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Looking ahead



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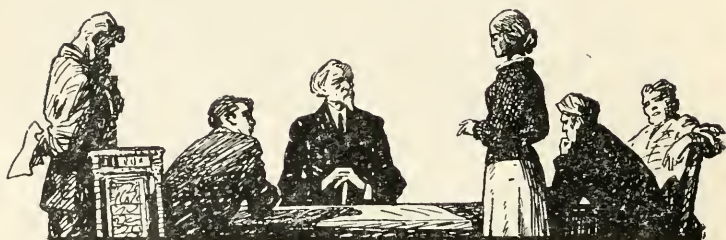
STALIN PRIZE

1947



Иванова

В Е Р А П А Н О В А



КРУЖИЛИХА

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
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VERA PANOVA



LOOKING AHEAD

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IN TRANSLUCENT gold, in ethereal ruby splendour, the sun rises over the broad river. And with it a slow, solemn whistle mounts to the sky, drowning the roar of engines, the rumble of machinery, and the hum of human voices—no sound is audible as engines cross the factory yard, cranes drop their loads, and people move their lips—The mighty blast lingers over the river and is heard in the town, nine kilometres away from Kruzhilikha.

As it blows, a human tide pours in through the gates; some people came from the settlement on foot, others by tram, but the majority by train. Long trains from the town and the suburbs pull up at the little station one after another. From there the people hurry to the factory, streaming in huge crowds towards the gates. There were sheepskin coats, quilted jackets, leather overcoats, great-coats, civilian overcoats, and fur coats; shawls, fur hats with ear flaps, Budyonny-style caps, and knitted caps; men and women, blondes and brunettes, tall and short, gay and melancholy, lively and retiring—ten thousand people of every description and race had come to the factory for the day shift.

The whistle dies away gradually as though coming down from a height, lower and lower; it sinks, spreading over the ground and fading somewhere in the earth's bosom with a last bass note. The human stream flows by and branches off into the shops. Only the guards are left at the gates—The shift has begun.

CHAPTER ONE

LISTOPAD

On a frosty evening in January General Listopad, director of the factory at Kruzhilikha, drove his wife to the maternity home.

It was a good maternity home, the best in the town. Mirzoyev, the chauffeur, had orders to be particularly careful.

"Make it seem like floating on air!" Listopad told him.

Most attentive during Klavdiya's pregnancy, Mirzoyev now outdid himself. The car did not run, it floated.

"It's almost as if we had carried you here in our arms, dear," Listopad said, helping her out of the car.

They had stopped at the wrought-iron gates. Beyond was a yard with tall white trees, and deep in the yard stood the maternity home. A lamp burned dimly over the entrance. The snowdrifts had piled shoulder-high and through them a deep path had been cleared from the gates to the porch. Listopad led Klavdiya along that path. She walked quickly, nervously; Listopad heard her breathing.

"Don't be frightened, everything will be all right," he said, giving her elbow a squeeze.

"I'm not the least bit frightened. Why d'you think I am?" Klavdiya said.

They entered the hall together, but Listopad was not allowed to go farther. An elderly woman in a white

smock and spectacles took charge of Klavdiya and told him to leave and take Klavdiya's fur coat with him. It was a new sealskin coat, the object of Klavdiya's pride and care.

"Yes, take it home," Klavdiya said, "and when you come for us, bring it with you—don't forget."

She laughed happily and Listopad smiled, already seeing himself taking Klasha and the baby home. He wrote down the telephone number of the doctor on duty. Klavdiya held him tightly for a moment, kissed him on the lips and went up the stairs, followed by the woman in spectacles. Listopad returned to the car.

"There," he said with mock annoyance, getting in beside Mirzoyev and putting the coat on the back seat, "you always get something silly for your pains. Never marry, Akhmet. Wives are a nuisance. Now I'll have to take that blasted coat to the theatre with me."

At the theatre that evening there was a meeting of the town Party active.

Listopad arrived late. As he crossed the foyer, he caught a glimpse of the crowded stalls through the half-open door and heard Makarov, the first secretary of the town Party Committee, speaking. By the phrases that reached him, he judged that Makarov was well on in his report. Listopad went through the wings and joined the presidium on the stage. A place was made for him at the middle of the long table, which was covered with red plush. Zotov, the director of the aircraft plant, at once sent him a note, "Why are you late?" Listopad wrote his reply on the same scrap of paper, "Had to take my wife to the maternity home." He watched the note pass from hand to hand and saw the understanding smiles of those who read it. Zotov leaned across the back of his neighbour and said in a loud whisper:

"The excuse is quite satisfactory. Congratulations."

"Don't be in such a hurry!" Listopad whispered back, but to himself he thought that *it* could happen at any minute.

He would have to ring up the hospital after the meeting.

He waited for the debate. The report did not interest him. Everything Makarov was saying had been gone over at a meeting of the town Party Committee bureau, and only that morning Listopad had sent him some of the figures he was quoting. Listopad had taken charge of the factory in 'forty-two and was no stranger in the town.

He scrutinized the auditorium. Where were his men—the Communists of Kruzhilikha? Ryabukhin, the Party organizer, was absent. He had been operated on the week before for a phlegmon in his shin caused by a splinter, and was still in hospital. Listopad had had a talk with the surgeon over the telephone the day before. She had said there was enough trouble with the splinters in Ryabukhin's shin to last for twenty years, and that he would have to return to the operating table more than once. Listopad made a mental note to visit Ryabukhin tomorrow. And where was friend Uzdechkin? Ah, there he was, sitting at the end of the fifth row and scowling at the speaker, while all the time he was thinking of Listopad and dying to steal a look at him. But he was holding himself in check. He had deliberately taken an end seat, to make it easier to reach the rostrum when the debate opened.

Oh, Uzdechkin, Uzdechkin, that foolish stubbornness of yours will cost you your neck. You think the workers have more faith in you than in me? You won't be holding down your elective job all your life. You haven't much of a trade and, besides, you've been out of practice for years. It won't be easy for you to return to the bench with your ambition.

Uzdechkin looked tense; he was pale, thin, and ugly like all sickly and badly shaved men. And Listopad, who

loved beauty, health and vivacity, eyed Uzdechkin with a frown.

Old Nikita Trofimovich Vedeneyev, now, was a pleasant sight. He had come to the meeting in a black suit, which, though somewhat old-fashioned, was made from excellent cloth. His starched collar was snow-white, his dark tie matched his suit, and his moustache and the hair on his temples were neatly trimmed. He looked as if it were his birthday. Grand fellow, Nikita Trofimovich! That's the stuff our people are made of! That's the kind of veteran workers we have at Kruzhilikha!

As a matter of fact this was a happy day for Nikita Trofimovich. He had received news of his elder son, Pavel; the younger boy was killed in 'forty-three. Pavel wrote to his father and to the Party organization at the shop where he had worked to say that he had recovered, was now wearing an artificial limb, and would soon return. And old Vedeneyev had put aside his proud reserve and was beaming with happiness. Indeed, who would not rejoice to have a son come back at a time like this, even if that son had lost a leg?

Makarov finished his report and returned to his seat in the presidium, his clever, slightly playful gaze slipping across Listopad's face. Listopad understood. Makarov already knew what Uzdechkin was going to say. But what Listopad wanted to know was whether he would support Uzdechkin or not?

The Communists who spoke next were mainly workers from Kruzhilikha and the aircraft plant. They spoke of what the newspapers call production thorns.

Listopad knew where all the thorns at his factory were. They were in sectors to which he had not yet got round or which needed his personal supervision. Old Vedeneyev

said that the new press, about which there had been so much talk, was not yet in operation.

"We've drawn the director's attention to it repeatedly through the Party organization and at technical conferences," he said with a quick look at Listopad.

Listopad nodded. Yes, they had. For a moment he was annoyed that the business about the press had been brought up. Two months before Zotov had almost pinned him to his telephone receiver, pleading for the loan of the press until the following quarter, when he expected to get one himself. Listopad had been firm. Now Zotov was offended and sent a note: "You're being a dog in the manger. You didn't let me have the press and you're not using it yourself."

All right. They'd get the press going, if not tomorrow then the day after—

The next speaker after Vedeneyev was a woman from the aircraft plant. She said that many of their dwellings were in disrepair and that the management was doing nothing about it. Zotov knitted his brows, stopped writing and rocked himself on his chair. Listopad wanted to write him a biting note, but he did not have time to get down to it. Uzdechkin mounted the rostrum.

Listopad first made Uzdechkin's acquaintance less than a year ago. When Listopad came to the factory, Uzdechkin, the chairman of the factory trade union committee, had already been called to the colours. He was badly shell-shocked, spent a long time in hospital and was not allowed to go back to active service. He was sent to Omsk on political work. From there he wrote desperate letters to the factory, begging them to help him get back home. Ryabukhin took the matter up and obtained permission for him to return to the factory, where he was soon re-elected chairman of the factory trade union committee.

After taking stock of the situation at the factory, Uzdechkin went to Listopad with a pile of complaints.

"Please don't meddle in that," Listopad told him. "That's my business."

"Excuse me, Comrade Director," Uzdechkin said, "don't you know that's just what the trade union's for?"

"I don't know," returned Listopad, who had taken an immediate dislike to Uzdechkin. "You ought to know what your job is."

"What about socialist emulation?" Uzdechkin inquired. "Are you making us answerable for it?"

"I'm not," Listopad said, "the front is."

"This conversation," Uzdechkin said, "will have to be continued under different circumstances."

"I don't see why it should, because you shan't hear anything new from me."

From that day the struggle between the two men grew more and more bitter. It irritated Listopad sometimes, but it consumed Uzdechkin like a fever.

Listopad was told that Uzdechkin had had a nasty blow. His wife went to the front as a nurse and was killed at the very beginning of the war, leaving him with two baby daughters, her brother, a boy in his teens, and a sick old woman—his mother-in-law. In domestic life Uzdechkin was a martyr. Listopad had no use for him and these stories left him indifferent.

What was the man up to now? He was pulling some foolscap from the breast pocket of his tunic. It looked as though he meant to make a longer report than Makarov.

His thin fingers worked to re-fasten the pocket button; it came off and fell to the floor. Somebody picked it up and gave it to him.

"The press is not the question, comrades," Uzdechkin was saying. "Generally speaking, that's only a feather in

the scale. The issue is far deeper—it's a matter of principle."

It was just like the man to make such a tiresome start. Come down to business, man. Out with it. Say how I'm clipping your wings.

"What did I find when I returned to the factory? The management was not in touch with the trade union committee and didn't want to be either."

That's a lie. When you returned you found that the factory was overfulfilling its programme month after month. Under the former director they had plagued the Commissariat with pleas to reduce the plan by at least fifteen per cent on the grounds that it exceeded the capacity of the factory.

"The main point is that we have no co-ordination. What we have is a one-man management, to be exact—absolute power in the hands of one man, and to be still more exact—an autocrat in the person of the director."

What a passion for accuracy!

"Never has our trade union committee been so insignificant in the life of the factory as now."

Who's to blame for that, my dear fellow? Prove you can be important. Prove—

"The former director reckoned with us, he knew how to uphold the prestige of the trade union at the factory."

Yet he could not uphold his own prestige. He was dismissed for incompetence.

"Comrade Listopad is trying to do the job of the trade union organization."

"Facts! Give us facts!" Makarov interrupted with a touch of impatience.

"You'll have them. Comrades, here are the facts for last year alone."

He flourished his notes. His lips were ashen.

Zotov pushed away his note-book and gazed at Uzdechkin with parted lips. Makarov watched him keenly

through narrowed eyes. The whole audience sat up. There had not been anything of the kind at meetings of the town active for a long time.

Uzdechkin enumerated the suggestions put forward at technical conferences and not carried out. There was quite a number—about twenty. Some were very sensible. Indeed, the devil only knew why they had been shelved! Some—because parallel projects were being worked out in the department of the chief technologist, others had been somehow forgotten under press of more urgent business.

"We must draw the conclusion that the director isn't paying sufficient heed to the voice of the masses."

A sorry conclusion.

"... but everything the chief designer wants is done instantly as though it were an order from the Commissariat."

Yes, I shan't deny that I have a weak spot for the old man.

"The chief designer has rheumatism or gout or something and so he's moved the department to his flat. The designers have to work there. Comrades, we can't allow it, we can't allow anybody to run a private office under conditions of socialist production!"

Would it be better if the chief designer retired on pension? It would take a lot of looking to find somebody to replace him.

"Or take Grushevoi, the manager of the special shop. The trade union committee was against the management giving him a bonus, but the director disregards our recommendation. I, personally, protested against conferring an Order on him."

"Why?" Makarov inquired.

"Because the workers have a definite opinion of him. Because all Grushevoi wants is to feather his own nest,

to further his own career. But the director pays no attention to us."

I can't be bothered with what Grushevoi thinks and wants. The man's shop is systematically overfulfilling its plan for fuses and I recommended him for a decoration—clear and simple.

"When we need money to meet our cultural or routine requirements we have a hard time wringing it out of the director, but when our football eleven beat Spartak he presented every player with a thousand rubles, and the goalie got two thousand."

"Is that a fact?" Zotov quickly turned to Listopad. "Well I'll be—" he said admiringly.

"It's impossible to make out what guides the director in his likes and dislikes. As a matter of fact he does not discriminate between people who had shed their blood for their country and people who've been sitting tight in the rear throughout the war—"

"Stop that demagoguery!" somebody shouted. It was old Vedeneyev. His younger son had been killed at the front and the elder one was returning home crippled.

Zotov did not hide his satisfaction. This time it was the Kruzhilikha director who was being taken to task! Well, well!

"That shows that at the factory the director leaves the trade union committee nothing but the organization of socialist emulation—"

"No small task that," Makarov remarked. "No small task. You'll do a good job if you manage it."

"... then we haven't got any say in the matter, either. When it comes to judging the output records, the director appears and shoves us aside. And the workers we recommend are left in the shade while the men the director thinks fit are moved into the limelight."

"Because my yardstick is different from yours!" Listopad shouted, finally losing control of himself. "I judge

a man by his work and have no business on how many of your committees he sits!"

"Did you hear, comrades?" Uzdechkin cried. "The director cares nothing for social work!"

Again there were shouts of "Demagogy!" in the auditorium.

"Quiet!" others cried. "Let him go on! Don't interrupt!"

"Comrade Listopad," Makarov said, "you'll reply when your turn comes."

What could he reply? There was really nothing he could say. What Uzdechkin said was true and there was a lot more he knew nothing about. There was no point in dragging that out. Better to say nothing at all. It was true he kept people down, broke rules and put his finger in every pie. Not because he wanted to be a despot, but because of a passion he had of poking his nose into everything, of tackling every job, big or small, with his own hands. That was perhaps not very wise, not wise at all, but he could not help it, it was his nature.

On the other hand, if he had behaved in such an anti-social and anti-Party way as Uzdechkin maintained, Ryabukhin and Makarov would certainly not have passed it over in silence. They would have told him.

He would have to get up and say something in reply. Why the technical suggestions had not been implemented. The twenty that had not been carried out that year were compensated by the more than four hundred that had. He could joke about those bonuses he gave the football players and raise a laugh in the audience. And as for his relations with Uzdechkin, he could point out that other people, Ryabukhin, for instance, had never said a word about his cramping their work. In conclusion, he could drop a gentle, sympathetic hint about Uzdechkin's nerves not being all they ought to be.

He walked to the front of the stage, a big man, broad-shouldered, with a row of ribbons across the breast of

his resplendent general's uniform, which he put on only for official occasions—a very strong man and yet with something of a child's expression in his eyes.

"Comrades," he began confidently.

The Communists—leaders among the workers—who formed public opinion at the factory, had to be made to leave the meeting, forgiving their director for his transgressions and believing in him as before!

"You're a dog in the manger all the same," Zotov told him after the meeting, pulling on his general's greatcoat. "It's a shame, that's what it is. Seriously speaking, when do you intend to get that press going?"

"I'll have it going, don't worry."

"What are you waiting for?"

"Somebody to operate it."

"Is that really what's holding you up?"

"It's all right for you to talk. Have you got all the men you need?"

"You know very well I haven't. But if you wish I can let you have somebody to handle your press. You have my word for it. The man will accept. You want him?"

"Yes."

"Only here's the condition. You let me have Grushevoi. You don't need him now that your special shop is running smoothly."

"I doubt if he'll want the transfer," Listopad laughed.

"But I'm serious. He's a fine worker! I'll see that he gets everything he wants. Let me have him!"

"I'm serious, too. Nothing will come of it, Your Excellency. I need Grushevoi myself."

Listopad wanted to know what Makarov thought of Uzdechkin's speech. In his closing remarks Makarov had spoken at length about the role of the trade unions in socialist emulation, but made no reference to Uzdechkin.

Makarov crossed the vestibule with two workers from the aircraft plant. He caught Listopad's eye but did not stop.

Listopad used the theatre manager's telephone to call the hospital.

"Your wife is in ward fourteen on the second floor," he was told. "She feels all right. No, the baby hasn't come yet. She hasn't even had any pains. You brought her too soon. She sends you her love. Ring up in the morning."

That was disappointing! So Klavdiya had been in too great a hurry. She thought her time had come and wanted to go to the maternity home at once. Her panic had been due to her inexperience. Next time she would know better—

He woke up in the middle of the night, alone in the big bed, and before he opened his eyes the thought that the baby might have been born already passed through his mind. What day was it? The eleventh of January and well past midnight. That would be his son's birthday. He wanted to ring up the hospital, but checked himself and rang up in the morning as he had been told.

A woman's voice answered. He gave his name and asked about his wife, Klavdiya Vasilyevna Listopad, ward fourteen.

"Listopad?" the woman's voice repeated hurriedly. "Wait a minute, I'll find out."

