

"I was born there. As soon as she heard the steamer hooting my grandmother used to fill a basket with plums, pears, nuts and what not and chase me down to the landing-stage to sell them. A troublesome old woman she was. But she never made a trader out of me for all she tried so hard."

"*My* grandmother was a very pious woman," Chugay said. "She was for ever going on pilgrimages to holy places and always took me with her to do her begging for her until I was ten years old."

But the Commissar went on without listening to him:

"Afterwards they apprenticed me to the blacksmith, his workshop is still there, just under the bell-tower. To this day I like the smell of charcoal and hot iron. When I'd had my share of boxes on the ear, I shifted to Kiev and got a job with the railway in the engine yard; and from there I went to Kharkov to the repair shops. . . ."

But Chugay went on without listening to him:

"I was a proper little tough—I used to scratch myself bloody somewhere, smear the blood all over my face, turn up the whites of my eyes and 'play Lazarus' on the church porch. And afterwards I used to fight my grandmother for kopecks. . . ."

He repeated "Fight my grandmother . . ." in a preoccupied drawl as he watched the bank which here jutted out into the river and beyond which the river turned sharply. Chugay's bulging eyes narrowed, he clapped his beribboned little sailor cap on his head and climbed quickly to the bridge.

"Hey, Pop," he shouted at the captain, a dry little old man with walrus whiskers, "turn a bit more inshore."

"I can't, comrade. I have to keep to the channel, there are sandbanks over there."

"Never mind the channel!" Chugay slapped his gun-holster. "Turn her, quick!"

The steamer rounded the bluff and soon a large village came into view on the sloping bank, with a tall belfry, a mill, white cottages and the fresh green of lush gardens.

"See that little cottage over there on the slope, that's where I was born," said the People's Commissar to Roshchin.

Chugay was shouting angrily:

"Come on, you . . .! Faster! Port that helm!"

A lot of wagons stood on the bank, and many boats were moored along it. Men were jumping into the boats and others were already rowing towards the steamer. Chugay, his coat flying behind him, slid down the companion to the deck. Rifles cracked on the bank and in the boats, and almost at once a machine-gun began to chatter back from the steamer. Men jumped into the water from the boats. There was panic among those still on the bank—men scrambled into the wagons and drove away at a gallop along the wide road, raising a vast cloud of dust, while the bell in the belfry rang the tocsin.

The exchange of shots and the flight of the bandits lasted only a few minutes. The bank was empty now. Chugay's bulging eyes twinkled merrily as he climbed up the companion.

"That was Zeleny. The son-of-a-bitch broke through the ring after all! There you are, Vadim Petrovich, that's what happens to plans of encirclement. Well, Commissar, I suppose we shall have to make a landing in force, eh?"

Zeleny's band twisted and turned in the narrowing ring like a pack of wolves, until at last they were forced back to the railway line, driven into the fire of an armoured train and finally wiped out in a dense thicket where the bandit wagons had assembled for a last attempt to break out of the encirclement. The surrounding fields had been trenched in advance to form pitfalls for the bandits. When the wagons with their four-horse teams dashed out of the wood, the horses stumbled into the pitfalls and the wagons overturned or broke. The bandits leaped out and ran for cover into the undergrowth; but only death awaited them there. None of them even tried to ask for quarter. Their leader, Zeleny himself, was found hiding under a pile of brushwood; the Red Army men who pulled him out of there by the legs had expected to find some terrible giant and were surprised when he turned out to be a scraggy little man, whose shifty, colourless, hate-filled eyes alone betrayed the fact that he was a wolf by nature. They tied him hand and foot and sent him to Kiev alive.

One group of the band however succeeded in breaking through to one side and escaping to the east. The People's Commissar sent a cavalry unit in pursuit: three hundred sabres commanded by Roshchin and Chugay. A long and tricky chase began. The bandits changed horses on the farms; the Reds had to ride their own all the time they followed the trail. The bandits were making for the village of Vladimirskoye, so the peasants told the pursuers in one village, where only twenty-hours earlier the marauders had commandeered all the horses and carried off as much loot as they could in their hurry.

"We wish you'd finish them off, comrades, as soon as possible," said the peasants to Chugay and Roshchin at the well, while the troopers were watering their horses. "I tell you we've had enough of all these military operations. We know their leader very well; he's from Vladimirskoye, Alexey Krassilnikov. He was a good farmer, no doubt about that, but he went wrong and now he's like a mad dog, the devil. . . ."

Thus did Roshchin unexpectedly pick up the trail of Alexey whom he had been vainly seeking for weeks and with it the trail of Katia. He had good reason to be shaken—only a day's march now divided him from Katia. How would he find her? So unrecognizably changed and tormented that all he could do would be to cradle her grey head on his breast (Katia and grey hairs, oh!) and say: "It's over now, Katia; now we can rest and live, for live we must." Or . . . no, that was impossible—she could never be the resigned, consenting, submissive wife of Alexey! Most likely of all was that at the end of their day's march he would pull up his horse at Katia's grave. And perhaps that would be best for her; thus her image would remain untouched, unsullied.

The regiment moved forward fast along the dusty road. Roshchin swayed in his saddle. Katia's image came and went in his memory. But in whatever condition he would find her he knew he would accept her back into his life as she was.

In Vladimirskoye the burnt cottages were still smoking, the children were still gazing in terror at the fresh pools of blood that had not yet been covered over with ashes; the women, their eyes swollen with weeping, were still in hiding when Roshchin and Chugay—each at the head of a column—galloped into the village from opposite directions. But Krassilnikov had gone. Someone had warned him and he had ridden away with his bandits about half an hour before the arrival of the Reds, though not before he had taken revenge on the committee members, and sabred seventeen men, with Grandfather Afanasi for the eighteenth, this last out of sheer perversity.

The peasants were so incensed against him that almost the entire population of the village assembled and surrounded the troopers whose horses were staggering with exhaustion.

"Ride after him," the peasants shouted; "kill Alexey, he has few men and no ammunition. He isn't far away. We know where they have gone, the brutes. You can surprise them and take them with your bare hands."

"And what about giving us fresh horses, citizen-comrades?" Chugay asked.

"We'll give you horses. For this we'll give them."

"How many?"

"About fifty. You can leave your horses behind and call for them on the way back. Kill him; he'll never leave us in peace else."

While the horses were being caught and saddled, Roshchin stretched his legs and went up to the women. They saw that he was about to ask them a question and came closer.

"I knew a Krassilnikov in the great war," he said. "He had a brother who was married, but he was a bachelor I think. How about this one? Is he married?"

The women, not yet understanding what he was driving at, said readily:

"Oh yes, he's married, he's married."

"No he isn't. She wasn't his wife!"

"Well, he lived with her, didn't he?"

"No, that's not right either. Comrade soldier, I'll tell you how it was. He won this woman at cards and brought her here, he wanted to marry her. She of course said to him, I'll marry you, but I am not used to living like the *muzhiks*. She was a fine lady, young and beautiful she was. But Alexey's house had been burned by the Germans last year. So he began to build a new one for her, but then that thing happened with Jacob. . . ."

A third woman was even better informed. She elbowed her way through to Roshchin:

"Listen, comrade commander; he beat her, he beat her badly, nearly killed her, but not quite. Since March she's been the schoolmistress here."

"Oh yes?" said Roshchin and cleared his throat. "Is that so? And is she still here, in the village?"

The women exchanged glances. Then a fourth woman who had just joined the group said:

"He took her away, in his wagon, under the hay, but whether alive or dead we don't know."

A little boy who had been staring spellbound at Roshchin, at his great sabre with its brass pommel, at his dusty boots and spurs, at his big wrist-watch and his revolver on its lanyard, now threw his head back so that he could look into Roshchin's face and said roughly:

"Uncle, they're all lying. They don't know anything about Auntie Katia. I know everything."

A thin, ugly little girl with a sore on her lip who was standing just behind the boy now said:

"Uncle, you can believe him, this boy knows everything."

"Well, what is it you know, sonny?"

"Matryona took Auntie Katia away to the railway station. Auntie Katia didn't want to go and she cried and Matryona cried too. Then Auntie Katia said to me, 'Tell the children I'm coming back soon'. When Alexey was driving into the village at one end, Matryona with Auntie Katia drove out at the other end. When we got up to the top of the hill they sent me back."

"To horse!" shouted Chugay.

Thus Roshchin had no time to hear the end of the story. The troop, with fresh horses, moved out of the village taking its machine-guns with it. A guide rode beside Chugay and Roshchin. This was a stocky black little man, one of those who had hidden from Alexey in their wells, standing up to the navel in water and slime all day. He had only just crawled out from his hiding-place, and just as he was, wet, dirty, barefoot, his beard matted, his shirt torn, he had leapt on the back of a horse without waiting to saddle, and was now galloping along in front, throwing up his elbows as he rode. He led the troop by roundabout ways to a dense oak wood which was the haunt of the bandits in this region.

They reached the thicket while it was still daylight and surrounded it, leaving only one road out and that leading into an ambush. The rays of the setting sun filtered through the gleaming foliage, lighting up the rugged tree-trunks. Roshchin's horse was restless—it nodded its head, bit its knees, kicked up its hind legs. Roshchin dropped the bridle-rein and held his carbine at the ready with both hands. Clouds of gnats danced golden in the sun's rays that spotted and streaked the forest into a dazzling pattern. To the right and left of Roshchin the dismounted troopers were cautiously threading their way through the undergrowth in a wide sweep.

The guide had told them that near here they would find a forest guard's shelter and also the road which the bandits must take in order to reach the shelter of the thicket. When they suddenly came upon the sagging thatched roof rising a few paces in front of them, Roshchin reined in his horse and eyed it through the dense undergrowth. He gave a low whistle and soon he heard twigs crackling close by under the feet of his men. He pushed his horse forward again, rode through the bushes and saw the deserted hut standing in a little clearing with a few abandoned wagons in front of it. The clearing was littered with rubbish and rags. The bandits had obviously been here and had gone again.

Roshchin rode cautiously round the hut, holding his carbine at the ready. Alexey Krassilnikov just as cautiously retreated before him from corner to corner. He intended to capture this rider's horse. Roshchin stopped at one of the side walls of the hut; Alexey waited at the front, in which there were a broken window and a door torn from its hinges. He wanted to take the horse without noise and therefore held only a knife in his hand. When Roshchin appeared round the corner Alexey rushed him with his knife raised, but Roshchin parried the thrust with his carbine. In leaping back, Alexey crashed against the wall of the hut. He dropped his knife and stared at Roshchin—Roshchin, who had been dead and was now alive. In superstitious terror he uttered a cry and, bending forward and flailing with his arms, he ran from this apparition.

"Alexey!" Roshchin called, jerked his rein and rode in pursuit. Suddenly Alexey swerved, ran to a tree, put his arms round its trunk and hid his face in the rough bark. Roshchin sprang from the saddle in full career and fired point-blank into Alexey's broad, quivering back.

"This is where she lived?"

"Uh-hu."

Roshchin had to bend his head as he stepped over the threshold. The tumbledown little cottage's one window was so low that the burdocks growing outside covered it completely. In the greenish light near the window stood a table, small and low, like the cottage itself, and on it lay copybooks made of

wallpaper and a few books, on which a green-tinged light fell from the window. One of the copybooks was open and beside it was a bottle of ink and a pen. Katia had evidently only just had time to run, leaving everything as it was. Roshchin squatted down on his heels at the table. The little boy covered his mouth with his hand to keep from laughing aloud and indicated the stove with his eyes.

In the oven, perched on the poker, a baby jackdaw sat staring at them with round stupefied eyes—it had obviously fallen from a nest in the chimney. Seeing that it had been noticed, the fledgling hopped away into the oven, helping itself along with its wings.

"There are four of them in the nest," said the boy. "I'll catch them all."

Rummaging among the things on the table, Roshchin found Katia's school diary, in which she had recorded her lessons and other school events. Nearly every day the record ended: "Ivan Gavrikov was naughty again," or "I solemnly promise myself not to speak to Ivan Gavrikov for three days" or "Ivan Gavrikov again walked on the very edge of the roof, just to frighten the girls. I am at my wits' end what to do with him."

"Who is this Ivan Gavrikov?" Roshchin asked.

"It's me."

"Why are you so naughty? Why d'you worry Yekaterina Dmitrievna?"

Ivan Gavrikov sighed deeply and his blue eyes took on an expression of consummate innocence.

"I can't help it. I'm all right at lessons. You look at the girls' copybooks —their writing looks like an old fence, tumbling all ways. Here's *my* copybook. Surprised, aren't you? And I know all of the multiplication table, you can ask me anything you like." He puckered up his face violently to keep back his tears.

"I'll take your word for it," Roshchin said, sat down on the floor cross-legged and went on reading the diary. It contained not a word about Katia herself. But Katia's eternal youth, her trustful, pure tenderness seemed to rise towards him from every page. He seemed to see her blue-veined hand and her clear, gentle eyes. . . .

"Nine nines are eighty-one. That right?" said Ivan Gavrikov.

"Quite right. Good boy. Look here, didn't she tell you anything about where she was going?"

"To Kiev."

"Is that true?"

"Why should I lie to you?"

"Perhaps she has—you know—perhaps she has hidden more copybooks or letters somewhere. . . ."

"No, everything is here and I'm taking it all home with me to-day. That's what she told me—to take the copybooks and see that the men don't use them for cigarette paper again."

On the last page of the diary he found this:

". . . *For some reason I am sure that you are alive and that we shall meet again. Just think: I have come out of my long night. I want to tell you about the little world in which I am living now. Birds outside my window wake me in the morning. I go out to bathe in the brook. Afterwards I drink milk in Auntie Agafya's cottage—I owe her one rouble sixty kopecks already, but she doesn't mind waiting for her money. Then the children come and we have our lessons. No one bothers us and we have no worries. I have found that people need something quite different from what we always thought they needed and without which we thought we couldn't live. I am ashamed to say it but I feel seventeen years old. I know you will understand what I mean, dear Dasha. My only sorrow is my favourite little boy, Ivan Gavrikov . . . he is exceptionally . . .*"

Here the letter broke off because there was no more space in the book. Roshchin looked at Ivan Gavrikov and took him on his knee.

"Well, what shall I give you for a present?"

"A cartridge."

"I haven't got an empty one."

"Fire one off then, let's go outside."

Roshchin got up from the ground, closed the book and stuffed it into the breast of his tunic.

"I am taking this book, Ivan."

"You mustn't. She'll scold me."

"I shall see Auntie Katia soon and I'll tell her that I took it. Come on now, we'll fire off your cartridge."

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE WAS NO wind and the sun was scorching the deserted streets of Tsaritsyn, littered with heaps of rubbish lying on the pavement in front of the wide-open house-doors and gates. The inhabitants had gone into hiding. Only in the streets sloping down to the Volga could one hear the rattling of galloping carts loaded with government property and official archives. The city was living through its last hours before its occupation by the enemy. At its approaches the Tenth Army, much reduced in strength after the battles on the Manych, was fighting desperately to beat off the thrusts of General Wrangel's fresh North Caucasian Army.

The telephone exchange was still in operation, but there was no longer any water or electricity. The factories were idle. Everything that could be taken away had been unscrewed, taken apart and carried down to the docks. In the working-class districts only children and old people remained. The workers of Tsaritsyn had made tremendous sacrifices for the defence of the city during the last ten months and expected no mercy from the Whites; those who were fit to bear arms were fighting with the army, the others were evacuating themselves on the tops of railway coaches and in the holds and on the decks of the river steamers, moving always towards the north, to an unknown destination, but ever northwards. The timber stocks on the Volga docks had been fired and were burning down. The thud of gunfire was coming nearer and could be heard more and more distinctly.

All the life of the city now centred around the railway stations and river piers. The riverside docks were piled high with innumerable sacks, boxes, engine spares and machine parts; hundreds of sweating, shouting, and cursing men were swarming among the goods, back-packing them along swaying planks into the holds of the river boats. Thousands of others were waiting in massive queues for embarkation or were lying on the bank in hungry and silent crowds, watching the oily water sparkle in the sun through a pall of dust. It was the end of June and the broad Volga was so shallow that a sandbank jutting out from the far bank reached almost completely across the river. On the sandbank people were strolling about naked or bathing in the water. This side of

the river people were bathing from the wharves among floating rubbish; but even the river brought no relief from the heat.

One after the other dirty and battered steamers tied up at the piers. Their decks were crowded with refugees and soldiers, and with groaning, muttering, raving men and women stricken with typhus, the living mingling with the dead. Dozens of steamers and tugs waiting to load or unload, bumped against each other and hooted hoarsely. . . . All had come from down the river, from Astrakhan and Cherny Yar.

Stretcher-bearers, white with lime, boarded the vessels and picked their way between the sick lying on the deck. They carried away the dead and piled them up on the bank to make room for the quick. They scattered lime and sprinkled carbolic all over the deck. The orders were to pack the corpses into the refreshment booths on the bank. But the corpses swelled in the heat and burst the flimsy structures. The heavy stench, as much as the danger, made people hurry to leave the Tsaritsyn docks. Wrangel's planes glided over the city, flitting like shadows through the haze of dust, and dropped an occasional bomb into the river.

The crowd burst through the barriers set up on the docks, and rushed the steamer tied up at the pier, catching their sacks and bags on the points of the sentries' bayonets. Boxes and bags flew crashing on to the decks. The steamer soon rode so low that the water reached her gunwales.

In the thick of it all a cart was standing quite close to the gangway. In it lay Anissya and Dasha, brought here from the front line by Kuzma Kuzmich in obedience to Telegin's harsh command to get both women away, not by rail, but by steamer, even if it cost him his life. Telegin had said:

"Comrade Nefedov, you have never had a job involving greater responsibility. You will land with the women and remain wherever you find it possible. Steal, kill, if need be, but look after them and feed them well. You will answer for them to me with your life."

They were lying on a bed of hay in the cart under a makeshift covering, and were like skeletons. Anissya was already conscious, but so weak that she could not so much as open her mouth without help. Kuzma Kuzmich had to pry her teeth apart with his finger when he gave her a drink out of the bottle of lukewarm water. Dasha, who had caught the disease later than Anissya, was delirious and ceaselessly muttered to herself in a low, petulant tone.

Kuzma Kuzmich had already tried many steamers in vain. With tears in his eyes he begged people to help him embark the women, and had recourse to all sorts of wiles. But the circumstances were such that no one so much as listened to him. Leaning against the cart, he gazed with inflamed eyes at this mirage—at the sun gleaming red through the dust on the warm, sultry river and the impatiently hooting steamers full of corpses. Then the menacing roar of aircraft engines came again and this time the bombs threw up the earth somewhere not far away and raised a cloud of dust that enveloped the whole scene. Many people sprang into the river and swam to an approaching motor-ship, shouting: "Throw a rope!" But no ropes were thrown and their heads bobbed up and down alongside for a long time, like black water-melons.

Then the steamers had gone and there was only one vessel left, perhaps the last—a low-built yellow tug with enormous battered guards over its paddle-wheels. The tug did not tie up at the landing-stage but beside it, straight at the quay, where there was no crowd. Kuzma Kuzmich turned the cart in the deep sand and ran. He was the first to reach the quay. He ran up the plank and waved his arms in despair:

"Hi, captain, comrade!" he yelled at the old-fashioned, grey little man on the bridge. "I am evacuating the wife and sister of the commander on this front, give me two men of your crew to help me bring them aboard—if you refuse, you may be shot."

The forceful way he spoke and his excited manner had their effect. A grim, black stoker, naked to the waist, wearing a pair of ragged trousers, climbed over the gunwale to the quay.

"Where are they?"

"You can't manage them both alone, comrade."

"Leave that to me."

The stoker walked up to the cart, looked at the women lying in it, pointed to Anissya and asked:

"Is that the wife of the commander of the front?"

"Yes, that's her. If anything happens to her, we'll all get shot."

"Don't spin me any yarns, that's our ship's cook, Anissya," the stoker said calmly.

"You must be crazy, comrade. Cook, indeed!"

"Don't you dare shout at me, old fool!" and the stoker lightly lifted Anissya from the cart, slung her over his shoulder and shifted her into a more comfortable position.

"Here, give a hand with the other." Thus, carrying both women on his shoulders, he went back to the tug, the planks of the gangway bending under the burden until they touched the water.

Kuzma Kuzmich, very pleased, followed after, carrying a sack with food and a bag with medicine.

On the third of July, Stepan Alexeyevich, schoolmaster, dragged mattresses, pillows, arm-chairs upholstered in green plush, and piles of books and manuscripts out of the basement kitchen into the courtyard. He staggered out again with an enormous armful of dusty coats and trousers, skirts and woollen dresses, threw them all on the ground, panted with his mouth open, and wiped rivulets of sweat from his face with his sleeve. Everything on him was drenched with sweat, his yellow hair and beard, his canvas trousers, and his dirty shirt, which clung to his protruding shoulder-blades.

Stepan Alexeyevich's mother, a raw-boned woman dressed in black, was sitting on a bentwood chair and feebly beating a carpet with a cane. His palsied sister, a girl with a bulging forehead jutting out over a tiny shrunken face, was lying in a wheel-chair in the shadow of an acacia. Even the sparrows were panting in the heat.

"I think that is all, mamma," said Stepan Alexeyevich," and, in any case, I can't do any more. Good God! What would I give now for a mug of cold beer!"

"Stepushka, we haven't a drop of water in the house; you will have to take the bucket and bring some, my dear."

"Really, mamma! Can't we do without? No? Damn it all, this is really too awful."

Stepan Alexeyevich fell a prey to an attack of despair: bringing water meant going down to the bank of the Volga, where heaps of ashes still lay mingled with piles of charred corpses, burnt together with the refreshment booths; he would have to wade into the river up to his chest to find clearer water, fill his bucket and climb the hill up to his ankles in sand, and all this in such infernal heat!

"Couldn't we hire somebody? I would gladly pay ten roubles for a bucket of water. My heart is worth more than that to me."

"Please yourself."

"But you, mamma, prefer me to rupture myself with these infernal buckets?"

His mother made no reply and went on feebly beating the carpet. Stepan Alexeyevich heaved a deep sigh and looked at her broad face, down which the sweat was running in rivulets.

"Where's that bucket?" he asked quietly. Then: "Where's your bucket?" he shouted, so savagely that the invalid sister under the acacia said entreatingly:

"Oh, Stepa, don't!"

"Yes, I will. I will bring you buckets of water; I will carry your pots! To the end of my life I will work like a beast of burden! To the devil with my future, with my career, with my thesis! Everything is finished, destroyed! A lousy desert, charred corpses, a bloody cemetery! No Denikin can ever patch it all up!"

He wrung his hands, wet with sweat, just as he had wrung them when he was talking to Dasha. He was determined to dodge bringing the bucket of water one way or another. Suddenly the great bell in the cathedral belfry boomed out, a bell that had not been rung for more than a year. It boomed out and the solemn peal floated over the deserted city, soothing all troubled hearts. Stepan Alexeyevich stopped in the middle of a word, his lean twitching face suddenly grew calm and even puckered into a smile which gave him a rather foolish expression.

"Stepushka," said mamma, "you ought to change and go to the cathedral, don't you think?"

"But he is an unbeliever, an atheist, mamma," the sister under the acacia said with quiet malice.

"What if he is—he can still show himself in the cathedral. We are regarded as Reds already as it is."

"Mamma, what are you talking about?" Stepan Alexeyevich shouted as if in pain. "Scarcely have we been delivered from the joys of Bolshevism and you already hurry to drag me into the swamp of respectability. Yes, just that!" Turning towards the acacia, under which his sister had closed her eyes to show that she was not listening, he snarled: "Who regards me as a Red? Only your Shaverdov's, your Preisses, your petty-*bourgeois* nobodies. Shall I sink down to their level? Oh God! I might just as well destroy myself. Was it for this that I studied and thought and dreamed? I hate the Bolsheviks, but not because they drove me into a cellar, not because they took away all the coal of the waterworks. No; I hate them because they trampled on the freedom of my soul! I want to think as my conscience, as my genius dictates and I don't want to read Karl Marx, even if he is a thousand times right in what he says. D'you hear: I don't want to. I am myself. And in just the same way, mamma and dear sister, I am not going to kiss your Denikin's hands, for exactly the same reasons."

