SOVIET LITERATURE

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Contents

PREFACE

The history of the Soviet Russian short story dates back half a century. It was with the short story that the Soviet prose writing began in the first literary journals of the post-Revolutionary period. It was with short stories that Vsevolod Ivanov, Dmitri Furmanov, Alexander Malyshkin, Boris Lavrenyov, Konstantin Fedin, Alexander Fadeyev and Lydia Seifullina made their débuts in literature—writers who were among the founders of Soviet prose writing, who brought into literature the people of the Revolution and presented a broad panorama of national life at a turning point in history.

Since then the short story, with its instant sensitive reaction to the urgent problems of the time, with its close attention to man and its gift of selecting the most essential and vital aspects in the life and deeds of that man, the builder of a new, socialist society, has occupied a prominent place in Soviet literature. This was true in the years of the Civil War, in the years of peaceful construction, heroic and romantic years of the first Five-Year Plans, in the grim years of World War II, and the difficult postwar years of rehabilitation.

It is, probably, not accidental that so many writers embark on their literary careers with short stories. For the short story, though small in size, is capacious in content; this far from simple genre of fiction enables a real talent concisely and directly, without preliminaries, so to say, to unburden to the reader his heart and mind.

So it was that Isaac Babel and Mikhail Zoshchenko, Mikhail Sholokhov and Andrei Platonov, staked their claims to literary fame in the mid twenties, and Konstantin Paustovsky, Boris Gorbatov, Mikhail Loskutov, Vasili Grossman and Arkadi Gaidar, in the early thirties. So, too, in the first postwar years, Yuri Nagibin, Emmanuil Kazakevich, Galina Nikolayeva, Sergei Antonov and other writers just back from the battlefields made their débuts with short stories. And finally, so in the mid fifties a fine new galaxy of story writers, such as Vladimir Tendryakov, Vladimir Soloukhin, Yuri Kazakov, Victor Astafyev, Anatoli Kuznetsov, Anatoli Pristavkin, Victor Konetsky, Georgi Vladimov, Vasili Aksyonov, Andrei Bitov and many, many others, entered our literature.

The present issue of Soviet Literature *departs from the magazine's customary make-up and content: it is something of a small anthology of Soviet short stories which recapitulates in general lines the fifty-years' history of the genre in the Soviet Union.*

We use the word "anthology" with reservations, for it is of course impossible to encompass within one (even enlarged) issue of the magazine a fully representative selection of Soviet short-story writing. Furthermore, as much as the editors wished to present as complete as possible a gallery of Soviet short-story writers, they were in some cases forced to be guided in their choice of particular stories by considerations of size rather than of a given writer's most characteristic style or approach so as not to encroach too much on the available space to be allocated to other authors.

Finally, it goes without saying that in a collection devoted exclusively to short stories quite a few eminent Soviet writers known primarily as novelists had to be omitted.

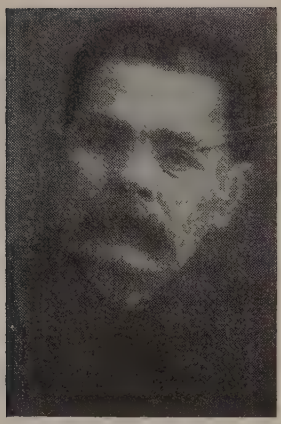
We hope, however, that with all its inevitable shortcomings this collection will give our readers a fair idea of Soviet Russian short-story writing.

Most of the translations were done specially for the occasion by Elena Altschuler, Brian Bean, Robert Daglish, Eve Manning, Rose Prokofieva, Avril Pyman, Vladimir Talmy and Margaret Wettlin. A few of the old translations used in this issue have been thoroughly edited and revised in conformity with the original.

The Editors

Maxim Gorky

Stories About Heroes



"Whatever is done is done by man and judged my man."

The farther towards the sea, the wider and more leisurely the Volga. The flat steppelands of the left bank melt in the misty moonlight, the clayey bluffs of the right cast dense shadows on the river, and the red and white buoy lights are especially bright against these oily black shrouds. A broad, shimmering streak of light, like a shoal of silvery fishes barring the steamer's way slants across the river. The black right bank slips swiftly by; once in a while occasional mounds of buildings loom on its ridge like steppeland burial mounds. The darkness is deeper and more murky astern than ahead, creating a fantastic illusion of the river flowing uphill. The steamer skims along almost noiselessly, sweeping a glimmering brocade of lights along the water, the purl under the stern is delicately caressing, and the air too is caressing, fondling the face like a child's hand.

On the stern a dozen or so sleepless passengers are talking in hushed tones. Only one high, strident voice rises clearly, drawing out the last syllable in the broad Kostroma dialect:

"I tell you, men die of fear!"

Others scoff and ridicule him spiritedly:

"That's a foolish thing to say, citizen!"

"Never seen combat!"

They remind him of typhus, hunger and hard work, all of which reduce a man's lifetime. A moustached man sitting huddled in a sailcloth side by side with a fat woman queries angrily:

"And what about old age?"

The Kostroma man holds his peace, waiting for the objections to end. He is the most conspicuous passenger. He boarded the boat at Nizhni Novgorod, more than three days ago. Most of the passengers are spending their holidays on board. They are Soviet office employees, neatly dressed, and in their midst this one attracts attention because he is homely, tousled, somehow crumpled, he limps strongly on his right leg and looks generally decrepit. He is at least fifty, if not more, of medium height, gnarled, with a brown, stringy neck and a grizzled ginger beard on a red face. From under arched brows blue eyes look out searchingly and as if accusingly. It is hard to tell what he lives by. He looks like an old-time artisan, his own master. His hands are restless, and he moves his lips as though recalling or calculating something. He is lively, but not merry.

A couple of hours after he had boarded the boat he had walked all over it, unceremoniously eyeing the top-deck passengers, and asked a sailor:

"I say, how much do the top-deckers pay to Astrakhan?"

A little later his drawling voice could be heard clearly on the lower deck:

"Nacherly, light things float up, heavy 'uns cling to earth. Well, now things've been set right: if you want it lighter—pay fourfold."

It would hardly be right to say that this man was talkative or that he was easy-natured; but one felt that he was worried by a desire to relate and explain to people all he had seen and learned, all he saw and would learn. He had words of his own which had apparently cost him dear and he was in a hurry to mouth them, maybe just to reassure himself of their truth. He would limp up to a conversing group, listen in silence for a couple of minutes and then loudly proclaim something not quite usual:

"Nowadays, citizen, it's like this: you for me and I for you; we've got a common cause, mine is stitched to yours, yours to mine. We're like a pair of pants. You're no master of mine, I'm no lackey of yours, right?"

The man, somewhat taken aback by the sudden interruption of a stranger, eyed him testily. An old woman in a red kerchief said with a sigh:

"Right you may be, but there's too many as won't see it!"

"It's only those as move backwards and live backside forward," the lame man retorted, waving a hand towards the dark bank: the boat was turning sternwards to it.

"That's true enough," the woman assented, then adding: "Come join us, comrade."

He declined to sit down, was silent for two or three minutes and then said in his clear high voice:

"Whatever is done is done by man and judged by man."

It sounded like a proverb, but a proverb just now unexpectedly coined by him.

Thus for three days he had been sparking conversations, indefatigably driving at something. This time too, after listening attentively to all the objections against his words that "men die of fear," he said, lifting his hand defensively:

"Old men, of course, pass away from the destruction of their body systems, and some of the younger 'uns from their brashness. But I wasn't speaking of everyone: I meant the masters. The masters used to fear death like kids fear darkness. And I knew 'em pretty well. They lived without joy and their joys were dull."

"How do *you* know that?" the moustached man asked sarcastically. "You don't look like a lackey."

A young Red Armyman in army greatcoat and cap interrupted sharply:

"I say, citizen, what's a lackey got to do with this?"

"There's a saying that in a lackey's eyes no man is human."

"Keep you sayings to yourself."

Another voice joined the conversation:

"That saying was thought up when a lackey wasn't considered human."

"That'll do, citizens!"

The lame man waited patiently, choosing a cigarette from a package, before saying:

"I could pepper you with more sayings than you'd care for, citizen, but they'd get us nowhere. You know, it's not right when they say, 'A proverb never dies.' "

"You're not right about fear either," the Red Armyman broke in. "It's only now the capitalists are frightened of death, but before. . . ."

"And before too," the other persisted, dragging on his cigarette. "I know life from the inside. Used to be a floor waxer in Petersburg."

"Oh well, if that's the case. . ." the moustached man grunted with a chuckle.

"It is the case! I was an orphan and worked as a herdsboy up to thirteen. Then my godfather swooped down on our village and carried me off like a wolf a lamb. After that I spent four years a-dancing with a brush tied to my foot in flats and restaurants, and whore-houses, too. There used to be swank whore-houses in Petersburg then, real ladies used to come there on the sly from their husbands. And the husbands on the sly from them, of course. I lived all four years in a basement, in the back yard of such a whore-house, so nacherly I could observe a few things."

The man smoked hastily, inhaling deeply, and the smoke curled out through his shaggy yellow moustaches as though he were on fire inside and would in a moment start exhaling flames.

"And I was in all kinds of fighting, buddy, too," he said, turning to the Red Armyman. "I've seen more than you'll ever see, and I wouldn't wish you to. I was at Liaoyang, and ran from there so fast my boots sweated through."

Someone laughed.

"Are you proud of that?" the fat woman asked.

"No, why should I," the man parried in his high-pitched voice. "I've got plenty other things to be proud of. Two St. George Crosses earned in action all the way between Chernovitsy town and Riga. Wounded twice then, and twice in our own, Soviet war. I've got plenty cause for pride!"

"What did you get the crosses for?" the moustached man asked.

"One for capturing a machine-gun while on a reconnaissance patrol, the other from the company," the man answered quickly yet somehow reluctantly. He spat into the palm of his hand, extinguished the cigarette in the spittle and tossed the stub over board.

Two young girls, humming softly, arms around each other's waist, came up.

"Look," one said "a boat exactly like a bug."

"Lights on the shore," the other murmured thoughtfully.

The Red Armyman asked something about the machine-gun.

"Pure chance," the lame man drawled reluctantly. "They sent three of us on a recon mission. I was in charge. It was night, of course. The Austrians weren't far off and were fussing about somewhat. That was back in the beginning of the war. We crawled ahead. Suddenly someone coughed behind a clump of bushes. Turned out to be a machine-gun nest, something like an ambush. There were five of them there. We took one, a vet he turned out to be, and knew some Russian. And we left one of our men there, because a chase began, and he was wounded, and we had the machine-gun. The whole thing was qualified as bravery, and a regimental order of the day was issued."

"When did you get your leg hurt?" the Red Armyman asked.

"That was when we were chasing Denikin back," the lame man said readily. "I actually saved it by my stubbornness. The doctor wanted to cut it off, but I asked him to leave it to heal. Nacherly, he was in a hurry, hundreds of people all round him were crying, he was almost in tears himself. In his place I'd hack off arms and legs with an axe just for pity's sake. Well, I talked him over, and here I am with the leg!"

"That makes you a real hero," one of the girls said.

"In the Civil War for the Soviets we were all heroes."

"Well, not all," the moustached man objected. "Some ran, like at Liao-yang, and some surrendered."

"I didn't see anyone run," the lame man retorted, "but I did surrender—you'd surrender and then came back to our side with two or three dozen in tow. Some brought over even more."

"Are you a peasant?" the woman asked.

"All men, they say, are of peasant stock."

"A Party member?" the Red Armyman asked.

"What use has the Party got for the likes of me? Party men are all educated. I was so poor I never got a chance to learn to read and write until I was most forty. And even then I had nothing else to do, being wounded and in hospital. My mates there began to scoff at me. 'How come, Zausailov? Hurry up and learn before it's too late.' Well, they taught me how to read and scribble a bit. Later they said, 'Pity you couldn't read and write before the Revolution. You might have made a good commander.' But how did I know there'd be a revolution? In the revolution after the Japanese war I had only one thought in mind: how to get back to my herd in the village, but instead I landed in a disciplinary company in Omsk."

The Red Armyman laughed, someone echoed him, while the moustached man said didactically:

"By the way you talk you're certainly not much of a scholar."

"Good enough for me," the man shrugged him off, reaching for another cigarette. The Red Armyman moved up closer to him and asked:

"What did you land in the disciplinary company for?"

"Four others for letting a prisoner escape, me for not shooting. He jumped out of a wagon and ran along the tracks. I was standing on guard up at the steam engine when suddenly I saw a man who looked like he's in a big hurry. But everyone was in a hurry then, the railway stations were all a-bustle. At the court-martial Lieutenant Izmailov testified: 'I cried out to him to shoot.' 'Did he?' the judge asked. 'Yes,' I said. 'Why didn't you shoot?' 'I couldn't see whom to shoot at.' 'You mean to say you didn't recognize the prisoner?' 'No, I didn't.' 'Didn't recognize him although you rode with him as guard for three stops? Don't play the fool!' He asked for the death sentence. But no one was shot." The man laughed a ringing, youthful laugh and said, shaking his head: "It was a crazy time."

"I say, mate, you're alright," the Red Armyman said approvingly, patting the older man's knee. "What are you doing with yourself now?"

"Beekeeping. At an experimental station. It's an interesting job, you know. I learned it from an old man in Tambov, a cur, incidentally, but a real Solomon at his job."

Zausailov's speech became more lively and merry, as if the Red Armyman's praise had encouraged him. The fat woman went away.

"I'll come in a moment," said her moustached neighbour, he got up at once and left, and the girl who had compared the boat to a bug took his place on a coil of rope.

"He did things with the bees fit to be shown in a circus," Zausailov went on, and smacked his lips. "But he was a pretty pest himself and got his own in twenty-one when he was bumped off for helping some bandits or other. And that was when I got mine the fifth time: a crack on the skull. Only I don't count it

because it wasn't in wartime. Besides, it was my own fault: I'm so curious, I like snooping. In the army I was reckoned an ace scout."

"In our—the Red—Army?" the girl asked softly.

"Sure. We ain't got no other army. Yes, and in that one too, though there, nacherly, it was because I had to, on orders, while in ours it was because I wanted to."

He fell silent. A woman came out with a boy of seven or eight, a pale, thin boy, evidently ailing.

"Won't sleep?" the girl asked.

"No."

"I want to be with you," the boy declared resentfully, pressing to the girl.

"Sit down and listen," she said. "Here's a man telling interesting things."

"That one?" the boy asked, pointing at the Red Armyman.

"No, the other."

The boy looked at Zausailov and grumbled:

"Oh-h, but he's old!"

The Red Armyman drew the boy to himself.

"Old but tried, whatever he does," Zausailov responded.

The Red Armyman seated the boy in his lap.

"I say, comrade, how did the bandits get you?" he asked.

"I got 'em first, then they got me. It was like this. I began to notice that queer men took to visiting our bee-garden, all of a kind, wolf-looking and morose. It looked suspicious to me, and I told our comrades in the town as much. They said I should pretend to take their side. That was easy: they were a moronic lot, blind with hatred. One was brighter than the others, a horse-doctor and former artillery man. Must have been fifteen or twenty years older than me. He was forbidden to treat the horses and took offence. Besides, he hit the bottle. He was something like the band's staff officer. Then there was a private from the Rostov Regiment, a grenadier and swell accordion-player."

The boy dosed off, his cheek pressed to the Red Armyman's shoulder. The girl sat with her elbows resting on her knees, her face cupped in her hands, and gazed out across the water from under high-arched brows. The ship hugged the right bank as it passed by a bulging hillock with a large village scattered at its foot; the straggling houses bracketed between two churches. A shaggy spit with black shrubs loomed to port, and it all slipped back rapidly as though trying to hide.

"The band wasn't big, fifty men or so. Its leader was an official of some kind, a forester, I think, a sonovabitch and suspicious like the devil. Well, the three of 'em would tell me to find out this or that. The comrades would tell me what I could know and what I couldn't. They acted in small groups: a dozen

here, a dozen there, killing our people; burned down a school; marauders, in short. My task was to get them together in a fist so that ours could nab 'em all at once, like birds in a net. A lure was set up—at a creamery in Borisoglebsk district, as I recall it. They believed me and began to gather their forces. Somehow or other the old man got an inkling that something was wrong and turned up, like the devil, before all had assembled. Still, there were thirty-four of them. Well, he began to sow doubts, saying they ought to make sure and wait and see. I saw he could ruin the whole undertaking, so I told ours, 'Take all there are.' They were in small numbers behind my back. And here someone cracked me with a pistol butt. That's all."

"Lord," a woman sighed, "when will it all end?"

"When we end 'em," the narrator retorted spiritedly. The woman waved a hand at him and walked away.

"But you really are a hero," the Red Armyman said gleefully.

The boy started and asked petulantly.

"What're you yelling for?"

"Sorry, kid, I won't," the Red Armyman said. "He's a character. Yours?" he asked the girl.

"My nephew," she replied. "Go to bed, Sasha."

"Don't want to. Someone's snoring there."

He pressed to the Red Armyman's shoulder again, while Zausailov repeated in a half-whisper: "Sasha." He sighed, rocked back and forth, rubbing his knees with his palms, and continued softer and slower:

"You say, 'a hero,' comrade. But it's not the right word for our kind. We're defending our own, but then, the bandits, the kulaks are defending *their* own, aren't they?"

The boy started again and declared loudly, with apparent pride:

"The kulaks killed my father. I saw them do it. We came back from town, daddy got out to open the gates, and they attacked him—drunk, two of them, and I woke up and hollered. They hit him with sticks."

"There you are," Zausailov said.

"Ye-es," the Red Armyman echoed gloomily, and the girl said:

"He wasn't three yet, but he remembers."

"I remember," the boy confirmed, shaking his head.

"He stopped growing after that," the girl went on with a sigh. "He's eleven now."

"I'll grow up," the boy promised, frowning.

Zausailov patted the boy's knee.

"Make sure you remember," he admonished the boy.

"That's how it is," the Red Armyman mumbled. "Are you a teacher?"

"Yes. Both of us, his mother too."

"Your sister?"

"My brother's wife."

"The murdered one's?"

"Yes."

Everyone fell silent. The Red Armyman unbuttoned his greatcoat and covered the boy, pressing him closer.

"There's heroism for you," Zausailov spoke up again. "It's everywhere, comrade."

Fingering the cigarettes in the package, he spoke in a low, unhurried voice.

"But I knew a real hero. In our detachment he was. His name was also Sasha. From Tula, where they make the samovars, a bright merry lad. Wherever he went he was in his place. Looked a little like you, sturdy, and sharp-toothed, like a polecat. You're of the cavalry, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"You can tell by your long coat and trimness."

Zausailov lighted a cigarette and continued with renewed animation:

"He was a seminarist, but never finished. Expelled for brashness, he said. But he was really educated. Turned me and many others into atheists. He was a past master on religion, and very persuasive. Knew God like his rich neighbour, and could show him up how little good he does in life that you couldn't help believing him.

"Well, it once so happened that in the heat of the pursuit our detachment got too far ahead. That was beyond Kursk, when we were chasing Denikin off. Everything was mixed up and we couldn't make out where was friend and where was foe. The commander called me. 'Zausailov,' he said, 'go and see who we've got on our left flank, and how many. Choose one or two men to go with you.' That was because of my illiteracy, of course, served me right. I took Sasha and Vasili Klimov, a stately man, like a senior janitor: there used to be janitors like that in Petersburg in the tsar's time—a janitor, the sonovabitch, but with the bearing of a church warden.

"Well, off we went. None of us knew the places there. We hugged the railway line, Sasha and Klimov on one side of the embankment, I on the other a hundred paces or so ahead of them. The road, of course, was all potholes. It was a moonlit night, with a stiff wind, clouds scuddling and shadows flitting here, there and everywhere, and suddenly, whang! 'Halt!' someone hollered. I could see five of them. And though they were Whites, they were the same colour as the ground and unnoticeable in the shrubs by the embankment. The commander was a mere boy, beardless still, a pistol in his hand, a sabre at his side, a stunted rifle slung on his shoulder: armed fit to have his picture taken. He levelled his

pistol at me and shouted a whole string of questions. I pretended to be so frightened that I yelled out loud, so's Sasha and Klimov would hear me, saying that I'd escaped from the Reds because I was afraid they'd take me up to the army. He almost believed me when one of his men said: 'Sir, there's something fishy about his bearing: must be a Red soldier, a scout.' Why, you sonovabitch, I thought to myself. Well, they knocked me about a bit, of course, and two of them led me away. They didn't hurry, and it began to rain. I began cracking jokes with my guards, but it was no good. They only got mad, were probably tired. Better hold your tongue, I thought, or they might bump you off.

"Well, betimes we reached a village. A big village but damaged: burned in two places and some of the houses hit by shells. There was a tethering rail under a clump of trees at the church fence, with seventeen horses, all of them junk. Two bodies were swinging from a nearby tree. If you don't give 'em the slip, here you stay, I thought. It was dark, with hardly any lights in the windows: past midnight and the Whites fast asleep, just four or five men hiding from the rain on the church porch. Well, my guards led me to the school, and opposite it stood a fine two-storey house with only the roof smashed. There were lights and it was noisy inside. One guard went in, the other sat down on the school porch, while I stood in the rain. There was no running away here.

"The other guard came out and said orders were to keep me till morning. They discussed where to lock me up, then led me a short way from the school and shoved me into a hut. It was pitch dark, the windows being boarded up. One of the guards lit a match and I saw that the floor was broken, one corner was busted, the upper logs had fallen in, and in one corner lay a bundle of rags that looked like a dead man. Rain leaked into the hut. The guard looked about and went out into the passage, but he didn't shut the door. Too bad, I thought, it's a cinch to get out of here. I sat down on the floor. It was quiet, only the horses champed and snuffled and the rain pattered. There was no sound of people. The guard fussed a little in the passage and then he began to snore.

"I don't know how much time passed, but I sat there without closing my eyes as if in a nightmare. My heart ached: a pretty kettle of fish! I struck a match carefully and looked about. The logs were hanging in so that one might be able to get into the hut from outside, but not climb out. I got up and tried the logs: they teetered.

"Then suddenly, as though someone had thrown cold water over me, I heard a whisper: 'Zausailov!' It was Sasha! 'Climb out,' he whispered. 'Can't, there's a guard in the passage,' I whispered back. He said nothing, and I heard him scratching and the logs began to wobble. Luckily I'd moved away to the stove, because all of a sudden the logs caved in with a crash. Well, I thought, that's the end of both of us.

"The guard woke up, of course. 'What's that?' he cried. 'Not my fault,' I said. 'The corner's caved in.' Well, he didn't give a damn, of course, as long as I was there. Said it was a pity they didn't fall on me. It got quiet again, and I heard breathing nearby. I reached out with my hand and felt a head. 'Sasha,' I whispered, 'what are you doing here?' 'We heard everything,' he said. 'I sent Klimov back and followed you. Their main force isn't here but four versts away.' He'd found it all out, you see. 'They think that ours are in their rear and to the right.' As he spoke I could hear him grit his teeth and sort of gasp. 'Those logs scratched my side, it's bleeding, and trapped my leg.' I felt out and tried to shift the log, but he whispered: 'Don't touch it, or I'll holler and you'll be lost. Go away! Do you remember all I told you? Hurry, go away!' No, I won't, I thought. How could I leave him? I pushed at the log again and he hissed at me: 'Stop it, you bloody fool, or I'll cry out!' What could I do? I tried once again, maybe I could free his leg.... You know, friend, believe it or not, but I heard the bone crack—just like that, 'cr-rack.' Yes.... I broke it, you see.... He only groaned and stiffened. Lay there stock still. This is it, Sasha, I thought: forgive me and farewell."

Zausailov bowed his head. He fingered the cigarettes in the package, probably feeling for a tighter filled one. Without lifting his head he continued his story somewhat slower and in a lowered voice.

"Our troops came up in the night, by evening we had pushed the Whites back to the gully, and it was all over. Klimov and I and a dozen of others were the first to enter that wretched village. It was burning, of course. And Sasha hung from that very tree where another had hung before him—young also, they'd pulled him down and thrown him into a mud puddle. Sasha was stripped naked save for one leg of his underwear. He'd been beaten up and his face was mauled beyond recognition. One side was ripped open. His arms were stretched along his sides, his head turned down and sideways. As if he felt guilty of something.... But I was the guilty one...."

"Nothing of the sort," the Red Armyman mumbled. "Both of you, comrade, did your duty as you should have."

Zausailov lighted his cigarette and shielded the match with his hand, letting it burn down to his fingers. He blew on it, crushed the glowing coal and said:

"There was a hero for you."

"Ye-es," the girl echoed softly, and asked: "Is he asleep?"

"Yes," the Red Armyman said, looking into the boy's face. After a pause he said firmly: "We still have heroes. Take the frontier guards in Central Asia—smashing chaps there. Once, I recall, two men went on patrol in the steppe. It was a dark night, they separated, and one of them stumbled on a band of Basmachi. They seized him before he'd any time to offer resistance. So he cried out to his mate: 'Shoot at my voice!' The other one emptied a clip at once.

He wounded one Basmach and the others scattered, leaving their prisoner and even his rifle. But at that moment they caught the other man; he called out: 'Do like I did!' He hadn't had time to reload his rifle and hit out with the butt. The first one began shooting in the direction of the voice, and also hit one. When they came back to their post no one believed them. But in the morning they went and saw the blood and saw it was true. Shooting at a voice meant shooting at one's comrade. Get that?"

"I certainly do," said Zausailov. "We're all gradually getting to see what's what. Returning from leave, comrade?"

"From a duty mission."

The teacher girl got up.

"Thank you. I must wake Sasha."

"What for? I'll carry him" the Red Armyman said.

They went away. Zausailov also rose, walked to the side and tossed his cigarette into the river.

The silver globe of the moon rolled high up into the sky, the shadows of the right bank grew shorter, and it seemed to slip by faster into the murky distance.

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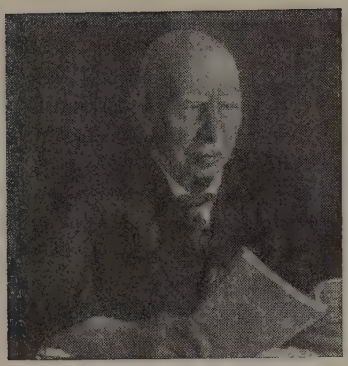


Alexander Serafimovich

Two Deaths

A grey-eyed girl with a shawl over her head came to the Moscow Soviet, to headquarters.

The October sky was grim and threatening; White Guard cadets, crawling over the bleak wet roofs between the chimneys, were firing, bringing down careless people who ventured to cross the Soviet Square.

"Can't I do something useful for the Revolution?" said the girl. "I'd like to get information for you about the cadets. I don't know anything about nursing —you've got plenty of nurses, anyway. I can't fight, either, never held a weapon in my hand. But if you give me a pass I'll get information for you."

The comrade, in a greasy leather jacket, a Mauser automatic stuck in his belt, peered at her intently; his cheeks were sunken from sleepless nights and consumption.

"If you fool us, we'll shoot you," he said. "Do you understand the situation? If they catch you over there, they'll shoot you. If you deceive us, we'll shoot you here!"

"I know."

"Think twice!"

She straightened the shawl on her head.

"Give me a pass and some document showing that I'm an officer's daughter."

They told her to go into another room and placed a sentry at the door.

On the square outside shots were exchanged—a cadets' armoured car had dashed up, fired and withdrawn.

"The devil alone knows! We've tried to check on her but what's the good of it?" said the comrade with the consumptive face. "Of course she might be a fake. All right, give her a pass. Anyway, there's not much she can tell them about us. If we catch her at any tricks, we'll fix her."

She was supplied with false documents and she went to the Alexandrov

Military School on Arbat Street, showing her pass to Red Army sentries at the corners.

When she reached Znamenka Street she hid her red pass. She was surrounded by cadets who took her into the school to the orderly officer.

"I want to work as a nurse. My father was killed in the German war, when Samsonov retreated. I've got two brothers in Cossack units on the Don. I'm here with a younger sister."

"Very good, excellent. We're very glad. In our hard struggle for great Russia we are glad to have the sincere help of every noble patriot. And you—the daughter of an officer. Come this way, please."

They showed her into the drawing room and brought her tea.

In the meantime the officer on duty said to his subordinate:

"Stepanov, dress yourself as a worker. Make your way to Pokrovka. Here's the address. Find out all the details about the girl who's sitting here."

Stepanov went and put on an overcoat with a blood-stained hole in front that had just been taken off a worker who had been killed. He put on his trousers, torn boots and cap and in the twilight set out for Pokrovka.

A ragged, red-headed man, whose eyes rolled strangely, told him about her.

"Yes, there's some woman living in Number Two. With a little girl. Some bourgeois."

"Where is she now?"

"She hasn't been home since morning. She's probably been arrested. Captain's daughter, she can't be any good. What do you want her for, anyway?"

"She had a maid who comes from our village. I wanted to see her, that's all. So long."

At night, when the cadets returned from their posts, they all gathered around the grey-eyed girl. They got cakes and sweets for her. One of them began playing on the piano, another dropped onto his knee and, laughing, offered her a bouquet.

"We'll soon dispose of that scum. We've already given them a good lesson. Tomorrow night we'll attack from Smolensk Market and then you'll see the feathers fly."

Next morning they took her to the hospital to dress wounds.

As they passed a whitewashed wall something attracted her attention: against the wall lay the body of a worker in a pink cotton shirt, his head thrown back, mud-covered boots with worn soles, a dark hole over his left eye.

"A spy," snapped the cadet walking past without looking. "We caught him."

All day the girl worked in the hospital, gently and skilfully, and the wounded looked gratefully into her grey eyes with their long dark lashes.

"Thank you, sister."

On the second night she asked for permission to go home.

"Where can you go? Don't you know it's dangerous? They're watching every corner. As soon as you get out of our zone those blackguards will grab you or else they'll just shoot without any talk."

"I'll show them my documents. I'm a peaceful citizen. I can't stay away. I have a little sister there. God knows what's happening to her, I'm terribly worried."

"Yes, the little sister. That's true. All right, I'll give you two cadets as escort."

"No, no, no..." she said in a frightened voice, holding out her hands, "I'll go alone... alone.... I'm not afraid."

He looked at her closely.

"Y-yes.... All right.... Off you go."

"Pink shirt, and a dark hole over his eye... head thrown back...." ran through her mind.

The girl went out of the gates and was immediately immersed in an ocean of darkness—not a sign or a sound of anything.

From the school she passed diagonally across Arbat Square to the Arbat Gates. A little circle of darkness went with her in which she could distinguish her own figure. Nothing else—she was alone in the whole wide world.

She was not afraid. Only inside she was all tensed up.

In her childhood she would sometimes go into her father's room when he was away, take down the guitar that hung on a wall-carpet over his bed, sit down with her feet tucked up under her and pluck a string; then she would turn the peg pulling up the string tighter and tighter, the note got thinner and more plaintive until it became unbearable. A thin ting-ting-ting, a spasm that pierced the very heart. What if it snaps, surely it could not bear the strain.... And the shivers would run down her back and there would be little beads of sweat on her forehead.... This gave her an exquisite, unique pleasure. Thus she walked in the darkness, and there was no fear in her, only that thin ting-ting sound filled her head. Vaguely she could distinguish her own dark figure.

Suddenly she stretched out her hand. The wall of a house. The horror that spread through her whole body brought with it a weakening langour and the sweat stood out in little beads as it had done then, in her childhood. The wall of a house—there should have been the railings of the boulevard here. That meant that she had lost her way. Well, it didn't really matter, she would find the right direction. Her teeth chattered from a fit of shivering deep down inside her. Somebody bent over her and whispered:

"This is the beginning of the end... don't you understand? You think you have only lost your way, but it's the begin...."

She made a superhuman effort to remember: Znamenka Street on the right, the boulevard on the left.... Obviously she had got somewhere between them.

She held out her hand and felt a post. Telegraph pole? With a fast-beating heart she knelt down and felt along the ground, her fingers felt cold, wet iron.... The boulevard railings. The weight immediately fell from her. She got up calmly and... shivered. Everything was in motion all round her—vaguely, indistinctly disappearing and reappearing. Everything was moving, the buildings, the walls, the trees. The tram standards, the tram-lines all moved blood-red in the blood-red darkness. And the dull red darkness moved. And the low-hanging clouds blazed blood-red.

She went in the direction from which came this silent, fluttering gleam. She went towards the Nikitskiye Gates. It was strange that so far nobody had hailed or stopped her. She knew that in the blackness of gateways and doorways, at the corners, sentries were hidden who did not take their eyes off her. She was in full view, she walked along lit up by the red blaze, she walked in the middle of it.

She walked calmly, in one hand holding the pass given by the Whites, in the other hand that of the Reds. Whoever hailed her she would show the necessary pass. The streets were empty, there was nothing but the mournfully red, silent blaze. There was a tremendous conflagration at the Nikitskiye Gates. Furious tongues of flame pierced the low-hanging red clouds over which rolled masses of red smoke. A huge building was lit through and through with a blazing, blinding light. In this blinding incandescence everything was trembling madly, was ferociously whirled up to the clouds; only the beams, frames and walls stood motionless, like a black skeleton. And the gaping window holes glared with the same searing light.

The sparks of a long-tailed, red bird carried up to the clouds, and the crackling and white-hot whispering drowned whatever else was going on around that building.

The girl turned round. The city was plunged in darkness. The city with its countless buildings, belfries, squares, theatres, brothels—had disappeared. There was nothing but impenetrable darkness.

In the whole of that space there was silence and in the silence, mystery: something was about to happen, something nameless. But the silence reigned supreme and in that silence—anticipation. The girl was terror-stricken.

The heat was unbearable. She crossed the street diagonally. She had no sooner reached a dark corner than a squat figure appeared out of the darkness, the light reflected on his bayonet.

"Halt! Who are you?"

She stopped and looked. She had forgotten which pass was in which hand. A second's hesitation dragged out.... The muzzle of a rifle rose to the level of her chest.

What was the matter? She had wanted to hold out her right hand and

suddenly, without knowing what she was doing, she held out her left hand and jerkily opened it.

In her hand lay the pass issued by the cadets.

The sentry put down his rifle and with clumsy, disobedient fingers smoothed out the pass. She trembled, a tiny little shiver such as she had never experienced before. Behind her a shower of sparks burst out of the conflagration, casting a flickering light. . . . The cadets' pass lay on his calloused palm. . . upside down. . . .

"Uh. . . he's illiterate. . . ."

"Here."

She crumpled that accursed piece of paper.

"Where are you going?" he called after her.

"To headquarters. . . . To the Soviet. . . ."

"Stick to the side streets or they'll get you."

At headquarters she was listened to with eager attention: the information she had brought was very valuable. They all were friendly with her, asking her questions. The man in the leather jacket, the one with the consumptive face, smiled warmly at her.

"Well done, girl. Only watch your step."

In the evening, when the firing died down, she made her way back to Arbat Street. More and more wounded were all the time arriving at the hospital from the surrounding district. The attack launched by the cadets from Smolensk Market had been beaten back; there had been heavy losses.

All night long the girl with a tired, worn-out face gave the wounded men water, bound their wounds and the wounded followed her movements with gratitude in their eyes. At dawn a cadet without a cap and dressed in worker's clothes burst into the hospital; he was dishevelled and his face was contorted.

He ran straight up to the girl.

"That. . . bitch. . . sold us out. . . ."

She staggered back, white as a sheet, then her face was flushed with the flush of death as she screamed:

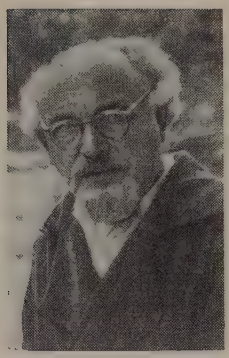
"You. . . you are killing workers. They are fighting their way out of their awful lot. . . . I have. . . . I don't know how to use weapons but I've killed you. . . ."

They led her out to the whitewashed wall and she fell meekly with two bullets in her heart onto that same place where the worker in the cotton shirt had lain. And until they took her away her grey, long-lashed eyes stared fixedly at the grim and threatening October sky.

1926

Mikhail Prishvin

The Old Mushroom



1

In the year 1905 we had a revolution. At that time my friend was in the prime of his youthful strength and fought on the barricades of Presnya[1]. Strangers greeted him as "brother."

"I say, brother," one would ask, "where is. . . ." He would name a street, and "brother" would tell him where the street was.

Then came the First World War in 1914 and I heard people saying to him:

"I say, father. . . ."

They began calling him "father" now instead of "brother."

The last great Revolution came. White, silvery hairs appeared in my friend's beard and on his head. When they met him now, people who had known him before the Revolution looked at his grizzled hair and said:

"What's happened to you, father? Trading flour?"

"No, silver," he would say. "But that's not what does it."

His real trade was to serve society and, in addition, he was a doctor and healed people and, over and above that, he was a kind man and helped those who came to him for advice in every way. And so, working from morning till late at night, he lived for fifteen years under Soviet rule.

One day I heard someone stopping him on the street.

"Grandfather, hey, grandfather, tell me. . . ."

So my friend, once a little boy with whom I had shared a desk at school, came to be hailed as "grandfather."

And so, before you know it, time passes, time simply flies.

However, let me go on about my friend. Our "grandfather" grew whiter and whiter and, finally, there came the great day of our victory over the Germans.

[1] Presnya—an industrial district of Moscow—*Tr.*

And "grandfather," having received an honorary invitation to the Red Square, made his way there under an umbrella, heedless of the rain. So he and I walked together till we reached Sverdlov Square where, behind a line of militia, the whole square was filled with troops, grand-looking youngsters, picked and matched to perfection. Everything round about was damp with rain, but to see them standing there like that made you feel that it was a very fine day.

We began to show our passes and then, suddenly, a cheeky boy popped up from nowhere—probably trying to bluff his way through to watch the parade. The cheeky lad saw my old friend with his umbrella and asked him:

"What's the good of your going, you old mushroom?"

I felt hurt and, I must admit, thoroughly lost my temper and seized the lad by the scruff of his neck. But he tore himself away with a leap like a hare, glancing back at us in mid-air, and bolted.

2

For a while, the parade on the Red Square quite eclipsed the memory of the boy and his "old mushroom." When I reached home, however, and lay down for a rest, the "old mushroom" came back to my mind. I admonished the cheeky youngster *in absentio*.

"In what way is a young mushroom better than an old mushroom? A young mushroom's only good for the frying pan, whereas an old mushroom sows the spores of future generations and spends its life for other, new mushrooms."

And I remembered a certain rawbite[1] in the wood where I always go to gather mushrooms. It was going on towards autumn when birches and alders are beginning to scatter their golden coinage over the young firs.

It was one of those warm, even steamy, days when mushrooms seem to rush up from the damp, warm earth. On such a day, it is possible to make a clean sweep of all you find and soon afterwards another mushroomer will come after you and will gather more from that very same place; they just go on sprouting up again as fast as you can pick them.

This day, then, was like that, a steamy day, ideal for mushrooms. This particular time, though, I was out of luck. I had collected all sorts of common bits in my basket; rawbites, redheads, birch-mushrooms—but only two white mushrooms. If there had been plenty of them, I would scarcely, old man that I am, have gone bending down to pick the more common sorts! But at need one will make one's bow even to the rawbite.

It was very steamy and all the bobbing and bowing had set my insides on fire so that I was dying for a drink. But how could I go home with nothing but

[1] The rawbite is the popular name for the *russula* mushroom—*Tr.*

trash in my basket on such a day? There was plenty of time still to look for white mushrooms.

Sometimes one comes across streams in our forests, from these little streams smaller streamlets branch off, and from these little trickles or even simply oozy patches. I was so thirsty that I would, I think, have tried chewing damp earth. But it was a long way to the stream and even further to the nearest rain cloud; the stream was out of walking distance, the cloud beyond reach.

Suddenly I heard a little grey bird beyond a dense stand of firs, whistling:

"Peet, peet[1]!"

It is a sign of rain when this little grey bird, the rain-bird, asks for a drink in this way:

"Peet, peet!"

"Silly," I said, "we'll see whether the cloud'll take any notice of you."

I glanced up at the sky but there was no sign of rain: A clear sky above us and steam rising from the earth, like in a bath house.

What was to be done in such straits?

The bird, too, kept harping on in its own language:

"Peet! Peet!"

At that, I had a little grin to myself: here was I, an old man who had lived a long life and seen many sights and learned much wisdom, and there was this little bird, and both of us were sharing the same wish.

"Come now," I said to myself, "I'll take a look at this comrade of mine."

I moved cautiously forward, making no sound in the dense firs, raised one little branch—and what a surprise I got!

Through this forest window I found myself looking out onto a glade with two birches in the middle of it and, beneath the birches, a tree stump and, beside the stump, in a clump of green wortle-berries, a red rawbite, the biggest I have ever seen. It was so old that the edges had turned upwards, something which only happens to rawbites.

Because of this, the whole mushroom was just like a soup plate and, what was more, it was filled with water.

I began to feel lighter of heart.

Then, suddenly, I saw a tiny grey bird come flying down from the birch tree, alight on the edge of the rawbite and plunge his beak into the water—peck! Then back went his head to make the drop go down his throat.

"Peet! peet!" another bird was twittering at him from the birch tree.

There was a leaf on the water in the bowl—a small, dry, yellow leaf. Every time the bird pecked, the water trembled and the leaf bobbed on the surface.

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[1] The Russian word for the verb "to drink" is "peet," pronounced approximately as written with a palatalized "t"—*Tr.*

As for me, I was happy looking on at all this through my little window and in no hurry: How much can a bird drink after all. Let him slake his thirst, there'll be plenty left!

The bird finished his drink and flew up into the birch tree. The other flew down and settled, like the first, on the edge of the mushroom. Then the one which had finished drinking encouraged her from above:

"Peet, peet!"

I came out of the firs so quietly that the birds did not take much alarm, but merely fluttered over from one birch tree to another.

However, they began to chirrup less placidly than before, with a certain anxiety, which I understood as one of them asking:

"Vypyet?"

And the other answering:

"Nye vypyet!"

I understood them to be talking about me and the bowl of forest water: one was asking, "Will he drink it all up?" while the other answered back, "He will not."

"I will, though, I will drink it all up!" I said to them out loud.

"He *will* drink," they twittered still more persistently. "Vypyet-Vypyet!"

However, it was not so easy for me to drink that bowl of forest water.

Of course, it would have been very easy to do what everyone does who has no knowledge of forest life and only comes to the forest to take something for themselves. Such a one would have carefully cut the stalk of the rawbite with his mushrooming knife, raised it to this lips, drunk the water and immediately dashed the old mushroom's head, which would be of no further use to him, against a tree.

And that's that!

To my way of thinking, though, that would be simply foolish. Just think—how could I do a thing like that when two birds had just drunk their fill from that old mushroom before my very eyes, when there was no telling who had drunk from it before I came there, when here was I myself, dying of thirst, and about to drink, and when after me the rain would come and fill it up again and again everyone would come to drink. Furthermore, seeds were maturing in this mushroom, spores which the wind would seize on and scatter about the wood for the future. . . .

There was nothing else to be done. Grunting and groaning I sunk down on my old knees and stretched myself out flat on my stomach. At need, as I was saying, I did make my bow to the rawbite.

And the birds! The birds kept up their old will-he-won't-he game.

"Vypyet—nye vypyet?"

"That's enough from you, friends," I said to them. "You can call off the argument: now I'm down here and I'm going to drink it all up."

As good luck would have it, when I got down on my stomach my parched lips were just touching the cool lips of the mushroom. Just as I was about to take a sip, however, I saw a spider in the gold birch-leaf boat lowering himself on his fine thread down into the soft bowl. Either he had been visited by an urge to swim or he needed a drink.

"What a lot of you hopefuls there are!" I said to him. "I've had enough of you. . . ."

And drank off the whole forest goblet at one draught.

3

It may be that I remembered about the old mushroom and told you about it out of pity for my friend. But the story of the old mushroom is only the beginning of my long story about the forest. Further on, I will tell you what happened to me when I drank the living water.

It will be a tale of wonders, not like those of the legend of the living water and the dead water, but real wonders such as happen here, there and everywhere and at every moment of our lives, save that, so often, having eyes, we see them not, and having ears, we do not hear them.

1945

Alexander Green

The Water-Colour

Clisson woke up in a bad mood. The previous evening, Betsy had reproached him bitterly for living on her earnings whereas Wilson had got himself a job on the river steamer *Dennim*.

Clisson had also signed on, as stoker, but he had deliberately missed the train so that the *Dennim* should sail without him. The washerwoman earned quite good money. Clisson encouraged Betsy's weakness for the bottle. When tight, the woman would hand over money to him quite meekly. She was considered a good washerwoman and therefore always had plenty of work.

Lying in bed with a thick head and heartburn, Clisson smoked a cigarette and wondered how on earth he was going to lay hands on five shillings? It was a holiday; the day before the stoker had made an appointment with a pal in Fooks' pub.

The gay, green morning stirred the ivy leaves that climbed over the window-frame. The shrubs growing up against the cottage wall smelt sweetly. Clisson, gazing at the white and yellow flowers, tried to imagine that they were silver and gold coins. He counted up to forty of them and sighed.

Betsy brought in the metal teapot. Yawning, she began to lay the table.

There was no other furniture in the room except for stools, two beds and an old wicker chair. In the corner behind the door the rubbish was allowed to collect for a week at a time. Scraps of food lay on the window-sill; the floor was scattered with cucumber and apple peel. Against the wall huge laundry baskets full of soiled linen exhaled a damp, rotten smell.

As she moved round the table, the washerwoman kicked over an empty bottle and it rolled away expressively, reminding Clisson that what he needed was a hair of the dog.

Betsy's sullen expression was not encouraging. Regretting that he had forgotten to wheedle the money out of her the previous evening, Clisson dressed

dejectedly; apprehensive of a renewal of yesterday's reproaches, he was in no hurry to start the talking.

They sat down to tea in silence. By the way in which Betsy snatched the knife with which the stoker was cutting his bread, Clisson felt darkly convinced that the washerwoman had not forgotten the *Dennim*. There is nothing to lose. Clisson said:

"Missed the train. Don't think I did it on purpose, do you? Bad luck, that's all. Now won't you spare me a shilling?"

"I'll be damned if I do," Betsy replied calmly. "I've done the wash for five households this week. Enough for me; now I'll take to drinking, like you."

They swore at each other, then fell silent again. Clisson forced down a mug of tea, envying Betsy who didn't know what it was to have the headache. To get his own back, he remarked:

"You drink yourself. You got tight yesterday and began to sing. Put on someone else's lace slip and preened yourself."

"Well, you shouldn't encourage me. I never drank so much before. Now I do drink and, what's more, I'm going to go on drinking, but I'll keep my money."

They were on the verge of coming to blows but, at that moment, a neighbour called to Betsy through the window and she went out, glancing at a laundry basket in the corner as she went. No sooner was his wife out of sight than Clisson sprang across to the basket and thrust his hand into the linen in the place on which Betsy's eye had rested. The money was in an old cigarette packet and Clisson took a couple of half-crowns and quickly smoothed over the linen, then returned to his seat at the table.

Betsy, who came back almost immediately, shot Clisson a suspicious look but did not detect the theft. Sighing, she began to shake a blanket out of the window and Clisson hid his cap in the inside pocket of his jacket; passing through several empty rooms vainly expectant of lodgers, he came to an open window, jumped out of it and went round the back of the shed where Betsy did her washing in the summer. Then he put on his cap and, sure now that the washerwoman was not following him, hurried to the tram stop.

In the crowded car Clisson completely relaxed.

Half an hour later Clisson was in the town centre and, looking fondly at his five shillings, he set out for Fooks' pub. Having crossed the road, Clisson looked about him and started: Betsy was walking straight towards him, not taking her eyes off him, and she nodded significantly when, coming to an involuntary halt, he sank his head into his collar.

The forthcoming explanation so wrung Clisson's heart that he had not the courage to face the music. The sight of that black skirt and check kerchief advancing on him with inexorable speed, thrusting aside and overtaking the passers-

by, impelled him to flight, and Clisson took to his heels, glancing into all the doors and entrances in the hope of finding some safe hiding place. Hearing behind him a shout of "You won't get away, you dirty dog!" Clisson broke into a run and turned a corner. Here there was a deep-set, imposing entrance with revolving doors. With the quickness of desperation, Clisson read the legend on the oval plaque: "Spring Exhibition of Water-Colours." He ran up a sunlit flight of steps to the door of the hall where he was stopped by a determined-looking young lady who obliged him to purchase a ticket. Changing one of the half-crowns, he felt a certain satisfaction that he had at least succeeded in spending some of the money and that Betsy must have lost sight of his fleeing back.

Clisson passed through a room from the lofty walls of which a multitude of faces stared down at him. It was not part of his intentions to criticize Smiles or Dejrois; he just wanted to spend a bit of time there and to go away again. He saw some thoughtful visitors exchanging quiet comments and then... there could be no doubt, he recognized Betsy. She was bearing down upon him, smiling coldly. Her eyes were narrowed and she saw no one and nothing other than Clisson, who had taken her five bob.

"So here you are!" said Betsy in a voice of ice. "Let's go outside and talk things over."

"Not here, though," implored Clisson. "This is an exhibition.... I came to see the exhibition.... Where were you? I didn't see you on the tram...."

"In the second car. Answer me: How long is this to be going on? You dirty dog, you!"

"I'm not tied to your apron strings," Clisson snapped back, and walked faster and faster through the crowd.

Trying to keep their voices down, they quarrelled, showering abuse on one another, and Betsy burst into tears. Clisson's cup of underhand misery was full to overflowing. He saw that the visitors to the exhibition were beginning to notice him and the washerwoman; he became aware of enquiring glances, smiles. Not knowing what to do, Clisson turned out of one door and through another and Betsy followed him like a drill boring through wood, and Clisson began stopping in front of pictures—although he was in no mood to look at them—choosing the places where there were most people. When he did this Betsy would fall silent but he had only to move on again to hear the suppressed whisper: "Idler! Hypocrite! Drunkard!" or "Come away from here at once! Give back the money!"

"Shut up!" said Clisson, so loudly that the woman, afraid of a scandal, fell silent. She came up behind him to a picture at which Clisson was glowering fixedly as though he were contemplating a smiling enemy. There were about ten people looking at it. The path dappled with light which slanted down

through the leaves and fell on the ivy-clad wall of a brick house with a little porch and an empty cage abandoned beside a wooden bench struck Clisson as familiar.

"Looks like our house," he pronounced on a note of pleading, hoping to put an end to his torment.

"Have you gone balmy?"

However, the longer the washerwoman looked at the picture, the clearer it became to her that this was indeed the house from which had vanished the ill-starred five shillings. She recognized the windows, the bench, the boughs of maple and oak between which she had stretched her clothes-line. The gap in the bushes, the corner of the wall, the slope of the roof, even the empty tin—all these left no room for doubt. Eyes and memory combined to prove that Betsy and Clisson were looking at their own home. Thrilled, awed, interrupting one another with detailed commentaries, they made sure that there could be no mistake.

"There's the rubbish bin behind the porch; it's out of sight!" announced Betsy joyfully.

"Aye, but what about the inside? If only you'd tidied up a bit," commented Clisson ruefully.

They retired to a corner; there, whispering together, they tried to establish how a picture of their house came to be in this gallery. Clisson proferred the suggestion that the picture was a coloured photograph. Betsy, however, remembered a man she had seen with a box and folding chair about a month and a half ago.

"I thought to myself then," she said, "he walks along and takes no notice of anything. I wanted to go back, it seemed so queer meeting him there, not like anyone I've ever seen! But you'd gone and got yourself lost for three days and for two days I'd been looking for you."

Having said all they had to say to one another, they returned to the picture which had so unexpectedly liquidated their hostile mood. Several people were standing in front of it. Looking at these people, Clisson felt as odd as if they had come to look at his real life house. A lady said:

"Quite the loveliest thing of the season. What light! And just look at the ivy!"

On hearing this, Clisson and Betsy began to feel more confident and pressed up closer. They were tormented by the fear that the lookers-on would see the empty bottles and the bundles of dirty washing. At the same time the picture began to exercise a kind of enchantment over them, they absorbed the charm of the over-exuberant greenery which had curled about the brick house on that morning when the man with the folding chair had passed along the sun-dappled path.

They looked round proudly, regretting bitterly that they would never have the courage to declare their ownership. Two years now since we've been the tenants, the thought flashed through their minds. Clisson drew himself up. Betsy straightened the kerchief over her shrivelled bosom.

"Anyway," said Betsy, "I get more washing than that slut Raban, because I know my job. I don't use no soda and I don't spare my hands. Well... since you pinched it, you'd better go and have a drink on it... but don't spend it all."

Clisson did not answer at once, then he whispered:

"Let's go. I don't mind if I do have a drink. I said I would and I always keep my word. Tomorrow I would have to have a word with Hobson. Hobson promised me a place if Snake refuses."

"He's just having you on, you take my word for it."

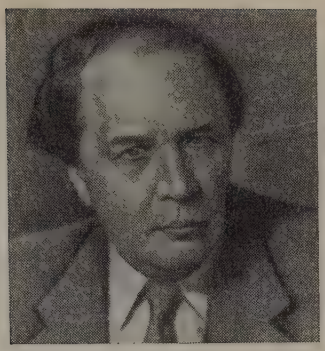
"Well, never mind, Hobson and I'll have a drink and a bit of a chat."

They passed by the picture once again, taking a last sideways glance at it as they went, and came out into the street with a feeling of surprise that they were on their way back to that very house about which all those strangers were saying such pleasant and appreciative things.

1929

Alexei Tolstoy

The Russian Character



The Russian character! It is too impressive a title, of course, for a story of no great length. But there it is, it happens to be the Russian character that I want to talk about.

Yes, the Russian character—describe it, if you can, I could tell you about plenty of heroic feats, but there are so many that I should be at a loss which to choose. Luckily, however, a friend of mine has come to my rescue with a story from his life. I shan't tell you how he fought the fascists, though he wears the Gold Star and sports a row of medals across his chest. He is a simple, quiet, ordinary man—a collective farmer from a village on the Volga in Saratov region. But he used to stand out among others because of his powerful physique and good looks. You just couldn't help staring when you saw him climb out of the turret of his tank—a veritable god of war! He would leap to the ground, pull off his helmet, freeing his thick hair, now damp with sweat, wipe his smudged face with a rag, and then—he always did it—smile with the sheer joy of being alive.

When a man's at war and constantly facing death he rises above his ordinary self. All the trashy stuff that doesn't matter peels off him, like dead skin after sunburn, and only the kernel, the real man, is left. Of course, the kernel is tougher in some men than in others, but even those with a few flaws in them are trying hard, because every one wants to be a good and loyal comrade. But my friend, Yegor Dromov, was strict in his ways even before the war—he had enormous respect for his mother, Maria Polikarpovna, and his father, Yegor Yegorovich. "My father's a man of dignity. The first thing you feel about him is that he has self-respect. 'You'll see a lot of things in the world, son,' he says, 'and you'll go abroad, but mind you always keep your pride in being a Russian.' "

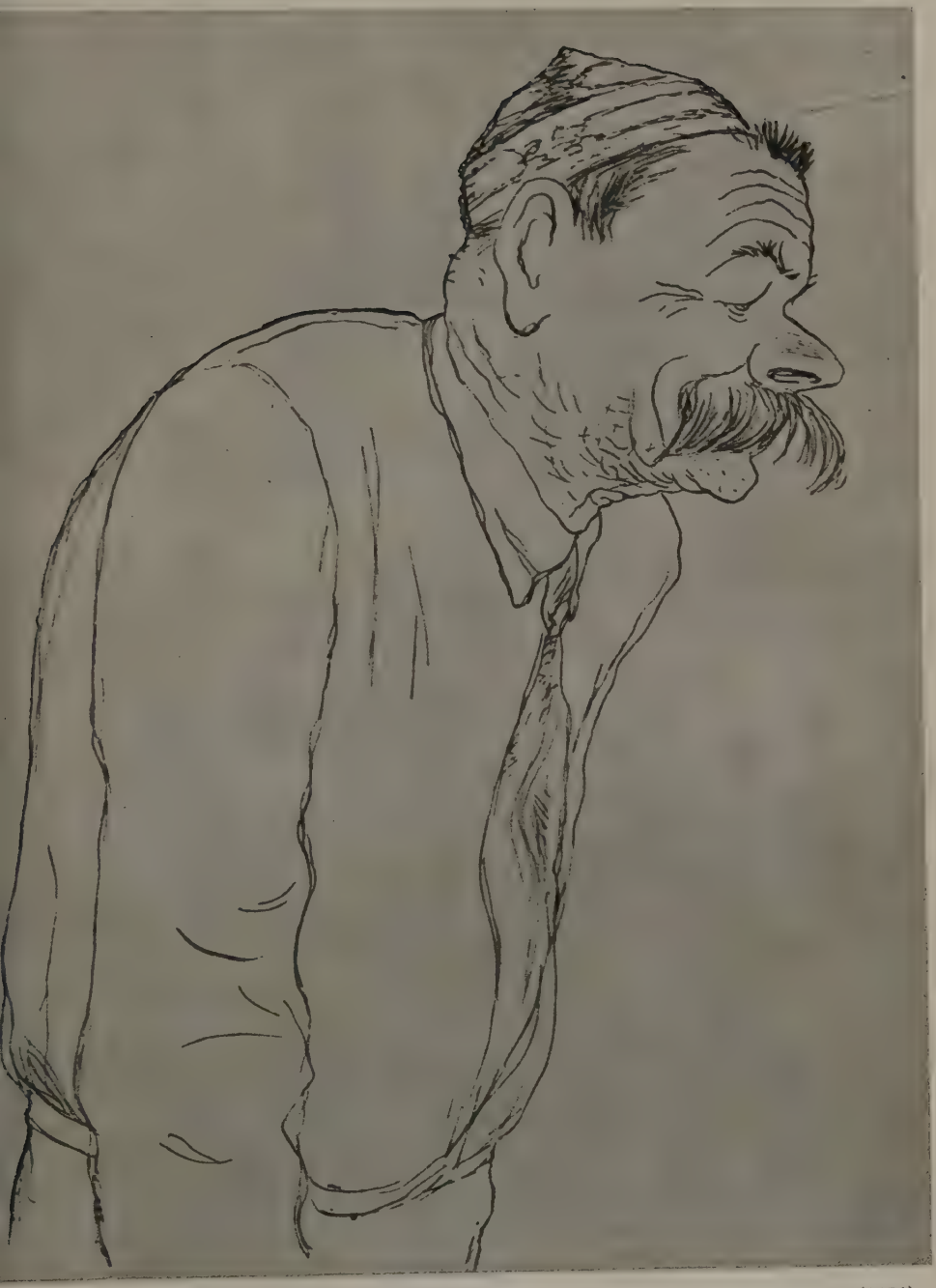
Yegor was going to marry a girl from the same village on the Volga. Our lads talk a lot about their girls and their wives, especially when it's quiet on

the front line, and cold, and there's a fire in the dug-out and they've had their supper. The things you hear sometimes, it's enough to make your ears curl up. Someone starts off, for instance: "What's love?" "Love arises out of respect," says one. And another'll say: "Nothing of the kind! Love's a habit. A man doesn't just love his wife, he loves his father and mother, he even loves animals." "Blow me, what a fool!" says a third. "When a man's in love, he's throbbing with it. He goes about as if he's drunk." And they keep it up like that for an hour or two till the sergeant-major chimes in with his voice of authority and goes right to the heart of the matter. Yegor Dromov, no doubt because he was embarrassed by such discussions, only dropped me a hint about his girl. She was, he told me, a very good girl, and if she said she'd wait for him it meant she'd be there when he came, even if he came back on one leg.