The receiver grew silent. Listopad waited. A long time went by. There were voices near the telephone, but nobody went to the receiver. At last somebody picked it up and a man's deep, even voice said:

"Comrade Listopad? Will you please come down to the hospital immediately."

"Has anything happened? Is there any trouble?"

"Please come to the hospital," the voice repeated in a deliberately level tone.

That was not a tone of voice to announce good news.

"Is something wrong?" Listopad asked.

"Yes. Very."

For a moment Listopad felt dizzy.

"Perhaps there's something I can get or bring?"

"No need for anything. Come at once."

The receiver was hung up.

In the evening she had been gay and laughed at her own haste. There had been no pangs. Twice she had felt a slight pain. She had her supper and went to sleep. In the morning when they came to wake her—she was dead. And the unborn baby was dead, too.

The head surgeon described it all in great detail. He used words such as *hypertonia*, the *vascular system* and *periphery of the heart*. He took a sheet of paper and drew many branching lines in order to explain what Klavdiya had died of. Listopad watched the point of his pencil nimbly drawing the lines but understood nothing. Something senseless, hideous, foul and insulting had happened.

"Did she ever suffer from dystrophy?" the head surgeon asked.

"She must have," Listopad said. "She went through the Leningrad blockade. Yes, of course."

"Did she ever complain of a flow of blood to her head?"

"I've never heard her complain of anything," Listopad said, walking away from the surgeon with his eyes cast down.

Klavdiya's body was brought to Kruzhilikha, to the House of Culture. All the arrangements were made by the factory trade union committee. Girls, her friends from the institute where she had studied, ran in shivering with cold, their eyes red with weeping. They brought wreaths and the institute's banner, and laid her out. Listopad did not interfere.

Margarita Valeryanovna, the wife of the chief designer, appeared during the civil funeral rites. Crossing herself and whispering, she kissed Klavdiya on the lips and hand, then went up to Listopad and embraced him.

"It's terrible," she said, "when such a young—" tears prevented her from saying anything else.

He did not reply. He stared at Klavdiya.

Deep hollows ringed her eyelids making them seem very big, and altogether she looked different from what she had been in life. Her lips had always been slightly parted but now they were pressed tightly in a severe line—her jaw had been tied, tied forever, and never again would these dear lips open. Klavdiya's fair hair had always been unruly and fluffy, each strand had shone in the sun, but now it was smoothly combed with a neat parting in the middle, and the smoothed hair seemed darker than it was and made the face more grown-up, proud and wise.

Listopad stared at this beautiful new face and the more he thought of the terrible wrong done him the more unbearable his loss seemed.

He was not used to such wrongs. Until now he had been fortune's favourite. The consciousness of this glaring absurdity and of the irreparability of what had happened made everything go dark before his eyes and shortened his breath. If only it would all end quicker! There was still the procession to the cemetery, the burial—these girls, her friends, might, for all he knew, yet take it into their heads to speak at the graveside.

No more than two months ago, Klavdiya, her hair loose, her beautiful lips parted, had been sitting on the sofa, sewing something, while he talked to her of his mother.

"You do love your mother, don't you?" Klavdiya said, listening with rapt attention.

"Yes," Listopad replied thoughtfully.

"And yet you never write to her. All sons are alike—too lazy to write home. When my brother was alive he seldom wrote to Mother."

"But I write to her," Listopad said. "I write whenever anything important happens. When we got married I wrote immediately and sent her your photograph. But, of course, I've broken with them. They probably wouldn't think of wiring if Mother died. They'd send me a letter to tell me the date on which she died and was buried so that I could commemorate it. Nothing more."

Klavdiya had listened sympathetically, with tears sparkling in her kind, lively eyes. Only two months had passed since then and now Klavdiya was dead and he would have to write and tell his mother.

They all went up to Klavdiya for the last time, the lid was put on the coffin and it was carried out of the room. "Feet first, feet—" Margarita Valeryanovna mumbled anxiously. The coffin was placed on a lorry dressed with wreaths and garlands of pine. The brass band from the factory followed in another lorry. It played the funeral march slowly, solemnly while the lorries raced at full speed. It was all like a nightmare.

After the funeral Margarita Valeryanovna tried to persuade Listopad to come to their flat, but he refused and went home.

He had given the chief designer the flat vacated by the former director and lived with Klavdiya in two rooms in an old house belonging to the factory.

A broad marble staircase with shallow steps led to a spacious landing, paved with grey and white stone slabs. The ceiling was high and the white walls reflected a blinding light that came from the huge window. Footsteps rang hollow and harsh. A long, dim corridor stretched on either side of the bright landing. To the left

the corridor resembled a tunnel with an oval window glimmering at its far end. The walls of the tunnel were symmetrically dented with high door niches. On the right the corridor ended in a door covered with black oilcloth. That door led into Listopad's flat. He opened it with a latch key.

He had not been home since the morning of the eleventh, when he had learned of Klavdiya's death. He had lived in his office at the factory.

The rooms were big and cold—they were never properly heated.

One was his study and the other was Klasha's domain: there were little boxes—he never could make out what she had used them for—and little bottles with something in them, and exercise-books with shorthand notes he could not understand, and books he never found time to read. Her old slippers lay under the bed. A stocking with a needle in it was hanging over the big mirror, which reflected a hole that she had not finished darning.

Listopad disliked big rooms with high ceilings. He had grown up in a peasant's hut with whitewashed walls and neat potted plants on the window-sills. Klavdiya, too, loved a cosy home, and frequently told her friends how beautifully she would do up the place before the baby came. She spoke enthusiastically about the curtains she saw at Anna Ivanovna's—she was Listopad's secretary—and said she would make some like them, and that if the study were divided by a set of bookshelves it would not look so much like a barn. But she never got round to buying the cloth for the curtains or to order the bookshelves at the cabinet-maker's, and nothing was changed. One day Listopad came home in a bad mood and picked a quarrel with Klavdiya; he said that he was sick and tired of living like a Gipsy, called in some workers and got them to partition off a part of the bedroom for a kitchen and a bathroom.

The bustle infected Klavdiya and she contrived to get a bath somewhere. The bath was delivered, the partitions made, but they never succeeded in putting up the geyser. There was a shortage of plumbers at the factory and the few that there were had their hands full. The bath stood there unused and Listopad went to the public baths. Their dinner was brought from the dining-hall at the factory, and the office cleaner came in to tidy up their flat and did their shopping.

Listopad stood in the bedroom for some time, then he went to his study and finally returned to the bedroom. It seemed that all he had to do was to call: "Klasha!"—and her voice would reply, "Yes." Her sealskin coat was hanging on the rack. A blue exercise-book lay open and he saw the page filled with hooks and twirls. The cover bore the legend: *Strength of Materials*. She had taken shorthand notes of the lectures at her institute. Something inside him told him to put all this out of sight.

But he did not put anything away. He took off his tunic and boots and lay down on the low couch in the study, covering himself with his greatcoat.

Winter dusk darkened the windows. It was quiet. The telephone did not ring.

"Klasha!" he called with a soundless movement of his lips. There was no answer but he could imagine her voice. Klasha had been here and Klasha was no more. Gone like a dream.

He fell asleep, for the first time in almost three days. When he awoke the sunlight was streaming in through the window from the east. He had slept the remainder of the day and the whole night!

The door-bell rang. He went out barefoot and opened the door without taking off the safety chain. Ryabukhin was standing there, hatless and wearing a baize dressing-gown.

"Where have you come from?" Listopad demanded, letting him in.

"From the hospital as you can see for yourself."

"Am I dreaming all this?"

"No, you're not dreaming," Ryabukhin smiled.

Listopad sat down on the disordered couch. He gazed at Ryabukhin, rubbing his bare hairy chest, screwing up his eyes and yawning.

"You've given them the slip, have you?"

"Yes," Ryabukhin said. "I had to. They wouldn't discharge me or give me leave."

"What an idea to go out into the frost in a dressing-gown. You'll catch a cold, you fathead, and be in bed for another month. You could have given me a ring and I'd have sent Mirzoyev with the car and a coat."

"I suppose that's all you've got to think of just now," Ryabukhin said, looking away. This roundabout hint of sympathy made Listopad's heart ache still more.

"I want some tea," Ryabukhin said, limping into the kitchen. Listopad heard him setting the primus stove and striking matches. Ryabukhin was sorry for him, he thought. It was out of sympathy that he had run away from the hospital in a dressing-gown and was making tea for him. He thought that this tea would help to heal the wound in Listopad's heart.

The kettle was boiling by the time Listopad finished washing, brushed his teeth and put on a clean shirt. Without asking any questions Ryabukhin found cups, bread and a tin of meat. He spread a newspaper on the writing desk and they sat down to breakfast.

"I'm not going back to hospital and it's no use them coming for me," Ryabukhin said. "My wound's closed and they were keeping me under observation like a Guinea-pig. That surgeon is crazy even if she is a colonel in the medical corps. 'I can't let you go,' she said to me.

'You've got a remarkable constellation of splinters.' A constellation, mind you! Astronomers, bahl!"

The chatter, too, Listopad thought, is only meant to take his mind off his loss.

"This dressing-gown will have to be returned and my suit and greatcoat brought back."

"You can wear some of my things for the time being, but send that dressing-gown back or you might be charged with stealing state property. I don't suppose you've heard how Uzdechkin gave me hell at the meeting of the active."

"Yes, I have," Ryabukhin replied.

"So it's reached you already!"

"The chaps who came to see me in hospital told me."

"Now listen to me," Listopad said, with a pang of jealousy. "If you're at one with Uzdechkin you'll do him a good turn by telling him he's going about it the wrong way. He won't achieve a damn thing even if he keeps wrangling till doomsday. He's got to write to the Central Committee!"

"He will," Ryabukhin looked thoughtfully at Listopad. "He said he'll write to the Central Committee."

"What's he waiting for?"

"You see, he respects discipline and order—"

"Incompetency!"

"... As a modest man who respects discipline and order he will naturally first go to the primary Party organization."

"Then up the ladder."

"Yes, then up the ladder."

"You people bore me," Listopad said. "You can't even put up a decent fight."

He said that intentionally, to vex Ryabukhin and to get him heated. But the latter only looked at him with a calm light in his blue eyes, and sipped his tea.

"You're a snake in the grass," Listopad said. "You came to me today and look after me, but you dislike me. You like Uzdechkin."

There was a ring. Ryabukhin went to open the door. It was Domna, the office cleaner.

"Hello, Domna!" Ryabukhin exclaimed. "Glad to see you! How are you, my dear? Listen, will you do me a favour? Get me my things from hospital. You're my only hope."

"Is the Director at home?" Domna asked in a thin, plaintive voice. "Will the poor man be going to the office? They brought a letter for him early this morning and told me to take it to him."

"A letter for you," Ryabukhin announced, seeing Domna out and returning to the study.

Listopad opened the envelope—it contained a photograph of Klavdiya in her coffin; Listopad could be seen vaguely behind the coffin. When had they the time to do all this? He hid the envelope in a drawer without showing the photograph to Ryabukhin.

"You like Domna, too," he said, ignoring the fuss that was being made about his bereavement. "You like the plain and simple sort who can't do anything but sweep floors and take down minutes."

"Yes, I do," Ryabukhin said, clearing the desk. "You're a self-centred ass, but I like you as well, the devil knows why."

The telephone interrupted them. It was Anna Ivanovna asking whether she should send his post to his flat or whether he would come down to the office himself. She said that the chief designer had arrived and was kicking up a row in the workshops.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHIEF DESIGNER

Margarita Valeryanovna was the first lady at the factory.

Ten years before Sergo Orjonikidze had called upon the wives of industrial leaders to share in the social life of the factories. Margarita Valeryanovna had tried it and liked it.

Before that she had devoted her whole life to her husband and his household. She did not have a clear idea of what social work meant. But she went ahead and organized a model kindergarten and a dietetic dining-room.

Her work was commended and she came to have respect for herself. Until then she had respected nobody but her husband, Vladimir Ippolitovich. Her only reason for existing had been to see that his dinner and supper were served in time, that the little box of inlaid wood, standing on the left side of his desk, was filled with cigarettes and the bronze match-box on the right was filled with matches, and that strong tea, made the way he liked it, was ready at six o'clock in the morning.

Margarita started her social work at a factory in the south, where her husband worked at the time, and continued it here, at Krushilikha.

During the war there was such a great deal of work that sometimes Margarita Valeryanovna felt quite exhausted. She helped the factory trade union committee and had business with doctors, book-keepers, disabled workers, evacuees, pregnant women, house managers, cooks, sanitary inspectors, the social maintenance department, and children of kindergarten age.

Everybody at the factory knew this thin, busy woman. She was flat-chested, her face had a bluish pallor and was covered with a network of fine wrinkles, and her hair

was done up in funny little curls tied with a funny old-fashioned bow that became neither her age nor her looks.

"The old woman," people would say of her, "said she'll get us the fire-wood," or "Ring up the old woman and get her to ask the director—" It would have been a great surprise to Margarita Valeryanovna to know that people called her an old woman. When she married Vladimir Ippolitovich thirty years earlier he was a man getting on in years while she was only a young thing. And all these thirty years she had subconsciously thought of him as a man getting on in years and of herself as a young creature. In summer she wore dresses with flounces, and socks and sandals like young girls. On occasion she was charmingly coquettish.

On the whole her appearance and manners were those of an old maid rather than of a matron of respectable years.

She had no children because Vladimir Ippolitovich did not want any. He considered that they took up too much time and strength that could be more usefully employed in other ways. Nobody could tell how the children would turn out, but he, Vladimir Ippolitovich, had already turned out to be a man above the average, a man to be valued. He was an outstanding inventor and one of the most prominent designers in the country, and he held that it was Margarita Valeryanovna's duty to look after him and to cherish him instead of having unpredictable babies.

Vladimir Ippolitovich raised no objections to his wife's social activity, but he laid down the condition that it should in no way blight his interests. Horrified by her own resolution, Margarita Valeryanovna promised that his interests would not suffer. She had kept her promise for ten years.

Vladimir Ippolitovich got up by the alarm clock at half past five. At six he had his tea: just two glasses, very

strong, very sweet and not too hot or too cold. Then he smoked a cigarette. He required the utmost silence while he had his tea and smoked, for this was the time when he thought over his plans for the day. Several writing pads always lay before him and he made his notes in them. At half past six he collected his writing pads and left the dining-room for his study, kissing the hand of his silent wife and saying, "Thank you."

He worked alone until nine o'clock, when the designers came. They rang the door-bell timidly and entered very quietly. They were afraid of the chief designer. This concentration of the main work of the department in the chief designer's flat was torture to them.

He set aside three of the biggest and brightest rooms for this work. They were well heated, for Vladimir Ippolitovich suffered from rheumatism. The excellently lighted rooms were fitted with comfortable desks, a technical library in four languages, a telephone, carpets—But to escape the chief designer's indefatigable and captious supervision any designer would have gladly exchanged all this comfort for the large and poorly heated premises of the department at the factory, where only the copyists worked now.

Involuntarily they admired him for the magnificent job he was doing. They realized that not every designer had the good fortune to work under so capable a teacher. But they could not help hating him. They were people with ailments of their own, children, domestic troubles and cares, but he refused to take into account anybody's weariness, indispositions or cares. If illness kept somebody away from work he took it as a personal affront.

"I work, don't I?" he would say.

He could discharge a man unexpectedly and without any explanation for the slightest inattention, for a trifling miscalculation, or out of mere caprice. What happened to the man after that concerned the management and the

trade union. The discharged designer was free to ask for a transfer to one of the shops or to leave the factory altogether—the chief designer did not care.

He was more considerate to the men he valued. But he was cordial to none.

He had no use for the time-table observed at the factory; he subordinated his men to a time-table of his own.

At half past one he got up and left the study. That was the signal for the lunch hour.

Margarita Valeryanovna personally superintended the cooking of his dinner. She never relied on the cook. Heaven knew what would happen if the meal was not to her husband's taste. He would not eat it, and she would worry herself to death. He ate little, only twice a day, but the food had to be what he fancied. For dessert he liked a small piece of home-made cake. During the most difficult months of the war, when everybody in the town lived on peas and linseed oil, Margarita Valeryanovna put herself to no end of trouble to get white flour, vanilla and saffron, and baked the cakes she was convinced her husband could not do without.

Vladimir Ippolitovich had a short rest after dinner and then again went into the study where he stayed until midnight.

"You don't get enough sleep," Ivan Antonych, his doctor, said. "At our age, my dear patient, you've got to sleep more."

"I sleep disgracefully long," Vladimir Ippolitovich protested. "Edison slept only four hours."

He had a loudspeaker on a little shelf above his desk. It was turned on only so much as was needed to tone the broadcast down to a whisper. That whisper did not disturb him. But as soon as the signals which always preceded Stalin's Orders of the Day came faintly out of the loudspeaker, he turned it on full blast and called in the designers from the other rooms. When they entered,

he would announce with a lift in his voice, his hands slightly trembling:

"They'll be broadcasting the order in a minute!"

At the beginning of the war, when the fascists invaded large territories and approached Moscow, Vladimir Ippolitovich was racked with anxiety. He did not doubt that the invasion was temporary, that the Soviet Union would triumph; but bitterness choked him. Now he was having his revenge. He had the happiest evening of his life in the summer of 1944, when five Stalin Orders were announced in a single broadcast. The Red Army's victories in January 1945 made him feel young again.

On rare occasions he would approach something akin to kindness. If he noticed a designer's eyes closing from weariness, he would glance at his watch and say in a dry and offended tone:

"You may go home."

By that glance he hinted to the man that he was letting him go earlier out of sheer compassion. For all that, he was a very hard worker and few could keep up with him. Very, very few.

He was seventy-eight.

On the morning when Ryabukhin ran away from hospital, Vladimir Ippolitovich suddenly spoke over his morning tea.

"So you're ill again!" he said irritably.

Margarita Valeryanovna sneezed into her handkerchief delicately like a kitten and looked at her husband with red-rimmed eyes.