Having said all this, gesticulating violently in a temperature of a hundred degrees, Stepan Alexeyevich most inconsistently dragged his frock-coat and best trousers out of the heap of clothes and carried them down into the cellar. Half an hour later he appeared again, all dressed up, with a starched collar round his neck, holding his uniform cap in one hand and a cane in the other. No one said a word in the little courtyard. Stepan Alexeyevich went out into the street and walked along the shady side towards the cathedral.

The cropped acacias around the cathedral were grey with dust. A few ragamuffins were sitting under them. One of them looked the schoolmaster up and down and then straight in the eye and said mockingly:

"A series of miraculous transformations of a wonderful individual."

Inside the cathedral railings a *sotnya* of dismounted Cossacks in field-brown uniform were drawn up, and a platoon of cadets in full parade dress, great-coats rolled over shoulders, mess tins and entrenching tools on packs, were lying on the sun-scorched grass. A group of civilians had gathered near the cathedral entrance. Stepan Alexeyevich saw Shaverdov the haberdasher decked out in an embroidered shirt, with his wife and two children; there was Preisse the printer, a baptized Jew, small, tousled and fussy, likewise with his wife, but with six children. Stepan Alexeyevich nodded to them nonchalantly and entered the cool interior of the cathedral. He was allowed to pass unhindered because of his uniform—a few people even made way for him.

The cathedral still showed traces of neglect (under the Bolsheviks it had been used as a food store)—the panes in the huge windows were broken and the peeling walls still showed such inscriptions as : "Potatoes, 94 sacks. Received (illegible signature)"; but the golden altar-screen gleaming in the light of many candles, the smoke of incense rising to the cupola, the intonation of the deacon rolling sonorously under the arches, the dispassionate trebles of the choir-boys all made a mixed impression on Stepan Alexeyevich: from old habit it made him feel solemn and from another old habit he felt humiliated; his intellectual tail which he liked to carry independently high somehow of its own accord had slipped between his legs.

Up in front, facing the altar, stood the chiefs, the dictators; ten generals, some tall, some short, some fat and some lean, in snow-white summer tunics, with soft and wide gold and silver shoulder-straps. Each of them held his brass hat in the crook of his left arm, and when the deacon sang, "Let us pray", each of them sketched the sign of the cross on his chest. In front even of them, on a separate little carpet, stood a general of medium height, in a wide field-brown coat and trousers with a red stripe running down the side; his grizzled hair was brushed back from his forehead. He raised his small, plump, white hand much less often than the other generals, and when he did he made the sign of the cross slowly, with a wide gesture, solidly applying his bunched fingers to the wrinkles of his slightly receding forehead.

Stepan Alexeyevich knew at once that this was Denikin. He stared at him eagerly, his thin lips still continuing, quite unconsciously, to form a smile of acid scepticism. One of the officers, who had watched him attentively, now unobtrusively drew closer and stopped just beside him. Stepan Alexeyevich was a prey to conflicting emotions. He was particularly attracted to that very white hand of General Denikin's. Who did not know the peculiar quality of a general's hand, that special slow languor? However hard one might try, one could not impart any special dignity to a hand, and the hands of generals were always ridiculous as a result of such vain efforts to achieve dignity—especially when they were condescendingly stretched out towards you for a handshake, or when a general used his flabby bunch of sausages to deal a hand of cards or tuck a table-napkin into his collar. All this was true, but that white hand of Denikin's had nevertheless seized history by the throat and a wave of it had sent armies into bloody battles. . . .

Stepan Alexeyevich got so heated by these thoughts that he did not notice that the service was ended. Now the priest, a little bespectacled old man, was in the pulpit and beginning to speak:

"The historic order of the day issued by our beloved leader, Lieutenant-

General Anton Ivanovich Denikin, Commander-in-Chief of the White forces of Southern Russia, is engraved in fiery letters on the heart of every orthodox Russian. The Commander-in-Chief's order opens with these words: 'My final aim being to capture Moscow, the heart of Russia, I herewith, on this Third of July, order a general offensive. . . .' Gentlemen, have not the heavens opened above our heads, is that not the voice of the Archangel Michael calling pure white warriors to battle?"

Stepan Alexeyevich felt a prickling in his nose, his chest heaved under the moist starched dicky and a great exultation was in his heart. He saw Denikin slowly raise his hand to his forehead. All of a sudden it was quite clear to Stepan Alexeyevich that he must, he absolutely must, kiss that hand. A few minutes later Denikin, having been the first to kiss the cross, slowly walked along the carpeted path, such a simple, amiable old uncle with his little clipped beard. Stepan Alexeyevich, with frenzied enthusiasm, strode vigorously towards him. Denikin sprang back, raised his hand as if to ward off an attack, and his face contorted painfully and pitifully. The other generals immediately stepped between him and Stepan Alexeyevich. Stepan Alexeyevich himself was seized by the elbows from behind and jerked back and down so violently that his knees bent and he nearly fell.

"Listen, I only wanted to . . ."

The officer who had seized him was looking at him very hard.

"How did you get in here?"

"I only wanted to kiss his hand."

"Where's your pass?"

The officer still kept his grip on Stepan Alexeyevich and began to push him through the crowd. At a side door he summoned, with a jerk of his head, two cadets standing there with rifles.

"Take this fellow to security headquarters."

Dear and respected Ivan Ilyich,

As you see we have come all the way to Kostroma; I dared not land anywhere on the way, even Nizhni-Novgorod did not seem to me a safe place from the point of view of military vicissitudes. In Kostroma we have settled down on the outskirts of the town, in a little wooden cottage by the Volga. We have hawthorns and a rowan tree in the garden; everything as it should be. It's a pleasant little town; it stands on hills, just like Rome, and oh, is it quiet, is it far from everywhere! But that is exactly what we want.

Daria Dmitrievna is improving, though slowly. She is very weak as yet and I carry her from her bed to the garden, like a baby in arms. Her appetite is amazing—although she can't speak she shows me with her eyes that she wants something to eat all the time. Her eyes are almost all that is left of her, her face is no bigger than my fist and she often weeps because she is so weak; her tears just run down her cheeks. She was unconscious and delirious for nearly three weeks, while we were splashing up the Volga with our paddle-wheels. She was restless and tormented in her ravings, her soul ceaselessly struggled with some visions from the past. Most surprisingly a considerable part was played in this by a treasure of some sort, diamonds which apparently fell to her as a result of some crime. In her delirium Daria Dmitrievna spoke in two different voices: one that accused, and the other that made excuses. This last is a queer, thin, whimpering voice. I would not write to you about this at all were it not for an extraordinary discovery I have made purely by accident.

Keeping your orders in mind that I was to feed our two patients well and making this my main business, I often fell a prey to depression and sometimes even to panic. These are hard times. People are either thinking and feeling in vast categories on a cosmic scale—or else they are saving their own skins with the most unashamed cynicism. In both cases they lack any trace of common kindness. You can persuade some and frighten others, but you cannot touch their hearts; to ask for ten pounds of bread merely because your eyes are watering with hunger rarely has any effect.

All our surplus effects, everything we brought with us, I exchanged little by little for bread, or eggs, or fish. I was often tempted to let Daria Dmitrievna's buff coat go the same way, the one in which she fled from Samara in the autumn. But I refrained, not so much because of the sensible thought that it was going on for autumn, but because of the fact that this coat was somehow always present in Daria Dmitrievna's ravings, as some kind of reproach that I couldn't understand. So there was nothing for it but to have recourse to guile, to imposing on trustful souls, or to straight thieving. My palmistry helped us out again. All one has to do is to pick out on the riverside a peasant woman with a full sack and start cajoling her, probing for weak spots. One can always find weak spots, it's merely a matter of experience. Then one begins to talk about the Antichrist—the Antichrist is much talked of at present on the Volga, especially upstream from Kazan. It's easy enough to frighten a silly peasant woman. If you can make her believe you, half of her sackful is already yours.

Well, yesterday, it being a Sunday, I was occupied in putting Daria Dmitrievna's clothes in order. Apparently I am the only person in Kostroma to possess a large reel of sewing cotton. This is a not unimportant fact as it makes us a shrine to which people come on a pilgrimage—to get a button sewn on or a pair of trousers patched. I make no bones about charging for this accordingly. Well, I was sitting on the porch examining Daria Dmitrievna's coat; as you probably remember, it has a flannel lining of Scottish checks. I thought to myself: what if I took the lining out and made a lovely skirt out of it? Daria Dmitrievna's old skirt is like a sieve. Then I could put something else in the coat for a lining. I liked the idea so much I asked Anissya Konstantinovna's opinion, and she egged me on; she said it would make a fine skirt, and for me to go ahead. So I began to unpick the lining—and some diamonds fell out, of the first water, thirty-four stones in all. It was like a dream. The same day I showed Daria Dmitrievna the stones and saw at once that she remembered them. There was horror and entreaty in her eyes; her lips moved, she wanted to say something but she had forgotten how to speak. I bent down and put my ear to her poor, pale lips and she whispered the first words she'd said all the time she's been ill: "Throw them away, throw them away!"

Ivan Ilyich, without your instructions I dare not do anything. I don't know where she got this treasure and why she abhors it so, and I don't know what to do —I am afraid to keep it in the house and I think it would be foolish to throw it away. I swore to Daria Dmitrievna that I took a boat, rowed out to the middle of the Volga and threw the stones into the water. She calmed down immediately, her eyes sparkled as if she had at last shaken off something unpleasant that had clung to her.

Excuse me, dear Ivan Ilyich, for writing about all this in such detail, but it is my nature to be garrulous and wordy. Please make shift to let me know whether you are well and also whether we are to spend the winter here in Kostroma or whether we are to go to Moscow. With which I remain your and Daria Dmitrievna's faithful servant to the grave.

Kuzma Nefedov.

"I brought the mail along with me," said Sapozhkov, as he got into the wickerwork *tarantas* and sat down in the hay beside Telegin. "Congratulations, Ivan."

"I'm sorry about all this, Sergey Sergeyevich. If I had my way, I'd rather remain here and command our Kachalins. New people and new cares—I don't want them."

"Come, don't talk like an old man."

"It'll pass. It's just that I'm a bit tired."

The horses jogged along the country road, the *tarantas* jolted and swayed past a dark oak wood on the left and a harvest field on the right, the stooks on it hardly distinguishable in the semi-darkness. The air smelt of wheat straw. The sky was covering itself with August stars.

"Who is to be your chief of staff in the brigade?"

"Oh, they'll appoint somebody."

The road now ran closer to the thicket which exhaled a slight dampness. The horses snorted.

"There were no letters for me, of course?" Telegin asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Ivan, there is one. I forgot. . . ."

Telegin—who was sitting drowsily with drooping shoulders, the picture of weariness—sat up at once:

"How could you, Sergey Sergeyevich? Where is it?"

Sapozhkov searched for a long time in his haversack. They stopped the horses and struck matches, but the matches only hissed and their heads broke off and flew away. Telegin took the letter—it was from Kuzma Kuzmich—and turned it over and over in his hands.

"It's a fat letter. What a lot he writes," Sapozhkov said in a whisper.

"Why? Is that bad?" Telegin answered in the same whisper.

He sprang from the *tarantas* and walked to the edge of the thicket, hastily gathered some twigs, struck a match and blew on the twigs.

"Why don't you take a sheaf? It'll light instantly," said Sapozhkov, and brought Telegin a wheatsheaf at the run, then left him alone. The straw flared up immediately. Telegin squatted down and read his letter. Sapozhkov saw him read it to the end, wipe his eyes with his sleeve and begin to read it all over again. So there could be no more doubt. Sergey Sergeyevich sniffed, got into the *tarantas* and lit a cigarette. The old man who was driving them wanted to get home and remarked:

"I'm afraid we may miss the train; the road farther along is bad, all sand, and we'll have to find the ford too. We'd better go on."

Sapozhkov did not look at Telegin when he came back; he climbed into the cart which swayed under his weight, and settled himself in the hay. Three million light-years over Sapozhkov's head, the hazy bifurcation of the Milky Way spread across the sky. The wobbling back wheel of the vehicle squeaked, but the old driver paid not the slightest attention; if it wanted to break it would break, and that was that.

Telegin said in a subdued voice:

"What tremendous strength of mind she has. Eternally struggling to renew herself, to be clean, to be perfect. . . . I am simply overwhelmed. . . ."

"But is she alive?"

"What did you think? She's in Kostroma and getting well."

Sergey Sergeyevich quickly turned towards Telegin and both burst out laughing. Sapozhkov nudged Telegin with his fist and Telegin nudged Sapozhkov. Then he told him the contents of the letter in detail, leaving out

only the affair of the diamonds. These diamonds were the same she had written about the previous summer to her father. Obviously it was in those days of confusion that Dasha had sewn the stones into the lining of her coat. And she had never once mentioned them to her husband. Obviously she had forgotten all about them—that was just what she would do—and remembered them only in her delirium. That "throw them away, throw them away" made a lump rise in Telegin's throat, so delighted was he. Of course there were a lot of unexplained things in all this story, but then he had never attempted to understand Dasha completely.

"One thing is clear to me, Sergey Sergeyevich—to win the love of a woman, say of such a woman as Dasha, is a great prize."

"Yes, you've been very lucky; it's what I always say."

"One ought always to rise above oneself, really, but one often stumbles for all that. I suppose you do the same, Sergey Sergeyevich?"

"My case is altogether different."

"But don't you ever long to find a woman such as my Dasha?"

"Oh, women don't play the same part in my life as in yours. My attitude to these things is much simpler. Much less trouble that way."

"So *you* say! I know you better, Sergey Sergeyevich. We live our lives on a lofty plane—victory or death, that's all that matters. But we live! And how we live with all this! And in relations with women every triviality should be eliminated. Love is a thing to be cherished. A man must always be on his guard. Have you ever tried to look deep into eyes that you love? It's the greatest miracle in life."

Sergey Sergeyevich said nothing. By degrees his cap had slipped right down to the back of his neck—he was again gazing up at the Milky Way.

"Somewhere over there there is a hole in the universe," he said, "a starless black space like the outline of a horse's head. On a photograph it looks rather terrifying. The time will come when we shall understand, quite simply and obviously, that immeasurable space holds no terrors at all. Every atom of our bodies is just such an immeasurable stellar system. There is infinity wherever one turns. We ourselves are infinite and everything in us is infinite too. And you and I are fighting for infinity against finity."

The vague outlines of huge trees now came into view in front of them, but they turned out to be merely not very large bushes growing high up on the river bank. They could smell the cool smell of the water. The *tarantas* was running downhill. The horses snorted loudly and splashed through the shallows, picking their way carefully.

"Let's hope we don't happen on some hole," said the driver. But they crossed the river without mishap. On the other side the old man jumped off the box as nimbly as a youngster and ran alongside the *tarantas*, jerking the reins and shouting. The horses pulled hard up the slope through the sand and stopped at the top, breathing heavily. The old man climbed back into his seat. They were quite close to the station now. The old man turned round to his passengers:

"It's all no good, he'll never get anywhere; he's only killing a lot of people all for nothing. This is what people say in our village: we'll never give the land back anyway, they can never get the better of us by force now. This is not the year nineteen six. The peasants are strong now and not afraid of anything. In Kolokoltsavka yonder," he pointed with the handle of his knout in the darkness, "they threw down some leaflets from an aeroplane. The *muzhiks* read one; it said that the gentlefolk were willing to buy back the

land. So that's how it is—even they don't expect to get it back from the peasants for nothing. Never mind, we can wait: as he has come from nowhere so he'll go away to nowhere, this Denikin!"

In the morning Telegin and Sapozhkov arrived at the headquarters of the southern front, in Kozlov, the apple kingdom. This was the real thing, the real Russia. Little cottages roofed with sun-bleached thatch, geraniums in the tiny windows, and a cloud of dust rising in the wake of a battered droshky rattling along the bumpy cobblestones past forlorn telegraph poles with tatters of paper ribbons fluttering from the wires; a brick-built shop with an awning over its window, its door boarded up with two planks nailed on crosswise. A barefooted mite of a girl scuttling across the road like a frightened rabbit, dragging her waddling, bow-legged little brother along by the hand. No one had cleared away the rubble that was once the chapel, now destroyed, that stood by the public fountain in the filthy square which used to be the market-place but is now empty. Beyond the tumbledown fences stood apple-trees heavy with red and green wax-like fruit. Above the orchards and roofs flew a merry flock of jackdaws, rhythmically showing the underside of their wings.

It looked as if the inhabitants of such a place would have lived in timeless tranquillity for another thousand years, had it not been for a disturbance such as the revolution. At any rate, no one minded losing anything here—even life was worth only a kopeck. People slept a lot, that was all.

"It's strange to think," said Sapozhkov, jolting along with Telegin in the droshky, "that in foreign countries overseas seconds are being turned into money right now, men are being die-stamped under a monstrous press to make them fit to produce goods as in a dream and pour goods and more goods out of their factories. Ten million men had to be killed to make business good for a little while. That's what they call civilization! And here paper ribbons hang from the telegraph poles, and look, over there an old man at the window is scratching his tousled head and drowsing. Yet straight from here we are about to leap into an unexplored future and make the dreams of mankind come true. There's Mother Russia for you! Life is good, Ivan. There's a nice smell of apples, almost like the fragrance of a young woman. If we only live to see it all! I feel I'm going to write a book."

The driver pulled up at staff headquarters, recognizable by the rattling of typewriters that came from the open windows.

While they were waiting for their interview, Telegin and Sapozhkov heard all the latest news of the war. The general picture was this: Denikin's forces were, after a short check, continuing their advance towards Moscow in three columns. General Wrangel's North Caucasian Army (the same from which the Tenth Army had succeeded in breaking away last July at the price of sacrificing Kamyshin) was moving along the Volga and cutting off the food-producing Volgaside and Siberian regions from Central Russia; Cossack Ataman Sidorov, with the Don Army reorganized by Bogayevski, the new Don Ataman, a partisan of Denikin, was pressing towards Voronezh with two cavalry spearheads commanded by Mamontov and Shkuro; the Volunteer Army commanded by the gifted but always drunken General May-Mayevski was developing an offensive on a broad front, at the same time clearing the Red troops and partisan detachments out of the Ukraine and thrusting with its "fist", General Kutepov's Guards corps, towards Orel, Tula and Moscow.

Denikin's military successes were undeniable; his equipment and supplies magnificent; his Volunteer regiments, although by now strongly diluted with

peasant contingents, were fighting with skill and confidence. But in his rear the mood of the population was growing more dangerous to him every day, a fact which he was fatally under-estimating. The Kuban wanted to be completely independent, and in order to enforce his imperialist policy there, Denikin had been driven to hang two prominent members of the Kuban *rada*. On the Terek there was internecine bloodshed. The Don Cossacks, when told of the campaign against Moscow, said: "The quiet Don was ours and shall be ours; but as for Moscow, Denikin can go and capture it himself". In the districts occupied by the Volunteers the peasant question was being decided with military simplicity, by means of floggings; governors, district administrators, and the old Tsarist policemen were being put in office and the *muzhiks* were again sawing off shotguns as they had done the year before under the Germans and were waiting for the Red Army to come. Makhno, having succeeded in shooting with his own hand his chief rival, Grigoryev, had now openly proclaimed his "free anarchist order" in the whole of the Yekaterinoslav district, had assembled about fifty thousand bandits and was threatening to take Rostov, Taganrog, Yekaterinoslav, Odessa and the Crimea away from Denikin. There was also a new sort of bandits, the "greens", mostly confirmed deserters who now also harassed Denikin's flanks wherever mountains and forests offered hiding-places.

After the heavy defeats of the Thirteenth and Ninth Armies and the heroic retreat of the Twelfth from the Dnyester and the Bug, the Red Army was re-establishing its line. The striking power and morale of the troops was improving, mainly as the result of a mass influx of Communists from Petrograd, Moscow, Ivanovo, and other Northern cities. The army was daily expecting to receive the order to start a counter-offensive.

Telegin and Sapozhkov, having attended to the formalities connected with their new appointments—Telegin as commander of an independent brigade and Sapozhkov as commander of the Kachalin regiment—returned to their units the same day. On the way they did nothing but discuss the news they had heard and were agreed that Denikin's ambitious plan had no solid foundation; that he would not be able to repeat in Great Russia the successes of the previous years' operation in the Kuban. There he had defeated only Sorokin, but here he would be matched against Lenin himself, and against a genuine, hereditary proletariat; even the *muzhiks* were different here, these *muzhiks* had taken on Napoleon himself with nothing but pitchforks.

"Colours, advance! Remove the sheath!"

The standard-bearer and the two men standing at the salute on both sides of him—they were Gagin and Latugin—stepped forward. Telegin was handing over the regiment to Sergey Sergeyevich Sapozhkov, its new commander. Telegin was serious, even grave, his forehead wrinkled in concentration, his bronzed cheeks had even lost their usual colour. He was holding a sheet of paper in his hand with the notes of his speech on it.

"Men of the Kachalin regiment!" he said, and glanced at the men drawn up with grounded rifles; he knew every one of them intimately, knew how and where a man had been wounded and what his troubles were—he and these men belonged together. "Comrades, we have marched more than a few thousand miles together, in winter cold and summer heat. Twice have you covered yourself with glory at Tsaritsyn. If we had to retreat through no fault of our own, you made the enemy pay a high price for a temporary and insecure victory. Many glorious deeds are yours—though they have nowhere

been recorded in loud words of praise and their fame was lost in the terse wording of a general communiqué. But that is nothing. (Here Telegin squinted at the sheet of paper he was holding in his bent palm.) I warn you that great labours are still ahead of you, the enemy is not even broken yet, and it is not enough merely to break the enemy, the enemy must be destroyed. This is a war which we must win; a war we cannot, must not, lose. If a man grapples with a beast, it is the man who must win. Here is an example for you: a germinating seed with its little root is surely green and tender enough and yet it pushes through the hard black earth, pushes even a stone aside. In a growing seed lies all the power of new life and that is paramount, that cannot be stopped. On a gloomy, bleak morning we came out to fight for a bright day against our enemies who want it to be darkest night, a night such as robbers like. But day will come in spite of them, even if they burst with malice. (Here Telegin looked at his notes again with a worried air and then crushed the notes in his hand.) I must admit, comrades, that my heart is heavy. I shall miss you greatly. It is no small matter to have sat together round the camp-fires for a whole year. But I must leave you; I must say farewell to your battle colours. I wish, and I order, that these colours may lead the glorious Kachalin regiment from victory to victory."

Telegin took off his cap, walked up to the colours and raised one corner of the faded, bullet-torn cloth to his lips. Then he put on his cap, saluted, closed his eyes and screwed up his face hard to keep back his tears.

. . . . . .

After a farewell dinner given him by Sapozhkov and all the other unit commanders, Telegin's head and eyes were swimming, as he sat in the cart, holding his kit-bag (which among other things contained Dasha's china puppy and kitten) and thinking of the ardent speeches made at table. It seemed impossible that men could be fonder of each other than they. They had embraced him and kissed him and shaken his hand as if they never wanted to let go. Good, decent, faithful fellows! The young subalterns had jumped up and sung songs about the world revolution—some of the words had been simple and others stilted but all were sincere. One of the battalion commanders, a quiet, modest chap, took it into his head to get up on the table and dance a whirling *trepak* among the gnawed goose-bones and water-melon rinds. As he remembered this scene, Telegin burst into a loud guffaw.

As the cart was leaving the village, it suddenly stopped and three men came out of the shadows. They were Latugin, Gagin and Zaduiviter. They passed the time of day with him and then Latugin said:

"We thought you would not forget us, Ivan Ilyich, but you forgot us after all."

"Yes, we expected to hear from you," confirmed Gagin.

"Wait a minute, comrades, what's all this about?"