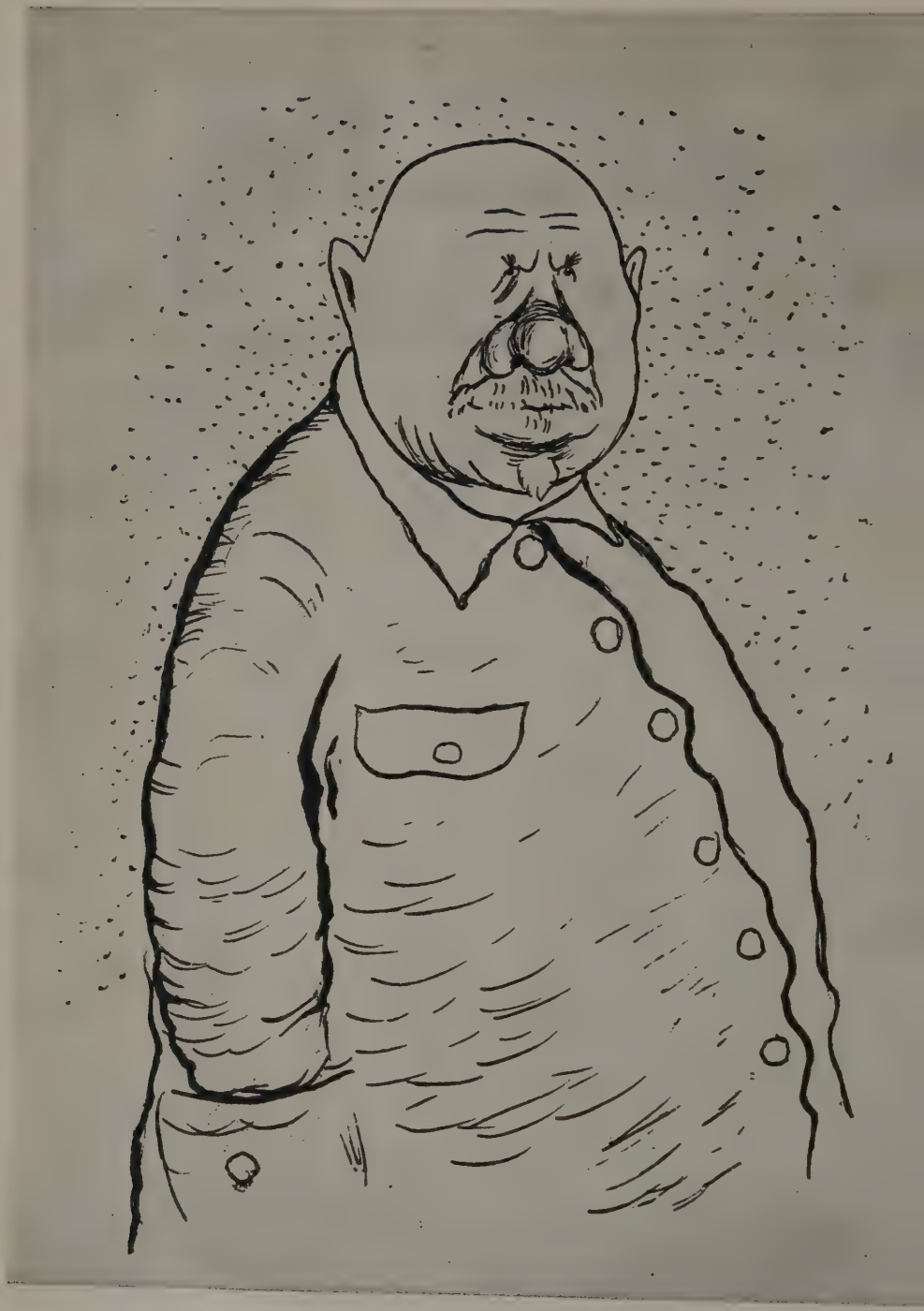
Nor did he like to talk much about his battle record. "I don't like recalling such things," he would say with a frown and pull hard at his cigarette. We heard about the battle exploits of his tank from the crew. Driver Chuvilyov told a particularly impressive story.

"...We'd only just turned round and what did I see coming over the hill.... 'Comrade Lieutenant,' I shouted, 'a Tiger!' 'Step on it!' he shouts back. So off I went, weaving through the fir trees, making use of what cover there was. The Tiger groped about with its gun like a blind man, then fired and missed. But the lieutenant let him have it right in the side—what a wallop! Then he got another shot in on the turret and the Tiger toppled back with its snout in the air. And with the third shot the smoke started pouring out of every slit, and then the flames shot up about three hundred feet high. Out comes the crew through the escape hatch and Ivan Lapshin mows 'em down with his machine-gun.... Well, that cleared the road for us, and in five minutes we came tearing into the village. What a lark! The nazis went scuttling all over the place. And it was muddy, mind you, so a lot of 'em lost their boots and went hopping around in their socks, making for the barn. So Comrade Lieutenant gave me the order: 'Ram the barn!' We turned our gun round back to front and went smack into it—Cor! There were beams and bricks and planks crashing down on us, and the nazis who'd climbed into the loft. I swung round and went in again to iron the place out. The ones that were left put their hands up and yelled 'Hitler kaput!' "

And that was how Lieutenant Yegor Dromov fought until he had a stroke of bad luck. During the Battle of Kursk, when the Germans were already hard pressed and had begun to give way, his tank, which was stationed in a wheat field on a hill, was hit by a shell that killed two of the crew outright. The next shell set it on fire. Driver Chuvilyov, who had escaped through the front hatch, climbed back onto the turret and managed to pull out the lieutenant—he was unconscious and his battle dress was burning. Chuvilyov had only just dragged

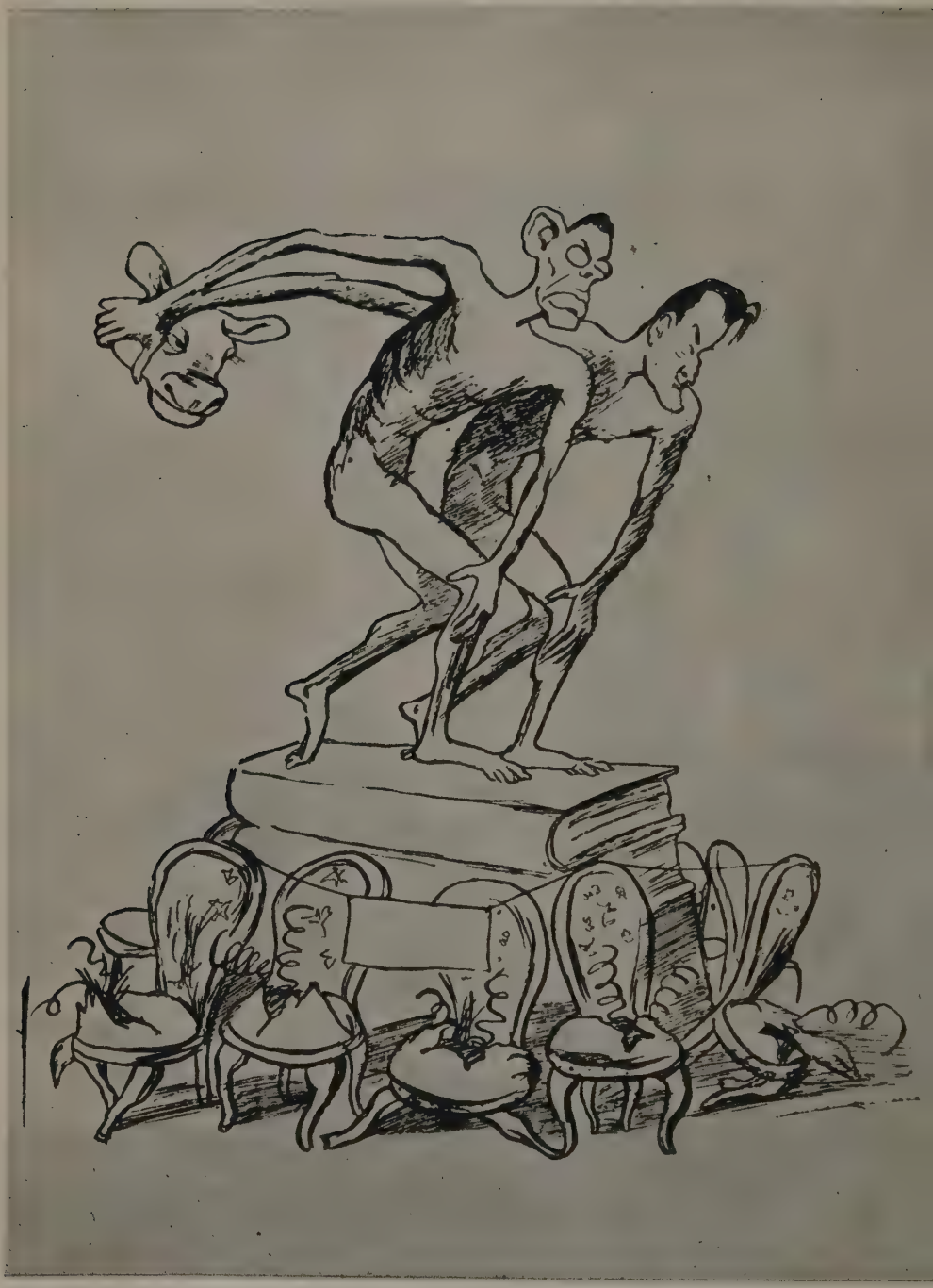


Maxim Gorky (1931)



Alexander Serafimovich (1932)

Alexei Tolstoy (1934)



Ilya Ilf and Evgeni Petrov (1934)

him clear when an explosion ripped the tank to pieces and hurled the turret about fifty yards. He threw handfuls of loose earth on the lieutenant's head and clothes to put the flames out, then dragged him from one shell hole to another till he found a first-aid post. "Why did I do it?" Chuvilyov said afterwards. "Because I could hear his heart was still beating. . . ."

Yegor Dromov survived and didn't even lose his sight, although his face was so badly burned that in places the bones were showing. He was in hospital for eight months. Plastic surgery restored his nose, lips, eyelids and ears. When the eight months were over and the bandages taken off, he looked in the glass at a face that was his, yet no longer his. The nurse, who had given him the little pocket mirror, turned away and cried. He gave the mirror back to her.

"I've known worse," he said. "I can get by."

But he never asked the nurse for her mirror again. Instead he would often feel his face, as though trying to get used to it. When the medical board declared him fit for non-combatant service, he went straight to his general and asked permission to return to his regiment. "But you're disabled," said the general. "No, I'm not. I'm disfigured, but that doesn't matter. I'll soon be able to fight as well as I ever did." (Yegor noticed that the general tried to avoid looking at him during the interview, and this made him give a grim smile with the blue slit that was his mouth.) He was granted twenty days' leave to complete his convalescence and went home to see his father and mother. That was last March.

He had expected to get a cart at the station but had to walk the ten miles to his village. The ground was still covered with snow. It was damp and deserted everywhere. The biting wind kept dragging open the flaps of his great-coat and howling loneliness in his ears. It was growing dark by the time he reached the village. Yes, there was the well, with the long well-sweep creaking to and fro in the wind. The sixth cottage down the street was his father's house. Suddenly he halted, pushed his hands into his pockets and shook his head. Instead of going up to the front door, he cut across the patch of ground round the house and, sinking knee-deep in the snow, bent down to the low window and looked in at his mother. By the dim light of an oil lamp she was laying the table for supper. She still wore the same dark shawl on her head, still looked as quiet, unhurried and kind, but she had grown older, and her shoulders were very thin. If only I'd known, he thought, I'd have written every day, even if it was only a few words. She prepared her simple meal—a bowl of milk, a piece of bread, two spoons and a salt-cellar—and then, standing at the table with her thin arms folded under her breast, she seemed to become lost in thought. As he watched his mother through the window, Yegor Dromov realized that he couldn't possibly give her such a fright, that he mustn't let her poor little face crumple in despair.

Very well then! He opened the gate, stepped into the yard and knocked at the door. He heard his mother's voice ask from inside who was there. "Lieutenant Gromov, Hero of the Soviet Union," he replied.

His heart was thumping so violently that he had to lean against the doorpost. No, his mother hadn't recognized his voice. He himself felt as if he was hearing it for the first time, it had changed so much after all his operations. It was thick and hoarse.

"What do you want, son?" she asked.

"I've brought you greetings, Maria Polikarpovna, from your son, Senior Lieutenant Dromov."

Then she opened the door, rushed out and grabbed his hands.

"Is he really alive, my Yegor? Is he well? Come inside, dear, come inside."

Yegor Dromov sat down on the bench at the table in the very place where he had sat in the days before his legs were long enough to touch the floor, when his mother would sometimes stroke his curly head and say: "Eat up, my little swallow." He started telling her about her son, about himself. He told her in detail what he ate and drank, how well and happy he was, and free of hardship, and only briefly did he mention his tank battles.

"But tell me, isn't war frightening?" she interrupted, staring into his face with eyes that were focussed elsewhere.

"Yes, mother, of course, it is," he replied, "but you get used to it."

Yegor Yegorovich, his father, came in. He had also aged; his beard looked as if it had been sprinkled with flour. He eyed the guest, kicked the snow off his battered felt boots against the doorstep, slowly unwound his scarf, took off his overcoat, and walked over to the table and shook hands—ah, how well Yegor knew that broad, just hand of his father's! Asking no questions, because it was quite clear without that why this man with a row of medals was here, he sat down and also began to listen, with half-closed eyes.

The longer Lieutenant Dromov sat there unrecognized and talked about himself as though he were someone else, the more impossible it became to throw off the pretence, to stand up and say: "Can't you recognize me, father and mother, disfigured though I am!" At his parents' table he felt both happy and hurt.

"Well, mother, let's have supper. Bring us something for our guest." Yegor Yegorovich opened the door of the little dresser. Yes, the matchbox full of fishhooks was still there, and so was the teapot with a chipped spout and the dresser still smelled of bread crumbs and onion peel. Yegor Yegorovich took out a small decanter of vodka—only enough for two glasses—and sighed because he wouldn't be able to get any more. They sat down to supper, as they had in years gone by. And only after a while did Lieutenant Dromov notice that his mother was following every movement of the hand in which he held his spoon. He gave a short laugh; his mother raised her eyes, and her face quivered with pain.

They talked of one thing and another, of what the spring would be like and whether the people would manage to get the sowing done, and Yegor Yegorovich said that they might expect to see the end of the war this summer.

"Why do you think the war may end this summer, Yegor Yegorovich?"

"The people have got their dander up," Yegor Yegorovich replied. "They've been through death itself. There'll be no stopping them now. The fascists are finished."

Maria Polikarpovna asked: "You haven't told us when they'll give him leave to come home and see us. We haven't seen him for three years. I expect he's got much bigger and wears a moustache. And being near to death every day, like he is, I dare say his voice has got harsher."

"Yes, when he comes back you mayn't even recognize him," said the lieutenant.

They put him to bed on the ledge over the stove, where he remembered every brick, every chink in the log wall, every knot in the ceiling. It all smelt of sheepskin and bread, of that homely comfort that a man never forgets, even in the hour of death. The March wind whistled and murmured under the eaves. Behind the wooden partition his father snored gently. But his mother sighed and stirred restlessly on her bed; she was not asleep. The lieutenant lay on his stomach with his face in his hands. How can it be that she didn't recognize me, he was thinking.

In the morning he was wakened by the crackle of burning wood; his mother was quietly tending the stove. His footcloths, which she had washed, were hanging on a rope stretched from wall to wall. His boots had been cleaned and were standing by the door.

"Do you like millet pancakes?" she asked him.

He didn't answer at once. He climbed down from the stove, put on his tunic and belted it, and sat down on the bench barefooted.

"Does a Katya Malysheva live in your village? Andrei Malyshev's daughter?"

"She finished her courses last year, she's our village schoolteacher. Do you want to see her?"

"Your son asked me to make sure I passed on his regards."

His mother sent the neighbours' daughter for her. Before the lieutenant had time to pull on his boots, Katya Malysheva was there. Her wide grey eyes were shining, her brows raised in wonder and her cheeks flushed with joy. When she threw back her shawl onto her broad shoulders, the lieutenant groaned to himself. If only he could kiss that hair! This was just how he had imagined her. Fresh, tender, merry, kind, beautiful—so beautiful that the whole cottage seemed to glow like gold when she entered it.

"Have you brought greetings from Yegor?" (He was standing with his back to the light and he merely nodded because he couldn't speak.) "Tell him I'm waiting for him day and night."

She came closer. Her eyes met his and she fell back a pace, as though she had been struck in the chest; she was frightened. That made up his mind—he wouldn't stay a day longer.

His mother made some millet pancakes with baked milk. He talked again about Lieutenant Dromov, this time about his deeds of valour. He spoke harshly, without looking up at Katya, so that he shouldn't see in her sweet face the reflection of his disfigurement. Yegor Yegorovich wanted to go and ask for one of the collective farm's horses, but the lieutenant went off to the station on foot, as he had come. He was so overwhelmed by what had happened that he kept stopping and pressing his hands to his face, muttering hoarsely to himself: "What shall I do now?"

He returned to his regiment, which had been brought back to the rear for reinforcement. And there he got such a welcome from his friends that it shifted the load off his heart, which had kept him from eating and sleeping, and had been nearly choking him. He decided that his mother needn't know about his misfortune for some time yet. And as for Katya—he would tear that thorn out of his heart.

About two weeks later he received a letter from his mother:

"My darling son! I am afraid to write to you, for I hardly know what to think. We've had a visit from a man, who said he came from you. He was a very good man but his face was badly disfigured. He was going to stay with us for a while but he changed his mind and left suddenly. And ever since, my son, I haven't been able to sleep a wink, because it seems to me that man was you. Yegor Yegorovich scolds me, 'You must be out of your mind, old woman,' he says. 'If it had been our son, do you think he wouldn't have told us? Why should he pretend if it was he? A man should be proud to have such a face as he had.' Yegor Yegorovich tries to talk me round, but my mother's heart knows otherwise—it was he, it was he, it tells me. That man slept on our stove and I took his greatcoat out in the yard to clean it, and I held it to my breast and wept because I knew it was you. Dear Yegor, please, for the love of Christ, write to me, tell me what happened. Or perhaps I have really gone out of my mind."

Well, Yegor Dromov showed this letter to me, Ivan Sudarev, and, as he told me his story, he wiped his eyes on his sleeve. I said to him: "That's a clash of character for you! You're a fool, man, you're a fool. Write to your mother and ask her forgiveness. Don't drive her mad. A lot she cares about your appearance! She'll love you even more as you are now."

He wrote a letter the same day. "My dear parents, Maria Polikarpovna and Yegor Yegorovich, forgive me for my foolishness. It really was me, your son, who came to see you." And so on and so forth, for another four pages, in small handwriting. He'd have written twenty, if he had had the time.

Some time later we were on the proving ground together, when a soldier came running up. "Someone wants to see you, Captain Dromov," he said. Though he was standing stiffly at attention, the soldier looked as if someone was just about to treat him to a drink. We went down to the hut where Dromov and I were living. I could see he was uneasy—he kept coughing and clearing his throat. He may be a tank soldier, I thought, but he's got nerves. He went into the hut ahead of me and I heard his voice:

"Hullo, mother, it's me." I saw a little old woman clinging to his chest. When I looked round I noticed there was another woman in the room. Well, there must be other beautiful women about, she's not the only one, I'm sure, but I've never seen another like her.

He freed himself from his mother's embraces and turned to this girl. As I said before, his magnificent physique made him look like a god of war. "Katya!" he said. "Why did you come? You promised to wait for another man, not this—"

The beautiful Katya answered him and, although I went out into the porch, I heard her say: "Yegor, I'm going to live with you for ever and ever. I will love you truly, with all my heart. Don't send me away."

Yes, that's the Russian character! A man may seem ordinary enough, but when trouble comes, in things great or small, he is endowed with a mighty strength—the beauty of the human heart.

1942-1944

Boris Lavrenyov

The Kshesinskaya Palace

Andrei went straight from the station to the Petrograd Side. The tram swayed along the tracks with a great clatter. People and houses went flashing by. Andrei hugged his rucksack with its precious contents to his knees as he gazed out upon the town.

During his two years' absence Petrograd had grown bald and lustreless. The houses looked dark, neglected, dreary.

The thing that struck Andrei most was the abundance of the military in the streets. When he had left for the front two years before, men in uniforms were rarely seen in the streets and Andrei was glad of this: such encounters were frought with trouble.

Now khaki was the colour that dominated. Almost everybody was dressed in khaki. Whole companies of soldiers, cadets, officers, mingled with the crowds. Andrei said to himself: If it wasn't for the Revolution a person'd have to keep his hand at salute as long as he was in the street.

He gave a little laugh. All those little grievances of a soldier's life had been done away with once and for all.

He turned his gaze to the people in the tram. At the door stood a pretty pink-cheeked girl with her knees pressed against a bulging sack. On meeting Andrei's admiring gaze her cheeks grew even pinker and a faint smile twisted one corner of her mouth. Andrei blushed too and looked away. Instantly he was on the alert, for next to the girl stood a lanky bloke in a short jacket, with long, thin, grimy hands dangling out of the sleeves. The bloke had shifty no-colour eyes, which were fixed on Andrei's rucksack. Andrei frowned and drew the sack closer to him, just in case. Soldiers who had come from Petrograd to join his regiment had said the city was overrun with thieves.

There was treasure in Andrei's sack. When they had received the copy of the *Pravda* in the trenches containing an appeal to workers and soldiers to give whatever they could to support their Bolshevik newspaper, the division Bolshe-

viks had called a meeting. At this meeting a whole forest of uplifted hands approved a decision to donate all their St. George crosses and medals to the *Pravda*. Next to the munitions case serving as a platform, members of the Bolshevik faction of the division committee had sat down and begun making a list of all the decorations handed in. By evening it numbered nine hundred and thirty crosses and medals, more than a hundred of which were gold.

The next morning Andrei was commissioned to Petrograd with a rucksack bursting with these crosses and medals. It was a heavy load—weighed over a pood. In the train Andrei slept with the sack under his head. Not a comfortable pillow—the crosses pushed through the canvas and pricked the back of his head, but he had to grin and bear it. He dared not risk putting the sack up on the baggage rack. The division committee had entrusted him to deliver the treasure to the Petrograd committee of the Party.

The tram rumbled hollowly over the Troitsky Bridge, under which the blue Neva flowed in slow majesty. Enormous white clouds hung above the Petrograd Side. Andrei got up and went out onto the platform. Now the tram was flying with a little shriek down the incline. At the stop Andrei leaped off the steps, slung the rucksack over his shoulder and made for the Kshesinskaya Palace. He had no need to ask the way; he knew Petrograd as well as he knew his own hand. But scarcely had he taken a few steps and cast a look at the familiar tiled façade of the mansion glimpsed behind the dark foliage of the boulevard, when he stopped in perplexity and alarm. All the pavements and the boulevard itself were swarming with people. Here and there separate individuals rose above the human sea; they waved their arms and beat their breasts and seemed to be shouting, but their voices were drowned in the general roar.

Andrei was taken aback. He was used to seeing this district absolutely empty. He remembered it from childhood. A giant of a police officer with a chestful of medals had always stood opposite the mansion guarding the peace of the emperor's aging mistress. Cabbies were forbidden to drive here and no passer-by was allowed to halt on the pavement. Andrei stood and watched. What was the trouble? Why such a crowd? Perhaps something had happened? A raid by a band of cadets or other bastards?

In that case he could not enter the building. They would arrest him, at best beat him up. But the main thing was that they would take away his crosses. That had to be avoided at all cost. Andrei was standing in the middle of the street deliberating what to do when he was approached by a lumbering man with a red band on his arm bearing the letters P.N.M. A militiaman. A battered rifle hung uselessly over one shoulder. After looking Andrei over, the militiaman asked cautiously:

"Looking for somebody, comrade?"

It took Andrei only a second to appraise him. No, he was not a spy.

"What's all the excitement about?" asked Andrei fearlessly. "Somebody got run over, or have they caught a pick-pocket?"

The militiaman glanced glumly at the palace and replied with irritation:

"You fall out of the sky or what? That's the Kshesinskaya Palace. Been took over by the Bolsheviks. So the people come swarming. Worst beat a man could be assigned to. Never know when somebody's going to start shooting."

Andrei gave a little laugh. In other words, there was no danger, he could continue on his way. He nodded to the militiaman. Just then he heard an automobile horn behind him. He turned round. Over the smooth tarred paving blocks a big and shiny car advanced noiselessly. It was as different as possible from the rattle-trap cars he was used to seeing at the front. A bright little flag waved above the radiator. Inside the car Andrei caught sight of a girl in nurse's uniform, an elderly lady and a gentleman with a long foreign-looking face adorned by a pale and drooping moustache. The man was wearing a top-hat of glistening black silk. The car moved very slowly and as it came abreast of Andrei he saw the gentleman glance at the ballet-dancer's palace, saw him tighten his lips disdainfully, saw him lean over and say something that must have been sneeringly malicious to the girl. The girl's eyes also lighted up with hatred tinged with fear. The car moved on. Andrei instantly realized the passengers were resentful and afraid of that house and that crowd. It cheered him.

"They don't like it, the bourgeois don't," he said to the militiaman, nodding towards the house. "See the face he made?"

"What's it to him?" returned the militiaman. "He's outside it all. He's the English ambassador. Comes here for a ride every blessed day."

Andrei plunged into the crowd and began elbowing his way to the main entrance of the palace. People snapped and hissed at him but he moved steadily ahead without answering back. On the porch he was stopped by a tall working-class youth who came, perhaps, from the Vyborg Side. A revolver was hanging from his belt. Andrei took his credentials out of his tunic pocket. The youth read them and gave Andrei an amiable smile.

"Go ahead. You've come for a good purpose. Ask somebody in the hall where to go."

Andrei entered the vestibule. The crowd here was as thick as in the street. People clutching piles of papers were running up and down the stairs, taking the steps three at a time. Andrei discovered he could get no satisfaction from them. Before he had spoken three words the person he was addressing was swept away by those coming behind. People did not live here, they bounced about in this boiling cauldron.

This was a house hated by the bourgeoisie and the military, loved by the workers and soldiers of Petrograd. The bourgeoisie walked past with clenched

fists, dreaming of the hour when they could destroy the loathed nest. The workers and soldiers came to it as to their own home, bringing their needs and griefs, all the questions and problems the Revolution had faced them with. They came here from the plants and factories of Vasilievsky Island and the Vyborg Side, from beyond the Obvodny Canal, from Ligovka and Volkovo, from the Golodai and the port, from the barracks where the grenadiers and the armoured division were quartered, from the brick jail of the Baltic navy crews. They came bringing resolutions and appeals, on business and without business, merely to shuffle about these seething rooms and breathe this air, pregnant with storm and excitement. To this house Lenin had been brought from the Finland Station in an armoured car, and here he had thrown himself into battle without so much as a moment's rest. At night shots were fired at the lighted windows of this house from the roof of the Peter and Paul Fortress. Anonymous letters full of wild threats and dire fears were addressed to this house. It was the headquarters of the great proletarian war just beginning.

Andrei pushed himself into a big white hall whose far wall was one great window connecting with a conservatory. There was more room in this hall, but people were running about in the same frantic way. Several desks stood about. The men seated at them were surrounded by petitioners. A buzz, a hum filled the room like a single unending shout. Andrei looked about him in perplexity, wondering whom to approach. Just then a smallish man in a grey suit and with a paper in his hand came out of one of the side doors. Unlike the others, he walked unhurriedly. The lips under the small moustache were moving as if he were reading the contents of the paper to himself. Andrei found something oddly familiar in the man's face. He stopped two paces from Andrei, raised his head and cast a glance over the hubbub in the room. Andrei took advantage of this pause to say to him:

"Look, comrade, where ought I to go? I've come from the front. Brought the division's crosses to donate to the *Soldier's Pravda* fund. But there's such a hullabaloo here a person can't find a place to set his foot down."

The man narrowed his eyes on Andrei with a faint smile.

"Have you brought many crosses?" he asked.

Andrei let his rucksack fall to the floor; the thump and clatter was answer enough.

"Over nine hundred. More than a pood."

The man in the grey suit laughed.

"That's splendid. A whole bank in a sack. Come with me."

He took Andrei's arm and led him to a low platform in front of the conservatory. At a desk next to the great window sat a heavy-set man with a round beard and tired kindly eyes who was patiently and good-naturedly answering

the questions of the soldiers clustered round him. To this desk the man in grey guided Andrei.

"Mikhail Vasilievich," he said, "see to this comrade. He's just come from the front. He's brought crosses the men have donated to the *Soldier's Pravda* fund. A whole bagful. Take them and talk to him about affairs at the front."

The man at the desk asked Andrei where exactly he had come from, what division he belonged to, how long it had been since he set out. He expressed surprise at the weight of the rucksack and told Andrei to put it beside the window.

"Nobody'll filtch it?" asked Andrei uneasily.

"Not while I'm here," laughed Mikhail Vasilievich, then went on interrogating him. Andrei answered all his questions calmly and scrupulously, Mikhail Vasilievich jotted down some of his answers in a notebook and ended by asking him how long he intended to stay in Petrograd.

"Drop in before you leave and I'll give you some pamphlets to take back with you," he said in parting, holding out his hand. Andrei stood for a moment in painful indecision, then came out with:

"I'd like... d'ye suppose I could get a look at Comrade Lenin?"

Mikhail Vasilievich looked up at him in surprise.

"Why, you just saw him, comrade."

"Where?" asked Andrei.

"He brought you to me. It was Lenin who introduced us."

Andrei's heart sank. He sucked in his breath noisily and said with venom:

"Why the hell couldn't you have told me so before?"

Mikhail Vasilievich threw back his head angrily but, seeing the despair in Andrei's face, he could not help laughing.

"How was I to know you didn't know him, you queer egg?" he said. "He held you by the arm, I thought you were friends. That's all right, don't take it so hard. Come back this evening, Vladimir Ilyich is going to speak from the balcony. Then you can see him and hear him too."

Andrei turned away from the desk and pushed his way to the door, searching the faces of those around in the hope of getting another glimpse of Lenin. But Lenin was no longer there. Upset and disappointed he left the palace to go for his dinner. He firmly resolved to come back and wait all night long if necessary—but he'd hear Lenin!

1937

Ilya Ehrenburg

The Communard's Pipe

There are many beautiful cities in the world, but Paris is the most beautiful of them all; light-hearted women laugh there, under the chestnut trees dandies sip vermilion liqueurs, and thousands of lights scintillate on the glossy pavements of spacious squares.

Stone-mason Louis Roux was born in Paris. He remembered the "July days" of '48. He had been seven then, and he was hungry. He opened his mouth like a fledgling blackbird and waited mutely; but he waited in vain, for his father, Jean Roux, had no bread. All he had was a rifle, but you couldn't eat a rifle. Louis remembered the summer morning when his father cleaned the rifle and his mother wept and wiped her nose on her apron. Louis ran after his father: he thought that father, with his newly cleaned rifle, would shoot the baker and take the biggest loaf—bigger than Louis, big as a house. But his father met other gloomy men. They also had rifles and they began to sing all together and shout, "Bread!"

Louis tingled with anticipation, expecting that, in response to such fine songs, the windows would disgorge loaves and croissants and crumpets. But instead he heard a loud noise, and small bullets whizzed by. One of the men shouting "Bread!" cried "Ugh!" and fell to the ground. Then father and the other men did some strange things: they overturned two benches and brought a barrel, a broken table and even a large hen-coop from a nearby courtyard. They piled all this up in the middle of the street and lay down on the ground. Louis thought the gloomy men were playing hide-and-seek. But they fired their rifles, and someone fired at them. Then other men came. They also had rifles, but they smiled gaily, they wore large, colourful cockades on their caps, and everyone called them the "Guards." These men took his father and led him along the Boulevard Saint-Martin. Louis thought that the gay Guards would feed his father and followed them, although it was already late. Women laughed on the boulevard, dandies sipped vermilion liqueurs under the chestnut trees, and

thousands of people thronged the glossy slate of the pavement. At the Porte Saint-Martin one of the light-hearted women sitting in a café called out to the Guards:

"Why should you take him so far? He can get his due here."

Louis ran up to the laughing woman and without a word opened his mouth like a fledgling blackbird. One of the Guards levelled his rifle and fired again. Louis' father cried out and fell, and the woman laughed. Louis ran up to his father and clutched at his legs, which continued to jerk as though father were trying to walk lying, and screamed terribly.

The woman said:

"Shoot the brat too!"

But a dandy sipping vermilion liqueur at a neighbouring table said:

"Who will work then?"

So Louis remained alive. The grim July was followed by a tranquil August; no one sang and no one fired rifles any more. Louis grew up and justified the hopes of the kind dandy. His father, Jean Roux, had been a mason, and Louis Roux became a mason. He wore baggy corduroy trousers and a blue linen blouse, and he built houses, he built them summer and winter. Beautiful Paris wanted to be even more beautiful, and Louis was there wherever new streets were being laid: the many-rayed Place de l'Etoile, the broad Haussmann and Malersherbes Boulevards lined with chestnut trees, the sumptuous Avenue de l'Opéra with buildings still in scaffolding to which impatient traders were already carting their wondrous wares of furs, lace and precious gems. He built theatres and shops, cafés and banks, he built beautiful houses so that light-hearted women could continue to smile light-heartedly when the wind blew from the English Channel and November mists caused the flesh to go numb in workers' garrets, he built bars so that dandies could continue to sip their vermilion liqueurs all through dark, starless nights. He lifted ponderous blocks of stone to build the light slate shroud of Paris, most beautiful of all cities.

Amongst the thousands of blouse-clad workers there was one, Louis Roux by name; his corduroy trousers were powdered with lime dust, he wore a broad, flat hat, held a clay pipe in his mouth and, like thousands of others, he toiled honestly for the splendour of the Second Empire.

He built fine houses, but in the daytime he stood on scaffoldings whilst at night he lay in a smelly cubby-hole in the Rue de la Veuve Noire in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. The cubby-hole smelled of lime, sweat and cheap black tobacco; the house, of cat dung and unwashed linen; and the Rue de la Veuve Noire, like all the streets of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, reaked of fat from the braziers on which street vendors fried potatoes, the putrid smell of butchers' shops with purple carcasses of horsemeat, herrings, cesspools, and the smoke of little stoves. But then, it is not for the Rue de la Veuve Noire, but for the broad

boulevards redolent with the scent of lilies-of-the-valley, tangerines and the perfumed treasures of the Rue de la Paix, for the boulevards and the many-rayed Etoile where the builders rocked all day on the scaffoldings that Paris has been called the most beautiful of all cities.

Louis Roux built cafés and bars, he carried building stones for the Café La Régence, favoured haunt of chess lovers, for the Café d'Angleterre, meeting place of snobs, race-horse owners and foreign celebrities, the Taverne de Madrid, where actors of twenty different theatres gathered, and for many other worthy buildings. But never, since the death of his father, did Louis Roux come close to the finished cafés, and he never partook of the vermilion liqueurs. When he received several small white coins from the contractor he took them to the old bar-owner in the Rue de la Veuve Noire, who gave Louis several large dark coins in return and poured out a glass of muddy liquid. Louis downed the absinthe in a gulp and went to bed in his cubby-hole.

When there were no white or dark coins, no absinthe, no bread, no work, Louis would fish for a pinch of spilled tobacco in his pocket or pick up a cigarette stub in the street, fill his clay pipe and walk gloomily with it along the streets of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. He did not sing or shout "Bread!" like his father Jean Roux once had, because he had no rifle to shoot from and no son to open his mouth like a fledgling blackbird.

Louis Roux did all he could so that the women of Paris could laugh light-heartedly, but when he heard their laughter he cowed furtively, for thus had the woman once laughed in the café on the Boulevard Saint-Martin when Jean Roux lay with twitching legs on the pavement. In fact, until the age of twenty-five Louis had never even seen a young woman at close quarters. But when he was twenty-five he moved from one garret in the Rue de la Veuve Noire to another, and an event happened which sooner or later happens to all men. In a neighbouring garret there lived a young charwoman by the name of Juliette. One evening Louis met Juliette on the narrow winding staircase; he stepped into her room for a box of matches, as his flint had worn down and would not kindle a light—and came out only at dawn. The following day Juliette transferred her petticoats, mug and brush to Louis' garret and became his wife; a year later a newcomer appeared in the cramped garret and he was registered at the Mayor's office as Paul-Marie Roux.

Thus Louis came to know woman. But unlike so many other women of whom beautiful Paris is justly proud, Juliette never laughed light-heartedly, though Louis Roux loved her dearly, as only a mason can who lifts heavy stones and builds beautiful buildings. Perhaps she never laughed because she lived in the Rue de la Veuve Noire, where the only time they heard light-hearted laughter was when the old washerwoman Marie was being taken away to the madhouse. Perhaps she never laughed also because she had only two petticoats, and Louis,

who frequently had no white or dark coins and gloomily walked with his pipe through the streets of the Faubourg Sain-Antoine, was unable to present her with even a single yellow coin for a new dress.

In the spring of 1869, when Louis Roux was 28 and his son Paul was two, Juliette took her two petticoats, mug and brush and moved to the flat of the butcher who sold horsemeat in the Rue de la Veuve Noire. She left Paul with her husband as the butcher was a nervous fellow and, though he liked young women very much, he detested children. Louis picked up his son and rocked him so that he wouldn't cry; he rocked him clumsily, for he could lift stones but not children, and strode with his pipe in his teeth through the streets of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. He loved Juliette dearly, but he knew she was right: for the butcher had many yellow coins, he could even move to another street, and with him Juliette would learn to laugh light-heartedly. He recalled how on that July morning his father Jean, preparing to leave with his newly-cleaned rifle, had said to his weeping wife, Louis' mother:

"I must go and you must hold me back. A cock seeks a higher roost, a ship seeks deeper waters, a woman seeks a sheltered life."

Recalling his father's words, Louis thought once again how right he had been not to restrain Juliette, and Juliette too had been right to foresake him for the rich butcher.

Louis continued to build houses and nurse his son. But soon a war began and evil Prussians besieged Paris. No one cared to build houses any more, and the scaffoldings of unfinished buildings were deserted. The shells from Prussian guns destroyed many of the buildings of beautiful Paris on which Louis Roux and other masons had worked. Louis had no work and no bread, and three-year-old Paul learned already to open his mouth silently, like a fledgling blackbird. Then Louis was given a rifle. He took it, but he did not sing songs or shout "Bread!" and, like many thousands of masons, carpenters and smiths, he went to defend Paris, the most beautiful of all cities, from the evil Prussians. A kind woman, Madame Monod, owner of a greengrocery, took care of the little boy. Together with other working men, Louis Roux, barefoot in the winter frost, rolled bomb-shells up to the cannon at the Fort of Saint-Vincent, and the cannon fired at the evil Prussians. He had nothing to eat for days on end, for there was famine in Paris. His feet were frost-bitten, for the winter of the siege was fiercely cold. Prussian shells fell on the Fort of Saint-Vincent, and there remained less and less blouse-clad men, but Louis Roux did not leave his place at the little cannon, for he was defending Paris. The most beautiful of cities deserved such defence. In spite of hunger and frost, lights swarmed in the Boulevards des Italiens and des Capucines, there was sufficient vermilion liqueur for the dandies, and light-hearted smiles fluttered on women's lips.

Louis Roux knew that the Emperor was gone and a republic had been proclaimed in Paris. Rolling cannon-balls up to his cannon, he had no time to ponder what the "republic" was, but working men coming from Paris reported that the cafés in the boulevards were filled as ever with dandies and light-hearted women. Listening to their angry muttering, Louis Roux reflected that nothing had changed in Paris, that the "republic" was located not in the Rue de la Veuve Noire, but in the broad avenues of the many-rayed Etoile, and that when the mason drove the Prussians back little Paul would open his mouth again. Louis Roux knew this, but he did not leave his place at the cannon, and the Prussians could not enter Paris.

But then one morning he was ordered to leave the cannon and return to the Rue de la Veuve Noire. The people called the "republic"—probably dandies and light-hearted women—let the evil Prussians into beautiful Paris. Louis Roux walked gloomily with his pipe in his teeth along the streets of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

The Prussians came and went, but no one built houses. Paul opened his mouth like a fledgling blackbird, and Louis Roux began to clean his rifle. Then a stern order was pasted up on the walls exhorting the working men to turn in their weapons, for the dandies and light-hearted women called the "republic" remembered the July days of '48 only too well.

Louis Roux did not want to turn in his rifle, and neither did the other blouse-clad men of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and many other suburbs. They went out into the streets with their rifles and fired them. It was a warm evening, when spring was just beginning in Paris.

The following day Louis Roux saw resplendent carriages, ponderous coaches, covered wagons and carts rolling through the streets. The carts were loaded high with chattels, in the carriages sat men and women whom Louis was used to seeing in the cafés of the Grand Boulevards or in the Bois de Boulogne. There were diminutive generals in crimson kepis with sternly drooping moustaches, young women in wide skirts fringed with lace, fat, flabby abbés in purple soutanes, old dandies in black, tan and ginger top-hats, young officers who had never been at the Fort of Saint-Vincent nor at any other fort, stiff bald flunkeys, dogs with ribbon bows in sleekly-comed silky fur, and even clamorous parrots. They were all hurrying towards the Porte de Versailles. And when that evening Louis Roux went to the Place de l'Opéra he saw deserted cafés where dandies no longer sipped vermilion liqueurs and boarded-up shops with no light-hearted laughing women near them. The people from along the Champs-Elysées, from the Auteuil and Saint-Germain districts, vexed at the blouse-clad men, left beautiful Paris, and even the glossy slate pavements no longer reflected the extinguished lights and were a gloomy black.

Louis Roux saw that the "republic" had left in the carriages and carts. He asked the other blouse-clad men who had remained in its stead, and they answered: "The Commune of Paris." And Louis understood that the Commune of Paris lived somewhere close to the Rue de la Veuve Noire.

But the dandies and women who had left Paris did not wish to forget the most beautiful of all cities. They did not want to give it up to the masons, the carpenters, the smiths. And again cannon-shells began to shatter buildings, but this time they were fired not by the evil Prussians but by the gay frequenters of the Café d'Angleterre and other cafés. And Louis understood that he had to return to his old place at the fort of Saint-Vincent. But Madame Monod, the owner of the greengrocery, was not only a good woman but also a good Catholic. She refused to take care of the son of one of the godless men who had murdered the Bishop of Paris. So Louis Roux took his pipe in his teeth, hoisted his son Paul to his shoulders and went to the fort of Saint-Vincent. He rolled cannon-balls up to the cannon, while little Paul played nearby with empty cartridge cases. At night the boy slept in the home of the watchman of the pump-house at the fort of Saint-Vincent. The watchman gave Paul a brand-new clay pipe, exactly like the one which Louis Roux smoked, and a piece of soap. Now, when Paul got tired of listening to the shooting and watching the shell-spitting cannon, he could blow soap-bubbles. The bubbles were of different colours: blue, pink and purple. They looked like the balloons which dandies and light-hearted women bought for daintily dressed children in the Jardin des Tuileries. True, the bubbles of the worker's son lasted only a moment while the balloons of the children from the houses along the Champs-Élysées were tied fast and lasted the whole day, but both were beautiful and both died soon. When he blew soap-bubbles from the clay pipe Paul forgot to open his mouth and wait for a piece of bread. When he approached the people whom everyone called "Communards," and among whom was Louis Roux, he clenched the empty pipe importantly in his teeth in imitation of his father. And the men, forgetting the cannon for a moment, said kindly to Paul:

"You're a real Communard!"

But the blouse-clad men had few cannons and few cannon-balls, and there were few blouse-clad men themselves. Meanwhile the people who had left Paris and now occupied the former royal residence at Versailles daily brought in new soldiers, sons of the simple-minded peasants of France, and new cannons presented to them by the evil Prussians. They drew closer and closer to the fortifications around Paris. Many of the forts had already fallen into their hands, and no one came any more to replace the dead gunners who had defended the fort of Saint-Vincent together with Louis Roux. Now the mason rolled up the cannon-balls himself, loaded the cannon himself and fired it himself, and only two remaining blouse-clad men helped him.

Meantime merriment reigned in the former residence of the French kings. The hastily erected clapboard cafés were unable to accommodate all those thirsting for the vermilion liqueurs. Abbés in purple soutanes conducted sumptuous thanksgiving services. The generals stroked their sternly drooping moustaches as they chatted merrily with visiting Prussian officers. And bald flunkeys already bustled over their masters' trunks in preparation for their return to the most beautiful of all cities. The wonderful gardens built on the bones of twenty thousand workmen who had once day and night been digging the earth, cutting forest lanes and draining bogs so as to meet the deadline set by the *Roi-Soleil,* was bedecked with flags to celebrate the victory. In the daytime brass trumpeters puffed their cheeks and the stone tritons of nine big and forty small fountains shed crocodile tears, while at night, when the extinguished lights were no longer reflected in the slate pavement of the squares of enfeebled Paris, triumphant lampions glittered brazenly amidst the foliage.

Lieutenant François d'Eymonian of the National Army presented his fiancée Gabrielle de Bonivet with a bouquet of delicate lilies as a token of the nobleness and chasteness of his feelings. The lilies were clasped in a golden *porte-bouquet* adorned with sapphires purchased from a jeweller from the Rue de la Paix who had succeeded in carrying off his jewels on the first day of the uprising. The bouquet was also a token of victory, for François d'Eymonian had come for a day from the Paris Front. He told his fiancée that the insurgents had been defeated and on the morrow his men would capture the fort of Saint-Vincent and enter Paris.

"When will the season at the Opera begin?" Gabrielle asked.

Then they gave themselves up to amorous twittering, quite appropriate between a hero-fiancé, just back from the front, and his fiancée, who was embroidering a satin tobacco-pouch for him. At a moment of supreme tenderness François said, squeezing Gabrielle's apricot-coloured bodice with his hardened hand of a hero:

"*Ma chère*, you can't imagine how cruel those Communards are. Through a field-glass I saw a little boy firing a cannon from the fort of Saint-Vincent. And imagine, that tiny Nero already smokes a pipe."

"But you will kill them all off, together with the children," Gabrielle chirped, and her bosom heaved higher under the hero's hand.

François d'Eymonian knew what he was saying. The following morning the men of his regiment received the order to take the fort of Saint-Vincent. Louis Roux and the two surviving blouse-clad men fired at the soldiers. Then François d'Eymonian ordered a white flag to be unfurled and Louis Roux, who had heard that the white flag means peace, stopped firing. He thought that the soldiers had taken pity of the most beautiful of cities and decided finally to make peace with the Commune of Paris. The three blouse-clad men smiled and

puffed at their pipes as they awaited the soldiers, while little Paul, who had no more soap to make soap-bubbles with, in imitation of his father also held his pipe in his teeth and smiled. And when the soldiers approached the fort of Saint-Vincent François d'Eymonian ordered three of them—the best shots of the mountains of Savoy—to kill the three rebels. But the little Communard he wished to take alive so as to show him to his fiancée.

The Savoyards knew how to shoot, and when they finally entered the fort of Saint-Vincent they saw three men with pipes lying at the cannon. The soldiers had seen many dead men and were not at all surprised. But when they saw a little boy with a pipe astride the cannon they were taken aback and swore, some by the Holy Jesus, some by the Devil.

"Where did you come from, you little brat?" one of the Savoyards asked.

"I'm a real Communard," Paul Roux replied, smiling.

The soldiers wanted to finish him off with their bayonets, but the corporal said that Captain François d'Eymonian had ordered the little Communard to be conducted to one of the eleven points where all the prisoners were being herded.

"He must have killed plenty of ours, little angel that he is," the soldiers muttered as they prodded Paul on with their rifle butts. But little Paul, who had killed no one and had only blown soap-bubbles with his pipe, couldn't understand why these men scolded and hurt him.

The soldiers of the National Army led Paul Roux, their four-year-old prisoner insurgent, into Paris. In the northern suburbs blouse-clad men were still shooting back and dying, but along the Champs-Elysées, in the vicinity of the Opera and the new blocks around the many-rayed Etoile people were already making merry. It was May, the best month, chestnuts were blooming in the wide boulevards, and around the marble tables of cafés under the chestnuts dandies were sipping vermilion liqueurs and women were smiling light-heartedly. When the tiny Communard was led past them they cried out that he be given up to them. The corporal, however, remembered his captain's orders and guarded Paul. But other prisoners, men and women, were delivered into their hands. They spat on them, struck them with fancy sticks, and stabbed the exhausted ones with bayonets borrowed from soldiers passing by.

Paul Roux was conducted into the Luxembourg Garden. There, in front of the palace, a wide space was fenced off into which the prisoner insurgents were herded. Paul strode importantly among them with his pipe and, wishing to sooth some bitterly weeping women, said:

"I know how to blow soap-bubbles. My father Louis Roux smoked a pipe and fired a cannon. I'm a real Communard."

But the women, who had children somewhere in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine who probably also liked to blow soap-bubbles, listened to Paul and wept all the more bitterly.

Then Paul sat down on the grass and began to think of the bubbles, how beautiful they were, all blue and pink and purple. But as he couldn't think for a long time, and as the road from the fort of Saint-Vincent to the Luxembourg Garden had been a long and difficult one, he soon fell asleep, clasping his pipe in his hand.

While he was sleeping two fine horses were drawing a light landau along the road from Versailles. François d'Eymonian was taking his fiancée Gabrielle de Bonivet to beautiful Paris. Never had Gabrielle de Bonivet been as beautiful as she was on that day. The delicate oval of her face was reminiscent of the portraits done by the old Florentine masters. She wore a lemon-coloured dress with lace woven at the Melsele Convent. A tiny parasol protected her delicate skin, the colour of apple blossoms, from the direct rays of the May sun. She was in truth the most beautiful woman of Paris and, knowing this, she smiled light-heartedly.

When they entered the city François d'Eymonian hailed a soldier from his regiment and asked where the prisoner from the fort of Saint-Vincent had been placed. And when the lovers entered the Luxembourg Garden and saw the old chestnuts in blossom, the ivy over the Medici Fountain and the blackbirds hopping in the lanes, Gabrielle de Bonivet's heart overflowed with tenderness and she whispered, clasping her fiancé's hand:

"*Mon cher*, how fine it is to be alive."

The prisoners, some of whom were every hour led away to be shot, viewed the captain's galloons with horror, each thinking that his turn had come. But François d'Eymonian paid no attention to them as he searched for the little Communard. Seeing him asleep, he roused him with a shove of his foot. The boy awoke and first began to cry, but seeing the happy face of Gabrielle, so unlike the doleful faces of the other women around him, he took his pipe between his teeth and said with a smile: "I'm a real Communard!"

Satisfied, Gabrielle murmured: "Really, so small! I think they must be born murderers and they should all be exterminated now, even the infants."

"Now that you have seen him he can be finished off," said François, and called up a soldier.

But Gabrielle asked him to wait a bit. She wished to prolong the satisfaction of this light and carefree day. She remembered that, strolling once in the Bois de Boulogne during a fair, she had seen a shed with clay pipes hanging from the ceiling. Some of them were spinning rapidly and young people were firing at them from rifles.

Although Gabrielle de Bonivet came from a fine, noble family, she liked simple folk amusements and, recalling the fair, she asked her fiancé:

"I want to learn to shoot. The wife of an officer must know how to hold a rifle in her hands. Let me try and hit that little murderer's pipe."

François d'Eymonian never begrudged his fiancée anything. Only recently he had presented her a pearl necklace worth thirty thousand francs. Could he deny her such an innocent rustic pleasure? He took the soldier's rifle and handed it to Gabrielle.

Seeing the rifle in her hands the prisoners ran away and crowded at the opposite corner of the enclosure. Only Paul stood calmly with his pipe and smiled. Gabrielle wanted to hit a moving pipe and, taking aim, she said to the boy:

"Run, I'll shoot!"

But Paul had seen many people fire rifles, and he stood calmly without moving. In her impatience Gabrielle fired, but as she had never held a rifle before she could not be blamed for missing.

"*Ma chère*," said François d'Eymonian, "you pierce men's hearts with arrows much better than clay pipes with bullets. Look, you've killed the little viper, but the pipe is unbroken."

Gabrielle de Bonivet said nothing. Looking at the small red spot, she breathed quicker and, pressing closer to François, asked him to take her home as she felt that now she was in need of her fiancé's loving caresses.

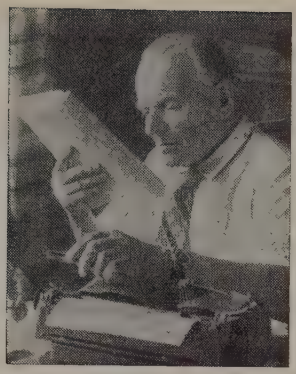
Paul Roux, who had lived on earth four years and above all liked blowing soap-bubbles from a clay pipe, lay motionless.

Not long ago in Brussels I met Pierre Lautrec, an old Communard. I made his acquaintance, and one day the lonely old man presented me his only treasure: the clay pipe from which little Paul Roux had blown soap-bubbles fifty years before. On that day in May when the four-year-old insurgent was killed by Gabrielle de Bonivet, Pierre Lautrec was in the enclosure in the Luxembourg Garden. The Versaillais had shot almost all of those who had been there. Pierre Lautrec remained alive because some of the dandies realized that someone had to work and that beautiful Paris, which would want to grow even more beautiful, would need masons, carpenters and smiths. Pierre Lautrec was exiled for five years, he escaped from Cayenne to Belgium, and through all his vicissitudes he carried the pipe picked up by the body of Paul Roux. He gave it to me and related all that I have written down. I often touch it with lips dry with anger. It carries the trace of tender and still innocent breath, perhaps the trace of long-burst soap-bubbles. This toy of little Paul Roux, killed by the most beautiful of women, Gabrielle de Bonivet, from the most beautiful of cities, Paris, tells me of a great Hatred. I touch it with my lips and pray: On seeing a white flag, not to lower my rifle like the unhappy Louis Roux had done, and in the name of all the joys of life, never to betray the fort of Saint-Vincent, still haunted by three defiant blouse-clad men and a child blowing soap-bubbles.

1924

Konstantin Paustovsky

The Telegram



October was exceptionally cold and unpleasant that year. The shingled roofs were black with damp. The grass lay flat in the garden, only a little sunflower by the fence kept shrivelling with every day but, unlike everything else, seemed unable to shrivel completely and shed off its petals. From beyond the river shreds of clouds swept low over the water-meadows, catching on to the bare branches of the willows in passing. Rain sifted out of them tediously. The roads had become impassable even on foot and the herdsmen no longer drove the village cows to the meadows.

The herdsman's horn would be silent until spring. Now it was harder than ever for Ekaterina Petrovna to get up in the morning and look upon the same old things: the rooms with their acrid odour of unheated stoves, the dusty copies of *Vestnik Evropy*[1], the yellowed cups on the table, the samovar that had not been polished for many a month, the pictures on the walls. Nothing could be made out in these pictures any more, perhaps because the rooms were too dark, or Ekaterina Petrovna's eyes were too weak, or the pictures themselves had faded. But Ekaterina Petrovna remembered that this one was a portrait of her father, and that little one in the gold frame was a sketch for Kramskoy's *Unknown Lady in a Velvet Coat* which Kramskoy himself had presented to her father.

Ekaterina Petrovna was living out her life in the old house her father, a well-known painter, had built. He had left St. Petersburg in his old age and returned to his native village, where he lived quietly, tending his orchard. He could no longer paint—his hands trembled and his sight had failed, his eyes often pained him.

The house was what Ekaterina Petrovna called "a memorial." The regional museum was responsible for its preservation, but Ekaterina Petrovna often wondered what would become of it when she, its last occupant, was dead.

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[1] *European News*—a monthly magazine of pre-Rrevolutionary times—*Ed.*

There was not a soul in the village (the village of Zaborye) with whom she could talk about the pictures, or life in St. Petersburg, or the summer she had spent with her father in Paris when they had witnessed Victor Hugo's funeral. She could hardly talk about such things to Manyushka, daughter of the kolkhoz shoemaker who lived next door; the girl came every day to fetch water from the well for Ekaterina Petrovna, sweep her floors and heat her samovar.

In lieu of money, Ekaterina Petrovna gave Manyushka wrinkled old kid gloves, stringy ostrich feathers and a hat trimmed with black spangles.

"What'm I supposed to do with them?" Manyushka asked with a sniff. "What do you take me for, the ragman?"

"Sell them, dear," whispered Ekaterina Petrovna. For a year now she had been so weak she could not speak above a whisper. "Sell them."

"As scraps," decided Manyushka, and she gathered them up and went out.

Sometimes Tikhon, the fire-house watchman, dropped in. He was skinny and red-headed. He remembered the time when Ekaterina Petrovna's father came from St. Petersburg, built the house and laid out the grounds. Tikhon had been but a boy then, but he had preserved his esteem for the old artist for the rest of his life. Whenever he looked at the pictures he would say with a loud sigh:

"Genuwine, that!"

Tikhon made a lot of fuss with little effect, other than to show his sympathy for Ekaterina Petrovna, but still he was of some aid to her—he cut the withered bows off the trees in the orchard, sawed them into lengths and chopped them up for firewood. Every time he took his leave he would pause in the doorway to say:

"Heard anything from Nastya, Ekaterina Petrovna? Does she write?"

Ekaterina Petrovna would make no answer, just go on sitting, so small and bent, on the divan and begin rummaging among some papers she kept in a brown leather reticule. For a little while Tikhon would stand there shifting his feet and elaborately blowing his nose.

"Well, guess, I'll have to be going, Ekaterina Petrovna," he would say at last, without waiting for an answer.

"Go along," Ekaterina Petrovna would whisper. "Go along, and may God be with you."

He would go out, closing the door carefully behind him, and then Ekaterina Petrovna would begin to weep quietly. Outside the wind whistled through the bare branches, tearing off the last leaves. The tongue of the kerosene lamp flickered on the table. It seemed to be the only live creature in the abandoned house. Without this faint light Ekaterina Petrovna would not have known how to live until morning.

The nights were already as long and exhausting as insomnia. The dawn seemed more and more reluctant to appear, tarrying longer and longer and then

glancing drearily through the unwashed windows, where dry and blackened leaves that had once been shiny and yellow lay upon cotton wool between the frames of the double windows.

Ekaterina Petrovna's daughter, Nastya, the only person who was close to her, lived far away in Leningrad. Three years had passed since Nastya had last visited her mother.

Ekaterina Petrovna knew that Nastya had no time for her old mother. Young people had their own affairs, their own incomprehensible interests, their own happiness. It was best not to intrude. For that reason Ekaterina Petrovna rarely wrote to Nastya, but she thought of her all day long as she sat on the edge of the sagging divan so quiet that a mouse, deceived by the silence, would run out from behind the stove, stand up on its hind legs and sniff the stuffy air.

There were no letters from Nastya either, but once every two or three months Vasili, the breezy young postman, brought Ekaterina Petrovna a money order for two hundred roubles. He gently guided her hand as she signed for it so that she would not write in the wrong place.

When Vasili was gone Ekaterina Petrovna would sit dazed for a while with the money in her hands, then she would put on her glasses and read the brief message on the money-order blank. It was always the same: Nastya was so busy she had no time even to write a letter, to say nothing of paying a visit.

Ekaterina Petrovna carefully fingered the limp notes. Old age made her forget that the money she was fingering was not the money Nadya had held, and it seemed to her that the notes retained the smell of Nastya's perfume.

One night at the end of October somebody knocked insistently at a gate at the far end of the garden that had been nailed fast for years.

Ekaterina Petrovna was alarmed, she spent much time winding a warm shawl round her head, put on an old cape, and for the first time that year went outside. She walked slowly, feeling her way. The cold air gave her a headache. Forgotten stars looked piercingly down at her. She had difficulty making her way through drifts of fallen leaves.

On approaching the gate she said softly, "Who's there?", but nobody answered.

"I must have imagined it," said Ekaterina Petrovna to herself as she retraced her steps. She paused beside an old tree to catch her breath. On clasping her fingers round a cold wet branch, she recognized the tree. It was a maple that she herself had planted when she was a gay young girl. Now here it stood cold and naked, with nothing to shield it from the wind on this desolate night.

Ekaterina Petrovna felt sorry for the maple. She stroked its rough bark, then made her way back to the house and that very night wrote a letter to Nastya.

"My precious," she wrote, "I will not live through this winter. Come and see me if only for a day. Let me set eyes on you and hold your hand in mine. I am old and so weak I can scarcely sit and lie, let alone walk about. Death seems to have forgotten the way to my door. The orchard is drying up, you would not recognize it, but I myself never see it. The autumn is dreary this year. Everything is so hard—it seems to me my whole life has not been as long as this autumn."

Manyushka, sniffing as usual, took the letter to the post-office. She took her time slipping it into the slot, then peered in after it—what was inside? Nothing at all so far as she could see—nothing but an iron emptiness.

* * *

Nastya worked as a secretary at the Artists' Union. She was very busy. The arranging of exhibitions, the holding of competitions—all this was her responsibility.

Ekaterina Petrovna's letter was delivered to her at the office. She put it into her bag without reading it, hoping to do so after office hours. Every letter from her mother drew from Nastya a little sigh of relief—once her mother wrote, she must still be alive. At the same time they were the cause of a dull gnawing at her heart, as if each letter was a silent rebuke.

After work Nastya had to visit the studio of a young sculptor named Timofeyev so as to report to the Union about his living conditions. Timofeyev had complained that his studio was cold and that in general he was being ignored and not given a chance to do what he was capable of.

Nastya stopped on one of the stair landings, took out a looking-glass, powdered her nose and gave a little laugh—she was pleased with what the looking-glass showed her. The artists called her Solveig because of her fair hair and big cold grey eyes.