"I must have caught a cold at the funeral yesterday," she admitted guiltily.

"You shouldn't have gone," Vladimir Ippolitovich said. "I didn't go. Do you think you've lightened Listopad's grief by going?"

"Of course not. But, you see, it's what people expect of you," Margarita Valeryanovna said in mild justification. "I couldn't do otherwise. He comes to see us. You work together. It just wouldn't have been right if neither of us went to the funeral."

"Prejudices, provincialism," Vladimir Ippolitovich snapped. "In our day men take these things quite differently."

He went to his study, treading gingerly with his rheumatic feet, and sat down pensively at his desk.

Funerals, funerals. He had been hearing that word for days. A young woman had died. So young and full of life. "What a pity!" everybody was saying. They did not understand that there was no limit to the desire to live.

There was no limit to the *right* to live, either. Had he less right to live than that young woman because he had lived three-quarters of a century?

He examined his pale, wasted hands, knotted with rheumatism. He carefully clenched and unclenched his fingers.

Doctor Ivan Antonych had not minced his words. "It's time you looked after yourself before it's too late." Yes, it was time. The war was ending and his life's mission was coming to a close. He had trained designers for the factory; if they proved unequal to the task, they would put someone else in his place. As for him—he would rest, rest. He would retire on pension. He and Margarita did not need very much.

He would be able to do the things for which he had no time now. He could, for example, study all that had been done in the field of atomic energy. That was the greatest field for the next century. A new era in engineering! He had a few ideas, but they had to be verified. That would take years.

It was terrible that infirmity should strike a man when he reaches the peak of his creative maturity, when he has every reason to live on and on.

In the final count, was anybody responsible for this swinishness? Or was it nobody's fault?

He was leaving a rich legacy. His automatic tools were better than the British, American or German. His motor saw was known to every Soviet sapper.

Every single machine-tool at the factory had a part of him in it.

Whenever he felt better he went to the shops and looked at the wealth he was leaving his heirs.

He reached for the telephone and picked up the receiver after a moment's thought. What was the weather like? Ten degrees Centigrade below zero. He rang up the garage and ordered a car for eight o'clock.

Nonna Sergeyevna was the first to report for work.

"Good morning, Vladimir Ippolitovich," she said, putting her fair head in at the door of his study.

"Good morning. We're going to the factory in a minute."

"Must I go with you?"

"Yes."

She turned and went to put on her coat, which she had just taken off. The chief designer was out of humour and was leaving for the factory to let off some steam. He would go from shop to shop and find fault with everything. The old man was impossible!

It was not far to the factory.

The car drove past the warehouses, jolting over the ruts, skirting heaps of rusty scrap and broken ice, and slowing down at the crossings over the railway tracks. The chief designer sat beside the chauffeur and stared ahead with cold eyes.

"It's dirtier than ever," he said, turning to Nonna.

She made no reply. Her expression was as cold as his. She saw all this every day. The heaps of rubbish grew before her eyes. The old man could never understand that there was nobody to clear it away.

Vladimir Ippolitovich got out of the car near the wood-working shop and walked on slowly, leaning on a stick. Short and frail, he nevertheless looked impressive even here among the immense stacks of timber. His sealskin hat sat firmly and defiantly on his head.

The car followed slowly while Nonna walked beside him, bored and annoyed and wondering why he could never go alone. It was his confounded lordliness; she had quite enough to do to run to the laboratory and shops ten times a day.

There were slogans on the walls, "Everything for the country's defence!", "Death to the fascist invaders!" and others in the same vein. The red paint had been dulled by damp and soot.

"Still the same ones," said the chief designer, pointing to the slogans with his stick. "They've been up for three years! Is it so difficult to write something new like 'On to Berlin'?"

German prisoners of war were clearing the snow. They broke the hard icy crust and shovelled it into trolleys. A ruddy-faced young Russian soldier with a rifle was guarding them. The chief designer stopped. They were the first Germans he had seen since the war started. They worked listlessly, with an apathetic expression on their faces. An expression that seemed to say: "What did you bring us here for? You won't get any good out of us anyhow. We're only here because we've got to be." The young Russian soldier wore an apathetic expression, too. The chief designer gazed at them with icy curiosity. The Germans stole glances at him.

"Yes, there was a time when you fired at Moscow, and here you are now doing a navy's job for us," he said suddenly in German.

"The war has its own pills," one of the Germans replied after a pause.

"They are very bitter pills," the chief designer said.

He went slowly on, leaning on his stick, his head slightly thrown back. The Germans gazed after him and the haughty young woman accompanying him.

"Who's that?" one of them asked.

"The owner of the factory, of course," replied the man, who had spoken to the chief designer. "Can't you see that for yourself?"

After giving the maid her instructions, and washing her husband's glass and putting it into the cupboard, Margarita Valeryanovna rang up Doctor Ivan Antonych and asked him to drop in to see her on his way to the out-patient hospital. She did not feel well and was afraid she might have to take to bed. That she could not afford to do.

Ivan Antonych was the oldest and most popular doctor at Kruzhilikha. Before the Revolution he had been the only physician there, not counting the quacks and midwives. The directors of the company had prided themselves on being progressive enough to employ a doctor at the factory. Now Ivan Antonych headed the out-patient clinic at the factory and had a numerous staff of doctors, who received patients at the clinic and visited them at their homes. People had great confidence in him and always preferred to see him when they fell ill; he never refused to answer a call although that no longer formed part of his duties.

"Let me see, now," he would say, "what year was it? The year we built the malaria station, now I remember!"

"Petrov?" he would ask. "Who can that be? Oh, yes,

he's the chap who's inclined to angina. You should have said so at once!"

He remembered people by their illnesses as others remember them by their names and faces. In rare cases he remembered surnames, but never first names or patronymics. He thought that unnecessary.

"I'm an old man and I see no reason why I should strain my memory over that," he said.

To avoid misunderstandings he addressed all men as "my dear patient" and all women simply as "madame."

"You must go to bed, madame, you must rest," he told Margarita Valeryanovna, writing out a prescription. "You've got a touch of flu and I shan't answer for the consequences if you go running about."

"But doctor," Margarita Valeryanovna protested with modest pride, "you know that I don't run about for my own pleasure. I've got many social duties to attend to!"

"Duties must come in reasonable doses," the doctor said, struggling with his galoshes and shuffling his feet like a floor-polisher, "in doses that are not harmful to your health. In principle I'm not against them. But when they're abused, like all excesses—in short, you must go to bed!"

When he left, Margarita Valeryanovna went to the mirror and put on a youthful tasselled hood and set out for the social insurance department. She had to see about a pension for an old woman, the mother of a soldier. She knew from experience that it was hopeless to ring up.

In the street she saw a car she knew well driving up. It was Vladimir Ippolitovich returning from the factory.

She could not tell what prompted her to dodge round the corner of the house, when her way led in quite a different direction. Stopping to catch her breath, she listened. The car drew up and the door clicked, then the car hummed again, turned and drove away. But Margarita

Valeryanovna remained in her shelter—Vladimir Ippolitovich usually took a long time to mount the steps.

She felt somewhat embarrassed about slipping away like this. Good heavens, she was behaving like a little girl!

"He would have detained me," she said to herself to justify her behaviour, "and I might have missed the vice-chairman. Without him, nobody will take the responsibility for the pension. Besides," she thought, taking courage, "when all's said and done I get up at five o'clock for his sake and I always have to be at home at half past one, but I can't be tied to him all the time—everybody has the right to get something out of life for himself!"

She went off with her usual brisk, business-like gait to the social insurance department, stopping on the way at the chemist's to order her medicine.

"The old man's at the factory," Listopad told Ryabukhin, replacing the receiver. "We'll have to go and see him, to humour him. Put on whatever will fit you, and come with me."

"No, I'll go to the Party Committee," Ryabukhin said, "the work's heaped up on me. Give the old man my respects."

Listopad left him trying on jackets and trousers. The people he met told him that the chief designer was in the foundry. There he found only the shop manager, dishevelled and sweating as though he had just come from the baths.

"He was here," he said, answering Listopad's question, "but he's gone now. Heaven knows where he is. You should have heard the way he bawled at us," an admiring smile spread across the manager's face as though he was pleased to have the chief designer shout at him. "I thought he'd burst a blood vessel."

Listopad ran his eye over the shop. The second conveyor was in disrepair again; the pouring was done on the floor. The belt was worn out and it was time the conveyor was given a general overhaul.

"What are they doing?" Listopad asked, nodding to a corner where there was less rubbish. Two women, powdered with dust, were moulding something big and intricate, carefully levelling the earth and stepping back to survey their work.

"They're making an iron railing," said the shop manager. "The Town Executive ordered it for the public gardens. It's our first town improvements job, Alexander Ignatyevich."

Listopad overtook the chief designer near the old open-hearth furnaces. He came out of the shop, surrounded by engineers, steel-makers, the chief power engineer and the manager of the mechanization department, Chekaldin, a young technician whom Listopad had recently promoted to that leading post. Nonna was standing silently apart from them with boredom eloquently expressed on her face.

"Vladimir Ippolitovich," Listopad greeted him, "I'm very happy to see you here."

"I'm going home now," he said with an impatient gesture of his small, withered hand. "I've seen everything and said everything I wanted to say. Good-bye, comrades. And you, young man," he addressed Chekaldin, "I advise you to go over your plan again. You have a lively imagination, but you can't substantiate your ideas. You lack experience, experience." Chekaldin stared at him and his face clouded with confusion. "But your imagination is not bad, not bad at all! I'll think over what you've told me," he promised generously. Chekaldin brightened and his broad young face lit up with frank and trustful pleasure. "I'll think it over. Ring up Nonna Sergeyevna in about ten days."

"I'll come with you," Listopad said.

He sat in the back seat beside the chief designer, while Nonna Sergeyevna, whom he disliked for her conceit—his dislike went so far that he could scarcely bring himself round even to greet her—sat in front by the chauffeur.

"Has Chekaldin been talking to you about reconstructing the foundries?" Listopad asked. "I haven't seen his plan myself but they tell me it's got vigour."

"I doubt whether that plan is the first item on our agenda today," the chief designer interrupted. "Before starting on any reconstruction we've got to clear out the premises. The shops are littered with scrap." He paused. "We can't overhaul the conveyer and here we are talking of reconstruction." He made another pause, moving his thin lips. "They filled the second furnace while I was there and I got them to bring me a sample of the charge—it contained far too much silicium and chromium. No wonder we get rejects."

"What else?" Listopad thought with amusement. The old man had not said all he had wanted to say at the factory. "Get it off your chest, you'll feel better."

"We're still a long way from perfection."

"Well, that was nothing new."

"However," the chief designer continued, "it's hardly my business now."

That was an old story. Now he would say it was time he retired. He repeated it every time they met; his words contained the envy of an old man for youth and a humility that was higher than pride.

"I must warn you, Alexander Ignatyevich, that my work at the factory will finish the day the war ends."

So he had already fixed the time, too!

"It's no use your keeping silent, Alexander Ignatyevich. You must think of finding somebody to replace me."

No man is indispensable with us. A substitute can always be found—for the work, but not for the heart. Listopad liked this whimsical, imperious old man, who was always poking his nose in where he was not wanted. Was it the sparkle of the man's genius, or the charm of his strong will, or both that attracted him? If he had his way he would never let him go. But how could he keep him?

They were approaching the house.

"We'll talk it over," Listopad said.

They entered the warm study. When the designer, working at a big desk near the window saw the director, he tactfully went out of the room, leaving the two men alone.

"Vladimir Ippolitovich, to begin with, you ought not to take to heart what's going on at the factory. It's not so bad as you think. Whatever way you look at it, the factory was awarded three Orders during the war. You should not upset yourself. Let me do the worrying. If I'm not mistaken, you've not worked in production since about 1926. Is that correct?"

"You seem to remember my biography very well."

"Yes, I know it by heart. I know everything about you and I treasure you as I would a gem—surely you can see that?"

He was ready to say anything to flatter the old man, to go on his knees before him to get him to give up his idea of leaving the factory.

"Compared with ours, the factory you used to work at was a sorry outfit."

"I wouldn't say that," the old man protested, taking offence. "It was a splendid state factory with three thousand workers—highly-skilled men, not like the ones we have now."

"You are forgetting it was the NEP* period, when we had unemployment. You could pick and choose your men. I agree that for the day your factory was quite good, but I'm sure you wouldn't give it a glance today."

The chief designer gloomily toyed with some details lying on his desk.

"If I were you," Listopad went on, "I wouldn't let scrap bother me! I remember the dawn of our industrialization, the first five-year plan. Valuable machinery was damaged, rejects were turned out, and there were all sorts of mistakes and sacrifices. I went through it all myself. But we built a socialist industry, you can't take that away from us. And what about the speed we worked at? Just think how far we would have gone if those blasted fascists hadn't disturbed us! Vladimir Ippolitovich, you've helped to build socialism. As a great Soviet patriot, you are now unstintingly helping to fight the fascists. Do you really mean to go now?"

"I've already told you that I shall go when the war ends."

"But aren't you looking forward to a share in the life that will begin after the war? Besides, the time's coming for us to turn over to peace-time production."

"Wishful thinking."

"Why wishful thinking? I'm judging by the bulletins of the Information Bureau, by the advance of our army and by the orders we're receiving. Did you see them moulding railings for the public gardens in the foundry? You realize the inference of course—it's enough to dance with joy."

"We still have Japan to deal with."

"Surely, if we're making short work of the German fascists we shan't have much trouble there!"

* New Economic Policy.—*Tr.*

"What's months for you," said the chief designer, leaning back in his arm-chair, "means years and years for me. My time is not measured like yours. You say it won't be long. But what does that mean? How long do you think? A month?"

"More!"

"A year?"

"Possibly less."

"Possibly? And possibly I shan't live to see the end of that year. I'll hold out till victory, but not longer. My post will soon be vacant." He opened the little box of inlaid wood. "Smoke?"

They lit cigarettes. Nonna entered the study with an independent air. Without a glance at either of the men, she went to the chest of drawers, took some drawings and walked out.

The chief designer watched her go.

"We began the work," he said, "they'll continue. We can take it," he went on after a short pause, a cloud of smoke about him, "that the range of our production will be much greater than before the war."

"Of course," Listopad replied. "First we'll have to satisfy the demands that have arisen in the country since the war started. Secondly, we now have much more powerful equipment and our possibilities are much more extensive. Stay with us, Vladimir Ippolitovich. We'll think of the factory's future together."

"I'm thinking of other things," said the chief designer, "of sad and dull things. No, don't count on me, Alexander Ignatyevich. My tale is told."

"You see," he said to his wife during supper, "I told you that in our day people take their sorrows differently. Yesterday Listopad buried his wife, but today he was

here making a forecast about peace-time—and he was quite enthusiastic about it, just imagine.”

It was difficult to say whether he was praising Listopad or censuring him. Margarita Valeryanovna took his words as censure. “How dreadful!” she exclaimed, clasp- ing her hands. She felt a little guilty before her husband and was more anxious than ever to please him. But Vladimir Ippolitovich looked up sternly and she realized that she had made a mistake.

“Naturally, I didn’t mean that it was dreadful that he made a forecast—”

“But that he was enthusiastic, I understand.” Vladimir Ippolitovich finished her thought for her. “Will you please pass the salt, Margarita,” he said, putting an end to the conversation.

CHAPTER THREE

LUKASHIN’S HOME-COMING

Ex-Sergeant Semyon Yefimovich Lukashin left his train at the little station near the factory.

He was in an army greatcoat without shoulder-straps, in rough top-boots. Over his shoulder he carried a wooden suitcase and a kit bag, strapped together.

Dusk was gathering. A lamp was already burning in the ticket office at the far end of the station house, but it was still light outside. Immediately beyond the station was a hill, steep and white, up which a wooden staircase for pedestrians rose in black zigzags.

The staircase halved the distance to the settlement and it was not so slippery as the road. Lukashin adjusted his load more comfortably on his shoulder and began the climb.

People were coming down to the trains exactly as they had done four years ago. And there were the familiar columns of smoke above the factory, their crests spreading and merging.

At the top of the hill Lukashin reached a very wide street. Far down the street the tall brick buildings faced each other across large plots of vacant land. The golden light of the sunset flooded the street, and from where Lukashin stood the trams looked no bigger than match-boxes.

It was a new street. They had started to lay it out during the period of the first five-year plan, but the work was cut short by the war. There were no fences round the houses and in place of gardens there was waste land.

A tram passed with people on the steps and on the buffers. Lukashin stood no chance of boarding it with luggage and he continued his journey on foot.

There seemed to be no end to the street: a house, then vacant land, two houses and vacant land again for half a kilometre.

He passed the fire station with the big bell over the gates, the U-shaped brick building of the industrial high school, a very long fence made of boards—it was impossible to tell what was on the other side—and an endless line of telegraph poles with black wire stretched taut between them.

The fence ran in a semi-circle, the street narrowed abruptly and led down between two hills. Wooden houses were scattered helter-skelter about the hills. The houses were old, many had been built during the last century. Crooked little staircases led down to the tram stops. The houses were grimy and dark with age. The old settlement looked like a charcoal sketch done on white paper.

Well-trodden paths led up to the houses. The path to the Vedeneyev house was strewn with ash as it used to be; that must have been done by Mariamna, Vedeneyev's

wife. The brass bell-plate shone; Mariamna always saw to that. Lukashin rang the bell and heard its familiar note behind the door. Footsteps sounded and the bolt grated. Mariamna opened the door. She did not recognize Lukashin. She knitted her eyebrows and blocked the doorway with her broad shoulders.

"Don't you recognize me, Mariamna Fyodorovna?" he smiled.

"Good heavens!" Mariamna exclaimed in her man-like voice. Then she let him in.