"We were expecting you," said Latugin, and set his foot on the hub of the wheel. "We spent a year together, we were good partners. Oh, all right, if you don't care, good night. I'm sorry I spoke." His voice trembled with pain and anger.

"Wait a bit," Telegin said, and got out of the cart.

Zaduiviter said:

"What are we here in the infantry? Just a pain in the neck. Are we to go on foot-slogging for ever?"

"Naval gunners, that's what we are, and you might go a long way and find no better," Gagin said, and his eyes gleamed.

"When we embarked at Nizhni there were twelve of us," Latugin joined in. "Now there are three left—and you the fourth. But you get into your *tarantas* and wave a good-bye and that's that. Why bother about us? We are just Ivans, just a few grey great-coats. We were—and are not. I don't know what made me talk to you at all and, in any case, you're drunk."

Zaduiviter said:

"Now that you've got a brigade, Ivan Ilyich, you will have some heavy artillery under your command. . . ."

"Go, stick your artillery into the back of your pants," shouted Latugin. "I'd clean latrines if that was what's wanted! That's not the point! The point is that I'm sorry to lose a friend. I believed in you, Ivan Ilyich, and I grew fond of you. Do you know what that means—to get to be fond of a man? But you, all I am to you is 'the fifth man from the left'. We've talked enough, let's go. You'll understand things better later."

"But, comrades!" Telegin was quite sobered by this exchange. "You misjudged me, honestly you have. It was my intention, as soon as I took over the brigade, to post you three to headquarters, for duty at the artillery depot."

"Oh, thanks," said Zaduiviter, beaming.

But Latugin angrily stamped his foot in its ragged boot.

"It's a lie. He's just invented it all!" Then he said, somewhat less harshly, shaking his finger half-jestingly at Telegin: "It's not enough to be ashamed of yourself, comrade, though I'll thank you for even that much."

Telegin laughed and slapped Latugin on the back.

"Why all this excitement? You know you're being most unjust to me in all this."

"What the devil do I want justice for? I am not aiming to cheat anybody. I can forgive you, but only because you are a simple soul. That's why the women like you. Well, it's all right now, don't be annoyed, get back into the *tarantas*." He squeezed Telegin's elbow hard. "Have you ever drawn a knife on a man in order to stand up for a pal? You haven't?" His light, wide-spaced, coldly passionate eyes searched Telegin's face. "You did lie to us just now, didn't you?"

Telegin frowned and nodded:

"Yes, it was a lie all right. You were dead right to remind me and show me my mistake."

"Now you're talking."

"Let him go, don't keep him here all night. Playing the king of nature again, eh?" boomed Gagin.

Without another word Telegin shook hands with them all, got into the *tarantas* and drove away, smiling and shaking his head for a long time after he had lost them from view.

The headquarters of the independent brigade were an hour's flight away by plane and a bit over a day's ride on horseback. Telegin travelled by rail and the journey took four days, during which he had to change innumerable times and loiter endlessly on filthy, hungry railway stations. Needless to say there had been no trace of the special saloon coach he had been promised; indeed the last part of the journey he had to travel in a cattle-truck, half of which was full of chalk; no one knew who wanted the chalk and for what purpose in times such as these. In addition there was another passenger in the cattle-truck, a man with a fat face that looked like a jug with pince-nez. This man ceaselessly hummed an air from Offenbach and when it grew dark he began

to fumble in his luggage, packing and unpacking things, taking things out, smelling them and putting them back again.

Telegin, mortally tired and hungry, began to distinguish quite clearly the smells of various good things to eat. When finally the blackguard cracked a hard-boiled egg, sniffed, peeled it and began to eat it, Telegin's patience was at an end:

"Listen, citizen, we're coming to the next stop very soon. When we get there, kindly take yourself and your luggage off at once."

The other immediately stopped chewing and sat quite still in the dark. Presently Telegin felt the sharp smell of sausage right under his nose and angrily pushed away the unseen hand that held it.

"You misunderstand me, comrade soldier," the other passenger said in a soft tenor voice. "I'm merely offering you something to eat and drink." He heaved a sigh and Telegin could smell the sausage coming closer again. "Principles, always principles, all our life nowadays is nothing but principles. Why should there be any principle in a bit of Ukrainian sausage with a touch of garlic and bacon in it? I've got a little vodka too, just a sip." He waited expectantly, but Telegin said nothing. "You are probably taking me for a black marketeer, or a hoarder. Well, I'm not. I'm an actor. Perhaps not a second Kachalov, or Yuryev, or Mamont Dalski, the Lord have mercy on his black soul. There was a great tragedian for you! But he fancied himself as a leader of world-wide anarchy, the swine, and he took to robbing the mansions of Moscow and it was as much as your life was worth to sit down to a game of cards with him. My name is Bashkin-Razdorski, not quite unknown in the provinces; I get special billing." He waited again, perhaps for Telegin to exclaim: "Ah! Bashkin-Razdorski, of course, very glad to make your acquaintance.". But Telegin still said nothing. "I played through two seasons in Moscow, in the *Eremitage* and the *Korsh*. Nemirovich-Danchenko was already drawing circles round me, trying to rope me in, 'No', I said, 'not yet, Vladimir Ivanovich, let me act my fill first, then you can have me'. In the year eighteen we opened at the Korsh with *The Death of Danton*. I played Danton. A roaring lion, a tribune, thick fleshy lips, a bull, a beast, a genius, a glutton, a sensualist—Oh, what a part it was! And what a triumph! But there was no fuel, Moscow was as dark as Hades, no box-office takings of any kind, the troupe scattered; five of us got together for a provincial tour with this same *Death of Danton*. In Moscow, People's Commissar Lunacharski wouldn't allow us to bring the guillotine on to the stage, but in the provinces we could do as we pleased. In the last act we brought out the guillotine to the middle of the stage, and bang, off went my head. The box-office was a beauty. Believe it or not, the audience used to shout: 'Again! Cut it off again!' We played in Kharkov, in Kiev—that was under the Reds—then at Uman in the fire station shed, in Nikolayev, in Kherson, in Yekaterinoslav. Then the devil put it into our heads to go to Rostov-on-Don. We did our stuff and it was a tremendous success. One officer in a box even fired at Robespierre. But the next day the chief of police sent for me and shook his fist under my nose in the approved Tsarist style: 'You may remember General Denikin in your prayers,' he said to me; 'if I had my way, I'd have hanged you. Now get out of Rostov before I change my mind.' Yes, it's difficult just now so far as dramatic art is concerned. We wandered about in the most out-of-the-way places, lived like gipsies. The scenery got so battered that we were ashamed to use it. In Kozlov they refused to let us load the guillotine into a railway truck; they said it was an 'object of unknown purpose' and wouldn't take it.

So there we were. We would have to cut off my head with a hand-chopper. Have you got a match? No? A pity, I wanted to show you the head; I've got it in my bag. It's a beauty, the property man of the *Maly* theatre in Moscow made it, he's a wizard. And then the censorship! You take the script to the comrade censor, he reads it and reads it. You explain that these are all historical facts. Still he goes on turning the pages and then he asks: 'Where is your evidence that these are historical facts?' You show him an enthusiastic review by Lunacharski. He reads it, then: 'But couldn't you stage something a bit more cheerful?' It's as if someone were scratching on your nerves with his nails. I don't know what's to happen to us next, we're on our way to play at Ensk, where the headquarters of the independent brigade are."

Telegin suddenly asked:

"And where is the rest of your troupe?"

"In the next truck, with all our props. Robespierre is travelling on the engine; he's Tinski, surely you've heard of him, the best Robespierre in the whole republic. If he's with you, you needn't worry; he can get vodka out of thin air, he's a wizard at it; then he gets on the footplate and we travel smoothly. Well, comrade soldier, what about it? Shall we have a bite to eat? Surely you won't refuse me?"

"No, I won't this time."

"Much obliged." Bashkin-Razdorski rummaged in his bags grunting and whispering to himself 'Where, oh where have I put it?' Then an egg, a piece of sausage and a biscuit appeared in Telegin's hand. "We'll finish in Ensk, and then ho! for Moscow! We've had enough of the gipsy life. On the Neglinny, number five it is, at the back, an Armenian keeps a café—a wizard! Sausages, grills, anything you like. The police come to search every day. 'What's going on here? all the guests smell of vodka.' They search and search and never find anything. The Armenian's got a tankful of vodka on the fourth floor, in the attic, connected up with an ordinary water pipe. Downstairs in the café there's a wash-hand basin and a tap, just like any other. You turn on the tap, fill your glass with vodka and there you are."

Chewing his sausage with gusto and in a genial mood after a sip of vodka, Telegin said:

"I'll do my best to provide everything you need so you can have a rest and rehearse without any hurry—only give us a good show. In Ensk you will be my guests; I am the brigade commander."

"Oh-ho!" Bashkin-Razdorski drew in his breath sharply, "so that's who you are. And I was watching you all the time and thinking 'ouch, this is where you die, my boy'. You frightened me so, I just talked and talked and couldn't make out why I wasn't dead yet. My dear fellow, we'll put up a show for you; we'll act with heart and soul, as if we were playing for ourselves, see if we don't."

Telegin got out of the truck, his kit-bag in his hand. A broken paraffin lamp threw a dim light on a little group of military men waiting on the platform.

"Good evening, comrades," Telegin said as he came up to them. "Are you waiting for the brigade commander? Here I am: Telegin. Excuse my appearance, will you?"

As he shook hands he glanced at each man and was startled as he looked at one of them, a grey-haired, lean, grave man of medium height and very soldierly bearing. As they all walked across the platform and out on to the dark square, Telegin looked at this man again over his shoulder, but could not

distinguish his face clearly. Telegin was ushered into a carriage and driven for a long time across endless fields smelling of muck. At last they stopped in front of a long barn-like building with a high roof. Here a freshly white-washed empty room had been prepared for him. A candle was burning on the window-sill and there was food on a plate, covered over with another plate. Telegin dumped his kit-bag on the floor, took off his tunic, squared his shoulders, sat down on the freshly-made bed and started pulling off his chalk-stained boots.

There was a gentle knock at the door. "I should have put out the candle at once, now somebody wants to talk to me; damn, it's five o'clock already," he thought angrily and said: "Yes, come in."

The man who came in quickly was the same grey-haired soldierly man Telegin had noticed at the station. He closed the door after him and raised his right hand to his forehead in a curt salute.

Telegin pushed his foot back into the half-discarded boot and stood staring at this phantom.

"Excuse me, comrade," he said, "it was rather awkward at the station, but I decided to put off all formal introductions, all business in general, until to-morrow. If I am not mistaken, you are my chief of staff?"

The officer was still standing near the door. He answered:

"That is so."

"May I ask your name?"

"Roshchin, Vadim Petrovich."

Telegin looked round helplessly. He opened his mouth and swallowed several times.

"Oh. . . . So . . ." his face twitched and he said, in a whisper now: "Vadim, is it you?"

"Yes."

"I see. Very strange. You here, you my chief of staff. Merciful God!"

Roshchin said in the same hard, dry voice:

"Ivan, I made up my mind to speak to you straight away so that there should be no embarrassments to-morrow."

"Yes, I see. You want to speak to me."

Telegin quickly pulled up the sagging leg of his boot, picked up his tunic from the floor and put it on. Roshchin watched him without impatience or agitation.

"Vadim, I am afraid there is a slight misunderstanding here."

"No."

"You are a man of sense, Vadim, a man of sense. I was very fond of you once. And I have not forgotten our meeting last year at the railway station in Rostov. You were very generous to me then. You were always kind-hearted. Oh, my God!"

He tightened his belt, twisted his buttons and groped in his pockets and it was not clear whether he did this out of embarrassment or in order to postpone for a little the inevitable painful end of this interview.

"You are obviously thinking that we have changed places and that it is my turn now to show the same generosity. There is nothing I would like better. We were very close to each other, closer than most. But. . . . To put it plainly: Vadim, what is your business here? Why are you here? Tell me."

"That is why I came to see you."

"Very good. If you think that I can cover up anything. But you are a man of sense. Let's get this quite clear: I can do nothing for you. In that respect we differ radically from each other."

Telegin frowned and took his eyes off Roshchin, who was smiling as he listened.

"You are up to something and I think I know what. The false rumour of your death was obviously part of your scheme. Well, say what you want to say, but I must warn you that I am going to arrest you. Oh, why did this have to happen?"

Telegin moved his hand in a gesture of resignation. He was sorry for Roshchin, sorry for himself, sorry for their broken lives. Roshchin now moved for the first time since he had come into the room; he walked up to Telegin, put his arm round his shoulders and kissed him firmly on the lips.

"Ivan, you're the salt of the earth, you simple soul you. I'm glad to see you still the same. Let's sit down." He drew the reluctant Telegin to the cot. "Don't be a fool. I am no spy, no secret agent. Be reassured; I have been in the Red Army since December."

Not yet quite recovered from his own decision, which had shaken him to the marrow, half-believing and still half-doubting, Telegin gazed at the deeply bronzed, hard and yet gentle face of Roshchin and into his black, dry, intelligent eyes. They sat down on the cot, still holding each other by the hand. Roshchin began to tell the story of how he had come over to this side, how he had returned home.

At the very beginning Telegin interrupted him:

"And Katia? Is she alive and well—where is she now?"

"In Moscow, I hope. We missed each other again. I got to Kiev too late, just before the evacuation. But I have found her trail."

"Does she know that you are alive and with us?"

"No; that is what is driving me crazy."

CHAPTER XIX

TWO MONTHS HAD passed.

The Red Army had been unable to stop General Denikin's offensive. Kolchak, "Supreme Ruler" of Russia, was pressing forward against the Urals in a last desperate effort. In the Baltic the Seventh Army suffered reverse after reverse as it retreated through bottomless mud before General Yudenich's onslaught, losing Pskov and Luga and Gatchina one after the other. General Yudenich had already issued an order of the day calling upon his troops to break into Petrograd.

The Soviet Republic was completely cut off from food and fuel. Available means of transport scarcely sufficed for carrying troops and ammunition. The October sky wept above the Russian earth; above the hungry, palsied cities where life was smouldering in expectation of an even more hopeless winter; above smokeless factory chimneys and deserted workshops from which the workers had gone to be scattered on every front; above the endless cemeteries of damaged railway engines and broken trucks; above the age-old quiet of the thatched villages in which there were few men and where, as in olden times, kindle-lights were lit at night and home-made looms creaked again.

In those ill-starred days General Mamontov broke through the Red front a second time. Ravaging the Red rear and destroying its supply lines, he pushed with his Cossack corps deep into the interior of the republic.

Telegin, Roshchin and their commissar, Chesnokov, were bending over a ragged map, stuck together with spittle at the folds. Chesnokov was a new man, recently sent to replace the previous commissar who had gone down with typhus; he was a Moscow working man whose health had been shattered by years in Tsarist prisons and who was exhausted and prematurely aged by undernourishment. Stroking his bald head as if he had a pain there, he was reading for the tenth time the latest operational order of the Supreme Command.

Telegin sat sucking his pipe. Of late he had given up rolling cigarettes and had taken to pipe-smoking, after Latugin had given him a pipe taken on patrol from a White officer. This pipe was a consolation and a sedative in moments of crisis, of which there was a surfeit just then, and if he refrained from cleaning it it would sing a homely little song as he sucked it, rather like a samovar on the table on a stormy evening.

Roshchin had seen at the first glance that the order was a mere hysterical outburst without rhyme or reason. Leaning back against the log wall of the cabin, his eyes flashing angrily between his half-closed eyelids, he waited for the commissar to come to the end of his comments on this fruit of the Supreme Command's labours.

They were on a farm where the field headquarters of the brigade had been established about six miles from the front line. Of the two regiments over which Telegin had been given command in August, scarcely three hundred fighting men were left and the replacements which had been sent could hardly be described as fighting men. The Supreme Command had hurriedly roped in deserters, "greens" caught in towns and villages where they were now taking refuge in increasing numbers because of the autumn rainy season, formed them into units without training or preparation and pushed them out into the front line, there to carry out battle operations which were only feasible for a red pencil moving over the map in the solemn quiet of the Commander-in-Chief's office.

"I can't understand it," said Commissar Chesnokov, and looked at the reverse of the paper in his hand, although that side was blank. "I can't understand the general trend."

Roshchin enlightened him:

"There is nothing there to be understood. It's simply a routine order. The Commander-in-Chief eats a couple of soft-boiled eggs for breakfast and drinks a cup of cocoa, smokes a delicious cigarette and then goes up to the map on the wall. His chief of staff, who is waiting only for the day when all this accursed business will dissolve at last like a bad dream, takes the little red flag which represents the 123rd regiment of our brigade on the map—according to the report of the cadres department this regiment consists of two thousand seven hundred men—and daintily sticks it in about sixty miles to the south of its former position: 'Having thus occupied the village of Muckheap, we create a menace to the enemy's flank.' Then he takes the other flag, representing the 39th regiment of our brigade—according to the report of the cadres department this regiment consists of two thousand one hundred men—and sticks it in fifty-five miles farther to the south-east: 'Thus, the 39th regiment, by a frontal attack . . .' and so on and so forth. The Commander-in-Chief cocks his eye at the map through the cigarette smoke and agrees to everything because the chief of staff has thought out everything so nicely overnight, the little dots and lines and arrows are all so nicely drawn in red and blue ink and hence, however you may stick in your little flags, the result is the same : 'lively activity on all fronts', which is all that is required."

"I say," Chesnokov interrupted him, shaking his big bald head, "this isn't criticism any more; this is poison."

"Call it what you like. Why should I hold my tongue if this is what I think? Telegin thinks the same, and our fighting men all think the same and say so."

Telegin heaved a deep sigh without taking the pipe out of his mouth. The commissar felt bitterness, doubt and uncertainty fill his heart—the very things he struggled so hard to suppress within himself. During the ten years spent in Tsarist penitentiaries he had lost touch with life to some extent, and life now was so very complicated and difficult; these were such deep waters that, God preserve us. . . . His heart, purified by years of suffering, found it difficult to distrust men who were fighting on the revolutionary side. He immediately took all such men to his bosom—but they only too often proved unworthy of his confidence. The reason why he liked Roshchin was precisely because Roshchin was angrily outspoken, straightforward and not afraid of anything, not even of a gun held to his head.

"Well, and what is it the men are talking about specially?" the commissar inquired. "Soon we'll issue them with warm padded kit and felt boots and then they'll sing a different tune. Who are the grumblers? The deserters? Of course rain is soaking them to the marrow and their bellies are empty, so they shoot their mouths; it's only natural."

"When are we going to issue them with felt boots and padded coats?" Roshchin wanted to know.

"The quartermaster promised to send them without fail. I saw the papers all being got ready. They promised us fifteen hundred geese, too, and half a truckload of bacon."

"They didn't by any chance promise you roast birds of paradise while they were about it?"

The commissar did not answer this; he only grunted. It was perfectly true; all he had been able to obtain for the brigade were promises and bits of paper. He went to Serpukhovo often enough, rang them up on the telephone and made rows, lost his sleep over it all, and spent many a night pacing up and down the room out of the old prison habit. There was something incomprehensible going on, and wherever his sound, revolutionary common sense carried him he met with mysterious obstacles in which everything got entangled and confused.

"But still, what is it the men are saying?" the commissar asked again.

Roshchin angrily pointed to a passage in the order:

"It says here that we are to take Mitrofanovka village and Dalny farm with a force of two companies and hold them. We have taken this Mitrofanovka and this Dalny once already at the orders of the Supreme Command. And we were thrown out of there again as fast as our legs could carry us. The same thing will happen the day after to-morrow, when we carry out the orders given here."

"Why?"

"Because it is a position that cannot be held and we ought not to go there."

"That's right," Telegin nodded assent.

"But we shall go, lose about a hundred men on this operation, drive a wedge into the White front without proper contact with our rear; then the

Whites will squeeze us from right and left and we'll rush back to get out of the pocket, in which process we must cross this little stream three times—serving as a target each time at the fords—then cross an open field where the cavalry will charge us and, finally, a swamp where we shall lose half our supply vehicles."

"But, look here, surely this village and this farm are wanted for some purpose in our whole strategic plan?"

"Nothing of the sort; take a look at the map. That is just what our men are saying: that there has been no sense, no object, no plan in all our operations during the last two months. We are marking time without any ulterior object; we strike senseless blows, and all the time we are losing men and with them our faith in victory. Mark my words: during the night a few dozen of our men will go off without permission; you see if they don't. Then in a month they'll be sent back to us. What has happened, what is going on here, I ask you? Why this paralysis?"

Telegin sucked at his pipe and said:

"I heard to-day in the squadron—I wish I knew how they find out these things—that Mamontov has apparently broken through again from the Don and is coming up in our rear."

Roshchin snatched up the order, glanced through it again, threw it on the table and again tilted his chair back to the wall.

"Quite possible; although there is no mention of it in the order."

An orderly, a stocky, bearded elderly man in a dirty canvas shirt, came into the room and reported:

"Comrade brigade commander, you are wanted on the telephone."

Telegin glanced at the commissar with a puzzled expression, hurriedly got into his great-coat and went out. The commissar rubbed his head again and said to Roshchin:

"To hear you talking, Roshchin, one might lose all faith. What's it all about? Are we being betrayed?"

"I make no suggestions; I assert nothing. All I know is that we can't go on fighting like this."

"Are battle orders to be carried out or not?"

"Yes, battle orders must be carried out and I'll carry them out to-morrow."

The commissar thought this over and asked with a smile:

"D'you want to die, or what?"

"That has nothing to do with the matter and in any case it's nothing to do with you. Besides, I haven't the least desire to die. If you had been with us a bit longer you would know that this regiment doesn't want to carry out these orders. But it is imperative that they should. Obeying battle orders is the very life of any army. Failure to do so means disintegration, anarchy and death. I shall read the orders to them myself and will lead them to the attack. You can regard the operation as a test of discipline. And that's all there is to it."

Telegin came back and sat down without taking his hands from the pockets of his great-coat. His eyes were wide open. He said: "Comrades, the President of the Supreme Military Council is touring the front line. He'll be here in an hour."

More than one hour went by. Rain was falling slowly. The squadron, in full strength, was drawn up in a field outside the farm. Raindrops flattened down the curled manes of the horses and their carefully brushed forelocks, and darkened the grey coats of the troopers. The horses churned the ground under their hoofs into mud. They were beginning to look more and more like carrion pulled out of a watery grave—their ribs protruding, their hip-bones sticking out, their lips drooping. Immerman, the squadron commander, round-faced and snub-nosed, a former lieutenant of the Grodno Hussars, was casting piteous glances at Telegin. What a show! To crown it all, a long-legged dirty puppy had appeared from nowhere and full of ingenuous curiosity had sat himself down right in front of the squadron.

Immerman tried to shoo him away, but the puppy merely cocked his ears, tilting his head on one side. And now a mounted sentry posted on a hill not far away suddenly dug his heels into his horse's ribs, whirled round and rode towards Telegin at a heavy gallop, scattering clumps of mud right and left.

A long, light-grey touring car, with huge glittering radiator and enormous headlamps, came rushing up the hill.

Its mighty roar made the horses in the line dance and fidget. Immerman shouted: "'Tention!" The car came to a stop, nearly crushing the puppy, which leapt away and sat down again to watch. Telegin rode up to the car, flashed his sabre in salute at the three military men sitting in the car with brown peasant coats over their military great-coats. The man who was sitting beside the driver in the front seat stood up, put his hand on the windscreen and received Telegin's report without looking at him.

Then he turned sharply towards the front of the squadron. The two uniformed men on the back seat—one of them paper-white, with a wet beard, and the other, broad, bloated and fierce—stood up and raised their hands to their caps. The first man began to speak in a voice like the barking of a dog, tossing his head so that his nostrils showed black and the misty pince-nez on his nose danced:

"Men, in the name of the workers' and peasants' government I command you to whet your sabres to a keener edge and screw your bayonets on tighter. Which of you does not want to water his horse in the quiet waters of the Don? Only a coward does not want this. Why are you still here? Why not there? The republic expects you to perform legendary deeds of heroism. Forward! Overwhelm the enemy and scatter their ashes in our mother—the steppe."