The door was opened by Timofeyev himself, a small, resolute, ferocious man. He was wearing an overcoat and an enormous scarf wound round his neck. Nastya noticed that the felt boots on his feet were women's boots.

"Don't take off your things," he barked. "You'll freeze even in a fur coat. Come in."

He led Nastya down a dark corridor, up a few steps, and opened a narrow door into his studio.

There was a smell of smoke inside. A kerosene stove was burning on the floor next to a barrel of wet clay. Sculptures covered with wet cloths stood about on stands. Beyond the big window snow was slanting down, throwing a veil over the Neva, melting in its dark waters. The wind whistled through cracks in the window-frame, stirring old newspapers on the floor.

"God, how cold it is!" exclaimed Nastya. She fancied the white marble bas reliefs hanging in disarray on the walls made the room even colder.

"Pleasant, isn't it?" said Timofeyev, as he pushed an armchair smeared with clay towards Nastya. "Why I haven't passed out long ago in this cave is more than I can understand. In Pershin's studio the radiators give off heat like the Sahara."

"Don't you like Pershin?" asked Nastya cautiously.

"He's an upstart," said Timofeyev viciously. "A navvy. His figures all have clothes-hangers for shoulders. His *Kolkhoz Girl* is a stone *baba* with her apron tucked up. His *Workman* looks like a Neanderthal man. He sculpts with a wooden shovel. But he's sly, my dear lady—as sly as a cardinal."

"Show me your Gogol," said Nastya by way of changing the subject.

"Come here," said the sculptor glumly. "Not there. Here. Over in this corner. Here you are."

He took the wet cloths off one of the figures, narrowed his eyes at it critically, squatted down beside the kerosene stove and rubbed his hands together to warm them, saying:

"There he is, Nikolai Vasilievich. Mr. Gogol, if you please."

Nastya started. A bent, sharp-nosed man was looking at her mockingly, as if he could see through her. Nastya was sure she saw a swollen artery pulsating at his temple.

"That letter in your bag—you haven't even opened it, have you?" Gogol's gimlet eyes seemed to say to her. "Eh, you little monkey!"

"Well?" said Timofeyev. "No fooling with that guy, eh?"

"It's marvellous," Nastya brought out with an effort. "It's really extraordinary."

Timofeyev gave a bitter laugh.

"Extraordinary," he repeated. "Everybody says it's extraordinary. Pershin says so, and Matyash, and all those experts from all those committees. But what's the good of it? Here it's 'extraordinary,' but there where my fate is decided, your Pershin gives a noncommittal grunt and—that's that. Pershin grunts," shouted Timofeyev and began rushing about the studio in his felt boots. "Me with rheumatism from handling wet clay. In the last three years I've read every word that's ever been written about Gogol. I've been seeing pigs' snouts in my dreams."

Timofeyev picked up a pile of books lying on the table, shook them in the air and hurled them down on the table. A cloud of plaster dust rose up.

"They're all about Gogol," he said; then, suddenly calm: "Humph, have I frightened you? Forgive me, but I certainly am in a fighting mood."

"Good. Let's fight together," said Nastya, getting up.

Timofeyev shook her hand warmly and she went out with the firm determination to win recognition for this gifted artist at any cost.

She returned to the Union, went into the chairman's office and talked to him long and vehemently, trying to convince him that they must hold an exhibition of Timofeyev's work. The chairman tapped on the table with his pencil, made some mental calculations, and in the end agreed.

It was only when Nastya had returned to her room in the old house on the Moika with its gilded stucco ceiling that she read Ekaterina Petrovna's letter.

"What talk can there be of my going now?" she said, getting up. "How can I get away?"

She thought of the crowded trains, the transfer she must make to the narrow-guage railway line, the bumping ride in a cart, the neglected orchard, the tears her mother was sure to shed, the unalleviated boredom of village life.... She slipped the letter into one of the drawers of her desk.

For two weeks she was busy arranging Timofeyev's exhibition. Several times during that period she quarrelled and made it up with the hot-tempered sculptor. Timofeyev sent off his things to the exhibition as if he were sending them to their doom.

"Nothing will come of it, my dear," he said to her gloatingly, as if she were arranging an exhibition of her works rather than his. "It's just a waste of time, it really is."

At first Nastya was offended and driven to despair by his remarks, but then she realized they weren't worth the breath it took to make them, they were an affectation hiding the satisfaction Timofeyev felt at the prospect of exhibiting his works.

The opening was held in the evening. Timofeyev was angry and asserted you couldn't look at sculptures by electric light.

"No life to it," he grumbled. "Anything'd be better, even kerosene lamps!"

"Well, what sort of lighting do you want, you impossible man?" said Nastya impatiently.

"Candles. Candles are what we want," cried Timofeyev. "Think of exposing Gogol to electricity! Could anything be more absurd?"

Sculptors and painters were present at the opening. Hearing their remarks, the uninitiated could not be sure whether they were praising or damning him. But Timofeyev knew the exhibition was a success.

An impulsive grey-haired artist came up to Nastya and patted her on the back.

"Thanks. I hear it was you who dragged Timofeyev out into the light of day. Good for you. There are lots of people among us who talk their heads off about being thoughtful, solicitous, concerned about the fate of artists, but when it comes down to doing anything about it, most of them find excuses. Thank you again."

A discussion of Timofeyev's works was held after the exhibition. They talked about them at length, praised them, argued over them, and in every speech the old artist's approbation of the solicitude shown a young and unjustly-neglected artist were repeated.

Timofeyev sat frowning at the floor, but from time to time he would steal a look at the speakers, wondering if their words were to be trusted or whether it was still too soon.

At one point the courier from the Union (good-hearted, scatter-brained Dasha) appeared in the doorway. She motioned to Nastya. When Nastya went over to her, she giggled and handed her a telegram. Nastya returned to her place and opened it unobtrusively, reading without comprehending:

"Katya dying Tikhon."

Who's Katya? thought Nastya in perplexity. Who's Tikhon? The wire must be for somebody else.

She glanced at the address. No, the telegram was for her. Only then did she notice the word "Zaborye" in small letters on the tape.

She crumpled the telegram in her hands and frowned. Pershin was speaking.

"In our day," he said, swinging up and down on his toes holding onto his glasses, "concern for the welfare of others has become a noble reality that helps us to work and to grow. I am happy to note that this is as true of our sphere of life, the sphere of artists and sculptors, as of every other. This exhibition of the works of Comrade Timofeyev is ample proof of this. I hope the management will not take offence if I say that we are obliged for the holding of this exhibition to one of the rank-and-file employees of the Union—young Anastasia Semyonovna."

Pershin bowed to Nastya and everyone applauded enthusiastically. Nastya was moved to tears.

Someone sitting behind her touched her arm. It was the hot-tempered old artist.

"What's that?" he whispered, indicating the crumpled telegram. "No bad news I hope?"

"No," said Nastya. "Nothing special. From one of my friends."

"I see," murmured the artist and once more turned his attention to Pershin.

Everyone was listening to Pershin, but Nastya was aware of a piercing eye fixed on her and she was afraid to look up. Who could it be? she thought. Do you suppose someone has guessed? Nonsense. Just another attack of nerves.

She forced herself to raise her eyes, but immediately dropped them. Gogol was looking at her mockingly, the swollen vein still pulsating at his temple. Nastya seemed to hear him whisper through clenched teeth:

"A fine one *you* are!"

She got up quickly and went out, hastily put on her things an rushed into the street.

Wet snow was falling. The dome of St. Isaac's cathedral was etched in greyish hoarfrost. A frowning sky had settled low upon the city, upon the Neva, upon Nastya.

" 'My precious.' " Those were the words with which her mother had begun her letter. " 'My precious.' "

Nastya sank down on a bench in the square near the Admiralty and wept bitterly. The snow melted on her cheeks, mingling with her tears.

Nastya shuddered with cold. Suddenly she realized that nobody had ever loved her as dearly as that abandoned old lady in the dreary village of Zaborye.

Too late. I'll never see mama again, she said to herself, conscious that this was the first time in months she had pronounced that touching childish word "mama."

She jumped up and walked briskly away in the face of the wind.

What have I done, mama? she kept saying to herself, blind to everything about her. Mama, how could it have happened? I have nobody but you; nobody will ever be as dear to me as you. If only I'm not too late! If only I have time to see her, to ask her forgiveness!

She came out on the Nevsky Prospekt and made for the railway ticket office.

She was too late. All the tickets were sold.

She stood at the window with trembling lips, afraid to utter a word lest she burst into tears.

The middle-aged cashier peered at her through the window.

"What is it, citizeness?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Nastya. "It's only that my mother. . . ."

She broke off and walked quickly towards the door.

"Come back!" called the cashier. "Why didn't you tell me at once? Just a minute."

Nastya left that evening. It seemed to her that the Red Arrow Express hardly moved, whereas it was tearing through the nocturnal forest at great speed, dousing steam over the rail-side trees and giving prolonged hoots of warning.

* * *

Tikhon went to the post-office, held a whispered conversation with postman Vasili, took a telegraph blank, turned it in his hands, and after repeatedly wiping his whiskers on his coat sleeve, wrote a message in crooked letters. Then he carefully folded the blank, put it inside his cap, and trudged over to Ekaterina Petrovna's house.

For ten days Ekaterina Petrovna had not left her bed. She suffered no pain but a weight she could not lift lay on her chest, her head, her feet, and she was short of breath.

Manyushka had been watching over her for the last six days. At night she slept in her clothes on the sagging couch. At times Manyushka fancied Ekaterina Petrovna had stopped breathing. Then she would whimper and say in a frightened voice:

"Granny. Granny. Are you alive?"

Ekaterina Petrovna would move a hand under the covers to reassure her.

From early morning the corners of the rooms were filled with November darkness, but the house was warm. Manyushka kept the fire going in the stove. When the dancing flames played on the log walls, Ekaterina Petrovna drew a feeble sigh. The fire made the room look cosy and lived-in, as it had looked long ago, before Nastya had gone away. Ekaterina Petrovna shut her eyes and a single tear stole out from under one eyelid and crept across a sallow temple, losing itself in her grey hair.

Tikhon came in. He cleared his throat and blew his nose to hide his agitation.

"What is it, Tisha?" asked Ekaterina Petrovna faintly.

"It's got colder, Ekaterina Petrovna," said Tikhon brightly, studying his cap. "It'll be snowing soon. And a good thing. The frost'll harden the roads and make it easier for her to get here."

"Who?" Ekaterina Petrovna opened her eyes and began stroking the quilt with a withered hand.

"Who but Nastasia Semyonovna?" replied Tikhon with a crooked smile, pulling the telegram out of his cap. "Who should it be but her?"

Ekaterina Petrovna tried to raise herself, but fell back on the pillow.

"Here." Tikhon painstakingly unfolded the telegram and held it out to her.

Instead of taking it, Ekaterina Petrovna fixed Tikhon with an imploring gaze.

"Read it," said Manyushka in a hoarse voice. "She can't read, her eyes are too weak."

Tikhon cast a frightened look round the room, straightened his collar, stroked his thin red hair, and began to read in a wavering voice: "Coming wait for me remain always your loving daughter Nastya."

"Don't, Tisha," said Ekaterina Petrovna softly. "Why should you, my good man? God bless you. Thank you for your kindness... your thoughtfulness."

Ekaterina Petrovna turned her face to the wall and seemed to fall asleep.

Tikhon went out and sat down on a bench in the cold entrance, where he smoked and spat and heaved heavy sighs until Manyushka came and beckoned him to come into Ekaterina Petrovna's room.

Tikhon tiptoed in and stood wiping his face with all five fingers of his big hand. Ekaterina Petrovna was lying there tiny and white as wax, as if she had peacefully fallen asleep.

"Could not wait no longer," murmured Tikhon. "The poor old thing! The poor old thing! How she did suffer! No word for it!" Here he turned angrily on Manyushka: "See you behave yourself, you little vixen! No monkey business! She was good to you; you be good to her. Sit here now while I go and report it to the rural soviet."

He went out and Manyushka sat trembling on a stool, her knees under her chin, her eyes glued on Ekaterina Petrovna.

* * *

Ekaterina Petrovna was buried the next day. The weather was cold. Fine snow fell. The world was white, the sky was dry and bright though greyish, as if a strip of frozen homespun was stretched above the earth. The expanses beyond the river were hazy grey and they gave off the cheery smell of snow and frost-bitten willow bark.

The funeral was attended by old women and little children. Tikhon, Vasili and the two Malyavin brothers (old men who looked as if they were sprouting oakum) carried the coffin. Manyushka and her brother Volodka carried the coffin lid, staring straight ahead of them without blinking.

The graveyard was at the edge of the village, high above the river. Tall willows yellow with lichen grew on the slope.

The schoolmistress happened to meet the funeral procession as she came down the road. She had arrived only recently from the regional centre and knew hardly anyone in Zaborye yet.

"The schoolmistress! The schoolmistress!" the little boys whispered to one another.

She was young, shy, grey-eyed—scarcely more than a girl. On catching sight of the procession she stepped aside and stared at the little old lady in the coffin with frightened eyes. Prickly snowflakes fell on the old lady's face without melting. Back in the region centre the schoolmistress had left her mother—just such a little woman as this—just as grey, always worried about her daughter, always doing something for her.

After standing a moment, the schoolmistress joined the procession. The old women stole glances at her and whispered to each other that she was so young and quiet she would have a hard time managing the boys at first, they were such harum-scarums in Zaborye.

Presently the schoolmistress found the courage to turn to one of the old women—Granny Matryona—and ask:

"Had she no relatives? Was she all alone?"

"Ah, my dear," wailed Granny Matryona, "you may count her as being all alone. And such a kind-hearted creature she was! There she'd sit, day after day on her couch, with never a soul to say a word to. Enough to break your heart! She's got a daughter in Leningrad, but looks like the girl's too grand for her old mother. So the old one died alone, with none of kin beside her."

On reaching the graveyard they put down the coffin beside a newly-dug grave. The old women bowed low, touching the ground with their age-darkened hands. The schoolmistress went up to the coffin, bent down and kissed Ekaterina Petrovna's withered yellow hand. Then she quickly straightened up, turned round and walked off to a crumbling brick fence.

Beyond the fence stretched the land she loved so well—the land veiled in light sadness and mist of falling snow.

For some time the schoolmistress stood gazing out over it, while from behind her came the voices of the old people, the sound of clumps of earth striking the coffin lid, the crowing of cocks in distant yards forecasting fine weather, light frost and the quiet days that come with winter.

* * *

Nastya arrived in Zaborye two days after the funeral. She found the fresh grave mound in the cemetery (the earth had frozen in clumps on it) and Ekaterina Petrovna's dark cold room, from which all life seemed to have withdrawn ages before.

Nastya wept all night long in that room—wept until a cheerless blue dawn peered in at the window.

Next day she stole out of Zaborye, afraid of having to meet and speak to anyone. She felt that nobody but Ekaterina Petrovna could relieve her of the awful weight on her heart, of the unbearable burden of her guilt.

1946

Konstantin Fedin

A Drawing of Lenin

1

It was a summer noon when the newspaper office rang up Sergei Shumilin and asked him to drop in and talk something over with them. The young artist lay aside his drawing, washed his hands, thrust a drawing-pad and a pencil into the pocket of his jacket and went out.

The shop windows exhibited pictures of Lenin framed in red calico. "Long Live the Third Communist International!" met the eye everywhere. Sergei glanced at the windows. No doubt the photographs reproduced Lenin's features correctly, without any deviations, he thought, but an artist could have better caught the individual traits and the liveliness of the movements; it would be wonderful to draw Lenin from life some day.

"We've got a commission for you," they told Sergei in the editorial office. "Foreign delegates are coming to the Comintern Congress. Will you go to the Palace of Labour—they are going to meet there today—and sketch a few of them?"

"All right."

"And tomorrow we'll give you a pass for the opening session of the Congress; there you can draw any of the delegates you like, and if you see Lenin. . . ."

"Lenin?" Sergei exclaimed. He smiled as it flashed through his mind that fate was curiously prompt in granting his wish.

"Yes, make a drawing of Lenin if you get the chance."

"All right," Sergei said once more.

He left the office in high spirits and took the tram for the Palace of Labour. Every time he caught a glimpse through the open window of the tram of a portrait of Lenin, he wondered again at the extraordinary coincidence and saw

in his mind's eye how easy, natural and expressive his drawing of Lenin would be.

He decided which sketchbook he would take with him, which pencils he would need, and how, later on, he would paint a portrait from the drawing.

2

It was noisy and crowded in the Palace of Labour when he got there. On the stairs and in the corridors there were groups of foreigners surrounded by Russians who were telling them about life in the Soviet republic.

The war with Poland was still going on. But the Poles were defeated and the Red Army was in hot pursuit of the retreating enemy. In the Crimea, too, Baron Wrangel's White Guards were being made an end of. But it was still a long way to peace. The blockade was holding the young Soviet land on the verge of exhaustion, and it was difficult for anyone coming from abroad to get to Petrograd. The foreign visitors had to travel by sea, around Scandinavia, taking a lot of risks on the way. But the desire to see the country of the Soviets was strong enough to make them overcome all obstacles; people came from all ends of the earth.

Sergei made the acquaintance of a German, a little hunchback with a grave face and a leisurely gait. He was a tailor by trade and hailed from Braunschweig. During the German revolution he had been head of an "independent" republic in Braunschweig for three days until it was treacherously overthrown by the German Social-Democrats.

He agreed at once to sit for the artist, but proceeded with detailed questions about the Soviet system of government. He could not understand why it should have been found necessary to do away with every kind of private trade and introduce distribution of goods.

They were standing on the balcony, looking down at the square in front of the palace where traces of the heroic defence of Petrograd against General Yudenich were still visible—the hastily filled-in trenches, the sandbags and logs, remains of breastworks in the boulevard. Sergei was saying:

"Hordes of enemies have risen against us. We think of one thing only—of how to rout them."

"I quite understand that," said the Braunschweigian in a tone of superior understanding, slowly and rhythmically nodding the head that lay deep between his shoulders. "But what exactly was the object of closing down the haberdashery shops?"

"The shopkeepers are hand in glove with our enemies."

"I see, yes, I see. But supposing a button was to come off my jacket, where am I to buy it?"

It looked as though there would be no end to these arguments. Sergei, suddenly bored, felt that if he started to draw this man, nothing would come of it.

"You know what, I think I'll have a shot at sketching you at the Congress tomorrow," he said.

The German agreed and the artist took leave of him.

3

With the pass in his pocket, Sergei hurried off next morning to the opening of the Congress. When he got there the hall of the Uritsky Palace was already packed, the galleries rippled with living waves of heads. The hum of voices and the flutter of white sheets of newspapers filled the building. It was hot and stuffy, more and more jackets were taken off in the amphitheatre, people fanned themselves with newspapers and handkerchiefs, and the vibration of innumerable spots of light dazzled the eyes; everything was permeated with tense expectation.

Sergei found a place in the reporters' box opposite the platform. He could see the benches of the presidium very clearly from there. He opened his sketchbook and got ready to draw.

The buzz in the galleries swelled suddenly to a volume of sound that, drowning all other sounds, swept downward in an avalanche of applause. Sergei sprang to his feet like the rest and stared at the place that was to be occupied by the presidium. There was no one to be seen. He looked around the hall and then dropped his sketchbook, and started to clap as furiously as the rest.

Straight toward him, across the hall, Lenin was coming at the head of a crowd of delegates. He was hurrying, his head bent, as if forcing his way against the current of air and striving to slip out of sight as soon as possible, so as to put an end to the applause. He mounted the platform and was no more to be seen while the ovation lasted.

The moment he appeared, the doors of the hall were flung open, and huge baskets of red carnations were brought into the galleries and amphitheatre. The flowers were quickly distributed, colourfully linking the long rows of benches with the scarlet banners and decorations. Glancing about him, Sergei caught sight of two elderly artists who had once been his teachers. They had already settled down while he was still on his feet. Remembering what he was there for, he picked up his sketchbook and got out his pencil.

Suddenly, when all was still, he saw Lenin again, hurrying between the seats in the amphitheatre. The people did not notice him at once, but hardly had they done so than they started to applaud again and crowd the aisle up which he was almost running. Lenin noticed someone, his face brightened, he smiled

and held out his hand. The other man got to his feet, shook hands in a leisurely way, with something of the slow dignity of a peasant, and greeted him with a reserved, affectionate smile. They talked for a moment, bending close to each other because the roar of applause was gaining in volume and people were pressing in on them.

"That's Mikha Tskhakaya," Sergei heard someone say. "A Georgian Communist. He was in Switzerland with Lenin."

The ring of people pressed still closer. With a hasty shake of the hand Lenin left his old comrade, almost forced his way through the unyielding throng and hurried on down the hall. He was obviously displeased with the applause and the jostling crowd.

Sergei missed no movement of his. He fancied he had observed some very important characteristics in the movements of this agile shortish man, and he was already seeing them in his sketchbook, caught by his pencil.

Lenin mounted the platform, disappeared for a moment, then reappeared. Sergei saw him take out a writing pad and sit down on the steps. It all happened in an instant, and so casually, so simply—that a better pose could not have been looked for, could not have been thought of. Sergei sensed that his neighbours, the artists, were already hard at work. He gripped his pencil but could not take his eyes off Lenin.

He had a perfect view of his head—a big head, of an unusual form, a head that instantly remained fixed in one's memory. Lenin laid down his papers on his knee and bent over them, reading. The line of his brow, the curve of his head, the light curling hair just touching the collar at the back of his neck, dominated his whole aspect. Sergei wanted to compare Lenin with someone in ancient or modern history, but Lenin resembled no one. Every trait belonged to him alone.

At length Sergei put pencil to paper. With one soft, gliding stroke he roughed in the contour of the head. Then he looked up. Lenin was no longer there.

4

Sergei saw him again when he came onto the rostrum to speak.

An enthusiastic ovation greeted him, and he had to bear it to the end. He sorted and arranged his papers for a long while, then raised his hand and shook it as though exhorting the stormy audience to be still. He glanced about reproachfully and sternly—alone amid the tumult. Suddenly he pulled out his watch and, turning its face so that the audience could see it, tapped it impatiently. It was no use. Again he took to fingering his papers, rearranging them, until at last the ovation exhausted itself and died down into attentive silence.

Then Lenin began to speak.

Now Sergei saw him in movement, directed to convey thought. That was precisely how the artist had dreamed of showing him in his drawing. The features of the Lenin of a moment ago now seemed to have vanished in Lenin the orator, superseded by others in swift succession. Sergei marked them one by one but they never reappeared and he was afraid to miss any of them. He could not have said now what he was doing: studying Lenin's gestures or listening to his speech.

The complete unity between the words and gestures of the man made a powerful impression on him. The substance of the speech was transmitted plastically, with the whole body. It seemed to Sergei as though molten metal was being poured into a living, yielding mould—so closely did the form of external movement embody the spoken word, so vividly did the impetuous utterance convey the fiery sense of the speech.

Lenin was exposing the policy of Great Britain, who, having suddenly become imbued with a love of peace and a desire to rescue crushed Poland and the White General Wrangel, offered to mediate between these two and the Soviet republic. When Lenin demanded of the audience why the world had been thrown into a state of "unrest"—as the bourgeois government of Great Britain mildly put it—the whole figure of the man ironically expressed this awkward "unrest" so embarrassing for the English bourgeoisie, and its policies were momentarily presented in a sharply sarcastic aspect.

Lenin glanced every now and again at his notes and quoted figures, but never for a moment did he become the tedious professor, always remaining the masterful people's leader. His high voice was unwearying. His language expressively simple, his pronunciation easy and soft; sometimes he slurred his "r's", and it gave his speech a human touch, brought it somehow nearer to his audience.

With the feeling that he was not missing a sound in this speech, Sergei started to draw. He roughed in the raised head, the outstretched arms, the strong, straightened line of the back, the rounded, thrust-out chest. He put aside one drawing and started another; in one he did not get the head right, in another the arms, in a third the torso. He repeated the details he caught correctly, struggled with those which eluded him, turned over page after page, made innumerable fresh starts and at last realized with horror that he was getting no nearer his goal.

He glanced at his former teachers. One of them was bent over his work, painstakingly rubbing out what he had done. The bald spot on his head was crimson, and Sergei remembered that he had always been in the habit of flushing like that whenever things went wrong. The other artist left the box and settled down in the seats opposite the platform. He stopped drawing and was simply listening to Lenin.

A terrible fear came over Sergei that he would let his one chance slip forever, that Lenin would come to the end of his speech soon, and there would not be a single finished drawing in his sketchbook. He went out of the box and pushed his way to the door where people were standing, closely packed. He found a place for himself down below in the aisle, from this point Lenin seemed bigger and taller. He decided this was the best view of all. But the lights got in his way; the photo and cinema cameras as well as the artists were all hard at work, trying to catch the elusive living Lenin. The lights blinded him, leaving everything dark before his eyes. He went over to the other side of the rostrum. From this point he could see Lenin almost in silhouette, because the light behind him was more glaring. No, his first place had been the best, after all; he had better get back to the box as quickly as he could.

He found his seat occupied, so he had to stand. But as he stood there he suddenly got a view of Lenin in full stature and in a completeness that had previously eluded the eye kept busy with the details of a figure whose very nature was unity. Sergei started a new drawing. And now all his preparation, all those uncertain attempts, groping fragmentary studies, made as if half-blindly, of gestures, turns of the head, separate features, gradually began to augment each other, fill out and unite in a coherent drawing, into a portrait conveying something of the truth—into the living Lenin. Sergei was now drawing rapidly, effortlessly, never taking his eyes off his sketchbook.

There was a roar of applause. Sergei raised his eyes. Gathering up his papers with a sweep of his hand, Lenin ran lightly down from the platform.

Sergei closed his sketchbook.

5

When the meeting was over, Lenin came out with Gorky surrounded by the hot, tightly-packed crowd of delegates. The glare of the blue summer's day blinded and scorched after the warm yellow twilight of the auditorium. At the exit, it was impossible to move forward because of the crowd. Cameramen pressed in on the delegates from all sides, clicking frantically, delighted by the glaring light. Jostled by the crowd, Gorky and Lenin paused by a column at the entrance to the Palace. They were photographed incessantly. Gorky's clean-shaven bluish head shone in the sun and could be seen a long way off. His name was heard on every side. Lenin, bare-headed, too, was standing in front of him, a step or so lower.

Sergei stood just beside them; he ought to have been drawing. But the crowd crushed him. And he had no thought of stirring; he had not seen Lenin as close as this all day. He could feel himself smiling; he was conscious that it was perhaps out of place, but the smile seemed fixed to his face. Of course it

was no joy to him that the cameramen would make several dozen poor photographs, but he envied them the swiftness of their carefree profession.

The procession set out. High overhead among the waving banners a huge wreath of oak boughs and red roses was borne. They were going to the common grave in the square named after those who had laid down their lives for the Revolution.

Lenin walked at the head of the delegates. Beside him walked foreigners and Russians, young and old—the groupings changed every now and again; when he had finished talking to one, he began talking to another.

He wore no coat. His jacket was unbuttoned, his hands sometimes clasped behind his back, sometimes thrust deep into his trousers' pockets. He did not look as though he were out in the street, surrounded by great towering buildings, but in an intimately known room, at home. He appeared to find nothing out of the ordinary in the multitude around him; he felt natural and prefectly at ease among the mass of people irresistibly drawn to him.

Sergei, who was walking at a little distance, caught sight of a man he knew threading his way through the close rows of people. Taking advantage of the first opportunity, he darted ahead and came alongside Lenin. It was the man from Braunschweig. He introduced himself with great thoroughness, shook hands, and plunged into what was evidently a well-prepared tirade.

Lenin bent his head to one side the better to hear what the man was saying. The latter emphasized his impressive, weighty sentences with important gestures of his long arm, fearful of letting a word slip by unnoticed. At first Lenin listened with a serious countenance. Soon he smiled and screwed up his eyes quizzically, making little curt impatient jerks with his head. Then he recoiled a step and waved his hand in a way that plainly said: "Absurd! Nonsense!" The tailor went on trying to prove his point—whatever it was—and gesticulating. Lenin took him by the elbow and uttered two or three phrases, final and irrevocable. To these the Braunschweigian protested furiously. Suddenly Lenin clapped him lightly on the shoulder, then stuck his thumbs inside the waistcoat and started to laugh; he laughed and laughed, rocking from side to side as he walked on at a quicker pace, never turning once to look at the man who had amused him so much.

Had the unlucky Braunschweigian raised the problem of buttons? Quite possibly. And Sergei smiled, when the German lagged behind Lenin and was lost in the crowd. Curious feelings had been awakened in Sergei by this scene; it had been all dumb show for him, yet full of movement, so keenly had it expressed Lenin's lack of constraint, accessibility and merciless sense of humour. Sergei had seen him gay and laughing heartily, had watched his manner when arguing —the quick changes of expression, the quizzically screwed-up eyes, the gestures full of passion and will-power. This scene with the Braunschweigian would help

to round out Sergei's drawings, to give those important touches that he could not see before.

Two premiers, he thought to himself, smiling as if still he could see the two figures before him. The head of the three-day Braunschweig government that has been consigned to oblivion, and the head of a government that has existed now for three years and will last forever.

An unfamiliar, almost physical sense of pride swept over Sergei; almost at the same moment his heartbeats quickened with vexation and a sudden bold desire. Why, why, when so many people were approaching Lenin, and he seemed to find time for them all—why should he, an artist whose duty and desire was to depict Lenin's features for hundreds and thousands of people—why should he have to snatch chance moments to get a glimpse of his face, catch the line of his smile, his glance.

Sergei opened his sketchbook. There were traits of resemblance in the drawing, of course. Caught in passing, they were not absolutely unquestionable, but what would Lenin himself say of them?

Sergei was pushed forward. Or perhaps, he only fancied he was—and in reality it was his own impulse that pushed him into the front ranks where he found himself marching alongside Lenin. He was almost out of breath. Only a step divided him from his goal, and still wondering whether he had the strength to make it, he made it.

He went up to Lenin.

"I want," he began, and then the just thought-out sentence collapsed: "Vladimir Ilyich, what you think . . . this drawing?"

Lenin glanced at Sergei, took hold of the sketchbook and, bending over it, peered at the drawing through narrowed eyes. Then he pushed it away and glanced at the artist with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"Do you like it yourself?" he asked.

"No," Sergei replied, "but I think there is some resemblance. . . ."

"I'm not an artist—I can't judge," Lenin rejoined hastily.

There was a sly expression in his eye; he threw back his head, gave Sergei an encouraging nod, and turned away to someone else claiming his attention.

Sergei was squeezed out of the first row and then out of the second and he wondered why it was that after contriving to keep a good place in the procession all the time, he had suddenly lost it. Was it disappointment? Was it embarrassment? Sergei evoked anew the state of mind he had just experienced. But no, neither Lenin's voice nor glance conveyed anything to alarm Sergei. Yet—why had it ever occurred to him to show Lenin his poor sketch? It had been sheer weak-mindedness. Sergei opened his sketchbook and shut it again, at once; the drawing was no good at all.

At that moment someone took him by the elbow and pulled it downwards. He turned. It was the German holding his arm in a hard grip.

"You intended to draw me, my friend," he said in a loud tone. "You have not been able to do it today, but I can receive you tomorrow."

And lifting his long, dry hand high above his head, he clapped Sergei on the shoulder.

"It's a devilish hot day. Not in the least like your Mother Russia."

"You know what," Sergei said suddenly, "I've changed my mind. I don't think I'm going to draw you."

"Oh, very kind of you, I'm sure," Sergei heard as he made his way through the crowd.

He forgot the German immediately. And at that moment he felt a warm, welcoming handshake. His teacher, the artist who had been sitting in the box next to him, said with the usual, long-familiar thoughtfulness:

"You know. Nothing came of my drawing of Lenin. And what about yours?"

"Same thing," Sergei replied. Then, suddenly, pressing the kind hand, he burst out passionately:

"But I promise you, I promise you on my honour, that something will come of it yet!..."

1939

Isaac Babel

Awakening

Everybody in our circle—brokers, small shopkeepers, bank and shipping clerks—had their children taking music lessons. Our fathers, lacking opportunity, had invented a lottery. The stakes were made with the bones of the little folk. The craze affected Odessa more than any other town. Indeed, for a number of decades, our town had supplied the concert platforms of the world with *Wunderkinder*. Mischa Elman, Zimbalist, and Gabrilowisch were from Odessa: Jascha Heifetz too began his musical career in Odessa.

When a boy attained the age of four or five years, his mother would take the diminutive and frail creature to Mister Zagursky. Zagursky ran a factory of *Wunderkinder*, a factory of Jewish dwarves in lace collars and patent-leather slippers. He sought them out in the Moldavanka[1] slums, in the evil-smelling backyards of the Old Bazaar. Zagursky gave the initial direction after which the children were sent to Professor Auer in Petersburg. In the souls of these shrimps with their blue, swollen heads lived a mighty harmony. They became famous virtuosos. So it was that my father decided to try our luck on the same lines. Although I had outgrown the age of *Wunderkinder* (I was in my fourteenth year), I was so frail and stunted that I could pass for an eight-year-old. (Everything was staked on that.)

I was taken to Zagursky. Out of regard for my grandfather he agreed to a rouble a lesson—cheap rate. My grandfather, Levi-Itzhok, was the butt of the town, and its ornament: he strolled the streets in a top-hat and worn shoes and cleared up people's doubts on the most obscure matters. He was asked the meaning of the word "tapestry," why the Jacobins had betrayed Robespierre, by what process artificial silk was manufactured, what was a Caesarean section. My grandfather had the answers to these questions. Out of regard for his scholarship and his craziness, Zagursky took only a rouble a lesson from us. Indeed,

[1] Moldavanka—a district of Odessa—*Tr.*

it was for fear of grandfather that he bothered with me at all because there was nothing with which to bother. Sounds peeled off my violin like iron shavings. They scratched across my own heart, but father was adamant. All the conversation at home centred around Mischa Elman, exempted from military service by the tsar himself. Zimbalist, so my father had been informed, had been presented to the King of England and had played at Buckingham Palace; Gabrilowisch's parents had bought two houses in Petersburg. The *Wunderkinder* brought wealth to their parents. My father would have put up with poverty, but he needed fame.

"Impossible," people whispered in his ear as they ate his food. "Impossible that the grandson of such a grandfather. . . ."

My thoughts were otherwise occupied. While playing through my exercises on the violin, I would put a volume of Turgenev or Dumas on the note-stand and, strumming quietly, would devour page after page. During the day I would make up stories for the boys next door, at night transfer them to paper. Writing was a hereditary occupation in our family. Levi-Itzhok, whose wits began to wander in old age, had been writing a story, *The Headless Man*, all his life. I took after him.

Three times a week, weighed down by my violin case and music notes, I dawdled unwillingly along Witte Street, formerly Dvoryanskaya, to Zagursky's. There, along the wall, hysterically excited Jewish women would be sitting, awaiting their turn. To their weak knees were pressed violins whose measurements exceeded those of the future performers at Buckingham's Palace.

The door of the Sanctum would open. Staggering, big-headed, freckled children with necks slender as the stems of flowers and unhealthily flushed cheeks would emerge from Zagursky's studio. The door would shut with a snap, swallowing the next dwarf. Behind the wall, unsparing of himself, sung and conducted the maestro, with his bow tie, his red curls, his spindly legs. The director of this monstrous lottery, he peopled the Moldavanka and the black blind alleys of the Old Bazaar with ghosts of piccicato and cantilena. Later, this singing strain would be polished up to a devilish brilliance by old Professor Auer.

I had no business in this sect. Just such another little dwarf as they, I distinguished a different injunction in the voices of my ancestors.

The first step was not easy. Once I left home all hung about with the case, the violin, the notes and twelve roubles for a month's tuition. I was walking along Nezhinskaya Street and should have turned into Dvoryanskaya to reach Zagursky's, instead of which I struck up Tiraspolskaya and found myself at the port. The hours of my lesson flew by in the Practicheskaya harbour. This was how my emancipation began. Zagursky's waiting room saw me no more. Matters of greater moment absorbed all my thoughts. I and another boy from my form, Nemanov, became frequent visitors aboard the steamer *Kensington* to see an old sailor called Mister Trottyburn. Nemanov was a year younger than

I. Since the age of eight he had been engaged in the most complex trade in the world. He was a genius in matters of trade and lived up to his early promise. Now he is a millionaire in New York, a director of General Motors, a company as powerful as Ford. Nemanov dragged me along with him because I did what he said without arguing. He bought contraband pipes from Mister Trottyburn. The pipes were made in Lincoln by the old sailor's brother.

"Gentlemen," Mister Trottyburn used to say to us, "you mark my word, children should be the work of your own hands.... To smoke a factory pipe's no better than to put an enema into your mouth.... Do you know who Benvenuto Cellini was?... He was a craftsman. My brother in Lincoln could tell you about him. My brother doesn't force himself on anyone. He's simply convinced that children should be the work of your own hands, and not of other people's.... You and I cannot say he's wrong, gentlemen...."

Nemanov sold Trottyburn's pipes to the directors of banks, to foreign consuls, to rich Greeks. He made a hundred per cent profit on them.

The Lincoln craftsman's pipes exhaled poetry. In each a thought had been packed away, a drop of eternity. A yellow eye glinted in their mouthpiece, their cases were lined with silk. I tried to picture Old England and the life of Matthew Trottyburn, the last craftsman of the pipe, standing out against the tide of events.

"You and I cannot say he's wrong, gentlemen. Children should be the work of your own hands...."

The heavy waves at the sea-wall drew me further and further from our home with its ineradicable smell of onion and Jewish destiny. I switched my haunting ground from the Practicheskaya Harbour to the breakwater. There, on a patch of sandy beach, lived the boys from Primorskaya Street. From morning till night they never pulled on their trousers, diving under the barges, stealing coco-nuts for their dinner and waiting for the moment when boats would come in from Kherson and Kamenki with water-melons and it would be possible to split those water-melons against the quay sides.

It became my dream to learn to swim. I was ashamed to confess to these bronzed lads that, having been born in Odessa, I had not seen the sea until I was ten and, at fourteen, could not swim.

How late I was in learning needful things! In childhood, tied to the Gemara, I lead the life of a wise man and, after I grew up, I began to climb trees.

Swimming turned out to be beyond me. The fear of water inherent in all my ancestors—Spanish rabbis and Frankfurt money-changers—drew me to the bottom. The water did not support me. Chastened and sodden with salt water, I returned to the shore, to the violin and the music. I was bound to the instruments of my transgression and hauled them about with me. The struggle between the rabbis and the sea continued until such time as the local god of the waters—the corrector

of the *Odessa News* Efim Nikitich Smolich—finally took pity on me. The athletic breast of that man was alive with compassion for Jewish boys. He was the life and soul of a whole crowd of rickety shrimps. Nikitich used to collect them from bug-ridden Moldavanka hovels, lead them to the sea, bury them in the sand, do exercises with them, dive with them, teach them songs and, baking through and through in the direct rays of the sun, he would tell them stories of fisherfolk and of animals. To the grown-ups, Nikitich would explain that he was a *Naturphilosoph.* The Jewish children burst their sides laughing at Nikitich's stories, they squealed and snuggled around him like puppies. The sun sprinkled them with crawling freckles, with freckles the colour of lizards.

The old man observed my duel with the waves in silent detachment. Seeing that there was no hope and that to learn to swim was not for me, he included me among the protégées of his heart. It was altogether there with us, his gay heart, never aspiring to be elsewhere, never greedy or anxious.... With his bronze shoulders, his head of an ageing gladiator, his bronze, slightly bandy legs he lay amongst us behind the breakwater like the very sovereign of these be-meloned, be-paraffined waters. I came to love this man as only a boy suffering from hysteria and headaches can come to love an athlete. I clung to him and tried to be of service.

He said to me:

"Don't get so fussed.... You want to toughen up your nerves. The swimming'll come of itself.... What do you mean, the water won't hold you.... Why shouldn't it hold you?"

Seeing how much I was attached to him, Nikitich made an exception for me alone of all his pupils, invited me to visit him in his clean, spacious mat-lined attic, showed me his dogs, hedgehog, tortoise and pigeons. In exchange for these riches I brought him a tragedy I had written the day before.

"I *knew* you wrote," said Nikitich. "You've got that look in your eye ... gazing into space, more often than not...."

He read what I had written, twitched a shoulder, ran his hand through his wiry grey hair, walked up and down his attic.

"It looks to me," he said deliberately, pausing between each word, "as though you have the divine spark...."

We went out into the street. The old man came to a halt, brought his stick forcibly down on the pavement and looked hard at me.

"What is it you lack? Youth is no drawback, it'll pass with the years.... What you lack is a feeling for nature."

With his stick he pointed out a tree with a reddish trunk and low crown.

"What tree is that?"

I did not know.

"What grows on that bush?"

I did not know that either. We made a tour of the little square on the Aleksandrovsky Prospekt. The old man darted his stick at all the trees, he grabbed me by the shoulder when a bird flew by and forced me to listen to the various voices.

"What bird is that singing?"

I had none of the answers. The names of trees and birds, the division of them into species, whither the birds flew, whence the sun rose, when the heaviest dew fell—all this was outside my ken.

"And you have the nerve to write? Any man who is not a living part of nature as a stone or an animal are a part of her, will never put two worthwhile lines together. Your landscapes are like descriptions of stage decorations. Good God, boy—whatever have your parents been thinking about these fourteen years?"

What had they been thinking about? About overdue debts, about Mischa Elman's mansions. I did not tell Nikitich this, I said nothing.

At home, I did not touch the food at dinner. It would not go down.

A feeling for nature, I thought. My God, why did I never think of it before? Where can I find somebody to tell me about bird voices and the names of trees? What do I know about them? I might recognize a lilac—if it happened to be in flower. Lilac and acacia. Deribasovskaya Street and Greek Street are planted with acacias.

Over dinner my father was telling a new story about Yascha Heifetz. On his way to Robin he had met Mendelsohn, Yascha's uncle. The lad, it appeared, received eight hundred roubles for one appearance. Work out how much that comes to at fifteen concerts a month.

I worked it out. It came to twelve thousand a month. Across the cement courtyard, his caped top coat billowing gently, his red curls escaping from beneath his soft hat, leaning on his cane, Mister Zagursky, my music teacher, was advancing. One could not complain that realization had come to him any too soon. More than three months had gone by since my violin sank to rest on the sand by the breakwater.

Zagursky was approaching the front door. I dived for the back entrance—it had been boarded up against thieves the day before. Then I locked myself in the lavatory. Half an hour later the whole family had gathered round my door. The women wept, grandma rubbed a fat shoulder against the door and unloosed a fountain of sobs. My father was silent. He began to speak more quietly and deliberately than ever before in his life.

"I am an officer," said my father. "I own an estate. I go hunting. The peasants pay me rent. I have sent my son to a Military Academy. I have no worries about my son. . . ."

He fell silent. The women sniffed. Then a terrible blow fell on the door

of the lavatory. My father had launched his whole body at it from a run in a flying leap.

"I am an officer," he howled, "I go hunting... I shall kill him.... This is the end...."

The latch came off the door, there remained a bolt which held by one nail. The women were rolling about on the floor, clinging to my father's legs; beside himself, he struggled to be free of them. The noise brought the old woman, my father's mother.

"My child," she addressed him in Yiddish. "Our sorrow is great. It is boundless. Only bloodshed is wanting in our home.... I do not wish to see bloodshed in our home...."

My father groaned. I heard his footsteps going away. The bolt hung on the last nail.

I sat on in my fortress until nightfall. When all had gone to bed Aunty Bobba led me off to my grandmother's. It was a long way. The moonlight hung caught up in the unknown bushes, in the nameless trees. An unseen bird gave one pipe and fell silent, perhaps asleep. What bird was it? What was it called? Does dew fall in the evenings? Where is the constellation of the Great Bear? From which side does the sun rise?

We walked along Pochtovaya Street. Bobba held me firmly by the hand in case I made a run for it. She had reason. I was thinking of escape.

1930

Mikhail Zoshchenko

The Aristocrat

Grigori Ivanovich sighed noisily, wiped his chin on his sleeve and said: Friends, I don't like women who wear hats. If a woman is wearing a hat, silk stockings, or carries a poodle, or has a gold tooth, then she's an aristocrat and not a woman at all, a blank space, that's what she is.

Of course, in my time I was attracted to one of these aristocrats. I went walking with her, and took her out to the theatre. And it was in the theatre all this happened. In the theatre she displayed her ideology in full.

I met her in the front yard of our tenement, at a meeting. I looked and there she was, silk stockings, gold tooth, an' all.

"Which room are you from, ma'am?" I says.

"From Number Seven," she says.

"Pleased to meet you," says I.

And somehow I took a fancy to her immediately. I became a constant visitor at Number Seven—in my official capacity of course. You know:

"How are the lavatory pipes, ma'am, working all right?"

"Yes," she replies, "they're all right."

And she wraps herself tighter in a flannelette scarf, and not a murmur more. Only her eyes spoke and her gold tooth glittered. Well, I kept this up for about a month and she got used to me. She began to reply to my questions in more detail. You know:

"The water-supply is working, thank you, Grigori Ivanovich!"

Better and better. I began to go for walks with her. We would go into the street and she would tell me to take her arm. Naturally I'd take it, and get dragged along—like a pike on a hook. I never knew what to say and felt embarrassed in front of all those people.

Well, once she says to me:

"Why are you always dragging me round the streets? My head's going round. You being a man," she says, "and one of the authorities, ought to take me to the theatre for instance."

"I don't mind if I do," says I.

And bless me if the next day the Party cell didn't send round tickets for the opera. I got one ticket and Vaska the locksmith sacrificed his for me. I didn't look at the tickets, but they were for different places. Mine was for down below and Vaska's was for the back of the gallery.

So off we went to the theatre. She took my ticket and I took Vaska's. I sat right up at the back and couldn't see a damn thing. But if I bent and looked under the barrier I could get a glimpse of my dame. Only none too good either.

I got fed up and went downstairs. Soon it was the interval and she took a walk.

"Hullo," says I.

"Hullo."

"I wonder if their plumbing's all right here?"

"I don't know," she says, and makes for the buffet with me in tow. She walks around and looks at the counter. Now there was a dish on the counter with cakes on it. And I, fool that I am, hover round her and say as good as any old-time capitalist:

"If you would like a cake, please don't hesitate to take one. I'll pay."

"*Merci*," she says, and mincing up to the counter devours one of the cakes with cream on. And I have practically no money at all, only enough for three at the very most. She eats, and I fumble anxiously about in my pocket, to see just how much money I have got. And it was next to nothing, as I said.

She ate the cake with cream on and grabbed another. I only groaned but said nothing. A dreadful bourgeois bashfulness took hold of me: after all I was playing the cavalier and shouldn't worry about the odd coppers. So I strut around her like a cockerel and she laughs and fishes for compliments.

"Isn't it time to go back?" I says. "I think the bell's rung."

"Not yet," says she, and takes a third cake.

"You'd better be careful what you eat on an empty stomach; too many cakes might make you throw them all up," I say.

"Oh no," she says, "I'm used to it."

And she takes a fourth. At this point the blood rushed to my head.

"Put it back," I said.

And she got scared, and opened her mouth, and the gold tooth shined. But my blood was really up. Never mind, I thought, it's all over now anyway.

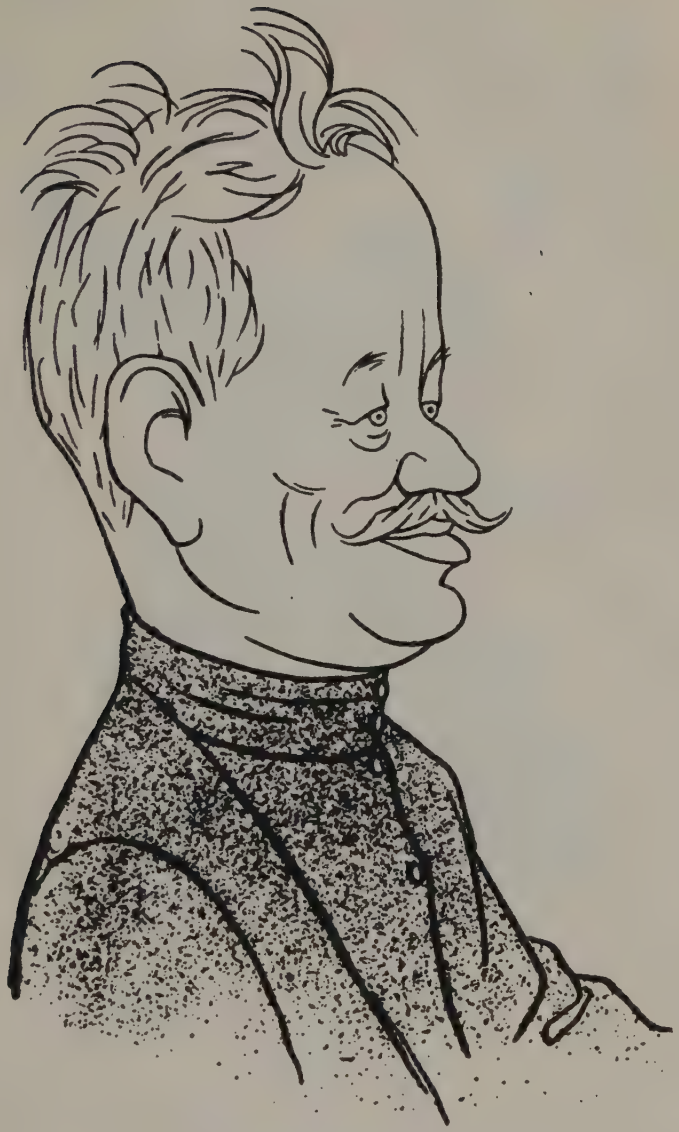
"Put it back, for Christ's sake," I said.

She put it back, and I say to the fellow behind the buffet:

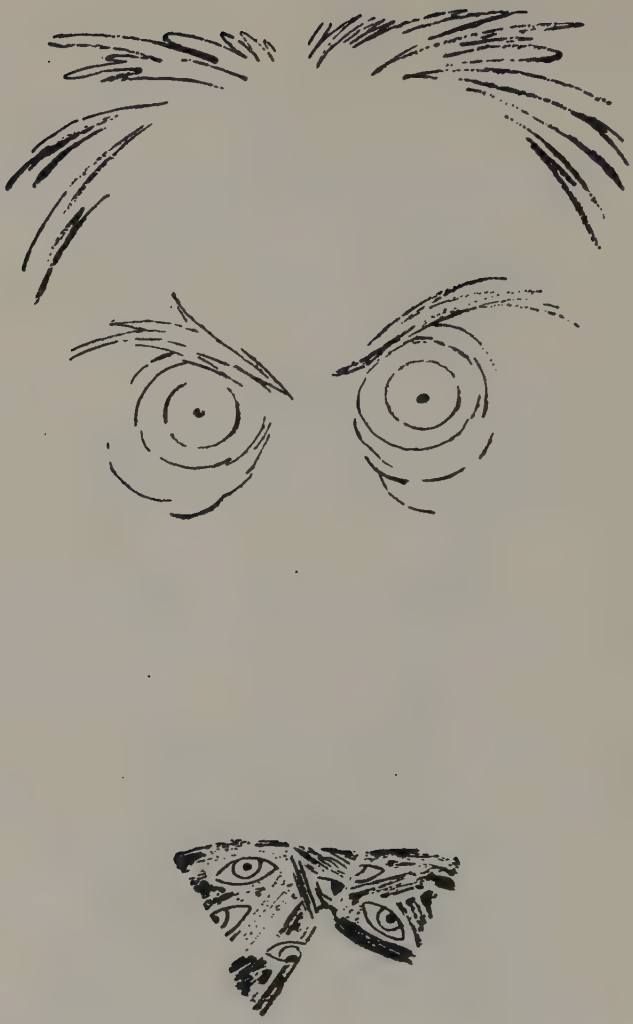
"How much for the three cakes eaten?"

And the attendant looks indifferent and says, playing the innocent:

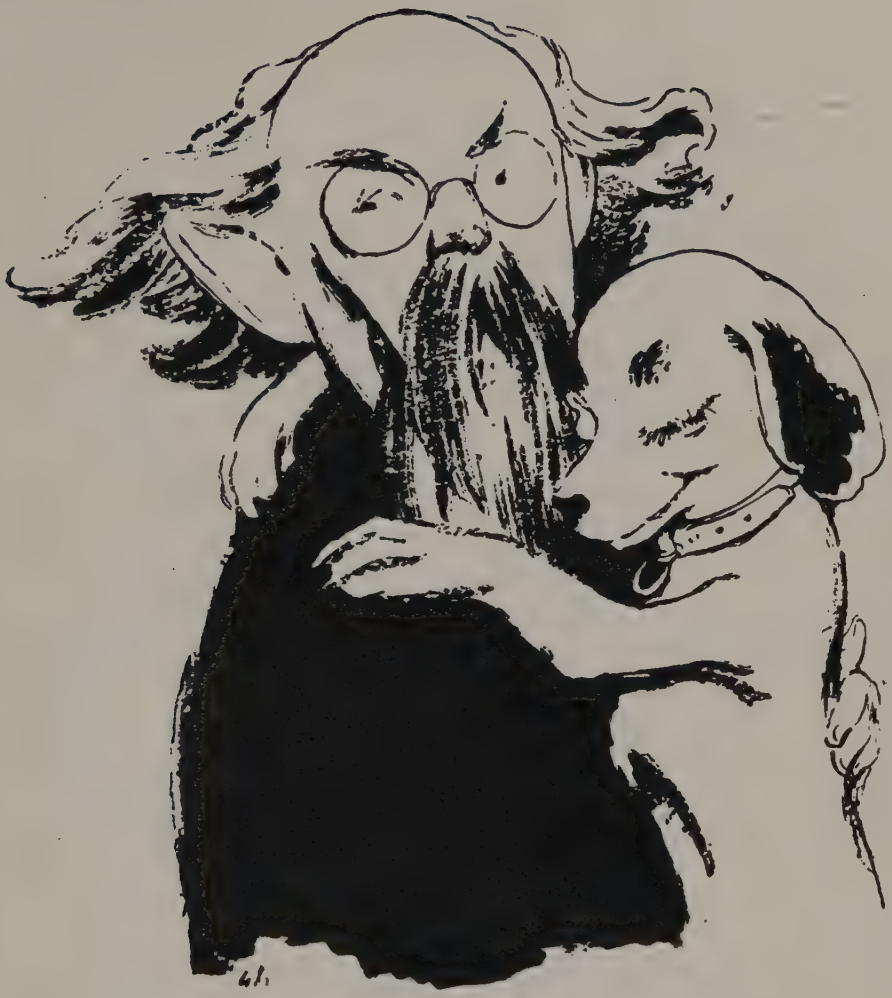
"Such and such for four cakes."



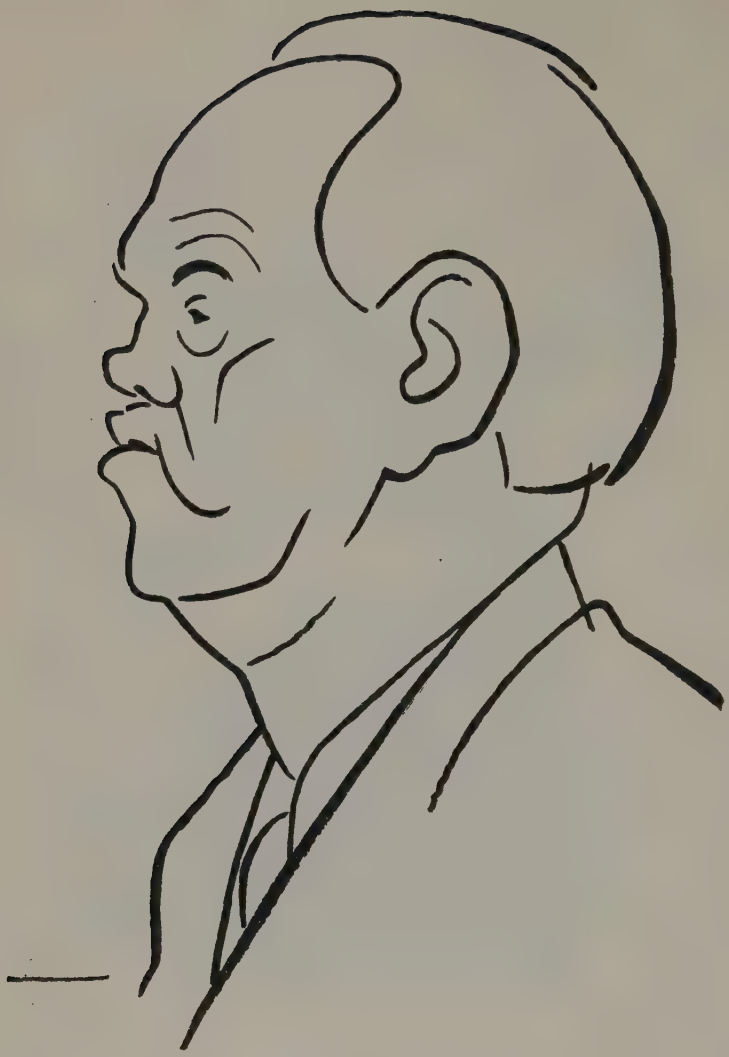
Mikhail Sholokhov. Cartoon by Yosif Ighin (1956)



Konstantin Fedin. Cartoon by Boris Prorokov (1957)



Mikhail Prishvin. Cartoon by Boris Prorokov (1957)



Nikolai Tikhonov. Cartoon by Yosif Ighin (1966)

"What do you mean," says I, "for four when the fourth one is on the dish?"

"Oh no," he replies, "it's on the dish, but a nibble's been taken out of it, and it's been fingered."

"What," says I, "a nibble for goodness sake! You're imagining things."

But he just stands there indifferently and waves his hands in front of his ugly mug.

Well of course everybody gathered round. The experts you know. One says a bite's been taken, another says no. And I turn out my pockets. All sorts of odds and ends tumbled out onto the floor—and the crowd laughed. I didn't think it was in the least funny. I just went on counting my money—just enough for four. There was no point in arguing, so I paid. Then turning to the madam, I said:

"Well, go on, eat it, now it's paid for."

But she didn't move; she was too abashed to eat it. And then some old boy chips in:

"Give it here, I'll eat it," he says.

And he did too. For my money.

We went back and sat through the opera.

Then home. And outside the tenement, she says to me in her bourgeois voice:

"Enough swinishness from you. If you've no money you shouldn't go out with a lady."

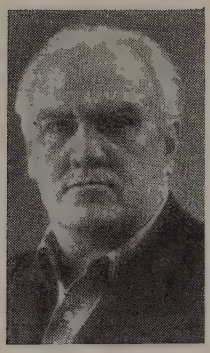
And I says:

"Happiness isn't all money, you know. If you'll pardon the expression."

So we parted.

I don't like aristocrats!

1923



Nikolai Tikhonov

The Apple Tree

In the bomb shelter the lights went out. It was at once filled with shouts and the grating of shifted chairs and benches, and then a voice loudly cried:

"Quiet, comrades, keep your seats, please."

And so they continued to sit in the pitch darkness. The raid had already lasted for several hours. The artist sat on the folding stool which he used to take with him for his outdoor sketching. This light, three-legged stool of his own construction came in very handy nowadays. The artist lived in a small, one-storeyed house, one of those many veterans which still stood on the broad streets of the Petrograd Side. The little house had a front garden, and in the garden there was even an old, neglected fountain, with its rusty pipe and moss-covered granite. Now it lay beneath the deep snow, and the last thing the artist thought of at this moment was the house, the garden, and the fountain.

His mind vaguely registered the conversation of his neighbours, the exclamations of horror and astonishment, the weeping of children. The black, solid murk enveloped him from head to foot like a cloak. . . .

"I ought to have gone away from Leningrad long ago," a voice said in irritation.

Yes, the artist thought to himself, how silly it was of me not to have gone away too. There would have been nothing cowardly about it. He was now designing posters, posters that were very popular; they were displayed in the streets, in clubs and in dug-outs at the front. That was true. But it was not at all essential that he should do them in Leningrad. What was more, conditions had become such that it was almost impossible to work. It was cold in his studio, his frozen fingers could scarcely hold a pencil, the tiny stove hardly emitted any heat and there was no way of warming himself. Naturally, there was no bomb shelter in his little house, and each time he had to run to the large neighbouring building and sit for long hours in its cellar. He had caught cold, he was weary and was

coughing badly, and he had not had a square meal for ever so long. His hands were covered with sores; rheumatism, or something like it. He found it difficult to walk the long distance from his home to the Artists' Club; the street cars were not running. And now the lights had gone out. Yet he had been told that he had only to cross the Volga, and there he would find lighted towns, warm rooms and abundant food. There his colleagues were living who had left in time.... Yes, how silly it was to be sitting here in the dark, cold and hungry, waiting for a bomb to fall on your head.