In the house everything was in its old place. It was refreshing to see how people had stuck to their old ways. Even the china dog with the chipped muzzle stood in its old place between the cut-glass egg and the Crimean sea shell on the second shelf in the little glass cupboard.

Only the big portrait of Andrei, wreathed with red and black ribbons was new. Lukashin saw it the minute Mariamna switched on the light. It hung opposite the door and smiled down at you when you entered the room.

"Sit down," Mariamna said. "The old man will be home soon."

Born in Perm, she had lived for thirty years in a village and spoke with a local accent.

Lukashin sat down.

"How long ago?" he asked, looking at the portrait.

"Long ago. In Stalingrad."

"Is the lodger still with you?"

"The lodger? Yes."

She said "lodger" in a contemptuous and unfriendly tone. Lukashin shook his head understandingly and changed the subject.

"Have you heard from Pavel?"

"Pavel's coming home," Mariamna said in a different voice, with animation and a touch of pride. "He won't

recognize Nikitka, the boy's grown so much. But Katerina's away. Bad luck that she had to go just when Pavel's coming. They sent her to the Ukraine. The Hitlerites burned everything there and drove the people away, and she's been sent to put things right."

Katerina, Pavel's wife and Nikitka's mother, was a Party worker and was always travelling from one place to another.

"Pavel lost a leg and now he's got an artificial one. Are you on your own legs?"

"Yes. Only my lungs are shot through and I've got false teeth."

Mariamna looked at the stripes over his breast pocket. There were seven—he had been wounded seven times. He wore no shoulder-straps on his tunic.

"Discharged for good?"

"Yes."

Mariamna laid the table for four. There had been a time when many covers were laid on that table. When Andrei was alive and Pavel and Katerina were at home. The lodger, Nonna Sergeyevna, would come down and take her place next to Andrei. Mariika, Mariamna's step-daughter and sister of Pavel and Andrei, used to run in and talk herself out of breath. They teasingly called her a grass widow and she used to flare up at the word.

"The grass widow's getting on in the world," Mariamna said. "She's a Stakhanovite now, operates two machine-tools and wears an Order."

Mariamna went on with her house-work while she spoke to him. She lit the stove in which the wood and kindling lay ready, put away her sewing, covered the sewing-machine, and brought water in a kettle and watered the flowers.

All day long she either went about the house with her heavy step doing one thing or another or sat over her

sewing-machine. The family was big and she did all the sewing for them.

"You have your own house now!" she said. "The old man told me it's bigger than ours, six rooms. You'll be letting them to summer visitors and making money, Semyon!"

"I've got the house, all right, but it's a burden."

"Why?"

"There's still the inheritance to be settled. And I've got to pay two years' taxes."

"You've been at the front and that exempts you from taxes," Mariamna said. She always knew everything that concerned private houses.

"I know that. But father was two years in arrears."

"Your poor mother died of grief. She outlived your father by only six months."

"She died of liver trouble," Lukashin said. "The doctors found she had cancer of the liver."

"But what causes liver trouble? Grief."

The door-bell rang.

"It's the old man," Mariamna said and hurried to open the door.

A cow had gored Semyon when he was a boy. There had been many children playing in the street, but it had gored only him. Even after many years—when his moustache was already growing—in the village of Rogachi people still spoke of him as "Lukashin's boy who was gored by a cow."

He dreamed of getting a higher education. He saw peasant lads going off to study in the city and returning as teachers, doctors, and agronomists. He wanted to be a teacher, to teach children, to command respect, to have mothers come to him and say:

"Tell me, Semyon Yefimovich, what must I do with my Petka to make him listen to me."

He would call Petka and have a quiet, heart-to-heart talk with him and Petka would repent and become as mild as a lamb.

But as soon as Semyon had finished the fifth class his father made him take a short course in book-keeping and got him a job in the grain purchasing office which he managed.

Semyon sat in a musty room amid baskets of eggs and sacks of yarn and suffered. Everybody lived and worked somehow collectively, but he was as lonely as an owl from morning till night.

It galled him that he had obeyed his father and ruined his whole future by burying himself in work he hated.

He thought he would never see the bright, sensible life he dreamed of and he was dejected and morose even at the holiday festivities and dances.

"He's like that because a cow gored him when he was little," people told his mother.

His mother turned a deaf ear to this. She had only one occupation in life to which to give herself up body and soul—medical treatment. There was always something ailing her and she took powders, mixtures and drops, applied hot-water bottles, compresses and mustard plasters, rubbed herself with ointments, and brewed concoctions of herbs. She invited her neighbours to tea in order to tell them of her illnesses. Other people's illnesses interested her much less, she listened to them enviously and when she could no longer restrain herself she would interrupt:

"I, too, have—"

From time to time she went to town to consult the doctors there. She would be so emphatic about her ailments that they would immediately send her to hospital and put her through a series of examinations. A week or so later she would be discharged and told that there was nothing wrong with her.

"They don't understand anything," she would say, returning home disappointed.

In later years she actually fell seriously ill. And when she was told that she would have to submit to treatment in real earnest, she was frightened and very distressed. She drew no satisfaction from her treatment and wasted away rapidly and sadly, in silence and consternation. She saw that her life had gone without her noticing it and that all the medicine she had taken had been in vain.

Lukashin spent eleven years in the purchasing office.

Whenever his father was away on business, he put aside his abacus and took up a book. He would cry and laugh over the books and women entering the office would hear strange sounds coming from the back room—as if someone were blowing his nose or gargling. They never entered the back room. The counter stood in the way.

"Is anybody there?" they would call.

"I'm coming," Lukashin would reply, wiping away his tears and appearing behind the counter.

Sometimes his father let him go to see his godfather, Nikita Vedeneyev, a relative of the Lukashins, but so far removed that the relationship had no name. Lukashin liked to visit the Vedeneyevs. The big family got on well together.

"They're all so friendly," thought Lukashin whenever he was in their midst.

He was called up twice for short terms of service in the army. He was delighted with life there: he was among other men and did what they did, and what they did was essential to the whole people. A soldier was respected. The training and marches were recreation for Lukashin from the purchasing office, from his loneliness. When the war broke out he was called up and he went to the army eagerly.

"The good thing about the army," Lukashin thought, "is that every minute you know what to do. You're respected when you do your duty well, but if you show yourself in a bad light, all your previous service is forgotten. And if you try to justify yourself nobody will listen. But you always get the opportunity to win back people's respect and sometimes even their admiration."

He did what was required of him zealously and soon earned his sergeant's stripes. He was much too staid for his years. He was fond of lecturing young soldiers and they jokingly called him "grandad." During the short bivouacs he would fall asleep with pleasant thoughts and the consciousness of duty well done.

They say that it is a poor soldier who does not dream of becoming a general. Lukashin realized that he would never be a general—he did not have the talent; but he was a good soldier.

He was lucky. He got through the most dangerous military operations with light wounds. He could not help but look upon his wounds as light, when all around him he saw men killed or seriously maimed, while he only stayed a while in a field hospital and returned to his unit.

The war continued and Lukashin went on fighting. Other men were awarded Orders and medals, but he received nothing. Many got awards for exactly the same thing he was doing and that, he thought, meant he was as useful as they. And he learned to respect the soldier at the front whether he had awards or not.

The end of the war was in sight; Soviet troops were driving the fascists to the border. Would the soldiers soon disperse to their homes? He would return home and his father would ask, "When do you intend to start at the office?" He would not reply immediately. He would sit

and smoke and his father would understand that he had left the parental wing and could no longer be shouted at or threatened. "At the office? No," he would then say, "I'm going to stay on in the army."

Near Stanislav he was badly wounded in the face and chest. It happened just at the time when he was calmly confident in his lucky star!

"Just my luck," he thought when he regained consciousness in the field hospital. "Something like this had to happen to me."

He was transferred from one hospital to another. Finally, he was brought to Moscow where a famous stomatologist performed an operation on his face in several stages. It took three months, and was very painful, but the operation was successful. The scars could scarcely be noticed.

"They will disappear altogether in time," the surgeon said, admiring his handiwork.

After this they put in a new jaw with a set of pearly teeth. He liked them very much; to some extent they even compensated him for his suffering.

While in hospital in Moscow he received a letter from his native village, telling him that his parents had died and left him the house and money in the savings bank. In the letter he was asked for instructions about the house.

Lukashin replied that for the present he would not need the house and that the Village Soviet could take charge of it. For several days after that he was sad and bewildered and had the strange feeling that something had been torn away from him. His father had twisted his youth out of shape and he had never had any really warm affection for his mother, still he felt as though something had been lost!

When his bandages were removed, he went to the big mirror in the corridor and inspected his face.

It was thin and yellow and there were deep wrinkles running down the cheeks. The forehead was lined. There were scars on the chin. The nose stuck out prominently. The beard grew in patches; where the skin had been grafted there was no hair. A fine sight! Nobody would say he was thirty. He looked much older!

Only the teeth were good.

"What am I going to do now?" Lukashin asked himself as he stood in front of the mirror.

It was doubtful whether the army would take him back. He had to think of something to do.

The difficulty lay in reaching a decision by himself. What if he made a mistake? There would be nobody then he could turn to and say, "See what your advice is worth!"

He no longer dreamed of becoming a teacher. His young days were over. He had forgotten everything except soldiering.

He had no heart for book-keeping. The simplest solution would be to return to the purchasing office. But he did not want to.

He decided to go to the Vedeneyevs in Kruzhilikha.

Nevertheless, he first went to Rogachi. He saw the house. It was empty and unheated; it was colder in the house than outside. He paid a visit to the cemetery and saw his parents' graves covered with snow. He went to the Village Soviet and then to the savings bank to collect the money his father had left him, and made his way to the railway station.

Two old women saw him off, asking questions, talking and sympathizing with him. He listened in silence.

"Will you work in the office or on the collective farm?"

"I won't work in either," he replied. "I'll go to Kruzhilikha and look around."

The old women were disappointed but they did not try to dissuade him.

"No harm in that," one of them said. "Go and look around and perhaps you'll find it better there than with us."

They looked after his luggage while he bought his ticket. They had known him since he was a baby. They had buried his parents. And now he was leaving them. They did not reproach him. He boarded the train and they left the station, dragging their feet after them in their old, patched boots.

Nikita Vedeneyev entered with an old friend, Martyanov, whom Lukashin knew.

"Hello!" Martyanov shook hands with him, "here's another living soul come home! I had a feeling we'd need some vodka and I've brought a bottle along with me. Mariamna Fyodorovna, may I put it on the table or will you let us have a decanter?"

"Just try and put that bottle on the table," Mariamna warned. "I like his nerve, wanting to put a bottle that's been held with dirty hands on the table!"

Old Vedeneyev put his hand on Lukashin's shoulder and scrutinized his face.

"Yes, my boy," he said, "the war's not made beauties out of us! And Andrei is no more!" He turned and went to wash, followed by Martyanov, who pulled off his oily overalls on the way.

"He loves you, the old man does," Mariamna said, putting a fifth cover on the table. "He loves you and that's why he mentioned Andrei. He never speaks of Andrei to anybody."

Seven-year-old Nikitka, named after his grandfather, ran in from the street. He was a graceful boy, tall for his age, with greenish eyes like all the Vedeneyevs.

"Isn't he like his father?" Mariamna said. "I'll show you a picture of Pavel when he was Nikitka's age. As like as two peas!" There was pride in her voice. With the edge of her apron she wiped Nikitka's forehead and neck. "You've been skating in the frost and yet you're sweating as though you'd just had a hot bath. Go and wash your hands!"

"It's good here," thought Lukashin, watching this charming family life, a life he had been deprived of. "It's so good that it hurts!"

If he were asked he would stay here for the rest of his life.

The men finished washing and returned to the dining-room. They all sat down at the table. Mariamna served hot potatoes and stewed carrots. Lukashin got some stale bread and tinned meat from his kit bag. Martyanov poured out vodka.

"To those who have returned and to those who are returning," he said.

"This is good stuff," Lukashin said, emptying his glass.

"A drink for girls," Martyanov remarked. "In my old age I've begun to respect neat alcohol. It never fails, no extra water gets into your stomach and it's a splendid disinfectant for your whole body."

"Martyanov, Martyanov, you'll ruin your health yet with this poison," Vedeneyev put in.

"On the contrary," Martyanov rejoined. "Doctor Ivan Antonych examined me and said that I'm so soaked in alcohol that even cholera will not get the better of me. Your health, Semyon. Here's hoping you'll find a place for yourself. I'm thinking this cultured habit of mine will keep me going until I'm a hundred."

"A hundred?" asked Vedeneyev, winking at Lukashin.

"At least," Martyanov replied.

"Do you want to live that long?"

"I certainly do."

"You're religious."

"What follows from that?"

"Why do you cling to life on earth if you think your soul is immortal?"

"How can I put it?" Martyanov said. "I don't love my soul as much as I do my body. You may tell me there's nothing to love about it. I agree with you one hundred per cent. There's really nothing to love about it. But I cherish and treasure it and coax it along as much as I can. My soul, Trofimovich, is even worse than my body. It's the most ordinary little soul. Do you know the kind of soul I prize? Do you understand me, Semyon? I prize lofty souls, passionate souls! What good will anyone get out of the immortality of *my* soul? Better to let my body live a little longer."

Martyanov came to Kruzhilikha from the Kuban in 1931. "I was hit in that kulak business," he explained. He came with his wife and was then fifty years old. The climate here proved too stern for his wife and she soon died. At first Martyanov was a barge-man and then he was given work at the Kruzhilikha Factory.

He immediately realized what the Soviet power demanded of him. He became one of the shock workers after only a few months. He was a strong man and quickly mastered all the work he was given. He treasured his new position, was punctual in paying his dues to the trade union, and attended all the meetings. As for the rest, he never overdid things. He never fawned upon his superiors, made allowances for self-criticism in reasonable doses and even flaunted his piety. He was a clever man with an enormous zest for life, even though he was a drunkard.

In the course of his long life he had been in many places, tried many trades and read many books. He could speak eloquently on any subject, but it was never pos-

sible to guess when he was sincere or when he was mocking.

Pavel Vedeneyev did not like him much and called him a potential blood-sucker. But old Vedeneyev liked to talk to Martyanov, who had an inexhaustible supply of stories and jokes. Nikita Vedeneyev listened to him, now and then putting in short edifying phrases. He was convinced that he was rearing Martyanov in a communist spirit, by deep and subtle methods which Pavel did not understand. Their friendship strengthened with the years and grew into the attachment common among old men.

Sometimes, Andrei used to say that Martyanov was a living stratification of all the economic reforms of the twentieth century, beginning with the Stolypin system and ending with the liquidation of the kulaks as a class.

The back-door of the kitchen banged, there was a quick patter of heels, and Mariika, Vedeneyev's daughter, ran into the dining-room.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, stopping and spreading her arms. "If it isn't Syoma!"

Lukashin rose with an embarrassed smile and straightened his tunic. He had always kept as far away from Mariika as he could. She made him feel awkward. Why? Perhaps just because she was young and—he thought—very pretty. She laughed often and he thought she was laughing at him. She was so noisy and full of life that the minute she entered she seemed to fill the whole room. It was the same now.

Before the war she had married twice, but had been unlucky in both husbands and had divorced them. The family began to tease her by calling her a grass widow. That, too, embarrassed Lukashin.

After her two divorces she did not return to her father and Mariamna, but lived alone in a room she was given in a new house.

"I'm a disappointed woman," she told them, "my heart is broken, so let me shed my tears in solitude."

Nobody ever saw her shedding tears, but she was fond of talking about her broken heart and saying that a woman could have no happiness because men were scoundrels.

"Syoma, dear Syoma," she repeated over and over again in happy confusion, "oh, how wonderful when people return. You've matured and grown handsome, a real man."

"What was he before—a woman?" Martyanov asked.

"He was a young man," Mariika answered imperturbably.

"Sit down," Vedeneyev said, gazing with disapproval at his daughter. "You had better tell us what you got that reprimand for."

"The reprimand!" Mariika cried. "Don't talk to me about it, I've shed so many tears already! Uzdechkin's boy, Tolka, spoiled a detail and I got the reprimand because I'm his instructor. What times we're having, Syoma. Besides my own work I have to nurse a crowd of kids. The minute I look the other way they take the wrong device and start putting out rejects. When will real workers finally come back?" She fixed her greenish eyes on Lukashin and he began to drum on the table with his fingers.

"Well?" Vedeneyev asked, when Mariika had carried her noise away and Mariamna led Nikitka to bed and it grew quiet in the house. "What are your plans?"

Lukashin made no reply. That evening there had been more than one hint that his road led straight to Kruzhihka. He had thought of that himself. But he needed more

time. He had to be sure that he would not be sorry once he made his choice.

"Leave him alone," Martyanov said, winking at Lukashin. "He's a landlord now and perhaps he won't want to hob-nob with us proletarians."

"You can sell the house and buy another one, here in the settlement," Vedeneyev advised. "But you must start working before that. Listen to me, Syoma, get a job at our factory. You must understand that every worker is priceless today, for we're working for the front."

"I haven't made up my mind," Lukashin said. "I'll look around. I haven't a trade—what'll I earn?"

"You'll learn a trade. Martyanov will make a turner out of you in two months—he knows his job. Our trade union committee is not doing the right thing by putting war veterans on to the easiest jobs such as time-keepers or salesmen. There's a lot of talk about letting war veterans rest and take things easy. They don't seem to realize that what these men need is not rest but to tread firmly on the road of life. You'll be a turner, Semyon."

Vedeneyev said that as confidently as Semyon's father, when the latter had once said, "You'll be a book-keeper." Semyon sighed.

"For the time being, until you've got a job, you can stay with us," Vedeneyev offered, getting up from the table. "Mariamna's made up your bed on the chest."

"You'll not be a lone man in other people's corners for long," thought Martyanov, remembering the bustle Mariika had made around Lukashin the whole evening, "you'll find a place for yourself. You're not a restive chap and the woman who spreads her nets for you will catch you."