He spoke a lot more in the strain, then wound up with a shout of "Hurrah!" and a flourishing of his fist. The men answered with a ragged cheer. They were perplexed by this speech. Had this man tumbled from the moon? They had been through many strange things, but they had certainly not expected such an insult as to be called cowards by this fellow.

The great man summoned Telegin by a jerk of his chin:

"I am dissatisfied with the condition of your men. This is a rabble on horseback! I am dissatisfied with the condition of your horses—they are jades! Follow me!"

He sank back into the seat beside the driver. The giant machine leapt forward towards the farm.

Telegin followed at a gallop, weighing up in his mind whether this meant that he would be shot at dawn.

The car drew up in front of the command post. Telegin and Chesnokov, the latter clumsily wallowing in his saddle, came galloping up. They saw the telephone orderly standing on the porch with a terrified expression on his face; his hand was trembling as he raised it to his cap in salute. With his eyes he mutely begged Telegin for permission to speak. Stammering with the effort of observing the prescribed forms of address he reported that brigade headquarters had just rung through from Gaivorony (a village about twenty-five miles away where the stores, equipment, funds and archives of the brigade were kept), but all they had had time to say was that White patrols, probably

Mamontov's men, had raided the village—and then the telephone had gone dead.

The broad fierce man on the back seat of the car—he was chief of staff to the Supreme Command—bent forward to the front seat and whispered something in the president's ear. The latter nodded and said to Telegin over his shoulder:

"You will get my further orders through the usual channels."

Telegin and Chesnokov stood rooted to the spot for a long time, gazing at the black strip of road along which the great monster of a car had sped away and melted into the rainy mist like a phantom.

Dasha had taken a job in the Soviet administration and was working as second assistant to the chief of the planning section of the Land Redemption Department. Sometimes she painted coloured areas in water-colours on to a map of the Kostroma district in preparation for the draining of swamps and the production of bog ore and peat in inexhaustible quantities. Sometimes she copied reports which Gribosolov, one of the engineers, composed for the sole purpose of keeping the executive committee of the Soviet in a constant state of nervous agitation at the grandiose scope of his schemes, although the schemes were in essence quite useless; the only resources at the disposal of the department being a little box of water-colours, a few brushes and a small supply of drawing-paper; there were no shovels, no vehicles, no horses, no pumps, no money, and no labour.

Dasha was given rations: every day four ounces of bread bristling with straw and sometimes a few bay-leaves or a small quantity whole black pepper. Anissya, who was working as a messenger in the executive committee office, was drawing increased rations in consideration of her war service: in addition to the four ounces of bread and the pepper there was also sometimes a small perch or half a kipper.

In her spare time Anissya also worked in a dramatic circle and attended popular lectures at the historical and philosophical faculty of the university evacuated to Kostroma from Kazan. Her actual duties were to sit in a tattered arm-chair in the passage in front of the door leading to the chairman's office, and these duties Anissya took very lightly. She was either not in her place at all or else would sit with her fingers in her ears with a volume of Shakespeare on her knees reading some tragedy, and if she was wanted would answer absent-mindedly, 'coming', 'coming'; if called a second time she would snap impatiently at those who disturbed her with errands such as that she should take a packet somewhere to one of the innumerable rooms full of tables and crowded with people who had invented some sort of occupation for themselves. One day, when one of the employees, a woman with a face like a potato, rebuked her for this, Anissya said: "Don't raise your voice, comrade, I faced Cossack sabres and wasn't afraid", and gave her such a dark look that the intellectual lady, who had been a champion of the emancipation of women in the old days, thought it best not to cross swords with this worker-peasant fire-eater.

Dasha returned home regularly every evening at six, but Anissya often came home late at night. They lived in a little wooden house above the Volga. Kuzma Kuzmich, mindful of Telegin's order that he must feed Dasha and Anissya properly, reluctantly continued his devious pursuit of food and fuel, although he sometimes found it hard enough, what with his increasing years and the autumn weather which between them made him more inclined towards

philosophical meditations by the fireside, while the rain drummed a soft melody on the roof.

Usually Anissya and Dasha got up when the bluish morning light shone in at the window, drank tea made from carrots, ate something and went off to work. Kuzma Kuzmich washed up, carried out the slops and swept the two little rooms. While he was doing this he slowly, and sometimes not without a sigh, turned over in his mind the main question: who might to-day be good for a couple of eggs, a bit of bacon, a bottle of milk or a hatful of potatoes. Kusma Kuzmich didn't beg, oh no, God forbid! He simply practised honest barter, exchanging philosophical and moral ideas for food. In these two months all Kostroma had come to know him and occasionally he even extended his foraging to the surrounding villages.

While he was making his plans for the day, Kuzma Kuzmich would sit down to mend or sew something near the window. Life is a mighty force. Even in times of the greatest historical cataclysms and the most severe trials, human beings issue forth head first from their mothers' wombs and, with angry cries, demand a place for themselves in this world whether their parents like it or not; human beings fall in love quite unmindful of the fact that their worldly resources for this purpose are greatly inferior to those of a blackcock when he dances and spreads his gaudy tail in the spring. People always want to be consoled and are willing to give half their loaf to the man who can pour unexpected balm into their souls torn by the question: "What is to become of us if things go on like this—are we to eat grass and cover our nakedness with cabbage-leaves?" Others, in those days, were grateful to the sympathetic listener to whom they could unburden themselves without fear of the *cheka* and let off the steam of all their accumulated malice and anger.

Kuzma Kuzmich would go the rounds of the households. He would wipe his feet in the dark entrance and then go on to the kitchen. The housewife would sometimes shout at him angrily:

"What, here again, you good-for-nothing? There's nothing for you to-day, nothing at all. . . ."

"I just came to ask about Matryona Savishna's health," Kuzma Kuzmich would say, shaking his red face in a conciliatory way and pursing his lips. "How is she?"

"Very bad."

"It isn't death that is terrible, Anna Ivanovna, it is the knowledge of a fruitlessly spent life that fills us with grief. That is when consolation is wanted, a hand laid on one's forehead and a voice that says: 'Your life was a bleak one, Maria Savishna, you need not regret its passing, but think of this: you have toiled like a little ant; like the ant, you have dragged along your little burden busily, never asking for a reward. And yet toil never goes unrequited, every little thing counts; the house of mankind is growing; it is both tall and broad, and somewhere your little straw is supporting some part of it. You have brought up children and grandchildren, now your evening has come; close your eyes and gently go to sleep. Have no regrets for anything: it is not you who are to blame for your forlorn life."

Kuzma Kuzmich murmured thus while sitting near the door on a low stool; the housewife, who was cutting kindle-lights, suddenly threw down the knife, sniffed several times and the tears ran down her cheeks.

"That's it. We live, we live and when we die we don't get a word of thanks for all we've done."

"That is because our way of life is not right yet. All human beings ought

to have a memorial erected to them for the sake of their labours, and that is what will happen in the future, Anna Ivanovna; in the future life will be good."

"What, in the next world, is that what you mean?"

"No; in this world."

"You're the only beggar I've ever come across who is kind."

"It's my job, Anna Ivanovna, and I am not kind, just curious. What people want is not that you should be sorry for them, what they want is that you should be curious about them. Well, can I go in to Maria Savishna?"

"All right, go in."

From such a house Kuzma Kuzmich never went away with empty hands. In the evening, having sawn and chopped up a log brought from somebody's woodpile, having made a fire in the stove, blown the ashes off the boiling samovar and set it on the table, Kuzma Kuzmich would tell Dasha and Anissya about his adventures during the day.

"A competitor has appeared in my line," he said, blowing on the tea in his saucer. "An old chap has started hanging around the backyards, wearing nothing but a shirt made of sackcloth, barefoot, with his beard all mussed up on purpose and an enormous nose almost as big as his face. He calls himself Father Angel. This fraud has worked up quite a simple dodge; he barges into a house, squats down on the floor, rocks himself to and fro, wrings his hands and says: 'There you are, Angel, serves you right, you wouldn't believe it, ugh, ugh. . . .' The people listen to him with their mouths open; he goes on with his play a bit and then tells them that a few days ago, on the Friday night, a woman whose husband is in the Red Army was brought to bed of a strapping boy, and the boy had a full set of teeth. Well, they washed the boy and wrapped him up and put him in his mother's arms. She wanted to give him the breast but he wouldn't have it, just looked at his mother and said: 'Mamma, mamma, here I am!' " Kuzma Kuzmich took another sip from his saucer and laughed. "This Angel is taking my customers away from me. He's very jealous, too. We met to-day in the same house; he cocked a snook at me and said: 'What is it, Kuzma, have you come for my leavings? Look out, if you start following me about, you'll make acquaintance with my cudgel.' "

"Why don't you give up all this nonsense, Kuzma Kuzmich?" Dasha said in a severe tone. "Take a job in the Soviet service. We'll manage on the rations, never fear. You know there are all sorts of unsavoury rumours going round about you already, and that is most unpleasant for me."

Anissya, suddenly emerging from her usual day-dream, now said:

"I had a talk to-day with a man, such a horrible creature," and she went on, mimicking each person and speaking in different voices. "One of our employees came up to me, a man from the civilian supplies department, one of those rotten, flabby sort of fellows with a mouth all on one side, and he says:

" 'I'd like very much to have a talk with your uncle.'

" 'What uncle?'

" 'The one you're staying with,' says he. 'I want to ask his spiritual advice.'

" 'He doesn't give any sort of advice,' I say.

" 'But I heard different,' says he; 'many people go to him and are consoled.'

" 'Comrade,' I say, 'I'm busy and can't be bothered with listening to your nonsense.'

"But he puts his mouth to my ear and whispers and makes my ear all wet:

" 'Haven't you heard about the talking infant?'

" 'Go to the devil,' I say to him.

" 'That's not far to go,' says he, 'we're all there already. But this infant, it isn't the Antichrist by any chance?' "

"Very unpleasant," said Dasha.

"Yes, it's a forlorn place." Kuzma Kuzmich thoughtfully poured out another glass of hot water for himself. "So forlorn it makes your ears ring. And yet the Russians are an inquisitive lot, inquisitive and impressionable. And with heads on their shoulders, too. All they need is knowledge to find the way out of all this Byzantine mire. Well, my dears, my precious girls, I have long wanted to make a suggestion, but I could never make up my mind. Here it is: let's get out of here and go to Moscow."

"Moscow?" asked Anissya, opening her eyes wide.

"Yes, to the light, to new ideas, closer to the great things that are in progress. I'll give up all this trickery, on my word of honour. I've been sick of it myself for a long time. And when I saw my own image in that Father Angel, it upset me completely."

"Yes, let's go to Moscow," Dasha said. "We've even got a place to go to there: Katia left a flat behind with Maria Kondratevna, our old housekeeper. Of course it may all be gone by now. Oh, Kuzma Kuzmich, don't let's put it off, there's a good chap. We're wasting our most precious substance here, and all for a few scraps of food. And you have changed here, you have deteriorated. Listen, in Moscow we can get Anissya into the school for dramatic art, too. can't we?"

Anissya said nothing to this, only blushed scarlet and closed her eyes.

"Kuzma Kuzmich, you must go first thing to-morrow and find out whether there are any steamers still going up to Yaroslavl."

Dasha was tremendously excited, but said nothing more, just sighed deeply from time to time. Kuzma Kuzmich, with sombre mien, pressing his hand to his belly, was thinking that in Moscow there would probably be little difficulty in feeding the women properly: if the worst came to the worst they still had Dasha's precious stones, which he had hidden away in secret. One could also take about a hundredweight of rye flour along from Kostroma. Queer how he had suddenly blurted out this idea about Moscow! Well, it was done now! It was all for the best, of course. In his thoughts he was already composing an explanatory letter to Ivan Ilyich, from whom they had recently had a postcard with a short message saying that he was alive and well and sent love and kisses.

Anissya, her elbows propped on the table, was staring into the tiny flame of the tin oil-lamp and saw in her imagination a great staircase (like the one in the executive offices) down which she was walking in a low-necked dress, rustling a silken train and rubbing blood-stained hands; or a long box of a coffin, from which she emerged to see Romeo and see the phial of poison. . . .

For a long time the three of them sat and mused around the singing samovar, while rain lashed the tiny window in fitful gusts. But what did they care about the foul weather, the meanness of their dwelling and all this fortuitous poverty when their hearts were confidently knocking at the entrance door to life as though eternal youth was theirs.

Telegin had always regarded himself as a man of an equable temper, who, whatever else he might do, never lost his head. Therefore it should not have happened that without thinking, merely acting by blind instinct, he suddenly unbuttoned his holster with fumbling fingers, drew his revolver, put it to his

head and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened, because for some reason or other someone had removed the cartridges from his Nagan.

Roshchin and Commissar Chesnokov turned towards Telegin and began to curse him, calling him 'snot-nose', 'intellectual', 'wet-rag', 'good-for-nothing', 'no use even to wipe an old mare under the tail'. They both yelled at him, out there in the open, where they had dismounted near a haystack blackened by the rain. Close by stood the squadron and the commander's company, all on horseback. They were all that were left of Telegin's brigade.

Mamontov's corps had broken through to their rear on a broad front, cut their communications, destroyed roads and bridges, and blown up their food stores and ammunition dump at Gaivorony. Within twenty-four hours the rear of the brigade was in chaos and scattered units and individual soldiers were wandering about, hiding themselves or retreating without contact with any higher command post.

Both rifle regiments had suddenly found themselves encircled from the rear by Mamontov and from the front by foot Cossacks of the Don. The men abandoned their positions and scattered.

The extent of the catastrophe could be assessed only slowly and by degrees. Telegin, with the cavalry squadron and the headquarters company went out in search of the brigade. He still hoped to rally the remnants of his men now that the panic had subsided and Mamontov was far away. But he soon found that under this leaden sky, on these soaked pastures and impassable ploughed fields, in these ravines and thickets veiled in mist, it was impossible to rally anyone. Some of the men had gone in search of some front line unit which they could join, others had scattered to the farms where they begged to be admitted to warm themselves at the fire, others again had long been waiting for just such an opportunity to clear out and go home to their wives and firesides.

Two Red Army men of the 39th regiment, living skeletons who were sitting in complete exhaustion under a haystack when Telegin, Roshchin and Chesnokov came upon them, had a grievous story to tell.

"It's no use you riding about here," one of them said. "You'll find no one. There was a 39th once, but there isn't any more."

The other, still sitting with his back to the haystack, bared his teeth as he snarled:

"We've been sold and that's all there is to it. D'you think we don't understand the orders we get? We understand them all right, and I say we've been sold; our high command has sold us out, damn them. They give us cardboard boots! Here, look!" He wiggled his toes that were sticking out of torn boots. "We've had enough! No more wars for us! We've finished. Amen!"

It was at this haystack that Telegin gave up. He thought of the long, grey car with the huge glittering radiator and the enormous headlamps: how could he justify himself in such eyes? With his lazy good nature he had messed up everything; he had lost his grip and had lost his men.

"Wait before you shout at me," he said to Roshchin and Chesnokov. "All right, I weakened; I am a coward, I am to blame. . . ." He screwed up his face with disgust as he put his revolver back in its holster. "I've been lucky all my life and all my life I have expected my luck to turn. All right, let the revolutionary tribunal judge me, if you prefer it that way."

"Damn you, you fool, it's not you we are worrying about now," Roshchin shouted at him, his face twitching. "Where are you leading the squadron? East or west or where? What are your intentions? What is the immediate task before us? Think, man!"

Telegin snatched the map angrily out of Roshchin's hand and examined it, muttering all sorts of barrack-square epithets at himself. The names of towns, villages and hamlets swam before his eyes. He regained control of himself with an effort. After a short discussion it was decided that they would move eastward to seek contact with units of the Eighth Army.

All the rest of that day they moved at a trot whenever possible. In the dark of the night, when they could no longer see the ears of their own horses, they sent out scouts to search for the village of Rozhdestvenskoye, supposed to be quite near, but lost in an impenetrable darkness. They halted without dismounting and waited for a long time. Roshchin moved his horse closer to Telegin's and touched his knee with his own.

"Well," he said, "perhaps you might explain? Are you willing to talk?"

"Why not?"

"Why did you do that bit of play-acting?"

"What play-acting?"

"With an unloaded revolver."

"Are you mad?" Telegin turned towards Roshchin but could distinguish nothing save a vague whiteness with black eye-sockets in it. "Vadim, so it wasn't you who took out the cartridges?"

"I certainly didn't take any cartridges out of your revolver! I am beginning to think that you are more cunning than you seem."

"I don't understand. I lost heart for a moment—what has that to do with cunning? I wouldn't bring that up again if I were you."

"Don't hedge!"

They were speaking in low voices, but Roshchin was trembling like a hound on a leash about to be slipped.

"The whole squadron saw that disgusting exhibition at the haystack quite well. Do you know what they are saying? That you did a bit of play-acting as an alibi to save your life when you come up before the revolutionary tribunal."

"What's that you're saying?"

"No, you've got to hear me out!" Even Roshchin's horse felt the mood of its master and began to fidget. "You must answer me in all conscience. These are days that test a man's mettle. Have you passed the test? Do you realize that there is a stain on you and you have no right to have that."

His horse, fidgeting, slashed its tail painfully across Telegin's face. At that Telegin croaked in a voice hoarse with the lump in his throat:

"Get away from me! I'll kill you if you don't!"

But immediately Commissar Chesnokov said out of the darkness:

"That'll do, lads, you've barked at each other enough. It was I took out the cartridges."

Neither Roshchin nor Telegin said anything to that. They were both breathing hard, one because of the cruel insult, the other still bristling with fury. Then sharp short cries, like shots, came out of the darkness:

"Halt! Halt! Who goes there?" "Take your hands off me!" "What unit?" "We're all right and who are you, you ——— ——— ———?"

It was scout meeting scout. The riders circled around each other, afraid to draw weapons in the infernal darkness and unwilling in their angry pride to give way. They yelled and cursed, although they already knew from the juiciness of the language that they all belonged to the same side, all Reds.

"Here, take your paw off my bridle!"

"What unit?"

"—— —— —— you son of a—— —— bitch. We're a big cavalry force."

"Where is your unit?"

"Come on and we'll show you."

Finally both patrols were mollified and rode up amicably to the squadron. It appeared that the village of Rozhdestvenskoye was not far away, on the other side of the brook and thicket. Asked what units were in the village, one of the scouts of the other patrol answered none too politely:

"Come and you'll find out."

Semyon Mikhailovich Budenny and his two divisional commanders were sitting at a table in the room drinking tea from an enormous samovar. . When Telegin, Roshchin and Chesnokov came in, Budenny said jocularly:

"More reinforcements, I see. You're welcome. Sit down, have some tea."

They came up to the table and exchanged greetings with Budenny, who squinted slyly at the wandering brigade commander and his staff (he already knew all about them); with the divisional commander of the Fourth—a slight man but with such phenomenal whiskers that he could easily have wound them round his ears; with the divisional commander of the Sixth who thrust out a huge hand towards each of them and squeezed their hands with a force sufficient to straighten a horseshoe, while his rosy young face expressed the utmost calm.

Budenny asked them whether they had found good billets for their men and beasts, and whether they had any wishes or complaints. Roshchin answered that they billeted the men as best they could and had no complaints.

"So much the better," said Budenny, who knew perfectly well that in the village in which his cavalry corps had halted for a short rest there was not even room for a fly to find a good billet. "Well then, why are you standing? Bring that form closer and sit down. I remember you very well, comrade Telegin, we gave the Don Cossacks a good time together, didn't we?" Very pleased, he winked at the others sitting round the table; the commander of the Sixth nodded in confirmation of the excellence of the time given to the Cossacks, and the commander of the Fourth also nodded his bony Kalmyk face. "So this time Mamontov has given you a bit of a drubbing, eh? What are these men you've got with you—non-combatants or fighting men?"

"Fighting men, a reinforced squadron," said Telegin.

"What's the condition of the horses?"

"The horses are in fine condition," Roshchin intervened quickly, "they are even shod on their forefeet."

"No!" said Budenny in mock admiration, "are they really? Shod on their forefeet, eh? In that case I think you needn't look any further for the Eighth Army—it may no longer be where it used to be, anyway."

"But I ought to make my report to the commander of the Eighth," said Telegin.

"Why not give your report to me? What do you think?" Budenny turned to the divisional commanders, "shall we take the brigade commander and his reinforced squadron in?"

Both divisional commanders nodded assent. Budenny took a pinch of tobacco out of a tin box and began to roll a cigarette.

"Why should you go any further?" he repeated. "Join us. We've been sitting here with the divisional commanders and thinking things over; now we've thought enough and have made up our minds: our horses are getting fat and our fighting men are getting bored, the best thing for us is to go north to look for General Mamontov. So we are all running, he from us and we after him."

Budenny was joking; the position was very serious indeed. Having heard that Mamontov's corps had broken through the Red front, he had disobeyed, at grave risk to himself, the orders given to him by the President of the Supreme Military Council in person. These orders were that he was to carry on with the execution of the now obviously senseless plan of campaign, a plan long since proved faulty if not treacherous, but Budenny had on his own initiative rushed in pursuit of Mamontov instead. Both he and his divisional commanders knew perfectly well what a furious scratching of pens this would evoke in the offices of the Supreme Command and what threats redolent of the grave would await them at the end of the telegraph wire. But they were more concerned with saving Moscow than their own heads, and as they saw it, the only way to save Moscow was to pursue Mamontov without delay and destroy this crack cavalry force. That the White cavalry would not stand up to a charge of Budenny's seven thousand sabres and would be cut down on some battlefield between the Tsna and the Don, they never doubted for an instant. The problem was to catch up with Mamontov, who had adopted the bandit custom of exchanging his overdriven and exhausted horses for fresh ones in the villages and hamlets as he passed through.

Mamontov's Don Cossacks, dashing but spoilt by success, were far superior in numbers to Budenny's forces. But Mamontov had no desire to encounter Budenny. He was afraid of this experienced opponent who was pursuing him; for this was no partisan body of horse, but the most dangerous thing in the world to meet and clash with in the open field: a force of regular Russian cavalry. Budenny moved forward more slowly but more wisely, at times choosing a shorter or more convenient road, at times driving Mamontov into regions where forage or fresh horses were hard to find.

Day after day the pursuit went on, a deadly game played by two great cavalry forces. Smoke and the glare of burning villages softened by the autumn mists marked the trail of Mamontov. He threw himself on Red garrison troops with a rapid thrust and disappeared as suddenly as he had come. But in the end Budenny tricked and overtook him. Early one morning —when the charcoal tracery of dry branches in the orchards was just becoming visible—Budenny, at the head of a troop, charged into the wretched hamlet in which Mamontov was spending the night.

But at the same moment a *troika* drawn by three sorrels dashed out of a gate at the other end of the village and galloped away. In the open carriage Mamontov was sitting bareheaded and with his coat unbuttoned on his chest. He turned in his seat and fired several times at the bewhiskered rider in the black Caucasian cape who was galloping at the head of the pursuers. Mamontov had recognized Budenny, but his hand trembled as he aimed his carbine. The pursuers rode hard, but the Don sorrels flew like the wind and the carriage was lost to view.

The hamlet still resounded with savage yells, the clash of sabres, the crack of shots. The Cossacks of General Mamontov's personal escort put up a fight to the death. In mopping up after the battle, Budenny's troops found a number of frightened men lurking in a corner, and drove them out into the street, some in their underwear only, some with one boot on and one off. It turned out that they were bandsmen. The troopers surrounded them and laughed. Budenny rode up and, hearing what had happened, ordered the band to bring out their instruments.

Seeing that the Bolsheviks were not sabreing them, only laughing at them, the bandsmen ran and brought out their fanfares, their giant helicons, their trumpets and bugles. All their 'brass' instruments were of pure silver. Budenny's men opened their eyes wide and clicked their tongues. Nice bit of booty there!