From time to time the house shook from top to bottom: everybody fell silent, and then for several minutes pandemonium reigned. Then, gradually, calm was restored. The blackness seemed to be growing thicker. The artist lost all sense of time. He had come to the bomb shelter in the evening; so it must be very late now. The raid seemed to be endless. Again the thud of an explosion, and again, and again... They are dropping bombs, he thought drearily. How the city he loved so dearly had changed! It was painful to think of it, it almost brought tears to one's eyes. How sad and dreary it all was. Soon the alarm would be over, the all-clear signal would be given—he would come out into the street and perhaps he would see the fresh ruins of houses, fires, and piles of debris.... Oh, those apartments, with beds and wardrobes hanging in the air, caught in the girders—pitiful attributes of human life!...

A child whimpered in the corner. In the murk, the artist tried to picture that childish head with the wide-open eyes full of tears. Perhaps it had been sleeping and had awakened, and had begun to cry from fear of the darkness. Should he paint a picture of a bomb shelter, one like this, say, only illuminated by candles? The trembling flames flickering on the faces, the black shadows on the walls, the taut anxious figures, the old women wrapped in worn winter coats, the young people whispering in the corner, the infants clasped to the breasts of young mothers....

A light flared on the staircase, and through the open doors came the sound of the all-clear signal. The raid was at last over.

The artist did not hasten to go. He waited until the dark, solid crowd had oozed out through the narrow exit and was one of the last to leave, groping his way along the cold walls.

He was afraid that ruins would greet his eye as soon as he emerged into the street. He thought of how he would make his way, stumbling, to his little house which was only a few paces away.

As he came out into the street he stopped in amazement and confusion.

Everything was bathed in the mighty, dazzling light of the moon, which hung, almost violet in colour, in the frosty haze, above the house walls, high in the greenish-blue sky, which was studded with white fleecy clouds that looked like a flock of sheep. The sky seemed to be ringing with cold and light. The

blank walls of the high houses looking onto a waste ground seemed to be built of bronze. The snow crunched softly underfoot. Blue velvety shadows lay on the snowdrifts piled high along the street which, always so commonplace, now gleamed with an unknown splendour.

He strode towards his house, and could scarcely recognize it. He found himself in a garden, fantastic as in a dream. The trees were covered with hoarfrost three fingers thick. Every twig seemed to have been cast by a master hand and sparkled, radiating a soft iridescence. Strange lights flickered in the summits of the trees, where the snow lay like caps of ermine. It was as if the trees were clad for some solemn dance and would soon break into a stately march around the artist, joining hands and scattering diamonds all around.

In the middle of this miraculous garden stood a tree of enchanting beauty. Everything that adorned the other trees—the tinsel, the radiance, the spangles and the diamonds—was multiplied on it. Everything attained perfection beyond the power of human skill. The tree burned in a cold and wonderful light; like a white bonfire, it threw off snowy flames, and never for a moment did these flames cease their iridescent play. The artist stood amazed, lost in dumb contemplation. He did not recognize the spot and could not understand how he had arrived in this garden, or where he was at all.

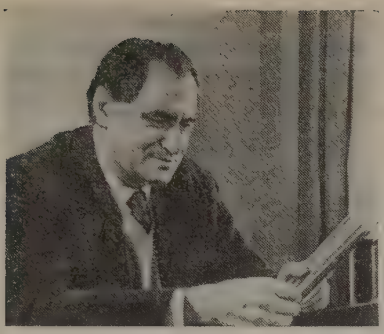
He glanced around him. People were walking along the street. Young laughter and gay crunching of snow could be heard. He took off his fur cap and stood for a moment with closed eyes. Then his senses returned to him. As he opened his eyes he seemed to have come back to earth. He was in his own garden, he had come straight to the snow-covered fountain. How had he passed the fence surrounding the garden? The fence had disappeared. A powerful blast had carried it away and dropped it far down the street, scattering its old and rotting boards. The tree of dazzling beauty was his old familiar apple tree, which always stood modestly near the fountain.

He looked around and saw the city bathed in the bewitching light of the violet moon. The splendid city rose up around him in wonderful, inimitable beauty.

The artist gazed at it as if he had been born anew. All the gloomy thoughts that had irritated him there in the bomb shelter disappeared. What, quit this amazing world of beauty, heroism, labour and splendour? Could he leave it all? No, never!

This city must be defended to the last breath, to the last ounce of blood; the enemy must be hurled back from its walls; he must be exterminated, utterly. But leave it? Never! And the artist stood and stared, and there was no end to his pleasure and wonderment, to his delight and pride.

1942



Valentin Katayev

Our Father, Which Art in Heaven...

"I want to sleep! I'm cold!"

"Heavens! I'm sleepy too. Get your clothes on. And stop being naughty. That'll do, now. Get your scarf on. And now your cap. Put on your boots. Where are your mittens? Stand straight, don't wriggle."

When the boy was ready she took his hand and they left the house. He was still half asleep. He was only four, and he shivered and stumbled as he walked. Dawn was just breaking. A frosty pale-blue mist filled the air. The mother tucked the scarf more snugly round the boy's neck, straightened his collar and kissed his drowsy, sulky face.

The dry stalks of wild grapes, hanging from the wooden balconies with their broken glass, were sugared with hoarfrost. The temperature was 25 below zero. Their breath made clouds of thick steam in the air. Slop water thrown out in the yard had frozen hard.

"Mummie, where are we going?"

"I've told you—we're going for a walk."

"But what's the suitcase for?"

"Because we need it. And be quiet. Don't talk so much. Keep your mouth shut or you'll catch cold. See how frosty it is. Better look where you're going or you'll slip."

The janitor was standing at the gate in a sheepskin coat and a white apron, with a metal badge pinned to it. She passed him without a glance. Silently he closed the wicket behind them and shot a big iron bolt. They walked down the street. There was no snow, only hoarfrost and ice everywhere. And where the ground was bare of these, there were smooth stones or earth frozen hard and smooth like stone. They walked beneath the bare acacias which snapped in the frost.

Mother and son were dressed almost alike. They wore rather good beige

coats of artificial fur, beige felt boots and bright-coloured woollen mittens. Only the mother had a checked shawl on her head, while the son wore a round fur cap with ear-flaps. The street was empty. When they came to the crossing, the loud-speaker there gave such a sharp click that the woman started. Then she guessed that it was only the morning broadcast beginning. It opened, as usual, with a cockcrow. The shrill voice of the cock resounded down the whole street, announcing the beginning of a new day. The boy looked up at the loud-speaker.

"Mummie, is that a cock?"

"Yes, dearie."

"Isn't he cold up there?"

"No, he isn't cold. And don't wriggle. Look where you're going."

Then there was another click of the loud-speaker, and a tender childish voice repeated three times in angelic tones:

"Good morning! Good morning! Good morning!"

After that the same voice unhurriedly and very reverently said the Lord's Prayer in Rumanian:

"Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done. . . ."

At the corner the woman turned away from the wind and, dragging the boy with her, almost ran into a sidestreet, as though fleeing from the pursuit of that too loud and too sweet voice. Soon the voice fell silent. The prayer was over. The wind swept in from the sea along the icy passage of the road. Before them a fire was burning swathed in rosy mist, and a German patrol were warming themselves at it. The woman turned and went in another direction. The boy trotted along beside her in his little beige felt boots. His cheeks were red as cherries and a frozen drop hung under his nose.

"Mummie, are we having our walk now?"

"Yes, we're having a walk."

"I don't like to walk so fast."

"Come along."

She cut through a yard that had another entrance leading into a different street. It was beginning to get light. Through the blue and grey clouds of steam and hoarfrost shone a brittle-looking rosy strip of dawn. It was so cold that its pink colour set one's teeth on edge. A few passers-by appeared on the street. All of them were moving in the same direction and nearly all of them were carrying bundles. Some were pushing handcarts before them, others were pulling loaded sledges, the runners scraping the bare stones of the road.

From all parts of the town that morning people loaded down with bundles were moving slowly in one direction. These were the Jews on their way to the ghetto. It had been set up at Peresyp, in that desolate, low-lying part of the town where burned-out oil cisterns stood at sea level resembling the tents of

travelling circuses. Several dirty blocks had been surrounded with two rows of rusty barbed wire with one entrance left free, like a rat trap. The Jews passed under the railway bridges. They slipped on the icy pavements. Among them were decrepit old people who could not walk and people with typhus. Those were carried on stretchers. Many people collapsed and remained leaning against a lamp-post or clutching at some corner post. Nobody was driving the people on, they went alone, without any guard. They knew that all who remained at home would be shot. And that was why they went themselves. The penalty for sheltering a Jew was also death. For one hidden Jew, all living in the appartment would be shot on the spot without exception. Jews were going to the ghetto from all parts of the town—down the steep slope, under the railway bridges, pushing handcarts and leading muffled-up children. One after the other, like ants, they went on past the houses and frost-rimmed trees. They passed closed doors and gates, passed smoking watch fires where German and Rumanian soldiers were thawing out. The men paid no attention to the Jews and continued to warm themselves, stamping their feet and rubbing their ears with their mittens.

The frost was terrible. Even in a northern town it would have been severe. But for Odessa it was something quite remarkable. Such a frost happens there once in thirty years. Through the thick clouds of blue and greenish vapour a small round sun gleamed faintly. Sparrows dropped dead while still in flight and lay about on the pavement hard as stones. The sea was frozen white to the very horizon. It was from there that the wind was blowing.

The woman looked Russian. So did the boy. His father was Russian, but that made not the slightest difference. His mother was Jewish and they had to go to the ghetto. The boy's father was an officer in the Red Army. The woman had torn up her passport that morning and thrown it down the frosty lavatory. She left the house with her boy, thinking to walk about the town till everything quietened down. She hoped to manage somehow. It would be madness to go to the ghetto. That would be certain death. So she began walking about the town with the little boy, trying to avoid the more frequented streets. At first the boy was quiet, believing that they were taking a walk. But soon he began to be fretful.

"Mummie, why are we walking about all the time?"

"We're out for a walk."

"But we never go so quickly when we're out for a walk. I'm tired."

"Never mind, sonny. I'm tired too. But I'm not grumbling."

She realized that she was indeed going much too fast, almost running, as though pursued. She forced herself to go more slowly. The boy looked up at her and hardly recognized her. He felt frightened as he saw the swollen, bitten lips, the strands of hair whitened with frost, peeping out untidily from under the shawl, and the fixed, glassy eyes with their sharp pupils. He had seen eyes like

that on toy animals. They looked at him and did not see him. Squeezing his little hand, she dragged the boy after her. He felt frightened and began to cry.

"I want to go home. I'm hungry."

She took him into a dairy, but two Rumanian policemen in wide-skirted coats with dogskin collars were breakfasting there; she had no papers, and fearing that they would arrest her and send her to the ghetto, she pretended to have entered by mistake, apologized and hastily banged the door to behind her. The boy ran along with her, not understanding what it was all about, crying. The next dairy was empty. With a lightened heart she crossed the threshold on which an old horseshoe was fastened for luck. Here she bought the boy a bottle of kefir and a roll. While he sat there on the high stool, muffled up, eating his roll and drinking the sour milk which he was very fond of, she was feverishly trying to decide what to do next. She could think of nothing. But there was an iron stove burning in the dairy and they could get warm. Then it seemed to the woman that the proprietress was taking too great an interest in her, and she hastily began to pay. The proprietress looked apprehensively through the window and suggested that they sit by the stove for a little while. It was red-hot and glowing—a dark cherry colour, with sparks playing on it. The heat made the boy sleepy. His eyes began to close. But the woman was in a hurry to leave. She thanked the proprietress and said that she had no time. Nevertheless, they did stay there for nearly an hour. Sleepy and fed, the boy could hardly stand on his feet. She shook his shoulder, fastened his collar and pushed him gently to the door. He stumbled over the horseshoe nailed to the threshold. Then he gave her his hand and again she led him through the streets. Ancient plane trees grew here. They walked past the trees with their patched, tender, frost-rimmed trunks.

"I want to sleep," said the boy, shivering in the icy wind.

She pretended not to hear him. She knew that they were in desperate straits. They had practically no acquaintances in the town. She had come here two months before the war and had been unable to get away. She was completely alone.

"My knees are cold," whined the boy, beginning to sniffle.

She took him aside and began to rub his knees. He quietened. Suddenly she remembered that there was one family she knew in the town, the Pavlovskys. She had met them on the *Georgia* sailing from Novorossiisk to Odessa and they had met several times afterwards. They were a newly married couple; he was a reader at the university, she had just graduated a builders' college. Her name was Vera. The two women had liked each other and made friends on the voyage. Then they had visited each other once or twice. Once they had all four gone to the Kharkov-Odessa football match. The Pavlovskys supported the Odessa side, while she and her husband wanted Kharkov to win. Victory had gone to Odessa. Heavens, what a commontion there had been in that huge new stadium by the sea! Shouts, yells, clouds of dust. They had nearly quarrelled about the

game. But now it was pleasant to remember it all. Pavlovsky was not in Odessa, he was in the army. But Vera had not been able to evacuate in time and had been stranded here. She had seen her not long before at the Alexandrovsky Market, they had even exchanged a few words. But it was not safe to stand there in the market too long. Nearly every day the Germans staged round-ups and arrests. The women could talk only for two or three minutes. Since then they had not met. But Vera must be in town—where could she go? The Pavlovskys were Russian. She might try to stop a little while with Vera. At least she could leave the boy there. The Pavlovskys lived quite some distance from where she was, at the corner of the French Boulevard and Pirogov Street. The woman turned.

"Mummie, where are we going? Are we going home?"

"No sonny, we're going visiting."

"Where?"

"You remember Auntie Vera? We're going to see her."

"All right," said the boy, quietening. He liked going visiting. His spirits rose.

They crossed Stroganovsky Bridge over the street leading to the port called Quarantine Slope. Down below stood dull square sandstone houses. Several of them had been reduced to heaps of rubble. Many had been burned down. At the bottom of the slope the arches of another bridge could be seen, and beyond it the angular ruins of the port. Still farther, beyond the burned, shattered roofs lay the white sea, frozen to the horizon, where a strip of open water stood out dark-blue. Around the white ruins of the famous Odessa lighthouse, several Rumanian transports painted a leaden grey were frozen in. Farther away, on the hill to the left, the cupola of the city theatre looking like a shell rose over the town through the clouds of pale blue and pink mist. The railings of Stroganovsky Bridge formed a long line of high iron spikes. They stood out sharply in silhouette. Down below, people were climbing Quarantine Slope with buckets. Water splashed from them and froze immediately on the road, gleaming like glass in the dull light of the pale-pink sun. It was all very beautiful. After all, they would be able to stop for a while with Vera, and then they'd see.

They had to go a very long way. The boy was tired, but he was very good. He trudged along quickly in his little beige boots, barely keeping up with his mother. He wanted to get there quickly. He liked paying visits. Several times on the way his mother stopped to rub his whitened cheeks. Near the house where the Pavlovskys lived, a fire was burning on the pavement with soldiers standing about warming themselves. The house was a large one, consisting of several wings. The gate was fastened with a chain. Arrests, a round-up. Everybody entering or leaving had to show papers. The woman passed the gate pretending to be in a hurry. Nobody paid any attention to her. The boy began to complain again. Then she picked him up and ran, her feet pattering on the bluish clinker slabs covering the pavement. The boy grew quieter. Once more she began to

wander through the town. It seemed to her that she was passing the same places too often, that people were beginning to notice her. Then the idea struck her that she might spend several hours in a cinema. They opened early as people were forbidden on the streets after eight on pain of death.

She felt dizzy and nauseated in the stuffy, stinking cinema, crowded with soldiers and prostitutes who, like herself, had come in to escape the frost. But at least it was warm, and she could sit down. She unwound the scarf from the boy's neck and he immediately fell asleep, holding her arm above the elbow with both hands. She saw the programme through twice, barely following what was happening on the screen. It appeared to be a newsreel of the war, followed by a comedy or something of the sort—she could not follow the thread. Everything was confused. The whole screen would be filled by the head of a pretty girl with fair hair done in puffs like horns, who pressed her cheek to the flat chest of a tall man without a head, and then they sang a duet, later the same girl climbed into a low sports car, then black columns of explosions rose—one, two, three, four, with a metallic roar as though iron roofing had been split at one go into long strips—one, two, three, four of them—and a hail of black clods of earth descended, rattling as though on some metal drum; tanks with funereal black crosses crawled over shell-ploughed fields, grinding and lurching, their long guns spitting still longer tongues of flame and wreathing streams of white smoke.

A German soldier in mended felt boots and a Russian fur cap with ear-flaps leaned heavily on the woman's shoulder and began tickling the boy's cheek with a thick, dirty finger, trying to waken him. He stank of garlic and raw alcohol. He was laughing amicably and kept repeating:

"Don't sleep, Bube. Don't sleep, Bube."

"Bube" means boy in South German. The child did not waken, only turned his head and whimpered in his sleep. Then the German rested his heavy head on the woman's shoulder, and embracing her with one arm, began kneading the boy's face with his other hand. The woman said nothing, fearful of angering the soldier. She was afraid that he might demand her papers. He also smelt of smoked fish. She felt ready to vomit. She made a tremendous effort to control herself and not to flare up, not to make a scene. She told herself to keep quiet. After all, the German had done nothing terrible. Just a boor. Quite tolerable for a German. She could stand it. In any case, the German soon fell asleep on her shoulder. She sat motionless. The German was very heavy. A good thing he had fallen asleep.

The girl with the flaxen hair in horns was again moving about on the screen, and with her a long cluster of black and white rays moved through the whole hall. Then the black fountains rose with their metallic rumble, and tanks crawled about, and German battalions marched over desert sands, and a huge nazi

flag rose on the Eiffel tower, and Hitler with his sharp nose and womanish chin barked from the screen pushing out his womanish behind, rolling his eyes and opening and shutting his mouth very fast. He moved his jaws so swiftly that the sound lagged behind: wow, wow, wow, wow. . . .

Soldiers tickled their girls in the darkness and the girls squealed. It was terribly hot and stuffy, with a mingled stench of garlic, smoked mackerel, raw alcohol, and Rumanian Chat Noir perfume. But all the same, it was better here than out in the cold. The woman was able to rest a little. The boy slept. But the last programme came to an end, and once more she had to go out. She took the boy's hand and they went. It was quite dark outside. Only the thick frosty mist rolled among the darkened houses. It made her eyelashes stick together. Smoky fires burned on the streets, almost choked by frost; sometimes a single shot would sound from somewhere. Patrols were marching along the streets. It was after eight. She picked up the boy, heavy with sleep, and ran, almost fainting at the very thought of being stopped by a patrol. She chose the most deserted side streets. Planes and acacias, frost-rimmed, stood like spectres along the roads. The town was dark and empty. Sometimes a door would open in the darkness, and the passionate notes of plaintive violins would accompany the bright ribbon of light that flashed from the entrance of the brothel onto the cars standing freezing before the entrance. The woman got safely as far as the huge Schevchenko Park that stretched along the sea front. Here everything was dark and quiet. It was especially quiet down below, under the cliff, overlooking the frozen sea. The silence over the sea was dense and solid like a wall. Several large stars twinkled over the white branches of trees. Among them slid the blue finger of a searchlight.

She walked along the broad asphalt road. On her left was that same stadium where they had seen the Odessa-Kharkov match. Beyond the shattered stadium lay the sea. She could not see it in the darkness, but she could sense its presence from the silence. On her right lay the park. The broad asphalt road gleamed in the starlight like emery paper. The woman walked along, recognizing all the different varieties of trees. Those familiar trees—catalpas—with their long pods hanging almost to the ground like ropes. There were pyramidal acacias and planes, maples and poplars too. Interlaced, white with frost, they hung over the ground like clouds. She began walking more slowly now, past the long row of empty seats, trying to catch her breath. But there was somebody sitting on one of them. She went past with beating heart. The black hunched figure, with its head resting on the back of the seat, never stirred. Then the woman saw that it, like the trees, was half covered with hoarfrost. Above the observatory cupola that rose among the white clouds of the park, the stars of the Great Bear twinkled. It was very quiet here, and not at all frightening. Perhaps it was no longer frightening because the woman was so tired.

Next morning, when dawn was only just breaking, lorries ranged the town collecting the bodies of those who had frozen during the night. One of them drove slowly along the road running through Shevchenko Park.

The lorry stopped twice. Once it stopped beside the bench where an old man was frozen stiff. The second time it stopped by a bench where a woman and a boy were sitting. They were sitting side by side, and she was holding his hand. They were dressed almost alike. Both were wearing rather good coats of artificial fur, beige felt boots and bright woollen mittens. They were sitting there just as though they were alive: only their faces, which the hoarfrost had covered during the night, were quite white and downy, and an icy fringe hung from their lashes. When the soldiers lifted the bodies it was impossible to straighten them. With a heave and a swing, the soldiers threw into the lorry the sitting body of the woman. She knocked against the old man with a dull wooden thump. Then with a swing they easily tossed in the sitting body of the child. His little body knocked against the woman with a light thud, and even bounced a bit.

As the lorry started off, a cock crowed through the street loud-speaker, announcing the beginning of a new day. Then a child's sweet voice repeated three times in angelic tones:

"Good morning! Good morning! Good morning!"

After that the same voice unhurriedly and reverently repeated the Lord's Prayer in Rumanian:

"Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. . . ."

1946

Ilya Ilf, Evgeni Petrov

A Man of Many Parts

Two men were lying on their beds in the rest home—talking. It was the hour set aside for after-dinner sleep, so they were talking in low voices.

"What a pleasure," said one of them, pulling up the sheet to cover his hairy chest, "to have an educated man to talk to. Now let's take this country's science for instance. It's advancing with great strides. All sorts of discoveries, inventions, improvements. It's all one can do to keep up with them."

"Yes," said the second. "Science is coming in for a great deal of attention nowadays. Now take me, for instance. Last summer I took my holiday in a sanatorium belonging to the CECILCS[1] and, you know, I can't tell you how much I enjoyed it. You get up in the morning and breakfast is served immediately: two soft-boiled eggs, caviar, a good hearty slice of ham, then always something hot, and coffee, of course—all very-very, in fact."

"You only have to open a newspaper," pursued the first enthusiastically, "and it warms the cockles of your heart. First they find gold on the Volga, then they strike oil. Then some ancient academician, all but eighty years old, goes haring off into the depths of the steppe and starts digging up something."

"Yes indeed, you're quite right, enormous progress. Now in that CECILCS I put on eight kilograms. A splendid sanatorium. Ideal cleanliness, excellent service, dinner sharp at two. Not a very convenient hour, but what a meal! I stayed there for six weeks. Yes, science now, that's something!"

"And art?..." the first man queried passionately. "What grandiose projects! In Moscow alone! They're laying out new, straight roads, erecting majestic buildings. And if we once had their doubts about our architects we can now truly say that they are on top of their jobs, quite up to the demands of the epoch."

"Absolutely! That's just what I always said myself. After the scientists, I went to slim down at a mineral waters spa and it happened to be in the Archi-

[1] Central Committee for the Improvement of Living Conditions for Scientists—*Tr.*

tects' rest home. Just a small place, but splendidly well organized. You get up in the morning and they serve you a very light but uncommonly tasty breakfast. Then you go to the spring, and go for walks. My wife, you know, is not an easy woman to please, but even she liked it. Well, you wouldn't expect anything else. Interesting company, first-class food, showers, massage, a symphony orchestra every evening. You're quite right, the architects have achieved great things."

"Or take literature," continued the first holiday maker. "Take the writers of Leningrad. Such high-class exciting fiction. Fedin's *The Rape of Europa*, for instance. Did you enjoy it? Wonderful, isn't it?"

"What on earth's so wonderful about the Leningrad writers? I stayed in their rest home in the Crimea in June or July, can't remember which. Anyway, I only stuck it for a fortnight. Nothing but tea with so-called buns for breakfast, and lunch in much the same style. No—I'm no admirer of the Leningrad writers. The Muscovites are not so bad, though! They've got a rest home near Moscow. Ideal conditions. Each writer gets a study-bedroom all to himself to rest and to work in.... I liked it so much that I spent two months there—recuperating from the Leningrad lot. And the wife's still there now. To get up in the morning is pure pleasure. Pine trees, sunshine, a stroll in the forest to look for mushrooms, and then, of course, by the time you come in for breakfast you could eat a house. And after a private snifter of vodka in your private study-bedroom you feel even hungrier. No, there's no two ways about it. Our literature is not bad at all. Painting now, that really is a bit behind the times."

"Behind the times? Why?" The first man was astonished. "What about the exhibition '15 Years Since October'? I spent one or two agreeable hours at that exhibition."

"That's exactly what I mean—one or two hours. There's no bearing it any longer. If you don't mind my saying so, it's nothing but a sort of doss-house. They've crammed six people or so into every room, the food is beyond description, there's an obvious calory deficiency. My wife and I left the day we arrived—and for where, do you think? For a peasants' sanatorium. Yes, yes, for peasants, for kolkhozniks. To tell the truth, my wife and I had grave doubts about it before we got there. I could just imagine our arriving there and them drying their foot-cloths all over the place, or building pigsties. But what we actually saw was good, God alone knows how good. Advancing with great strides, you say. Great strides indeed! Colossal! You get up in the morning: Meat pie, stuffed eggs, magnificent brawn, cocoa. And where, may you ask? In a simple collective farm sanatorium. We lived there for three months, never wanted for anything. You go out on the beach and you find some prize-winning Masha the milkmaid already lying there. There's agriculture for you. There's pigsties and foot-cloths!"

The first holiday-maker wriggled uncomfortably under his sheet and made another attempt to direct the conversation into intellectual channels.

"In industry too," he said, "we see enormous changes for the better. Take Magnitogorsk, Bobriki, the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station."

"I've never been in the Dnieper Hydroelectric's rest home, so I wouldn't like to venture an opinion. As for the Magnitogorsk people, they don't do themselves badly at all. An experienced matron and ultra-violet treatment the likes of which you wouldn't even find in Berlin. You get up in the morning—the traditional eggs, a good-sized pat of butter and hot chops. You take a little drink in the morning and feel the better for it all day long. I was there quite recently. A pity, but we only managed to stay for one month. They wouldn't give us an extension. The head doctor turned out to be on the swinish side."

"On the swinish side?" asked the first, startled.

"With every known symptom of swinishism," answered the second cheerfully.

At this the first man said nothing for a while.

"Do you like music?" he asked in a fading voice. "Our composers. . . ."

"Wait a moment, wait a moment!" the second man interrupted. "Composers? That brings something back to me. Wherever were we now? In Abas-Tuman? No, not in Abas-Tuman. In Miskhor, I think. My memory's getting rotten. Aha! In Khosta. Now I've got it. Useless, your composers! Not worth a kopeck. You'd never believe it, but me and my wife lived at the composers' place and went to the ex-political convicts for our meals. Ridiculous. And why? Because at the composers' the food was repulsive. You get up in the morning and before you know where you are they try to push cold sausage and tomatoes down your throat. Don't even mention composers to me. I won't listen. The old convicts, now, that's quite another matter. You come to them in the morning, tired and fed up after your precious composers, and everything's ready for you. Clean little old men sitting round the table, all of them with napkins tucked under their beards, the table laid with various foods, no definite helpings, take what you like, just think what that means, grab what you fancy. The staff have a really filial attitude. I put on twelve kilograms there. And that in spite of the exhausting nights spent with the composers. The rooms were full of mosquitoes, snakes, earwigs, everything but wolverines. Ugh, disgusting! If it weren't for that rest on the steamer my wife and I would have been quite exhausted."

"The steamer?" asked the hairy-chested man in some surprise.

"Quite simple. From Batumi to Odessa, from Odessa to Batumi. There and back it takes five days. I did six round trips, spent thirty days on the steamer. A wonderful combined holiday. You may say what you like, but our water transport is up to any requirements. A splendid cabin, a private bath, you get up in the morning and proceed according to the weather. If it's rough, you begin with a brandy. But if it isn't rough, you start in on a dish of ham and eight eggs—*à la marine*. The sea air gives you a ferocious appetite. It's very good for the health. I must say, though, I did rather overdo it. I had to pay a visit to

the actors at Essentuki to lose three or four kilograms. If you're ever there get yourself into the actors' rest home, there's a pretty nurse-maid in the sixth wing."

The first holiday-maker was by now bereft of speech and beyond questions. The second, however, continued with enthusiasm.

"They're an amusing lot, those actors. Our theatre really is the best in the world. You get up in the morning—anecdotes, gossip, impromptu dramatics. Full of pep, they are—you'll laugh enough to last you a lifetime. Then you go for your dinner. Chicken, goose, turkey, anything you like! I'm no actor myself, but I got to taking part in various little scenes they put on. The only thing to watch out for is, don't take them on at billiards for money. Actors are terrific at the pyramid game. Their own ball always seems to stay near the short end of the table as though it were tied with a thread. Never go to Essentuki in the winter, though. Boring and lousy. The place to go in winter-time is Karelia. There's a sanatorium there near Petrozavodsk, I just can't tell you.... You get up in the morning—skis, skates, cold veal with mustard. There's no two ways about it, the producing potential of the border regions is growing from day to day. You get up in the morning.... Oh, but I've already told you what they give you for breakfast. But the best of the lot is a stay at a state farm. As soon as I've finished the course here I and my family are going straight onto a holiday on a pig farm. The director is a friend of mine. At the pig farm you get up in the morning and at once they give you milk hot from the cow, new-laid eggs, best ham. And you have the children with you, the wife, grandmother. It's a tiring business of course, this kind of eternal wandering, as it were. On the other hand, though, it does enrich one's experience, broaden one's horizons. Aren't I right?"

A nurse appeared and, having handed each man a thermometer, went out again. The enlightened traveller placed the thermometer under his arm and, frowning, said:

"Tell me, my dear fellow—I know, of course, but I seem to be having a kind of black-out. Whose rest home is this one?"

"This one?"

"Yes. This one, in which you and I are at the moment."

"This is the Post and Telegraph Employees' Rest Home."

"Ah, quite right! Post and Telegraph employees. It had slipped my mind. Not a bad house. You'd never think any good would come of Post and Telegraph, but there you are, they're being laid on quite nicely. Sleep well, now. You must keep your strength up. We still have dinner to cope with today, and tea at five o'clock and supper at seven! It's a hard life, you know, when you come to think of it!"

1934

Leonid Sobolev

Tatian, the Scout

Our first meeting was a curious one.

On those fresh October days when the bright sun of Odessa shines deceptively in a clear blue sky but the north wind carries stinging dust, talking out of doors is not altogether pleasant. So the naval scouts invited me into their hut. All round me were bold faces—sunburnt, wind-roughened, gay. Then, while we were talking, two more scouts entered.

They were dressed and equipped alike—new tunics and khaki trousers tucked into smart top-boots, forage caps with a cocky tilt and an equal number of hand grenades, pistols, flash lamps and cartridge clips. But whereas on the giant form of one this arsenal looked like strings of trinkets, it covered the second like clanking mail. One of the scouts was twice the size of the other.

My curious look evidently embarrassed the small scout. His cheeks, which still retained the fresh roundness of childhood, flushed red, his long lashes trembled and fell, hiding his eyes.

"All set for war?" I said, patting his cheek. "A bit early, isn't it? How old are you?"

"Eighteen," said the scout in a high, thin voice.

"Oh yes? Added a bit on, haven't you, so they won't send you back home?"

"Honest, I really am eighteen," the scout repeated, raising his eyes to my face. There was no trace of mischief in them, or the eager curiosity of a boy dreaming of war as an adventure. They were earnest, serious eyes that held some knowledge of their own, they gazed at me in embarrassment and expectation.

"Well, all right, let it be eighteen, then," I said, pinching his cheek. "Where are you from, what's-your-name—Vanya, or what?"

"She's a girl, comrade writer!" the giant burst out in a deep bass. "She's Tatiana from Belyaevka way."

I snatched my hand back as though I'd burned it. It's one thing to pinch a boy's cheek, quite another to take liberties with a grown-up girl. A loud burst of laughter rose behind me.

The sailors roared. The cottage vibrated with all notes of laughter, topped by a powerful bass that rumbled like an airplane close under the ceiling. This came from the giant who had entered with the girl. His was a wholehearted, slow, deep "ho-ho!", he was delighted at the misunderstanding and looked down at me until I laughed too.

"You're not the first," said the giant when he had got back his breath. "Everyone takes her for a lad. What d'you say, boys—what if we make her Tatian—naval scout."

Tatiana was the daughter of a collective farmer in Belyaevka, now occupied by the Rumanians. Her father had joined a partisan group and she had escaped to town. She was assigned to lead naval scouts to her village, and in this three-day march in the enemy rear their friendship had begun. She was a girl after the men's own hearts—plucky, enduring, clever and cautious. She led the sailors through villages and farms where she knew every bush and fence, hid them in quarries, found secret wells, and when at last the path they were following was cut off by the enemy, led them to their own unit across the coastal salt lake.

At first she went on scouting sorties in a flowered frock, head kerchief and slippers. But in the daytime that frock showed up too well, and soon the nights turned chilly, so the seamen got her fitted up with the queer mixture of army and naval uniforms they sported themselves, resurrecting the Civil War style. This conglomerate uniform was born of the conflict of two opposing forces—the need for camouflage and a passionate desire to retain the navy look.

The slippers she still had to wear, however; naval stores had no boots her size.

Yefim Dyrshch, seaman gunner of the *Paris Commune*, soon found himself in the same boot difficulty. His forty-eights finally gave out altogether, and all he could find for his great feet were galoshes, cleverly fastened to his calves with army puttees. Just before my arrival the secretary of the regional Party committee, learning about this double difficulty, had sent a pair of huge, specially made top-boots with another tiny pair slipped inside them, and with these, two complete army uniforms made to size. So now Yefim and "Tatian" looked like an ocean liner and its miniature model; the only discrepancy was in the grenades and pistols which in their full size weighed down the girl's small form.

These weapons were not just for show. More than once Tatiana had stood on tiptoe to hurl a grenade into a Rumanian machine-gun emplacement, and more than one bullet from her captured *parabellum* had found its mark. In her sing-song southern speech she told me something of what she had seen in Belyaevka before her escape; her clear eyes darkened, her voice broke, and the burning

hatred in her made me forget that this was a girl, hardly more than a child.

She did not like to talk about these things. Much more often, climbing on a haystack, she joked and sang merry songs among the lively group of sailors. In the first weeks her vivacity misled some of the scouts. A jaunty signaller from the *Sobrazitelny*, formerly a cinema operator and the ladies' man of the district, was the first to launch an attack. But that same evening Yefim Dyrshch called him aside and showed him a massive fist.

"You see that?" he asked softly. "What d'you take her for—a bit of skirt or a fighter? Disgracing our detachment. You mind your step with a girl like that. Get me? Don't you forget it, then!"

For the others the warning was not needed. That gay, dashing group of sailors who played with death every night bore the girl through war in their rough, strong hands as carefully as a flower, protecting her from bullets and shrapnel, from coarse jokes, from annoyance and hurt.

In this, of course, there was an element of romantic chivalry; they were all a little in love with her. Faced with the grisly spectre of death which may clutch him at any moment, a man seeks that which warms his heart. The spirit is chilled by constant proximity to death, it reaches out eagerly for friendship, love and affection. How many times I have seen men hug one another in that grimly restrained moment before setting out on a combat flight, a naval sortie or reconnaissance. I have seen tears in the eyes of bold fighters, tears of leave-taking—the proud weakness of a warrior's lofty spirit. They shone on lashes but did not fall to the deck, the grass of the air-strip, the sand of the trenches. Forced back by a resolute will, they fell in heavy, burning drops into the heart of the warrior, steeling and hardening it for the deadly battle. Love was transmuted into hatred for the enemy, friendship into fury, tenderness into strength. They are terrible, those tears of fighting men, and woe to those who bring them forth.

The night after our talk the scouts went out on a raid, and in the morning I saw such tears; Tatiana had not returned.

At the front line the scouts had come up against a machine-gun placed on the top of a steep rocky slope. It was firing into the night from up above, and any flanking approach was impossible. The sailors began to climb, telling Tatiana to wait for them below.

Dark as it was, the machine-gunner evidently spotted the scouts and bullets began to spatter the rocks. The sailors pressed close to the cliff, but the bullets kept coming closer—a Rumanian was methodically covering the whole rise. Suddenly, down below on the right, a bright light flashed. A rocket speared through the darkness to the top of the cliff, followed by a second and a third. The sailors gasped—Tatiana had the rocket gun. She was helping them by a tried method, sending up rocket after rocket into the enemy's eyes to blind him.

But this could be done only when the machine-gun was near and the others could reach it quickly with grenades. Now they were still far away and the flashes that showed up exactly where Tatiana was placed her in the utmost peril.

The sailors rose and stormed the steep slope like a whirlwind, trying to get at the Rumanian before he pinpointed Tatiana by the rocket flashes. Now all the bullets were aimed in her direction, probing for the person with the rocket gun. Fury lent the sailors superhuman strength and within a minute the Rumanian was dying with a bayonet through him. Then the men crawled down again, marvelling at how they had got up.

They searched the whole slope in the darkness, but they could not find Tatiana.

The machine-gun fire had aroused the whole forward area. Random firing began, followed by the artillery. There was no place where the men could conceal themselves when daylight came, this was open country with everything visible from the hill top. Somewhere at the foot of the cliff there was a quarry, but the entrance was known only to Tatiana herself. Dawn was breaking, they had to go.

It was a ghastly day. Yefim Dyrshch who had been on a different sortie the previous night sat staring fixedly in front of him. His massive hands clenched till the joints cracked. He looked at the others and said hoarsely, "What a girl we've lost—eh, mates. . . ."

He rose and went to the captain with a plan for a sortie and found others there with similar plans. The sun was sinking when I left the cottage and saw Yefim alone in the small garden. His face was hidden in his knees and his great body shook silently. Perhaps I should have left him—there are times when a man needs to be alone. But the grief of this giant was dreadful, and I sat down beside him.

He raised his head. He wept unbeautifully, smearing the tears with his fist, and rubbing it across his nose like a child. He was glad I was there—somebody to whom he could pour out his heart. Mixing Ukrainian with Russian, in words of strangely tender beauty that revealed his pure, shy, patient love, he talked about Tatiana. He recalled her jokes, her quick glances, her voice, and a picture of Tatiana unfolded before me like an opening flower—not the "scout Tatian," but a tender girl, feminine, charming and shy. It seemed impossible that this girl could have drawn the machine-gun fire upon herself to help the sailors climb to the top of that steep rocky slope.

He only wanted to know that she was alive, and would live. All that he had kept hidden, to hold soldierly friendship intact, he now poured out in a passionate confession. He had never said anything to Tatiana "so as not to upset the maid, she's at war, that's enough," he was bearing his love within him till victory came, when "Tatian" would be Tatiana again. But his dream was a warm

spring welling up in his heart, he could see the cottage by the Dnieper, and Tatiana in it, and happiness, and moonlit nights in the orchard, and gay dancing at the wedding. . . .

The captain's voice called him. Yefim rose and went into the cottage with a firm step.

When dusk fell he went with five other scouts to the cliff. Nobody slept. We awaited their return.

In the morning the scouts appeared carrying Tatiana. She had been wounded in the chest and, half conscious, had crawled to the quarry entrance and lain there all day. In the evening she regained consciousness. From the darkness nearby she heard foreign speech and saw moving shadows. She opened fire. How long she held the entrance to the drift she did not know. She fired at every shadow she saw. Her cartridges were coming to an end. She put one aside, for herself. Then she heard an explosion by the entrance and again lost consciousness.

That explosion came from the first grenade flung by Yefim Dyrshch. As they approached the cliff he heard firing, left the other scouts behind and rushed towards the sound, breaking through bushes like a bear in a fury that was terrible. A tommy-gunner began firing at him from above. Yefim stood upright to see what was happening at the foot of the cliff; he saw a dark hole, the entrance to the quarry, and beside it three or four bodies and a dozen live Rumanians firing into the hole. He hurled a grenade, then a second and a third, and was swinging his arm with a fourth when bullets from that tommy-gun smashed his left hip and pierced his arm and side. He fell and slid slowly to the very edge of a sheer drop before he checked himself, clutching at the grass.

When they brought him in on a stretcher, his big fingers still held a white flower he had gripped.

He raised dulled eyes to my face.

"If I die, say nothing. No need to tell her, let her not know it. . . . If I live I'll tell her myself."

His eyes closed and with some difficulty the scouts raised the heavy stretcher bearing the gunner from the *Paris Commune.*

1942

Andrei Platonov

In the Beautiful and Violent World

1

Alexander Vasilievich Maltsev was considered the best engine-driver at the Tolubeyev depot.

He was in his early thirties, but had already qualified as a first-class driver and had long since been working on expresses. When our depot acquired its first high-powered passenger steam engine of the "JS" series, Maltsev was assigned to drive it, as was only right and proper. Maltsev's mate on this job was an elderly mechanic from the depot called Fyodor Petrovich Drabanov, but he soon passed his test as a driver and went to work on another engine, and I was sent to take his place in Maltsev's team as assistant engine-driver; before that I had had some experience as engine-driver's mate, but only on an old, low-powered engine.

I was pleased to be put onto this job. Just to look at the "JS" engine, at that time the only one in our district, was enough to send my spirits soaring: I could look at it for a long time and it touched off a feeling of tremulous joy, as beautiful as when I first read Pushkin's poetry as a little child. Besides, it was my ambition to work in the team of a first-class driver so that I might learn from him the art of driving heavy express trains.

Alexander Vasilievich accepted my appointment to his team with calm indifference: it was obviously all the same to him whom he had as mate.

Before the run I went through the usual routine of going over all the joints on the engine, tested all the service and auxiliary mechanisms and felt assured that the engine was ready to go. Alexander Vasilievich watched me work, seeing that everything was done as it should be, but he then rechecked the state of the engine with his own hands, as though he did not trust me.

He kept this up later on too, so that I became resigned to the fact that Alexander Vasilievich was always interfering in my duties, although I privately

felt rather hurt about it. As a rule, though, as soon as we were under way, I forgot my ruffled feelings. Letting my attention wander from the instruments indicating the condition of the running engine, from the work of the left-hand engine and the line ahead, I kept on glancing over at Maltsev. He drove his train with the bold confidence of a great expert, with the concentration of an inspired artist who has gathered all the world about him into his own inward experience and thus made it his own dominion. Alexander Vasilievich's eyes were fixed before him, to all appearances empty and abstracted, but I knew that they saw all the way ahead and all the country rushing up to meet us—even the sparrow swept from the gravel embankment by the wind of the engine as it cut through the empty air, even that sparrow attracted Maltsev's gaze and he turned his head for a moment to look after it: where had it flown to, and what would become of it after our passing?

We were never late by our own fault; on the contrary, we were often held up at transit stations where there should have been no stop because we were running ahead of time and they brought us back to schedule by means of such hold-ups.

Usually we worked in silence; only occasionally Alexander Vasilievich, without turning his head in my direction, would tap on the boiler with a spanner in order to draw my attention to some irregularity in the smooth working of the engine, or to prepare me for some sharp change in that working, so that I should keep my eyes open. I always understood the silent directions of my senior mate and put all I had into my work, but he continued to keep me and the stoker at a distance and, at the stops, he was always checking the lubricator, the tightness of the bolts in the connecting rod joints, testing the axle-bearing boxes on the main axles and so forth. When I had just finished inspecting and oiling some friction working part, Maltsev would reinspect and reoil it as though my work simply did not count.

"Alexander Vasilievich, I've already checked that cross head," I once said to him when he began checking the part after me.

"But I like to do it myself," answered Maltsev with a smile, and there was a sadness in the smile which astonished me.

Later I came to understand what was behind his sadness and the cause of his perpetual indifference towards us. He was conscious of his own superiority over us in that he had a more exact understanding of engines than we did, and he did not believe that I or anyone else could learn the secret of his talent, the secret of being able to see simultaneously the wayside sparrow and the next signal, while at the same time remaining aware of the track, the weight of the train and the strain on the engine. Maltsev understood, of course, that we might even surpass him in conscientiousness and endeavour, but could not conceive that we might love the steam engine more than he did, or drive a train

better—better, he thought, was impossible. That was why Maltsev felt sad with us; his talent was a burden to him, like loneliness, and he did not know how to tell us this in such a way as to make us understand.

As for us, his skill really was beyond our understanding. I once asked his permission to drive the train independently for a while: Alexander Vasilievich let me drive about forty kilometres and took the mate's seat. I drove the train and, after twenty kilometres, was already four minutes behind time, and could not get more than thirty kilometres an hour out of her on stretches where there was a steep pull-up. Then Maltsev resumed the controls; he took the up-grades at fifty kilometres an hour, the engine showed no signs of swinging on the bends as it did with me, and he had soon made up the time I had lost.

2

For nearly a year I worked as Maltsev's mate, from August to July, and on the fifth of July Maltsev completed his last run as the driver of an express train....

We took over a trainload of twenty passenger coaches which was four hours late before it came to us. The dispatcher came over to the engine and specially requested Alexander Vasilievich to make up as much time as possible, to cut it down to three hours at most, or else it was going to be difficult to transfer it empty to the neighbouring line. Maltsev promised to make up time and we started off.

It was eight o'clock in the evening but the summer day still held and the sun shone with a triumphant matutinal brightness. Alexander Vasilievich told me to keep the pressure of steam in the boiler at a steady half atmosphere below the safety limit.

Within half an hour we were out on the steppe, on an easy straight stretch. Maltsev brought his speed up to ninety kilometres an hour and never allowed it to slacken,—on the contrary, on the horizontals and down gradients he took her up to a hundred. On the up-grades I forced the stoking to the limit and made the stoker load the coal by hand to supplement the stoking mechanism, because I found the steam pressure was falling off.

Maltsev drove the engine on, putting the regulator hard over—full steam ahead. We were now running straight towards a great cloud which had loomed up over the horizon. One edge of the cloud was illumined by the sun, but it was torn from within by wild, ferocious lightnings and we could see how the swords of lightning went plunging vertically down into the silent, distant earth and we hurtled furiously towards that distant earth as though charging to its defence. Alexander Vasilievich was evidently fascinated by the spectacle; he lent far out of the window and his eyes, accustomed to smoke,

fire and distance, were alight with exultation. He understood that the labour and power of our engine were comparable with the labour of the storm and, perhaps, took pride in the thought.

Soon we noticed a pillar of dust advancing on us across the steppe. That meant that the thundercloud, too, was bearing the storm full into our face. The world grew dark about us; dry earth and steppe sand whistled and scraped along the iron body of the engine, visibility went down to nil, and I set the turbo-dynamo working and switched on the front head-light. It was hard for us to breathe now in the hot, dusty whirlwind which tore its way into our cabin, its force increased twofold by the opposing momentum of the engine, in the fumes from the stoke-hole, and in the premature dusk in which we were enveloped. The engine advanced screaming down a crack of light cast by its own projector into the murky, stifling darkness. The speed fell to sixty kilometres; we stuck to our work, looking straight in front of us as though in a dream.

Suddenly, a large drop struck the wind-screen and dried immediately, drunk up by the hot wind. Then a brief blue light flared at the end of my eyelashes and penetrated right down to my leaping heart. I caught hold of the injector tap, but the pain in my heart had already passed and I immediately glanced across towards Maltsev: he was looking straight in front of him and driving the engine. His expression remained unchanged.

"What was that?" I asked the stoker.

"Lightning," he said. "Aimed at us and scored a near miss."

Maltsev overheard what we were saying.

"What lightning?" he asked loudly.

"The one just now," said the stoker.

"Didn't see it," said Maltsev and again turned his face to the outside.

"Didn't see it?" echoed the stoker. "Here was I thinking the boiler'd blown up, there was such a blaze, and he didn't see it."

I also had my doubts as to whether it really had been lightning.

"Where's the thunder then?" I asked.

"We've left the thunder behind," explained the stoker. "The thunder always comes afterwards. Before it had time to strike and start off all those vibrations in the air and get from there to here we were already past it. The passengers may have heard it, they're behind."

Further on we ran into pouring rain but were soon through it and emerged into the dark, quiescent steppe, above which were suspended tame, exhausted clouds—motionless and at rest.

Darkness had fallen and the night was calm. We smelt the wet earth, the sweet scent of grass and grain permeated by rain and thunder, and hurtled on, making up time.

I noticed that Maltsev had begun to drive with less assurance—we were

swinging on the bends and our speed could sometimes increase to 100 kilometres an hour and at others fall as low as forty! I decided that Alexander Vasilievich was most probably very tired and therefore refrained from saying anything to him, although it was very hard for me to keep a good rhythm for the stokage and boiler given such behaviour on the part of the driver. In half an hour, anyway, we were due to halt to take in water and there, at the stop, Alexander Vasilievich would be able to snatch a bite to eat and some rest. We had already made up forty minutes and before the end of our stretch we should make up at least another hour.

Even so I was worried by Maltsev's weariness and began to watch the way ahead myself—both the line and the signals. On my side, over the left part of the engine, an electric bulb hung, illuminating the pounding connecting rods. I had had a good view of the straining, confident workings of the left engine, but then the bulb above it dimmed and began to burn thinly, like a candle. I turned to the cabin. There, too, all the lamps were burning at a quarter-strength, scarcely lighting the instruments. It was strange that at such a moment Alexander Vasilievich should not have tapped me out a warning of the irregularity with his spanner. It was obvious that the turbo-dynamo was not revolving as it should and that the tension had fallen. I began to regulate the turbo-dynamo and was a long time fiddling about with it, but the tension would not rise.

In the meantime a dim glow of red light spread over the instrument dials and the roof of the cabin. I looked out.

Ahead, in the darkness—whether near or far it was difficult to see—a red streak of light wavered across our line. I did not understand what it was, did not realize what we ought to do.

"Alexander Vasilievich!" I shouted and gave the stop signal.

The sound of exploding petards came up from beneath the wheels. I dashed over to Maltsev. He turned his face towards me and looked at me with calm empty eyes. The arrow on the speedometer pointed at sixty kilometres.

"Maltsev!" I shouted, "we're running over petards!" And stretched out for the controls.

"Hands off!" ordered Maltsev and his eyes glinted, reflecting the light of the dim bulb over the speedometer.

He immediately brought the emergency breaks into play and slammed over the reverse to shut off the steam.

I was thrown against the boiler and heard the wheels scream as they shaved the rails.

"Maltsev!" I said, "we must open the cylinder taps, we'll wreck the engine."

"No need! We won't wreck it," answered Maltsev.

We stopped. I pumped water into the boiler with the injector and looked out. Before us, at a distance of about ten metres, an engine was drawn up on

our line, the tender towards us. On the tender was a man, in his hands was a long red-hot poker, and this it was that he had been waving in order to halt the express train. The engine was pushing a goods train which had stopped on the line.

This must have meant that, as I was fiddling with the turbo-dynamo and not looking ahead, we had passed an amber signal and then a red and, most probably, several other warning signals put out by the line inspector. But why had Maltsev not noticed those signals?

"Kostya!" Alexander Vasilievich called me.

I went up to him.

"Kostya!... What's that out in front there?"

I explained.

"Kostya.... You'll have to take over the engine. I've gone blind."

The following day I brought the return train back to our station and put the engine into the depot because on two wheels the flanges had got slightly out of allignment. Having reported on what had happened to the manager I took Maltsev's arm and led him to the place where he lived; Maltsev himself was in a profound depression and had not gone to the depot manager.

We had not yet got to the house on the grass-grown street where Maltsev lived before he asked me to leave him.

"I can't," I replied. "You're a blind man, Alexander Vasilievich."

He looked at me with clear, thoughtful eyes.

"I can see now, you go on home.... I can see everything. There's the wife come out to meet me—"

At the entrance of the house where Maltsev lived there really was a woman standing waiting, Alexander Vasilievich's wife, and her bare, black head shone in the sun.

"Has she got anything on her head or nothing at all?" I asked.

"Nothing," answered Maltsev. "Who's blind, you or me?"

"Well, if you can see, watch your step," I decided, and left him.

3

Maltsev was charged and the investigation began. I was called up before the investigator in charge of the case and asked what I thought of what had happened to the express train. I answered what I did think—that Maltsev was not to blame.

"He was blinded by a near electric discharge, there was a flash of lightning," I told the officer. "He was in a state of shock and the nerves which control the sight were damaged.... I don't know exactly how to say it."

"I understand you," pronounced the investigator. "What you say is true

enough—it's all quite possible but not certain. After all Maltsev himself said that he didn't see the lightning."

"But I saw it, and the stoker saw it too."

"Which means that the lightning struck nearer to you than to Maltsev," reasoned the investigator. "Why are you and the stoker not contused and not blind whereas the engine-driver Maltsev suffered a contusion of the nerves of the eyes and lost his sight? How do you make that out?"

I was nonplussed, but soon had the solution.

"Maltsev couldn't have seen the lightning," I said.

The investigator heard me out with an air of astonishment.

"He couldn't have seen it. He was blinded instantly by the impact of the electro-magnetic wave which goes before the actual flash of the lightning. A lightning flash is the result of a charge of electricity, not the cause of the lightning. Maltsev was already blinded when the lightning flashed and a blind man could not have seen the flash."

"Interesting," smiled the investigator. "I would call off the case against Maltsev if he were still blind. But as you know, he now sees as well as you or me."

"He does," I agreed.

"Was he blind, then," continued the investigator, "when he drove the express train at enormously high speed towards the tail of the goods train?"

"He was," I confirmed.

The investigator looked at me attentively.

"Why did he not hand over the controls to you, or at least ask you to halt the train?"

"I don't know," I said.

"There you are, you see," said the investigator. "A grown-up man with his head screwed on the right way driving the engine of an express train takes hundreds of people towards certain death, escapes catastrophe by sheer chance, and then justifies himself by saying he was blind. It just doesn't make sense. . . ."

"But he would have been killed himself!" I said.

"Probably. However, I happen to be more interested in the lives of hundreds of people than in the life of one individual. Perhaps he had his reasons for wanting to die."

"There were no reasons," I said.

The investigator began to lose interest; he was already bored with me, obviously considering me a simpleton.

"You know everything except the one thing that really matters," he said, unhurriedly chewing the cud of his own thought. "You may go."

From the investigator I went to the Maltsevs.

"Alexander Vasilievich," I said to him. "Why didn't you ask me to help when you were blinded?"

"But I could see," he replied. "What need had I of you?"

"What could you see?"

"Everything. The line, the signals, the wheat on the steppe, how the right-hand engine was working—I could see everything. . . ."

I was puzzled.

"But however did such a thing happen to you, then? You passed all the warnings, we were heading straight into the tail of another train. . . ."

The ex-first-class engine-driver looked sadly thoughtful and answered me softly, as though talking to himself.

"I'm used to seeing the world go by and I thought that I could see it, but then I was only seeing it in my mind, in my imagination. In fact I was blind, but I didn't know it. . . . I didn't even believe in the petards, although I heard them: I thought that I was just hearing things. And when you gave the halt signal and shouted at me I was seeing a green signal ahead. I didn't realize straight away."

Now I understood Maltsev, but could not think why he had not told the investigator how, after he had been struck blind, he went on seeing the world for a long time in his imagination and believed in its reality. And I asked him.

"But I did tell him," answered Maltsev.

"How did he take it?"

"That was your imagination, he says to me. It may well be that you're imagining something now, I can't tell. It's my job, he says, to reconstitute the facts, and not your imagination, or your fancies. Your imagination—what you saw with it and what you didn't—is something I can't check, it was going on in your head, that's what you say yourself, and the crash which so very nearly happened—that is a matter of fact."

"He's right," I said.

"I know he's right," the driver agreed. "And I'm right too. I'm not guilty. What'll happen next, do you think?"

I did not know what to say.

4

Maltsev went to prison. I continued working as engine-driver's mate, but this time with another driver—a cautious old man who began slowing down his train a kilometre in advance if he saw an amber light, so that by the time we got there as often as not the signal had gone green and the old man again began to haul his train forward. There was no class about the work—and I missed Maltsev.

That winter I was in the district's main town and dropped in on my brother, a student who lived in the university hostel. In the course of conversation, it came out that in the university's physics laboratory they had a Tesla apparatus for obtaining artificial lightning. A vague idea began to dawn on me, but it was not yet clear, even to me.

When I got back home I thought over my inspiration regarding the Tesla apparatus and decided that I was on the right track. I wrote a letter to the investigator who had been in charge of the case requesting that the prisoner Maltsev should be tested for his reactions to the effect of electricity discharges. Should it be proved that Maltsev's psyche or organs of sight were particularly susceptible to the effects of sudden, near-by discharges of electricity, then his case would have to be reviewed. I informed the investigator where he could find a Tesla apparatus and how to use it in tests on a man.

The investigator did not answer for a long time, then replied that the district council for the prosecution was willing to make the test which I had suggested in the university physics laboratory.

A few days later the investigator sent for me. I came to him in a state of excitement, convinced in advance that Maltsev's case had come to a happy conclusion.

The investigator greeted me but then kept silence for a long time, slowly reading through some paper or other with sad eyes; I began to lose hope.

"You've done your friend a bad turn," said the investigator.

"What happened? Does the sentence stand?"

"No, we've released Maltsev. The order has already been issued—Maltsev may well be at home by now."

"Thank you," and I rose to my feet before the investigator.

"We are not going to thank *you* though. You gave us some bad advice. Maltsev is blind again. . . ."

I sank wearily back onto my chair, my soul shrivelled in an instant, and I felt suddenly thirsty.

"The experts led Maltsev under the Tesla apparatus in the dark, without warning him what they were going to do," the investigator informed me. "They switched on the current, the lightning flashed and there was a sharp clap. Maltsev continued calmly on his way, but now, once again, he cannot see the light. It's been established objectively by the court's medical specialists."

The investigator took a sip of water and added:

"Now he's back where he was—seeing the world in his imagination. . . . You're a friend of his, so do what you can for him."

"Perhaps his sight will come back again," I suggested hopefully, "like it did then, after the engine. . . ."

The investigator considered.

"Unlikely. That was the first trauma, this is the second. One wound has been inflicted on another."

And, dropping his self-control, the investigator got up and began to walk excitedly about the room.

"It's my fault.... Why did I have to go listening to you and, like a fool, insist on the expert's test! I was gambling a man, and the gamble didn't come off."

"It's not your fault, you weren't taking an unnecessary risk," I comforted the investigator. "What's better—a blind man at liberty or a man who has his sight but is unjustly imprisoned?"

"I did not know that I should have to prove a man's innocence by causing him an injury," said the investigator. "The price is too high."

"You're an investigator," I explained to him. "It's your job to know everything about people—even things that they don't know about themselves."

"I see what you mean, you're quite right," he agreed quietly.

"Don't get all worked up about it, comrade investigator. It was a case of facts that were taking place inside a man, and you were only looking for them outside. But you were able to recognize your own mistakes and you treated Maltsev very fairly. I respect you."

"And I you," admitted the investigator. "You know, we could make an assistant investigator out of you."

"Thanks, but I'm otherwise employed. I'm an assistant engine-driver on an express."

I left. I was not a friend of Maltsev's and he had never treated me with interest or consideration. But I had wanted to defend him against the blow of fate, I felt bitter against these blind forces which had so fortuitously and indifferently crushed a man; I sensed some secret element of calculation on the part of these forces in that they had picked on Maltsev and not, say, on me. I understood that nature does not calculate in our human, mathematical sense, but I saw events taking place which demonstrated the existence of circumstances hostile and destructive to human life, and that these destructive forces crushed exceptional, highly gifted people. I decided that I was not going to stand for it, because I felt something in myself which could not be subject to the exterior forces of nature or of fate, I felt my own entity as Man. And, bitterly, I set my will and made up my mind to resist, not yet knowing myself just how I should go about it.

5

The following summer I passed the test as a fully qualified engine-driver and began to work independently on an engine of the "SU" series, attached to the local passenger service. Almost every time that I brought the engine up to

the train standing at the station platform I would see Maltsev sitting on a painted bench. Resting his elbow on the stick which he had planted upright between his legs, he turned his passionate, sensitive face with the blind, empty eyes towards the engine, avidly inhaling the smell of burning and train oil, hearkening attentively to the rhythmical working of the steam-air pump. I had no comfort for him and drove away, but he stayed behind.

It was summer-time, I worked on the engine and often ran into Alexander Vasilievich—not only on the station platform but on the road, walking slowly along, feeling his way with a stick. He had grown hollow-cheeked and had aged over the last few months, he did not want for anything—he had been awarded a pension, his wife worked and there were no children, but he was fretting away at the lifeless lot which had fallen to him and his body had grown thin from constant unhappiness. I sometimes talked to him but I could see that he was bored by empty chat and by my polite consolation to the effect that a blind man is also a man who has as many rights and as great a contribution to make as anybody else.