Before going to bed Lukashin went out into the yard for a smoke. The stars were shining and it was frosty and quiet. The old settlement was deep in well-earned slumber. A late tram passed down the street at the foot

of the hill, its bell tinkling. It could not be seen from the yard, only a green spark hissed on the overhead wire, illuminating it. A light suddenly came on in the second floor of Vedeneyev's house and Lukashin saw Nonna Sergeyevna, the lodger, in the window. She was wearing a coat and a little hat—evidently, she had just come home. There had been no mention of her throughout that evening, as though the Vedeneyevs ignored her existence. She raised her arms slowly, took the little hat off and drew the curtain across the window.

Lukashin pulled at his pipe meditatively. He would not immediately yield to Vedeneyev's persuasions, he told himself. Perhaps somebody else would advise something better—who could tell? He had money and he was in no hurry. A rest would do him good, just to stand like this and to look at the world—how peaceful and clear and gentle it was! Then Mariika filled his thoughts, bringing noise and confusion. "She's a beautiful woman," Lukashin thought with feeling, "a remarkably beautiful woman!" He no longer thought she was laughing at him; he realized that she had been very glad to see him. Every man needed a comrade, a close friend. He pictured himself and a beautiful and loving wife sitting side by side, hand in hand, sharing everything and advising each other. "Why should I be thinking that when perhaps she never meant a thing? I shouldn't have told Mariamna about my teeth; I expect she's already told Mariika." Before leaving, Mariika had said in passing that she would drop in tomorrow evening after work. "If she comes it'll mean she wants to see me; if she doesn't then it was all just empty flirting."

Mariika came the next evening and the evening after. In a week she and Lukashin talked things over and several days later Lukashin moved to her room with his suitcase.

There were eight entrances and five floors in the house where Mariika lived. Each landing led to two flats and each flat had three rooms and a kitchen.

Mariika lived on the fifth floor.

The flat opposite hers belonged to Uzdechkin, the chairman of the factory trade union committee.

Before the war he had occupied the whole flat, but now only two rooms belonged to him. Anna Ivanovna, the director's secretary, and her lanky daughter Tanya, lived in the other.

Anna Ivanovna had moved in in August 1941. Uzdechkin was at the front at the time. Nyura, his wife, had left with a hospital train. Olga Matveyevna, Nyura's mother, remained with the children. She was called into the house manager's office and told that she would have to give one of her rooms to a woman evacuee. Olga Matveyevna objected angrily, went to the District Soviet and the military commissariat, but that did not help—she was put to shame everywhere. She had to submit. Anna Ivanovna and Tanya arrived just before evening. Olga Matveyevna entered their room without knocking, climbed on a chair and took down the curtains from the window.

"They were only bought six months ago," she said in an offended tone, although nobody had said a word. "I'll still find some use for them."

She carried the curtains away and came back for the mirror. She had been told to give the room to the evacuees with all the furniture but she decided that they could do without the mirror. Behind the mirror the wall-paper was darker; a spider darted out of a web and ran up the wall. Anna Ivanovna, who was on her knees unpacking, rose and said to her daughter:

"Come, Tanya, help me."

Together they moved all the furniture, down to the last chair, into the hall. Anna Ivanovna had some trouble with the lamp-shade, but eventually, all dusty and

flushed with the effort, she took it down, saying to Olga Matveyevna:

"I shan't give you the lamp. I don't mean to sit in darkness. As soon as I buy one I'll let you have it."

Olga Matveyevna was pleased to recover all her property. Still, she was vexed that this hot-headed newcomer had so easily turned down free luxuries and threw all the furniture out without asking for any of it.

"What will you sleep on?" Olga Matveyevna asked.

"That's not your headache," Anna Ivanovna replied.

Olga Matveyevna bristled up. She wanted to have a quarrel right away. But it was difficult to pick one with Anna Ivanovna. The latter was at the office all day, dined out with Tanya and hardly ever entered the kitchen. Olga Matveyevna had to content herself with censuring Anna Ivanovna at every opportunity: for her clothes ("she's already quite grey and yet she dresses and makes up her lips like a young woman!"); for her pride; for not speaking to her daughter in Russian.

Anna Ivanovna talked to Tanya in French and English: on even dates they spoke English and on odd dates—French. But when Anna Ivanovna caressed her daughter she spoke in Russian. "My foolish little girl," she would say. And when she rushed out after Tanya on the landing, it would be in Russian that she would shout:

"Tanya! Come back at once and put on your shawl! You crazy thing! Do you hear?"

Anna Ivanovna had lived in Leningrad before the war. Her husband was an architect. Tanya had been a little girl then and attended a ballet school.

When the war broke out, her husband sent her and Tanya far into the rear out of danger and remained behind in the city. Anna Ivanovna had brought with her two typewriters, one with Russian type and the other

with foreign characters, and had not been without work a single day. She immediately found employment at the factory. "They simply snatched her up," Mariika said. During the day she worked at the office and in the evenings she ran an English class for engineers and technicians at the House of Culture.

After clearing the room of Olga Matveyevna's furniture, Anna Ivanovna bought two folding beds, two chairs and two plain tables. Tanya did her home-work at one of them and on the other Anna Ivanovna kept her two typewriters under their glossy black covers.

"Oh, how ugly our room is!" Tanya sometimes said.

"You'll have to bear it, dear, for a year or two," Anna Ivanovna would answer, looking up from her typewriter.

After she had been at Kruzhilikha for a month, Anna Ivanovna received a letter from her husband, saying that their flat on Staro-Nevsky had been bombed: nothing remained of the entire floor. Anna Ivanovna wept over the news. She was particularly sorry to lose the little secretaire, which had been a present from her late uncle, a cabinet-maker. The secretaire had not been comfortable to work at. It had stood in the flat as an ornament and took a good deal of time to dust because of the carving. The carving had always annoyed Anna Ivanovna, but now she thought of it and of the china medallions with flowers inlaid in its sides.

"Tanya, do you remember the little medallions?" she asked in Russian, blowing her nose loudly.

Tanya said nothing. She thought it was strange that her mother should weep over the secretaire when people had been killed there. Almost forty victims, father had written. She did not care if everything were lost, the furniture, the clothes and the piano, so long as the people were unhurt.

There were some anxious months when there was practically no news from Leningrad. One day Anna Ivanovna

was informed by someone who had friends in Leningrad that her husband, with whom she had lived happily for nineteen years, had died of dystrophy. She came home, outwardly calm, and said slowly to Tanya, "Father is dead." She lay down on the folding-bed and told the horrified Tanya to cover her with a warm quilt—she was shivering.

"There's nothing we can do about it, Tanya," she said some two weeks later, "we'll have to settle down to a normal life."

She went to town, sold her gold watch and bought two arm-chairs, a couch and a bed.

"Aren't we ever going to return to Leningrad?" Tanya asked.

"I don't want to," Anna Ivanovna said. "Don't you like it here?"

"It isn't bad," Tanya replied wistfully.

"That's what I think," Anna Ivanovna said.

They suddenly embraced each other and wept long and bitterly.

Anna Ivanovna might have decided to return to the ashes of her former happiness if it had been necessary for Tanya's career as a ballet dancer. But Tanya had grown so fast in the past year that it was clear she would never be a dancer. "She's too tall for the stage," Anna Ivanovna told herself and unhesitatingly settled down to a new life.

The ugly, temporary things that had been bought in a hurry were soon replaced by beautiful, expensive furniture. Anna Ivanovna liked comfort. To earn a good living she typed manuscripts, university theses and book-keeping accounts. She made a little more by taking shorthand notes and teaching.

The work tired her. Usually she was a sound sleeper and Tanya had to wake her so that she would not be late for work. But sometimes she had spells of insomnia.

She would lie and stare at the window facing her. She felt easier in her mind when the window was black and painted with silver frost. It was quite bearable when the rain pattered against the window-pane. When the weather was bad it was pleasant to think that she and her darling had a good roof over their heads, that they were warm and that people were friendly to them. But the light summer nights were tormenting! Then she could not stay at home. She wanted to walk on and on—she knew not where. Out into the deserted streets, under the languid sky, to what had been and never again would be.

During the day she was calm and friendly. She and Tanya were very much alike. Both had round faces, white and pink, with black eyes and a dark shade on the upper lip. Only Anna Ivanovna was plump and grey-haired, while Tanya was slim and wore her black hair in long braids.

Mirzoyev, the director's chauffeur, was a neighbour of Mariika's. A handsome man, his friendly sweet smile showed his dazzling white teeth and turned women's heads. Before the war he was a harvester combine operator at a state farm and had looked upon his job as the best and most honourable. Everybody liked him and praised him. He became a chauffeur in the army; he thought that job very good, too. His courage won him the esteem of his battalion commander and the latter kept him in his own service. Mirzoyev grew attached to that commander—may his memory live forever! During a desperate drive, their car was caught by enemy fire. Mirzoyev was wounded and there was not a trace of the battalion commander. After recovering he came to the factory. At the hospital he had to have a kidney removed, and now he joked about his disability light-heartedly.

"I find," he said, "that two kidneys are a luxury. I get along splendidly with one."

But he took care of himself, kept to a diet and did not drink—only pretended to when he was at parties.

He could be recklessly brave or very careful, as was the case when he had the director's pregnant wife in the car. He was a very efficient driver, and he made use of the director's car as much as he could to earn a good living on the side.

Lukashin took stock of him. He could not understand why Mariika did not choose this handsome dandy who lived in the same flat. "Does she really prefer me?" he wondered.

Lukashin was very happy during his honeymoon. He never tired of admiring Mariika and derived great pleasure from carrying out her whims.

"Do you know what I'd like, Syoma?" she would coo. "I'd like a meat and egg pie with a brown crust. Wouldn't you?"

And Lukashin would go to the market and buy white flour, meat and eggs, and Mariika would bake a pie with a brown crust, and he would watch her, conscious of his power and wealth, and say:

"Is there anything else you'd like?"

"Nonna Sergeevna," Mariika told him, "has a pair of lovely boots. She ordered them just before the war. They've got heels like this and toes like that, and they lace up at the side, with tassels on the laces—I simply adore them."

And Lukashin went and bought Mariika a pair of shoes that were even better than Nonna Sergeevna's. They were the smartest and the most expensive he could find and had the right kind of heels and tassels.

All her life Mariika had had to plan her expenses from one pay day to another. When she lived in her father's house she could not spend even her own money without asking him. "Father, I'm going to the cinema. The ticket costs two-fifty." Her first husband sold the things she

bought with her own earnings and spent the money on drink. Her second husband—she was ashamed even to think of him. When she fell in love with him how could she know that he was a scoundrel and a cheat and that he had a wife in Kaluga and that that wife would come to him and discredit her at the factory? In the three months that she lived with him she saw nothing but waste and trouble. Syoma, on the other hand, spent money lavishly on her and only sought for an opportunity to do something she liked. This abundance turned her head. She did not ask Lukashin how much money he had. He was spending it freely—that meant he could afford it.

They were fond of planning their future prosperity.

"I'll sell my house," Lukashin said slowly, smoking his pipe, "but it'll be a good idea to buy a smaller one. However you look at it, it's pleasant to have your own roof over your head."

"Syoma, dear," Mariika said, disagreeing with him, "there's always no end of trouble with houses. You've got to worry about painting the roof, repairing something, patching up the fence and so on. You've got to give it half your life, like father and mother are doing."

"But you can keep hens and have a vegetable garden. We could buy a goat. Goat's milk is very good for you."

"If I were you," Mariika said energetically, "I'd invest all your money in the State Loan. The whole lot of it. That'll be helping the state and at the same time we'll have a chance of winning twenty-five thousand rubles."

Nikita Trofimovich was very displeased with his daughter and son-in-law. He mentally calculated their expenses and found that the young couple were being fantastically extravagant. For some kind of perfected electric pan Mariika had paid three hundred and fifty rubles. Three hundred and fifty rubles for a pan!

How much more sensible it would have been if they had put the money in the savings bank and spent it carefully on necessities. One fine day they would wake up without a kopek to their name. That is what always happens.

Semyon and Mariika gave him no details about the money they spent and all the old man could do was to keep an approximate record. But he had other things to think of besides all these blouses, mincing machines and lamp-shades.

"We must buy a bed," Mariika told Semyon in her father's presence one day. "Mine's no good."

"You've got all the beds you want in Rogachi," the old man cried, losing his temper. "The house is full of furniture but you keep on buying and buying! I forbid it, Mariika! Be good enough to bring the furniture over from Rogachi!"

The old man stormed. Mariika fell silent, pouting her lips. Lukashin flinched.

"We'll go to Rogachi tomorrow and bring back a bed," he said to Mariika on Saturday.

"I don't think the beds there are worth the trouble of going such a long way for them," Mariika said. "Most likely they've all rotted."

"No, Mother had a good bed, with nickel-plated knobs."

"Oh, all right. It'll be a jaunt anyway. I haven't been out of town for years."

That Sunday they went to Rogachi.

About a kilometre from the station Mariika saw a two-storeyed wooden house with a small tower and a weather-cock. It was a solitary house with pines and snow all around it. Mariika followed her husband into the little front hall. It was cold, musty and deserted. The rooms were cheer-

less and bare. In one of them stood an iron bed, the bedclothes had been removed and the torn mattress was grey with dust.

"That's the bed!" Lukashin said. "It's quite good, only the mattress is old and we needn't bother to take it."

He drew a length of rope out of his pocket and tried to take the bed down. It was rusty and resisted his efforts. While he was busy with the bed, Mariika went upstairs. There she found bright little rooms with big windows where the family used to live in the summer. "They're nice rooms," thought Mariika with a sigh. On a window-sill stood a big ornate *samovar*, green from neglect and without a lid or top. She tried the tap to see if it would turn. It did. The window gave a wonderful view of the lake and the woods. Mariika went downstairs. The bed was already folded and Lukashin was tying it with the rope.

"Take the knobs," he said, sitting on his heels, his pipe in his mouth.

Mariika thrust the three nickel-plated knobs that Lukashin had unscrewed from the bed into the pockets of her coat. The fourth would not come off—the thread must have gotten very rusty. The knobs were well preserved. They shone like new.

"I'll take that little round table," Mariika said. "We can put it in the corner near the window. And that iron vase, to put on it."

"Don't take the vase, it's too heavy. You're a woman and you mustn't drag anything heavy. I'll come back for it some other time."

He easily swung the bed on to his back and carried it out of the house.

"Well, come on," he said.

Mariika walked at her usual brisk pace with the little table on her shoulder, thinking how sad a deserted house was and how nice it would be to live in those upper rooms in the summer and bathe in the lake.

"You know what?" she began, turning round to Lukashin and it was then that she suddenly noticed that he was not beside her. She quickly glanced back. He was trudging heavily after her, bent almost to the ground under the weight of the bed.

"Here, let me help you," she said, feeling sorry for him. "It'll be easier if we each take an end."

"Don't talk rot," he panted. "You'd do better if you didn't rush like mad, but kept pace with me. I wouldn't feel so lonely then."

Mariika never liked to walk slowly, she was not used to it. Angrily she measured her stride to his, arguing that she was much stronger than he and that in any case it would be much easier if they carried the bed together. But Lukashin kept his ground and finally shouted that the whole village would laugh at him if he were seen carrying the bed with her: he calls himself a man, they'd say, and can't carry a little thing like a bed by himself. Mariika stopped arguing. About a hundred yards were covered in silence. They stopped to let Lukashin catch his breath, then he lifted the bed on to his head.

"Much easier like this," he said.

And they went on. But soon Mariika noticed that no matter how slowly she walked, Lukashin lagged behind all the same. His strength had given out. She wondered how she could make him accept her help, but she knew that it was hopeless. She saw now that he could be very stubborn at times!

They still had about three hundred yards to go.

"I'm sure we'll be fined on the train," Lukashin said, his voice scarcely audible.

"Why?"

"As if you don't know! Because they don't allow furniture in passenger trains."

Mariika frowned. She did not want to waste money on fines.

"I'll tell you what," she said quickly. "If they begin pestering you, tell them that the bed is mine. I'll know what to say." Suddenly an idea flashed across her mind. "Syoma! To hell with it, throw it away!"

No sooner had she said it than he let the bed drop to the ground.

"It's nothing to be sorry about," Mariika said, stroking his head, while he stood there, breathing heavily and filling his pipe with trembling fingers. "I'm sure we'll be able to buy a bed in town!" She took out a handkerchief and wiped the sweat off his face. "Why didn't I think of it before? And why didn't you?"

"I thought of it the moment we stepped out of the house. But you couldn't have expected me to throw it away right off!"

The train was approaching.

"Let's run," Mariika said, "or we'll miss it!"

Together they seized the little table, happy and pleased, and ran to the platform.

There were only a few people in the carriage. They sat apart from the others and gazed into each other's eyes.

"Thank you," Lukashin said, taking Mariika's hand and squeezing it.

"What for?" she asked, smiling.

"For being so good."

Mariika forgot to throw away the knobs and brought them to Kruzhilikha.

Nikita Trofimovich's fears were soon justified. One morning Mariika and Lukashin woke to find that there was not a kopek left.

"We'll have to sell something," Lukashin said, stunned. "Something we've no use for so that we can hold out."

Mariika maintained a glum silence.

"I've got just the thing," Lukashin sighed.

"What thing?"

"My leather jacket."

"Are you so sure you don't need it?"

"It's quite old. I can't wear it."

"You can't, but others can?"

"How you twist what I say!" Lukashin said, taking offence. "Someone might find it useful. The lining is quite new. Only you'll have to do the selling."

"Why me?"

"I'm a man and I'd feel awkward."

"Oh, no," Mariika said, "I never sold anything and I never will. I'm a Stakhanovite and I can't be seen in the market selling old clothes."