"Well," said Budenny, "at least we get a bunch of hair off a mangy dog. Can you play the International?"

The bandsmen could play anything he pleased—there were students of the Moscow *conservatoire* of music among them, who for the last eighteen months had been wandering from town to town in search of a living and of white bread, and in avoidance of pogroms, questionnaires and street fighting, until they were at last mobilized by the Whites in Rostov. The bandmaster, whose bulbous nose was like a sponge full of vodka, even went so far as to declare that he was an old and enthusiastic revolutionary. They looked at his bluish-purple nose and believed him when he said he would do no harm.

Once more Mamontov evaded an encounter. His corps withdrew from contact with Budenny's forces by a rapid manœuvre. The pursuit went on. By now Mamontov's intentions were obvious—he wanted to push right across the Red front to join his own side. This was what Budenny was more afraid of than anything else; were Mamontov to succeed, the whole campaign would have been in vain and he would have to answer for his actions not only to the Supreme Command but to the President of the Supreme Military Council, which was worse.

Another difficulty was the lack of communications and of all information regarding events elsewhere. Finally, however, the railway line was reached; Budenny with his staff galloped on to the station and sat down to the wires. The news he heard over the telephone caused him to send an urgent message to his divisional and other senior commanders summoning them to join him at the railway station.

They assembled in the refreshment room, through the broken great windows of which they could see their squadrons approach in campaign formation and cross the permanent way against a backdrop of a sinister purple sunset lowering under a canopy of cloud. The rows of horsemen, with pennants on their lances, seemed made of iron as they rode up the embankment, giants on giant horses. Telegin was startled by the expression on Roshchin's face as he looked out of the window—a proud, set face glowing in the light of the setting sun.

"We ought to have known that she is like this," he said half to himself in a low voice and Telegin moved closer to him in order to hear better. "We had forgotten. There is no punishment great enough for such a betrayal. Kiss the earth in gratitude that it has forgiven you."

After their quarrel near the haystack this was the first time Roshchin had spoken to him in this way. Telegin knew that he had been tormenting himself and had been silent not out of pride but rather out of a feeling of despair because there was no way for him to show his regrets; he could not just say, "I'm sorry, Ivan," and leave it at that. Now, in this state of unceasing tension and fatigue, he had been overcome by this all-pervading emotion as he looked out on his lost, forgotten, and reconquered mother-country and this was at the same time his prayer for forgiveness.

Telegin cleared his throat. He, too, wanted to say something kind to Roshchin, make him feel that their foolish quarrel was forgotten, as if it had never happened. But at that moment Budenny came out of the telephone booth. Everyone gathered round him. He said:

"Comrades, there's a lot of news. Let's start with the bad: Kutepov has taken Orel, comrades, and by now patrols are near Tula. By this advance he has driven a broad wedge into our lines. The Eighth and Tenth armies are thrown back towards the east, the Ninth and Thirteenth towards the west. This was what happened last week." Budenny paused and his eyes sparkled merrily. "But a lot of things have changed since then, comrades. In the first place here's a bit of good news for you: the entire Supreme Command has been removed. And the President of the Supreme Military Council no longer rules the roost on the southern front. Orel has been retaken by us. The famous regiments of Kornilov, Markov and Drozdovski have been completely smashed between Orel and Kromy. What we have been waiting for all this time has now started. There are no details yet, but a special assault group is successfully operating against Kutepov too."

Budenny paused again, twisted a piece of telegraph strip between his fingers, twitched his whiskers and darted a piercing glance at the commanders surrounding him.

"The operations of our corps were carried out not in accordance with, but in contradiction to, the orders received from the Supreme Command. Our orders were to go south, into the Salsk steppe, to the Manych, where the Tenth army escaped annihilation by the skin of its teeth. But we went north instead. Instead of the left bank we chose the right bank of the Don. Instead of running away from the Don cavalry, we got on to their tail. No good, all wrong! As for our plain common sense—well, after all, our heads are just peasant heads, Cossack heads, we shouldn't try to use them when there are so many fine educated brains on the staff of the Supreme Command. Well, we just rubbed along and the orders of the Supreme Command followed after, but I didn't get them, or didn't read them; if I had, maybe our sabres would have fallen out of our hands. Still, whether I liked it or not, one order has overtaken me now. It's not very long. . . ." He untwisted the telegraph strip and read: "To Corps Commander Budenny. Latest reconnaissance reports indicate enemy cavalry moving from Voronezh to north. Orders to Cavalry Corps Commander Budenny are to smash this enemy cavalry." That's all, short and clear. So it seems our heads were right after all. The order is signed by Stalin, President of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front and dated headquarters of the Supreme Command in Serpukhov."

Katia returned to Moscow, to the very same little house in Old Stable Lane on the Arbat to which Nikolai Ivanovich Smokovnikov had moved with Dasha at the beginning of the war and to which she, Katia, had returned from Paris; to the very same room in which she had experienced such a hopeless depression on the day of Nikolai Ivanovich's funeral. That day she had lain on her bed, covered with her fur coat and had not wanted to live any longer. She had wept and then had thrown off the coat and had gone to the dining-room for a glass of water to wash down the poison—and there in the dusk had suddenly seen her second span of life: Vadim Petrovich Roshchin was sitting there and waiting for her.

And now this second cycle of her life, tense, emotional and tormenting, had also come to its end. A long road of irretrievable losses was now left behind. Katia felt this with particular intensity as she walked along with her little bundle from the Kiev Station in Moscow one day in the middle of July. Little children were paddling on the sandbanks in the Moscow river and their

voices sounded piercingly sad in the quiet. On the bank of the river an old man was sitting on the trampled grass and angling. As she turned on to Sadovaya Street, from which all the railings were gone, Katia was surprised at the complete quiet of it all. Only the huge lime-trees on the boulevard rustled pompously, screening the deserted houses behind them with their green shadows. On the sometime noisy, busy Arbat there were no tramways, no cabs, and the rare passers-by hid their noses in their collars as they crossed the rusty rails. Katia reached Old Stable Lane, turned into it and finally saw her house. Her knees buckled under her; then she stood a long time on the opposite side of the pavement looking at it. In her memory this little house had seemed charming, of a golden brown, with flat white pilasters and clean windows curtained with white and peopled by the shades of Katia herself, of Vadim Petrovich, of Dasha. . . . For things that have been can never disappear completely. Or does life go by like a dream in a head lying on a pillow—a dream that however enticing it may be with its futile illusions, yet melts away at the first sight of returning consciousness? No, that was impossible. They must still be there: Katia, dropping the phial with the poison and lying limp in Vadim Petrovich's arms while he whispers words of love in her ear. That was no dream, that cannot have disappeared utterly, all this must still be there behind those dark windows. And there, too, must be their first night together, without sleep, spent in silent embraces as deep as suffering and full of the old and yet ever new words of wonder at this only true miracle on earth, which united them, the most manly and the most tender in the close intertwining of his strong brown fingers and her frail white hands.

The little house stood there, forlorn, crooked, the paint peeling from its walls. It had no white pilasters of any kind; Katia had simply imagined those. The two end windows on the first floor were covered from the inside with sheets of newspaper—the rest were so spattered with dry mud that it was obvious no one lived there. On the ground floor, where Dasha's bedroom had been, all the windows were broken.

Katia crossed the street and knocked at the front door from which the brown paint was peeling in strips. She hammered on the door for a long time, until she noticed that there was no door-knob on the door, only a hole full of dust. Then she remembered that there was a back entrance from a side street; she found it open and from it a scarcely visible track led across the yard overgrown with grass. This was evidence that someone did live there after all.

Katia knocked on the kitchen door. After a few minutes the door was opened by an undersized be-spectacled man with a face as pale as paper and an untidy mop of fair hair on a head too big for his body:

"Are you deaf? Didn't you hear me shout that the door is open? What do you want?"

"Excuse me, I just wanted to ask whether Maria Kondratyevna, an old lady, was still living here?"

"Yes," he said in a tone of voice as though he was expounding a mathematical formula. "But she's dead."

"Dead? When did she die?"

"Not long ago; I can't remember the exact date."

"What am I to do now?" Katia asked with a bewildered air. "Is my flat occupied?"

"I have no idea whether this flat is yours or not, but it's certainly occupied."

He made a movement as if to close the door, but seeing that the eyes of this beautiful woman were filling with tears, he paused.

"It is very unpleasant. I've come here straight from the railway station and I have nowhere else to go. I haven't been to Moscow for two years, now I've come home and now . . ."

"Come home, did you say?" he asked in a tone of utter amazement. "To Moscow?"

"Yes. I've been in the south first and then in the Ukraine. . . ."

"Look here, are you insane?"

"No. Why? Is it so crazy to be coming home?"

The haggard, white face of the man twitched, his thin mouth curved upward at one corner, wrinkling one sunken cheek:

"Don't you know that people are starving to death in Moscow?"

"Yes, I heard that there were difficulties with the food; but I don't need much and then all this is only temporary. Besides, when things are bad, it is best to be at home."

"Who are you, actually?"

"I am a school-teacher, Yekaterina Roshchin—here, I'll show you. . . ."

She fumbled to undo the knot of her canvas bundle, and got out the identity card given her by the Commissariat for Education.

"I've been working in Kiev right up to the evacuation, in the Russian school for infants. The commissariat would not let anyone stay under the Whites, and in any case I didn't want to stay. They gave me this letter for Lunacharski too, but it's stuck down."

The man read the identity card and the address on the letter. All his movements were slow and deliberate.

"Well, the old lady's room isn't actually occupied. If you insist on living here of all places you can move in. But it's rotten and filthy here. One can occupy any empty private house one likes in Moscow now."

He stood aside and let Katia pass into the kitchen, which was dark and full of broken furniture. He pointed to the key of the old lady's room, hanging on a nail in the smoke-blackened passage, and slowly went back to his own room, which was none other than Nikolai Ivanovich's former study. With some difficulty Katia opened the door of the stuffy room with its two windows spattered with mud on the outside. This had been her bedroom. Her bed still stood there in the same place and in the same place on the wall hung her carved medicine cupboard with a faded Alkonost and Sirin on the door—the same cupboard out of which she had taken the poison *that* day. The late Maria Kondratyevna had brought all the best things here from the whole flat: armchairs and sofas and tables were piled up here on top of each other, all broken and covered with cobwebs.

Katia almost despaired. How was she to live again, to begin the third cycle of her life in this enormous city burning under the July sun; in this empty and hungry Moscow, in this stuffy room crammed with unnecessary lumber. She sat down on the bare mattress and began to cry. She was very tired and very hungry. The difficulties and struggles ahead of her seemed unsurmountable to her feeble forces. She thought of the dear little crooked cottage near the school in Vladimirskoye, the little garden, the undulating fields beyond, the broom leaning against the door, the water-butt in the passage, the green light filtering through the foliage and through her window on to the copybooks of the children . . . those care-free, merry children, her little favourite, Ivan Gavrikov. . . .

Why couldn't she have stayed there for ever?

Katia got off the bed to fetch some water and soak the dry roll she had

brought with her from Kiev. But there wasn't even so much as a glass to start her off on her new life! No longer grieved but angry, Katia wiped her eyes and went in search of the pale-faced man.

She knocked gently on his door and said softly:

"Excuse me, I am sorry to bother you. . . ."

He came slowly to the door, opened it and stared fixedly at Katia as though not knowing what to make of her.

"Excuse me, please, but have you got a glass. I am thirsty."

"My name is Maslov, Comrade Maslov," he answered. "What sort of glass do you want?"

"Any glass will do."

"All right."

He walked away into the room, leaving the door open. Katia saw many books on unplaned board shelves that bent under their weight, open books and manuscripts on the writing-desk, a miserable iron bedstead on which lay more books, a floor littered with rubbish, yellowed newspaper on the windows instead of curtains. In the same deliberate way Maslov came back to Katia and held out a dirty glass:

"Here you are. You can keep it."

In the kitchen Katia had difficulty in struggling through the lumber to the sink, which was full of dirt and rubbish to the rim; but the water was running. Having washed the glass, she eagerly drank her fill and went back to her room. She wanted to open the windows and have at least some sort of a wash before eating her roll. But opening the tightly stuck windows proved no easy task. Katia struggled for a long time, prodding the windows, hammering at the catches with the broken leg of a chair and sighing loudly. The noise brought in Maslov who stood looking at Katia in quiet amazement for some time before he spoke:

"Why did you have to open the windows?"

"It's stifling in here."

"Do you think the air in the street is fresher? There is dust and filth everywhere. I shouldn't if I were you." Katia listened to all this as she stood on the window-sill, pressed her lips tightly together and again began to hammer the catch with the chair-leg. "Suppose you did open it," Maslov continued, "you would have to close it again for the night. Why make unnecessary efforts?"

The catch gave way at last. Katia sprang from the window-sill, opened the window wide, and leaned out, greedily breathing in the street air.

"Ye-es," Maslov drawled thoughtfully, "we have not yet solved the problem of urban settlement." His knees suddenly trembled and gave way. He looked round for a place to sit down on and then leant up against the door-frame, tucking his thick fingers into the cord that loosely belted his dirty canvas shirt. "When the snow melted all the filth, rubbish, dead cats and dogs, even dead horses, were left in the streets and courtyards to rot. A little of the muck was washed away by the rain, but that is no solution of the problem."

Katia interrupted him:

"Could you tell me whether the bathroom is in order?"

"I haven't the faintest notion. There was a plumber lived here at one time. He used to mess about in the kitchen and in the bathroom on Sundays, but he joined up and went away."

"I'll tell you what, you run away now," Katia said resolutely. "I want to clean up a bit here and wash and then I'll come over to you. First of all I must get various addresses and I don't know anyone in Moscow. You'll help me, won't you?"

"All right. It's Sunday to-day. I shall be in all day."

He slowly sheered away from the doorway and went out. Katia turned the key in the lock. All one had to do was to lose one's temper and then things began to move. She took off her bodice and skirt in order not to soil them and began a battle with the dust. There were plenty of rags and cloths in the cupboards. Digging into them Katia found bed-linen with her own initials, then her own chemises and knickers, and even a few pairs of well-darned stockings. Good old Maria Kondratyevna, how she had preserved these priceless things! The defunct old lady had in general been greedy and a bit of a thief. But who cared? May she rest in peace.

The same evening Maslov showed Katia some of his manuscripts and even read bits out of one of them, an historical treatise about the classics of Utopian socialism. He said to Katia, who was sitting on his unmade bed:

"It may appear strange to you that in such times a man should concern himself with the Utopists? Utopias in an epoch of proletarian dictatorship! Where's the inner logic of it? Admit that you are surprised?"

Katia, who was so sleepy that she could hardly keep her eyes open, nodded in confirmation of the fact that she was surprised.

"And yet there is an inner logic to it. I deal in detail with the attempts made by individuals and small groups in the middle of the nineteenth century to put their Utopian ideas into practice. It is one of the most curious chapters in the history of social movements."

He turned his face away from Katia in order to hide a sneer which bared his small teeth.

"But I can write only on Sundays. I am very busy in the party local; there are very few of us, most of the party members are out of Moscow. I was exempt from mobilization for the front line only in view of the extremely delicate state of my health. I am morally and physically exhausted."

In spite of his delicate health and apparently complete unsubstantiality, Maslov proved to be quite resourceful. The very next day he accompanied Katia to the People's Commissariat for Education, introduced her to the people who mattered, and helped her to comply with the formalities and obtain her food ration cards.

Katia would have been completely lost without him in the vast building of the People's Commissariat with its countless departments, sections, and directors, especially as the restlessness of the staff and their aversion to routine drove them to move, together with all their tables, cupboards and archives, from one room to another and from one floor to another once a week at the very least, and also to change the whole system of organization and responsibility no less frequently.

Katia was immediately appointed "pedagogue" in a primary school of the Pressnya district. In another department she was "mobilized" for volunteer work at evening classes for the elimination of illiteracy. In a third department an incredibly thin, olive-complexioned man with enormous, feverish eyes captured her and dragged her along passages and up and down stairs to the Department for the Propaganda of Art, where she was commissioned as an extra-mural lecturer on art in the factories.

"As for the content of the lectures," said the olive-complexioned man, "we'll work out the details later and give you the relevant literature and a

syllabus. Don't be afraid; you are an educated woman and that is sufficient. Our tragedy lies in the fact that we haven't enough educated people—more than half of the intellectuals sabotage us. The time will come when they will regret this deeply. The rest of them have been swallowed up by the war. Your coming here has made a very favourable impression on every one."

Finally, in one of the corridors, Katia encountered a fat, bustling, thick-lipped man, wearing a canvas blouse stained green under the armpits.

"You're an actress, aren't you? I've just been told about you," he said hurriedly, and completely disregarding Katia's denial he put his arm round her shoulders and dragged her off along the passage. "I'll put you into a mobile troupe; you'll travel to the front by special coach. As soon as you leave Moscow there will be bread *ad lib*, sugar and the very best butter. Repertoire? Nonsense; with your looks all you need to do is sing a song, do a dance, the men will clap like mad. I sent Professor Chebutykin to the front; he's sixty years old, a chemist or an astronomer, I don't quite know which—and now he's billed as the 'king of mobiles' and sings couplets by Bérenger. Don't thank me, I'm doing it out of pure enthusiasm."

"Listen!" shouted Katia, tearing herself from his grasp, "I've already got a school, lectures, and classes for the elimination of illiteracy. I am physically incapable . . ."

"Stuff and nonsense! Do you think I am physically capable? Shalyapin is physically incapable too, but I got him a case of brandy and now he is asking to go to the front of his own accord. All right, think it over; I'll find you when I want you."

Katia walked home, overwhelmed by her responsibilities. A hot wind blew out of the deserted alleys, whirling eddies of dust and scraps of paper over the cobble-stones. She turned into the Tverski Boulevard, reckoning in her own mind whether she would have time to sleep six hours a night? Six hours would leave eighteen. Not enough! Teaching school, correcting copy-books, preparing next day's lessons, then not less than two hours for the elimination of illiteracy and—good God, and the journey there and back. And, of course, she would have to prepare for it—— No; eighteen hours were too little.

She sat down on the boulevard, on the same seat on which they had been sitting with Dasha in the year 'sixteen when they met Bessonov. How he had walked along, dragging his feet, all dusty. . . . How silly it had been. Two utterly useless women, who didn't know what to do with their excess of leisure, experienced God knows what tragic emotions when Bessonov bowed to them, just like a figure from one of Alexander Blok's poems, and then slowly walked away, and they looked after him and were especially moved to pity by the fact that his semi-military trousers looked as if they would come down any moment.

No; she would have to sleep only four hours and catch up on Sundays. And then the food queues! Katia closed her eyes and groaned. The wind played with the curls on her delicate little neck and roughly rustled the branches of the old lime-tree over her head. Listening to the noise of the wind in the leaves, Katia finally stopped worrying about how she could get more than twenty-four hours into one day—never mind, she would manage somehow. Her thoughts now strayed around the strange change in herself which had not ceased to amaze and gladden her. In that hour when she had looked into Alexey's furious face and pressing her head against the stove had said "NO!" a calm and confident certainty of a new happiness in store for her had begun to grow in her heart. A little of this happiness she had already experienced

that spring, when every evening, before she went to bed, she thought of the day just passed and found nothing dark, nothing stifling in it. Katia was pleased with herself. All this exaggerated worry and despair at her supposed inability to cope with her obligations was merely a game. That wasn't the point at all, the point was that she, who had so recently been a stray kitten anyone could pick up, had now suddenly turned out to be a person of importance; she was wanted; the influential comrade with the olive complexion and the beautiful eyes had spoken to her with the greatest respect. So she would have to justify all this confidence—it would be dreadful if the people in the Commissariat were to say: "A pity; we had such great hopes of her." This business in Moscow was something quite different from just sitting on a loaded cart and jogging along in Alexey's wake, chewing a straw and thinking: what good is your beauty to you? You are just booty.

Maslov insisted that Katia give him a detailed report on everything. When she told him about the conversation with the olive-complexioned comrade, Maslov's whole right cheek gathered into the concentric wrinkles of a lopsided smile.

"Yes, yes," he said, and turned his face away from Katia; "the tragedy of the *intelligentsia* is only half the trouble. There are other far greater tragedies. . . ."

On the first of August Katia opened the school. Barefooted little girls, their little pigtails tied up with string or bits of rag, and shaven-headed little boys in ragged shirts, came in softly and sat down quietly on the forms. Many had faces almost transparent and old-looking, so thin were they.

Katia spent the whole of the first day making friends with the children. She sat beside them on the forms, asked them questions, and encouraged them to talk of themselves. She had already gained some experience and knew how to interest children from the start. She took a book, opened it and said: "Here's a book—just white pages, black letters, grey lines. You can look at it from morning to night and see nothing else there. But if you learn to read and learn about history, geography, and arithmetic and many other things, a book like this will suddenly come to life. . . ."

She remembered with what curiosity the eyes of the little boys and girls used to glisten in her school in Vladimirskoye, especially when she told them about King Saltan:

"You begin to learn the A B C, then to write letters on the blackboard, then to spell out words and then read words out loud—it must be loud—one after the other from full stop to full stop. But suddenly, one fine day, the lines will disappear and instead of lines in a book you will see a blue sky and waves running up the beach and you will even hear the waves break on the shore and forty warriors will come out of the sea-foam in iron chain-mail and helmets, and they will be wet but jolly, and with them will be Uncle Chernomor with his long beard . . ."

Telling the same story here in Moscow, Katia felt that her words did not seem to reach the children's ears; the words wilted and faded in this class-room where half the panes in the windows were boarded up and the plaster on the walls had peeled off, exposing the bricks. The hands of the little girls were so thin that they could have passed through a napkin-ring, and the little boys were wrinkled and many had sores. They listened quietly, but in their eyes she saw only polite consideration. They were all thinking of other things.

During break the children went out into the playground, but only a few little girls began to hop on one leg and throw pebbles about, and two boys

started a gloomy quarrel. Most of the children sat down in the shade of the fence, where docks were growing, and just sat there. None of them had brought any food. They were all sons and daughters of workers living in this district and the fathers of many of them were away fighting. One of the boys, putting his hands on the ground, gazed up at a great cloud, like smoke, that hung over Pressnya. Katia sat down beside him and said in a business-like tone:

"You're Mitya Petrov, aren't you?"

"Aye."

"Where does your father work?"

"My dad's gone to the wars long ago."

"And your mummy?"

"Mum's at home; she's ill."

"Does your dad write home?"

"Naw."

"Why doesn't he write?"

"What should he write? There isn't much good news. When he went away he said to my mummy: 'I'll kill ten generals because of your rupturing yourself with hard work.' He's very bold, my dad."

"What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"I don't know. My mummy says we won't live through this winter."

The White hordes were advancing against Moscow; but even faster came the autumn that bore down upon the city. After a few sad golden days of Indian summer, cold winds came whistling down from the north, driving endless tiers of clouds before them.

There was no fuel for the little iron stove in the school. Katia went to the People's Commissariat for Education and complained to the olive-complexioned man, but he only nodded his head, never taking his feverish eyes off Katia's sweet face.

"I understand your concern, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, and admire your enthusiasm, but the fuel situation this winter is going to be terrible. Our Commissariat has been promised wood fuel, but the wood is in the Vologda district and must be brought here by horse transport. Still, don't give up, push hard wherever you can, you might get a little something. . . ."

The children came to school blue with cold, soaked through and through in their thin little coats and in old woollen jumpers of their mothers', fit only to be put on a scarecrow. Katia could not bear it any longer and made up her mind to a stroke of open robbery: she appointed a Saturday for breaking down the fence. The school caretaker, a deaf old man with a wooden leg, Katia and the children—nearly all the children had turned up—broke up the fence on a dark evening, with a stormwind whistling in their ears; they carried all the wood into the school and stacked it in the passage. The caretaker sawed up some of it and in the morning it was warm in the class-room, even if it was damp from the wet walls which steamed in the heat. The children were gay, and Katia told them all the things about solar energy she herself had learned only the evening before out of a useful book entitled, *The Forces of Nature.*

"Everything you see here, children, this platform, these forms, this fire in the stove and you yourselves, are all solar energy. To master this energy is one of the great tasks of mankind. That is why we must learn and learn, fight and fight. And now we are going to have a Russian lesson. The Russian

language is also a form of solar energy, and that is why we must master it properly."