"Hands off!" he would say, having heard out my well-meaning phrases.

But I had a temper, too, and once, when he repulsed me in his usual manner, I said:

"Tomorrow at ten thirty I'm taking out the train. If you will sit quietly I'll take you with me in the cab."

Maltsev agreed.

"Good! I'll behave. Give me something to lay my hands on, let me hold the gear: I won't muck on with it. . . ."

"You certainly won't!" I agreed. "If you do any mucking on I'll put a hot coal in your hands and never take you in the engine again."

The blind man said nothing; he wanted so badly to be in an engine again that he was prepared to swallow his pride.

The next day I invited him to exchange the painted bench for the engine and got down to meet him, so as to help him climb up into the box.

When we were moving I sat Alexander Vasilievich in my driver's seat, set one of his hands on the gear and the other on the automatic break and covered them with my hands. I made the necessary movements with my hands but his, too, were at work. Maltsev sat in silence and did as I said, enjoying the movement of the engine, the wind in his face and the work. He began to concentrate, forgot his blind man's sorrow, and a gentle happiness lit up the wasted face of this man for whom the feeling of his engine was supreme bliss.

On the return run we drove the same way: Maltsev sat in the driver's seat and I stood stooping over him and holding my hands on his. Maltsev had already got so well into the way of this method that it was enough for me to exert a light pressure on his hand and he sensed exactly what I was requiring of him.

The former, perfect master-driver was struggling to overcome his lack of sight and to sense the world by other means in order to work and to justify his existence.

On the quiet stretches I left Maltsev altogether and looked ahead from the assistant's place.

We were approaching Tolubeyev; our routine run was coming to a safe end and we were on time. On the last crossing, however, there was an amber signal light. I did not begin to slacken speed prematurely and approached the lights at full steam. Maltsev sat quietly, holding the gear in his left hand; I watched my teacher with secret expectancy.

"Shut down the steam!" Maltsev said to me.

I kept quiet, my heart in my mouth.

Then Maltsev got up from his seat, stretched out his hand to the regulator and shut down the steam.

"I see the amber light," he said, and brought the break-handle over towards himself.

"But maybe you're only imagining again that you can see the light?" I said to Maltsev.

He turned his face towards me and burst into tears. In reply, I crossed over to him and embraced him.

"Take the engine into the station, Alexander Vasilievich: you can see the whole world now!"

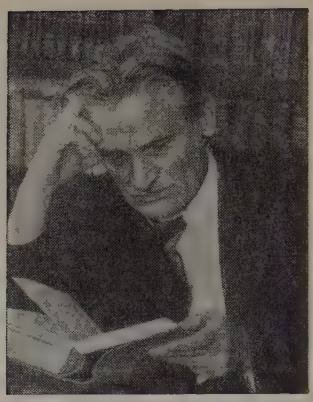
He brought the engine back into Tolubeyev without any help. After work I went back with Maltsev to his place, and we sat together the whole evening and the whole night.

I feared to leave him alone, as though he had been the son of my body, alone and defenceless before the sudden, inimical forces of our beautiful and violent world.

1941

Yuri Olesha

Human Material



I am a small grammar-school boy.

When I grow up I shall be like Mr. Kovalevsky. The whole family demands it.

I shall be an engineer and a property owner.

The balcony door is wide open. Sounds can be heard from the port. On the balcony there is an oleander growing in a green tub. Mr. Kovalevsky has come to dine with us. He stands silhouetted against the balcony door, black as a shadow, on his thin parted legs.

My father is an excise official, an impoverished nobleman, and a card-player. We are poor but respectable. My father is still a gentleman; no one has turned away from him.

I go into the drawing room to say hullo to Mr. Kovalevsky. I am small, round-shouldered and have very large ears. I go in, escorted by my ears. Father walks in behind me. He is demonstrating me. I am a child prodigy. The guest offers me his hand, which looks mottled as a chicken.

Father knows exactly what kind of life I must live in order to be happy, that is, to be rich, independent and to have a position in society. Like Mr. Kovalevsky. Father considers his own life unhappy. Like any other impoverished gentleman, he feels humiliated and insulted. But life is over and it is too late for regrets. Be it so. But, at least, he has a plan of the ground he has covered. And besides this plan of his own life, he has also an approximate plan of the life of Mr. Kovalevsky. It is not difficult to compare them, these two plans. And the comparison has been made. The coincidences and discrepancies have been noted, smoothed out, evened up, collated, and the result of all this is a plan of the life—the ideally successful life—that father might have lived if fate had ordained him to be happy. But no one can live his life over again. So

what is to be done with the plan? It must be handed down to his son. And so, for my guidance I am offered a plan drawn up by my father, based on envy and disappointment, on consideration of aspirations and abilities that belong only to him. The plan is offered as the best and I have no right to discuss it.

Father realizes the difference between himself and Mr. Kovalevsky. It is an enormous difference and father will never be able to reduce it. But as I enter the room, father says, "Dosya is top of the class."

This means that I have overcome one of the obstacles that are marked on the plan of father's life with the sign of disaster.

I am top of the class. I am younger than my classmates and cleverer than they. This is very important. This should grate slightly on Mr. Kovalevsky. I am a quiet boy and very reserved. Even the fact that I am anaemic raises father's chances in his contest with Mr. Kovalevsky. Let him know that I have all the qualities I need to rise in the world. A reserved character, diligence, anaemia—all these are qualities that promise much. In fact, it would seem that I have introduced an unexpected and brilliant ammendment to my father's plan for the ideally successful life—anaemia!

We stand facing each other. I, the grammar-school boy in class two, and Mr. Kovalevsky—engineer, property owner and president of something or other.

I lift my eyes and see a beard.

It is fair and big and has little wavy ringlets. Beneath it, like a dryad in a forest, nestles a decoration of some sort.

Now, when I look around me, I see no beards.

There are no people with beards!

We were once small grammar-school boys. We had fathers, grandfathers, uncles and elder brothers. They formed a gallery of shining examples. Our parents led us down that gallery, turning our heads this way and that and whispering to us the names of our uncles and cousins, our great relatives and all the great friends of the family.

Our childhood passed in the shadow of these human paragons, these engineers and bank managers, lawyers and company chairmen, property owners and doctors.

The Russo-Japanese war, the feat of Private Ryabov, the first cinematograph, the two hundredth anniversary of the victory at Poltava, the Jewish pogroms, General Kaulbars, and the assasination of Queen Draga—these were the landmarks in my childhood. And in addition to these were the human paragons, the shining examples, the bearded suitors of my dreams. Beards, beards, beards....

Some were parted down the middle. These possessors of beards parted down the middle had red lips, smiling lips—the colour of smoked salmon—the lips of a *bon vivant* and a seducer of schoolgirls.

There were also grey beards, long and tapering to a point, like a sword.

The men with such beards had frowning, knitted brows, and these men were the conscience of the generation.

And there were also short, broad beards. They were held in fists—the mighty beards of railway officials and generals.

I shall become like Mr. Kovalevsky.

I shall grow a beard.

We both wear uniforms—the grammar-school boy and the official. His uniform is black; mine is grey.

O, grey tunic of the grammar-school boy! You did not fit me, you stood round my body and towered over it, and your shoulders had nothing in common with my shoulders. You encased me, stiff, broad and rigid as the back of a chair!

I am a small grammar-school boy in clothes that allow for growing. We are both in uniform—Mr. Kovalevsky and I. We are links of one big chain. We wear badges, tabs and coats-of-arms; we live the regimented lives of the schoolboy and the official.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Kovalevsky," I say.

"Ah!" Mr. Kovalevsky exclaims. "Good afternoon, young man of fair appearance and agile build."

After a pause my father speaks.

"Dosya is going to be an engineer."

At this point I should have retorted that future engineers go to technical schools. Why did he send me to a grammar school?

I must be an engineer and I must also know Latin. How can one get along without Latin? But an engineer does not need Latin! No, but you are clever, you must know everything and be able to do everything, catch every hare and beat every rival. You must be the most diligent and well-behaved of all pupils because your father, even before you were born, lost his fortune at cards and now wants to win it back.

On my name-day I was presented with a set of mechanical-drawing instruments.

Dosya must learn to draw.

And I did not even know what a pair of dividers was.

So I started drawing, experiencing pangs of creative effort that was quite useless, depressing and could never be crowned with success, because the part of the brain where the future engineer's gift for drawing is centred was in my case a perfect blank. I could feel the scientific impossibility of setting in motion something that simply did not exist, and this awareness became a pain in my forehead, a weight pressing on my temples.

A coldly gleaming pair of dividers lies in its velvet bed, its legs firmly closed.

It has a heavy top. I try to lift it and quite unexpectedly it comes open and pricks my hand. I clutch one of its legs in my fist. But it moves faster than any part of my brain, even my protective reflexes. I lift my hand to my mouth to lick away the blood, and before I can even tell myself to be careful, the dividers swing round in my fist and one terrible point is staring straight into my eye. I can't understand what is happening. What is this? What is that shining? What is that point which I cannot physically identify and which threatens me with death?

I unclench my fist. The pair of dividers is standing on the table, looking round. Now it's walking, now it stops and pitches forward on its head, spreading its legs. And both my eyes are to be impaled on them at once.

Nowadays, when I look around, I see engineers everywhere.

Not a single property owner—all engineers.

And among them I am a writer.

And no one insists on my being an engineer.

They used to tell me a lot about justice. They used to tell me that poverty was a virtue, that the patched coat is beautiful, and that I must be just and good, and not despise the poor. When the Revolution occurred, I was confronted with the greatest act of human justice—the victory of the oppressed class. Then I learned that not every patched coat was beautiful and not all poverty, a virtue. Then I learned that only those things that help to liberate the oppressed class are just. Those who had taught me how I should live had never said a word to me about such justice. I had to find that out for myself, with my own brain. And what had been pumped into that brain? The dream of riches, of making the rest of society bow down before me.

I have to wrestle with myself, I must seize by the throat that self which wants to turn round and reach out for the past.

The self which thinks the distance between us and Europe is only a geographical one.

The self which thinks that everything that happens is only its own life, my life, the one and only, all-embracing life, the end of which must end all that exists outside of me.

I want to crush that self, and all the other selves that creep out of the past.

I want to destroy all the petty feelings that are in me.

If I cannot be an engineer of the elements, I can be an engineer of human material.

Does that sound pretentious? Let it. Pretentiously I cry: "Hail the reconstruction of human material, the all-embracing engineering of the new world!"

1928

Pyotr Pavlenko

The Voice that Calls

The road from Sokolinoye to Yalta across Ai Petri Pass is considered one of the most picturesque in the Crimea. Following the tortuous path of the oak-clad gorges, the highway climbs to the northern slopes of Ai Petri into a dense pine wood that thins gradually out at the top.

On the bare crest of the mountain range it is cold even on a hot summer's day. The hollows are filled with greenish-red snow carpeted with pine needles and, like a roaring flame, the wind howls monotonously in eternal fury. It is as if some invisible air torrent were hurtling down the mountain side, sweeping all before it.

Travellers muffle themselves up in blankets, overcoats, leather or quilted jackets only to find themselves an hour later in the midst of the calm heat of the dry Crimean summer. And how suffocating and exhausting does the heavy stagnant heat of the coast seem after the invigorating mountain gale!

The windy crest past, the road winds around the mountain overhanging the sea which though actually quite a distance away seems to be washing the hillsides. A view of the sea coast from Cape Sarych to Yalta, half-hidden by Mt. Mogabi, and further east up to the very Sudak mountains, from here but blue faint shadows against the sky, spreads before you.

The vast expanse of the sea surrounds the mountains. Naked, fantastically-shaped rocks resembling petrified eagles look down from the southern slopes of the ridge onto the narrow strip of coastline caught between the mountains and the sea.

From above, from Ai Petri, everything below looks tiny, miniature and bunched together, and it all seems to be within reach of one's hand, within shouting range. The many villages, their vineyards and the steep, rocky roads like dried-up streams are hidden from sight.

Only the largest objects are visible from this altitude. From these eagles' perches it is difficult to distinguish even the most familiar places. Then begins

the hairpin descent to Livadia. The pine woods clinging to the mountain side shut out the perspective and one feels rather than sees the approach to the seaside: the air grows steadily warmer, heavier and sweet-scented.

And then quite naturally, the first sanatorium buildings appear, the roadside lodges, the Livadia outbuildings, and beyond them—Yalta.

One autumn I was returning from Bakhchisarai to Yalta via Ai Petri. Evening found our bus on the northern slopes of the pass beyond Sokolinoye, about two hours' drive from our destination.

A fresh stillness enveloped by the mountain shadows filled the dense woods of the gorge and there was a smell of sun-warmed tar in the air. But the clouds over the chain grew heavy and black, threatening a swift change in the weather and from over the mountains came a damp woody smell as if heavy rain had fallen somewhere in the mountains.

Sokolinoye had already vanished behind the endless loops in the road, the loud whining of saws and the sounds of the accordion, that had persisted long after all the other noises had subsided, were now silent.

The road climbed steeply upward. Suddenly the bus came to a halt. The driver announced that his brakes had jammed and that we would be stuck for quite some time. He advised those who were in a hurry to try to get a lift. But there was not much chance of meeting cars bound for the southern shore at this hour.

And so a few of us set out on foot hoping that on the plateau up above we might be able to pick up a truck hauling ice to Yalta.

Somewhere high up, nearer to the pass, we could hear the wind sweep wildly far above our heads. But only its distant echo, the snapping of twigs and the creaking of tree trunks reached us.

At that moment the road curved sharply as if it had collapsed on its side and out of the deep, mist-filled gorge the wind struck us with such astonishing force that we stopped dead in our tracks. It tore along like a waterfall, choking us and almost sweeping us off our feet.

Someone suggested moving forward holding onto the bushes that bordered the road but the bushes grew rather too high up and there was a ditch between them and the road.

"Have to wait for our bus," said someone.

"Ought to turn back," advised another.

But one of our number, a little slip of a girl who worked in some institution for children and was to be on duty early the next morning strode resolutely forward. I said I'd join her.

Evidently she had no choice. But what made me decide to follow her I have never been able to understand. Perhaps I was shamed by the courage of this frail little creature in a light jacket and short skirt and the coloured scarf which

she first held in her hand, then neatly tied around her head, then wound around her neck and finally carried on her arm, marching forward and letting the wind toss her curls and make her look like a bristling Caucasian sheep dog. I followed her rather reluctantly, judging that we ought to be pretty close to the top by this time. We pressed forward, tossed by the wind from side to side. For a time we tried holding hands but that did not help.

The forest gradually thinned out and knots of trees bent almost to the ground by the wind receded away from the road. Presently the forest vanished in the fog. The fog was thick and prickly like snow in the wind. It danced over the earth trailing long tresses. It caught in the throat and stuffed the ears.

"Where are you?" I hailed the girl in a voice that had lost all vibrancy.

There was no reply.

"Where are you?" I shouted again and this time from a distance I heard: "Where are you? I. . . am. . . ."

But whether the voice was ahead of me or behind I could not tell and hence I did not know whether I had to push ahead and catch up with the girl or on the contrary to wait for her.

It happens sometimes that one finds oneself in a hopelessly foolish position, placed by some impulsive, thoughtless action at the mercy of chance which forces one to submit to the dictates of absurdity instead of listening to the voice of reason.

How much more sensible, I told myself, would it have been to have stayed in the bus and waited patiently for the dawn than to be groping blindly along an invisible and elusive road, falling from exhaustion, bruising my feet and risking to break my neck any minute.

What stupid stubbornness! In the name of what?

How I cursed myself for not having tried to persuade my obstinate curly-haired companion to do the sensible, logical thing! The mountains have no use for thoughtless folk.

Now, however, I had no alternative but to trudge wearily ahead, my hands outstretched in front of me as one gropes one's way in a dark room and to call loudly to my lost companion and listen intently in the howling darkness for her reply.

"Where are you?" I heard and replied at once.

A long silence followed. Then at a bend in the road discovered by sheer luck, when the wind changed its direction for an instant, the faint sound of singing reached my ears. It came to me in separate notes and it was hard to guess at the tune, but it was most certainly a song. I shouted once more.

We signalled one another like two radio operators divided by ocean. Her song finished she switched over to reception, so to speak, picked up my voice and started singing again.

By the sound I judged her to be ahead and somehow above me and I hurried along for fear of falling behind.

But now and again, stumbling over a stone, I would fall and find it difficult to get to my feet for a while. The moment I stopped moving I found my strength ebbing so that the effort of rising again seemed each time beyond my powers.

The wind and the fog, the uncertainty of the road and the nearness of the precipices no longer worried me. Indeed my mind was practically a blank.

Only occasionally did the unpleasant memory recur of how I had once nearly drowned, how on another occasion I had fallen on a night as dark as this on the muddy spring fields near Kerch under German fire. But the memories faded instantly leaving no trace of either excitement or fear, as if they did not concern me. My heart hammered. It refused to beat and I felt a sharp stabbing pain in my now exhausted lungs. The blood pounded in my temples and my eyes ached and watered with the strain of peering into the gloom.

"Hullo-o! Hullo-o!."

"Hullo-o! Hullo-o!."

I remembered a short story by Korolenko about a light in the distance that had encouraged some nocturnal wanderer. Then Ivan Bunin's story *The Pass* came to my mind. There was one passage in that tale that always stirred me. I knew it by heart:

"How many difficult and lonely passes have there been in my life! Grief, suffering, disease, the treachery of loved ones and the bitter injuries of friendship bore down upon me like the night—and the hour of separation from everything I had held dear would come. And gritting my teeth I would again take up my wanderer's staff. The ascents to new happiness were steep and difficult; darkness, fog and storms awaited me at the summit, an awful loneliness seized me in the passes. . . . But forward, forward!"

I muttered these words under my breath with the tears streaming down my cheeks, but to tell the truth I did not really feel sad. At home in my cosy study the story had moved me far more. Here in the foggy chaos of a treacherous night in the mountains, with death dogging my footsteps, the story struck me as cold, pompous and unconvincing.

"Hullo-o, hullo-o!" came the voice ahead of me.

"Hullo-o, hullo-o!" I replied mechanically, preoccupied with my own thoughts.

However painful the ascent, one dare not halt. It is not the weary that perish but those who halt, I reflected. So long as my heart beats I shall continue stubbornly to move on and if my feet give way, I shall crawl forward on my hands and knees. Indeed how could I think of stopping now, I thought. That crazy child was quite capable of searching for me all night in the impenetrable curtain of fog, feeling with her hands along the road, shouting to every bush,

touching every stone. And then again she might be depending on me for help, knowing that I was following closely behind her.

"Ehei!" I cried and I detected a doughty note in my voice.

"Ehei!" the darkness responded in a high-pitched voice touched with laughter or tears, I could not decide which.

Drat the girl! Being considerably older than her I ought to have stopped her, argued with her, persuaded her to be sensible. As a matter of fact I should simply have forbidden her as her elder—and everything would have been simple, I would be sitting right now in a comfortable bus chatting pleasantly with my fellow travellers and ignoring the weather. The fog would not affect me in the least. Instead, here I was picking my way painfully over sharp rocks on the windy crest of the mountain pass listening to the fluttering of my feeble, exhausted, stricken heart. It struggled like a mouse that has just been trapped, it hammered in my chest now on the right, now on the left, now somewhere in my throat. . . .

If I had seen a light, just the tiniest flicker, somewhere in the distance, I would, of course, have stopped at once. For that would have meant that there were people not far away and the girl could make her way to them somehow without my help. But there was not a glimmer anywhere. The very stars had disappeared. Everything in fact that might have given me some clue to my whereabouts had disappeared.

Yet even the void that surrounded me would not have frightened me at all had it not been for that lonely, despairing and at once stubborn "Ehei" that sounded every few minutes now ahead of me, now somewhere to the left or right.

I followed it blindly but it was forever slipping away from me, melting into the mist.

"Hullo there, wait for me," I shouted, waving my arms in despair.

In reply came the echoing cry: "Hulloo-oo."

And again I blundered forward cursing my weakness, the night and the girl.

At daybreak an ice truck belonging to some sanatorium picked me up on the road leading down from the mountain pass. It was a long time before I could make the driver understand how I came to be stranded at the dead of night on the mountain top.

"A fine thing for a man of your age to do," he grumbled in a tone of utter disapproval as he helped me to climb onto the jagged chunks of ice. "Try sitting on that for a while," he advised, "maybe it'll help cool your head."

Notwithstanding the awkwardness of my position, I managed to tell the driver about the girl, instructing him to stop and give her a lift if we should happen to catch up with her.

"Can't be bothered about skirts," said the driver, shaking his head.

The lorry sped downhill leaning at a precarious angle at the turnings and the ice slid and slithered under me. My heart gradually slipped back into its place, shuddering now and again like a child that has had a bad dream. With each loop in the road the air grew noticeably warmer. It became heavier, weighing down on the lungs. My eyes closed and the smell of pine made me dizzy.

Dozing, I heard as from a great distance the horns of cars running below us along the great highway to which we were descending. The still slumbering sea gleamed now quite close by. The suburbs began. Soon we would be in Yalta. At the point where our road converged with the highway stood a group of people waiting to get a lift from a passing car.

"Hey, professor!" the driver shouted to me from the cab, "the joy ride's finished. Climb down."

As I was picking my way gingerly over the ice toward the edge of the truck I was startled to hear a familiar high-pitched complaining voice behind me. Looking over my shoulder, I saw the darn girl standing beside the driver waving her hands and shouting at the top of her voice:

"Haven't seen an old chap up there, have you? A queer-looking bloke wearing glasses, bit of a fussbones.... No? That's terrible! What shall I do now?"

The driver jerked a thumb in my direction:

"That's the only old bloke I came across. That the one?"

"Sure, that's him! Hurray!" and as I was balancing there on the back tyre I was seized by the legs and deposited swiftly onto the road.

"Now see here," she cried, her weary mud-stained little face tilted belligerently close to mine, "what's the idea of keeping up such a pace. What do you think this is? A cross-country race or something? The way you dashed along like mad. Are you the European marathon champion, or what?"

"Who dashed?" I whispered soundlessly, dropping onto the kerbstone. "Who was it that dashed?"

"I had to run the entire way," she went on, tossing back the hair from her forehead and turning to the people waiting for a lift, who evidently had been informed of my adventure. "You were ahead of me when I called. So I ran forward to catch up with you, but the next time I called, you were way ahead again.... I got sore.... What's the use of risking your life just for the sake of showing off. You're not a young man.... And you entrusted yourself to my care...."

"I entrusted myself?" I barely whispered.

"Surely you don't think I depended on you for help," was the girl's indignant rejoinder and she rattled on: "Of course I finally got sore.... If it's

going to be a race, I says to myself, we'll see who's going to win. Forward, Komsomol! And I stepped on it!"

"If you'd like to know, it was I who was running all the time to catch up with you! Hundreds of times I wanted to stop and wait for the bus."

"And what about me? What about me?" cried the girl and the tears started to her eyes.

She wouldn't yield to me in anything—not in kindness, or consideration, not even in weakness.

"You think it was easy for me? But I figured if you insisted on going ahead I couldn't very well stop, it wouldn't be the comradely thing to do.... Why didn't you tell me to stop?"

"But I did. Didn't you hear me?"

"I shouted to you, too, but you didn't hear me...."

Suddenly she clasped her hands and shook them in front of me.

"But it is grand just the same."

"Of course it is. We're still alive to tell the tale, thank goodness."

"No, I mean the way we did it!"

Lights danced in her deep-sunken eyes that seemed to have aged overnight, and her pale lips trembled at the corners and spread out in a smile.

"It was damn good if you ask me!" she said, running off.

Fifteen minutes later I was walking along the streets of the town that were as warm as if they had been heated during the night. The mist still hovered over the mountains. From a distance it was beautiful and it was hard to believe how cold it was.

A night to remember, I thought, smiling as I recalled the strength in the girlish voice that had been tremulous with fear.

It was gratifying for me to discover that my hoarse, feeble city voice whose weakness I had always been ashamed of also had the power to impel another's will. The important thing is to push forward and urge others to follow you.

Though your voice be weak, though it tremble with weariness and tension, go forward, ever forward and call to those behind you:

"Ehei!"

And you will always hear the response: "Coming!"

Yalta, 1948

Ivan Katayev

Immortality

I never saw that mechanic called Bachurin.

But I know the place where he lived.

Whether fog fills the broad valleys, whether fine rain covers the clothes with soda-water spray, whether the sky is clear—the view of the new Grozny oilfields is always beautiful, just as it is always sad. The sense of sadness probably comes from the incompleteness of the conquest of these tall hills by human labour. What are they? They are no longer the wild free range of the Asian Caucasus knowing only the winds, the great sky and a rider in his square-shouldered cloak. But there is as yet no town on the mountain, no factory spreading its bulk over primeval nature so that it can barely be seen, lost in the passageways between factory blocks and the tangle of service railways. The oilfields have hovered for a long time on the brink between the primeval and civilization, and however loudly steel may clank against steel, however brightly the lights may burn in the night in a terrestrial Milky Way, still civilization cannot claim the victory.

The highway climbs the mountain side in zigzag strides, with industry all round. Derricks black with the cold thickness of oil, derricks still pale and new run over the slopes, stand in a thick forest on the crests and jostle one another out of the deep gullies; there are stout white tanks, the slate roofs of workshops, houses and canteens; there is the cooling station of the gasworks, the humming fortress of the electric substation. It is life concentrated on the production of power, with rumbling and beating, with dense puffs of steam breaking out of the ground. But after climbing the hill the road leaps over its crest and down, and now it leads one into primeval silent land.

Close by rise the steep waves of unconquered heights clad in the reddish velvet of shrubs, the outcrops touched with snow—quiet, untrodden thickets where one lonely path may perhaps wind timidly through the prickly tangle of clinging wet hawthorn. Headlands jot out, reddish, brown, and hazily purple, and beyond

the last purplish one lie the grey mists of the Chechen-Aul Valley. On the right, beyond Aldan, far, far away on the horizon, blue, windy and unattainable, stand the forested Black Mountains patched and ribbed with snow.

Vast and cheerless spaces!

But as the light grows the main peak rises to dominate all—majestic, white, with shadowed folds, a song in an unknown tongue, a wild legend that runs from sea to sea; Kazbek gleams suddenly from amidst the clouds with the thrust of its "fearful ice" (as Gogol would have said).

The day after my arrival I went to the first section. The rain had stopped only towards morning, it was damp, foggy and unpleasant, everything was blurred as though seen through wax paper. On the roads the mighty Grozny mud clutched at one's feet tugging the boots off, but even on the grassy land round the derricks the resilient soil was soaked through and squelched sadly as it released the passing feet. I was struck by the strange lack of people on the section. I had read that modern oil extraction with pumps and gas-lifts requires no great number of workers, it is largely automatic and needs only general supervision and occasional repair work. Nevertheless to me, accustomed as I was in former years to the loud bustle of pump bailing, it was strange to sense this invisible work being carried on all round by inanimate machinery, apparently completely abandoned by man. The previous day I had jotted down in my notebook that in the past month the section had brought up two hundred and thirty thousand tons of oil.

So all this mass of oil has been drawn from the earth and sent along pipes to the refineries in silence, almost untouched by human hands.

The pale quiet sky, the wet grass, the pipes, the frugal silhouettes of the pump rockers and gas-lifts emerging from the mist made up a kind of metallic desert; yet titanic work was going on here, the shifting of vast masses and weights. A vision rose of the future: similarly deserted factories with machine tools and conveyors moving automatically, while people have gone off somewhere across the river to sit dreamily on the bank beneath the sky.

The silence on the section would have been absolute had it not been for rhythmic creaking, faint moans that came through the mist from various sides, and an even rustling in the grass, close to the ground. I knew the source of this rustling; I had already stepped over metal hawsers that stretched out to all sides and jerked endlessly forward and backward. To keep them from touching the ground big wooden bobbins stood here and there in wooden troughs and these too moved rhythmically forward and backward, forward and backward. I followed one of the hawsers and it led me to the pump rocker; I recognized it from a drawing I had seen, an ordinary rocker of the Oklahoma type, which first replaced the more primitive pump on the fields in 1925. It was this rocker that creaked plaintively, lowering and raising a polished rod connected with the

pump piston. It was set in this simple motion by the hawser that ran through the grass on bobbins. I turned back and soon saw that the hawser led to a solitary concrete building on a mound, whence similar hawsers rayed out in all directions. Inside the building the transmission from a motor leisurely rotated a horizontal cam wheel with all the hawsers fixed to it. Here, within clean whitewashed walls, in the clear light from large windows, like a maternity home, this simple movement was born to be transmitted to dozens of wells.

In all the time I spent wandering about the section I saw only two men—the watchmen who checked my admittance pass.

That evening Vasili Mikhailovich Botov, an old friend of mine and an old-timer at the oilfield, told me the brief story of those hawsers on wooden bobbins.

"We'd a chap here, a queer sort, Bachurin, a mechanic. He was the one who thought up this cam wheel-to-rocker system, in twenty-five it was. Simple enough, you'd think, but it's being used now all over the field, you'd never find anything cleverer. Of course Bachurin got a bonus—fifty roubles. He was a Party man, by the way, but all the same—the old tsarist time habit—he liked a drink or two. Well, and likely enough that was how he used that bonus. But he'd had TB in him a long time, and of course that sort of thing does not agree with TB. He was given treatment, went to a health resort. But it was no good. So last year our Bachurin kicked the bucket. All that's left of him is those bobbins. You walk about the section now, it's all quiet everywhere, the rocker creaks and bows to you, the bobbins go back and forth in the grass everywhere. And you walk on and think: our Bachurin's still working, still working. . . ."

Botov gave a short laugh and the talk turned to other subjects. There were many things I had to ask him, my head was full of newspaper assignments, there were questions arising from a bad lag in drilling, while the pumping was all right, everything going well. In short, I had no thought to spare just then for Oklahoma rockers or anything else that went with them. I merely made a mental note that it was all very interesting and that I ought to remember it, and then Bachurin's story was pushed into the background by other matters and impressions.

It was not until the day I left that I again crossed the first section on my way back from a distant well. The weather had turned cold and firm snow covered the oilfields. Everything grew white and even more deserted. The spare black forms of chimneys, derricks and machinery etched out in sharper outline, the distances grew more sombre under their leaden-white covering, and the ribbed bluffs and serrated teeth of the main range rose over the whole with a colder, more menacing gleam. The invisible, sleepless work still continued, the rockers called sadly to one another through the clear frosty air and the endless motion

of the iron hawsers and wooden bobbins was harsher, more noticeable against the virgin whiteness of the snow.

What a simple, insignificant movement, I thought, remembering Bachurin. Forward, backward, forward, backward, never getting away from the same place. And this is all that's left of your life, Comrade Bachurin, a long life rich in many and varied movements.... A rich life?

It was then I realized that I knew nothing about this man who was gone, this man whose embodied thought continued to play its part in the people's work, raising ton after ton of oil to the surface. I did not know his appearance, his thoughts, his manner of talking, his habits. I knew nothing of that unique, individual entity which could say: I am Bachurin, and perhaps have a special wink for a friend, tossing off a glass with a chaser of pickled tomatoes and perhaps smoothing a thick moustache with the ball of his thumb. But had there been a moustache? This was where imagination, where literature took over; but about actual reality I could say nothing. I did not even know his name and patronymic.

I felt a passionate desire, an urge to find everything out at once, to ask Botov, to ask friends, relatives—there must be some. To see at least a photograph.

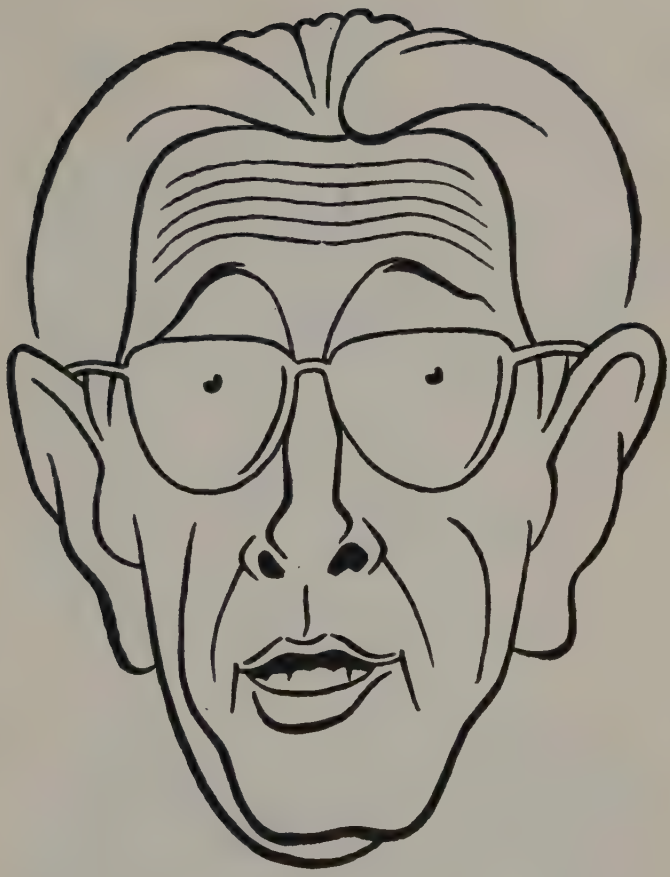
But there was a car at the central office which was going my way, I had to get back to town, every minute counted. So I had to give up Bachurin.

I have never been to the new oilfields since then. I thought of writing to Vasili Mikhailovich for information about Bachurin, but it seemed awkward somehow. And then what more could he tell me beyond what he had already said? Date of birth, number of years in the Party? All right, he might send a photograph—but that too would tell me nothing. So I did not write.

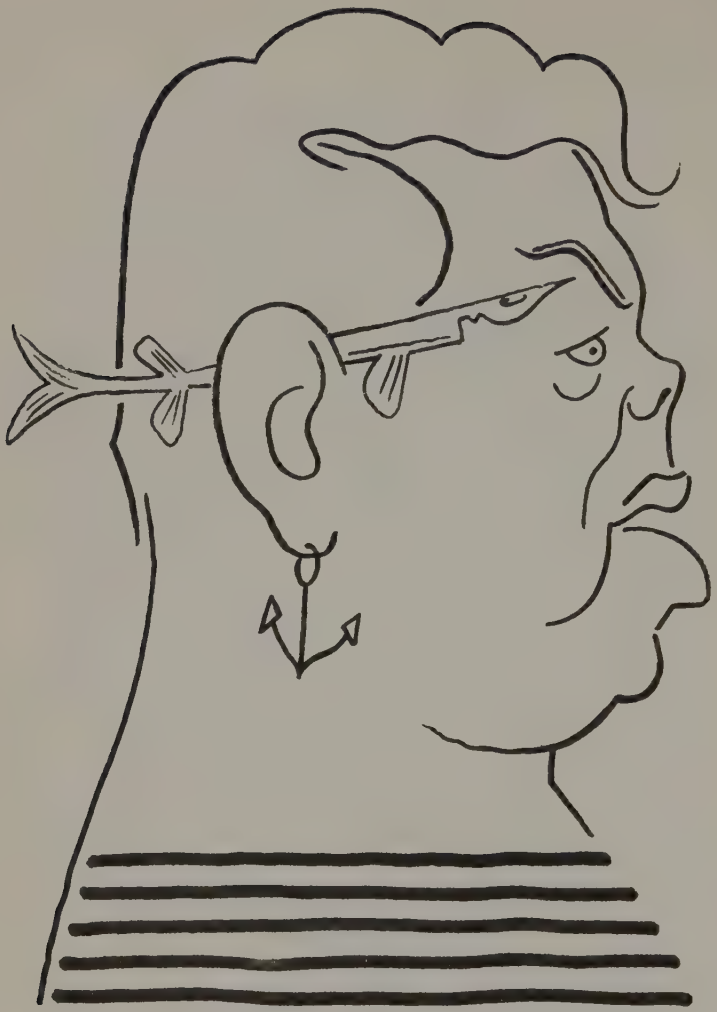
But the thought of Bachurin comes to me very often.

There was a time when we walked the same spot of the earth: in nineteen twenty and twenty-one. We may have met at meetings, or on voluntary jobs, without knowing one another. We may even have exchanged a few words or given one another a light. At that time the new oilfields, set on fire by the Chechens, were still smoking, all around there was the charred ugliness of smouldering buildings. Bachurin was one of those who put out fires, cleared up the debris, repaired, restored. But where had he been before that? Had he been with the partisans, had he wandered the mountains in winter with Nikolai Gikalo's detachment, had he fought at Vozdvizhenskaya, or stood with wildly beating heart on the hillside peering into the darkness of a spring night, waiting for the oil reservoir to flare up—the signal torch for the uprising? But it did not blaze that night, Gikalo's men waited in vain. There had been a mistake. And did Bachurin fling his cap down on the ground in bitter anger?

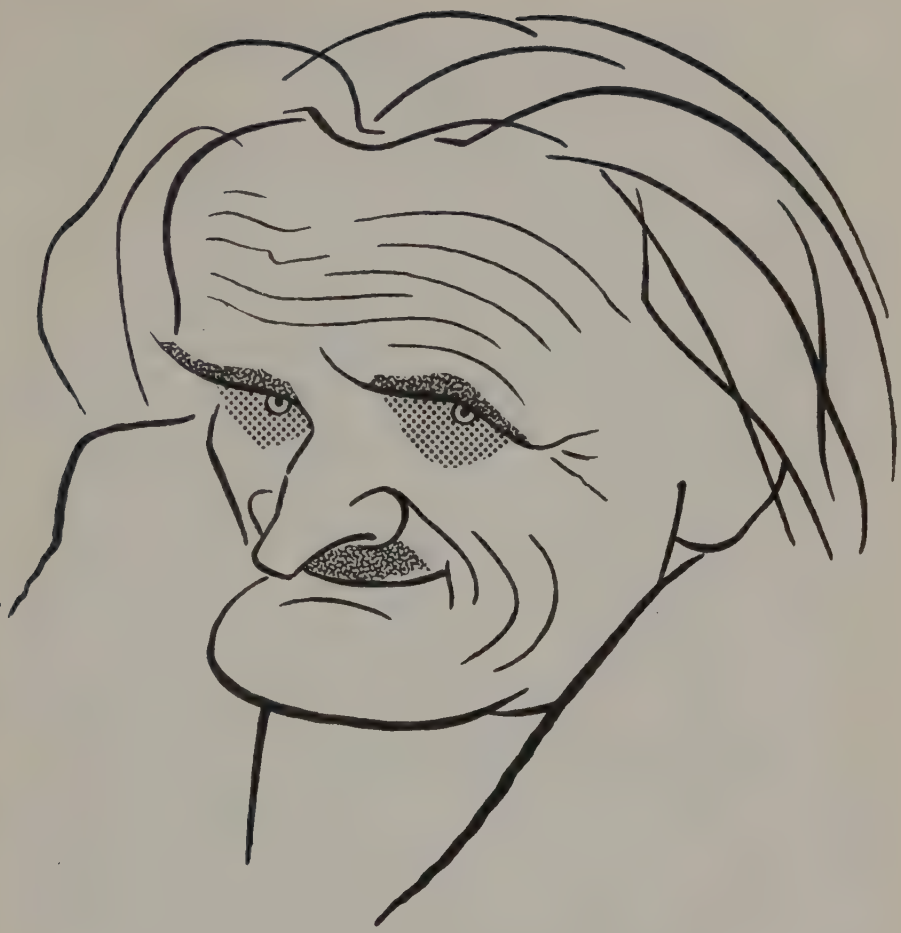
This was a Russian worker who had come here from the north, alone, or with friends, or as a boy with his father who had settled here, on this outpost of Russian land, this place like no other. Decades passed. The unconquered



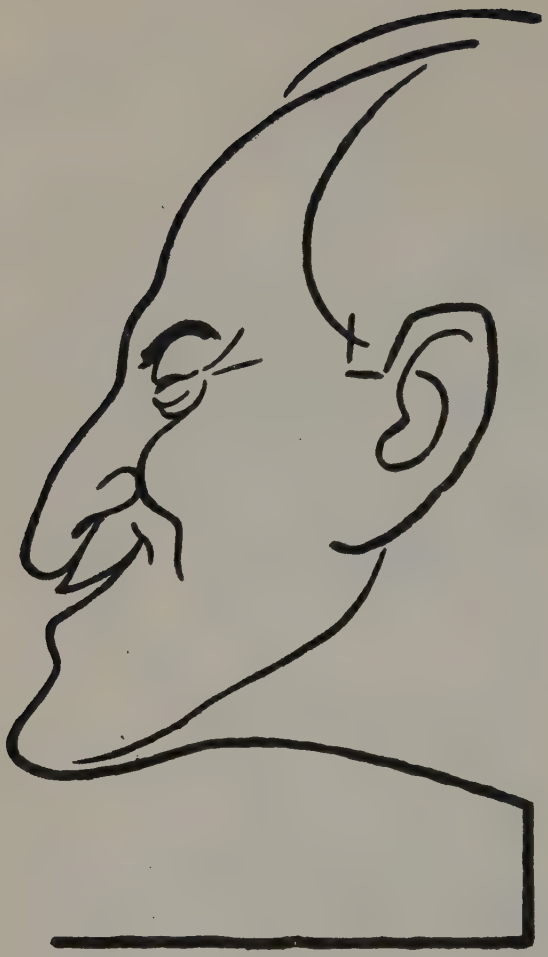
Boris Lavrenyov (1957)



Leonid Sobolev (1966)



Yuri Olesha (1959)



Valentin Katayev (1966)

Caucasus hung over them with its eternal snow, the muddy Sunzha roared, while he, the already sick Bachurin, did his mechanic's work which in unity with the work of other millions should some day change the whole face of this country, and the outlines of the mountain crags, and perhaps the awesome head of Kazbek itself.

Here everything had its especial, Grozny flavour, its colouring, its unique aroma of events. Bachurin might take a wife from a neighbouring village, might marry his son to a local Cossack girl or one from a different place. At the wedding there would be Kizlyary wine, and the ground would shake with the stamping of metal-tipped boots. Thousands of events, all kinds of events, about which we can learn only the sparse general outlines, took place here in Grozny, and on the oilfield—Bachurin saw them, experienced them; but of all this nothing was left. One can write an historical paper: the Grozny proletariat in 1905. One can write a novel about Grozny's achievements during the First Five-Year Plan, with somebody like Bachurin as the main character. It all would be authentic and life-like, yet nothing but the general outlines could be reproduced—typical, similar, but not the actual mechanic Bachurin who lived on the New Oilfields and died of tuberculosis in 1930.

The only trace of the real, genuine Bachurin lay in the combination of hawsers and bobbins, the idea of which had one day come to him. This was the only true memorial to him. But for those bobbins born of his independent creative thought, I would never have known a man called Bachurin had lived, never suspected his existence. Perhaps this immortality is sufficient for Bachurin—let the bobbins creak and roll back and forth?

But by thirty-one the primitive Oklahoma rockers were pushed out of the fields by the improved Vickers and Ideal pumps with their own motors. And at about the same time pumps of all systems were replaced by gas-lifts that squeeze the oil out of the well with the pressure of gas from a compressor station. Soon the Oklahoma rockers and Bachurin's system will vanish altogether.

The last trace of Bachurin's effort and thought will be erased.

But still I do not want to forget him.

When I read in the paper that a new town bath house has been built in Grozny I think: Yes, but Bachurin will never take a steam bath there.

When recently the news came about a tram line having been laid from Grozny to New Oilfields, I again thought of Bachurin: He'll never swing along in that tram with the bell ringing. People will get in and out, but he'll not be there....

Somehow, I have the feeling that this was a splendid fellow. Let him, then, be remembered, well remembered by children, grandchildren, comrades, the people!

1935

Mikhail Sholokhov

The Foal

Head foremost, legs outstretched, the foal emerged from its mother's womb into a world of bright daylight, beside a dung heap swarming with bottle-green flies. A shrapnel shell burst overhead in a soft, swiftly melting grey-blue cloudlet, and the fierce whine of the explosion sent the damp, new-born thing cowering to its mother's feet: its first experience in this world was terror. A stinging hail of shrapnel balls rattled down on the tiled roof of the stable. Some of the balls struck the ground, and the foal's mother—Trofim's chestnut mare—sprang to her feet, only to fall back again, with a brief moan, resting her sweat-streaked side against the protecting dung heap.

In the oppressive silence that followed, the flies buzzed louder than ever. A cock, not bold enough to mount the fence and face the artillery fire, flapped its wings once or twice in the shelter of the burdocks and issued an unrestrained, if somewhat muffled, crow. In the house, a wounded machine-gunner was groaning querulously, breaking now and again into a hoarse scream or a string of furious curses. Bees hummed over the silky red poppies in the little front garden. In the meadow beyond the village a machine-gun was chattering; and to the accompaniment of its brisk rat-tat-tat, the chestnut mare took advantage of a pause between two shrapnel bursts and tenderly licked her firstling, who, having found its mother's swollen udder, drank for the first time of the fullness of life, and of the infinite sweetness of a mother's love.

When the second shell burst beyond the threshing floor, Trofim came out of the house, slamming the door behind him, and headed for the stable. Rounding the dung heap he flung up a hand to shade his eyes against the sun. And then he saw the foal, all a-tremble with the effort, sucking at the udder of his chestnut mare and, completely at a loss, he fumbled in his pockets for his tobacco pouch and with trembling fingers rolled a cigarette.

"So," he said, when at last he managed to speak, "so you've foaled, have you? You picked a nice time for it, I must say!"

His voice rang with bitter injury.

The mare looked indecently thin and weak. Blades of grass and bits of dung had stuck to her matted coat, but her eyes, though deeply tired, shone with pride and joy, and, to Trofim at least, her satiny upper lip seemed to crinkle into a smile. He led her to the stable, and when she began to eat, tossing her head and snorting into the nose bag, he leaned against the door-post and inquired coldly, with a hostile glance at the foal:

"So this is what comes of having your fling, is it?"

The mare made no response.

"You might at least have got it from Ignat's stallion, instead of from God knows who. What do you expect me to do with a foal on my hands?"

Through the shadowed hush of the stable came the crunching of grain. A sunbeam filtered through a crack in the door, spilling gold on all it touched. Crossing Trofim's left cheek, it turned the red of his moustache and stubbly beard into gleaming copper and deepened the dark furrows around his mouth. The foal stood there, on its long, thin legs, like a child's wooden toy.

"Kill it, shall I?" Trofim demanded, pointing a crooked, tobacco-stained forefinger at the foal. The mare rolled her bloodshot eyes, blinked, and threw a derisive look at her master.

That evening Trofim had a talk with his squadron commander.

"She got careful, that mare of mine. Wouldn't trot, wouldn't gallop. Always short of wind. So I gave her a look-over, and sure enough, she was in foal. That careful she got—that careful! It's a bay, the little one. Well, that's that," Trofim concluded.

The squadron commander gripped his copper mug of tea much as he might the hilt of his sabre when riding into attack. Sleepily, he watched the lamp, where moths danced wildly around the yellow tongue of flame. They came in at the open window, to dance a while and then dash themselves to death against the hot glass, while others came to take their place.

"Bay or black—what's the difference?" the squadron commander said. "You'll have to shoot it anyway. Are we Gypsies, or what, to drag a foal around with us? Eh? Well, as I was saying—are we Gypsies? Suppose the commander comes along to inspect the regiment—and this foal of yours frisks around, spoiling the formation? What then? We'd be disgraced before the whole Red Army! I can't understand, Trofim, how you could let this happen. Such debauchery, right in the midst of the Civil War! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! The herders have strict orders to keep the stallions apart."

When Trofim went out of doors next morning, carrying his rifle, the sun was not yet up, and the dew glowed rosily on the grass. The meadow, trampled by infantry boots and criss-crossed with trenches, had the look of a young girl's

face, tear-stained and already lined with grief. In the yard, the kitchen orderlies were preparing breakfast. On the doorstep sat the squadron commander in his sweat-stiffened undershirt, plaiting a wickerwork skimmer. His hands, more used of late to the bracing cold of his revolver than to the once familiar household tasks, kept fumbling at their work.

"What's that you're making—a skimmer?" Trofim asked, passing by.

"Ah, it's the woman here—keeps after me all the time," the squadron commander muttered, working a twig around the handle. "I used to be good at this sort of thing, but I've lost the knack."

"Looks all right to me," Trofim returned.

The squadron commander brushed the left-over twigs from his lap.

"Off to shoot that foal?" he inquired.

Trofim shrugged silently and went on towards the stable.

The squadron commander sat with bowed head, waiting for the shot. But minute after minute passed, and no shot sounded. And then Trofim reappeared from behind the stable, looking rather uncomfortable.

"Well, what's up?"

"Reckon like the firing pin's stuck. Keeps misfiring."

"Let me have a look."

Reluctantly, Trofim handed over his rifle. The squadron commander slid open the bolt.

"It isn't loaded," he said.

"You don't say!" Trofim exclaimed, a bit too earnestly.

"It's empty, I tell you."

"Oh! Well, I'd better tell you. I emptied it. Behind the stable."

The squadron commander put down the gun. For some time he said nothing, mechanically fingering the wicker skimmer he had just finished. The fresh twigs were sticky and fragrant, tickling his nostrils with the odour of flowering willow and the smells of freshly turned soil long forgotten in the raging flames of war.

"Damn it all!" he said. "Let it live. For the time being, at least. Some day, maybe, when the war is over, it will pull a plough for someone. And the commander—well, he'll see how it is, because what has a suckling to do but suck; we've all done it, even the commander. So that's that. And there's nothing wrong with your gun."

A month or so later, near the village of Ust-Khoperskaya, Trofim's squadron went into battle with a company of Cossacks. It was late afternoon when the skirmishing began, and dusk was gathering by the time the squadron charged. Trofim soon fell hopelessly behind his unit. Neither the lash nor the bit, tearing

at her lips until they bled, could make his mare join in the charge. Throwing back her head and neighing hoarsely, she stood nervously stamping her feet, until the foal came scampering up, its tail flying. His face distorted with anger, Trofim dismounted, sheathed his sabre, and tore the rifle from his shoulder. At the edge of the bluff, the squadron's right flank had already closed with the enemy. Back and forth the mass of horsemen swayed, as though rocked by the wind, slashing away in a grim silence broken only by the rumble of the horses' hooves. Trofim threw a swift glance at the struggling men, then turned and took a hasty aim at the foal's chiselled head. But his hand must have jerked when he pressed the trigger, or perhaps it was something else that spoiled his shot. At any rate, the foal only kicked out playfully, gave a shrill neigh, and dashed off in a circle, kicking up little grey clouds of dust. Then, some distance away, it stopped and stood still. Trofim fired a whole round at the little imp—red-tipped armour bullets, too, which had been the first to come to hand in his cartridge pouch. But the bullets did no harm to the foal. Cursing savagely, Trofim remounted his mare and rode as fast as it would take him to the squadron commander and three of his men, who were hard pressed by the bearded, red-faced Cossack old-believers.

The squadron camped that night by a shallow gully in the steppe. There was little smoking, and the horses were not unsaddled. A patrol sent to the river bank reported that the enemy had amassed considerable forces at the crossing.

His bare feet wrapped in the folds of his waterproof, Trofim lay half asleep, looking back over the events of the day. Again he saw the squadron commander leaping down the steep bank, and the pockmarked old-believer slashing crosswise at the commissar, and the thin little Cossack lad someone had cut to pieces, and somebody's saddle, black with blood; yes, and that foal. . . .

Towards morning the squadron commander came up to Trofim and squatted by his side.

"Asleep, Trofim?"

"Dozing."

Looking away at the fading stars, the squadron commander said:

"Shoot that foal of yours. It's bad for morale. The very sight of it makes me so soft I can't use my sabre. You see, it reminds one of home, and that's no good in war. Turns your heart from stone to mush. Did you notice—the little imp was right in the thick of it, and never got a scratch."

The squadron commander broke off for a moment, his lips touched by a dreamy smile. But Trofim did not see this smile.

"Its tail, Trofim! Have you noticed how it throws it up, and skips away, with it streaming in the wind. Like a fox's tail, I swear. A beauty of a tail!"

Trofim did not answer. He drew his coat up over his head, shivered with the damp of the dew, and fell quickly asleep.

Opposite an ancient monastery, a hill jutting out from the right bank constricted the river bed, and the Don rushed through the narrows in headlong fury. At the bend the water seethed and bubbled, and green, crested waves flung themselves against the chalky boulders that marked the site of a spring landslide.

The squadron commander would never normally have ordered a crossing opposite the monastery; but where the river was broader and more peaceful, and the current weaker, the bank was held by the Cossacks, and the hill kept under fire.

The crossing began at noon. A makeshift raft took one of the machine-gun carts complete with crew and horses. In midstream the raft swung sharply round against the current and tipped slightly to one side. The left trace-horse, unaccustomed to river crossings, was seized with panic. The squadron, unsaddling in the shelter of the hill, clearly heard its uneasy snorting and the clatter of its hooves on the planks of the raft.

"The beast will sink the raft!" Trofim muttered glumly. His arm, half raised to the mare's sweaty back, fell to his side. With a wild neigh, the frightened horse on the raft jibbed and reared.

"Shoot!" the squadron leader bellowed.

And, as Trofim watched, the gunner sprang to the neck of the rearing horse and thrust a revolver into its ear. The shot came faintly to the bank, like the report of a child's popgun. The other two horses pressed closer to one another. To keep the raft balanced, the gun crew shoved the dead horse over against the back of the cart. Slowly, its forelegs buckled and its head drooped.

Some ten minutes later the squadron commander rode his dun mount into the water, and with a terrific splashing a hundred and eight half-naked men and an equal number of varicoloured horses followed. The saddles were loaded into three small boats. Trofim steered one of these, leaving his mare with the troop leader Nechepurenko. Half-way across he glanced back and saw the leading horses, already knee-deep, lower their heads reluctantly to drink. Half-whispering, the men urged their horses on. Soon the river a few yards from the bank was thick with snorting horses' heads. The men swam beside their mounts, grasping the horses' manes and holding high above their heads their rifles, to which they had fastened their clothing and their cartridge pouches.

Trofim dropped his oar and stood up in the boat. Screwing up his eyes against the sun, he anxiously scanned the swimming horses for a glimpse of his chestnut mare. The squadron resembled a flight of wild geese scattered across the sky by a sudden shot. The squadron leader's dun led the way, its gleaming haunches rising high above the water. Two silvery-white spots just behind its tail marked the ears of the horse that had belonged to the commissar. The rest followed in a broad, dark mass. And last of all, falling further and further behind, bobbed the shaggy head of the troop leader Nechepurenko and, to his left, the pointed ears of Trofim's mare. Still further back, Trofim with difficulty made out the foal. It was swimming unsteadily, now half out of the water, now immersed right up to its nostrils. And then the wind sweeping over the river brought to Trofim's ear the animal's faint, gossamer-thin call for aid, "Eee-ooo!"

Sharp and clear-cut as a sabre-tip, the cry stabbed Trofim straight to the heart, the effect on him was startling. He had survived five years of war, had flirted with death many a time, and had never lost his self-control. Yet now his face turned ashy-pale beneath the reddish bristle of his beard, and, snatching up his oar, he swung the boat across the current towards the eddy in which the exhausted foal was struggling. The mare too, neighing hoarsely, was swimming to the rescue, and try as he might, Nechepurenko could not restrain her.

"Don't be an idiot," cried Trofim's friend, Steshka Yefremov, perched on a heap of saddles in the boat. "Make for the bank. The Cossacks are in sight!"

"Shut your mouth!" Trofim breathed, reaching for his rifle.

The foal had been carried far downstream, and was caught in a small eddy that swung it effortlessly round and round, licking at its sides with green-combed waves. Trofim rowed feverishly, jerking the boat from side to side. On the right bank of the river the Cossacks emerged from the shelter of the bluff, and a Maxim machine-gun began its staccato chatter, bullets hissing as they struck the water. An officer in a torn canvas shirt shouted something, waving his revolver.

The foal's cries were fewer now, and fainter, and bore a horrifying resemblance to the cries of a human child. Nechepurenko abandoned the mare and made swiftly for the left bank. Shuddering, Trofim raised his gun and fired into the eddy, aiming a little below the foal's head. Then, with a dull moan, he tore off his boots and plunged into the water.

On the right bank, the officer in the canvas shirt shouted: "Cease fire!"

Within five minutes Trofim had reached the foal and thrust his left arm under its chilled belly. Choking and spluttering, he swam for the left bank. Not a shot sounded from the enemy bank.

The sky, the woods, the sand—everything was green and shadowy. With a last, almost superhuman effort, Trofim reached the shore and dragged the dripping foal out of the water. For a while he lay there, scrabbling at the sand and throwing up the green river water he had swallowed. The voices of his comrades sounded in the wood, and far off beyond the bend cannons were firing. The chestnut mare came up and stood beside Trofim, shaking the water off herself and licking the foal. Glittering drops of water rolled down her limp tail.

Trofim rose unsteadily to his feet and moved away across the sand. He took only a step or two, however, before he staggered and fell. Something hot pierced his chest, and as he fell he heard the shot. One shot, in the back, from the right bank. Over there, on the right bank, the officer in the torn canvas shirt calmly ejected the smoking cartridge from his gun. Trofim lay dying on the sand, only a step or two from the foal. A blood-stained froth brought the semblance of a smile to his blue, hard-set lips, that for five long years had not kissed his children.

1926

Vasili Grossman

The Road

The war affected all living beings in the Apennine Peninsula. On the 22nd of June, 1941, the mule called Diu, who belonged to the baggage train of an artillery regiment, observed many things—the radio going all day, the crowds of women and children by the barracks, the flags, the smell of wine from those who did not usually have this smell, and the shaking hands of the driver Niccolo when he led Diu out of the stall and slipped on the breech band. But the mule could not know that the Führer had persuaded the Duce to join the war against the Soviet Union.

The driver had no liking for Diu; harnessing him on the right of the team, he slapped him on the belly instead of the thick-skinned haunch. Nicollo had heavy dark-brown hands with thick horny nails, a peasant's hands.

Diu was quite indifferent to his team-mate, a big, morose, hard-working animal. The hair was worn off his chest and flanks by breech band and traces, and the smooth grey patches had a greasy graphitic gleam.

The team-mate's eyes were dull, his muzzle with its worn yellow teeth looked depressed and melancholy whether they were climbing a hill on asphalt softened by the sun or resting at midday under the trees. He would stand on top of the pass with orchards and vineyards before him, with the winding grey ribbon of asphalt road left behind, with the sea gleaming in the distance and the air giving off a salty tang of iodine, mountain coolness and the hot smell of dust. But the team-mate's nostrils never quivered and a long ribbon of saliva hung from his pendulous lower lip.

Once Diu tried pushing the old chap, but the old chap simply gave his young companion a kick—calmly, without anger—and then turned away; when Diu slacked and ceased to pull his weight, the old mule never showed his teeth or laid his ears back, he only pulled harder, snorting, his head nodding fast.

Soon they came to ignore one another, although day after day they hauled the same cart loaded with shells, and in the stables at night Diu could hear the heavy breathing of his old mate.

The driver, his whip, his boots, his hoarse voice, did not call forth in Diu any slavish devotion. Sometimes the driver seemed to be part of the cart, at others he seemed to be the most important thing and the cart an accessory. As for the whip—well, flies bit the tips of Diu's ears till they bled, but they were just flies. It was the same with the whip. And the driver.

When Diu was first harnessed he hated the uselessness of that long strip of asphalt—you couldn't eat it, you couldn't drink it, while on either side of it there were juicy leaves and grass, and water in ponds and pools.

Yes, the asphalt was the main enemy. But after a little while Diu became reconciled to the road, he even fancied that it would in the end free him of the cart and the driver.

The road climbed into the mountains, winding through orange groves, the cart rattled monotonously behind and the leather breech band pressed against his chest. The senseless toil made Diu want to kick out at the cart and tear at the traces with his teeth; now he no longer hoped for anything from the road, and had no desire to tread it. Memories of the taste and smell of food kept rising in his big unthinking head, vague mirages troubled him—the smell of the stall, the juicy sweetness of leaves, the warmth of the sun after a cold night, the coolness of evening after the heat of the day. . . .

In the morning he thrust his head obediently into the breech band held by the driver, and his chest felt the accustomed chill of the dead gleaming leather. He did all this now exactly like his old team-mate, without tossing his head or showing his teeth; the breech band, the cart, the road had become his life.

Custom had made it the ordinary, the right and natural life—work, the road, the drinking places, the smell of axle grease, the rumble of the stinking long-necked guns, the driver's hands smelling of tobacco and leather, the evening bucket of maize, the bundle of prickly hay.