"Rubbish!" Lukashin snapped indignantly. "Are you a countess or what?"

"If you wish to put it like that," Mariika replied and went to the factory.

Lukashin had to take the jacket to the market himself. He kept away from the crowd and shyly unwrapped the jacket. At first he held it in his hand. Then he took it by the collar with both hands. Some time later he turned it so that the lining would show.

"How much do you want for it?" somebody asked him.

Lukashin wanted to say two hundred, but for some reason he said one hundred rubles.

"I'll give you twenty-five," said the man.

Lukashin held back. The man returned the jacket and walked away indifferently.

"I must ask for fifty," Lukashin thought, "I'll be certain to sell it at that price."

But he could not ask for fifty because nobody else offered to buy the jacket. He waited and then went home. Near his flat he ran into Mirzoyev. The latter was on his way to a wedding and had come home to change. He was

wearing a thick fluffy coat and hat and reeked of Eau-de-Cologne, and his short black moustache was trimmed beautifully.

"Ah, neighbour, good day!" he greeted Lukashin. "How are things with you? Still not working?"

Lukashin told him about his difficulties.

"Is that a fact!" Mirzoyev exclaimed. "One buyer for twenty-five rubles? Here, let me see it."

He unwrapped the jacket.

"A bit old, I must say. You must have worn it for at least fifteen years. It's lost its colour. That's the way the seats of our trousers wear out. Hm. Twenty-five, you said?"

"If he offers fifteen, I'll let him have it," Lukashin thought.

"It's still strong," he said uncertainly.

"You'd never sell it," Mirzoyev said. "We'll see. Come on."

He walked fast—he was afraid of being late for the wedding. Lukashin hurried after him. They reached the market.

"Only, please, don't say a word," Mirzoyev told him. "Stand beside me and keep mum."

He carelessly threw the jacket across his shoulder, over his fluffy coat. His hat sat jauntily on his head, his thick-soled shoes shone. Before Lukashin could look round they were surrounded by a crowd.

"How much?" Mirzoyev was asked.

"Two hundred rubles," Mirzoyev replied.

"The man's out of his mind," Lukashin thought.

"How about a hundred?" one of the buyers asked.

Lukashin nudged Mirzoyev.

"I'm not a profiteer," Mirzoyev said with dignity. "Can't you see it's good leather?"

"It *was* good leather," somebody corrected him.

"That's one man's opinion!" Mirzoyev said coldly. "On the whole the jacket's worth two hundred."

There was a short pause which cost Lukashin deep suffering.

"I'll give you two hundred!" said a voice from the back rows.

"But I'm bargaining!" the first buyer was indignant. "Maybe I, too, want to give two hundred. Take the money. The jacket's not worth it, but I'm taking it on principle."

"I love good principles," Mirzoyev said with cheerful amiability, accepting the money. He took Lukashin by his arm and hurried him out of the market.

"Here are your two hundred rubles, Comrade Lukashin. That's the way you've got to do things."

"I'm a son-of-a-gun," Lukashin exclaimed. "How did you do it?"

Mirzoyev laughed lightly.

"I'll explain it to you if you wish. When you stand, excuse me for saying it, with a face as though you're about to throw yourself under a tram, and in this old army greatcoat, and in these boots—take my advice and throw them away: you have a new pair, I'm sure—people think you're a misfit and that you're selling your last clothes. But when I play the salesman," he adjusted his hat with a light movement, "people are convinced that they'll get their money's worth. Nothing off a well-dressed young man can be bad. That's the secret for you."

From that day on Mirzoyev began to take a lively interest in all Lukashin's affairs. Now that he had once helped Lukashin, he began to regard him as a brother: such was his nature.

"The most profitable thing in our day," Mirzoyev said, "is to have a car. You must take a driving course, make shift temporarily, and before you'll know it you'll have a diploma, and some organization will take you on.

You've got to choose somebody at the top to drive for, somebody who's up to his neck in work and, preferably, a bachelor. That would put a car completely at your disposal."

"You may get into trouble," reasoned Lukashin, who did not want to offend Mirzoyev.

"There can't be any trouble! There's nothing in it that harms the public. Am I extorting money from anybody? It's something exclusively to the satisfaction of both parties. There's a very big demand, what with the state the transport is in at the moment. That's where our advantage lies."

Lukashin smoked and listened.

"If you wish," Mirzoyev continued, "I can find out about the course for you. I've got a connection there."

"No," Lukashin said, "I'm thinking of getting a job at the factory."

He went to see old Vedeneyev and asked to be taken on as an apprentice to Martyanov.

Three days later he and Mariika went to work together.

He gave his number at the gates. The gate-man handed him his pass and told him he could go in. He found himself in the factory yard. The compressed ice underfoot was silvery black from coal and metal dust. A small locomotive went slowly by, blowing a current of warm steam into Lukashin's face.

"You must go there," Mariika said briskly, pointing to a gate between two brick buildings. "Well, good luck!" She gave him a motherly smile and hurried away.

Scores of people overtook Lukashin. Some were wearing army greatcoats like him.

A solemn booming seemed to rise slowly from the bowels of the earth and swelled into a frightening and deafening roar—it was the second whistle; the new shift was due to begin in a quarter of an hour.

"Good luck," Lukashin repeated to himself solemnly and with a thrill.

And as in the army, Lukashin again felt that he was one of many, a soldier in a great host. It was a fine feeling. He hoped it would always be like this. Everything that rascal Mirzoyev had said was a lie.

CHAPTER FOUR

UZDECHKIN AND TOLKA

Uzdechkin was on his way to the factory. A biting wind was blowing from the river. He felt ill, sleepy and tired.

How he had longed to return home! He thought that his wounds would heal once he was back in his old collective, with his family. But so far they were somehow not healing.

And why had Nyura been so crazy as to get involved in this business? She had two small children and nobody would have asked her why she hadn't been to the war. A nurse! What a terror for the Germans! There were enough nurses without her.

It was difficult with children. Nobody looking on would have thought that there was so much trouble with them. Before the war, Olga Matveyevna, Nyura's mother, had been such a vigorous woman. She had managed the whole household by herself, meddled in everything, and never given anybody a moment's peace. But when she got news of Nyura's death, Anna Ivanovna, the lodger, said, she went about looking bewildered, aimlessly starting to do one thing and then another. She took to her bed on the next day and lay there groaning. That was the beginning of the habit of pottering about the house for a little while every morning then going back to bed and groan-

ing till late at night. Her memory began to fail her. She kept losing the ration cards and forgot how to cook.

During Uzdechkin's absence, Nyura's brother Tolka left school and went to work in the factory. He wanted to be independent, you see. When other lads started out on an independent life they were more serious, but, perhaps because he got into bad company, Tolka obeyed no one and refused to study. His mother complained that he stole things from the house, and his team leader at the factory said that he wasn't much use there. Valya and Olga, the two little girls, were slatternly dressed. The manager at the kindergarten kept writing to ask why the children always wore torn stockings and never had buttons on their bodices. So when he came home from work Uzdechkin would take a needle and sew on the buttons. It was lucky that he got used to this sort of thing in the army.

Yesterday there had been a Party bureau meeting and then a general meeting and he had come home late. The girls were not yet in bed. Valya had burnt her hand against the electric range. Nobody else had been at home, neither Olga Matveyevna, nor Tolka, nor Anna Ivanovna and her Tanya. Valya had sat there nursing her burnt hand and waiting for somebody to come and bandage it; both girls had cried, Valya from the pain, and Olga out of sympathy. Uzdechkin bandaged the hand, fed the girls and put them to bed. Then he washed the dishes, swept the rooms and cooked the soup for the next day. He did the house-work, and was furious with Olga Matveyevna; she had probably gone to mass, the old fool, as though Nyura needed her masses. She would do better to look after the children. He decided to have it out with her when she returned. But when she came home, tear-stained, groaning and with expressionless eyes, he felt sorry for her and only asked gruffly, "Did you have your

fill of prayers? Want some tea?" and went to warm up the kettle.

Mirzoyev, who poked his nose in other people's business, told him, "You must marry as the only way out of the situation." Uzdechkin felt like punching his face for such advice.

At night he could not sleep. He lay staring into the darkness and listening to the sounds of the night. Trams passed by at long intervals. A mouse came out and cautiously nibbled a crust under the cupboard; he hissed at it and it stopped nibbling for a minute. Anna Ivanovna and Tanya returned home very late—they must have been to the theatre; they went into their room quietly. That wretch, Tolka, hadn't come in yet. He was probably loafing about somewhere. Uzdechkin pictured the priest swinging censers in the church and leading the prayers for the repose of God's servant Anna.* He rose and got out a photograph of his dead wife.

An ordinary woman with a permanent wave and a little snub nose, who quarrelled with her mother, loved presents, slapped the girls when they were naughty—

The factory trade union committee had its office on the third floor. Six flights, numbering ninety steps in all, led up to it.

Those familiar sickening sensations began by the time he reached the middle of the second flight: his heart leaped up and dropped, stopped as though listening, then leaped up again and again dropped—big and heavy. Uzdechkin wanted more air; he parted his lips and gulped—he felt a weakness in his legs and his knees shook. Formerly he had never noticed his heart; it had existed in him, lived with him, been part of him. But now it lived

* Nyura—a diminutive of Anna.—*Tr.*

a separate life, with its own habits and desires. It worried Uzdechkin like a cross room-fellow: it forced him to walk slowly and to stop for a rest after each flight of steps. In the course of the day it gradually grew calm and by evening Uzdechkin felt an influx of strength and a nervous exaltation.

The office smelt of newly mopped floors and there were no cigarette stubs in the ash-tray. Uzdechkin went to the telephone without taking off his greatcoat and called the machine-shop. Tolka had not been at work the day before and he had spent the night away from home. He might have gone straight to the shop.

"Call Vedeneyeva to the phone," Uzdechkin said.

Mariika told him angrily that this was the second day that Tolka had not turned up at the shop and that the factory committee had to do something about it or she would send everybody to the devil and get a transfer to the assembly shop. Those youngsters had given her enough trouble! Uzdechkin said that Tolka had not been home, either.

"Ring up the militia, then," Mariika shouted, "I'm not their nurse!" and she slammed down the receiver. Uzdechkin rang up the militia and asked whether there had been any accidents involving juveniles. There was one case, he was told. Two boys had played with a cartridge. It had exploded and wounded one of them in the hand. "How old was the boy?" "Nine." No, that was not him.

Uzdechkin yearned for higher things. He wanted to think of the great events taking place at the front, to watch the approach of victory day. On the way to his office he had seen excited faces and heard snatches of lively conversation: enemy resistance in Budapest had been broken. Hungary was getting out of the war. The Hitlerites were losing their last ally in Europe. It would soon be Berlin, now! He wanted to go up to the map where little red and blue flags were stuck in two rows

(the row of blue flags showed the front line on January 1, 1945) and calculate how far we had advanced towards the west since the beginning of the year. Instead he had to look for Tolka.

Short improvised meetings were to be held in the shops during the lunch hour. If only he could make a vigorous, rousing speech! But he had not had time to prepare it: heaven only knew what had kept him up late into the night—he had sewed on buttons, and cooked soup, damn it! An unprepared speech always sounded dry and official; when he spoke without notes he could not find the right words to express his thoughts.

Domna, the office cleaner, entered while he was speaking into the telephone.

“Are you looking for Tolka?” she asked. She knew everybody and was on familiar terms with each and everyone. “He’s probably gallivanting about somewhere. What I wanted to ask you, Fyodor Ivanovich, is whether there’s anything new about those vegetable gardens? There was some talk about us getting land in Ozernaya, but now nobody says a word. By the time we get the land and divide it up, it’ll be April and time to start digging.”

“You’ll have your vegetable gardens,” Uzdechkin assured her.

“Melanya says we won’t. But I don’t believe her. It’s unthinkable. Personally, Fyodor Ivanovich, I must have land.”

“You’ll get your land, don’t worry!” Uzdechkin said and busied himself with his files, in order to rid himself of her. His heart thumped heavily and painfully.

He would talk to the director about those vegetable gardens that very day.

Every year the factory was given a piece of land at a short distance from the town; the journey took only a

few hours. That year it had been allotted some at Ozer-naya, quite far away. The soil was poor, people said, but on Listopad's instructions the manager of the workers' supply department bought chemical fertilizers. That settled the question. The machine-and-tractor station there promised to do the ploughing and early in February the factory sent some men to the machine-and-tractor station to repair the tractors.

Suddenly the director informed the trade union committee that most of the land in Ozer-naya would be used by the factory itself and that only a small part of it would be available for individual vegetable gardens.

"There's no need to give plots indiscriminately," Listopad said. "Give them only to the big families."

That was unprecedented. The workers of Kruzhilikha had had vegetable gardens for as long as they could remember. Everybody wanted to store up potatoes for the winter. Special trains were booked every Sunday to take the workers out of town; they went with every member of their families, old and young, with spades, choppers, and lunch-baskets. The sacks of seed potatoes—whole ones or slices with carefully grown sprouts—were piled on the platforms. Every sack bore the name of the owner in ink or paint. You simply couldn't abolish a custom like that with a single flourish of the pen.

Uzdechkin went to see Ryabukhin.

"The best you can do," Ryabukhin said, thoughtfully scratching the top of his head, "is to come to an agreement with Listopad. It would enhance your position."

"I refuse to talk to Listopad," Uzdechkin cried heatedly. "Don't insist, I'll never do it!"

"Nonsense, Fyodor Ivanovich. I don't see how in a Soviet factory a trade union can refuse to negotiate with the management. Who is Listopad to you—a private employer? A capitalist?"

"All right, stop your sermons and ring him up."

Ryabukhin shrugged his shoulders, rang up Listopad and arranged for the three of them to have a talk about the vegetable gardens.

When Uzdechkin entered the director's office, Ryabukhin was already there. "Stole a march on me," Uzdechkin thought. "I suppose they've settled the business behind my back."

"Mariika Vedeneyeva ought to be given another medal," Listopad was saying. "As a worker she's conscientious and she's teaching the youngsters as well—it's an exploit, and I mean it."

"Undoubtedly," Ryabukhin agreed.

"A heroine, eh? How old is the girl? About twenty-three?"

"More. About twenty-six or twenty-eight, I should think. You ought to see how she shouts at them. I've spoken to her about it."

"There's no harm in that. She shouts because she's temperamental and has the job at heart. Do you think you wouldn't shout if you were in her place, especially when they scatter the minute you take your eyes off them. Ah, Fyodor Ivanovich, how are you?" Listopad said as though he had just noticed Uzdechkin. "Sit down."

Uzdechkin sat down and untied the tape round a thick folder.

"I've got all the material here," he said. "Applications from the workers and office employees. And the reports from the shops. And the general report."

"Quite a pile of paper," Listopad remarked. "Have you collected applications from *all* the workers?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it. The shop committees have led you astray. There can't be twenty thousand applications there."

A faint bluish flush appeared on Uzdechkin's cheeks.

"I mean from everyone who wants a plot."

"Let's have the general report." He glanced at it with a lift of his eyebrows and gave it to Ryabukhin. "Have you seen it? Eight hundred hectares. Eight hundred hectares for individual vegetable gardens. Why, they're crazy!"

"That's the bare minimum," Uzdechkin said, trying to keep calm. "There were times before the war when we asked for more and got it."

Listopad pushed away the report.

"Honestly, Fyodor Ivanovich, I hardly know what to say to you to make you understand. We keep on wrangling like two old fogies. How can I explain it all to you when you don't want to understand a simple truth? A worker must rest on his day off. Instead, you want to shove a spade in his hands and send him heaven knows where to plant potatoes! Have you thought how many pairs of shoes he wears out on this digging? I come from peasant stock and I'm accustomed to that sort of thing. I can walk on thorns with bare feet. But a town-bred man can't. I went to see your potato planters last summer. And my God, what did I see? Tiny plots with people swarming on them like ants. You see a woman fussing about her plot and looking as if she was thinking that her neighbour had got a better piece of land and was raising bigger potatoes. And then those countless sacks—and that same woman worrying that somebody might pinch some of her potatoes. It's all a lot of tomfoolery, primitive, a survival, and not at all in the spirit of our times—we're holding on to it from want and not because it's a good thing! I realize that it's all right when there's no other way out of it. But I'm giving you a way out! Can't you see that these potatoes won't last the worker all winter? His vegetable garden feeds him up to December or up to January at the most, and then he comes running to us! To the workers' supply depart-

ment! And he swears at us when we can't give him what he wants—and he's quite right. I've already told you what I propose to do. I'm shouldering the responsibility of supplying the workers with potatoes and other vegetables. But for that I need land. And I'm getting it in Ozernaya at the expense of your individual slices. I've got a thousand hectares there and I'll give you two hundred you can do what you like with."

"Two hundred hectares—that's a drop in the ocean," Uzdechkin protested. "Nobody'll be satisfied with that. It'll only make for discontent and complaints—there'll be trouble I tell you."

"Are you afraid of complaints? Can't you explain things properly to the people? If you can't, call a meeting and I'll explain that it's all being done for their own good."

"You must understand," Ryabukhin broke in, "that for many of the workers, in addition to what it gives, this gardening business has become a sort of hobby. On a summer's day the worker goes out to the country with his children, to the fresh air, to the woods, and although he digs and plants and weeds, this work in the open invigorates him."

"Cut it out, Ryabukhin. That's pure intellectual reasoning. The idea just came to you. You ask the worker how it invigorates him when he works till a late hour on his day off, returns home on legs that can scarcely carry him, and has to take his place at the workbench next morning. But if anybody wants to dig for the fun of it, I'm not going to object. He can please himself. He's welcome to dig at our farm. And I'll pay him for it."

"Where do you think you'll find the labour to manage such a farm?" Uzdechkin asked.

"I'll manage somehow, Fyodor Ivanovich. P.O.W.s will do the planting and the harvesting."

"You'll not get permission."