During break the children always gave Katia all the news. The children knew everything that was going on in Moscow and in the Pressnya district, and even what was going on abroad in the land of the English lords. Katia learned a great deal from these stories. Thus she knew, before the papers brought the news, that the Whites had broken through at Orel and that wounded men were beginning to arrive from there. Two little girls had heard with their own ears in the house of the Mikulins—they had gone there on purpose—how Stepan Mikulin, a turner, who had just come home, very pale, with bullet wounds, had sat up in his bed although the doctor had strictly ordered complete rest, and had shouted at his wife and mother in a very ugly voice:

"There's treachery at the front! Treachery, I tell you! Give me pen and paper, I want to write to Lenin! The best proletarians shed their blood and lay down their lives because they don't want to let the White general take Moscow. It wasn't our fault that we lost Orel; it was treachery!"

Mitya Petrov, as he listened to these stories of the little girls, went as pale as a sheet and his eyes opened wider and wider with such an expression of agony in them that Katia sat down next to him on the form, and pressed his head to her breast. But he pulled away—no consolation, no caress could help him now.

It rained in torrents for several days and the Pressnya district was covered with a leaden, liquid mud that looked as if it was knee-deep. The children arrived at school completely unnerved by the terrible rumours that were spreading like a plague through the city. It was difficult to get them to concentrate on their lessons. Claudia, a little red-haired girl who had not done the sums in addition and subtraction, began to weep aloud during the arithmetic lesson. Katia rapped on the table with her pencil:

"Claudia, you must take yourself in hand immediately."

"I—I—ca—can't, please, Auntie Katia."

"Why, what has happened?"

"Mum says it doesn't matter, Claudia, she says, if you don't learn your arithmetic. . . ."

"Nonsense; your mother never said anything of the sort!"

"Yes, she said, it's all one; we came out of the muck and we're going back into it. The officers will trample us all to death with their horses."

At dusk Katia went to her illiteracy classes, walking along in the lee of the fences and walls to keep her feet as dry as possible. She paused in despair on the street crossings, not knowing how to get across in the bottomless mud. The classes were held in the house of a worker of the name of Chesnokov, who had been sent away to the front not very long ago as commissar; but of the ten women who normally attended the class, not one had turned up that evening. Chesnokov's wife, who had been married only six months, was pregnant. She was dreadfully thin and her face was all blotched with yellow spots. She said to Katia:

"Don't you come to us just now, wait a spell; we've other things to think about now and it will be easier for you, too."

She showed Katia a note her husband had sent her from the front line. It said:

Lyuba, if they take Tula, you must be prepared. We won't surrender Moscow save over the dead body of the last one of us. I am writing in a hurry. Maybe a good comrade-in-arms of mine, name of Roshchin, will come to see you. You

can trust him. He'll tell you everything. It would be good if our comrades would also hear what he has to tell. And they are to help him if he needs anything. I am alive and well; have learned to ride a horse, a thing I never expected.

"We are expecting this comrade Roshchin, we don't know why he hasn't come yet," said Chesnokov's wife, looking glumly at the dripping window. "When he comes, you can come along to hear what he has to say. I'll send the little girl to let you know. Who is this Roshchin, I wonder—not your husband by any chance?"

"No," answered Katia. "My husband was killed long ago."

When she got home again, she made a fire in the little iron stove, the 'bee', as these stoves were called, because they hummed like bees if fed with splinters of wood. Working men of the Pressnya had made it for Katia and set it up in her room, on the grounds that their schoolmistress would be much more efficient if she slept in a room with the chill off. Katia took off her shoes and stockings, which were soaked, and her skirt, which was spattered with mud. She washed her feet in the icy water, changed into dry things, filled the kettle and set it on the stove, took a piece of grey bread bristling with bits of straw out of her pocket, cut it up into small squares and laid it on a clean table-napkin beside a cup and a silver spoon. She did all this absent-mindedly, hardly knowing what she was doing. When she heard the kitchen door slam and Maslov's intolerably deliberate footsteps shuffle along the passage, she got up and knocked at his door.

"Ah, good evening, Yekaterina Dmitrievna. Sit down. Awful weather. You are getting prettier every day. Prettier and prettier. Yes, madam."

For some reason he was exceptionally angry that evening. To Katia's question as to what was going on in the city, why everyone was so jumpy, he twisted his thin lips into one of his most poisonous sneers, this time without turning his face away.

"You are interested in party news and what else? The front? We are being thrashed. What else can I say? They are beating us. And in Moscow the outlook is rosy and optimistic, as usual. The Communists are being mobilized bodily against Denikin. In Petrograd the houses of the *bourgeoisie* are being searched. It has been decided to close down all factories and workshops because of the fuel shortage. The latest, really most encouraging piece of news is that there is to be a re-registration of party cards, or, in other words, a cleansing of the Augean stable. And that, of course, will help us beat Denikin and Yudenich and Kolchak."

He shuffled about the room which was littered with cigarette-ends; from under the wet seams of his dirty trousers the loose ends of the tape fastenings on his long drawers trailed after him. As he paced to and fro he snapped his fingers, but they were so flabby that they would not even snap properly.

"That will help us to win, that will help," he repeated in a sneering tone. "All this is incomprehensible to you, of course. That's only natural. What is much more surprising is that it is incomprehensible to me as well. I can't understand anything any more. Socialism is built on the basis of a material civilization. Socialism is the highest form of the productivity of labour. That is so. The presence of a highly-developed industry is indispensable? Yes. The existence of a highly-developed and numerous working class is indispensable? Yes, again. So what? We have read Karl Marx, we have read him very carefully. All right then, let's proceed to a re-registration of party cards. We have not used up all our ammunition yet, not we."

That remained all the information Katia could get out of Maslov. In the Education Commissariat, where she went next day for further instructions, a sharp wind blew through the main passage where she had never noticed a draught before (it was doubtful whether a window had been broken or left open on purpose), but in spite of this there were whispering groups of officials everywhere, and Katia wandered in vain from office to office until at last a woman official, her nose hidden in a shabby fur collar, told her:

"Are you asleep, or what, citizen? Don't you know that we are to be evacuated to Vologda?"

Then all at once, just as suddenly, there was a sudden change in the atmosphere. In the morning, as soon as it was light, Katia hurried to the school. On Sadovaya street she had to stop and wait while armed workers marched past in the stiff mud, shattering the ice on the puddles under the giant, bare lime trees in which the already winterly wind moaned and wailed. The columns marched in close formation, striding slowly like men under a spell. Here and there harsh, untrained voices began to sing the *Internationale*. The bunting streamers they were carrying bore inscriptions hastily scrawled with crooked letters: "All to the struggle against Denikin's White bands!" "Up the proletarian revolution in the whole world!" "Down with the world *bourgeoisie*!" Ever fresh columns came out of the morning mist and vanished into it again. Katia looked at those faces—those bearded, emaciated, exhausted, dark faces—and it seemed that they all had something in common: determination, inexorability, victory over suffering.

In the school the children immediately told Dasha the news: Lenin had been in Pressnya yesterday, at the Engineering Works, and had inaugurated a Party Week.

Not far from Voronezh, Skuro's Kuban corps joined Mamontov's forces. That gave Mamontov six cavalry divisions against Budenny's two, and now he could afford to stop and wait for his pursuers. But Mamontov was a cautious man. He detached a force to strengthen the defences of Voronezh; then formed his two corps into three columns, and picked the battle-field on which to surround and wipe out the Red cavalry. The site chosen was an enormous field running up to a railway embankment; along the railway line an armoured train cruised to and fro, a huge steel tortoise mounting six-inch guns.

Budenny was bold but not rash. He received detailed information about all Mamontov's preparations and manœuvres. Some village girl with a crudely-scrawled note hidden under her shawl or in her hair, some wretched old grandmother wandering with a sack to collect scraps, passed easily through the White outposts. Who would bother about a lousy little girl? And any Cossack would think twice before he interfered with such an old woman. The messengers met Budenny's scouts and delivered their messages.

Budenny did not debouch into the wide field that was intended to witness his destruction, but halted in a spot between a thicket and a swamp. He gave orders that the horses should be fed and their shoes seen to—the horses were still shod on their forefeet only—ammunition stocks replenished and captured pork and beans, sweetened condensed milk, various biscuits and aromatic tobacco issued to the men, instead of the eternal wheat gruel, so that they should have a treat at their camp-fires. All these luxuries had been obtained from the "mobile supply dumps", as the troopers had named the opulent supply columns of the Whites, which were now on the move day and night out of Voronezh towards Mamontov's encampment. Budenny enjoined his men to take as

many as possible of the new carbines supplied to the Whites by the Japanese, as their own rifles were old and battered in many battles. He also wanted some of the enemy stationery and office requisites.

Protected by forest and swamp, they could safely take a good rest before the decisive operation. But the prospect of a hand-to-hand struggle with six Don divisions seemed so serious a matter to the troopers that few of them slept. They groomed their horses—not just anyhow, but until you could wipe them down with a white handkerchief and it would not be soiled; they mended their saddles and ground razor edges on their sabres. There was no singing, no playing of accordions in the squadrons, only philosophical arguments. As soon as the men saw a commissar, they would wave their hands and beckon: "Come here, you Communist, dear comrade, tell us, if we make an end to Mamontov, are we going to take Voronezh next? We'd get a lot of booty there." The commissar would reply that no orders had as yet been given about Voronezh. Then the men began to argue: was it possible for cavalry to capture a fortified zone? Some said it was possible if one tried hard enough, and others maintained that it could not be done.

Telegin's squadron was on guard duty on the edge of the swamp. To the south was the open plain across which White scouts scurried from time to time. It was known that one of Mamontov's three columns was grouped over there and the faint glow of their camp-fires was reflected in the clouds at night.

In this squadron, too, there was much talk about the coming battle in which such unusually great and powerful cavalry masses would clash. A veteran trooper, Gorbushin, said that in the year 'fourteen he had been in such a battle near Brody; an Austrian cavalry division of four regiments had made a dashing attack on a Russian division of light cavalry—but after that the Austrians had kept their cavalry well to the rear. They had charged down the slope of a hill, hoping to throw our men down into a hollow. But our side had dashed out of the hollow, riding uphill, four Cossack *sotnyas* with levelled lances on each flank; in the centre there had been lancers, they, too, with their lances, and with them the Akhtir hussars, very smart with yellow piping and yellow cap-bands. Our men had known that the Austrians coming down the hill at such a pace would not be able to turn round. As they had come closer they had begun to rein in their horses, not expecting us to go for them so fiercely. But it was too late! Our side charged them with those long lances, thrusting upwards, very conveniently; you stuck your lance in, let it go, pushed through their line, turned round and slashed with the sabre, but not at their shoulders, they had steel plates under their shoulder-straps, you had to slash across the body. There they all remained on the slope, the whole of the four regiments, cut to ribbons, pinned to the ground with lances—it was horrible to see!

Latugin—who did not like others to spin interesting yarns when he was present—interrupted the veteran trooper:

"Yes," he said, "there's been this and there's been that, it's all a matter of luck. Tell us rather how three Red Army men of ours captured a whole German battalion. Never heard of it? Aha! That's what you ought to know about, not all that old stuff. . . ."

"You tell us, Latugin," came from all sides. Latugin was squatting quite close to the fire and the glowing embers lit up his face, drawn and haggard after three weeks in the saddle. He, Gagin, and Zaduiviter had been posted to the commander's battalion from the beginning and were now troopers in the squadron.

"There was a fellow with us in the Tenth, a certain Lenka Shchur, and a greater cut-throat would be hard to find if you searched ever so long," began Latugin, clasping his hands over the pommel of his sabre sticking up straight from the ground between his knees. "Last autumn, while he was still on the strength of a Ukrainian brigade, he rode out on patrol with two of his comrades. As they rode along unsuspecting, they came upon a lot of Germans, as near a whole battalion as dammit. The Germans had made themselves comfortable there in the back of beyond and were cooking soup."

"That's a lie," said one of the listeners. "Germans don't cook soup in hidden places."

Latugin gave the man a black look:

"Shall I explain why they were cooking soup? Very good. These Germans were making for home, because there was a revolution in their country. In the Ukraine all the villages were up in arms; they had set up machine-guns all over the place, the Germans had nowhere to go and they were hungry. Is that clear now? Before the Germans could move, Lenka got a clean white foot-rag out of his haversack, stuck it on the end of his sabre and rode up to them. 'Surrender,' he said, 'you are surrounded by a large force of cavalry, we wouldn't even have to blood our sabres, we could just trample you to death with our horses.' One of them knew Russian and he translated what Lenka had said. The commander of the German battalion, a big corporal, answered Lenka: 'I doubt very much,' he said, 'that you are speaking the truth.' And to that Lenka said: 'You doubt my word; very well then, get on your horse and come with us to the unit, there they will give you decent conditions of surrender.' The Germans discussed this very seriously among themselves and the commander said: '*Gutmorgen*, all right, we'll go with you, three of us to each one of you, and if you try any funny business we'll do you in on the spot.' Lenka said to him: 'Excuse me, there can be no funny business, you are dealing with champions of the revolution.' So they rode away together to headquarters and there they began negotiations with the Germans about surrender. The Germans wanted a free passage to the railway and ten hundred-weight of wheat. Our fellows wanted them to give up their arms and their two guns. The Germans wouldn't give way and our fellows wouldn't give way. But Lenka hung around there all the time and then he said to the brigade commander: 'Comrade Brigadier, they are hungry, that's why they are so obstinate. Let me do a little propaganda, give orders to let them have some good bacon and wheaten bread.' He said nothing about vodka officially, the devil, but the quartermaster was a pal of his, and he wangled a quart from him and sat down with the Germans in the house, sliced some bread and bacon for them, poured out vodka and then began to talk about this and that, how the people in the Ukraine were eating and drinking of the best and how they were very friendly; then he praised the Germans for having overthrown the Kaiser. Although they had no interpreter this time, the Germans understood everything: he thumped them on the back with his fist, took them by the ears, kissed each one in turn. Soon there were only two men left at table, Lenka and the German corporal. Lenka was doing his best, but the German only laughed and shook his finger at him. A messenger came from the staff to inquire how things were going and Lenka answered: 'Lousy. The corporal is hard to convince; we need another quart!' Well, when they had finished the second quart, Lenka was alone at the table. The Germans stayed the night, and in the morning the corporal left his men behind as hostages—they had such hangovers they could not have climbed on to a horse, anyway—and he and Lenka rode away together. By evening he brought back the whole battalion, about

four hundred men, under a red flag, he liked Lenka's propaganda that much."

Just as Latugin had finished his story—so much better a yarn than Gorbushin's story of the battle of Brody—and the Red Army men had laughed together, some showing all their teeth in a grin, some wiping away their tears, some only moaning and waving their hands, Roshchin came up to the fire, bent down to Latugin's ear and said:

"Find Gagin and Zaduiviter and come to my tent with them."

In the white mist of the morning that lay thickly over the wide field five horsemen were riding at a fast gallop. Roshchin rode a bay mare with close-cropped mane; half a length in front of him, on a black stallion, was little Dundich, a Serb, commander of one of Budenny's squadrons. On his irreconcilable path Dundich had found a new mother-country and had come to love with all the passion of his artless, light-hearted and utterly fearless nature this unfathomable Russia and her unfathomable revolution. He and Roshchin wore light-grey officers' great-coats with golden shoulder-straps; behind them, urging their horses forward, rode Latugin, Gagin, and Zaduiviter, in short fur coats with n.c.o. shoulder-straps, their cockaded caps jauntily crammed down on one ear.

Their job was to ride into Voronezh, find out the position of the artillery, the strength of the infantry and cavalry troops in the city, and finally to hand General Shkuro, commander of the defending forces, a sealed dispatch containing a letter from Budenny.

Dundich loved life and liked to play a dangerous game with it, and in these invigorating October days, when his muscles tautened of their own accord under the tunic as he breathed in the fresh, prickly morning mist full of all kinds of good smells, doing nothing chafed him intolerably. He volunteered to hand Shkuro the sealed dispatch. Then he went in search of Roshchin and said to him:

"Vadim Petrovich, you are just the man for a little mission that's on. You know all about the way officers behave and all the rest of it. Would you care to go with me to Voronezh? It'll only take a day and it will be a nice ride. Budenny promised to let us have his own horses Petushok and Aurora."

An absurd question: would he care to go? The only thing that displeased Roshchin was the phrase about "the way officers behaved". But it was a wise precaution and he spent the whole evening teaching his comrades such things as how "other ranks" jump to attention, salute and answer questions, or how a Volunteer officer must look: Drozdovski's men, for instance, affected an ironical expression and tended to wear pince-nez in imitation of their late chief; with Kornilov's men the proper thing was a lack-lustre stare and an expression of contemptuous disillusionment; Markov's followers were distinguished by their filthy great-coats and filthier language.

It was arranged that if they were stopped and questioned they would say, "We are bringing a secret message to Voronezh from the commander of the Volunteer reserve regiment just arrived from the south and now encamped near Kastornaya."

They rode three hours at a sharp pace before they saw, in the pale light breaking every now and then for a short time through the leaden clouds, the domes, the watch-towers, the red roofs of Voronezh lying before them. During their ride they had not been stopped by any patrols; those patrols who had watched them through field-glasses had seen five horsemen galloping towards the city and had paid them no further attention. The first check they met was on the bridge. The bridge was a makeshift wooden structure and it was guarded. Men in peakless caps, men of respectable aspect, with beards long and broad, dressed in white sheepskins with the skin side out—such as women wear in the Ukraine—were pacing to and fro on the bridge. On the far side a group of officer-cadets were smoking beside a row of bridgehead trenches. Dundich reined in his horse, dismounted and began to tighten his girths.

"It is hardly desirable to show faked passes here," he said in an undertone. "The river is in spate; to ford it somewhere else would mean wetting ourselves up to our necks and that would be even less desirable. We shall have to cross by the bridge."

"All right, we'll bully our way through," said Latugin gloomily.

Zaduiviter suddenly burst out laughing:

"Comrades, look! Why, those are priests on the bridge, a long-maned brigade."

"At the walk and make cheerful faces, forward!" said Dundich, and sprang into the saddle with catlike agility. The bearded men on the bridge began to shout all at once: "Halt! Halt!" Dundich rode towards them, holding his reins tight and tickling Petushok with his spurs. But the defenders of the bridge raised such a hullabaloo and brandished their rifles so violently that Dundich's horse began to fidget and angrily swish its tail. There was nothing for it but to pull up. Several hands were stretched out to seize Dundich's bridle, but Latugin pushed his horse in between and shouted:

"Are you daft? How dare you touch His Excellency's bridle! Who are you anyway? Show your papers!"

"Hold your tongue! Get back!" Dundich told Latugin calmly, throwing the words over his shoulder with a smile that showed a row of white teeth under his little moustache, and bent down from the saddle towards the bearded men.

"You want a pass for this bridge? I haven't got one. I am Lieutenant-Colonel Dundich and this is my escort. Does that satisfy you? Thank you."

Laughing, he sent Petushok forward so forcefully that the horse snorted, reared up, showing its grey-velvet belly and leapt past the bearded men, who only just managed to jump out of the way. But Dundich immediately reined it in and rode on at a walk. On the far side of the bridge the cadets threw away their cigarettes. Stumbling over the skirts of their long great-coats they ran to the trenches and directed the barrels of two machine-guns towards the five horsemen. The commander of the bridgehead, a tall officer with a slack bewhiskered face, shouted in a lazy drawl but such an insolent tone that Roshchin gritted his teeth with disgust:

"Hey, you there on the bridge, dismount, get out your papers. At the count of two I open fire."

Dundich said to Roshchin from the corner of his mouth:

"There's nothing for it, we shall have to charge them."

His hand moved towards the hilt of his sabre, but Roshchin arrested it with a quick gesture.

"Teplov!" he shouted. "Leave those machine-guns alone. It's me, Vadim Roshchin."

With that he quietly dismounted and walked forward alone across the bridge, leading his horse by the bridle. The officer was the same Vasska Teplov, fool, drunkard and braggart, who had served in Roshchin's regiment and whom Roshchin had one day seriously promised to give a thrashing for

malicious gossip. Teplov peered suspiciously at the approaching Roshchin and slowly returned his pistol to the holster.

"I didn't know you at first. Matter of fact I'm slightly squiffy. Good morning."

Roshchin shook hands with him without removing his glove.

"What are you doing here, Teplov? What's this outfit of beards and paunches that you've got yourself, you bloody idiot? You ought to be commanding a regiment by now. Been reduced in rank again, I suppose? For drunkenness, of course?"

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Teplov, mumbling because there was a black hole under his moustache in place of his two front teeth. "Vadim Roshchin, of all people!" The purple bags under his eyes wobbled as he spoke. "Where did you come from? We put you down as a deserter."

"Thank you for nothing," Roshchin gave him a hard, hot look, and Teplov, very uncomfortable under that look, decided to drop the subject of desertion. "You seem to have had a very good opinion of me. I was in Odessa all the time, on Grishin-Almazov's staff. And now I'm chief of staff to the Fifty-first regiment of reserve. Perhaps you'd like to see my papers after all?" he asked challengingly, then turned round and beckoned: "Dundich, come here; you needn't dismount."

Teplov only sniffed angrily; he had always been afraid of Roshchin.

"Stop playing the fool, Roshchin. I don't like the way you always talk to me. Where are you going?"

"To General Shkuro. We have come to help you out with our regiment. They say you're dreadfully scared of Budenny here."

"Yes, the whole place is a bloody mess-up. The entire civilian population has been mobilized; all the retired generals, all the civil service muckers, even the priests have been called in and now I've got them on my hands."

Roshchin took out a case full of foreign cigarettes captured the day before with a staff supply column. Teplov took one and blew out the aromatic smoke with an air of profound enjoyment.

"Good cigarettes," he remarked; "real imported stuff. Where on earth d'you fellows get these? We get only *makhorka*. Gives you an awful heart-burn. Give me a couple more, there's a good chap."

"Well, Vasska, and how are things with you?"

"Lousy; no money. Fed up with everything." He squinted under his eyebrows at Dundich who was just dismounting and at the three grim troopers behind him. "If you counted on having a good time in Voronezh, nothing doing, gentlemen. The red-bellied swine have taken everything away. No cafés, no bawdy houses, no place where you can have a little fun or a rest."

"Here," said Roshchin "let me introduce Lieutenant-Colonel Dundich."

"Captain Teplov."

They saluted each other, Dundich puckering his brown, quick-eyed face in a laugh.

"What a pity," he said. "We really hoped we could have a good time for once. We've even brought some money."

"Well, of course you can find girls in private lodgings and you can get old vodka too, and the black-marketeers can even produce champagne—at five hundred roubles a bottle. What do you think of that?" Teplov's inflamed, permanently watering eyes expressed indignation. "The military authorities treat these black-marketeers as though they were saints or something. The saviours of the country! In Tambov we drank a bit, you understand, and the bill was absolutely vast, and I hadn't a bean to pay it with, so I punched the fellow on the nose—and was reduced in rank. You know, Vadim, morale's pretty low in our lot. After all, we are giving our lives. Our youth goes by. And what have we to expect in the future? Life in ravaged Moscow? No money. You're lucky; you're a university graduate, you can throw away this lousy uniform and turn yourself into a lecturer or something. But I—what can I do? We won't even be permitted to keep a proper army when all this is over."

"Captain, what you need is a little distraction," said Dundich. "Let's go to town. All we've got to do is to hand over the dispatch to the general and then the night is ours. I'll be responsible for the champagne."

"Devilish bad luck!" exclaimed Teplov, and scratched his ear. "I can't just leave my post without any reason."