Sometimes a break came in the monotony. There was terror when a crane lifted him, netted with ropes, and swung him aboard a ship; there was nausea when the wooden ground fell away under his feet and he could not eat. Then there was heat far greater than that in Italy, and a hat was fixed on his head; there was the stubborn steepness of the stony red roads of Abyssinia, and palms with leaves he could not reach. He was very much startled one day by a monkey on a tree, and very much frightened by a large snake on the road. The houses were edible, he sometimes ate reed walls and grass roofs. The guns often boomed and frequently there were fires. When the baggage train halted on the edge of a forest, the mule heard rustlings and other ominous sounds at night—some of them filled him with instinctive terror and he trembled and snorted.

Then came nausea again and wooden ground falling away under him, and a blue plain all round with a salt mist over it; after that, in some mysterious way, although Diu had hardly moved, a stable appeared where his team-mate breathed heavily at night in the stall beside him.

After a day marked by music and the driver's shaking hands, the stable was replaced by a grinding, creaking stall that jerked and bumped with loud beats. After a while the cramped closeness of the grinding stall opened up into a vast plain that seemed to have no end.

A grey dust hung over the plain that was neither Italian nor African; lorries, tractors, guns with long and short trunks and drivers marching in columns moved along the road towards the sunrise.

Now life became really hard, everything was in motion. The cart was always loaded and Diu could hear the heavy breathing of his team-mate in spite of the constant roar and noise on the dusty road.

Animals began to collapse, conquered by the endlessness of that road. Bodies of mules lay by the roadside with distended bellies and stiffly extended legs that had taken their last steps; men were completely indifferent to them; mules appeared not to notice them, they shook their heads and hauled on the traces, but this indifference was only apparent; the mules did see their dead.

On this plain the food seemed especially good. It was the first time Diu had eaten such juicy grass, such tender, fragrant hay. The water, too, was sweet and the juicy young twigs held practically no tang of bitterness.

The warm wind did not scorch him like those African winds and the sun warmed his hide gently, quite differently from the savage sun of Africa.

Even the fine grey dust that hung in the air day and night seemed soft and silky in comparison with the red stinging dust Diu had known.

But the great expanse of that plain was implacably cruel, it had no end. The mules trotted, ears twitching, but the plain was stronger than they. The mules moved on at a rapid pace in sunlight and moonlight, but still the plain stretched out before them. The mules ran, their hooves beating the asphalt and raising dust on dirt roads, but the plain went on and on. It had no end either in sunlight or in moonlight. It had no mountains, no seas.

Diu did not notice the start of the cold rains, it crept on him imperceptibly. Monotonous weariness became sharp, suffering exhaustion. The ground turned sticky and sucked noisily at his hooves; this made the road longer, each step was like many steps and the cart was unbearably heavy; Diu and his team-mate seemed to be hauling not one cart, but many. There were many whips, too, all of them sharp and vicious, cold and burning, stinging and rasping.

To haul the cart over asphalt was sweeter than grass and hay, but for days on end his legs never felt asphalt.

The mules learned what it was to feel cold and the shiver of bodies under

hides soaked by the drizzling rain. The mules coughed and got pneumonia. More and more often the drivers dragged out to the wayside the bodies of those for whom movement and life was over.

The plain stretched out to infinity, its vastness was felt no longer by eyes alone, but by all four hooves. Those hooves sank deeply into the soft ground, they lifted great sticky clods, and the plain, heavy with rain, stretched out vastly, powerfully.

In the big, spacious brain of the mule, where vague impressions of scents, forms and colours were born, came an impression completely different, one belonging to the thought of philosophers and mathematicians—the impression of infinity: the misty Russian plain under the cold autumn drizzle.

Then, in place of what was dark, misty and heavy came a new impression—something fluffy, something white, that burned the nostrils and caked the lips.

Winter had swallowed up autumn, but this made life no easier. It brought a great burden: a cruel, rapacious beast had devoured up a beast less strong.

Now human bodies lay along the roadside together with those of animals; the frost had taken their lives, too.

The constant, exhausting work, the cold, a chest rubbed raw by the breech band, bleeding sores on the withers, pain in his legs, cracked crumbling hooves, frost-bitten ears, aching eyes, sharp stomach pains from frozen food and icy water drained Diu's physical strength and spirit.

The indifferent world beat upon him in a crushing attack. Even the driver's spite stopped, he sat huddled and did not slash Diu with the whip or kick the sensitive bones of Diu's front legs with his heavy boots.

The war and winter bore down on the mule and Diu answered the impersonal attack that could destroy him with his own complete apathy.

He was a shadow of himself, and this grey living shadow no longer sensed the warmth of his body, or enjoyment of food and rest.

He cared nothing whether he travelled along the icy road, his legs moving mechanically, or stood with hanging head. He chewed hay indifferently, without enjoyment, and just as indifferently endured hunger and thirst, and the cutting winter wind. His eyes ached from the whiteness of the snow, but he had no desire for dusk; the frosty sun and the moonless darkness were all one to him.

He paced beside his old team-mate, now completely like him, and their indifference to one another and to themselves was enormous.

This apathy was his last rebellion.

To be or not to be was all the same to Diu; the mule had settled Hamlet's question.

When the Russian offensive began the frost was not particularly hard.

Diu did not go frantic during the withering artillery softening-up. He did not tear at the traces or flinch back when lightning flashed through the cloudy

wintry sky, when the ground heaved and the air, rent with the scream of steel, was filled with fire, smoke, and hunks of snow and clay.

He stood with hanging head while men ran past him, fell, jumped up again and ran, while men crawled, tractors crawled and blunt-nosed lorries raced past.

His team-mate screamed in a strangely human voice, then fell, beat his legs and became still, while the snow about him turned red.

The whip lay on the snow, and the driver Nicollo lay on the snow. Diu no longer heard the creaking of his boots or caught the smell of tobacco, wine and raw leather.

Dusk came, and quietness. The mule stood with hanging head and limp tail. The roar of the artillery fire, long ended, still filled his head. At long intervals he would shift from foot to foot, and then stand motionless again.

All round him lay the bodies of men and animals, and lorries smashed or overturned; here and there rose a slow column of smoke.

Beyond that lay the dark, misty, snowy plain, with no beginning and no end.

The plain had swallowed up all the life that was past—heat, the steepness of red roads, the noise of brooks. Diu now differed little from the dead immobility about him, he sank into it, became one with the misty plain.

When the silence was broken by tanks Diu heard them, their metallic sound entered the dead ears of men and beasts, and entered the ears of the drooping, live mule.

When the immobility of the plain was broken by machines with clanking treads and guns that came across the untouched snow from north to south in extended formation, Diu saw them—they were reflected in the wind-screens and rear mirrors of the abandoned lorries, they were reflected in the eyes of the mule standing by the overturned cart. But he did not start aside even though the iron treads passed close by, breathing a bitter warmth and an oily stench.

After these came white human figures that separated themselves from the white plain; they moved swiftly, silently, less like men than savage hunters, and vanished again, melted away, swallowed in the immobility of the fresh snow.

Then from the north came a noisy torrent of men, lorries, guns and creaking carts.

This was when a man with a whip came to Diu. He examined the mule, and the mule smelt tobacco and raw leather.

The man tapped Diu's teeth and poked his side, exactly as Nicollo had done.

He pulled at the bridle and spoke hoarsely, and the mule looked involuntarily at Nicollo lying in the snow, but Nicollo was silent.

The man pulled the bridle again, but still the mule stood.

The man shouted, brandished his fist, and his shouts did not differ from those of the Italian in anger or menace, only in the combinations of sounds.

Then the man kicked the mule on the bone of his front leg and pain followed—this was the place where Nicollo had always kicked him and it was particularly sensitive.

Diu followed the driver. They went to the carts. Other drivers surrounded them in a noisy, gesticulating laughing crowd, they slapped Diu on the back and sides. He was given hay and he ate. Horses with short ears and vicious eyes were harnessed to the carts in pairs. There were no mules.

The driver led Diu to a cart with only one mare in the shafts.

The mare was small and dark, smaller than the tall mule. The mare looked at him, laid her ears back, then pricked them, tossed her head, turned away and lifted a hind leg to kick.

It was a thin mare with ribs that moved beneath her hide with each breath, and bleeding sores like those on Diu. Diu stood with hanging head, in the same dull indifference—to be or not to be.

With his usual movement he thrust his head into the breech band as he had done hundreds of times; it was not of leather, but it spanned his worn chest just like leather ones; its smell was strange, unaccustomed, the smell of horse.

The mare stood beside him in the shafts, but he cared nothing for the warmth that came to him from her hollow flank.

The mare laid her ears back almost flat, and her muzzle looked fierce, unlike that of a ruminant. Her eyes rolled, her upper lip lifted to bare her teeth for a bite, but Diu in his utter indifference offered an unprotected cheek and neck. And when the horse began to edge round, pulling the harness, to get into position for a kick he made no move but still stood, drooping and depressed. But the driver slashed the horse and then with the same whip, the brother to that one lying in the snow, he struck the mule. He had no use for a spiritless beast, and his hand was like Nicollo's, the heavy hand of a peasant.

Then Diu gave the mare a sideways look, and the mare looked at Diu.

Soon the baggage train got under way. Again the carts creaked, again there was the road in front and weight behind, a driver and a whip.

Diu went at a trot and the snowy plain had neither beginning nor end. But one thing was new—in his accustomed movement through an indifferent world he felt that the mare running alongside was not indifferent to him.

She flicked her tail at Diu, a slippery, silky tail quite unlike the tail of the old team-mate, and its touch on the mule's hide was gentle and friendly.

Again the mare flicked her tail, although on that snowy plain there was no fly, mosquito or gadfly.

Diu glanced at the mare and she gave a quick, very faintly mischievous look at him.

The solid surface of indifference to all the world showed a tiny, faint crack.

Movement warmed him, Diu smelt horse sweat, and the horse's breath, damp, with the sweetness of hay, came more strongly to him.

Without knowing why, he hauled more powerfully on the traces so that his chest felt weight and pressure, and the mare's breech band slackened, it was easier for her to pull.

They ran for a long time, and suddenly the mare whinnied—very softly, neither the plain nor the driver could hear, so softly that it reached only the ears of the mule running alongside.

They ran for a long, long time, until a halt was made for rest—ran side by side, nostrils distended, and the smell of the mule and the smell of the horse pulling the same cart merged into one smell.

The column halted, the driver unharnessed them and they ate together and drank from the same bucket. Then the mare went up and laid her head across the mule's neck, her moving lips touched Diu's ear, Diu looked trustfully into the mare's eyes and his breath mingled with the mare's warm, good breath.

In this warmth all that had long died came to life again—his mother's udder filled with sweet milk, the first grass he ate, the red stones of the mountain roads of Abyssinia, the heat of the vineyards, moonlit nights in orange groves, and the terrible toil which had seemed to be killing him with its burden but had evidently not killed him completely.

The life of the mule Diu and that of the Vologda mare, clear to both, was communicated in warm breath, weary eyes and a kind of strange wonder of existence in these trustful, affectionate creatures standing side by side amidst the wartime plain, under the grey wintry sky.

"He's turned Russian, the mule," laughed one of the drivers.

"No, look, they're both crying," said another.

And it was true, they were weeping.

1962

Boris Polevoy

A Bedtime Story

Professor Ekaterina Yakovleva, who had won considerable renown in recent years for her work on tuberculosis at a Moscow medical research institute, was about to take a well-earned holiday. And since a visit to her daughter would entail only a slight detour on her way to the resort, she decided to use the opportunity.

Mother and daughter were not only very fond of one another, they were real friends. But as often happens with busy people, they met but seldom. Ekaterina knew all well about her daughter's life from her letters and had heard much about the great construction project on the Volga where Zhenya and her husband, both hydraulic engineers, were working. She knew about Zhenya's difficulties on the job, and her successes. And yet whenever she read one of her letters she visualized Zhenya as a thin, lively child, as a long-legged schoolgirl, as a pretty fair-haired student, but try as she would, she could not picture her as an engineer on a great construction project.

Six years ago Zhenya had written from the Urals to say she had a little girl whom she had called Alyona. She sent a photograph of a funny, fat, sprawling, naked little being and a lock of black hair soft as down. The picture went round the whole clinic. That day Ekaterina Fyodorovna was strangely absent-minded and often lost in thought. In the midst of her usual duties she would suddenly say softly "granddaughter" or "granny," as though trying out the words, then smile and shrug.

Six years is a long time. Now the car stopped before a little house with a red tiled roof with low hanging eaves, southern style, and Ekaterina Fyodorovna felt slightly perturbed in the anticipation of her meeting with the little person who had made her a grandmother.

The door flew open noisily. A large Alsatian and a small girl in a bright frock with a huge red bow in her thick, wavy black hair erupted from the house and dashed off the vine-wreathed veranda. They ran along the garden path and

then stopped dead by the car, suddenly quiet. The dog sat down with alert sideways glances at the child while she, still breathless with running, stared at Ekaterina Fyodorovna. A mingling of surprise and mistrust filled her big brown eyes.

"This is granny," said Zhenya, coming up from the house. "Give her a kiss, dear."

"I'm Alyona," the child announced with dignity and held out a hand with long, slender fingers—surgical fingers, her grandmother noted instinctively. Then with a conspiratorial look at the dog, the child suddenly spluttered.

"But you're not a *bit* like a granny!"

Ekaterina Fyodorovna looked helplessly at her daughter. Zhenya answered the look with a mischievous smile.

"You're not a granny, you're an auntie," little Alyona decided judicially and added, "Tamara Zaitseva's got a granny. She's old and she wears glasses."

Taken up with her work, Ekaterina Fyodorovna had had little to do with children, and when that same day Zhenya and her husband went off to a Party meeting in the evening leaving Alyona in her charge, "granny" was rather at a loss.

Alyona, however, accustomed as she was to dad's and mum's friends spending the night when they came on business from other towns, felt quite at ease. She sat down opposite Ekaterina Fyodorovna and proceeded to entertain her with chatter about the construction project which was "*so* big, the very biggest there ever was!" She introduced her dolls and teddy bears. They too, it appeared, all built something with bricks and plasticine. But she soon found, to her great surprise, that this queer granny didn't understand anything at all about building. Then she remembered mum had told her granny was a very, very important doctor, so she changed the subject and launched into the tale of how she had had a sore throat in the autumn, and how they'd cured it.

Then she suddenly clambered onto granny's knee, wound her thin sunburnt little arms round granny's neck and demanded imperatively:

"Granny, tell me a story!"

"What sort of story do you want, dear?" asked Ekaterina Fyodorovna, somewhat taken aback.

"Anything. Only interesting. The most interesting one you know."

There was an awkward silence.

What was Ekaterina Fyodorovna to tell this child?

She reached back mentally to her own distant childhood.... Her mother went out washing by the day. When she came home she was so tired she would often fall asleep at the table while her daughter was getting supper out of the oven. Ekaterina, herself only six, had been left in charge of her little brother. And when she was eight she helped her mother with the washing and rinsing. She had many vivid childhood memories—of scoldings, screams, slaps

and a constant feeling of gnawing emptiness in her stomach. But not one single story.

"Granny, please!" Alyona impatiently shook Ekaterina Fyodorovna's shoulder.

What should she do, granny wondered. Maybe Pushkin could help?

She had a good memory so she started off confidently:

"Once upon a time there lived an old man and his old wife. . . ."

". . . right close by the blue sea—I know it, I know it! It's about the Golden Fish. Tell me another, something else!"

"All right," Ekaterina Fyodorovna agreed hastily, with an unpleasant feeling of inadequacy. She could see the child's surprise. All the other children had proper grannies who wore glasses and knitted socks and made them eat their meals on time and of course told them wonderful stories; and now here was a granny who couldn't do anything, not anything at all. Suddenly Ekaterina Fyodorovna was conscious of a gap in her life which she had never noticed previously, engrossed as she was in her numerous duties. And with this sad consciousness came a passionate longing to win this little heart, to tell a fine story, just as good as any of the other grannies could tell.

"Once upon a time there was a famous Tsar Dodon. . ." she began with considerably less confidence.

". . . and everyone was afraid of him," Alyona picked up the tale and yawned, politely covering her mouth with her hand. "They read us that in kindergarten. Don't you know any new stories? Even just a teeny, weeny, little one—like this?" She held out the tip of her little finger.

Alyona had stopped shaking granny's shoulder. Her eyes when she looked into granny's held no surprise or reproach, only the frank disappointment of a child. Ekaterina Fyodorovna's heart was heavy. In sheer desperation, dropping the accustomed "once upon a time there lived—" she started off without really knowing what she was going to tell.

"Do you know, Alyona, right here, where your dad and mum are building a hydroelectric station, used to be the front."

Ekaterina Fyodorovna felt even more nervous and excited than when she had risen to address an international congress.

"When they fought the nazis?" Alyona asked quickly and wriggled into a more comfortable position.

"No, before that. A long, long time ago. In the Civil War. There were Reds on one side of the front and Whites on the other. . . ."

"Why were they Whites? Did they wear everything white?"

"No, dear. That was the name given to the army that fought against the people, for the tsar."

"For Tsar Dodon?"

So Ekaterina Fyodorovna had to tell the child as simply as she could what the Reds fought for, and what the Whites fought for, and at the same time, not without considerable difficulty, to explain the difference between a fairy-tale tsar and a "really-truly" tsar, and who the landlords were, and the factory owners, and the merchants.

In her youth Ekaterina Fyodorovna had been considered an excellent agitator, and now she had the happy sense that the child was listening attentively; it was as though she were not merely telling something she herself remembered well, but leading her grandchild from the world of reality into a strange, unreal, incomprehensible and rather dreadful world, with a lot of very puzzling things in it. When Alyona heard, for instance, that the landlords and factory owners took what the workers and peasants had made, she wanted to know why the militia hadn't stopped them taking what wasn't theirs. So that meant more explanations. But the main objective was attained. Contact was established and the child listened eagerly.

When the door to the past was opened and Alyona sat quietly, granny settled her more comfortably and continued with confidence.

"Well, dear, so this was the front. The Whites were attacking the Reds, they wanted to take away all these parts where there's a lot of grain, so that the workers in Moscow and other towns would die of hunger. The Reds knew it, and fought hard. And the workers in the towns the Whites had captured tried to help the Reds. The Communists had their underground groups in the towns.... Only you mustn't think they were really under the ground."

"Oh, I know about the underground. They were like Oleg Koshevoy," Alyona said loftily.

"That's right. Like Oleg, only grown-ups. A lot of people. Well, one day the Red commander needed to get a packet into a certain town. There was a plan in the packet, it showed how the underground and all the workers could help the Reds when they came close to the town. But it was very difficult to get the packet in. The Whites were alert. And if they caught one of the Reds, they'd torture him first, and then kill him."

"Like the nazis?"

"Yes, that's right. Like the nazis. Well, the commander thought and thought—who could he send with the packet? If he sent one of the soldiers he'd certainly be caught, because the Whites grabbed all the men of army age. So what should he do? Then one of the commanders, a young sailor from the Baltic, said to him, 'Send our Katya, Comrade Commander.' Katya was his wife. The commander was surprised—how could she go? She'd got an infant in arms. But the sailor said, 'So much the better, they'll never suspect a woman with a baby.'"

"And who was Katya, granny?"

"She was in the Red Army too—a sort of soldier. She'd worked at a factory, and when the Revolution started she joined the Red Guards, and married that sailor and had a baby daughter. Well, Alyona, the commander sent for her and explained it all, and asked if she'd take the packet. And Katya said, 'If it's needed for the Revolution, I'll do it.' Then Katya changed her army tunic and top-boots for a smart frock and a fur coat and good warm shoes. They gave her forged papers, saying she was the wife of a White officer and was going to the town with her baby. Then she picked up the child and they drove her to a big station behind the front line and bought her a ticket for a first-class coach, where only landlords and factory owners used to ride."

"Wasn't she ashamed of travelling with landlords?"

"You see, dear, she did it to deceive the Whites, so they'd think she was a fine lady."

"Like the lady-dance?"

Ekaterina Fyodorovna laughed. But now, holding the key to the child's heart, she easily explained about fine ladies. Alyona urged her on. "And what then? She got into the rich people's coach, and the Whites?"

"She settled down on the seat with the baby in her arms, and suddenly the door opened and a White officer came in."

"Oooh! A White?"

"Yes, a White. A captain. And his seat was just opposite hers. Katya was terribly frightened. She'd been a nurse with the Reds, and a messenger, and a machine-gunner, she'd seen a lot of Whites but they'd all been dead, and this one was alive. He sat there opposite her and smoked a cigarette and smoothed his moustaches and looked gallant so that the young lady would notice him."

"He didn't guess she was a Red?"

"No, he didn't guess, Alyona, but that didn't make her any happier because she didn't *know* it. She huddled right into her corner so he wouldn't see she was trembling. Because what if he should guess, and search her and find the packet? And he soon noticed that there was something troubling her and asked, 'What's the matter, Madame? Why are you so pale?' But she said, 'Oh, captain, I feel dizzy. It's probably the tobacco smoke, I can't stand it.' He apologized and went outside and she felt for the packet—was it safe?"

"Where was the packet, where had she put it?"

"Katya had hidden it very cleverly. On the baby's chest, between the blanket and sheet she was wrapped in. So she had it under her hand all the time."

"But what if the Whites had found out?"

"They'd have killed her and the baby too. Well, the train went on and on and soon they were quite near the town. Then all of a sudden the train stopped, right in the middle of the steppe. And someone shouted, 'Nobody is to leave the coach! Documents, please!' Katya was frightened—what if they saw her

papers were false? She couldn't help it, she began to cry. But that captain sitting opposite. . . ."

"The White?"

"Of course! He tried to calm her—don't cry, Madame, it's our people, they're checking papers, they're only catching Reds, there's nothing for you to be afraid of. He kept on talking but Katya only got more frightened. She heard somebody being dragged out of the coach. Someone cursed, someone shouted, 'Long live communism!' They came walking through the coach where Katya was, knocking at the compartment doors. 'No need for panic, ladies and gentlemen, we're catching Reds. Please show your papers.' "

"And Katya could see everything and hear everything, like the girl who hid in the robbers' cave?"

"Yes, only it was worse for Katya. She thought about her husband, he'd never know her fate. She hugged the baby closer and thought that if she died, she'd die as a Communist should, spit in their faces and shout, 'The Revolution will conquer!' or something of that kind, and never plead for her life or her daughter's, either. She sat there saying goodbye to life, and that officer sitting opposite kept looking at her all the while."

Alyona was clinging tightly to granny. This was not a make-believe story of a little girl drowned by a wicked step-mother, or a princess put to sleep by a bad fairy, but a story of a really-truly woman with her really-truly baby.

Granny was moved, too. A flush rose on her calm face which still held traces of that calm Russian beauty, and her voice trembled slightly.

"Go on! What happened next?" the child hurried her on.

Granny spun out the pause another moment, then continued.

"Well, they came in, the Whites, and asked for papers. Katya nearly fainted while that captain was showing his. This was the end, she thought, they'd see she was frightened, then they'd look at her papers carefully and arrest her. And her life would be over at its very beginning, and she'd never see all she and her husband had dreamed of in those rare lulls when they had time to rest, and nobody would shed a tear over her grave. And she wouldn't deliver that plan, and the underground people in town wouldn't know how to help the Reds when they attacked, and because of that a lot of people would be killed.

"And do you know, when she thought of all that she suddenly felt quite strong again and all her fear went. She didn't even hear when there was a volley of shots outside. The patrol rapped out at her, 'Your papers, please!' And she gave him the baby to hold—the baby with the packet wrapped in between sheet and blanket—hold her, please, while I get them out; then she calmly held out the forged papers and asked, 'Can I get any milk at the next station, do you know?' "

"Why did she want milk?"

"For the baby. Only really, she was just distracting their attention, so they wouldn't look so carefully. And you know, dear, it's often that way in life, if a person wants what's good, and wants it badly enough, he'll always get it. It was like that with Katya. The patrol never noticed anything. At the station the officer himself carried her suitcase to a cab. Katya was very pretty, so he was eager to be of service."

"And did she give the plan to the people in town?"

"Of course! She left the cab some distance away from the place where she had to go, and crossed through a lot of connecting yards, and then went to the place she had been told."

"Why did she go like that?"

"To make sure none of the Whites followed her. And then, when she'd got there and handed over the packet, she fell right down in a faint."

"Why?"

"She didn't know herself. Because she'd been so frightened, probably. For the baby and herself."

"And were they glad, the underground people?"

"Of course! They began getting ready. And when the Reds came close they attacked the Whites from two sides at once. And freed the town."

"And Katya?"

"What about her? She'd done her job. Her sailor husband found her and the baby when he got into the town. And how glad he was that they were both all right and Katya'd done everything. . . ."

"And then they had a great feast and lived happy ever after?" the little girl asked gaily.

"No, Alyona, no time for feasts then, there were other Whites still left, and a lot of fighting before anyone could think of feasts and living happy ever after. It's only now, when. . . ."

Ekaterina Fyodorovna broke off short as her daughter came quickly into the room.

"Mum, why didn't you ever tell me that story?" she asked.

"Did you hear?"

"Yes, we got back half an hour ago. I heard it all from the dining room. That baby girl was called Zhenya? Yes, mum?"

Ekaterina Fyodorovna nodded silently.

Little Alyona, released from the spell of the story, kept looking at mum and granny in turn, wondering why they both seemed so—queer.

But then, grown-ups often were queer.

1951-1952

Victor Nekrasov

Private Lyutikov

One night I was returning from the front line after a routine check-up. I was tired as a dog and my only thought was of sleep. I would turn in, I decided, without wasting any time on supper. But it didn't work out as I had hoped. Climbing down the slope of our gully on the Volga bank, I saw some ten or fifteen men were crowding around the entrance to my dug-out.

"What's the matter?" I inquired.

"A man seems to be ill," someone answered out of the darkness.

"Have him taken to the aid station then. Don't just stand there. Replacements, are you?"

"Yes."

At the time (it was at Stalingrad towards the end of January of forty-three) replacements were infrequent and meagre, no more than fifteen or twenty men a week, and they were snatched up at once by the battalions. Then and there, in the gully opposite my dug-out, the new arrivals were issued sheepskin coats, felt boots, warm green mittens and arms, and were dispatched to the front line.

Someone touched my elbow. I turned. It was Terentyev, my orderly.

"A faker, that's what he is." Terentyev was eternally dissatisfied, grumbled continuously and denounced all and sundry. "Guzzled himself with something. Now throws it up all over the place."

"All right. Call Priymak. And get the men over to HQ. Might blow themselves up any moment here on the detonators. Get moving."

Grumbling, the men rambled towards the headquarters dug-out. Only the sick man remained at the entrance. He squatted on his haunches, hugging his knees and staring without a word at the ground.

"What's wrong with you?"

He raised his head slowly, said nothing and was sick again.

"Take him into the dug-out," I told Terentyev. "I'll pop over to HQ for a moment. Tell Priymak to bring a thermometer."

When I returned from Headquarters Priymak, the junior medical officer, was already sitting in the dug-out, and Terentyev was treating him to tea.

"Well, what's wrong with him?"

"God knows," Priymak said, sipping the hot tea. "Probably food poisoning. Let's have that thermometer, man."

The man laboriously reached beneath his greatcoat, jacket, tunic and underwear and pulled the fragile stick of glass from under his armpit. He looked bad: pallid, unshaven face, parched lips, tangled black hair reaching down to his eyes from under his ear-muffed hat. He was hardly more than twenty-five.

Priymak looked at the thermometer and got up.

"Thirty-eight point five[1]," he said, frowning. "Let him lie down for a while. Then we'll see."

The man got up, holding onto the bunk for support.

"When did you feel bad?" I asked.

"This morning."

"What were you given to eat?"

"Peas, canned stuff. What else. . . ."

"Were you ill before?"

"Not very."

He answered briefly, in a soft, hollow voice, without looking at us.

"Why didn't you report you were ill before crossing over?" Priymak asked.

The man lifted his eyes—black, tired, mirthless, lacklustre eyes of a person indifferent to everything—and said nothing.

"He's a fake, I bet," Terentyev muttered, sweeping some sugar grains from the table into a tin can. "Tapped the thermometer to get the temperature up, 's a fact."

"Much you understand in medicine," Priymak snapped at him, and turned to me. "Tinned food, sure enough. Let him stay in bed for a day."

But Lyutikov—the man's name was Lyutikov—was laid up for a week. The first two days he lay in my dug-out: a mortar shell had hit the engineers' dug-out and it had to be fixed. He lay silently, his knapsack under his head, his greatcoat drawn up to his chin, staring unblinkingly at the ceiling with tired black eyes. He hardly spoke, asked for nothing and never complained. About three times a day—usually after meals—he was sick. Terentyev swabbed up, grumbling incessantly and throwing things about. Then Lyutikov moved into the platoon's dug-out, and I forgot his existence in the turmoil of routine work. It was Cheremnykh, the most educated of my men, who acted as political officer, who reminded me of him.

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[1] Centigrade—about 101 Fahrenheit—*Tr.*

"Why not send off that Lyutikov, Comrade Senior Lieutenant. Does no work, only. . . ."

"Grudging him his bread ration?"

"Who cares for the bread, let him have it, but there's no cheer from him. And he asks all kinds of stupid questions. . . ."

"Stupid questions?"

"Very. At the last political information lecture he asked why we weren't issued any sugar. Said he saw three bombed truckfuls of sugar at the railway station on the way here. What had happened to that sugar, he asked, and why weren't we getting any of it. Or about the second front. Why weren't they opening the second front. Oh, you know the type. Never been at the front before, never been under fire. When they bomb the Red October Works, why he starts up. . . ."

"You should find the answers. That's what you're political officer for. You just want to get rid of him. Clever, aren't you? However, tell the platoon sergeant to dispatch him to the medical aid station."

The platoon sergeant drew out Lyutikov's papers, but at that very time an urgent mission cropped up and Lyutikov was left to guard the dug-out.

Several more days passed. My platoon lost three men, leaving only four, including the platoon sergeant. The platoon commander had been in the medical battalion for a fortnight already. As luck would have it we had more work to do: the Germans had hit the observation post and it had to be repaired in one night. The platoon sergeant, Kazakovtsev, a moustached, efficient and remarkably unperturbable man, came to me.

"Can I take Lyutikov for the night?" he asked. "The major said the OP roof should be made with three layers of logs covered with a row of rails. I'm afraid we won't manage it."

"Is he better?"

"God knows. Doesn't say a word. But he asked for a smoke today. Didn't smoke before. And got up for dinner."

"Well, try him out."

Towards morning I went to see how they were faring. The men had layed the roof logs and were heaping snow over them. Kazakovtsev rubbed his hands.

"We made it, Comrade Engineer. Just in time."

I asked how Lyutikov was. Kazakovtsev frowned.

"No good. He'd take a log, drag it for fifty metres and pant like a dog."

"Send him to the aid station tomorrow. Let them decide what to do with him. He's of no use here."

"He'll never make a combat engineer. Too weakly."

On the way back we dropped into the 3rd Battalion HQ: the morning shelling had begun and we decided to sit it out.

Nikitin, the battalion commander, a big, florid man wearing a Cossack hat tilted over one eye, was telling off his chief of staff.

"Call yourself a chief of staff! Senior aide.... All you know is to pen reports and all kinds of papers. You know, engineer, three times we've received orders to neutralize that damn gun under the bridge. And he sits there as cool as a cucumber writing papers. I spend days on end at the front line. Krutikov too, while he sits in a warm dug-out and all he knows is to talk over the phone: 'Report the situation.' There's the situation for you. That bloody gun's got a stranglehold on us."

The gun Nikitin was speaking of had been harassing him for some time. The Germans had somehow succeeded in fitting it into a concrete pipe passing under a railway embankment, and day and night they kept Nikitin's battalion under fire from the flank. All attempts to neutralize it had failed. Ammunition was scarce and a dozen shells fired at it had left it unscathed. Nikitin had just returned from the regimental commander, who had taken him to task, and was looking for someone to vent his pent up anger on. The chief of staff merely sat doodling on a piece of paper.

Nikitin turned to me.

"Call yourself an engineer! The papers write all kinds of wonders about you: blew up that, demolished that, but what do you really do? Dig dug-outs for the big brass!" He got up with an oath and began pacing up and down the dug-out. "Gets himself the fittest men and worries over them. All they can do is remove three or four mines and hurry home."

He halted and shoved his hat from one ear to the other. "For God's sake, engineer, help me out somehow. That bloody gun sits right here," and he slapped the back of his neck. "Keeps peppering us to blazes. And I haven't even got enough ammunition to neutralize it. Tell me, at least, what to do."

"What can *I* do?"

"Blow it up, damn it. You're the engineer. It's sticking in my guts. Honestly." A whining note appeared in his voice.

"You know I've got only three men. Lose them, and where am I? You won't offer me replacements."

"Give me one, at least one man. I'll provide whatever help he needs. It's not as if it were just for me, after all."

"Where can I get even one? I lost three yesterday. Kunitsa's laid up in the medical battalion, you know yourself."

"What about these?" He pointed with his chin to the corner where my engineers were sitting and smoking.

"I need them myself. One's a mineman, one's a carpenter, one's a stove-maker. That's the lot."

"What about the fourth? Who's he, an orderly?"

"No, he's just. . . well, suffering from food poisoning."

"Poisoning my eye." Nikitin turned to my men. "Who of you's guzzled himself sick?"

Lyutikov rose.

"Come here. I won't eat you."

Lyutikov walked over to the battalion commander. Clumsy, unnaturally stout because of his greatcoat worn over a quilted jacket, he stood before Nikitin on widespread thin legs wound up to the knees with putties and picked the earthen floor with a spade.

"What's hurting you, eh?"

Lyutikov glanced suspiciously at the battalion commander as if failing to grasp his meaning and said softly:

"My insides."

"I knew that. It's always your insides when you don't want to fight."

Lyutikov lifted his head, looked at Nikitin attentively with unblinking eyes, chewed his lips, but said nothing.

"Well, and could you blow up a gun?"

"What gun?" asked Lyutikov uncomprehendingly.

"A German one, of course."

"Where is it?"

"You tell me if you can or not. I don't want to waste my breath explaining."

"Alright," I interrupted Nikitin. "Stop pestering him. Let him get well first. Besides, he's not a combat engineer. If you really need some I can have the division engineer detail a platoon for you."

"The devil you can. They're worse even than yours. I'll ask the major, he'll issue you orders and that's that."

"We'll see." I got up. "Kazakovtsev, rouse the men."

The men stirred. Lyutikov stood picking the earth with his spade.

"Come on, Lyutikov," Kazakovtsev called out. "We're not needed here."

Lyutikov took his knapsack and, stooping, went out of the dug-out.

It was getting light. We had to hurry.

I was dosing off with my greatcoat drawn over my head when someone knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" Terentyev growled from his corner.

"Is the lieutenant already asleep?" a voice asked from behind the door.

"Yes."

"Who was that?" I asked, poking my head from under the greatcoat.

"Oh, that guy, what's his name, Lyutikov."

"Ask him what he wants."

But Terentyev didn't hear me—or pretended not to.

"The lieutenant's asleep. Come in the morning. There's no hurry."

I was dog-tired and, agreeing mentally with Terentyev, I turned over on the other side and fell asleep.

In the morning, over a plate of barley soup, Terentyev informed me that Lyutikov had come three times to inquire whether I was up yet.

"Call him here."

Terentyev went out, returning in a few moments with Lyutikov.

"What's the matter? Out with it."

Lyutikov looked at me in some confusion and saluted clumsily.

"Asking your permission. . . ."

"Want some tea? Terentyev, pour him a mugful."

"Thank you. I just had tea."

"Well, sit down then."

Lyutikov perched on the edge of the bunk.

"What did you want to see me about?"

"About that. . ." he faltered, ". . . that gun."

"What gun?"

"The one the battalion commander spoke about yesterday."

"Well?"

"He said it had to be blasted."

"Yes, so what?"

"So, you see. . . . I thought. . . maybe. . . ."

"You mean you want to blast it? Do I get you right?"

"Yes," Lyutikov whispered without lifting his head.

"Why, man, are you in your right mind? Why, you've never seen what TNT looks like, or a lighter fuze. Some blaster!"

"That doesn't matter, Comrade Senior Lieutenant." A note of reproach crept into his voice. "He did me mighty wrong."

"Who did?"

"The battalion commander."

"Battalion commander?"

"Yes, Nikitin. Said, 'It's always your insides when you don't want to fight.' "

I laughed.

"Nonsense, Lyutikov, he was just digging you. We all know that you're really unwell. You'll go to the medical company today. Tell Kazakovtsev, he's got your papers ready."

"I won't go to the medical company."

"What do you mean you 'won't go'?"

"I won't," Lyutikov whispered and got up.

"None of your cheek, now, and carry out orders! About face, forward march! See that you report at the medical company within the hour!"

Lyutikov looked at me from under his brows, turned clumsily, tripping over some logs of firewood lying on the floor, and went out.

"You, Terentyev, find Kazakovtsev and tell him my orders. Report their fulfilment in half an hour."

I spent the whole day attending a refresher course at the divisional engineers battalion and came back late. In the doorway of the headquarters dug-out I bumped into Kazakovtsev.

"What're you doing here?"

"The major's stove chimney. It was smoking."

"Fixed it?"

"Sure."

"Did the major ask for me?"

"No, but Nikitin was there, swearing at you for not wanting to demolish the gun."

"Let him swear. Has Lyutikov gone?"

"No. Says he won't go. Says he's well. Quite well."

"Worse luck for us."

"I tried to reason with him and threaten him, but he wouldn't budge."

"Are the men in their quarters or on mission?"

"They're with the second battalion, making poles."

"As soon as they get back detail two men to accompany him to the aid station. Let *them* decide whether he's well or not."

I went to the major. Knocking on his door, I walked in. He was sitting on the bed in his undershirt and talking with Nikitin.

"I'm hearing complaints about you," he said, nodding at a stool. I sat down. "Says you won't demolish the gun."

"Not 'won't' but can't, Comrade Major."

"Why not?"

"Not enough men."

"How many have you?"

"Three and the platoon sergeant."

The major scratched his flabby chest and sighed.

"Not many."

"He's got four men, not three," Nikitin said sharply, without looking at me.

"The fourth isn't a trained combat engineer, Comrade Major".

The major looked at me out of the corner of his eye.

"That moustached platoon sergeant of yours said that your 'non-engineer' had volunteered to demolish the gun. Is that right?"

"Yes, Comrade Major."

"Why don't you report then, eh?" he exclaimed in a sudden fit of anger. "It must be demolished, and that's all there is to it! Call the man here. Tell the sentry."

Five minutes later Lyutikov came in. The major looked him over from head to foot, obviously depressed by the sight. He had a soft spot for dashing soldiers—which was why he liked the loud-spoken Nikitin, bubbling over with animal spirits and smartly girdled with all sorts of belts and baldrics. But here was clumsy, flabby Lyutikov, the belt over his greatcoat askew and one putty loose at the bottom.

The major got up, fastened his braces and walked over to Lyutikov.

"What a sight: putties flapping, belt askew, stubbled cheeks. . . ."

Lyutikov flushed deeply and stooped to adjust the putty.

"You'll fix it later," said the major. "Look at me."

Lyutikov straightened up and looked at the major.

"I hear you want to blast that gun. Is that correct?"

"Yes," Lyutikov said evenly, looking the major full in the face.

"But the lieutenant here, your engineer, says you don't know the first thing about combat engineering."

Lyutikov smiled slightly with the corners of his mouth. It was the first smile I had ever seen on his face.

"Not much, of course."

"Not much or not at all?"

"I said I'd blast it. So I will."

Even Nikitin laughed.

"He's got guts."

"Can you crawl on your belly?" asked the major.

Lyutikov nodded.

"Let's see you do it. There, the bed's the gun."

Lyutikov looked at the major reproachfully and said in a quiet voice:

"Don't laugh at me. . . Comrade Major."

The major looked abashed. He frowned and for some reason started to put on his tunic.

That evening I showed Lyutikov how to make the charges. Three charges of ten four-hundred-gram TNT blocks each. They would blast the gun to smithereens. I showed him how to make the lighter fuze, how to insert the primer into the charge, how to light the fuze. Lyutikov followed my movements attentively. We detonated one block in the ravine, and I saw his fingers trembled when he was lighting the fuze. In those few hours his face grew more pinched than ever.

At two in the morning Terentyev woke me up, saying that the moon had set and Lyutikov was already packing the charges in a sack.

I stuck my feet into my felt boots, drew on my quilted jacket and went out. Lyutikov was waiting at the entrance, the sack on his back.

"Ready?"

"Ready."

We went. It was a dark night, the snow had melted and you couldn't see a thing three paces ahead. Lyutikov walked silently, the sack over his shoulder. He stooped at the sound of every overflying mortar shell. Sometimes he squatted to the ground, if one exploded too close.

Nikitin was waiting for us at his CP.

"Want some vodka?" he asked Lyutikov, reaching for a bottle.

"No," said Lyutikov, and asked who would show him where the gun stood.

"You're sure in a hurry, buddy," Nikitin chuckled. "Men usually smoke a dozen cigarettes before going on a mission, while you. . . ."

As usual, Lyutikov said nothing. He stooped over his sack and asked for some string to tie it.

"Make a hole in the sack and stick in a sliver, "I told him." "Then you'll insert the fuze there."

Lyutikov picked a sliver from a log of firewood, trimmed it with a knife and stuck it through the sacking into a fuze hole in one of the blocks of TNT. Then he took off his greatcoat, folded it carefully and laid it by the stove. He put on a white camouflage suit, coiled up the lighter fuze and put it in his left pocket. He put a spare fuze in his right pocket. He tried whether the matches struck easily and put them in his trousers' pocket. He did everything slowly and silently. His face was pale.

It was very still in the dug-out. Even the signalmen fell silent. Nikitin sat puffing on a cigarette with a concentrated air. A cricket chirruped peacefuly and cozily behind the table, as if there had never been a war.

"Well, do we go?" Lyutikov asked.

"Off we go."

We went out: Nikitin, Lyutikov and I. A fine snow was falling. Somewhere in the distance a machine-gun sputtered fearfully and fell silent.

We passed the 7th and 8th companies and crossed the embankment. Lyutikov, in the rear with his sack, kept lagging. It seemed hard going for him, and I offered to help him. He refused.

We reached the end of the 9th company's left flank and halted.

"Here," said Nikitin.

Lyutikov lowered the sack to the ground.

The embankment stretched out before us like an even white ridge. At one point there was a dark blob on it. That was the gun. It was some fifty to seventy metres away.

"Look there," I said to Lyutikov. "It'll fire any moment."

But the gun wouldn't fire.

"The sonovabitches," Nikitin swore, and at that very moment the dark blob spat a dagger of flame. A tracer shell described a swift curve and exploded somewhere between the 7th and 8th companies.

"See it?"

Lyutikov felt the breastwork with his hand, pulled on his gauntlets, shouldered the sack and without another word climbed out of the trench.

"Good luck," said Nikitin. I said nothing. At such moments it's so hard to find the right words.

We could see the crawling figure for a short while before it blended with the murky whiteness.

"It's a good thing they're not firing flares here," said Nikitin.

The gun fired again, then two more times in rapid succession. A lone mortar shell cracked somewhere nearby. A private approached us and asked for a match or a flint. I looked at my watch. Six minutes had passed. It had seemed like half an hour. Another three, two more. . . .

A blinding light lit up the landscape. Nikitin and I ducked instinctively. Chunks of frozen earth fell on us from above.

"Attaboy!" Nikitin exclaimed.

I said nothing. Something seemed to swell in my chest.

The Germans opened up a feverish, confused fire. It lasted for fifteen or twenty minutes and gradually subsided. My watch showed three thirty.

We peered over the breastwork but saw nothing: all was white and murky. We squatted back.

"Must have got it," Nikitin said with a sigh. He rose to his feet and leaned on the breastwork. "The gun's silent. Can't see a thing."

I also rose. My feet felt numb and cold.

"I say, engineer," Nikitin nudged me in the side. "Look there, could it be him?"

I peered into the darkness. Something vague and nebulous could be seen on the snow halfway between us and the Germans. It hadn't been there before. Nikitin looked about.

"Ought to send someone to see."

But there was no one about.

"Damn it, let's go ourselves."

Lyutikov lay with his face in the snow some twenty metres from our trench. One arm was stretched forward, the other was pressed to his chest. His hat was gone. So were his gauntlets. The spare lighter fuze had fallen out of his pocket and lay nearby.

We dragged him into the trench.

Lyutikov died. Three tiny fragments, tiny as sugar grains—I saw them later at the medical battalion—had pierced his abdomen. An operation was performed, but he developed peritonitis and died on the third day.

I visited him the day before he died. He lay, thin and sallow, covered up to his chin with a blanket and greatcoat. His eyes were closed, but he wasn't sleeping. When I approached his cot he opened them and looked at me with alarm.

"Well?" There was anxiety in his voice, and in his black eyes there glimmered something I hadn't observed before: a penetrating, boring thought.

"All's fine," I said with feigned cheerfulness and doing my best to conceal its phoneyness. "They'll patch you up a bit, and you'll come back to us."

"I didn't mean that."

"What then?"

"The gun, what about the gun?"

There was so much alarm in those words, so much fear that I would not answer the question that had been gnawing at him all the time, that even if he hadn't destroyed the gun I'd have said he had. But he *had* destroyed it, and with it a part of the ferroconcrete pipe so that now the Germans wouldn't be able to mount a new one there.

And I told him this.

He heaved faltering sigh and smiled. It was the second and last smile I ever saw on his face. The first one that time in the major's dug-out, the second one now. And although they hardly differed from each other—just a slight lifting of the corners of his mouth—there was so much happiness in this smile, so much. . . .

I couldn't bear it and turned away.

Several days later the Germans retreated from Mamayev Kurgan. They were driven beyond Dolgi Ravine.

We buried Lyutikov next to the ferroconcrete pipe where he had been mortally wounded. For a monument we placed the German gun he had demolished —or rather the remnants of the twisted carriage—and attached a tiny snapshot we found in his pocketbook.

On the day Lyutikov was wounded I wrote a citation commending him for decoration. The award arrived two months later, after we had been transferred to the Ukraine.

Lyutikov had no family, he was alone in the world. His award—the Order of the Red Banner—is, I think, kept in the regiment to this day.

1950

Konstantin Simonov

A Name that Did Not Die

Last autumn, when we were still on the left bank of the Desna, we got a flat tyre in our jeep and had to wait lying prone on the bank for about half an hour while the driver fixed it. And of course it had happened in the most awkward place, just where a temporary bridge was being flung across the river.

In that half-hour two groups of three or four German planes came over and dropped small bombs round the crossing. The first time it was just an ordinary bombing and the engineers hugged the ground and waited it out. But the second time the last of the German planes continued to circle over the river—nuisance tactics. Then a small black-haired major in command of the engineers jumped up and started cursing.

"So they'll go on like that all day, and you'll go on lying there," he shouted, "and the bridge'll stay as it is. After the war's over we won't need to build it, after the war we'll build a railway bridge. Get to work!"

One after the other the men rose and continued their work, eyeing the sky askance.

The German continued circling for a long time, then when he saw it had no effect he dropped his last two bombs and made off.

"He's gone," said the major loudly, dancing about on the edge of the bridge so close to the water I thought he'd fall in any moment.

I should probably have forgotten this small incident had not certain subsequent happenings reminded me of it. Late in the autumn I was at the front again, in more or less the same locality, first by the Dnieper, then beyond it. I was hurrying to overtake the army, already far ahead. As we drove I noticed a name which kept recurring, now here, now there, like a companion on the way. It might be on a piece of plywood nailed to a telegraph post or a cottage wall, or chalked on the side of a smashed German tank: "No mines. Artemyev," or "Road reconnoitered. Artemyev," or "By-pass left. Artemyev," or "Bridge repaired. Artemyev," or simply "Artemyev" and an arrow pointing the way.

It wasn't hard to guess that Artemyev must be an engineers officer who had passed along here with the forward units and cleared the road for the army. But these notices were particularly frequent, detailed and most important of all, completely reliable.

After travelling a good two hundred kilometres accompanied by Artemyev's name, round about its twentieth or thirtieth appearance I remembered that small black-haired major who had ordered the bridge-building on the Desna to go on under bombing, and wondered if he could be this mysterious Artemyev going ahead of the troops as a kind of guardian angel.

On a slushy winter day we stopped over in a hamlet on the bank of the Bug where a field hospital had been set up. In the evening we joined the doctors by the fire for tea. I don't remember exactly why, but I mentioned those notices.

"Oh yes, I know," said the head doctor. "We've been following them for nearly five hundred kilometres. A famous name. So famous that some women've got a crush on the fellow. Now don't be angry, Vera Nikolayevna, I'm only joking." He turned to a young woman doctor who had made a gesture of angry protest.

"It's nothing to joke about," she said and turned to me. "You'll be going on ahead, won't you?"

"Yes."

"They laugh at what they call my superstitious intuition, but my name's Artemyeva too, and I have a feeling that it's my brother who's leaving these notices."

"Your brother?"

"Yes. I lost track of him since the beginning of the war, our ways parted in Minsk. Before the war he was a highway engineer, and I keep having the feeling that it's him. In fact I really believe it is."

"Oh, she believes it all right," the head doctor interrupted, "and she gets mad because that Artemyev never adds his initials."

"Yes," Vera Nikolayevna agreed simply, "it's annoying. If the name was given 'A. N. Artemyev's—Alexander Nikolayevich—then I'd be quite sure."

"You know what she did once?" the head doctor interrupted again. "She wrote under one of the notices: 'Is it Alexander Nikolayevich Artemyev? If so his sister Artemyeva is looking for him, Field Post 390-B.' "

"No, really?" I asked.

"Yes, I wrote it. But they all laughed at me and said that whatever others might do, engineers hardly ever went back on their own tracks. That's true, of course, but all the same I wrote it.... When you go forward," she went on, "ask in divisional HQ, you might come across him. I'll write down my field-post number. If you find out anything, send me a couple of lines. Will you?"

"Certainly I will."

She tore off a newspaper edge, jotted down the address and handed it to me. And when I placed it in my tunic pocket her eyes followed my hand as though trying to see inside that pocket and make sure it was safely there.

The Soviet advance continued. Beyond the Dnieper and on the Dniester I kept meeting the name "Artemyev." "Road reconnoitered. Artemyev," "Crossing in order. Artemyev." "Area demined. Artemyev," and again "Artemyev" and an arrow pointing forward.

When spring came I was in Bessarabia and there I visited an infantry division where my question about the name Artemyev brought an unexpected answer from the general.

"Why, of course I know him, he's in command of my engineers battalion—Major Artemyev. A fine engineer. But why do you ask? You've probably seen his name a good many times?"

"Yes, very many."

"You would. He reconnoiters the road not only for the division and the corps, he does it for the whole army. He's always in front. The whole army knows his name, though not many have set eyes on him. A famous name, you might almost say an immortal name."

Again I remembered the crossing over the Desna and the small black-haired major, and said I would like to see Artemyev.

"You'll have to wait if there's any temporary stoppage—perhaps then.... No hope of catching him now, he's somewhere ahead with the reconnaissance units."

"By the way, what's his name and patronymic?"

"Alexander Nikolayevich. Why?"

I told the general about my encounter in the hospital.

"Yes, he's from the reserves, that's right," said the general, "though the kind he is, you'd think he'd served in the army all his life. It's probably the same man."

That evening I dug into my tunic pocket, found the scrap of newspaper with the hospital address and wrote a few words to Dr. Artemyeva saying that her intuition had been correct, it would soon be a thousand kilometres she had been following her brother.

A week or two later I regretted sending that letter.

It was on the farther side of the Prut. A bridge had not yet been built but two good ferries moved from bank to bank like clockwork. As I drove up to the river I saw on the shield of a smashed German gun the familiar notice: "Crossing organized. Artemyev."

I crossed on the slow ferry, climbed the bank and looked round, involuntarily seeking the familiar signature. Twenty paces away, on the edge of the steep bank, I saw a small fresh mound and a carefully made wooden obelisk with a

square board on top, under a metal star. And on the board: "Here lies Major A. N. Artemyev, engineer, killed in action crossing the Prut." Below, in large red letters was added: "Forward, to the west!"

A photograph was affixed to the obelisk under a square of glass. I examined it. It was an old photograph, with worn edges—probably it had lain for a long time in a tunic pocket, but it was clear enough; I saw again the small dark-haired major from the Desna crossing.

I stood by the grave overcome by a tangle of emotions—there was pity and sympathy for the sister who had lost her brother, perhaps even before receiving the letter saying that she had found him; there was a strange feeling of loneliness. The road would not be the same without the accustomed notices signed "Artemyev," I had lost an unknown companion who had guarded me along the way. But what was to be done? In wartime, you have to get accustomed to death, whether you will or not.

We waited for our cars to be unloaded from the ferry and then went on. After fifteen kilometres, at a place with deep gullies on either side of the road, we saw a big pile of German tank mines heaped on top of each other like great flat cakes, and on a lonely telegraph post a plywood board with the notice: "Road reconnoitered. Artemyev."

No, it was not a miracle. Like many units which keep the same commander for a long time, the engineers battalion was accustomed to calling itself Artemyev's battalion, and now his men honoured their commander's memory by signing his name where they had passed, clearing the way for the army. And when, following those notices, after ten, thirty, seventy kilometres I still saw the same immortal name, I felt that sometime, in a future not very distant, on crossings over the Niemen, the Oder, the Spree, I would again see plywood boards with the notice: "Road reconnoitered. Artemyev."

1944

Sergei Antonov

In the Morning

We are sitting near a bridge, Alexei on a log and I on my theodolite case. I am watching the road intently for a car going my way.

It is past four o'clock in the morning. Dawn is breaking; the sky above the birch grove has turned pink although the sun is not yet in sight.

The birds are still asleep. A stove has been fired in the last cottage in the village spread along the edge of the gully and a thin feathery pillar of smoke rises slowly skyward.

At intervals the air reverberates with dull detonations; blasters are at work on the ice above the dam. I can distinctly hear the wheels of a train clatter over the rails as if the railway were just beyond the nearest hillock. Actually the train is far away, and not behind the hillock, but quite in the opposite direction, next to the stand of trees where the webbed pylons of the high-tension power line and the new brick-kiln chimney soar into the sky.

The train pounds on, brooklets gurgle down the slopes, the dull reverberations of explosions carry from the distance, and yet everything about us, from the earth to the dome of the sky, is replete with the tranquil peace of morning.

It reigns supreme over the river, over the fields and the cottage roofs, over the birch grove, over myself and Alexei, and there is no noise that can startle this peculiar, immobile silence, this solemn tranquility that reigns before the sunrise.

Alexei, a grey-eyed, fair-haired young man of about twenty-three with broad, rounded shoulders and face smooth and shining as if he had just washed in icy water, is unhurriedly attaching an ice pick to its handle and keeping an eye on the river, whose surface is now dotted with dark blotches. He has been told to watch the bridge. During the night he dismantled the railings and carried both the rails and uprights a good five hundred metres to a hilltop where the flood water will not reach them. This year the water is expected to rise higher than usual, and the ice may sweep above the level of the bridge on its way down the river.

So far Alexei has nothing to do, and slowly, so as to stretch out the job, he whittles down the pick handle with an axe, and there are shavings clinging to his trousers. He wears his cap at a rakish angle and his quilted jacket is unbuttoned.

"No car in sight," I say, casting worried glances at the river.

"None," Alexei agrees complacently.

"You can't cross when the ice starts moving, can you?"

"'Course not."

"If no car shows up before it starts I'll be stuck here for two whole days."

"Maybe three."

"There you are. . . ."

"No need to worry. There are two trucks that'll be sure to come. Vaska from the First Five-Year Plan farm will go for superphosphate in his rattle-trap. They always leave things for the last day. And the director of the machine and tractor station will be sending a truck for lubricating oil. A tough fellow, that director. Break-up or no break-up—it makes no difference to him. If the oil's needed he'll have it fetched, and that's all there is to it."

Alexei speaks slowly, reluctantly almost, and between each word I hear the silence of the April morning. It is chill and damp. The sun is not up yet. Only the moon is melting away in the grey sky.

"Here she comes," Alexei suddenly says. He stops whittling.

"Who?"

"The wife. Who else'd be up this early?"

I strain my ears to hear. The train has gone by long since. There are no more explosions. Only the brooklets, racing one another to the river, continue to gurgle down the slopes.

"She's in a hurry," Alexei smiles tenderly.

"You're seeing things."

"Wait a minute. You'll see for yourself right away. It's Dusya all right."

True enough, a woman wearing a close-fitting white sheepskin jacket and felt boots with red rubbers came into view over the hilltop and hurried towards us. She was carrying a bundle. Alexei was visibly pleased that she had risen so early and that she was hastening to him with his breakfast, but to conceal his pleasure from me he scowled.

"Thought you'd bring something different, but I see it's the same old thing," he says to his wife.

Dusya is not taken aback one whit.

"You'll catch cold. Button up the collar," she persuades him.

"I won't catch cold. Spring air's good for you. Only makes you healthy," Alexei replies. Nevertheless he buttons up his collar. "What d'you bring?"

"What you asked for. Move over, will you?"

"Why should I. Your legs are young enough to hold you," Alexei says and makes room for her beside him.

Dusya sits down, opens up the bundle and produces from her pocket a packet of salt wrapped the way chemists put up powders.

She is bundled up in her shawl so that the grey eyes full of youthful curiosity and the snub nose are all that is visible of her face.

"Now look," she reaches for a jug and a package, "here's the milk, and here's bread and eggs. Don't throw away the egg shells, bring them home with you. . . ."

"Never heard of such a thing! Catch me saving egg shells."

"And come home as soon as you can."

"Aha! Lonesome for me, eh!"

"For you? Not likely. It's nice at home without the smell of tobacco for a change."

"Is it, now!" Alexei responds, barely managing to keep a straight face. "Well it looks like I'll have to stick it out here for another couple of days."

Dusya gasps. "Couple of days? Why?"

Her reaction is so sincere and sudden that Alexei cannot help laughing.

"Aw, go on," says Dusya with a gesture of annoyance, realizing that he is teasing her. "Smart, aren't you. You needn't think I was worried. You can stay here a week for all I care. . . . Why don't you offer the surveyor something? He could probably do with a bite to eat, too. . . ."

She wants to change the subject, but Alexei continues to laugh. I too begin to smile.

"You make me sick, the two of you. . ." says Dusya, embarrassed. "Of course I'm not used to being home alone at night. . . . Anyone would be scared. Well, I'll be going."

She says goodbye to me and starts out for home, and soon the sound of her footsteps dies out as she disappears behind the hillock.

"We've been living together for some time now, almost a year, and she can't get along without me for an hour. . . ."

I can see that Alexei wants to say something more, but after a pause he changes his mind. I pull out my crushed sandwiches and we both have breakfast.

A great red sun looms up from behind the birch grove. Neither the chimney of the brick kiln nor the high-tension power pylons can be seen now, they all have melted in the rose-hued sunrise.

"She's a hero, you know," Alexei speaks up all of a sudden.

"I can seen that," I reply, not catching his meaning at first.

"I don't mean that. Not a daredevil or one of your busybodies. A real Hero, she is. A Hero of Socialist Labour. Want to see her Star and the Order? I've got them here."

He produces a pocketbook with a rubber band around it and pulls out a gold star.

"It's safer here in my pocket. Otherwise Dusya'll be putting it in a different place every day and not finding it when she needs it. Once she put it away in a candy box in a gramophone that doesn't work any more and stuck the gramophone at the bottom of a trunk. Later when she had to go to a Komsomol conference she'd forgotten where it was. Turned the whole house upside down before she found it. After that she asked me to take care of it."

"What was she decorated for?"

"For buckwheat. You've eaten buckwheat porridge, haven't you? That's what she got it for. Buckwheat's the fussiest crop we have. It doesn't like the cold and it can't stand the heat. In cool summers it doesn't come out because of the cold and in hot summers the sun burns it up. We tried everything, down to sowing it in three relays: the first time as soon as the snow went, then again a little later and the third time around mid-summer. Which of these sowings came through depended on the weather. Now, the year before last they gave us a buckwheat plan five times bigger than usual. All of us board members were pretty much worried about it. But not Dusya. I didn't give any thought to her then—only knew her as a perky slip of a girl who got about everywhere and at Komsomol meetings didn't give anybody else a chance to speak. Well, Dusya thought up a buckwheat that doesn't mind the heat—a kind that spreads out on top. Let's see, how'll I explain it to you.... You know what a poplar looks like? There's a picture postcard called *Ukrainian Night* with a poplar on it. Well, ordinary buckwheat's like a poplar but Dusya's buckwheat is bushy, spreads out like an oak. The top makes a sort of umbrella shading the grain underneath."