"There's a reasonable chance that I will. Hosts of them are being brought in from the west. Well, if I can't have them, I'll get machines—cultivators and potato-diggers—and mechanize the whole job. Anyhow, let me worry where I'm going to get the labour from. Look here, I'm tired of all this squabbling. You'll get two hundred hectares of land. Divide it up among the workers with large families, among those who have many helpers."

He rose. But Uzdechkin did not take the hint to leave.

"Two hundred hectares," he muttered. "Impossible. You're making fun of me. I'd like to remind you that the Party and the Government have given directions on individual vegetable gardens."

"I'm sure the Party and the Government will forgive us if we provide our workers with potatoes from our farm," Listopad said carelessly.

Uzdechkin shook with anger at this careless tone.

"These are all empty promises," he shouted. "All you want is to make a grand gesture and to show your power, that's what it is! And in the end the worker will be left without potatoes!"

He seized his folder and rushed out of the office, banging the door and startling Anna Ivanovna, who was in the adjoining room. She followed him out with an amazed look.

"Did you hear?" Listopad demanded of Ryabukhin.

"You provoked him with your tone," Ryabukhin said. "You shouldn't have done it. He's a nervous chap."

"He's a lunatic. Please don't ever bring him into my office again. He'll bite me some day."

When Tolka left home that morning he went to see his friend Seryozhka. They had agreed to go to the country to visit Seryozhka's aunt.

Seryozhka was a year younger than Tolka, but Tolka

had a high opinion of his great store of knowledge. He had a brother, a boy of five; his father was in the army, and his mother worked at Kruzhilikha. He was his own master. A pupil of the seventh grade, he went to school when he liked, but most often he spent his time reading or with friends.

Tolka waited under the stairs until Seryozhka's mother went to work. Then he went up to the flat which was as pleasantly jumbled as two boys with different interests could make it. Seryozhka and Genka were already waiting. The three boys slid down the banisters and walked gravely to the tram stop. Seryozhka led Genka by the hand.

A crowded tram pulled up.

"You ride on the buffers at the back," Seryozhka told Tolka. "I'll have to take Genka to the platform in front."

At a market near the railway station Tolka sold some rationed lard and two tins of fish (he did not care for tinned fish) and bought some gingerbread, smoked sausages, two packets of cigarettes and a white roll for Genka. Then they boarded a suburban train.

The trip was very interesting. At first the train sped along a river-bank. The river was ice-bound, swollen and looked formidable. Tolka supposed that that was how the packed ice-fields in the Arctic looked. A faded pennant was fluttering in the cold wind from a mast beside the deserted river station. In the summer passenger steamers stopped there and the station was filled with people, but now it was empty. A concrete wall blocked their view; it began to grow dim in the carriage, then it became quite dark: the train had entered a tunnel. Genka pretended he was frightened and screamed only to be disappointed that same moment when the train emerged from the tunnel and the dirty-white swollen river with its icy furrows and creases came into sight again. It had not been a real tunnel, only a pretence at one! The clatter

of the wheels increased; the huge steel girders of a seemingly endless bridge flashed by. From the bridge they could see the river stretching into the distance and merging with the cold greyish-white sky from which snow could be expected to fall at any moment.

Seryozhka and Tolka started a fascinating discussion about what you had to be to earn plenty of money. Seryozhka was well informed on the subject. He knew the exact earnings of aircraft designers, academicians, sports champions and film actors. But his information was not consoling. Every profession required years of training, and Tolka had been too lazy to put up with more than six years at school.

"I can never make out why a boxing champion needs to know algebra and geometry, for instance," Tolka said.

"I can't make it out, either," Seryozhka answered with a shrug, "that's the way it is, though."

Meanwhile, Genka was standing on the seat and gazing wide-eyed out of the window at the tall green pines.

"An elk!" somebody shouted. "Look, an elk!"

The woods ended abruptly at a broad clearing and in the middle of the clearing stood a live elk! "Where? Where? Where?" Genka screamed desperately. He had never seen an elk. "Over there, look!" Seryozhka and Tolka shouted just as desperately, jumping up from their seats. The elk was standing motionless, surprised by the train and slowly turning its antlered head to look after it.

"It's a young one," said a stocky, ruddy-faced old man. "That's why it isn't afraid. It's just wandered out of the woods and doesn't know what fear is."

The whole carriage talked about the elk for a long time. Tolka and Seryozhka said that if you became a hunter, for instance, you did not need much money to live well and could rove about the woods and see all kinds of animals.

They left the train at a small station among thick moss-covered tree-stumps.

From there the village where Seryozhka's aunt lived could be seen plainly. It lay on a steep hill that was fringed by thick woods. The hill rose in a genuinely sheer line. It could be ascended either by a roundabout sleigh road or by one of the narrow icy paths. Naturally, the boys took a path, dragging Genka up by the hand. He squealed that it was slippery, but when they reached the top he pulled up his coat, sat on the ice and gaily slid to the bottom. Tolka watched and then followed suit.

"They've gone crackers," Seryozhka commented looking at them from the top. He sat down on the ice, stretched out his legs and likewise slid down, wearing a grave expression.

After taking several slides they went to Seryozhka's aunt. Her log house stood high on piles, the log-roofed yard was enclosed by a long log fence, and there were logs beaten into the street in front of the house. Seryozhka's aunt met them at the gates.

"Where've you been all this time," she called to them. "I expected you when the train whistled. I might have gone and locked up the house and you would have had to shiver in the cold till evening!" She marched into the house ahead of them, adding, "Don't pile into the house in your shells. Leave them in the hall."

Tolka looked questioningly at Seryozhka.

"She means our coats," Seryozhka explained. "That's what she calls them."

The entrance to the house led through a dim roofed yard, but the hall was as bright as the living-room. Inside, a huge stove occupied almost all the space. The aunt threw off her shawl, darted towards the stove and started drawing out pots of all sizes with a long-handled oven fork and putting them on the table. Genka came in from the hall, looked at his aunt and said suddenly:

"Hello, auntie."

The aunt paid no attention to him and served them porridge and hot milk. Then she hurried away, her felt boots pattering down the short flight of steps. Genka looked out of the window and saw her racing down the street.

"What's up?" Tolka asked.

"Nothing," Seryozhka replied. "She's afraid she'll be late for work, that's all. She's a team leader."

Photographs of officers hung on the wall round the mirror. There were many of them, with medals and without, some wore moustaches, one even had a beard. Seryozhka said that they were his aunt's sons.

"Has she got a husband?" Tolka inquired.

"That's her husband," Seryozhka told him. "The one with the beard."

Tolka and Seryozhka left Genka to look after the house and went for a walk. The streets were deserted.

"There's nobody about because they're overhauling the machinery for the spring sowing," explained Seryozhka, who was a frequent visitor to the village and knew all the news. "The men are in the army and the work's done by women, old men, and boys like us. Very much the same as in our Kruzhiikha."

The log houses were all alike, with windows so high you could not reach them.

"That's where the Reverend lives," Seryozhka said, pointing to one of the houses.

"You mean the priest?"

"He's no ordinary priest," Seryozhka said. "He got a medal for collecting money for a tank column. You know, from people that go to church to pray. From the Orthodox peasants."

They stopped to look in at the window, but nothing could be seen through the white curtains.

"Where do priests come from?" Tolka said. "How do they get to be priests?"

But that was something even Seryozhka did not know. After building up various conjectures on the subject they went to the woods along a well-packed sleigh road.

"Get up, you sleepy heads! You've slept long enough!" the aunt called to them in the morning. "Look how fine it is outside!"

Tolka jumped up and blinked. The sun was shining in his eyes. It was unbearably hot from the sun, from the blazing stove and from the sheepskins spread on the plank-beds.

"Phew!" Seryozhka exclaimed, springing out of his bed, "I'm sweating. Where's Genka?" he asked, looking sleepily about him.

"Playing in the kitchen garden. You ought to go out and see how winter is meeting spring."

Tolka went out. The high snow-covered vegetable beds were bathed in a flood of sunlight. The sky was a clear blue. A sparrow alighted on the fence, hopped a little way, turned first to the right, then to the left, its tail perkily sticking up and its brown eye gazing at Tolka in merry wonderment as though asking: What's happening? What does this smell of? It's a long time yet till spring.

"Tolka," Genka said, "let's never leave. Let's live here forever."

"Tell that to your aunt," responded Tolka, who suddenly very much wanted to live in the country. "I'm not the master here."

Genka ran into the house and told his aunt:

"Tolka said we're going to stay here with you."

"If you like," said the aunt. "I'll have to go to the district centre tomorrow morning so I'll take you along."

You've probably never handled horses. Well, you'll learn."

Tolka's thoughts wandered back to the factory. He knew that they were talking about him there. Probably looking for him. The team leader was swearing, Fyodor was swearing, his mother was groaning and also swearing. But he wanted so much to learn to drive horses, to stay among the pines in freedom with Seryozhka, that he chased away these unpleasant thoughts. Suppose he fell ill? Suppose he broke his arm? They'd get along without him then—

The boys spent a whole week in the village. Then they set out for Kruzhilikha, rosy-cheeked, and carrying cans of milk and bags of food for Seryozhka's mother.

The nearer the train approached Kruzhilikha the lower Tolka's spirits fell. He spent the rest of the day at Seryozhka's and reluctantly went home. He opened the door with his own latch key. His mother and the girls were sleeping. Fyodor wasn't in. He went to bed as quickly as he could. Soon Uzdechkin returned. Tolka shut his eyes and began to breathe evenly.

Uzdechkin switched on the light and saw Tolka.

"Scoundrel," he said quietly so as not to wake up the girls. His face darkened and the muscles of his cheeks twitched. "Scoundrel, if you weren't her brother, I'd have thrown you out into the street this very minute—naked as you are."

He leaned against the door-jamb in silence. Tolka quickly sat up and shouted:

"Bawl away! I knew you would. That's all you can do."

Uzdechkin looked at him. He pulled at the collar of his shirt and his face grew still darker.

"And you used to shout at her, too!" Tolka shouted, trying to gain the upper hand in this quarrel although he knew full well that he was wrong and Uzdechkin was right. "You think everybody's bad and that you're the

only good one. You're having a hard time so you're taking it out on all of us!"

The shouting woke up Valya and she started to cry loudly.

"Now, what's the matter with *you*?" Uzdechkin said in a strained voice. "Go to sleep, d'you hear? Go to sleep." He laid her down and tucked the blanket round her.

"What's happening? Who's shouting?" Olga Matveyevna cried. She got up and looked at them in fright. "Good Lord, we can't have peace even at night!"

Tolka turned to the wall and wept, the boy's tears choking him.

Nobody cared what he did during those seven days and there was nobody he could tell how he had learned to drive horses!

CHAPTER FIVE

CHILDREN OF THE FACTORY

Listopad once had an argument with Zotov about where a director ought to be during working hours. Zotov held that his proper place was in his office.

"You must realize," he said, "that you and I are just like generals in the field, with armies under our command. The shop managers, the chief designer, the chief technologist, the chief mechanic, the chief metallurgist and the chief power engineer are the senior officers! Am I supposed to nurse every one of them? Take it from me that a shop manager knows his job no worse than you and I put together. He doesn't want to have you butting in at every turn; he takes it as a sign that you don't trust him. I look in sometimes when they're assembling or testing the output but as a rule I keep to my office. I'm always there to receive my callers civilly and at once. But when you're wanted the usual answer is that you're

somewhere in the shops. What if somebody needs you urgently? Where is he to look for you? It's a habit you've got from the time our construction started, when the standard reply to, 'Where's the chief?' was 'On the scaffolding'."

But Listopad always felt depressed when he had to stay in his office. He felt restless at his desk. He stayed for an hour and a half at the most, and after that he would go to the shops.

Yet the minute he appeared in his office the telephone would ring and he would find callers waiting for him, needing to see him. Obviously he had to give some of his time to the office.

It was the same today. Hardly did he enter when Anna Ivanovna told him that Konevsky, the Komsomol organizer at the factory, had rung up three times already. Since he had come to the factory, Konevsky had asked to see Listopad not more than four or five times and each time it had been about something important. Listopad told Anna Ivanovna to ring him up at once.

Konevsky came quickly. He was an unfledged youth with a sparse dark moustache and warm brown eyes and he had the irregular, mobile and charming features that only belong to a very fine young man. The zip fastener of the collar of his velveteen jacket was open, exposing a neck as delicate as a girl's. He tried to look self-possessed and to curb his impetuosity, but he could not stop the colour from rising to his cheeks.

Listopad surveyed him with proprietary pride. He had ordered the manager of the workers' supply department to procure these velveteen jackets. He wanted all the young people at the factory to have just this democratically smart and easy air.

Konevsky spoke to Listopad about a fitter, a lad of fifteen, who had been absent without leave for a whole week and who would have to be taken to court. He had

come because he was sorry for Tolka; he was sure it was only childish irresponsibility that had kept him away from work. But if Tolka were to be helped, the law would have to be winked at and that was something Konevsky's conscience forbade him to do. Besides, Tolka was a relation of Uzdechkin's. The director, Konevsky argued with himself, ought to be told of this, but he might think that he, Konevsky, was defending Tolka because of that relationship. Uzdechkin himself would on no account use his influence for the lad, he was very touchy on such matters. He had flared up when Konevsky said without thinking, "Don't you think it would help if you spoke to the director yourself?" Tolka refused to acknowledge Uzdechkin (Konevsky supposed that touchiness played its part there as well), saying, "He's no relation to me. I don't consider him a relation, he's only my sister's husband. He's nobody to me!"

Konevsky put the whole affair before Listopad without mentioning Tolka's relationship to Uzdechkin.

Listopad regarded him kindly in silence. The lad was nervous—that was youth! Let him stay nervous a little longer—it was amusing to watch him flush.

"What would you suggest?" Listopad asked. "Concretely—what in your opinion ought we to do to get round the law?"

Konevsky grew pale but that was almost immediately followed by a rush of blood to his face. Listopad thought it became him extraordinarily well.

"I had an idea that a predated order might be issued for a week's leave."

"I have nothing to do with these matters," Listopad said, purposely drawing out the words. "They're the shop manager's business."

"The shop manager will not assume such a responsibility."

"And you think *I* will?"

The brown eyes with their bluish whites glowed as they looked at Listopad boldly and earnestly.

"Yes, I think so."

"So that's your idea of me. You think I'm capable of by-passing the people's laws. But tell me this—" he picked up a cigarette and took a long time lighting it, "have you looked at this question from another standpoint, from the standpoint of the Party, the Komsomol, the state? Have you thought what a precedent it would set for the rest of our young people if you and I hushed up the matter?"

Konevsky stood up.

"Alexander Ignatyevich, I look at it from the human point of view and I think that's exactly the way the Party and the Komsomol would look at it, for it's more in keeping than any other with the spirit of our state and the spirit of our Constitution."

He made this little speech in the heat of his feeling, but the moment he finished it he felt very embarrassed.

"What's the lad's name?" Listopad asked.

He wrote it down: Anatoli Ryzhov, machine-shop.

"I shan't say anything now. Ring me up in the evening."

Anna Ivanovna had been standing beside the door. It had been left slightly ajar all the fifteen minutes of the interview. She said nothing to Konevsky, but followed him out with an affectionate look.

You live and imagine you're doing everything you ought to do, Anna Ivanovna thought. You're careful not to disturb your neighbours, you try to be tactful at all times and you walk along the corridor on tip-toe. But perhaps I ought to have entered their rooms without knocking and taken an interest in their life. It will soon be four years since I moved to that flat. Tolka wasn't quite twelve but they already looked upon him as a

grown-up while Olya and Valya were "the children." His mother sent him to stand in all the queues, he was in charge of the fire-wood and he stayed up with the girls when his mother went out. She was quite well then and could have stood in the queues herself. I remember Tanya saying that Tolka never had time to do his home-work. When he was kept down for a second year in the same class he said he was fed up with everything and that as soon as he turned fourteen he would go to work. All the tit-bits went to Valya and Olya. Then his mother began to suspect him of stealing and I started locking my room when I went to work because I was afraid he might steal something of mine. He was given a job at the factory and I remember him returning home dirty from head to foot and washing his grimy little hands in the kitchen. I felt intensely sorry for him and gave him some pastry. Pastry! I should have interfered and insisted on his getting a proper life at home so that he could continue his education. The family wasn't so very badly off. Perhaps I should have helped with money, but I paid no attention to him, thinking only of Tanya and myself. Oh, what hard-hearted, abominable egoists we are!

And now he will be taken to court and it will be the fault of all the people at home. Listopad is a kind man and he could have helped. But would he want to help a relation of Uzdechkin's when they are on such bad terms? Sasha Konevsky didn't say anything about the relationship, but Listopad is bound to find out! How splendidly Sasha spoke about the Constitution! He's a good boy and you can tell at once that he comes from a fine family.

Uzdechkin ought not to have quarrelled with the director. It was shameful how he banged the door the other day! But he's very unhappy. He obviously loved his wife very much and was accustomed to work in different circumstances. I can well understand that his irritability and

pride make it difficult for him to work with Listopad. And their life at home is gloomy. I don't remember ever hearing them laugh.

How much sorrow the war has caused! It's so grand to help one another, to be considerate towards others. Especially at a time like this. But that's a thing we too often forget.

Listopad ordered the planning department to send him a report on the number of young people under eighteen working at the factory, dividing them into age groups and showing how many were studying, how many had no parents and so on. Then he went to the machine-shop. He wanted to have a talk with the lad Konevsky had put in a word for.

Many young people had come to the factory during the war years. Some—because they were eager to help their country in time of stress; others were driven here by need: their fathers were fighting and they had to support their families.

Many of them turned out to be splendid workers, their names were mentioned at meetings and in the factory newspaper and Listopad knew them by sight.