"Why not hand over to your senior N.C.O.," said Roshchin. "You can say afterwards that you suspected us of being Red scouts in disguise. If the worst comes to the worst, all they can say is that you are a fool."

Teplov opened his toothless mouth and roared with laughter, then wiped his eyes and said:

"That's an idea! So I wanted to arrest you fellows!"

"Of course."

"Corporal Gvozdev!" shouted Teplov in a crisp, resonant voice, turning towards the trench where the cadets were again sitting by their machine-guns and looking very bored, and when the senior corporal, an eighteen-year-old lad with insolent blue eyes, came up and gave a precise salute, elbow level with shoulder, Teplov handed over to him and ordered his horse.

On the way to the city, Teplov, fidgeting with impatience in his saddle, told them everything they wanted to know: what troops and how much artillery there was in Voronezh and where.

"There's a hell of a panic here, you know. Kutepov has had some sort of reverse at Orel, so here they've all filled their trousers. It was different in the old days. Remember the Icy Campaign, Vadim? But now we've all lost heart. Yes, something is gone, the old ardour's lost. And then the *muzhiks* round here are beasts, they make wolf's eyes at us. General Kutepov is right. They say he told the Commander-in-Chief that Moscow could be taken on condition that we give the people a land reform and plenty of gallows. Not a single telegraph pole should remain empty. Hang them as they were hanged after Pugachev, whole villages at a time. However, all this is boring stuff. I've got a little address, two sisters, most obliging young ladies, play the guitar and sing gipsy romance fit to drive you crazy. D'you know what—let's go to them straight away."

Teplov was evidently very well known; the patrols they met merely saluted him and never even looked at Dundich and Roshchin. In the main street they reined in their horses at the cast-iron façade of a hotel. Teplov dismounted, stretched his legs, and said with an embarrassed air:

"I don't want to make myself too conspicuous; I'd better wait for you here. The general staff office is on the second floor. Don't be too long, gentlemen." Then sternly, to the pockmarked Kuban Cossack with Tartar whiskers who guarded the entrance: "Stand aside, you clod!"

Dundich and Roshchin climbed up the draughty cast-iron stairs. Budenny's dispatch was addressed to "Major-General Shkuro. Personal. Secret." They decided to deliver it through the general's aide. The office was in the

former restaurant of the hotel. As Dundich and Roshchin entered, two officers came in through another door. One of them was tall and heavy, with luxuriant side-whiskers framing his coarsely handsome face. He walked on crutches which wrinkled his light-grey great-coat under his armpits. Roshchin recognized him—this was Mamontov. The other man was dressed in a brown Circassian coat. His high-cheekboned face was inflamed, the nose turned up, with flaring nostrils; his whole expression was one of coarse brutality. This was General Shkuro. Coming in, they stopped near a table, where a little staff officer in riding-breeches as wide as a bat's wings was dictating something to a pretty blonde who threw up her elbows as she banged the typewriter.

Roshchin indicated Shkuro to Dundich and asked: "What shall we do now?" At that moment Mamontov turned round and, seeing two strange officers, said in a deep voice:

"Come closer, gentlemen."

Roshchin stood to attention and remained near the door while Dundich approached Shkuro and said:

"I have a dispatch for Your Excellency."

Shkuro was standing with his back to Dundich; he did not turn round, only jerked his strong red neck into which his gold-laced collar cut deep. Without looking Dundich in the face he asked, drawing his lips back from his teeth like a wolf:

"From whom?"

"From the commander of the Fifty-first reserve regiment, just arrived on the right bank of the river with orders to hold themselves at your disposal."

"Fifty-first? Never heard of it," said Shkuro no less unpleasantly, but now he turned round, took the dispatch and twisted it this way and that in his hand. "Who is the commander?"

Roshchin, standing near the door, felt a chill run down his spine. He put his hand into the pocket of his great-coat and gripped the butt of his revolver. A silly, clumsy and useless business it had turned out to be. Dundich would blurt out some fancy name, and then it would be all up with them. A pity. They could have taken back precious information to Budenny.

"The Fifty-first reserve regiment is commanded by Count Chambertin," Dundich answered without a moment's thought, and his gay glance caught Shkuro's crooked, jaundiced, sleepless eye. "May we go now, Excellency?"

"Wait a minute, Lieutenant-Colonel, wait a minute," Mamontov said, and turned awkwardly round on his crutches. "Seems a familiar name somehow. Let me see. . . ." His handsome fleshy face was suddenly distorted with pain; the clumsy movement had disturbed his leg in its plaster cast—the leg that had been pierced by a bullet the week before when he was escaping from Budenny in a *troika*. "Damnation" he muttered, "damnation! You can go, Lieutenant-Colonel."

Dundich saluted, turned smartly on his heel and went to the door. Roshchin saw how Shkuro said something to Mamontov, whose face was still screwed up with pain, and began slowly to tear open the dispatch. The dispatch contained a letter signed by Semyon Budenny, the words of which were known to Dundich and Roshchin. It said:

"*On October 24th, at 6 a.m. I shall be in Voronezh. I order you, General Shkuro, to parade all counter-revolutionary forces in the market-place where you used to hang working men. I also order you to lead this parade in person.*"

As Roshchin and Dundich walked down the iron stairs they passed a file of cadets armed with rifles who were coming up. Roshchin thought that little

Dundich who preceded him with his nose in the air and his spurs jingling, was walking too slowly. Mere silly and superfluous bravado!

Up there on the second floor somebody cried out sharply, hoarsely. Dundich and Roshchin reached the exit and Teplov rushed at them from the pavement; his flabby face with its drooping moustache was athirst for champagne, songs and women.

"Thank God you're back at last! Let's go!"

He put one foot in the stirrup and hopped about on the other beside the restless horse. Roshchin was already in the saddle, but Dundich took out his case and lit a cigarette with slightly trembling dry brown fingers; then he threw away the burning match, took the bridle from Latugin and said sharply:

"Into the first turning on the left, gallop!"

The first turning was only ten houses away; Latugin, Gagin and Zaduiviter, clattering over the cobblestones, were the first to make it. Teplov reined in his horse, turned round and wailed:

"Not that way, gentlemen, it's the next turning to the right!"

But his horse carried him away to the left with all the others. As Roshchin turned the corner he looked back and saw the cadets come running out of the hotel, darting searching glances right and left and working the bolts of their rifles.

"Roshchin, what the devil . . .?" Teplov shouted almost in tears, as his horse began to gallop together with all the others. Dundich pushed his own mount against Teplov's in full career, leant over, seized Teplov's wrist in a firm grip, snatched his pistol out of its holster, jerking hard to break the lanyard that held it, and unseating Teplov from his horse. "If you want champagne, follow me!" shouted Dundich, showing his teeth in a grin.

Now Dundich and Roshchin and the three troopers were racing along the crooked lane at full speed, past cottages and hedges, and old lime-trees which brushed their caps with their bare branches. Behind them came the crackle of shots. Maintaining their pace, they galloped across a field but slowed down as they approached the bridge and rode up to it at a walk. Dundich, patting his horse's steaming neck, called:

"Corporal Gvozdev!" and when Corporal Gvozdev came out, concealing a cigarette in his palm, he said: "Captain Teplov asked me to tell you that he will be back in half an hour. We shall be here again on the morning of the twenty-fourth, so don't threaten us with machine-guns again."

"Yes, sir!"

When they had left the bridge far behind and it was dusk and they let their sweating, stumbling horses rest awhile, Dundich said to Roshchin:

"I am sorry, and I owe you and these comrades an apology. I've often reproached myself tor this sort of swank. But danger intoxicates me. It sharpens my wits. I feel in love with myself, and forget my objective and my responsibilities. And afterwards I am full of remorse. If these comrades dismounted now, pulled me off my horse and thrashed me, I wouldn't mind, I should be relieved even."

Roshchin threw back his head and burst out laughing—he, too, felt the need of snapping the long and depressing tension of the day.

"You're right, Dundich, you deserve a good walloping, especially for that last cigarette in the doorway."

Budenny's calculations proved correct. Mamontov and Shkuro, having read the letter handed to them personally with such unprecedented audacity,

were beside themselves with fury. But, they argued, if Budenny wrote like that, naming even the day and the hour for the assault on Voronezh, he must be pretty sure of himself. That again meant that he must have a reason for such confidence. The generals quite lost their sense of balance.

Budenny based his plan for the defeat of the White cavalry on a mass counter-attack in which his entire concentrated force was to fall on one after the other of the three columns into which the Don and Kuban divisions had been split up in the attempt to encircle him. Hitherto these columns had delayed their attack and had contented themselves with probing the Red resistance. Budenny was sure that now they would throw themselves on him without further delay.

During the night of the nineteenth of October, scouts reported that the enemy was moving. The hour of bloody battle had come. Budenny, bending over the map by candlelight with his divisional commanders, said: "Here we go!" and the order went out to every division, regiment and squadron: "To horse!"

Field telephones began to ring in dark cottages, in open fields, in trenches camouflaged with twigs and hay, in haystacks. The telephone operators heard in their headphones the word they had all been awaiting hour by hour. Dispatch riders leapt into the saddle, found their stirrups in full gallop and vanished in the darkness. The troopers who had slept in their clothes during this windless night, black as the grave, were awakened by long-drawn cries: "To horse!" They jumped to their feet, shook the sleep out of their eyes, rushed to their tethered horses, saddled them hastily, and pulled the girths so tight that the horses reeled.

The squadrons assembled in the field at the shouts of command, each unit finding its allotted place in the dark. For a long time they waited, watching the sky for the first splash of light. The horses breathed heavily. The piercing cold crept in under padded tunics, fur jackets and thin great-coats. No one talked, no one smoked.

Then the first plop of a shot came to their ears. The commissars now spoke to the men: "Comrades, Semyon Mikhailovich Budenny has ordered you to smash the enemy. The hirelings of the bourgeoisie are eager to reach Moscow. Death to them, glory to our revolutionary arms!"

The dawn brought little light. There was a thick mist. The mass of Budenny's eight regiments, strung out over more than half a mile, pounded heavily along, stirrup to stirrup. In the thick fog each man could see only his comrade on the left, his comrade on the right, and the croup of the horse in front bobbing up and down in a milky haze.

The enemy was close and coming closer. Already they could hear the rat-tat of random shots. The troopers bent forward and urged their horses on, eager to catch sight of the foe. Then a shout ran through the whole mass of men, growing in volume and in fury. The vanguard had sighted the enemy.

Shadows of mounted men appeared in the fog, but they were turning their horses' heads. The hearts of the Don Cossacks had failed them. They had met their match at last. The devil had driven them so far away from their native villages to fight these Red fiends. They heard the field hum and the earth tremble as Budenny's men came on, and they knew that such a terrific force would sweep away horses and men, break up their ranks, cut them down and heap up mountains of bloody corpses. If at least they had something to fight for! The Cossacks now put their trust in their fleet-footed Don steeds

drew rein and turned round. Only a few of the boldest, drunk with past successes, cut into Budenny's ranks slashing from the shoulder right and left.

But the speed of the Don horses was of no avail. Those who had already turned tail ran into those who were still striving forward. White fought White. Budenny's men slashed and trampled and drove them before them. Fierce shouts filled the air. All that could be seen in the fog were riders lying on their horse's necks and other riders overtaking them, swinging sideways in the saddle for a slash of the sabre. Frenzied horses squealed and bit fiercely at whatever they could seize with their teeth.

By now the whole Cossack force had turned tail. But soon they found their way barred by machine-guns, which took them in the flank and forced them to swerve. Then fresh squadrons of Budenny's cavalry fell upon the scattering groups of fleeing Cossacks, who had lost all semblance of order.

The pursuit of Mamontov's two divisions went on until full daylight. Thousands of dead bodies dressed in blue Cossack *beshmets* and wide Cossack trousers with red stripes down the seams lay on the field and riderless horses galloped about in panic.

By noon Budenny's troopers were already crowding round the excellent field kitchens, made of pure copper, which they had captured from the enemy. In the kettles the usual wheat gruel with bacon was being cooked; but this time there was added macaroni, rice, beans, ham, and many other things the cooks thought would improve the taste of the dinner.

Having eaten their fill, the troopers smoked and bragged to each other. Here a man showed a silver-inlaid cavalry sabre captured in battle, there a Japanese carbine, or a thoroughbred Don racer, a bay with white stockings and the tell-tale bald spot.

The excitement of battle did not die down. Now the accordions began to strike up, voices rose in song, and here and there with the jingling of the balalaikas came the sound of stamping feet and whistling as a man stepped into the ring, tapped his heel, spread his arms like a swan's wings and began to beat the earth in the rapid tattoo of a dance.

But soon the trumpets blared again. There was more fighting, more hard work ahead. Budenny, in his black *burka* and tall silver-grey hat, rode past at a walk with his two divisional commanders. Again the regiments closed their ranks; eight red flags were unfurled and swayed high over their heads.

The crushing defeat of the first White column compelled Mamontov to give up the encirclement of Budenny. His original plan was frustrated and Budenny immediately exploited the confusion in the enemy ranks. The following dawn Budenny's men attacked Mamontov's second column, which was no stauncher than the first, and retreated to the railway line under the protection of the armoured train. The armoured train steamed out of Voronezh, rattling heavily over the bridges. Under its steel turrets, officer-gunners manning its six-inch guns and heavy machine-guns gazed into the slowly dissolving fog. From time to time a flag-waving signaller appeared on the track ahead, and the train stopped for a minute to take the message. It was thus that the train crew learnt of the parlous position in which the second column found itself as it was driven towards the railway line by Budenny's troopers.

The armoured train put on speed. The hoarse whistle of its engine screamed without pause, heralding the arrival of succour to the hard-pressed second column.

The gunners watching through the loopholes of the turret in the fog saw

a vague shadow quickly approaching the armoured train along the permanent way. The train stopped and reversed, one of the guns opening fire at the rapidly nearing shadow. But it was too late. A huge goods engine, running without a crew, crashed head on at full speed into the armoured train. The goods engine was hung with dynamite charges in front and along the sides. The shock of the explosion touched off the shells inside the armoured train. The train reared up in a spurt of earth, sand, flame, smoke and steam, then turned over and hurtled down the embankment, crushing and dragging down in its fall the whole invincible steel tortoise.

Mamontov's second column now fled towards Voronezh. The third column retreated in the same direction without firing a shot, but was forced to give battle on the fourth day of this unprecedented slaughter and was completely annihilated, scattering the hills and dales for miles around with the bodies of its dead.

Badly battered, the casualties in some units amounting to half their strength, all the Don and Kuban divisions withdrew beyond the river. Early in the morning on the twenty-fourth, Budenny's main forces followed them there. The wooden bridge which had been occupied by the priests' squad and by Teplov's cadets was abandoned undamaged. A few batteries maintained a desultory fire from the city, throwing up columns of earth and water. Budenny rode up to the bridge and saw that it was a makeshift contraption. He summoned the bandsmen with their silver instruments, and ordered them to cross the bridge to the other side, and play the gayest music they knew, marches and dances. The students of the *conservatoire*, still dressed as they had been when captured, in short coats with yellow-and-red badges on their shoulders, ran across to the far bank. Scarcely had the last of them crossed when a shell struck and destroyed the bridge. Half-dead with fright, the bandsmen blared away on their silver instruments to the accompaniment of bursting shells.

Each trooper was now given a shell to carry. "Forward!" shouted the commissars and commanders, and at the head of their squadrons they plunged into the ice-cold water that boiled and spurted up as shell after shell burst in the river. In the deep water the men slipped from their saddles and clung to their horses' manes. Gun-teams galloped into the water and dragged their guns over along the bottom. Soaked and angry men on dripping horses attacked Voronezh with savage fury. But Shkuro and Mamontov refused battle again and withdrew hastily beyond the Don, towards Kastornaya.

The destruction of the best White cavalry units and the recapture of Voronezh was one of the first operations foreseen in the brilliant military plan drawn up by the new leaders of the southern front.

Copies of this plan, printed on blue paper and signed by Stalin, were put into the hands of all army, corps, divisional, brigade and regimental commanders. It contained detailed provisions, in a form any private could understand, for the operations of all units fighting in the south, from the regions of Orel and Kromy, (where a special task force under Sergo Ordzhonikidze had defeated and forced to retreat Denikin's battered Guards under Kutepov, the general who had sworn to be the first to enter Moscow) to the operations near Voronezh and Kastornaya, (where Budenny's corps was given the job of cutting the White front at the junction of the Don army and the Volunteer army) and down to the capture of Rostov-on-the-Don, the road to which lay through the breach now formed across the proletarian Donets coalfields. Everything had been foreseen in the new plan.

It was a surprise for everyone: for those who were waiting in their shabby hotels with their trunks packed, convinced that by the New Year the French would bring champagne, oysters and perhaps even Parma violets to Moscow. It was a surprise for those in Paris, who had formerly been kept waiting for hours on end in the antechamber of the ruler of Europe, but who had recently been walking, with head erect and a constitutional Russia practically in the bag, straight into Georges Clemenceau's study, where a fire was crackling on the hearth and the little round-shouldered, grey-browed dictator was sitting bent over a project to ensure churchyard quiet throughout the world before he stood up and the Russian could squeeze his square fingers in triumph. Finally, it was a surprise for Denikin himself, who had long since given up playing whist on Fridays and, being as full of human frailty as the rest of us, had seriously begun to believe that he was a leader specially chosen by the powers above. One and all they were amazed when the Bolsheviks spat on their hands and did something quite incomprehensible: in the middle of a typhus epidemic, a famine and complete economic ruin, they suddenly organized a mighty counter-offensive that blew sky-high the whole international policy of suffocating and dismembering Russia, that vast country which still remained an enigma for the Western mind.

The source of the enthusiasm of the Russian people was an enigma. Ideas of universal happiness and of a just social order, which seemed to have been buried for ever under the world war's mountain of corpses, had suddenly reappeared, like seeds of a tree of the Garden of Eden blown away by a storm to that ruined, poverty-stricken Russia where the *muzhiks* still told each other fairy tales about Ivan the Fool, Baba-Yaga the witch and the magic carpet, and where blind old men and women still sang lengthy epic poems about the battles, feasts and weddings of heroes.

Such ideas were as strong and elastic as steel blades when once they penetrated the minds of the peoples of Russia. The *muzhiks* who told fairy-tales, and the workers from half-destroyed factories which had long ceased to smoke, had conquered typhus, famine and complete economic chaos and were smashing and pursuing Denikin's first-rate army; they had held up at the very gates of Petrograd and driven back into Esthonia the shock army of General Yudenich; they had smashed and scattered into the Siberian steppe a great army led by Kolchak whom they seized and shot; they were beating and throwing back the Japanese in the Far East. Inspired by Lenin's ideas—by ideas only, for there was nothing to eat and nothing to wear in Russia—they believed that they were stronger than anyone else in the whole world and that on the ruins of their poverty-stricken country they would in the shortest possible time build up a just communist society.

CHAPTER XX

IT SEEMED TO Katia that her stomach could surely not be larger by now than a little purse for small change. All it could take now was four ounces of bread, a small piece of boiled fish and a few spoonfuls of soup. The worst thing was the nuisance of her skirts. They just fell off her and she had neither the material nor the time to alter them. To make up for this her eyes were now twice as big as they had been last autumn when Matryona had fattened her on purpose with greasy pancakes.

The little girls in the school sometimes said to her, affectionately puckering their hungry little mouths:

"Auntie Katia, how pretty you are."

This pleased Katia because her whole life now lay in the future. Her only keepsake, the emerald ring, the little green fire Vadim had given her, had been lost back in Vladimirskoye. The dear shadows peopling the old house in Old Stable Lane no longer haunted her. But the future, towards which all the hopes and plans of a people tormented by hunger, cold, want and war were striving, seemed to Katia a wide road sparkling like glass under the sun between green fields and steaming lakes with great mournful trees around them, and the road led to the outlines of a beautiful, rich, intricate city, bluish in the distance, where everyone would find happiness.

Once Katia told the children about it during lessons. The children listened and were very quiet. The sentimental little girls were specially pleased because the road ran between green fields where one could chase butterflies and pick bunches of tiny starry flowers. The boys found the story unsatisfactory: Katia had not mentioned trains rushing about in every direction across those fields, past signals, over latticed bridges and through tunnels, nor did she mention great factory chimneys merrily belching clouds of smoke. They were all agreed, however, that the city of the future was of course blue, with houses that touched the clouds, terribly fast trams, swings on all the boulevards and booths in which rolls and sausages could be had for the asking. But when Katia asked: "What about ice cream?" she found that none of the children had ever tasted ice cream, or perhaps had tasted it once when they were quite small but had forgotten what it was like.

Katia was compelled to husband her strength. Not long before she had carried a pail full of slops out into the yard and felt she could not carry it any farther; she had to put it down and lean against the wall to overcome her weakness as the world went dark before her eyes. Fortunately the lectures about art never materialized: Moscow was emptied of its people and one could walk from the Arbat to Strastnaya Place without meeting anyone. But on the other hand one could now read victorious war communiqués in *Izvestiya* every day. The Red armies had breached the White front at Kastornaya and were pouring through in a broad stream towards the Donets basin, while peasant risings flared up in the rear of the enemy. The end of the war and of their sufferings was in sight.

One evening at eight o'clock Katia was sitting in her room without lighting the lamp. The fire in the stove gave enough light through the half-open door. Sitting on a low footstool, Katia carefully fed the fire with chips of wood; they flared up brightly and crackled cheerfully, being part of that same solar energy about which Katia had told the children in school.

She was reading *Crime and Punishment*. Good God, how hopeless life had been in those days! How terrible the night Svidrigailov spent in the wooden restaurant on the Bolshoy Prospect! It was the same restaurant to which Bessonov had taken Katia on that one occasion when she had been alone with him; perhaps they had been in the very room in which Svidrigailov marked time hour after hour although he already knew that he would not be able to conquer his horror and disgust of life.

That curse was now lifted, burned, scattered into the wind. Now one could sit like this and calmly read about the past, put more chips on the fire and believe in happiness.

From the passage came the sound of many feet—Maslov was evidently having another conference in his room; these last few days all sorts of people were always coming to see him at dusk and their angry voices could be heard even in Katia's room. However late it was, Maslov, when he had seen his guests to the door, always knocked softly on Katia's:

"What, in bed already? Aren't you ashamed of yourself to go to bed so early? A modern woman like you? Ts—ts—ts."

He would rattle the door-handle with great persistence while Katia shook with indignation, but Maslov was so obstinate and conceited that he was quite capable of standing at her door until next morning.

"Yekaterina Dmitrievna, all I want is to sit a while, quietly, near your little stove. My nerves are all to pieces. Let me come in, in a comradely spirit," he would say.

It would have been silly to give no answer, and Katia finally always opened the door. He would sit down in front of the stove, put on log after log, although every such log was more precious than gold, and smiling enigmatically and stretching out his narrow little hands to the heated iron of the stove, he would argue about the attraction of the sexes, a force as mighty as the cosmos. Beauty consisted in obedience to this attraction. Everything else was loathsome puritanism. Katia, being beautiful, lonely and "free from billeting" as he put it, he was unshakably convinced that sooner or later she would undoubtedly admit him to her bed.

This evening, having read her fill of Dostoyevski, she was listening with apprehension to the hubbub in Maslov's room, to the voices raised in anger and the sound of things falling to the floor, as though someone was throwing books about. There could be no doubt that Maslov would turn up to-day to soothe his nerves.

There was a scratching at the door and a childish treble whispered through the keyhole: "Auntie Katia, are you there?" It was Claudia, in enormous felt boots tied on with string.

"Ma Chesnokov sent me; she's got that Roshchin in her house, from the front."

"Is it very cold outside?"

"Dreadfully, Auntie Katia, the wind blows into your eyes so, if only it would snow, but it won't and won't snow. What a horrid winter. It's nice and warm here, Auntie Katia."