"You'd call it a new variety, I suppose."

"No, not a new variety at all. It's grown from the same seeds. Only instead of planting buckwheat like rye or wheat, the way we used to, which didn't leave it any room to spread out, you plant it in rows half a metre apart so that the tops can spread out. And you don't have to plant it in three relays either because the sun won't scorch it. When we discussed the matter at a meeting of the collective farmers that autumn Dusya got up and said her team wanted to make only one late planting and promised to raise a ton and a half per hectare."

"You supported her, of course."

"Not exactly. You see, what happened was this.... I didn't know anything about the experiments she'd been making. And I'm not the kind to believe things without seeing for myself. So as soon as she was through and went back to her place at the presidium table, I took the floor and began to show her up. We're trying to get the sowing done as early as possible, says I, and here she

wants to sow late, though everybody knows the sun'll burn up the plants even if you planted them a metre apart. Today Dusya's invented some mysterious spreading buckwheat; tomorrow she'll come along with a six-legged billy goat and we're expected to believe it all. . . .

"I saw the folks around me laughing and like an idiot, I went at Dusya still harder. Usually when I speak at meetings I take care to keep my hands behind my back so as not to swing them around too much, but this time I forgot all about it and gesticulated right and left. There just couldn't be any spreading buckwheat and that's all.

"The people were laughing harder now and I realized there was something wrong. Maybe they were laughing at me? I gave myself a quick once-over, but everything seemed to be all right. The people went on laughing. Grandpa Stepan was in stitches.

"By that time I was all rattled and there I stood tongue-tied like a dope. It turned out that Dusya had planted several buckwheat plants in rows half a metre apart in her garden by way of experiment, and while I was speaking she had brought in a pot with one of the spreading buckwheat plants she had raised and stood it on the presidium's table right behind my back. Here I was spouting that there was no such plant with the thing there in full sight of everyone except myself. So I stood there gaping, wondering why everybody was roaring with laughter. At last I had the sense to look behind me. I tell you I could have bitten my tongue off.

"The chairman of the farm, Ivan Nikiforovich his name is, was laughing heartily and knocking at the table with his pencil and telling me: 'Go ahead, Lyosha, have your say. Don't take any notice of them.'

"I really should have had it in for Dusya for making a fool of me, but somehow the very opposite happened. From that evening I began to notice her. . . . You must be fed up listening to all this. . . . It's all about agriculture."

I ask him to go on.

"All right. Before this happened I had seen her every day. I had noticed that she was a good dancer and that Pavlushka, the melon chap, used to give her rides on his bicycle, and that was all. But that very evening I knew I had fallen for her. Of course I didn't let on at first.

"Sowing began, and it was done the way she proposed. I helped her team as much as I could, seeing that they got the best horses and making arrangements at the MTS to have their field cultivated first. I even learned to dance. When everybody got together of an evening to sing and dance, I'd dance with her a bit and then take her home as is proper, but I never let on I was gone on her. For the life of me I can't figure out how she guessed, but I could see she knew by the way she'd fall silent and get shy-like whenever we were alone. Well, since she knew, there was nothing for it but speak up frankly like a Komsomol

member should. 'I'm afraid of you, Lyoshka, you've got too much character,' she replied. 'I'm not the kind that gives in either. We won't make a go of it.' And she just walked off. The following Sunday I saw Pavlushka giving her a ride again.

"I decided that was the end. If she didn't want to have anything to do with me, there was nothing I could do about it. Instead of going to dances I stayed home nights and read, and read, and all the time it seemed Dusya was there beside me looking into the same book. I sort of went a bit soft in the head too. Believe it or not, I began studying my face in the mirror. I'd never done it before, but there I was inspecting my nose and my eyes and my lips in the looking-glass and thinking: 'Yes, Lyoshka, all you've got is character and not a damn thing besides. Even my mother noticed it. 'What's come over you that you're always looking in the mirror?' she asked me. I went to the cooperative and bought myself a necktie, although I can't stand ties—they choke you. I put it on and looked at myself in the mirror but I couldn't tell whether I looked better or worse. I remember going to town by truck once to attend a Komsomol meeting and every time somebody came along on a bicycle I'd grind my teeth with rage. I just couldn't stand the sight of a bicycle. That's what Dusya did to me.

"Summer came and the weather turned real hot. So hot that you'd wake up in the morning and stick your hands out of the window and feel as if you'd dipped them into warm water. You could practically see Dusya's buckwheat grow. The field was white with blossoms as if milk had been spilled all over it—so white it hurt the eyes. But, it did your heart good to look at that field.

"One day I went out there when Dusya and her team were at work weeding.

" 'What's the idea of hanging around us every day?' Dusya asked.

"She stopped right in front of me, her sleeves rolled up and both hands full of couch grass. She looked at my necktie and I could see her eyes were twinkling. So that's your little game, I said to myself, when we're by ourselves you're all quiet and shy but in public you try to make fun of me. I'll show you in public why I hang around! And so I grabbed hold of her and kissed her. She fought back and wriggled and twisted, but even a man wouldn't find it easy to get away from my grip.

"The girls squealed and laughed and I kissed her again, just like that. I only let her go when I saw she was about to burst into tears. She was all red, and her hair was mussed up, and her kerchief had slipped down her back. 'Look what you've done to the buckwheat,' she cried. I replied it was nothing, and that I'd done more good than harm. Hadn't I helped them? 'Helped?' says she. 'You made a big to-do about your help as soon as you saw that there was a record crop coming. Remember what you said at the meeting?' I wanted to

say something but she didn't give me a chance. 'We don't need your help any more than a cart needs a fifth wheel. We'll manage without you. I know you —just because the crop's going to be good you want to poke your nose in.' I don't know whether she wanted to hurt me or just said it on the spur of the moment, but whichever way it was I was kind of staggered by her words. 'Listen here, team-leader,' says I, 'you'd better be careful what you say, or I'll not come around any more.' 'I won't have you on my field any more. Trying to make a name for yourself at somebody else's expense!' This hurt me even worse. I bit my lip until it bled to keep from saying anything foolish. Picking up Dusya's comb which had fallen on the ground, I shoved it into her hand and walked off. That finishes it, I thought. Let them work by themselves.

"As luck would have it, that very same day the girls realized that there weren't enough bees around to pollinate the buckwheat. They went over to the Pobeda collective farm across the river to ask them to move their beehives over to our fields. The Pobeda people refused, although the chairman went there himself, and Pavlushka on his bicycle, and even Dusya too. I could see that things were in a bad way. The chairman went around cursing and Dusya was on the verge of tears. As for me, I just couldn't go to the Pobeda, otherwise Dusya'd think I was trying to get in good books with her. The next day I changed my mind, though. In the evening I took the truck and drove over to the neighbouring farm to see my uncle, Fyodor Nikitich, who had twelve beehives. I talked to him until eleven at night trying to get him to see that he'd be the gainer himself, for buckwheat honey is the sweetest there is. But uncle just couldn't make up his mind, because his wife, Pelageya Stepanovna, was dead against it. At last she went to bed and soon enough I had Fyodor Nikitich convinced. With the driver's help we loaded the hives in the truck, brought them in during the night, and by dawn had them placed in the buckwheat fields. I asked the driver not to tell anyone, least of all Dusya, that I had had anything to do with it, and went home. I was so tired that I threw myself on the bed without undressing and fell fast asleep. After a while I felt someone shaking me. Opening my eyes I saw it was broad daylight. And instead of mother there was Dusya at the bedside, looking at me as she had never done before.

" 'Lyosha,' she said, 'who brought the beehives?'

" 'I don't know,' I replied, turning over on the other side.

" 'Don't be angry, Lyosha. Pelageya Stepanovna's come.'

" 'What for?'

" 'To take the beehives back. She's furious.'

" 'Don't let her! Fyodor Nikitich is the boss. . . .'

" 'Fyodor Nikitich came with her. They're out on the field.'

" 'And what?'

" 'Well, he's loading them while she's doing the bossing.'

" 'I think it was Vasili Ivanovich, the driver, brought the hives. You'd better speak to him about it.'

" 'Vasili Ivanovich is out there too. There's nothing he can do.'

"I wanted to jump up, but just then Dusya bent over me and pressed her cool cheek against mine. Then she whispered in my ear: 'You're a good boy, Lyosha, and handsome too, but how could you... in front of everybody....' With that she ran out of the house, almost knocking mother off her feet at the door.

"I sat up, and remained sitting there for some time. At last, I thought, she's begun to appreciate my mug. My mother came in with a milk pail, but as soon as she saw me she stopped dead in her tracks. 'Whatever's happened to you, Lyosha?' she cried. 'Nothing. What's wrong?' I said. 'Take a look at yourself in the mirror!' she said. I looked and didn't recognize myself. My whole face was twisted out of shape. You see, the bees stung me during the night. One lip was swollen, and there was a great big bump like an ink blot under the eye. Of course, one look at that mug had told Dusya who brought the beehives, though she didn't say a word. A sly one, she was. I washed up and went out to the field. Fyodor Nikitich had already gone with his bees, and the girls were standing about looking helpless. But it didn't take them long to find a way out. Thought of a way to do the pollination artificially—by tying rags onto a rope and pulling it over the buckwheat blossoms. The rags do the job no worse than bees.... But I guess you've had enough of agriculture for one day...."

Alexei falls silent and begins to collect bits of egg shell into the paper. The sun is already high up and you can again see the smoke-stack of the brick kiln, as bright as a newly pared carrot, and the tracery of the power line pylon against the sky. The river is rising....

"There's a truck coming," says Alexei. "Must be Vaska from the First Five-Year Plan."

Although I can hear nothing yet, I proceed gaily to get my things together. Sure enough a truck soon comes into view. Unfortunately there are two people in the cab. I load my rods, tripod and theodolite in the back of the truck, say goodbye to Alexei, and climb in. As we drive through the spring fields and woods my thoughts dwell on the new beauty of man....

1949

Yuri Nagibin

Winter Oak

The narrow path from Uvarovka village to the school had been completely covered with snow during the night and only the barely perceptible tracery of light and shadows on its uneven surface revealed its course. The young schoolteacher stepped cautiously, ready to draw back her foot at once if the shadows proved treacherous.

It was no more than half a kilometre to the school, and the teacher had merely tied a woollen kerchief round her head and thrown her short fur coat over her shoulders. The cold was fierce, however, and fitful gusts of wind showered her with snow from head to foot. But the twenty-four-year-old teacher did not mind it. She even enjoyed the stinging sensation in her cheeks and the momentary cold touch of the wind. Averting her face from the gusts, she was amused to see the small imprints her pointed overshoes left behind, like the tracks of some forest creature.

The fresh, sunlit January morning filled her with happy thoughts. She had come here only two years ago, straight from college, and already she was considered the district's best teacher of Russian. In Uvarovka itself, in Kuzminki, in Black Gully village, in the peat settlement and at the stud farm, everywhere they knew her, and called her Anna Vasilyevna, adding the patronymic to show their respect.

The sun rose over the serrated outline of the distant woods and the long shadows on the snow grew a deeper blue, making far-away objects merge with those nearby—the top of the church belfry reached up to the porch of the village soviet, the pines across the river came up the slope of the hither bank, the wind-gauge at the school meteorological station whirled in the middle of the field, right at Anna's feet.

A man was coming across the field. What if he won't step off the path? Anna thought with mock apprehension. The path was too narrow for two

people and stepping aside meant sinking knee-deep into the snow. She knew, of course, that there was not a man in the district who would not go out of his way to let the Uvarovka school-teacher pass.

As they drew closer Anna recognized the man as Frolov, one of the workers at the stud farm.

"Good morning, Anna Vasilyevna," said Frolov and raised his fur hat over his shapely, short-cropped head.

"Now, now, put that hat on! What an idea, in this cold!"

Probably Frolov had no intention of keeping his hat off, but after the teacher's words he took his time about putting it on again. A short sheepskin coat fitted his trim, muscular body. In one hand he held a thin, snake-like whip, which he kept smacking against his high felt boots.

"How does my Lyosha behave? Up to any mischief?" he asked conversationally.

"All children are up to mischief, it's quite normal so long as they don't overdo it," replied Anna, savouring her pedagogical wisdom.

Frolov smiled.

"No fear *him* overdoing it. He's a quiet one, takes after his father."

He stepped off the path and immediately sank into the snow up to his knees. That made him look no taller than a twelve-year-old boy. Anna nodded to him graciously and hurried on.

The school, a two-storeyed brick building with wide, frost-painted windows, stood a little off the highway, behind a low fence. In the morning light its walls threw a reddish tint on the surrounding snow. Children from all over the district came to it—from nearby villages, from the stud farm, the oil workers' sanatorium and even the far-off peat settlement. Caps, kerchiefs, hats, hoods, and bonnets flocked to the school along the highway from both directions.

"Good morning, Anna Vasilyevna!"

From some the familiar greeting sounded in clear and ringing voices, from others it was muffled and barely audible, coming through thick scarves and shawls that swathed the young faces up to the eyes.

Anna's first lesson was to the twelve- and thirteen-year-olds in five-A form. She entered the classroom as the last peal of the bell was announcing the beginning of the lessons. The children rose, greeted her and sat down at their desks. But it took some time for them to quiet down. Desk tops banged, benches creaked, somebody sighed heavily, evidently unwilling to switch off the carefree morning mood.

"We shall continue to study parts of speech today."

Now they became perfectly quiet. The sounds of a lorry slowly rumbling along the slippery highway could be distinctly heard in the room.

Anna remembered how nervous she had been about this lesson last year.

She had kept repeating to herself, like a schoolgirl before an exam, the textbook definition of a noun. And how foolishly afraid she had been that they would not understand!

She smiled at those memories, adjusted a pin in her heavy knot of hair and sensing confidence coursing like blood itself through her body, she began speaking in an even, calm voice:

"A noun is a word that denotes a subject—that is, a person, thing, or quality. A subject in grammar is anything about which you can ask the question: what is it? or, who is it? For instance: Who is it?—a pupil. What is it?—a book."

"May I come in?"

A small figure in battered felt boots covered with melting snowflakes, stood in the open doorway. The round wind-reddened face glowed as if it would burst; the eyebrows were white with frost.

"Late again, Savushkin." Like most young teachers Anna liked to be strict, but now an almost plaintive note sounded in her voice.

Considering the matter settled, Savushkin quickly slid to his place. Anna saw him shove his oil-cloth school-bag into the desk and, without turning his head, ask something of the boy next to him.

Savushkin's unpunctuality annoyed Anna, it somehow spoiled the fine opening of the day for her. The geography teacher, a small dried-up old woman, very much like a night moth, had once complained to Anna about Savushkin often being late to lessons. She complained of other things too—the children's inattentiveness, their much too boisterous behaviour. "Those first morning lessons are so trying," she said. They may be, for incompetent teachers who do not know how to hold the interest of their pupils, thought Anna disdainfully and offered to change hours with the old woman. She felt a prick of conscience now: the old teacher had doubtlessly sensed the challenge in Anna's magnanimous offer.

"Is everything clear?" she asked the class.

"Yes!" chorused the children.

"Very well. Then give me some examples."

There was a short silence and then someone said haltingly:

"Cat."

"Correct," said Anna, recalling that last year, too, cat had been the first example.

After that examples poured in like a stream: window... table... house... highway....

"Correct," Anna assured them. The children were joyously excited. It amazed Anna to see such joy at the discovery of a new aspect in long-familiar words. At first the choice of examples embraced only the most everyday, tan-

Konstantin Simonov (1966)

Sergei Antonov (1966)

Yuri Kazakov (1966)

Vasili Aksyonov (1966)

gible things: cart, tractor, pail, nest.... From the back desk a fat boy called Vasya kept repeating in his thin voice, "Chicken, chicken, chicken."

But then someone said hesitantly:

"Town."

"Good," encouraged Anna.

"Street... victory... poem... play...."

"Well, that's enough," said Anna. "I can see you understand it."

The voices died down reluctantly, only fat Vasya's "chicken" still came from the back of the room. And then suddenly, as if roused from sleep, Savushkin stood up behind his desk and shouted eagerly:

"Winter oak!"

The children laughed.

"Quiet, please!" Anna brought her palm down hard on the table.

"Winter oak!" repeated Savushkin heedless of the laughter around him or of Anna's orders. There was something peculiar in his manner. The words seemed to have burst out like a confession, like some glorious secret which could not remain unshared.

Annoyed and uncomprehending, Anna asked, barely controlling her irritation:

"Why 'winter oak'? 'Oak' is enough."

"Oh, an oak is nothing. A winter oak, that's a noun for you."

"Sit down, Savushkin. That's what coming in late leads to. Oak is a noun, and what the word 'winter' in the case is we have not studied as yet. You will come to the teachers' room during the main interval."

"Now you'll catch it," whispered somebody behind Savushkin.

Savushkin sat down smiling to himself, not in the least put out by the teacher's strict tone. A difficult boy, thought Anna.

The lesson continued.

"Sit down," said Anna when Savushkin entered the teachers' room. With evident pleasure the boy sank into a soft armchair and rocked a few times on its springs.

"Will you please tell me why you are always late for school?"

"I really don't know, Anna Vasilyevna," he said with a gesture of surprise. "I leave home an hour before school."

It seemed that even in trifling matters like this truth was not so easily to be established. There were many children who lived much farther away from school yet none of them needed more than an hour to get there on time.

"You live in Kuzminki, don't you?"

"No, I live on the sanatorium premises."

"Aren't you ashamed, then, to tell me you leave home an hour before

school? Why, it's fifteen minutes from the sanatorium to the highway, and no more than half an hour's walk down the highway!"

"But I don't never go down the highway. I take a short cut through the forest," Savushkin said earnestly.

"Don't *ever* go," Anna corrected him mechanically. Why did children have to lie? she thought unhappily. Why couldn't Savushkin tell her simply, "I'm sorry, Anna Vasilyevna, I stopped to play snowballs with the kids," or something else equally straightforward. But the boy said no more and just looked at her out of his large grey eyes as if wondering what else she would want of him.

"It's a sad business, Savushkin. I'll have to talk to your parents about it."

"There's only my mother, Anna Vasilyevna," Savushkin said softly.

Anna blushed. She remembered the boy's mother, the "shower nurse," as her son called her. A withered, tired-looking woman who worked at the sanatorium's hydrotherapy section. From continuous contact with hot water her hands, limp and white, looked as if they were made of cotton. After her husband had been killed in the war she remained all alone to bring up four children as best she could. She certainly had enough worry without being bothered about her son's behaviour. But all the same they had to meet.

"I'll have to come to see your mother then," said Anna.

"Please do, Anna Vasilyevna. She'll be so glad to see you."

"I doubt that. What shift does she work on?"

"The second. She goes to work at three."

"Very well then. I finish at two. We'll go together right after lessons."

Savushkin led Anna Vasilyevna along the path that started right at the back of the school. As soon as they entered the forest and the heavy snow-laden fir branches closed behind them, they found themselves in a different, enchanted world of peace and quiet. Now and then magpies and crows flew from tree to tree shaking the spreading branches, knocking off dry pine cones and occasionally breaking off a brittle twig. But the sounds were short-lived and muffled.

Everything around was white. Only high up against the blue sky the dainty lacework of birch tops stood out as if sketched in with Indian ink.

The path followed a frozen brook, now right down along the bank, now climbing up a steep rise. Occasionally the trees fell back revealing a sunlit clearing criss-crossed with hares' tracks that looked like a watch chain pattern. There were larger tracks too, shaped like shamrock. They led away into the densest part of the woods.

"Elk's tracks," said Savushkin, following the direction of Anna's gaze. "Don't be afraid," he added, reading an unspoken question in her eyes.

"Have you ever seen one?" asked Anna.

"An elk? No. No such luck," sighed Savushkin. "I've seen elk droppings though."

"What?"

"Dung," Savushkin explained, embarrassed.

Diving under a twisted willow the path ran down to the brook again. The surface of the brook was in parts covered with a thick layer of snow, in parts its icy armour lay clear and sparkling, and there were spots where unfrozen water stood out in dark blotches like evil eyes.

"Why hasn't it frozen there?" Anna asked.

"Warm springs. Look, you can see one coming up right there."

Bending over the clear water Anna saw a thin quivering thread which rose up from the bottom of the stream and burst into tiny bubbles before reaching the surface. It looked like a lily of the valley with a fragile stem and tiny white flowers.

"Plenty of these springs here," Savushkin explained eagerly, "that's why the brook never freezes right through."

They came to another unfrozen stretch, with pitch-black but transparent water.

Anna threw a handful of snow into it. The snow did not melt, but grew bulkier at once and sank, spreading out in the water like some jellied greenish weeds. This pleased her so much that she started knocking the snow into the water, trying to push off bigger lumps which took on especially fancy shapes. Carried away by the game she did not notice Savushkin go on ahead. He perched up on a low tree branch hanging right over the brook and sat there waiting for her. A thin layer of ice covered the surface of the brook there and fleeting light shadows kept moving over it.

"Look how thin the ice is, you can see the water flowing underneath," said Anna, coming up to the boy.

"Oh, no, Anna Vasilyevna, it's the branch I'm sitting on. It sways and the shadows it throws over the ice sway with it."

Anna blushed. It looked as if she had better hold her tongue here, in the woods.

Savushkin trod on ahead, bending slightly and throwing keen glances around. Anna followed behind.

The winding path led them on and on. There seemed to be no end to all those trees and huge snowdrifts, to that enchanted silence and sun-speckled twilight.

Suddenly a bluish-white patch gleamed ahead. The trees grew sparser. The path rounded a nut bush and a vast clearing flooded with sunlight opened up before their eyes. The trees stepped humbly aside and in the middle of the clear-

ing in sparkling white garment stood an old oak, tall and majestic like a cathedral. Its branches spread far out over the clearing and snow nestling in the cracks of the bark made its gigantic trunk look as if inlaid with silver. It had not shed its dried foliage and stood now covered to the very top with snow-capped leaves.

"The winter oak!" gasped Anna. She reverently approached the tree and stopped under its glittering branches.

Unaware of the tumult in his teacher's heart, Savushkin got busy with something at the foot of the trunk, treating the magnificent tree with the familiarity of a long-standing friendship.

"Come here, Anna Vasilyevna," he called. "Look!"

He pushed aside a large lump of snow with earth and old grass clinging to its under side. A little ball plastered with decayed leaves lay in the hollow below. The skeleton-like remnants of the leaves were pierced with sharply pointed needles.

"A hedgehog!" cried Anna.

"See how well he hid himself?" And Savushkin carefully restored the protective covering of earth and snow over the immobile hedgehog. Then he dug at another spot and revealed a tiny cave with icicles hanging at its opening. It was occupied by a brown frog, its tightly-stretched skin shiny as if it were lacquered.

Savushkin touched the frog. It made no movement.

"Isn't he a sly one?" laughed Savushkin. "Shamming dead. But just watch him leap as soon as the sun warms him up a bit."

He guided Anna on through this world he knew so well. There were numerous other tenants in and around the oak: bugs, lizards, insects. Some hid among the roots, others in the deep cracks of the bark. Thin, withered, apparently lifeless, they hibernated there all through the winter. The powerful tree accumulated in itself a store of vital warmth, and those poor creatures could not wish for a better shelter. Fascinated, Anna watched this hidden forest life, so little known to her.

"Oh, mother'll be at work by now!" came Savushkin's anxious voice.

Anna looked at her watch. A quarter past three. She felt trapped. Ashamed for her human failings and inwardly begging forgiveness of the oak she said:

"Well, Savushkin, this only proves that a short cut is not always the best way to choose. You'll have to go along the highroad from now on."

Savushkin looked down and did not reply.

Heavens! thought Anna, isn't this the clearest proof of my incompetence!

The morning lesson flashed in her mind. How dull and lifeless were her explanations, how utterly devoid of feeling. And she was teaching the children

their native tongue, so beautiful, so rich in shades, colour and meaning! An experienced pedagogue, indeed! She'd taken no more than a few faltering steps along the path that might well require a whole lifetime to cover. And how is one not to swerve aside and follow the correct course? Yet the joy with which her pupils shouted familiar words, a joy she had not fully appreciated or shared, told her now that she had not strayed too hopelessly after all.

"Thank you, Savushkin, for the lovely walk," she said. "I didn't mean what I've just told you. Of course, you can take the forest path to school."

"Thank *you*, Anna Vasilyevna," Savushkin blushed with pleasure. He wanted to promise his teacher then and there that he would never be late again, but checked himself, for fear of failing to keep his word. He only raised his collar and, pulling down his hat, said:

"I'll see you back to school."

"No, don't. I'll find the way myself now."

He looked at her in some doubt, then picked up a long stick, broke off its thinner end and offered it to Anna.

"Take this," he said, "if an elk comes your way, just hit him on the back and he'll run for all he's worth. Though better not hit him, just raise the stick at him. He might take offence, you know, and leave the woods for good."

"Don't worry, I shan't hit him," she promised.

She took a few steps back, then stopped and turned to take one last look at the winter oak, tinged with pink by the setting sun. A small dark figure stood at the foot of the trunk. Savushkin did not go home. He stayed to guard his teacher's way if even from a distance.

And suddenly Anna knew that the most wonderful being in that forest was not the winter oak but this small boy in battered felt boots and patched clothes, the son of a "shower nurse" and a soldier killed in the war.

She waved her hand to him and went on her way.

1955

Vladimir Bogomolov

First Love

We lay very close together, and the ground did not feel cold, or hard, or damp.

We had been lovers for going on five months now, ever since she had come to our regiment. I was nineteen, she was eighteen. We met secretly, company commander and nurse's aid. No one knew that we were in love; no one knew that there were three of us now.

"I can tell it's a boy," she whispered for the tenth time. She was so eager to please me. "And he'll look just like you."

"If worse comes to worse, I'll settle for a girl, and she can look like you," I whispered back, but my thoughts were far away.

About five hundred metres up front my men lay asleep in shelters and in open trenches. Still farther up ahead, past the forward outposts, which infrequent German flares lighted up from time to time, was Height 162, now shrouded in darkness. At dawn my company was to do what another company had tried to do a week ago—capture that height. So far no one in the battalion knew this except the five officers our regimental commander had summoned to the headquarters dug-out earlier in the evening. After reading the order he turned to me.

"Remember," he said, "as soon as the 'Katyushas' have fired and the green flares go up, you charge. Your neighbours will follow too, but you are to capture the height!"

We lay in each other's arms, and as I kissed her I could not help thinking of the coming battle. But I was even more concerned about what would happen to her, and I racked my brain for a solution.

"I've got to sleep for two now," she was whispering in the lilting tones of her native North. "You know, sometimes at night I think I'll wake up in the morning and find that this is all over... the trenches, the blood, the death.... It's been more than two years already. It can't go on forever, can it? Imagine the sun rising in the morning and no war, no war at all...."

"I'm going to the major this minute!" I gently removed my arm from beneath her head and got up. "I'll tell him the whole story. You must be sent home. At once!"

"Have you lost your mind?" She sat up, seized hold of my hand and pulled me to her. "What a silly you are! Why, the major will skin you alive!"

And, imitating the regimental commander's low, gruff voice, she drawled in a strained whisper: "Sexual intercourse with subordinates does not promote a unit's fighting efficiency and undermines an officer's authority. If I find any officer involved in anything of the sort I'll send him packing, whatever his rank! And with a testimonial that will make the guard-house too good for him! Win the war, and then you can love whomever you wish as much as you wish. For the present... I forbid it!"

Pleased with herself, she lay back and laughed soundlessly, so no one should hear us. Yes, I knew what I was in for. The major was very strait-laced and convinced that war was no place for women and love.

"I'm going to see him anyway."

"Shh." She nuzzled her cheek against mine. After a brief pause she sighed and whispered: "I'll take care of it myself. I've thought it all out. You won't be the father."

"I won't be the father?!" I felt myself growing hot. "What do you mean?"

"How silly you are!" she laughed merrily. "No, heaven forbid, he shouldn't be like you!... I'll take care of everything. In the birth certificate and all that you'll be the father, but right now I'll tell the major a different story."

She was always so guileless, so naively truthful, that this show of cunning amazed me.

"Who will you say it is?"

"One of the dead men. Baikov, for instance."

"No, leave the dead alone."

"All right, Kindyaev then."

Sergeant Kindyaev, a handsome, dissolute young fellow who drank too much, had been caught stealing recently and sent away.

Touched, I opened up my greatcoat and pulled her to me.

"Easy there!" She pushed her fists against my chest in fright. "You'll crush us!" (She took a naive pleasure in speaking of herself in the plural.) "My silly darling. Consider yourself lucky you met me. With me, you can't go wrong."

She laughed gaily, but I didn't feel like laughing at all.

"Listen, you've got to go to the major right away," I said.

"In the middle of the night?!"

"I'll take you there. You can explain and tell him you can't stand it here any longer."

"But that's not true!"

"Please, for my sake! How can you go on? You must leave. Don't you see... suppose... in tomorrow's battle?"

"Tomorrow's battle?" She was alert at once. "Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes."

For a while she lay quiet, but I could tell by her breathing, her dear, familiar breathing, that she was upset.

"Well... one doesn't run away from battle," she said finally. "Besides, I couldn't even if I wanted to. It'll take some time before the medical commission examines me and the order comes through the division.... I'll talk to the major tomorrow. All right?"

I didn't say anything. I couldn't think of anything to say.

"Do you think I want to talk to him?" she whispered suddenly. "I'd rather die. All the time he's said to me: 'Now, keep a smart head on your shoulders!' And what have I gone and done...."

She gulped and turned away, burying her face in the sleeve of her coat, and began to shake with noiseless sobs. I held her close and kissed her small mouth, her forehead, her eyes, salty with tears.

"Let me go," she whispered, pushing me away. "Will you see me back?"

We descended into the dark, damp ravine where the battalion aid station was situated. I held her by the waist which had already grown a bit plumper. I held her with both hands, watching over every step she took so she shouldn't slip or fall. As if I could protect her from the war, from the battle at dawn, where she would have to be running across the field, tripping and falling as she dragged the wounded men to safety!

Fifteen years have gone by, but I remember it all as if it had been yesterday. The "Katyushas" opened up at dawn, the mortars and heavy machine-guns barked furiously, green flares soared into the air....

When the sun rose I had broken through to that height with the remainder of my company. Half an hour later, in a solidly-made German trench, the regimental commander and someone else congratulated me, embraced me, shook my hand. I stood there like a piece of wood, feeling nothing, hearing nothing.

The sun... if I could send it back below the horizon! If I could recall the dawn!... Only two hours ago there were three of us....

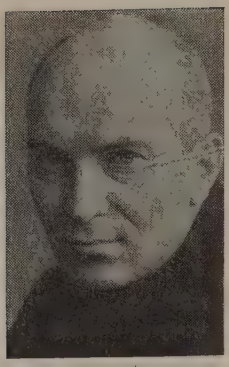
But the sun rose slowly, inexorably. I stood on the hilltop, and she... she remained behind, over there, where I could see soldiers from the burial squad moving about.

And no one, no one knew what she had meant to me and that there had been three of us....

1959

Yuri Kazakov

Arcturus—the Hunting Dog



To the memory of Mikhail Prishvin.

The story of how he came to this town is not known. He arrived in the spring from nobody knows where and chose to remain here. He did not disturb anybody, did not intrude on anybody, did not attach himself to anybody. He was a free spirit.

Some said he was cast off by a band of Gypsies who passed through the town. A strange tribe, Gypsies! Early in the spring they set out on their roaming; some board trains, others steamers or rafts, still others jog along the roads in carts, glowering at the automobiles that spin past. Despite the southern blood in their veins, they wander to the most remote northerly settlements. A band of Gypsies will suddenly pitch camp at the edge of a town and for the next few days these dark handsome people with rings in their ears and bright clothes on their backs will shuffle about the market place, feeling the wares and bickering over prices, or will go from house to house begging, reading palms, quarrelling and laughing loudly. They will disappear from the town as suddenly as they appeared, never to return. Other Gypsies may come, but not these. The world is wide and they are of no mind to return to a place once visited.

Some people, then, were convinced that he was cast off by the Gypsies in the spring.

Others said he was carried here on an ice-floe when the river was in spate. There he stood, black against the bluish-white ice mesh, the only static spot in all this motion. Overhead flew the wild swans crying shrilly: "Clink-clank!"

It is with a feeling of suppressed excitement that people always await the return of the swans. And when at last they come, when they are seen at dawn to rise above the flood with their wondrous cry "clink-clank!"—people follow

them with their eyes, the blood surges in their veins, and they know that spring has come at last.

The rustling ice moved down the river, cracking at times with a dull detonation, the swans cried overhead, and he stood on the floe, his tail between his legs, alert, uncertain, sniffing the air, listening to all that was happening about him. When the floe was borne to the river bank, he grew tence with excitement, made a clumsy leap, fell into the water but quickly scrambled out, shook himself and vanished among the piles of logs.

Whichever version is true, the fact is that he put in an appearance in the spring, when the days were filled with the shimmer of sunlight, the music of freshets and the smell of moist bark, and that he remained to live in the town.

One can only guess as to his history up to that point. No doubt he was born on a heap of straw under a porch. His mother, a pure-blooded Kostroma hunting-dog, long and low, with a swollen belly, crawled under the porch when her time came, so that she might fulfil her great mission in secret. When her master called she did not answer, nor did she eat anything, so withdrawn into herself was she, sensing that something of utmost importance was about to happen, something of more importance than the hunt, of more importance than people, her masters and her gods.

He was born blind, like all puppies, was instantly licked clean by his mother's tongue and drawn close to her warm belly, still taut with the act of birth. While he lay there learning to breathe, brothers and sisters were placed beside him one after another. They wriggled, grunted, and made their first attempts to whine—fuzzy little puppies like him, with bald bellies and tiny trembling tails. Soon it was all over. Each found a nipple and settled down and there was nothing to be heard but their sniffing and sucking and their mother's heavy breathing. That was how life began for them.

In time all of the puppies opened their eyes, and to their great delight they discovered there was another world even greater than the one they had known so far. He, too, opened his eyes, but he was not destined to see the light of day. He was blind. A thick white film covered his eyeballs. A hard and bitter lot lay before him, a blind dog. It would have been even worse could he have comprehended his blindness. But he did not know he was blind, he was not given to know it. He accepted life as it had been granted to him.

By chance he was not drowned or done away with, though this would have been an act of mercy towards a helpless creature whom nobody wanted. He remained alive to undergo trials so great, that they hardened him, body and soul, before his time.

He had no master to give him food and shelter and care for him as for a friend. He became a homeless tramp—morose, awkward, distrustful. As soon as he was weaned, his mother lost interest in him, as she did in his brothers

and sisters. He learned to howl like a wolf—a prolonged, desolate, lonely howl. He was dirty, often fell ill, rummaged in the refuse outside of chop-houses for his food, and, like other homeless hungry dogs, was kicked and had slops thrown at him.

He could not run fast. Indeed, he had little need of the strength in his good legs, so fearful was he of running into something hard and sharp. Unable to see his enemy when he fought (and he fought often) he bit and threw himself at the sound of their breathing, at their growling and snapping, at the scratching of their paws on the ground, but often he bit at the air and threw himself into space.

Who can say what name his mother gave him when he was born, for every mother, even though she be a dog, calls her child by name? Among men he had no name. And who can say whether he would have stayed to live in this town or have gone off to die in a gully offering up in his last moments a prayer to the dog-god? But a man entered his life and changed the whole course of it.

2

That summer I lived in a little northern town. The town stood on the bank of a river. White steamers, mud-coloured barges, long rafts, broad-faced tugs with tar-smeared flanks plied up and down the river. The piers on the bank smelt of hemp, bast, mould and fish. Nobody ever disembarked at this town with the exception of local farmers on market day and drab clerks in grey raincoats, who were sent from the district centre on errands to the saw mills.

The low hills encircling the town were covered with mighty virgin forest whose trees were felled and floated down from the upper reaches of the river. There were great glades in the forests and secluded lakes with gigantic old pines growing on their shores. The pines murmured incessantly. When chill moist winds drove clouds down from the Arctic Ocean, their murmur would be turned into an ominous roar accompanied by the thumping of pine cones, which they hurled down to the ground.

I rented a room at the top of an old house standing at the edge of town. The owner was a doctor, a quiet, busy man. Once he had had a large family, but his two sons were killed in the war, his wife died, and his daughter went to live in Moscow. Now he lived alone and doctored children. He had one weakness: he liked to sing. He would sing arias from operas in a thin falsetto, lingering sentimentally on the top notes. There were three rooms on the ground floor but he rarely used them, preferring to eat and sleep on the veranda. The rooms were dark and smelt of dust, medicine, and old wallpaper.

The window of my room looked out upon a neglected garden overgrown with black currant and raspberry bushes, with burdock and nettles growing along

the fence. Every morning there was a riot of sparrows outside the window, the blackbirds came in flocks to peck at the currants and the doctor did not drive them away or make any attempt to gather the berries. Sometimes the neighbours' cock and hens perched upon our fence. The cock would stretch out his neck and crow so fiercely that his very tail trembled, then turn a greedy eye upon the garden. Unable to resist, he would fly down followed by his train of hens, and they would rummage hastily under the currant bushes. Cats, too, came to the garden, where they would hide in the weeds and watched the sparrows.

After living in the town for about two weeks, I still was not used to its quiet streets lined by wooden pavements with grass sprouting in the cracks between the planks, to the creaking of doorsteps and the occasional hooting of steamers in the night.

It was an unusual town. The white nights lingered most of the summer. The streets and river bank were quiet and pensive. At night one could hear a rhythmic tapping passing along the line of houses: occasional workmen returning from the night shifts. And all through the night one could hear the footfalls and laughter of lovers. It was as if the walls of the houses were animate and strained their ears to follow the footsteps of the town's inhabitants.

At night our garden gave off the fragrance of currants and dew, while from the veranda came the doctor's soft snoring. Down on the river a motor boat chugged and muttered nasaly, "Doo... doo-doo....."

One day a new occupant came to our house. This is how it happened.

On returning from work one day, the doctor saw a blind dog with a bit of string round his neck squeezed between the logs of a wood pile and trembling all over. The doctor had seen this dog several times before. This time he stopped, inspected him thoroughly, whistled to him, picked up the string and dragged him home.

Once home, he washed the dog with soap and warm water and fed him. By force of habit the dog huddled nervously over his food and started from time to time. He ate greedily, hastily, chokingly. His brow and ears were covered with white scars.

"Now you can beat it," said the doctor when the dog had eaten his fill, and he pushed him off the veranda.

The dog began trembling and refused to go.

"H'm," said the doctor, and sat down in his rocking-chair. Evening came, the sky darkened but the light did not go out completely. Only the brightest stars could be seen. The dog, which was a hunter, stretched himself out on the veranda and drowsed off. He was so skinny that his ribs could be counted, the vertebrae stood out sharply on his back, and his shoulder-blades fairly stuck out. Every once in a while he would open his blank eyes, prick up his ears

and turn his head from side to side, sniffing the air. Then he would drop his head on his paws again and shut his eyes.

The doctor studied him in perplexity, fidgeted in his chair and tried to think of a name for him. What should he call him? Or hadn't he better get rid of him before it was too late? What use had he for a dog? The doctor looked up pensively. His eye was caught by the blue light of a big star twinkling low on the horizon.

"Arcturus," he murmured to himself.

The dog moved his ears and opened his eyes.

"Arcturus," repeated the doctor, his heart skipping a beat.

The dog lifted his head and waved his tail uncertainly.

"Arcturus! Come here, Arcturus!" called the doctor peremptorily, feeling himself happily the dog's master.

The dog got up and gingerly poked his nose between his master's legs. The doctor laughed and put a hand on his head.

In this way the name, never pronounced, which the dog's mother had given her blind son, was supplanted by a new name given him by a human being.

There are all sorts of dogs just as there are all sorts of people. There are beggarly dogs that go about asking for alms, there are stern freedom-loving rovers, there are foolish rapturous braggarts. There are contemptible supplicants, ready to crawl on their bellies to the first person who whistles; slavishly ingratiating, wriggling and wagging their tails, they yelp and flee in panic if you so much as lift a threatening hand, to say nothing of striking them.

I have seen dogs who were devoted, submissive, capricious, proud, stoical, fawning, indifferent, cunning and worthless. Arcturus resembled none of them. His feeling for his master was unique and lofty. He loved him passionately and poetically—loved him, perhaps, more than life itself. But he was chaste, he did not allow himself to indulge his feelings.

His master had his bad moments. Sometimes he seemed indifferent, often he gave off an irritating odour of eau de cologne. But usually he was benevolent, and then Arcturus melted with love, his pelt became fluffy and his body electric. He yearned to leap and run, barking joyously. But he restrained himself. His ears and tail relaxed, his body grew soft and still, the only mark of his agitation was the quick beating of his heart. What was his ecstacy when his master poked him in the ribs, tickled him, stroked him, all this accompanied by bursts of low laughter! His master's voice on such occasions was now languid, now sharp, now bubbling, now whispering; it was like the gurgling of water and the rustling of leaves, but on the whole it was like nothing but itself. Every sound evoked flashes of light and vague odours in the dog's mind, as a drop of water agitates the surface of a pool, and it seemed to Arcturus that he had ex-

perienced all this before, but so long ago he could not recall when or where. No doubt it was the recollection of the happiness he had known as a tiny blind puppy at his mother's belly.

3

A little later I had an opportunity to become better acquainted with Arcturus and I learned many curious things about him.

It seems to me now that he was aware of his affliction. By this time he seemed to be a full-grown dog with sturdy legs, black hair on his back and a sandy tinge to his belly and muzzle. He was big and strong for his age, yet his movements were tense and uncertain. His face and his whole body expressed perplexed inquiry. He knew only too well that other creatures were freer and more sure of themselves than he. They ran swiftly and confidently, they walked lightly and firmly without stumbling and running into things. Their steps did not sound like his. He always advanced slowly, cautiously and somewhat lopsidedly. He found countless objects barring his way. He could hear hens, pigeons, dogs and sparrows, cats and people and many other creatures running bravely up and down steps, jumping over ditches, turning into lanes, flying off, disappearing in places he had no knowledge of. It was his fate to be forever tense and uncertain. I never saw him walking or running calmly, quickly, freely unless he was in the open road, a meadow, or on the veranda of our house. But if he seemed to understand and somehow identify himself with people and animals, he was completely confounded and frightened by automobiles, tractors, motorcycles and bicycles. At first boats and steamers roused his curiosity, but when he realized he could never plumb their mystery he stopped paying them any attention. For the same reason he never showed interest in aeroplanes.

Though he could not see, no other dog had a sense of smell to compare with his. Gradually he learned all the smells of the town and was guided by them. Never once did he fail to find his way home. Every object had its own smell. There was an infinite number of them and they all sounded, all loudly proclaimed themselves. Each smelt in its own way—this one was sweet, that one unpleasant, a third said nothing at all to him. Arcturus had but to lift his head and sniff in the direction from which the wind was blowing to become as fully aware of rubbish heaps and ash dumps, of houses stone and wooden, of sheds and fences, people, horses and birds, as if he saw them.

Down by the river behind some warehouses there was a big grey boulder half buried in the ground that Arcturus was particularly fond of sniffing. The smell of the boulder itself was of little interest to him, but the most rare and surprising smells lurked in its cracks and pores. They would linger there for a long time—sometimes for weeks on end—indeed until a strong wind dis-

lodged them. Every time Arcturus passed this rock he would stop and examine it. It excited him immensely, he would snort at it, and walk away, only to come back to discover some overlooked detail.

Besides he heard sounds too slight for our ears to detect. At night he would wake up, open his eyes, prick up his ears and listen. He heard every rustle for miles around. He heard the humming of mosquitoes and the buzzing of wasps up in the attic. He heard a mouse scuttling in the garden and a cat stealing along the roof of the shed. For him the house was not the silent lifeless place it seemed to us. The house lived its own life: it creaked, rustled, crackled and shuddered faintly in the cold. The dew trickled down the rainpipe and gathered at the bottom, dripping slowly upon the flat stone beneath. From the river came the muted lapping of water. There was a stirring of logs floating in the lagoon near the saw-mill. The locks of a rowboat creaked softly as somebody crossed the river. In a distant village cocks were crowing in the barn-yards. This was a life unseen and unheard by us but well known to and understood by him.

He had another peculiarity: he never whimpered or whined to get sympathy, however cruel life treated him.

One day I was walking along the road leading out of town. Night was falling. It was warm and quiet as it so often is here on fine summer evenings. Far down the road I saw a cloud of dust, heard cattle mooing, whips snapping and men shouting in high voices. The herd was being driven back from pasture.

Suddenly I saw a dog running to meet the herd as if with a definite purpose in mind. I immediately recognized him as Arcturus by the tenseness and uncertainty of his gait. Never before had I seen him beyond the town limits. Where could he be going? I wondered, and at the same time noticed unusual agitation among the approaching cattle.

Cows do not like dogs. They are born with an instinctive fear and hatred of wolves and dogs. On seeing this dark dog running towards them, the cows at the head of the herd came to a halt. Instantly a powerful pale-yellow bull with a ring in his nose pushed to the fore. He planted his hooves wide apart, lowered his head and swept the ground with his horns as he roared and rolled his bloodshot eyes.

"Grisha!" cried a voice from behind. "Quick! Come up front! The cows have halted!"

The unsuspecting Arcturus ran on in his awkward way until he had almost reached the herd. Frightened, I called to him. He stopped short, squatted and turned his head towards me. At the same moment the bull snorted, threw himself at the dog and caught him on his horns. His black silhouette flashed against the sunset sky and dropped into the very thick of the

herd. The fall had the effect of a bursting bomb. The cows fled in every direction, snorting and butting one another. The cattle in the rear pressed on the cattle in front, everything churned and turned and the dust rose in a mighty column. With a painful contraction of my heart I waited to hear the death cry, but not a sound was forthcoming.

The herdsmen ran forward, swung their lashes, shouted in many voices, cleared the road, and I caught sight of Arcturus. There he lay in the dust, looking like a pile of dust himself, or a discarded rag. At length he stirred and dragged himself to one side of the road. The elder herdsman noticed him.

"You damn dog!" he yelled viciously, and with an oath, brought his lash down on Arcturus. The dog did not howl, he only shuddered, turned his blind eyes on the herdsman, crawled over to a ditch, stumbled and fell.

The bull stood blocking the road, pawing the ground and roaring. The herdsman brought his lash down on him as well, instantly pacifying him. The cows, too, were pacified and went on their way, raising milk-scented dust and leaving their droppings behind.

I went over to Arcturus. He was breathing heavily, with lolling tongue, his ribs shuttling under his dirt-splashed hide. There were moist stripes on his flanks. An injured hind leg was trembling violently. I laid a hand on his head and spoke to him but he did not respond. His whole being expressed pain, perplexity, a sense of injury. He could not understand why he should have been beaten and trampled upon. In such circumstances dogs usually whine. Arcturus did not.

4

And still Arcturus would no doubt have gone on being a house dog and become fat and lazy in time if a chance circumstance had not conferred lofty and heroic meaning upon his succeeding life.

This is how it came about. One morning I went to the woods to see the last, the parting flash of summer glory, which I knew would be swiftly followed by autumn's decline. Arcturus followed me. I tried to send him home several times, but he would only sit down and wait a little, then run and catch me up. I soon had had enough of his unaccountable doggedness and paid no more attention to him.

Arcturus was overwhelmed by his first experience of the woods. Everything in town was familiar to him: the wooden pavements, the wide streets, the planks along the river bank, the foot-worn paths. Here he found unfamiliar objects on every hand: high, now brittle grass, prickly bushes, rotting stumps, fallen trees, resilient young firs, and a noisy carpet of dried leaves. He was touched, pricked, knocked from all sides, as if everything conspired to drive him out of the woods. And oh, the smells, the smells! How many, how new

and frightening, some strong, some barely perceptible! And he had yet to learn the meaning of them! After running into all these smelling, rustling, crackling, prickling objects, Arcturus came to cough and quiver and huddle against my legs. He was frightened and confused.

"You poor dog!" I said to him softly. "You don't even know that there is such a thing as bright sunshine. You don't know how green the trees and bushes are in the morning and how brightly the dew sparkles on the grass; you don't know there are flowers all around—white and yellow and blue and red—and that the hips and rowan berries are glowing softly among the hoary spruces and the yellowing leaves. If you once saw the moon and stars at night you would surely bark for joy. How are you to know that horses and dogs and cats are all different in colour, that fences are sometimes brown, sometimes green, sometimes grey, the windows of houses flash in the sunset light and the river is turned into a sea of flame? If you were a normal healthy hound your master would take you hunting. Then in the early morning you would hear the hunting horn and men shouting wildly, as they never shout in ordinary life. And you would chase the game, barking frenziedly, beyond yourself with excitement, and this hot pursuit of the scent would be the service you rendered your master, the huntsman, and there would be nothing in your life more glorious. Ah, Arcturus, you poor dog!"

In this way, talking quietly to calm his fears, I led him deeper into the woods. Arcturus gradually became accustomed to his new surroundings and showed more pluck in sniffing at the bushes and stumps. How much that was new and extraordinary he discovered, and what raptures he went into! Absorbed in his new and important business he no longer came to seek assurance at my legs. Only now and then he would stop and turn his blind white eyes in my direction and listen, as if to make sure I was following him and approved of what he was doing. Then he would be off again, circling through the woods.

Soon we came to a clearing where there was nothing but shrubs and low trees. Arcturus seemed deeply agitated. He raced from one bush to another, biting at the grass, stumbling over the hummocks. He breathed hoarsely and rushed ahead, paying no attention either to me or the scratching of sharp twigs and boughs. Suddenly, his patience exhausted, he squeezed his eyes shut and plunged into a clump of bushes, from which came the sound of scuffling and panting. He's on the scent of something, I thought to myself, and stopped to see what would happen next.

"Woof!" came loudly but uncertainly from the bushes. "Woof, woof!"

"Arcturus!" I called anxiously.

But just then something happened that caused Arcturus to yelp and howl and throw himself noisily into the very heart of the underbrush. His howling turned into boisterous barking and by the shaking of the upper branches of the

bushes I could see that he was rushing ahead, heedless of possible danger. I called his name loudly and set out in pursuit. My cries seemed only to whet his appetite. Panting, stumbling, extricating myself with difficulty from entangling roots and grasses, I crossed one clearing, another, descended into a hollow, and only when I came out on a wide open stretch did I catch sight of Arcturus. He rolled out of some bushes and set out in my direction. I scarcely recognized him. He ran with odd little leaps, not like other dogs, but he was reckless and unremitting in the chase, barking incessantly in a high thin voice that broke as puppies' voices do.

"Arcturus!" I called.

The call arrested him and I managed to overtake and seize him by the collar. He struggled, growled, almost bit me, his eyes were bloodshot and I had all I could do to calm him. He had been badly buffetted and lacerated and now walked with one ear drooping to the ground. Apparently he had taken several severe blows, but so excited was he, so completely possessed by his passion, that he was oblivious of his injuries.

5

This experience was a turning-point in Arcturus' life. From then on he would go off to the woods in the morning, follow the chase all day and return only in the evening or perhaps the following day, always in a state of complete exhaustion, covered with scratches, his eyes badly enflamed. During this period he grew quickly, his chest expanded, his voice strengthened, his legs became as hard and powerful as steel springs.

To this day I cannot understand how he survived those solo huntings. Surely he must have sensed that something was lacking; surely he missed the support and encouragement of a human being, so essential to every hunting dog.

I never saw him coming back sated. The running of this blind clumsy hound was retarded and uncertain. The woods were his silent enemy; the woods clouted him, slapped him in the face, in the eyes, tripped him up, brought him to a standstill. Of course he could never catch his enemy and sink his teeth into him. He had nothing but the scent, the wild, exciting, enticing, irresistibly alluring and hostile scent—and this single call, among thousands of others, drew him on and on.

How did he ever find the way home on coming to his senses after his frenzied chase, his furious obsession? What great instinct, what extraordinary sense of space and topography enabled him—weak, exhausted, lacerated, hoarse, his ears teased by the rustle of grass, his nostrils by the scents rising from damp gullies in the depth of the woods—to find unfailingly the path leading home?

Every hound is in need of its master's approbation. A dog forgets everything in the heat of the chase, but even in the moment of greatest excitement

it knows that its master shares its excitement and is following in its steps and is ready, when the moment comes, to discharge the shot that will settle everything. During the chase the master's voice eggs the dog on and heightens its frenzy, while the master himself plunges into bushes, and shouts hoarsely in his effort to help the dog find the scent. And when all is over the master throws the dog a hare's paw and gazes at it with happy intoxication as he pulls its ears and cries ecstatically: "Good ol' boy! Good ol' boy!"

Arcturus was alone in this passion and felt his aloneness. His love for his master struggled with his passion for hunting. On several occasions I watched Arcturus, early in the morning, crawl out from under the veranda where he chose to sleep and, after running about the yard a bit, sit down under the doctor's window and wait for him to get up. Formerly this had been his usual morning ritual and if the doctor woke up in a good mood and came to the window to call "Arcturus!" the dog was thrown into raptures. He came solemnly up to the window, threw back his head with twitching throat muscles, and stood shifting from one leg to another. Then he went inside and I heard the sound of scuffling, the doctor singing, the dog's pit-patting about the room.

Now, too, he waited for the doctor to wake up in the morning, but some other consideration seemed to distress him. He would shudder nervously, shake himself, scratch himself, look up at the window, get up, sit down again, whine softly. Then he would run in expanding circles in front of the veranda, resume his seat under the window, indulge in short barks of impatience, prick up his ears and listen intently, inclining his head now to one side, now to the other. At last he would get up, stretch nervously, yawn, go over to the fence, pause, then resolutely climb through a hole in it. A little later I would catch sight of him far out in the fields, cantering along in his tense and uncertain way. He was headed for the woods.

6

One day I was walking with the gun in my hands along the high shore of a narrow lake. The ducks were fat that year and there were a great many of them, so that hunting was easy and a joy.

Finding an inviting stump, I sat down to rest; presently the wind fell and a moment of utter stillness set in. In that moment I heard strange sounds coming from the distance. It was as if someone were striking a silver bell at regular intervals, and this mellow chiming, winding through the firs, swelling in the pine groves, filled the whole woods and bestowed on all things an air of fine solemnity. Little by little the sounds grew more distinct, and by listening intently I discovered they were a dog's barking. It came from the depths of a pine wood on the other side of the lake—a faint, clear and distant barking that would fade away only to revive, this time louder and nearer.

I sat on the stump turning my head this way and that, gazing at the yellow birches, now transparent, and at the hoary moss strewn with flaming aspen leaves, and as I listened to the silvery barking it seemed to me that the squirrels, too, were listening with bated breath, and so were the grouse perched on the dry shore, and so were the birches, and the solid green firs, and the lake down below, and that the exquisitely wrought cobwebs were made to tremble by the sound. Soon I detected something familiar in that wonderfully musical barking and I knew without doubt it was Arcturus following a scent.

So this was how I was to hear his hunting voice! The faint silver sounds rebounded from the trunks of the pines, giving the impression that several dogs were barking at once. Once the chiming broke off: Arcturus must have hurt himself. The silence lasted for long minutes—the woods gone empty and lifeless. In my mind's eye I saw Arcturus limping round in circles, blinking his blind eyes with nothing to guide him but his nose. Or perhaps he had crashed into the trunk of a tree and was lying bleeding and broken, unable to struggle to his feet.

But soon the hunt was renewed with greater vigour and much closer to the lake. The lake was so situated that all paths led down to it; not a single one passed it by. I had seen many interesting things on the shores of that lake. Now too I sat and waited. Soon a fox ran out into a small clearing, russet with sorrel, on the opposite side of the lake. It was a dirty-grey fox with a ragged brush. For an instant it stopped with a front paw lifted and ears standing up, listening to the approaching barking. Then, crossing the clearing unhurriedly, it went to the edge of the woods, dipped into a gully and was lost in the underbrush. The next moment Arcturus came out into the clearing. He was slightly to one side of the fox's trail, barking incessantly and, as always, running with high and awkward leaps. He plunged into the gully in the wake of the fox, pursued it through the underbrush, let out a yelp and a wail, grew silent as he struggled through a difficult passage, resumed his barking when he was out, each sound as clear and rhythmic as the striking of a silver bell.

As in an odd sort of theatre, a dog and a wild beast passed before my eyes in eternal enmity and vanished, leaving me alone with the silence and the dog's distant barking.

7

Rumours about the extraordinary hunting dog soon spread throughout the town and its environs. He was seen on the banks of the distant Losva River, in the fields beyond the wooded hills, on the most remote roads running through the woods. He was talked about in villages, on the piers at the ferry crossing. Raftsmen and timbermen argued about him over their mugs of beer.

Local huntsmen began to come to our house. Few of them believed the rumours, they knew only too well the value of hunters' stories. They would examine Arcturus, discuss his ears and paws, his hocks and pasterns and tenacity. They spoke of his defects and tried to get the doctor to sell him. They longed to feel Arcturus' muscles, examine his legs and chest, but Arcturus sat at the doctor's feet looking so grim and unapproachable that none dared touch him. The doctor, red-faced and angry, repeated over and over again that the dog was not for sale and it was high time to have this understood. The men would go away in a huff, only to have others come in their place.

One day when Arcturus, who had returned home on the previous evening sadly done in, was sleeping under the veranda, an old man came into the yard. His left eye was swollen shut, his Tatar beard protruded at a sharp angle, he was wearing a disreputable cap on his head and worn hunting boots on his feet. On seeing me he blinked, snatched off his cap, scratched his poll and fixed his eyes on the sky.

"The weather these days... the weather..." he drawled, ending in a smacking of his lips. I guessed what he wanted and said:

"Is it the hound you've come to see?"

"That would be it," he replied with animation, putting his cap back on his head. "How, now, is a person to account for such a thing, for instance, that a doctor should keep a hunting hound, and me needing one so bad. Soon the season opens. Not that I've got no dog, but he's a poor creature, my dog is, can't keep to the scent and has no more voice nor a cat, while that dog—to think of it! blind and all, and what a chase he gives! A dog fit for a tsar!"

He heaved a sigh, blew his nose, and went into the house, but in five minutes he was back, flushed and confused. He stopped beside me, grunted and took some time lighting up. He frowned as he drew on his cigarette.

"Got a refusal?" I said, knowing in advance what the answer would be.

"You're asking," he said with chagrin. "But why, I should like to know? Me a hunter from my earliest days—see? lost an eye at it—and my sons too. Hunting's our business, our *business*, mind. That's what *we* need a dog for. And he won't give it up. Offered him five hundred roubles, I did—a lot of money, eh?—but no, won't hear of it. Nearly got to crying, mind, and it's me who should do the crying, what with the season coming on and me with no dog worth the name!"

His gaze wandered round the yard and fell on the fence, and suddenly a new expression flashed across his face, an expression of cunning. He instantly grew calm.

"Where does that dog of yours put up?" he said in a voice of feigned indifference, blinking his one eye.

"You aren't thinking of stealing him, are you?" I asked.

The old man looked embarrassed, took off his cap, wiped his face on the lining of it and gazed at me curiously.

"Heaven forbid," he said with a little laugh. "But the likes of him can lead a man into sin. What does he want a dog for, tell me that!"

He set out for the gate, but on the way stopped and looked at me happily.

"What a voice that dog's got, what a voice! You know something about a hound's voice? His is like a clear spring!"

He came back and whispered in my ear, winking towards the window:

"Just you wait, that dog'll be mine yet. What's he want a hunter for? He's a brain worker, no huntsman. He'll sell it me yet, you'll see. There's plenty of time till Intercession day, I'll think of something. But what *you* was thinking of—pooh!"

He had scarcely gone out when the doctor appeared.

"What did he say to you?" he asked in agitation. "Odious old man! Did you notice his eye? An evil eye. How did he find out about my dog?"

The doctor rubbed his hands together nervously, his neck was flushed, a lock of grey hair had fallen over his forehead. On hearing his master's voice Arcturus climbed out from under the veranda and limped over to him.

"Arcturus," said the doctor. "You'll not go back on me, will you, old boy?"

Arcturus shut his eyes and pushed his nose against the doctor's knees. Too weak to stand up, he sank to his haunches, his head drooped, he almost fell asleep. The doctor threw me a triumphant look, laughed and patted the dog's ears. He did not realize that his hunter had already gone back on him, had betrayed him on the day he first went to the woods with me.

8

How nice it would be if every story had a happy ending! And has not every hero, though he be but a hunting dog, a right to a long and happy life? Nobody is born into this world without a purpose, and a hunting dog is born to pursue the wild beasts that are its enemies—to track them down for not coming over to man and becoming his friend, as the dogs did in their time. A blind dog, unlike a blind man, has no one to help him; he is alone in his darkness, helpless and doomed by nature, which is always ruthless to the weak. If, in spite of his handicap, he yet tries to fulfil the purpose for which he was born, what could be more noble and praiseworthy? But Arcturus was not fated to live such a life for long.