Katia didn't feel at all like going out into the cold and dragging herself all the way to the Chesnokovs in the Pressnya, but the unavoidable nocturnal conversation with Maslov seemed to her even more exhausting. She put on her coat and wrapped her head and shoulders in a warm shawl. Very cautiously, so that Maslov should not hear, they stole out into the street. The night wind tore at them out of a dark alley with such force that Katia covered the little girl with the corner of her shawl. The dust stung their faces. The iron sheeting on the roofs clattered and rattled. The wind wailed and whistled as though Katia and Claudia were the last people on earth, everyone else were dead, and the sun would never rise again over the world.

Near a dimly-lighted window in a little wooden cottage Katia turned her back to the wind and stopped to rest a little. Through the slit between the incompletely drawn curtains she saw a furnished room, a black stovepipe bent in an elbow to go into the grate, a little stove like her own in the middle of the room and in arm-chairs around it a few people, chins in hands, listening to a young man who stood before them, reading something out of a copybook, his tip-tilted nose held proudly high. His much-worn overcoat was open over

his bare chest and the felt boots on his feet were tied round with string like Claudia's. By his gestures and the way he shook his thick mop of uncombed hair, Katia saw that the young man was reading poetry. She felt a warmth in her heart; she smiled, turned into the wind again and, still sheltering Claudia under her shawl, ran towards the Arbat.

There was quite a crowd at the Chesnokovs; wives of men who had gone to the front, with a few old men in the place of honour round the stove where the guest was telling them about the war. When Katia came they were just asking him questions, interrupting each other, wanting to know whether things would soon be easier with the bread ration, whether one could hope that some fuel would be brought to Moscow by Christmas, and whether the men in the army were being issued with felt boots and sheepskins. They named husbands and brothers and asked whether they were alive and well, as though this one soldier could know by name all the thousands of workers fighting on every front.

Katia could not get inside the room and remained standing in the doorway. Rising on tiptoe she caught a glimpse of the guest writing something down on a piece of paper. His head was bent and it was bandaged with lint.

"Any more questions, comrades?" he asked, and Katia started. That soft yet severe voice tore at her heart. She immediately turned round to go. Ah, she thought, so I have not forgotten anything at all. The sound of a voice that was like that dear voice now for ever mute stirred up all her old grief, all the old, useless, pointless pain. So does a lonely human being see in dreams some old, long-forgotten memory—some little house in the wood, never seen in reality, lit up by a yellow ray, and by the house a long-dead mother sitting and smiling as she smiled in far-off childhood; the dreamer tries to reach her, call her out of the dream back into life, but he cannot touch her, and she smiles but says nothing, and the dreamer knows that it is all only a dream, and deep sobs shake his breast.

Katia must have looked ill, for one of the women in the doorway said:

"Citizens, let the schoolmistress come in, you've nearly smothered her out there."

They made way for Katia to come into the room. As she entered, the man at the table raised his bandaged head and she saw his stern face clearly. Before joy could light up and widen her dark eyes, she swayed; her head swam, everything was confused, the hum of many voices receded into the distance, the light faded just as it had that day when she had carried out the slop-pail. Smiling guiltily, breathing hard, pale as a sheet, she sank to her knees.

"Katia!" shouted the guest, pushing everyone out of the way. "Katia!"

Several hands caught hold of her and did not let her fall to the ground. Roshchin took her face between his two hands, that sweet, that lovely face now so frail, with its cold, half-open mouth and eyes turned up under half-closed lids.

"This is my wife, comrades, this is my wife," he repeated with trembling lips.

They were walking along with the wind at their back. Roshchin held Katia to him with an arm round her thin shoulders. She wept all the way, stopping every now and then to kiss him. He began to tell her why he had been thought dead, while for a whole year he had been wandering in search of Katia from one end of Russia to the other. But the story was confused, too long and in general quite superfluous at the moment. Katia said every now and then: "Stop, we're going quite the wrong way," and then they turned round and wandered along dark and deserted streets where rusty cowls creaked on the chimneys,

broken sheet-iron plates crunched or the black branches of a lime tree tossed and rustled behind a broken fence, thinking, perhaps, how in just such a night as this it had seen Nikolai Vassilyevich Gogol, terrified of evil spirits, run past with his coat-tails flying behind him.

When they got to Old Stable Lane, Katia said:

"Here is our house, the same, you remember it, don't you? But in those days you used the front door. I am living in the same room, Vadim."

They hurried across the yard. The kitchen door was closed.

"How unpleasant. Now we shall have to knock. Knock as loudly as you can."

Katia laughed, then cried a little, kissed Roshchin and then laughed again. Roshchin banged on the door with both fists.

"Who's there? Who's there?" Maslov asked in a frightened voice on the other side of the door.

"Open up. It's me, Katia"

Maslov opened the door. The little tin oil-lamp with the glass chimney trembled in his hand. Seeing a soldier following Katia, he stepped back, his cheeks puckered into longitudinal wrinkles and his eyes narrowed with hate.

"Thank you," said Katia, and ran along to her own room, still holding Roshchin's hand. The room had preserved a little of its former warmth. Katia asked in a whisper:

"Got any matches?"

Roshchin was in such a state of agitation that he too answered in a whisper:

"Yes."

She made a light. It was only a tiny little flame floating in a tin of oil, but it gave light enough for them to gaze at each other all night by it. As she took off her shawl, Katia kept her eyes on Vadim: he was quite grey; there were a few grey hairs even in his eyebrows; his face had grown more manly and bore an expression of calm austerity that was unfamiliar to her, and greatly attracted her. He was younger and manlier and handsomer than the Roshchin she remembered in Rostov. She looked at his bandage, half opened her mouth and sighed:

"You are wounded?"

"Only a scratch. But they gave me this fortnight's Moscow leave for it. I knew you were here. But how was I to find you? (She smiled a glad but arch little smile which turned up the corners of her mouth.) Do you know I only just missed you in that village? I was chasing Krassilnikov. (Katia's chin quivered and she shook her head angrily.) Katia, I killed Krassilnikov. (She dropped her eyes and bent her head.) Katia, I started telling you how it happened that you got that news about my death. It was quite true, I did die. (Katia looked at him in alarm and her eyes filled with tears.) I was travelling one night in a railway train; I had nothing to live for, I had made a mistake about the main thing in life, and I saw clearly that all that remained to me was death or self-destruction. Katia, forgive me, I know this is hard, this is difficult, but I want to tell you in spite of that. Only the thought of you, not love, no, I no longer had any heart to love with, but a constant thought of you as something I could not tear up, throw away, forget, betray—only that still bound me to life. That night in the railway carriage I suffered complete disaster. Now, when over my rifle-sights I recognize a face I know, I understand into what a black and empty soul I send my bullet."

Katia put her hand on his shoulder and laid her cheek against his strongly and rapidly beating heart. They were still standing in the middle of the room,

he in his unbuttoned great-coat, she in her fur coat. She realized that what he was now talking about was the most important thing of all. What a dear, fine fellow he was. He wanted to justify himself first of all, so that she could love this new, righteous, stern, passionate man in him. When he ran amok in Rostov and deserted her, she knew he would suffer terribly but would come to understand everything in the end. Now, nestling close to him, she listened to his confused, disjointed words, that were like hastily sketched ideographs of his tremendous experiences and understood everything even without the words.

"Katia, our task is immense. We never dreamt that we would accomplish it. Remember, we often talked about it—the whirlpool of history, the destruction of great civilizations, ideas transformed into pitiful parodies of themselves—it all seemed so meaningless to us. Under the starched dress-shirt still the same hairy chest of the *pithecanthropos!* All lies! But now the veil has been torn from our eyes. All our past life was a lie and a crime! Russia has borne a new man and this man demands the right for men to live like men. That isn't a dream, it is an idea we carry on the points of our bayonets, an idea that can be made reality. A dazzling light has fallen on the half-ruined arches of past millenniums. Everything has a meaning, everything is governed by the same laws. We have found a goal, a goal every Red Army man knows. Katia, can you understand me a little better now? I wanted to give myself to you, all of myself, my darling, my heart, my beloved, my star."

He suddenly clasped her so close in his embrace that he almost crushed her, but Katia only clung the closer to his heart. At that moment there was a knock at the door, Maslov's voice said:

"Yekaterina Dmitrievna, could I see you for a minute?" and as he got no reply he began to rattle the door-handle according to his custom. "The point is, as you know, that there is a state of emergency in this city. You have a man in your room after ten o'clock, and as I am responsible . . ."

"Let me handle this," Roshchin said and took Katia's hands from his shoulders.

"Vadim, don't lose your temper. I'll speak to him. Please."

She went out into the passage closing the door after her. Maslov was standing with a sneer on his face and the little oil-lamp in his hand.

"You can't come in, comrade Maslov," she said firmly, in a tone she had never used towards him. He walked backwards from the door, beckoning her on and looking at her with a hysterically fixed stare. She followed him, asking:

"Well? What is it you want?"

"I want to warn you, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, not to attach too much importance to my catastrophe, because it has no such importance. You've already heard, of course. The whole district is rejoicing and celebrating. But they'll soon laugh on the other side of their mouths."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Katia said angrily. "All I want to say is that I should be obliged if you stopped knocking at my door."

"Don't lie to me. You know perfectly well. And I know all about you, too. So here it is: in the first place you will continue to speak to me as though my party card hadn't been taken away, you'll find that will pay you better. (Although Maslov was speaking softly, there was a queer rattle in his throat.) Nothing has changed, Yekaterina Dmitrievna! Secondly, your nocturnal guest will leave immediately. You want to know why I insist on this? Here is my answer. (He put his hand into the side pocket of his dirty jacket, from

which the buttons were missing, pulled out an automatic pistol and held it out on the flat of his hand for Katia to see.) After that we will carry on as before."

Katia was so shaken that she only blinked her eyes very slowly. Then the door flew open and Roshchin came out.

"What is your business with my wife?"

Maslov screwed up his face so that it was covered with wrinkles right to his ears, bent down to put the lamp on the floor and twirled the pistol in his hand.

"Stop that," said Roshchin, strode up to him, jerked the pistol out of his hand and put it in the pocket of his own great-coat. "I will deposit this to-morrow with the local *cheka*, you can get it back from there. If you come to our door again, I'll break your neck."

They went back to their room. Katia said nothing, only wrung her hands. Roshchin helped her out of her coat.

"Katia, all this is quite simple and he won't intrude any more. I've heard about this Maslov at the front, I think. He's one of the fellows who tried to undermine the morale of the army."

He took off his great-coat, slid down to the floor beside Katia, who was sitting disconsolately in an armchair, and rested his head on her knees. Her hands gently strayed over his hair, his face, his neck, and they both forgot the absurd scene with Maslov. Neither of them spoke. A new emotion, mighty, ever unexplored, rose in them with virginal intensity—in him the joy of desire, in her the joy of sensing his joy.

"A million times more, Katia," he said.

"I, too," she whispered. "Although I always, always, Vadim——"

"Are you cold?"

"No; I only love you too much."

He sat down with her in the broad old armchair and kissed her eyes, her mouth, the corners of her lips. Then he kissed her breast, and Katia remembered that she had a little birthmark on her left breast which had delighted him greatly in the past. She unbuttoned her bodice so he could kiss the birthmark.

The fire died down in the little stove and it was beginning to be very cold in the room. Roshchin, never taking his eyes off Katia and showing his even teeth in a smile, squatted down in front of the stove, blew on the embers and laid on wood—the chopped-up backs and legs of mahogany chairs. Soon it was warm again. Katia blushed as she undressed, and he laughed and took her face between his palms and kissed her.

The wind whistled in the chimney all night. Katia got up every now and then and, like Psyche, trimmed the lamp, but without taking her eyes off the face of the sleeping Roshchin. She was full of happiness and knew that he, too, was happy and that that was why his face was so calm and serious in his sleep.

"Katia! Katia!" shouted Dasha as she rushed into the kitchen. "Katia! My Katia!" she cried, stamping her frozen felt boots on the floor of the passage. She rushed at Katia, put her arms round her, kissed her, held her at arms' length, looked at her and again clasped her in her arms. Dasha smelled of snow, of sheepskin and of rye bread. She was wearing a short sheepskin coat, skin side out, she had a kerchief tied round her head peasant fashion and had a bundle slung on her back.

"Katia, my darling, my dear sister. How I grieved for you, how I dreamt of you. Just imagine, we were walking here from the Yaroslavl station and Moscow was just like a village, very quiet, lots of rooks and snow, and paths trodden in the snow. And the distances! I can hardly stand, and Kuzma Kuzmich had to carry a hundredweight of flour. When we got to Old Stable Lane in the end, just think, I couldn't find the house! We walked along it from one end to the other three times and then Kuzma Kuzmich said perhaps it was the wrong street. I was simply furious—I had forgotten the house! And then suddenly, just fancy, a man came round the corner, a soldier, and I said to him, "Listen, comrade," and he just stared at me and I gaped at him and sat down in the snow—it was Vadim! I thought I had gone crazy, seeing dead men walking about Moscow streets. But he began to laugh and to kiss me. But I couldn't get up. Katia, my beautiful, clever Katia! Why, we shall want ten nights to tell our stories to each other. Good God, it's the same room! And the bed, and the picture of Sirin and Alkonost. Vadim told me about Ivan. I've made up my mind: in a few days a hospital train is going to their section and I am going with it as nurse, and Anissya and Kuzma Kuzmich are going too. We can't leave Kuzma Kuzmich here alone, he would get too spoilt. Katia, first of all, we want to eat. Put the kettle on. And then we want a wash. We rode in a cattle-truck from Yaroslavl—a whole week. We've got to take everything off first and search it. Until then we won't go into the room, we'll stay in the kitchen. Come, I want you to meet my friends. Marvellous people they are, Katia! I owe them my life and more. We'll make a fire in the kitchen stove and boil water for washing, there's plenty of furniture there. Katia, why, you haven't got any grey hairs at all! My God, you look ten years younger than I. I'm quite certain the day will come very soon when we shall all be together again."

In Moscow only whole oats were being issued on the ration cards. Never had the capital of the republic gone through greater hardships than during the winter of the year nineteen hundred and twenty. The advance of the Red Army swallowed up all resources. The stocks of food and fuel captured from the Whites quickly melted away. The rich and fertile districts of the south had been so ravaged by Cossack and Volunteer that the requisitioning detachments of the workers found only a trifling surplus beyond the barest needs of the peasants.

On the anniversary of the Icy Campaign the Volunteer Army was fleeing towards Novorossisk and carpeting the bottomless Kuban mud with abandoned transport, stranded guns and dead horses. It was the end. Anton Ivanovich Denikin, his hair greyer and his back more bent, sailed away in a French destroyer into exile, there to write his memoirs. The miserable remnants of the Volunteer regiments crossed over to the Crimea in troopships. The Cossacks of the Don and Kuban understood at last that they had been cruelly deceived and had paid for their obstinacy with the nameless graves, that dotted the plain from Voronezh to Novorossisk.

In Moscow it was still winter. The March storms smothered the city in snow. All the furniture, all the fences had been burned in the little iron stoves. The factories and workshops stood idle. In the offices the employees sat in their fur coats and blew on their swollen fingers, which were too stiff to hold a pencil; the ink in the inkstands was frozen hard and would not melt until the warmer season. People walked very slowly, carrying haversacks, and there were few who could walk all the way from home to work without resting on a

snowheap or sheltering in a doorway from the wind. The famine was horrible —people dreamed of a roast sucking-pig on a dish with parsley in its grinning snout; in their sleep they chewed fat bacon or hard-boiled eggs. But in their thoughts they were all on the alert: the stubborn, bloody, suffocating fury of the counter-revolution was broken, life was on the upgrade, a few more months of suffering and privations and then the new harvest would be home and the demobilized men of the Red Army would be engaged in peaceful labour, rebuilding all that had been destroyed and building the new things that would make men forget all past suffering, all the bitterness of century-old wrongs.

Dasha's wish was fulfilled. They were all together again. Telegin and Roshchin had been given leave and rode to Moscow in Dasha's hospital train one bleak March morning when moist clouds hung over the city, the snow was melting on the roofs, huge icicles fell from the eaves and the heavy air was scented and restless.

Katia had come to meet them at the station. Roshchin was the first to catch sight of her from the corridor of the railway carriage. He jumped off while the train was still moving. Katia, beaming with joy, smiling with sparkling eyes, ran towards him through the smoke of the engine that trailed between the iron columns of the platform. She seemed to him even lovelier than when he had seen her in December. All their love was only in such short meetings. They immediately drew away to one side, under the clock. But the jealous Dasha dragged her Telegin after them—she insisted on hearing her sister praise him.

"Katia, do look at him! Can you see how changed he is? In Petersburg there was something unfinished in his face. And his eyes were different. You don't mind, do you, Ivan, but when we went to Samara on the steamer that time, your eyes were light-blue and rather silly and that bothered me at the time. But now they are like steel."

Telegin just stood in front of Katia and sighed with restraint in the fullness of his emotions. Katia found him very attractive indeed, calm, deliberate, kind.

"And here is the whole man for you, Katia: during all his campaigns, yes, just fancy, even while he was pursuing Mamontov on horseback, he carried with him in his saddlebags, guess what—a little china puppy and kitten he had given me on the day of our second wedding at Tsaritsyn, because I liked them very much, d'you see."

Now Kuzma Kuzmich came running to Katia and shook her hand for a long time with both his own; his clean-shaven brick-red face beamed with pleasure and devotion; in his white coat he seemed to have put on so much weight that the hungry people on the platform eyed him with hostile mien.

"In that short time I have grown as fond of you, Yekaterina Dmitrievna, as I am of Daria Dmitrievna. I always say that there are no finer women than our Russian women. They are sincere in their feelings, and selfless, and they love, and have a high courage when it is needed. I am always at your service, Yekaterina Dmitrievna. I'll just get myself in order and then I'll come round to your place and bring a few little things I got in Rostov. It's spring down there, but the north is sweeter to us for all that. Well, you must excuse me now."

Anissya came up to them now. She too was wearing a white overall. Her face, her large eyes expressed disappointment; she had wanted to stay in Moscow after this trip, but the senior surgeon, in quite un-Sovietlike fashion,

would not hear of it: "School of Dramatic Art indeed! Soon there will be great battles again and heaps of wounded! I'm not letting you go!"

"What can I do? I shall have to wait until next autumn," she said to Dasha and wiped her nose on the corner of her kerchief. "The years go by, I am losing, years, that's what worries me. Latugin is here, he came to the station to meet me. He's risen in the world too, he's here as a delegate to congress. He's grown very proud and serious. He told me he had been coming to the station for the last three days to meet our train. He's gone now to persuade the senior surgeon to give me twenty-four hours' leave. Daria Dmitrievna, he told me about Agrippina: she is in Saratov; she has had her baby, but he didn't know whether it was a little boy or a little girl. She was ill after it for a long time, but now she is back with the regiment and the baby too. I'm sorry for her; she has an unhappy nature; she will never love another man."

From the station they walked across all Moscow to Old Stable Lane, where a room had been prepared for Dasha and Telegin. It was the room formerly occupied by Maslov, who had now been gone for more than two months. He had first taken his books away and had then disappeared himself. They were walking slowly because of Katia. Roshchin would have liked to take her in his arms and carry her under the craggy spring clouds towering over the city. Telegin and Dasha lagged behind so as not to intrude on them. Dasha said:

"I am worried about Katia. Moscow and that school of hers are killing her. She doesn't eat anything and she's grown quite transparent in these last three months. She must come with us on the train and I'll fatten her up. Here she just lives on thin air, she simply can't go on like this."

Telegin said softly and significantly:

"Yes, and Vadim, too. He is pining without her."

Soon they were overtaken by Latugin and Anissya. She was no longer wearing her white overall and her cheeks were pink. Latugin, frowning, serious, shook hands without any show of emotion and took from the turn-up of his sleeve four guest tickets to the gallery of the Bolshoy theatre.

"Yes, life is easier at the front than here in Moscow," he said, as he handed out the tickets. "I had to fight a major battle for these. Fortunately the man in charge turned out to be one of our sailor lads, from the cruiser *Aurora*. Well, here you are, don't be late, it's an important affair. Come on, Anissya."

In the vast five-tiered auditorium of the Bolshoy theatre hundreds of electric bulbs glowed faintly red in a haze of human breath. It was bitterly cold. On the immense stage, in front of the canvas arches of the backdrop, the chairman and presidium of the meeting sat at a table placed to one side near the dim footlights. They were all looking towards the back of the stage where a large map of European Russia hung on rollers. The map was covered with multi-coloured circles and areas which took up almost the whole of the map space. In front of the map stood a little man in a fur coat, bareheaded; his hair, brushed straight back from his forehead, threw a shadow on the map. In his hand he held a long pointer with which he indicated one of the coloured circles from time to time. When he touched one of the circles, it immediately lit up with so bright a light that the dim gold of the decorations in the hall paled, and the tense, lean faces and attentively widened eyes of the audience showed up clearly.

In the tense silence the speaker was saying in a high-pitched voice:

"In European Russia alone we have many trillion tons of air-dried peat, stocks which would suffice for centuries. Peat is a fuel available locally. From one acre of peat bog we can get twenty-five times as much energy as from an acre of forest. Peat in the first place, oil in the second, and coal in the third will solve the problems of revolutionary construction which now confront us. For a revolution which has won the struggle on the field of battle but does not immediately proceed to the practical realization of its underlying ideas, would peter out as a sudden storm blows itself out. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who is sitting amongst you and who inspired the report I am giving here to-day, has indicated the main lines of a creative revolution. He said: Communism is Soviet power plus electrification."

"Which is Lenin?" Katia asked, looking down from the height of the fifth tier. Roshchin, who never for a moment let go her thin little hand, answered in the same whisper:

"Over there, in the black overcoat—he is writing quickly—now he is looking up—now he is throwing the note across the table. That's Lenin. And that thin one, with the black moustache, at the end of the row, is Stalin, the man who destroyed Denikin."

The speaker was saying:

"Wherever in the age-old silence of Russia milliards of tons of peat lie hidden; wherever a waterfall rushes down or a mighty river rolls its waters, there shall we build electric power stations, true lighthouses of socialized labour. Russia has freed herself for ever from the yoke of the exploiters—our task now is to light her way by an unquenchable glow of electric fires. What was the curse of labour shall now become its blessing."

Raising his wand he pointed to the future electric power centres and described the sites on the map from which the future new civilization would emerge. In the semi-darkness of the vast stage the circles flared up like bright stars. In order to light up the map in this fashion for a few short instants, the entire available energy of the Moscow power station had to be diverted to it, and even in the Kremlin, in the offices of the People's Commissars, all electric bulbs had been taken out with the exception of a single one of sixteen candle-power.

The audience, the men, in the pockets of whose military great-coats was a handful of oats issued to-day on the ration cards in the place of bread, listened with bated breath to the staggering but entirely practicable prospects of a revolution now embarking on a course of creative effort.

Telegin said to Dasha:

"A very business-like speech. I know this Krzhizhanovski quite well, he's a good engineer. As soon as we have finished the war, I'll go back to the factory. I have some ideas of my own as well as he. Dashenka, I am just wild to get to work again. If they build a network of electric power there is nothing we can't do. We have a devil of a lot of natural resources; once we get down to using them properly America can watch our smoke! We're much richer than they. We'll go to the Urals together, you and I."

Dasha took it up:

"Yes, we'll live in a log cabin with large windows, beautifully clean, with pearls of resin coming out of the wood. In the winter we'll have a huge fire flaming on the hearth."

Roshchin whispered into Katia's ear:

"Can you see now how purposeful all our efforts, all the blood we shed, all our unsung and uncomplaining torments have become? We shall rebuild the world, a better world. All these people here in this hall are willing to give their

lives for that. And this is not mere words—they can show you the scars and the blue marks of bullets. And this is happening here, in my country, and this is Russia!"

"The die is cast," said the man on the stage, leaning on the pointer as if it was a spear. "We are fighting on the barricades for our right and the right of the whole world to end once and for all the exploitation of man by man."

June 22nd, 1944.

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