August was coming to an end, bad weather had set in and I was getting ready to leave town when Arcturus disappeared. In the morning he went off to the woods and did not return that evening, nor the next day, nor yet the following one.

When a friend you have been living with, seeing every day, treating with the neglect bred of familiarity—when such a friend goes away and does not come back you are left with poignant memories.

I recalled the days Arcturus and I had spent together, his shyness, his uncertainty, his awkward one-sided lope, his voice, his habits, his touching little attentions, his love for his master, even his smell—the smell of a clean wholesome dog. I recalled all these things and regretted that he had not belonged to me, that it was not I who had given him his name, that it was not me he loved and not to my house he returned in the darkness to recover from the long chase.

The doctor grew haggard in a few days. He instantly suspected the "odious old man," and together we searched for him until we found him. But the old man swore he had not seen Arcturus, he even went with us to look for him.

The news of Arcturus' disappearance immediately spread through the town. It turned out that many people knew and loved the dog and all were anxious to help the doctor find him. The most varied conjectures and rumours were relayed. This man had seen a dog resembling Arcturus, that one had heard him barking in the woods. Children who were the doctor's patients and children he did not even know went to the woods, called the dog, explored all the paths, shot into the air, and returned to the doctor's house ten times a day to find out if the dog had come back.

I did not look for Arcturus. I did not believe he could have lost his way, his instinct was too keen for that. And he was too loyal to his master to have gone over to another. Undoubtedly he had been killed. But where? How? This I did not know. Many were the possibilities.

In a few days the doctor realized this too. He suddenly became morose, stopped singing and could not sleep at night. The house was silent and empty without Arcturus. The cats, now that the guard was gone, prowled freely in the garden. No other creature went to sniff at the boulder down by the river. It now thrust up gloomily and to no purpose, black with rain, giving off scents that nobody cared to investigate.

On the day of my departure the doctor and I talked late into the night, but we avoided the subject of Arcturus. Once the doctor expressed a regret that he had not learned to hunt in his youth.

9

Some two years later I again visited the town and again put up at the doctor's house. He still lived alone. But now I did not hear the sound of claws clicking upon the floor, of a muzzle snorting and a tail switching against the cane furniture. The house was silent and the rooms smelt, as before, of dust, medicine and old wallpaper.

But it was spring and somehow the empty house did not weigh upon my spirits. In the yard the buds were bursting, the sparrows were chirping, the rooks were noisily nest-building in the town park, the doctor sang his arias in his high falsetto. The town was bathed in azure mist in the morning, the river was in spate, as far as the eye could see the swans rose above the flood with their eternal cry of "clink-clank," gay motor-launches blew their nasal horns and the persevering tugs replied with long low hoots. It was very jolly.

On the day after my arrival I went hunting. A golden haze hung over the woods, the air was filled with sounds of dripping, gurgling, ringing. The ground was bare and had a strong pungent smell; of all the smells—moist aspen bark, rotting wood, damp leaves—the smell of the earth was strongest.

It was a beautiful evening with the sunset sky a sea of fire on which the woodcocks sailed in dense flocks. I shot four of them and had difficulty in finding them on the dark carpet of leaves. When the fire died down in the sky, leaving it a pale green pricked with stars, I slowly made my way home along a familiar unfrequented road, turning off to avoid great flooded areas in which the sky, the bare birches and the stars were reflected.

As I was crossing a low mound on one of my detours, my eye was caught by a whitish spot that I took at first for unmelted snow, but on coming closer discovered to be a dog's scattered bones. My heart beat faster, on examining them I found a collar with a tarnished brass buckle.... Yes, these were the remains of Arcturus.

I diligently studied the surroundings, and by the time dark had settled I was convinced of what had happened. A lower bough was protruding from a small but withered fir standing nearby. This bough, like the rest of the tree, had dried up, lost its needles, and broken off until it had turned into a stick as sharp as a lance. Undoubtedly Arcturus had run into this lance as he was dashing ahead, oblivious of everything but the tantalizing scent leading him on and on.

It was completely dark when I came at last to the edge of the woods and crossed through the sucking mud to the road leading back to town. But my thoughts kept turning to that low mound on which the withered fir tree stood.

Sportsmen have an odd fondness for extravagant names. What names haven't they given their hounds! Diana, Anteaus, Phoebe, Nero, Venus and Romulus. But surely there was never a hunter more worthy of the high-sounding name he bore than Arcturus—Arcturus, the unfading blue star!

1957

Anatoli Kuznetsov

Old Mother Grunya's Deer

Everyone knew her as Old Mother Grunya and had quite forgotten her patronymic. Her husband had died seven years before and she had lost both her sons in the war. She lived in Irkutsk all alone in a little house with three windows in a quiet sidestreet overgrown with grass, not far from the river Angara. But she was afraid of the river and never went near it.

She was a quiet, inconspicuous old woman, retiring and always on good terms with her neighbours. She let Larionych the cooper use her kitchen garden every summer, in return for which she was content if he gave her a couple of sacks of potatoes in the autumn. She had a soft husky voice and, as she spoke, accompanied her words with friendly nods of her grey head. She suffered from asthma and moved around heavily, as her figure dictated. The wrinkled skin of her big coarse hands, the thick nimble fingers and swollen veins spoke far more convincingly of her past than any words could.

The house had two rooms. For a long time she had let the one facing the street to students from the hydraulic engineering college.

The students were brazen and inconsiderate fellows. They never paid their rent on time although she cooked for them every day, saw to their laundry and cleaned up, without which the place would soon have become no better than a pigsty. What can you expect from them? she reasoned. ' Now they're here, they may as well stay, after all you can't throw people out into the street. In the end she generously let them off their rent debt on the grounds that her pension was enough for her to live on.

At first the lodgers hemmed and hawed at this unusual offer, though they really took it pretty much for granted: the old bird had one foot in the grave anyway and she couldn't take it with her. They thanked her and promptly forgot about it.

As a matter of fact Old Mother Grunya's pension didn't amount to much,

and she could have done with the extra money. To help herself out somewhat she took to keeping hens.

The fact was she saw how hard her lodgers worked at their studies, reading, writing and drawing far into the night. Why, they never went out and about to enjoy themselves as one would expect of such fine strapping young lads. Their stipends were not so big either, it was not easy for them to make ends meet. She often slipped an odd bottle of milk or a few eggs on the table for them, over and above the food she prepared on the money they gave her.

The boys gobbled up whatever was put in front of them and only marvelled occasionally how much cheaper it was to let the old lady feed them than to run round canteens. They were on to a good thing alright.

Old Mother Grunya readily agreed with them, thinking to herself that if circumstances had permitted her to study when she was young, things would have been different. She even remembered dimly how much she had wanted to study as a girl. But she had worked as a nanny and later as a washer-woman in a hospital and had nearly died of typhus in 1918. She had more or less learned to write but there her studies had ended.

It was quite another matter with her lodgers of course. They would complete their studies with or without her eggs and milk, yet she always fed them up especially well when they had exams. She worried about those exams more than the boys themselves, eagerly waited for the results and was delighted when they got good marks.

When their course was over the students kissed Old Mother Grunya goodbye and left for the hydropower station in Bratsk. They thanked her profusely and assured her they would write often. And that, as it turned out, was that. Either they forgot or were too busy, but though she waited and waited not a single letter did she receive.

At first Old Mother Grunya felt disappointed, but then she gave up waiting. She wasn't hurt. She understood that the boys had their own lives to lead. After all, it wasn't as if she was their mother, or related to them in any way. A brief card from her own sons had been a rare enough treat, so what could she expect of strangers. Off they'd gone—now that they'd learned to stand on their own two feet.

The trouble was that it had become rather lonely without the boys. The housework did not take up much time. Apart from her dozen hens she had a fat Siberian cat called Potap and a frisky puppy called Zhuchok. The old woman would laugh quietly as she watched them either fighting or licking each other, when they were not fast asleep on the couch. She herself would sit for hours by the window, sewing or knitting and looking out into the quiet street.

Sometimes she would take her knitting and go to the new five-storey house next door and sit with Yadviga Lvovna, who had been her younger son's teacher

before the war. She would settle down quietly on the couch and Yadviga Lvovna would work away until late correcting tenth-form compositions with complicated, incomprehensible titles, which to Old Mother Grunya seemed to embody the height of human wisdom, like "Chekhov—spokesman for the progressive intelligentsia of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century," or "Patriarchal peasant life as expressed by Leo Tolstoy."

Yadviga Lvovna was absent-minded and muddle-headed in the extreme when it came to housekeeping. When she sat over her pupils' exercise books late into the night and forgot all about supper and putting her daughter to bed, Old Mother Grunya would get up and go off to the kitchen, tut-tutting and shaking her head. She would cook a meal, feed little Valya, put her to bed and tell her a bedtime story. The stories were very dull but then Valya was all the sooner asleep and Old Mother Grunya was very pleased and proud of herself.

Then at midnight the two women would sit down to a cup of tea and pancakes and the teacher would invariably say:

"Mmm. Delicious! I don't know how you do it! Do teach me!"

The old woman would have been only too glad to oblige. After all, if there was one thing she could do it was cook. But Yadviga Lvovna never had time. Every evening there were piles of exercise books to be marked and on Sundays she'd just grab Valya along and go off to the theatre with her. The whole house might be upside down but she wouldn't even give it a thought!

So Old Mother Grunya never managed to teach her the art of cooking. And one day Yadviga Lvovna informed her that her husband had finally got a flat in Bratsk and she and Valya were going to join him there. Bratsk was a big modern town in the taiga, with plenty of secondary schools, where she'd get a job at once.

Yadviga Lvovna left and Old Mother Grunya was alone again.

She grew noticeably weaker. She could no longer carry a full bucket of water from the pump and had to carry half a bucket at a time. But then what did she need much water for anyway? It was not as if the yard was full of poultry and cattle, Potap and Zhuchok did not drink much, and she herself could make do with very little.

About that time she had trouble with the roof. She asked around and found a young man who agreed to repair it for a modest sum.

His name was Vanya. He came after work three days running and did a good quick job of it. The old woman generously added three dozen eggs to the agreed sum, and found more work for him to do: the fence needed repairing, the gate fixing, then she had him cut firewood and solder saucepans.

She fed him with tasty cabbage soup and gave him tea with bilberry jam. After all a working man needs good feeding. Before he went she would slip him a few rolled-up notes. He would pop them in the vase on the sideboard and go

off laughing and she would give him the same money the next time and scold him for not taking it.

Vanya always brought her the latest news from the factory, told her what he had seen at the pictures and asked her advice as to whether he ought to get married or wait a bit. They had long involved conversations on the subject and she advised him to waste no time marrying, but to make a careful choice.

She gradually got into the habit of expecting his visits, for although there were no longer any jobs to be done he would still pop in now and then, grimy and smelling of iron. He would bring her cedar nuts or a packet of tea and stay with her for an hour or so.

One day he turned up all aglow with excitement and told her that he was being transferred to the Bratsk HEP station. He had been applying to go there for a year, and now at last he was needed; as for getting married he'd see to it on the spot. The old woman's heart sank. She was upset and restless all evening. Everybody was leaving for the Bratsk power station, as if by some secret agreement. She had little idea what this Bratsk power station thing was, except that everyone in Irkutsk talked about it.

Anyway, she hoped Vanya would be happy there and find himself a sweet young girl for a wife and make a good living.

She put together a little bundle of dried fruit, a jar of jam and some pancakes, which she forced him to take when he came to say goodbye. He said she should not have gone to all that trouble, but was naturally very pleased.

Once again Old Mother Grunya sat by the window, embroidering a cat with a bow, that looked like Potap, on a rug, all sorts of thoughts about her life running through her head.

She had an ancient wireless receiver, which had been so well made that it still worked every bit as well as the modern sets. She suddenly developed a craze for listening to the radio.

Every morning Old Mother Grunya awoke at six to the strains of the national anthem and the announcer's voice saying "Good morning, comrades!" She listened all day until late at night, and immediately pricked up her ears every time the latest Irkutsk news was broadcast. Sometimes mention was made of the Bratsk power station and she soon knew everything about it.

She would go to her neighbour Larionych the cooper and tell him what she had heard while he planed staves for barrels. He would raise his head in astonishment and sputter: "Well, did ye ever the young blightersh! What'll they be getting up to nexsht!"

She remembered one broadcast in particular. It was in January and the announcer was describing how carpenters were at work amid the ice hummocks on the frozen Angara river, building something or other, though for the life of her the old woman could not make out what the "something" was.

There was forty-two degrees of frost in Irkutsk that day and although Old Mother Grunya had never been to Bratsk she knew that it was much further north amid mountains and forests, and Yadviga Lvovna had once told her that deeper down the ground was permanently frozen, even in summer. She could picture the men working on the ice, building some giant wooden pier or whatever it was and she thought that it must be all of fifty degrees of frost there.

The name of the best carpenter came over the air—Andrei Dolokhov, a Komsomol member. Her younger son's name had been Andrei, she reflected, and if he had been alive he too would probably have gone off to work amid the ice hummocks on the Angara. He'd been growing up a restless lad.

She forgot that if Andrei were alive he would no longer be a youngster in the Komsomol but a grown man. He would have been thirty-six in June and would probably be a married man with a family by now, and she would be a grandmother. But she forgot all this and just kept thinking and thinking.

Soon she began to imagine that it was not Dolokhov the carpenter, but her son Andrei there on the building site and that the radio was talking about him. Deep down she knew that this was just make believe but she wanted to think about it that way. She patiently awaited every broadcast and sometimes they really did talk about Dolokhov the carpenter. Then she just could not keep still but wandered around the room and dropped whatever she was holding and laughed softly or sighed to herself.

Once when there had been no news of Dolokhov for a long time, she called on Larionych and asked him to have a look at the newspaper, "Isn't there anything about Andryusha?" She found difficulty in reading herself, the small print was nothing but a blur for her.

"Ah, you shilly old woman," Larionych would cry and, laying aside his plane, put on his cracked glasses and go to the letter-box.

Once he read her an article of protest at the way not enough attention was given at the Bratsk power station to ensuring decent living conditions for the young people employed there. It took a number of high-up people to task for the bad conditions in several hostels, where the radios did not work, the lamps were dim, and there were not enough chairs or water-jugs to go round.

Old Mother Grunya listened attentively and recalled how, as a girl in 1919, she had lived in a hostel—"a commune" as it was then called. They used to go out in the bitterest frosts to gather wood for the steam engines. There was no electric light at all then, let alone radio. Her husband had just begun courting her. They suffered hunger and cold and sang revolutionary songs about the new world that was about to dawn, sincerely believing that communism lay just round the corner.

How many years had passed since then! She was old, and had her sons been alive, they would not have been so young either; everything had turned

out to be much more difficult and complicated. Her life was over and she had not lived to see communism. New young people had followed on and now they were continuing to build and cut down forests. . . .

Old Mother Grunya knew that she had not long to live. But she did not want to die. She thought how pitifully short the longest human life is, but it did not even cross her mind to feel resentful. She told herself that she should not feel sad that she had not lived to see the day, that after all Andrei might live long enough, or her lodgers from the engineering college, or Valya the teacher's daughter, or Vanya the fitter and his sweet young wife-to-be. They would live to see a different, better life, the old woman decided, and shed tears of joy for them.

Long ago, in the second year of her married life, she had embroidered two deers on a big rug. The young creatures were running on their strong, agile legs through the woods towards distant mountains. She had gone to no end of trouble to find the necessary cotton-yarn. The old man had loved the rug, and hung it on the wall above the cradle. The children used to run their fingers over it.

The rug still hung there. The thread had lasted well, and the colours had not faded. It was as if the deer had been embroidered only yesterday.

Old Mother Grunya took the rug down from the wall, carefully beat the dust from it outside the front door, and rolled it up. She took the knitted table-covers, the cat with the bow that looked like Potap, everything she could find of any value and put them with the rug. She had decided to send the things to one of the hostels at the Bratsk power station. After all, none of them were of any use to her, and there they had bare walls and no water jugs, and it was so unhomely with the dim lighting. True, it was sad to part with the deer. After all they represented almost a lifetime of memories.

She stuck a note in the rolled-up carpet. It took a long time to write, for the pencil kept on breaking and the letters came out big and uneven. But the note itself was short. "Dear lads, an old-age pensioner would like to help you somehow in your difficult life, and sends you her needle-work."

The trouble was she had no definite address. There was nothing on the radio about Andrei and she could not make up her mind for a long time what to do. She did not know whether he was still there, whether he was the only Dolokhov on the job. She finally decided to write simply. "To the management, for a hostel." They could sort it out for themselves when it got there.

The rooms were bare and gloomy now. But what did it matter, she thought, it was not as if she were a lass saving things up for when she'd get married; let some hostel look better and cozier. This simple reasoning set her mind at rest, and she took a piece of cloth and began to sew the things up in a tight parcel.

1960

Vasili Aksyonov

On the Square and Across the River

We waited all night and the whole house waited. The permanent tenants and the evacuees sat in that dilapidated wooden house in the centre of Kazan, in the ten one-room flats of what had once been manufacturer Zherebtsov's mansion; they sat on bent-wood chairs, on stools, on trunks, and talked quietly to one another, and we, kids, scuffled in the jumbled-up corridor, and played "wop-it," and smoked cigarettes, and no one chased us off to bed.

It might have been raining, there might have been a clear moon shining down on those suspense-gripped streets; it might have been windy or dead calm; we might have been hungry or full—but that night it just didn't matter and no one took any notice of such things.

Of course, we had known for several days that Berlin had fallen and the whole of Germany was occupied by our own and allied troops, but could it really be today that they would announce that those four years, those four-times-four years, were over, that no one in our house, in our yard, in our school would ever get death notices from the front any more, that this at long last was the end of all Hitler's foul deeds.

"Wop-it" was an odd, wartime game, an odd kind of sport. It disappeared with the war and nowhere afterwards did I ever see any kid or teenager trying to keep a bit of dog fur weighted with a lump of lead in the air with his boot. The local "wop-it" champion was that agile youngster Damir Faziev. He kept tapping and tapping and the count went up to five hundred and still the "wop-it" didn't fall to the ground. The champion's foot worked like a connecting-rod, while he chattered away, baring his yellow, nicotine-stained teeth in an enormous grin.

Damir was a made-up name put together out of the initial letters of words

meaning "Let's have a world revolution." The abbreviation had yielded a melodious, oriental-sounding name. One of our girls was called Elmira, which, in full, stood for "Electrification of the world," and another girl was Velira, meaning "Great worker."

So there was Damir performing his star turn while we—Elmira, Velira, Rafik Sagitov, Borya, nicknamed "Tub", Sevka Pasternak, Tolik, Valerik and I—sat on a torn mattress and talked about one of the things that many children used to talk about in those days—the capture of Hitler himself and the punishment of that dastardly villain.

Just imagine a huge vat, full of boiling lead, and ve-e-ry slowly.... No, here was a much better idea. In the Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedia there was a description of the Chinese torture of a thousand cuts.... But first Hitler would have to be put in a cage and dragged through all the towns and cities in the land.

Hitler, that comic-horrible figure, now a tiger, now an ape, now a jackel, now carrying an axe and up to his elbows in blood, now looking doleful as an old woman—"I've lost a little ring and in that ring there were twenty-two divisions"—was known to us from innumerable caricatures and satirical posters.

In our excitement we bounced about on the mattress and the protesting springs kept popping out from under us.

At any other time we should have been hissed at, shouted at and sent off to bed, the whole gang of us, but that night the grown-ups were all awake and wandering about from room to room, talking quietly to one another, some of them sobbing. Only from the flat of the young but unfit Misha Mamochko in the basement came the sound of singing and women's squeals.

Legal adviser Pasternak, Nina Alexandrovna, was smoking a big cigarette that had been presented to her that night by Auntie Zoya, who worked at the Mikoyan Confectionery Factory. All through the war Nina Alexandrovna had been very hard-up, greasing her frying-pan with a candle, frying potato peel in candle grease, shedding silent tears or weeping loudly; sometimes she would mutter something intellectual and reticently imploring, and sometimes she would swear at Sevka in the language of the gutter. She just could not adapt herself to wartime conditions, so the neighbours tried to help her along with what they could spare from their meagre resources and invited her to come in for a warm by their stove of an evening. At the fireside Nina Alexandrovna would come to life, unbutton and unwrap herself, wipe the permanent drip from the tip of her nose, and talk about crêpe-de-Chine dresses and Caucasian meat patties on the Georgian Military Highway. Then she would drop off to sleep with her mouth wide open.

From that blessed time, that golden age of "before the war," we had managed to keep a gramophone record, a seashell and a picture postcard with palms and

"Greetings from Alupka!" written on it. The record sang, "Do you remember, my love, those days of delight, the blue sky above, words of passion at night. . . ." And on the other side, "Sashka, remember, that evening in spring, on the shore together, the flowers all blossoming. Life's so much a fairy-tale. . . how quick the years slip by. . . ." The record sang silently, only in the memory, because our gramophone had long since departed to the bazaar, where it had suffered the same fate as Nina Alexandrovna's crêpe-de-Chine dresses.

Auntie Zoya, on the contrary, was the fairy godmother of our house. She was By the Grace of God Dispatch Clerk at the Mikoyan Confectionery Factory. In the first year of the war, after my uncle had joined the navy, our family had somehow fallen apart. We could not register at any food shop and our ration cards were simply being wasted. Then Auntie Zoya had appeared on the scene, gathered up the large wad of useless pink coupons and declared, "Can't do anything about the 'fats,' but I'll convert the 'sugar' into semi-finished foods."

The "semi-finished food" turned out to be a brown, fragrant, incredibly sweet fake-chocolate mass.

That night Auntie Zoya decided to make pies. The huge Russian stove in the corridor, which for many years had not been regarded as a stove but rather as a monument to manufacturer Zherebtsov, suddenly burst into life and began to roar. Auntie Zoya was the most optimistic and active of us all, although her husband had been killed in the first year. She was already preparing for the collective feast; the other tenants were preparing, too, but timidly and irresolutely, as though they still could not believe *it* would happen today.

"Today," said Uncle Lazik, the photographer, to Kamil Bayazitovich, an official of the regional committee, "from reliable circles we know that it's today. Don't we, Kamil Bayazitovich? Come on, tell us, everyone knows already. . . ."

"Patience, comrades," Kamil Bayazitovich said with a little chuckle. "All in good time. As long as we live we shan't be dead. It'll be announced today or tomorrow—we'll soon know. The main thing is that the enemy is beaten. Victory is ours."

Down the corridor strolled a fair-haired beauty with a blue overcoat—a gift from our transatlantic ally—draped over her shoulders. This was my sister Inna.

I walk in a land 'cross the sea,
The grey, grey dawn is breaking,
Do you ever remember about me. . . .

She smiled as she sang, thinking her own special thoughts, thoughts reserved for beautiful young women.

The door of the basement flew open and the burly Misha Mamochko emerged, grunting and belching. The basement was a den of thieves and hold-up men and, as we later discovered, this young tough was the boss of it. Mishka had been at the front a fortnight and got himself wounded in the heel, like Achilles. Unlike the Greek hero, however, he had not died of it, but had come back alive and the recruiting office didn't bother him any more. Usually he limped about with a stick, in his chrome-leather boots, saying little and smiling mysteriously. When he was on the booze he was noisy, but this he did rarely and only in the basement, never in the public view. Everyone was scared to death of him and he had only one chink in his armour—his weakness for my sister, fair-haired doctor Inna.

Now he came up to my sister, muscles bulging out of his silk singlet, and nudged her with his shoulder.

"Come on, Inka," he boomed casually, not bothering to turn his head.

Inna laughed and told him to go to hell.

"Careful, Inka. Them flyers of yours are going to take off one of these days, but Mamochko will still be here. You can count on that. I'll get my hands on you yet."

"Have a little shame, Misha. The war will be over today, and you—" Uncle Lazik exclaimed.

"War! War!" Mamochko bawled suddenly out of his crooked mouth. "War's what you make it, I says."

"Disgusting!" Nina Alexandrovna cried.

"I'll hit him with these tongs in a minute!" Auntie Zoya shouted.

"Keep within bounds, Mamochko," said Kamil Bayazitovich.

But Mishka began to sing.

Grandma took it easy, when she crossed the street.
Little did she guess a militiaman she'd meet.
You ought to know what my whistle's for
And now you've gone and broken the law
So three roubles fine and pay up quick,
Pay up, grandma, or you'll be in the nick.

He advanced upon Uncle Lazik, wriggling his big, white shoulders and pushing out his splayed fingers as he chanted the rhyme, but at that moment from all the loud-speakers all over the house came the slow notes of the Radio Moscow call sign and simultaneously pistols started going off in the street and a great cheer went up.

Standing on the wet asphalt below the windows were Inna's "flyers," our three handsome young men with walking sticks. One of them had his arm in

a sling, another had his leg in plaster, and there was a fourth, a Frenchman with a crutch, a convalescent officer from the Normandie-Niemen Squadron. All four of them were yelling hurrah, blazing away into the air, into the grey, barely awakened sky, and looking up with shining eyes, the young eyes of victorious youth.

"Inka, we've won!"

"Victory!"

"Inka!"

"Attention! This is Moscow!" came the famous rumble of announcer Levitan's bass.

The Frenchman was dancing round his crutch. Victory spread out like a glittering expanse of imaginary dance-floor before Inka's game-legged young men.

As for us—Damir (Let's have a world revolution), Elmira (Electrification of the world), Velira (Great worker), Rafik Sagitov, nicknamed "Tub", Sevka Pasternak, Tolik, Valerik, Shurik and I—we threw away our "wop-it" and, without waiting to hear the rest of the announcement, went running down Karl Marx Street to the centre of our town, to Freedom Square.

We ran for all we were worth and everything seemed to be bursting open in front of us, snapping, popping open, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, like a great white sheet tearing in several places at once—the first ray of the sun, one blue puddle among a lot of dark ones, a girl's plait, a bow, a red flag, an aeroplane, a horse, a sailor—everything was a blaze of colour and light and always would be.

When we started, the street had been deserted but by the time we reached the square we were running in a dense crowd that was also running. And on the square girl students were dancing amid the puddles under the windows of the Law Institute and trams with people hanging from them were rolling up, and little boys were climbing the telegraph poles, and slogans were being hung out on the building of the Officers' Club, the Typewriter Factory, and behind the barbed wire round the site of the new opera house there were some Hungarian prisoners-of-war—just think of that!—shouting and waving their forage caps, and... and....

We kept on running, afraid of being late, afraid of missing something, and we realized what was happening only when we reached the captured Tiger with its impotently drooping gun, which had now been standing for nearly two years on the square among other trophies of war.

Aeroplanes—two PO-2 trainers—appeared and came roaring over so low that we could see the laughing faces of the pilots. They flew right over the chimney-tops and dropped a shower of leaflets headed "Victory Greetings, Comrades!" Then people started throwing these leaflets from the windows of

the Officers' Club, from the roofs, and the biplanes kept it up all day, flying away and returning with fresh portions of leaflets.

We sat on that dirty monster that someone somewhere had lovingly fashioned for the purpose of killing us all, and now the monster looked dejected and miserable with its coyly lowered gun, and we perched ourselves on it to see everything all around, and all around there was. . . .

Leonid Utyosov: *Now Baron von der Fakon,*
To try the Russian bacon
Had such a very deep desire. . . .

"Come on, girls, catch the lieutenant! Let's toss him, let's toss him! Oh, goodness, this is too much for me! I'll die in a minute!. . ."

Klavdia Shulzhenko: *In a dusty packet of old letters*
I happened to find just one. . .

"I say, chaps, but where's Hitler? Surely he hasn't got away? Have they killed him? They can't have! He's been seen in disguise in Dublin. Hitler's submarine was spotted off the coast of Helgoland. Has he got away, the scum? No, he must have poisoned himself. . . .

Mark Bernes: *Fishergirl Sonya one day in May*
Sailed her boat up to the shore. . .

"What will happen now? Wow, it's going to be fine! No ration cards any more? No potato peel? No barter? What will there be then? There'll be butter and cheese, and cherry jam. And there'll be football again. And Butusov will be breaking the bar again, and I'll be going to the university—won't it be smashing!"

And now they were playing all those wartime songs and ballads. "A girl saw her boy to the firing line. . . ." "My sweet and pure love the fascist dogs have sullied. . . ." "It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go. . . ." "The night is short, the clouds are sleeping, and on my shoulder lies a strange girl's hand. . . ." "Then once again its sound was heard in that front-line forest. . . ." "Over that dear home my silver wing I'll wave. . . ."

Here come our heroes, our idols, and not marching along in parade order, but linking arms like girls and laughing—infantrymen, artillerymen, tankmen, all arms and services, striding along with their medals jingling. And look at that—strike me!—it's a sailor with a Guards black-and-orange ribbon, almost as fantastically magnificent as our uncle of the Pacific Fleet.

Tub who had nearly got left behind came running up.

"This way, chaps, there's a lieutenant-colonel over there treating everyone to ice-cream!"

The Tiger was clear in an instant, as if the wind had puffed us all away, and we all raced over to the lieutenant-colonel who was moving slowly through the crowd, pushing an ice-cream cart. He had bought it "wholesale" and was treating all children, everyone in sight, to "soufflé," the strange brown ice-cream of those years, made of a very strange kind of milk.

I would give a lot to be able to bring back that day, and particularly that moment, the sheer delight I felt when a silver fanfare rang out over the square and we saw the elephant. Its huge grey brow and back floated over the crowd, and on its back stood a page-boy with a bugle. And behind the elephant came the proud figure of a camel. This was Durov's Circus on tour in Kazan. And now it had come out in full force into the streets to help the townspeople celebrate victory.

Durov himself was riding at the head of the column in a white, gold-embroidered Hussar's uniform, cape, shako, sabre and pouch—all complete. In one hand he held a banner, in the other a burning bugle. Then came the elephant, waving its trunk. Of course, there must have been a great storm of delight raging in the elephant's vast breast, but the huge elephant kept himself under control and tramped on methodically behind the horse's dancing crupper. Sheets of plywood with the word "Victory" written on them hung from its flanks. We jumped and tugged at the elephant's velvety ears and at any other time he would, of course, have put a stop to such insolence, but that day even he could make us a gift of this violation of his person, just as the lieutenant-colonel made us a gift of the ice-cream.

The ship of the desert marched on with a page-boy perched between its two humps and two sheets of plywood, like the elephant's, hanging from his flanks. It was hard for him, of course, to take that grimace of eternal scorn off his face, yet even in his drooping lips there lurked a smile.

The camel—just imagine!—was followed by a car, on the roof of which sat a leopard. This beast of prey was rolling its yellow eyes in a bemused sort of way, as though it could not really understand what was going on; but the bears inside were behaving noisily, even wildly, making faces, waving their paws and slapping one another on the back.

Then came three jingling teams of ponies, decked out in bells and ribbons, and in the gaily decorated carriages there were all kinds of animals, and also circus performers with mouth-organs and toy whistles.

The whole fantastic cavalcade passed across Freedom Square, then down Lobachevsky Street, past the Black Lake, then along Chernyshevsky Street to our white Kremlin, then it proceeded down Bauman Street all the way to the Ring Road, then up again, along Kuibyshev Street and back to Freedom Square.

And this all took place to the accompaniment of silvery bugle calls, in a blaze of colour, under an absolutely blue sky. On they went, with a drumming of hooves and a jingle of harness and a blare of trumpets, as though their procession was to draw a line for all children between the years of war and the years of peace that were now to come.

The sun seemed to stay in the sky much longer that day than it was allowed to stay according to the calendar, but at last it sank and disappeared in the mysterious western districts of the town, and the bare branches stood out sharply against the bluish-green sky, and then we went back to our house, which by this time was smelling deliciously of baked pies, back to our creaking, cosy ark bobbing on the spring sea.

When night was on the wane all the pies had been eaten and a blessed, contented, slightly belchy stillness descended on the house. Only the wall-clock remained hard at work, ticking away stubbornly, almost bitterly.

I lay on my little couch and thought of what had happened to us that day, and what had happened all over the world. In those years the hugeness of the world used to worry me. It seemed incredible that there could be other, foreign countries that just didn't care a jot about us or what was happening to us. And now, I thought, this day, at any rate, must have affected the whole world in the same way, there was only one kind of news for the whole world today, and these thoughts reassured me and induced a strange feeling of harmony. I closed my eyes and melted into this blissful state. . . .

. . . All of a sudden I heard a scraping of feet on our front steps and the gentle tap of knuckles on the door. It was only a brief tap, but the scraping of feet continued; someone must be cleaning his boots on the step. Another tap.

I pulled on my trousers, threw my jacket over my shoulders, crept softly out of the room and went downstairs to the front door. Damir, Velira and Sevka Pasternak were there already.

"Someone's knocking," Velira said in a scared voice.

"Who's there?" Damir shouted.

"Open the door, please," came a rather hoarse man's voice from outside.

One after the other our kids came down stairs and gathered round the door. Damir opened it. On the threshold stood a hunched figure in a worn black overcoat and felt hat. The toe caps of a new pair of galoshes were peeping out from under his broad, baggy trousers.

"Who do you want to see?" Velira asked crossly.

"Keep quiet!" Sevka snapped at her. "Can't you understand?"

"Oh, I. . . er, just happened to knock," the man muttered. "I was walking

past and decided to knock on the door. I must have made a mistake. Nerves, you know. . . ."

"I expect it was the smell," Auntie Zoya said gently from behind us. She had her tongs in her hand. "Was it the smell of the pies? Come in."

"No, thank you. Really. I must have made a mistake. Your house is No. 55 and I'm looking for No. 22. You can see for yourself how alike the two figures are. I must have looked from the wrong angle," the man muttered and started backing cautiously away.

"Sevka, Vaska, Borka, take him from the right!" Damir commanded.

The little man swung round and ran. We rushed after him, but although we ran very fast, we couldn't catch him. His new galoshes twinkled in front of our very noses and we could hear the laboured gasps coming from his chest, but no one managed to grasp the black flapping tails of his coat.

It was beginning to get light and the sky at the end of the resounding, deserted street was pink. The tram wires seemed very low overhead and the rooks were cawing in the empty gardens.

"Quite a simple mistake! Just an elementary muddle! I thought it was 22 and it turned out to be 55!" the man shouted wildly and, turning the corner, raced in cloud of spray through the puddles across the square and down Podluzhnaya Street towards the dim ribbon of the river Kazanka, beyond which the fields began with little blue, pink and green lakes gleaming among them. He was making straight for Cow Bridge, a narrow little structure of planks.

"Hold him! Don't let him escape!" I shouted.

"Escape?! Of course, he won't. Our people are there! He's caught, the rascal!" Auntie Zoya cried.

And there certainly were some of our people on the bridge—Inka and her "flyers." The lovely creature was sitting on the rail, her curls hanging down over her shoulders. The officers were playing guitars and the Frenchman was singing a song that none of us had ever heard before.

Just one more walk at evening time
Around the Grands Boulevards,
Just one more walk. . . .

"There they are, they're chasing him!" Inka cried. "But don't shoot, boys. He must be taken alive!"

The officers spread out their arms and ran towards the man, but suddenly he took off and flew across the River Kazanka, wobbling, puffing, moaning and roaring, like an owl or a crippled bomber.

"Where's my Yak? Where's my Ilyushin? Where's my Aerocobra?" the flyers burst out in annoyance. Their boots and our battered shoes went clattering across the bridge.

The little man had landed clumsily on the other bank and was running across the fields, across the squelchy spring land. We raced after him, past the lakes under the pale moon and the pink dawn. Night and day blended into one. The black coat kept flapping in front of us, and the galoshes twinkling.

A naked Misha Mamochko was standing in one of the lakes, up to his waist in water.

"I took Berlin, spilt buckets of blood. It's all over my chest!" he roared and dived into the water. "It's because the bugs have been biting me!" he yelled when he came up, and roared with laughter. "Citizens, ten roubles for the joke!"

On the shore of another lake sat Kamil Bayazitovich with a fishing-rod. Seeing the chase, he jumped to his feet.

"I knew he'd rise to the bait!" he shouted. "There's a catch for you!"

But the little man again took off and flew over the lake on wings that were either cloth or armour plate and, having landed, set off again across the fields.

Uncle Lazik was standing on a hill, fussing round the tripod of his camera, and next to him stood legal adviser Pasternak, her hand raised.

"Get the flash ready, Nina Alexandrovna!" Uncle Lazik was shouting. "This is the picture of the century! Now!"

The bulb flashed and for a moment everything turned black and white.

"Ready!"

The little man was making heavy going of it now. His galoshes were dragging in the sticky earth, but he seemed to have no intention of parting with them.

And then the silver fanfares burst out over the whole fresh field and in the pink light of dawn stood the mounted hussar, the elephant, the camel, the four bears on the roof of the car, and the three teams of ponies with all kinds of animals in the carriages, and the performers from the circus with their mouth-organs and whistles.

"O-o-o-h!" wailed the little man. "O-o-h! O-o-o-o-h! Choocheroo hioplastr abrakadabra! Fuchi melazi rikatooer!"

He flapped his wings and rose slowly into the air, turned an absurd somersault, flew on a little way, then plunged into a green pond.

When we ran up, the circles were widening over the water. For a moment in the depths we caught a glimpse of that familiar crooked forelock, moustache and prominent teeth, then everything vanished.

"Adolph kaput," Damir said and wiped the sweat off his face.

. . . I could tell you how I awoke and all about the second day of Victory, which was the first day of Peace, but that is another story.

1966

AFTERWORD

Russian short stories gained widespread popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, especially with the advent of a brilliant galaxy of Russian writers—Anton Chekhov, Ivan Bunin, Alexander Kuprin, Leonid Andreyev and Maxim Gorky. So this short literary form occupied a central place in the new Russian literature. In the hands of the best Russian short-story writers, it never served to portray a particular incident or tell a curious episode, it always communicated general knowledge of the world and raised essential questions of social existence.

The short story played an important role in Soviet literature, too, from the very beginning. Gorky—the founder of the new Soviet literature—paid great attention to the development of this genre and stressed its role and significance in every way.

The main thing that became typical for the work of writers after the October Revolution was a striving to create a new literature, new in its themes and general trend.

Short stories in the twenties presented unusual highly topical subject-matter drawn from life. In 1926, eighteen-year-old Sholokhov published his *Don Stories* (among them the short story *The Foal* given in this issue), which shows how the Civil War split the strong, firmly settled life of the Cossack villages with their long-established hierarchy of family and social relationship. Son rises against father, brother against brother, tragic conflicts arise which are almost intolerably acute and are depicted by the young writer with great vividness.

The complex material of the revolutionary period, which bears clear tokens of a great turning-point and profound social upheavals, is unfolded in the short stories of the young Vsevolod Ivanov, a partisan, participant in the Civil War in Siberia, a man who at an early age received an immense store of the most varied impressions of life. An amazing multitude of faces, characters and events rise from the pages of his short stories. The language of V. Ivanov's prose, frequently oversated with "imagery" but possessing great expressive and emotional power, exercised a considerable influence on the development of literature in the twenties and the subsequent period. In his writing the reader hears constantly the author's lyrical recitative, his digressions from the plot occupy a great place in his short stories, they enter into the fabric of the narrative on an equal footing with the direct relation of events.

It is different with Isaac Babel. The more tense the action of his short stories, the more serious, slow and calm becomes the author's tone. And by virtue of this sharp and painful contrast Babel gains the possibility of relating the most tragic situations of the Civil War. The writer looks straight in the face at everything taking place around him, without flinching from unpleasant details. His book of short stories *The Mounted Army* immediately won wide popularity, though critics noted the writer's inclination to naturalism.

In the short stories of the twenties one may clearly see two lines, two different ways of assimilating reality through art: short stories "told by the author," more traditional in form; and short stories constructed in the form of "a tale," in which the narrator is someone unversed in literature—a peasant, a Red Armyman and so on. This type of short story is based on popular speech, on the specific syntax of the spoken word. The motley spoken language of revolutionary times substantially enriched the language of short stories.

The "tale" form was particularly widespread. The flowering of this difficult form was connected with the writers' desire to introduce new characters into literature—the man of the

"lower" orders, who had become an active figure of public life—and to give him the possibility of assessing events in his own way, of expressing himself fully.

This new main character was born by the October Revolution, his social awareness was brought to life by the Revolution. He was created by the new life and he was creating this life. This character became the central figure in the literature of the twenties.

Such is the main character in Gorky's *Stories About Heroes*. Simply and without hesitation he performs heroic feats for "the common cause." And he is not alone. "There are heroes everywhere among us, comrade," he says.

The best Soviet writers wrote about heroes of the Revolution. The content and form of the prose writing of those years were determined by a striving to preserve and convey the unique features of an amazing period.

The heroic uncompromizing spirit of the man from the people who has risen to struggle for his liberation is the principal theme of Boris Lavrenyov in the twenties. It was about this that he wrote his magnificent stories *Wind* and *The Forty-First*, in which loftiness and romance are combined with stark truthfulness. Lavrenyov's main character is a person of strong passions and resolute action, who possesses a directness and spiritual frankness that is purely of the people. The drama of the plot and his descriptive power give Lavrenyov's stories their particular attraction.

To replace the heroes who defended the Revolution arms in hand in the Civil War fronts there came other heroes—the builders, people who took it upon themselves to restore the country's ravaged economy.

Ivan Katayev created a striking character of this sort. His Zhuravlyov (*Heart*, 1928) was one of the first portraits of the Communist leader who regards his work in the economic sphere as a continuation of the battle for the new society. Again this is a man born of the Revolution: a poet-economist, an economist who is a sober, business-like and also passionate dreamer. Ivan Katayev's character is an intellectual who has enthusiastically welcomed the Revolution and is absolutely devoted to it, utterly carried away by "magnificent, frightening, headlong life." This is also the spiritual mould of Katayev's other characters, regardless of the social strata they belong to.

Mikhail Zoshchenko's characters are entirely different. They are the philistine dumbfounded by events, the bourgeois trying to find a place in new conditions and to derive the greatest benefit to himself from them. In such a person's mind all that happens in the world is seen through the prism of his own personal interests. In Zoshchenko's story *The Aristocrat*, which we offer our readers, the main character, narrating the story, with his aggressive outlook and militant ignorance is deeply repugnant to the author. But Zoshchenko doesn't directly express his own attitude to the character. The "tale" form itself serves to characterize the leading personage. The philistine turn of phrase emphasizes the moral deafness, the ridiculous self-assurance, the extreme self-love of such people, bordering on cruelty. It is precisely in his hatred of these deformities that one sees the humanism of Zoshchenko, the writer of whom Gorky said: "I do not know any other writer with this combination of irony and lyricism. . . ."

The prose of Alexander Green, the author of numerous short stories, one of which—*The Water-Colour*—we include in our selection, stands alone during these years. This "magician from Gel-Gyu" (Gel-Gyu is one of the non-existent towns which often figure in Green's works) was able to see the unusual in the usual, to colour life with romantic invention, to reveal poetry in the prose of everyday life. He believed in man who is strong, of pure heart and capable of loving. His stories are peopled with such characters.

Green's influence was felt by one of the most original writers of the late twenties, Yuri Olesha. Olesha's world is a whimsical and unusual one. As a literary critic wrote, he sees the world through the eyes of "romantics, artists, children and people in love." He uses

his ability to perceive, to give an unusual turn to the fleeting aspect of things and find bold metaphors, his keen gift of observation is not an end in itself—he writes of the most important things in man's life, of love, of death. A theme of particular importance to him, that of the artist and the Revolution, occupies a large place in his work. For all his dreaminess and seeming detachment from life "in the raw," he is able to portray the departing philistine world in satirical colours.

Valentin Katayev's prose recalls Olesha's prose in certain features. It is imbued with unusual epithets, unexpected comparisons, which protrude from the text, deliberately holding one's attention. In Katayev's work joyful "materiality," an ability to see the world in the full dazzle of its colours and to take joy in it, is combined not only with humour, but also with the grotesque, and sometimes with satire, too, not only with lyricism but also with heroic emotions. The short story we publish here, *Our Father...*, belongs to a later period; it was written in the forties and is in an entirely different manner. It is imbued with anger and pain. It is a story not about life, but about how life is destroyed under fascism. The story is based on real fact.

In the late twenties and early thirties the "short form" of the story was to some extent ousted by long narratives and novels. In the thirties interest revived in the short story, this form so necessary to literature, demanding great labour and great skill. The short stories of the thirties brought new themes and a new attitude toward them. "The simpler the story the harder it is to write," said Mikhail Prishvin, one of the brilliant masters of the short story. In these years it was precisely interest in the very short story, which "is harder to write," that steadily increased. A short story in which no action takes place, where it is entirely a matter of the inner lyricism of the theme, was accepted as real literature. In 1939 literary critics singled out Mikhail Prishvin's story *The Young Fox's Bread* and Arkadi Gaidar's story *Chook and Ghek*. These are precisely stories lacking sharp and intriguing form, but their simple plot is elaborated with brilliant skill, the stories are written in pure, lucid language and something significant and of general interest emerges from the "everyday incident" described.

One notices a curious phenomenon in these years—the most acclaimed writers of short stories turn out to be authors writing mostly for children—Prishvin, Gaidar, Zhitkov, whom Konstantin Fedin described as a true craftsman and said: "He wrote quite unlike anyone else and you enter his books like a pupil entering a craftsman's studio."

Andrei Platonov occupies a firm place among Soviet short-story writers. There is growing interest now in the original work of this writer, who came on the literary scene already in the late twenties. In his stories the author enables the reader himself to look at the characters and form his own opinion of them. Platonov is deeply confident that every human being is in some way remarkable. He feels a bond of kinship with his characters, he has "welded his heart" to each of them, he has an organic belief in good. And that is the main thing in his work.

A typical feature of Platonov's characters is their attitude to work. For them it is not a duty, not a heavy obligation but passion and inspiration. An example of this is his story *In a Beautiful and Violent World*. A beautiful and violent world is precisely the world Platonov creates.

In the second half of the thirties Konstantin Paustovsky wrote a lot of short stories. Perhaps the best short stories of those years are in his book *Summer Days* (1937). As with Prishvin, his stories lack intriguing plots and entertainment. Their characters are simple and sincere in their relations with one another, trustful and ungrudging, shorn of pettiness and suspicion. Both in the thirties and later Paustovsky maintains his emphatic interest only in man's good feelings, in courage, trust, in lofty nobility and human mutual understanding, he strives to move the reader by an emotional story of a feat, of loyalty, of true love.

The short story flourished anew during the years of the war.

From the very first days of the war the narrative essay, as the literary form which most immediately reflected the need to elucidate the new terrible and heroic events, occupied a leading place in literature. In this sense the short story came closest to the essay. In the short story of the war period—especially in its first years—real facts clearly show through the literary fabric and it was most often based on a specific episode, real events and people. It seemed as if the reality was so impressive that no artistic invention was called for. Konstantin Simonov wrote later that true persons and episodes are the basis of most of his wartime stories (such as, for instance, *A Name that Did Not Die* which we publish here).

Naturally, the best stories of that time, though real-life incidents provided the initial impetus, nevertheless rose above the facts. Thus Simonov's stories have not lost their significance even today and hold a firm place in his varied, wide-ranging literary output. These stories, together with his well-known novels *The Living and the Dead*, and *Soldiers Are Not Born*, written in recent years, constitute that "major book about the war" which Konstantin Simonov has been writing now for more than twenty years.

Alexei Tolstoy responded to the grim war events with all the force of his talent. He wrote a cycle of *Stories of Ivan Sudarev* (it includes the story *The Russian Character*, which we publish here), expressive of the writer's experiences of those "frightful and devastating" years of which he wrote: "Only faith in the inexhaustible strength of our people, faith in the correctness of our historical road, a hard and difficult, just and human road to a great life, only love for our country, burning pain for its sufferings... gave strength for struggle and for victory."

The theme of heroism, of the people's feat became the main theme of Soviet literature from the start of the war.

The high courage of ordinary Soviet people with the most peaceful prewar skills, who on becoming soldiers performed extraordinary feats, was described by Nikolai Tikhonov, Konstantin Simonov, Boris Lavrenyov, Alexander Bek, Vasili Grossman, Alexander Tvardovsky.

One of the first collections of wartime stories, Leonid Sobolev's *Sea Heart* (1942) (it included *Tatian, the Scout*), was above all stories of feats. These included the instant impulse requiring the momentary concentration of man's entire spiritual strength, the examples of exceptional initiative and resourcefulness, the extraordinary endurance almost exceeding the bounds of the possible, the feat performed for friendship, to save battle comrades.

In Boris Polevoy's story *Ivan Kuzmich's Last Day* heroism is shown as the most natural state of the heart of a man who, it seems, is even unaware to the very end that he is being a hero. All the spiritual strength of the peasant repeating the feat of Ivan Susanin are directed only to perform better the task he has in mind—that of doing the greatest damage to the enemy.

Most of the wartime stories are simple in form. The traditional narrator-author of wartime tales is the correspondent of a front-line or central newspaper, who is in the very thick of events, in direct contact with his characters and telling us about the "live" people he has spoken to, or retelling particular incidents in their words.

But those same writers, who in the war years wrote these documentary, compressed and deliberately uncomplicated stories, have in recent years felt the need to return to this theme, to those years which have been forever engraved in the memory. Young authors, too, whose mature life began at the front, have also written about the events of those years. A "second wave" of stories about the war has appeared, as it were, and among them are works of great talent (stories by Victor Nekrasov, Emmanuil Kazakevich and others).

These stories contain a deeper interpretation of the war, of the heroism and self-sacrifice which it called forth in people and of the frightful mark it left in their hearts. Contemporary stories about the war are marked primarily by profound and sensitive psychological portrayal, by a heightened attention to man's spiritual life, which continues all the same under the terrible burden of war.

The short stories of the mid-fifties strike one first of all by their complex moral problems, the posing of sharp problems of social life.

Such are the well-known stories by Sergei Antonov—*Rains* and *Running Empty*—in which the complexity of the characters' spiritual life and the tension of moral conflicts are revealed unobtrusively, in a leisurely way, against a background of the emphatically humdrum environment surrounding them.

The main message of Yuri Nagibin's stories is the probing of human character; for him human personality is of absolute and stable worth. Such is the personality of the boy Savushkin in his story *Winter Oak*, which reveals the poetic soul of a boy in love with nature.

Keen interest in the village and its inhabitants, in the very sources of the people's life is typical of the stories of Vladimir Tendryakov and Vladimir Soloukhin.

Yuri Kazakov occupies a special place. In style and even in subject he is drawn to the traditions of Russian classical prose. He has a broad range of interests: he writes of the "quiet courage" of the workers on the White Sea coast (*Northern Diary*), of vulgarity and greed that has still not been outlived; one of the themes to which he returns in several stories is that of talent which has not been able to give itself to its calling (*The Renegade, Trali-Vali, Adam and Eve*). Kazakov is a born master of Russian landscape. His utter conviction that communion with nature gives a full sense of life is invariably communicated to the reader.

Vasili Aksyonov has a keen sense for all that is of the present-day, starting with problems and ending with language. It is no accident that Aksyonov has said: "A writer should have the same blood formula as his contemporaries." Aksyonov looks closely at his contemporaries, more precisely, at those of this own age, and his demands upon them grow. Hence come a number of stories (*Papa, Put It There!* is one of them) in which the characters re-examine their life, their thoughtless, belated childish attitude to it, and try to find an answer to the most difficult and most important question for young people—how am I to live?

In recent years Maya Ganina, Vasili Shukshin, Irina Grekova, Victor Konetsky, Georgi Semyonov, Victor Astafiev have produced interesting stories which throw light on the most varied aspects of life but are always keenly social and psychologically exact.

Talented young writers have made their mark: Victor Likhonosov, Fazil Iskander, Evgeni Nosov, Vadim Belov, Rid Grachov, Andrei Bitov, Alla Drabkina, Askold Yakubovsky.

In a small article it is impossible to give any detailed analysis of the development of Soviet short stories over 50 years, to list all the names worthy of mention and characterize the variety of themes, manners and styles, all the roads along which contemporary Russian short stories are advancing. So I have tried to give only the most general notion of certain particularities and features of Soviet short stories and of some of its most notable representatives.

PYOTR ALEXANDROV

About the authors

MAXIM GORKY (1868-1936). The doyen of Soviet literature, author of numerous novels, stories and plays, many of which have been translated into English. His first story, *Makar Chudra*, was published in 1892.

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ALEXANDER SERAFIMOVICH (1863-1949) started his literary career in 1889. His novel, *The Iron Flood* (which has been translated into English), has become one of the classics of Soviet literature.

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MIKHAIL PRISHVIN (1873-1954) published his first book of stories and essays, *In the Land of Unfrightened Birds*, in 1907. *Soviet Literature* published his stories *Arctic Honey* (No. 5, 1952), *Little Vasya Does a Day's Work* (No. 10, 1955) and *My Earth-Mates* (No. 5, 1957).

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ALEXANDER GREEN (1880-1932) made a name in Soviet letters with his stories *The Scarlet Sails*, *Sparkling World*, *The Wave Trotters* and others. *The Scarlet Sails* also appeared as a film.

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ALEXEI TOLSTOY (1883-1945) printed his first story in 1908. His novels *Ordeal* and *Peter I* served as the basis for a number of highly successful Soviet films. Several of his books, notably the science-fiction novel *The Garin Death Ray*, have been translated into English.

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BORIS LAVRENYOV (1891-1959). His first story was published in 1924. His story *The Forty-First* (printed in *Soviet Literature*, No. 11, 1957) served as the basis for the famous prize-winning film of the same name.

ILYA EHRENBURG (b. 1891) began his literary career as a poet, his first book of verse appearing in 1910, in Paris. Subsequently he took up prose writing and journalism, without completely giving up poetry. His latest work is a book of memoirs, *People, Years, Life*. *Soviet Literature* published his novel, *The Ninth Wave* (No. 4, 1952).

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KONSTANTIN PAUSTOVSKY (b. 1892) published his first story, *On the Water*, in 1912. Author of a number of stories and plays, an autobiographical book *The Story of My Life*, and other works. Our magazine published his stories *The Ruffled Sparrow* (No. 2, 1949), *Briar Rose* (No. 5, 1952), *Treasure* (No. 8, 1953), *A Basket of Fir Cones* (No. 8, 1954), and *Night Coach* (No. 10, 1955).

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KONSTANTIN FEDIN (b. 1892). His first book, *Waste Land*, was published in 1923. Our magazine published his novels *No Ordinary Summer* (Nos. 8, 10, 1947 and Nos. 4-5, 1948) and *The Bonfire* (No. 7, 1956, Nos. 1-2, 1962, and No. 8, 1965). This February Fedin was publicly honoured on the occasion of his 75th birthday and awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labour.

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ISAAC BABEL (1894-1941) published his first stories in 1916. His first book of stories, *Mounted Army*, appeared in 1926. Our magazine published extracts from his correspondence with friends (No. 1, 1965).

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MIKHAIL ZOSHCHENKO (1895-1958). Author of numerous humoristic stories, the first of which appeared in 1922. Since then more than a hundred books of his stories have been published.

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NIKOLAI TIKHONOV (b. 1896) started his literary career with poetry. Then followed books of essays and stories. In our journal we published his verses (No. 12, 1956), story *Hands* (No. 2, 1958) and memoirs *Roads and Trails* (No. 9, 1964). In 1966 he was awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labour.

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VALENTIN KATAYEV (b. 1897). His first major work, *The Embezzlers*, appeared in 1926. He has written some 20 plays and several scenarios. Our magazine published his novel *The Cottage in the Steppe* (No. 9-10, 1956), stories *The Flight* (No. 2, 1949) and *The Flag* (No. 11, 1957), and fairy-tale *The Magic Flower* (No. 4, 1958). This January Valentin Katayev was publicly honoured on the occasion of his 70th birthday.

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ILYA ILF (1897-1937) and EVGENI PETROV (1903-1942). Satirical writers who worked together for ten years until Ilf's death. Their first work was the satirical novel *Twelve Chairs*, later followed by *Little Golden Calf*, a travelogue *A One-Storeyed America* and several books of stories and feuilletons.

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LEONID SOBOLEV (b. 1898) first appeared in print in 1925. Chapters from his major work, the novel *General Overhaul* (Book One, 1932; Book Two, 1962), were published in *Soviet Literature*, No. 11, 1962. His story *The Green Light* was published in our magazine in No. 11, 1955.

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ANDREI PLATONOV (1899-1951) began his literary career with a book of verse, *Blue Depth* (1922). His first collection of stories was published in 1927.

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YURI OLESHA (1899-1960). Author of novels, stories, plays and scenarios. His fairy-tale novel, *The Three Fat Men*, has served as the basis of a play, a ballet and, most recently, a film.

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PYOTR PAVLENKO (1899-1951). His first book, *Asian Stories*, was published in 1929. *Soviet Literature* published his *Italian Impressions* (No. 12, 1951) and *Devotion* (No. 7, 1964), and extracts from his *Notebooks* (No. 10, 1954).

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IVAN KATAYEV (1902-1939) started his literary career as a war correspondent. His first story, *The Poet*, was written in 1928.

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MIKHAIL SHOLOKHOV (b. 1905). Lenin and Nobel Prizes winner, author of the world famous novels *And Quiet Flows the Don* (extract published in *Soviet Literature* No. 1, 1966), and *Virgin Soil Upturned* (excerpts from Book One published in No. 1, 1956, and from Book Two, in Nos. 1, 2, 7, 1960). This February he was awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labour.

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VASILI GROSSMAN (1905-1964) published his first book, *Glückauf*, in 1934. *Soviet Literature* published his travel notes *Trips to Kirghizia* (No. 1, 1949).

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BORIS POLEVOY (b. 1908), author of *The Story of a Real Man*, began his literary career as a journalist in 1922. Our magazine published his stories *Home Again* (No. 12, 1949), *On the Military Road* (No. 2, 1949), *Smile of Friendship* (No. 1, 1955), *Along an Old Track* (No. 10, 1955), *Nick and Nina* (No. 7, 1956), *Our Lenin* (No. 11, 1966), and essays *Builders*

of a Great Waterway (No. 6, No. 12, 1952), and *Man Is Friend of His Fellow-Man* (No. 5, 1961).

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VICTOR NEKRASOV (b. 1911) published his first story, *Stalingrad*, in 1946. His stories *The New Recruit* and *The Perch* appeared in *Soviet Literature*, No. 8, 1964, and No. 9, 1965, respectively.

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KONSTANTIN SIMONOV (b. 1915). Poet, prose writer and playwright. His first verses were published in 1934. His wartime novels *The Living and the Dead* and *Soldiers Are Not Born* served as the basis for recent prize-winning Soviet films. In our journal were published his stories *Inozemtsev and Ryndin* (No. 6, 1963) and *Colonel Saburov* (No. 5, 1965) and several poems.

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SERGEI ANTONOV (b. 1915). His first story, *Spring*, was published in 1947. Our magazine published his stories *Lena* (No. 4, 1949), *The Poddubki Rhymes* (No. 5, 1951), *The Letter* (No. 5, 1952), *Friends* (No. 8, 1953), *Silver Wedding* (No. 7, 1959), *Alyonka* (No. 10, 1961) and *Running Empty* (No. 6, 1965).

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YURI NAGIBIN (b. 1920) published his first story in 1940. His first book of stories, *A Man from the Front*, appeared in 1943. Our magazine published his stories *The Heir* (No. 2, 1949), *Championship* (No. 7, 1953), *Chetunov, the Son of Chetunov* (No. 1, 1955), *The Nocturnal Guest* (No. 10, 1955), *The Old Tortoise* (No. 4, 1956).

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VLADIMIR BOGOMOLOV (b. 1924). His first story, *Ivan*, appeared in 1959. The film *Ivan's Childhood* based on it received the Golden Lion Prize at the Venice Film Festival. Our magazine published his story *Zosia* (No. 2, 1966).

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YURI KAZAKOV (b. 1927). His first book of stories, *Manka*, appeared in 1958, followed by other collections. Our magazine published his story *Kalevala* (No. 4, 1963).

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ANATOLI KUZNETSOV (b. 1929). His first story, *Sequel to a Legend*, appeared in 1957. (Our magazine published it in No. 11, 1957.) It was followed by several collections of stories and the novel *Babi Yar* published late in 1966.

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VASILI AKSYONOV (b. 1932) published his first stories in 1959. They were followed by the story *Colleagues* (published in *Soviet Literature*, No. 4, 1961). Our magazine also published his stories *Little Whale, Varnisher of Reality*, and *The Queer One* in No. 9, 1965.