One of them was Lida Yeryomina, who worked on the assembly line in the special shop. Everybody just called her Lida. She came to the factory when she was sixteen. A small girl with sharp elbows, curls and white shoes. You could see at a glance that she was her mother's darling.

Lida had been brought up to take it for granted that there would always be white shoes for her and sweets after dinner, and that when she took her little sisters to the children's *matinée* people would gaze after them and exclaim:

"What charming girls! How well looked after!"

When her father was mobilized and her mother thought of getting a job at the post office, Lida decided that it was now her turn to support the family.

"You stay at home, Mummy," she said. "I'll earn more than you."

She was sorry to leave school, but she made up her mind that she would complete her education after the war.

On her first day she had to change jobs several times. At first she was put to wrapping articles in paper. Then she was told to pack them in boxes. After that the team leader said, "Go over there, your job now will be to screw on detail number eight."

She did not grow angry or get flustered: she realized that she was being tried out. She concentrated all her thoughts on these strange objects which she would now have to handle every day until the war ended. She worked lightly. She had nimble fingers. Nobody in her class at school could tie a bow as nicely as she did. She wrapped and marked articles, screwed on details and worked her way up from the bottom of the assembly line to the top, from the last operation to the first, from second category to the fourth.

During off hours the foreman taught the workers the minimum technical knowledge they should have and Lida attended these classes regularly and passed the tests.

The first operation was to fit the detonating cap into the body. Lida sat at the head of the assembly line. The detonators looked like tiny decanters, the size of a thimble. The neck was the nipple of the detonating cap. The side opposite to the nipple was wrapped in tinfoil, just like decorations for a New Year tree!

Cases of detonators were moved up beside Lida. Each one contained five hundred detonators. The cases were carefully packed; the strings round them were gunmed down and bore sealing wax stamps. When you opened

the case the certificate lay on top. Lida worked out her own system of opening the cases. With an easy, lightning movement of her fingers she tore off the seal, then with another easy movement she flung the certificate on to the conveyer as one throws down a winning card. The quota for fitting detonators was at first eleven thousand in eleven hours; it gradually rose to twenty-two thousand. Lida fitted fifty-five thousand detonators and once she tried working faster and managed sixty-three thousand. But that exhausted her and her hands trembled for a long time. She was frightened and promised herself never to do it again. She was willing to give up high records but never her two and a half quotas! There were women who started off brilliantly. With an effort they turned out three quotas in a month, but after that they slid down to a hundred or a hundred and twenty per cent.

Lida sat at the conveyer with a kerchief tied round her head so that not a hair could fall and damage the delicate detail. Everything round her had to be clean, with not a single unnecessary object, and heaven forbid that anyone should have a pin or a needle about her. Something dreadful might happen. One woman pricked detail number one with a bread crust: her finger was blown off and her face was scorched. Lida would rather die than lose her beauty; and she was very careful. Little metal containers moved past her along the line. With the left hand she caught them up and with the right she fitted the nipple of the detonator into the groove. Two inspectors from the technical control department sat behind her; they were there to see that no empty fuses got through. She worked so fast it was as much as they could do to keep up with her.

At first, besides Lida, there was one other woman-worker fitting detonators. But she grew into the habit of falling asleep on the job. She would doze and miss the fuses.

"Take her away," Lida told the team leader, "let her sleep somewhere else."

She was merciless and never forgave people their faults. With the passion of youth she did not understand how anybody could sink so low as to go to sleep beside the conveyer. "Are you having pleasant dreams?" she would ask. "Go home to bed. I'll get along without you."

Sometimes she, too, would be overcome with weariness. But she did not sing as the others did. That distracted her from her work. She preferred to start an argument in order to keep awake; she usually picked on the inspectors from the technical control department for examining the same fuse twice. There was evidently too little work for the two of them; if so, the one who had nothing to do ought to go away from here. They could cast lots and decide who would stay and who would go and pull carts.

Once, when the cases of detonators were not brought in time and she had been kept waiting for a full twelve minutes she started such a row about the factory keeping a lot of idlers and about the management doing nothing to stop that scandalous practice, that the trade union organizer and the Party organizer, and the Komsomol organizer, and the women's organizer—all the organizers—came running to see what it was all about. Comrade Grushevoi, too, rushed out of his office. It pleased her to have people trying to placate her, and to see Grushevoi run to the telephone to haul somebody over the coals or complain to the director.

After the shift Lida would wash her hands, take off her kerchief and loosen her long ash-blond curls. As she left the shop she would affect the dreamy expression she thought became her most and the imp of the special shop was transformed into a well-behaved girl, into mother's little darling. On her rare days off she went for walks with young officers or with boys from the naval school; they treated her as though she were made of glass; they

believed she was created for exquisite emotions and words; all the other girls seemed coarse in comparison. It never occurred to the admiring boys that she could yell all over the shop and—you may be sure—slap somebody's face at the least provocation.

In 1944 she was awarded the Badge of Honour. She wore the ribbon and it impressed people. It had a devastating effect on the boys.

At home she now took her father's place. Her mother did her utmost to have the flat tidied up and a hot dinner ready when she came home, and there was always a frock to be ironed or stockings to be darned for dear Lida. Her mother cut out all the newspaper photographs and articles about dear Lida and sent them to her father.

Listopad made Kostya Berezhkov's acquaintance when one day the chief book-keeper rang him up to tell him that nineteen thousand rubles had been put down to the monthly earnings of one of the workers. It was unheard-of! He wanted Listopad's instructions, since the shop manager and the Party organizer insisted on the worker getting the money and he did not know what to do.

"Who is the worker?" Listopad asked.

"That's the whole trouble," the chief book-keeper said. "If he was one of our veterans I wouldn't have said a word, but he's only a boy of seventeen with hardly any production experience." It was evidently this latter circumstance that raised the book-keeper's suspicions.

Listopad took an interest in the matter and rang up Ryabukhin. The latter explained that Kostya had earned the money by making a conductor for drilling details on the *Sip* tool. That was a month and a half ago when the factory had received an urgent order and there had been a delay because the *Sip* tools could not cope with the demand. Kostya had turned out the details with his con-

ductor. Yes, it was true that he had come to the factory only about two years ago, but he was an amazingly gifted young fellow and would make a good engineer.

After ordering the book-keeper to pay Kostya at once, Listopad went to the shop to meet him personally. He turned out to be an ordinary lad with massive, good-natured features and big hands. The sleeves of his overalls were short—he must have grown out of them. Listopad spoke to Kostya and learned that he lived in a hostel. His mother with four small children lived far away in a little town, and his father had been killed at the front. Kostya had come to the factory from a vocational school.

“Are you continuing your studies?” Listopad asked.

“I’m studying with Nonna Sergeyevna,” Kostya said.

“Who?”

“Comrade Yelnikova, one of our designers. There are several of us studying with her,” Kostya explained.

Later Listopad was told that on her own initiative Nonna Sergeyevna had selected several boys and girls who had been to vocational schools and was giving them lessons at her home. Sasha Konevsky thought that if this group was included in the general system of technical education and if examinations were held from time to time it would set an example for the other young people at the factory. The classes could be held in the club so that anyone who wanted could attend them. Ryabukhin did not agree with Konevsky: the young people kept away from the club because it was cold there, while at Nonna Sergeyevna’s it was warm. “She gives us tea,” the boys said, “and she has many fascinating books on engineering and we can take them down from the shelves and read them.”

“Don’t you even so much as hint to Nonna Sergeyevna to move her class to the club or that her pupils ought to be examined,” Ryabukhin warned Konevsky. “She’s got her idiosyncrasies and might suddenly sniff at us and

throw everything up. That would spell the end of a good undertaking. We'll wait. She'll come to us herself."

Listopad gave Kostya a bonus, but when some time later he wanted to see the boy again he was told that he was no longer working at the factory. He had sent his nineteen thousand rubles to his mother and had enrolled in an industrial technical school.

Listopad was angry that a useful worker had been allowed to leave. Grushevoi lifted his hands in dismay and mumbled something about Nonna Sergeyevna having been very insistent. That Nonna Sergeyevna was doing what she liked with people. She ought to be put in her place, but Listopad didn't want to start a quarrel with a woman.

He was keenly interested in young people like Kostya Berezhkov, Lida Yeryomina and the clever technician Chekaldin, and he knew them by sight. But there were several thousand other rank-and-file young people at the factory. The old foremen, who were accustomed to deal with experienced and disciplined workers, sometimes flew off the handle at them. And yet they worked and did what was required, and by their clumsy, joint efforts the war-time programme was being fulfilled. Besides Lida and Kostya, the factory had a boy named Anatoli Ryzhov, who had been away from work without leave for a whole week and who would have to be taken to court.

A short, sturdy lad was tending a drilling machine. Many boys like him, wearing similar overalls, were working in the shop, but the look Ryzhov wore on his face marked him out from the others. It was an oppressed look. Listopad recognized him by that look from afar. The boy gave the approaching director a fleeting glance and continued his work.

"Are you Ryzhov?"

"Yes," Tolka said.

"Are you the boy who was on the gad for a whole week?"

"Yes." To himself Tolka thought, "These people make me sick! I've committed a crime and I'm going to be punished for it, but why does he have to come here and use words like 'on the gad'." He scowled and fitted a fresh detail into the clamp.

Listopad stopped the machine and asked:

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen." He was not sixteen yet, but he counted his age from the year he was born in and not from his birthday, he was born in 1929 so he was sixteen in 1945.

"Where did you go?"

Tolka was slow in answering. He was tired of answering that question.

"To the country."

"The country? What did you do there? Work?"

There was no reply.

"Does your family live in the country?"

"No. My family lives here, in Kruzhilikha."

"Is your family big?"

"No, there's only my mother."

"Any brothers or sisters?"

"No," Tolka said and was surprised that the thought about his being his mother's only child had never entered his head before. He had always counted Fyodor, Olya and Valya as forming his mother's family and had looked upon himself as being of the least importance to her.

"You came to us of your own free will," Listopad continued. "I suppose you're familiar with war-time laws. You must realize that we're not playing a game. We're straining every nerve to bring a great cause to completion, a cause for which hundreds of thousands of our

Soviet people have given their lives. But you are a deserter."

He spoke sternly, yet he felt his heart going out to Tolka and all those lads, to those clear eyes which he had somehow never noticed before and which were now fixed on him.

"Where do you boys live?" he asked the others.

They hesitated. Nobody wanted to push forward and answer first.

"Me?" asked Alyoshka Malygin. "I live with my family."

"And you?"

"In the young people's settlement," replied Vasya Surikov, a fair boy with a girlish face. "I live there and he, and he—we all live there."

That was a settlement of about a dozen prefabricated two-storeyed houses built during the war years for young workers who had no homes.

"How do you like it in your settlement? Is it all right?"

Judging by the glances the boys exchanged, he realized that it was far from all right.

"It'll pass at a pinch," said Vasya Surikov with the condescension of a grown-up who understands and is not afraid of difficulties. "It's not too bad."

Listopad gazed at them, his heart filling with emotion, with almost adoration for these boys.

He drew Tolka's cap down over the boy's nose and said:

"Wait, boys, wait a little longer, and when we'll go over to peace-time production you'll get leaves and we'll send you to holiday homes. Some of you, I expect, will want to study. You'll get everything you want. I promise you."

Mariika came up, looking upset.

"This boy, Comrade Director, has no sense of duty," she said, shaking her head. "And a relation of the chair-

man of the factory committee, too. You've disgraced Fyodor Ivanovich all over Kruzhilikha," she said to Tolka.

"What has the chairman of the factory committee got to do with it?" Listopad asked not understanding the implication. "Who is his relation?"

"Why, he is. This young fellow here," Mariika said. "Didn't you know? He's the brother of Fyodor Ivanovich's wife and they live together."

Listopad thought for a moment.

"All right," he said at last, "carry on, Ryzhov. Make up for it."

"They're splendid lads," he thought to himself as he walked away, "splendid." He went with a light step to the office of foreman Korolkov, rang up Mirzoyev, and drove to the young people's settlement.

Mirzoyev was unusually grave and stern as he drove the car. His delicate eyebrows were closely knitted.

"Why are you so gloomy today?" Listopad asked.

"This is my day of mourning," Mirzoyev replied with quiet solemnity, staring ahead of him sadly. "Exactly three years ago I lost a comrade and the best chief I ever had. The commander of our battalion. He was a man, I can tell you! I'll never forget him even if I live to be a hundred."

Fresh graves had been dug in everybody's minds during the war years. Had Klasha been alive there would have been a son or sons—boys with clear eyes and manly hearts. How much had been lost, how many years would have to go by before these graves would grow over and the pain of their memory would soften!

Listopad returned from the young people's settlement looking blacker than a thunder-cloud and he immediately rang up Uzdechkin.

"Fyodor Ivanovich? Please come to see me. At once."

It was not Uzdechkin alone who was to blame for what Listopad saw in the young people's settlement. Uzdechkin's guilt was shared by Ryabukhin and Konevsky and principally by Listopad himself. But Listopad hated the man and he vented all his wrath on him.

He received him standing and with that haughty and aloof air that infuriated Uzdechkin. Listopad did not sit down throughout the interview and Uzdechkin was compelled to stand in front of him; his awkwardness and his round shoulders were accentuated as he stood facing the splendid figure of the director.

"Fyodor Ivanovich," Listopad said, "what did you need those sixty thousand rubles that you asked me for recently? Sixty thousand. What for?"

"We asked you for sixty thousand rubles to repair the House of Culture."

"I see, to repair the House of Culture. What repairs?"

"The central heating is out of order. Quite a few window-panes have to be put in and the whole premises need to be painted. The director of the House is thinking of giving the auditorium a marble-like coat of paint."

"A brilliant idea, I daresay. And all you need is sixty thousand rubles?"

"Well, we know how unwillingly you respond to our requests," Uzdechkin pricked him. "We'll be using our own means mainly."

"Where can you get the means?"

"The young people are offering to work on a Sunday."

"Hm. Tell me, Fyodor Ivanovich, why don't you ask me for money to repair the young people's settlement? Not to look like marble, but simply—to look like a dwelling fit for humans?"

"So that's what's on your mind," Uzdechkin thought. "Oh no, you won't cut the grass under my feet there!"

"We're looking into it," he said. "We have an act drawn up by an investigating commission and it'll be up for discussion in a few days."

"Discussion?" Listopad thundered. "To hell with your discussions! What are you going to discuss? How active the members of the commission have been? Or the colour for the roofs? Everything's damp there, the dampness is making life a hell for the boys! Refuse and dirt everywhere, and the manager walks about with a sleep-swollen face—he probably sleeps all day. Have you seen the wash-basins and the taps where the boys wash themselves? The drains are clogged up, and there's dirty water right up to the brim! Before he can wash himself a boy has to bale out all that filth. Do you call that a place fit to live in? You ought to be made to live there yourself, Comrade Chairman of the Factory Trade Union Committee, then you wouldn't brood over your prestige or start your squabbles. You'd busy yourself with what the workers expect of you! You beat yourself on your breast in public and shout that I'm trying to squeeze you out of your job and don't let you put your stamp on everything that's done at the factory, but when you get down to facts it turns out that if I don't go into the smallest matter personally, you won't make a move! Who the devil do you think ought to look into this wash-basin business? You or I? I'm asking you. You or I?"

"We're giving living conditions our constant attention," Uzdechkin said with enormous restraint. "Not only the young people's settlement, but all the houses require repairs. We've repaired three flats for families of men at the front, and we have twenty families in urgent need of a dwelling—after all, the factory committee can't do everything at once."

"If you can't, get out—let somebody who can take your place!"

Uzdechkin was not looking at Listopad, but contempt was written all over his face. Suddenly he felt a real, unassumed calm stealing over him. So that was what the director was aiming at. He wanted Uzdechkin to leave his post. Oh, no! It was not Listopad who had appointed him. He had been elected by members of the trade union, by secret, direct and universal ballot. The director could not ignore that.

"The factory committee is not responsible for general difficulties," he said quietly. "We have hundreds of applications and we're considering them by turn. We've planned to repair the House of Culture and we're doing what we can for the families of men at the front—these come first, of course, because they are the direct dependents of the factory."

Listopad trembled with rage.

"I'll not tolerate words like that," he said. "We have no dependents at the factory, direct or indirect. We have children. Some are studying, others are working, but they are all children of the factory, all, down to the last one, and be so kind as to look after all of them! I'm telling you this as a member of the trade union, as your elector, to whom you are answerable! Do you understand? But how can one depend on you," he said, concluding the interview, "when you can't look after a boy in your own family, when you can't understand him. What can others expect of you!"

It was difficult to have to work with a man you hated. That hate was born when Listopad's wife was lying in her coffin. Uzdechkin had caught himself basely thinking that Listopad, too, was going through the same sorrow, and that his wife's death showed there was justice in the world, after all. The thought horrified him, he drove it away, and tried to forget it.

But his morbid pride—and Listopad did not spare it—was provoked day after day. His body refused to fight the disease. His strength steadily failed him. When he left Listopad's office he felt all in and his nerves were numb.

“Go to the young people's settlement,” Listopad ordered the head of the social welfare department, “look over the houses and draw up an estimate of the repairs. When I say repairs I don't mean stuffing the biggest holes,” he added, his eyes flashing, “I mean the kind of repairs you'd want in your own home!”

CHAPTER SIX

NOTE-BOOKS

Klavdiya's life had been short but eventful.

She finished school on the eve of the war. A white dress was made for her. Her hair was curled at the hairdresser's, and she had her first manicure. There was a ball at school. The stern maths teacher invited her to a waltz and spoke formally to her. She realized that she was now a grown-up but could not overcome her awe of him. Her parents came to the ball, dressed specially for the occasion. Her mother, in a gay dress with a lace ribbon at the collar, sat in her chair with solemn pride.

Klavdiya had no idea what she would do after school.

“The best a woman can do,” her mother said, “is to get married and have children.” But Klavdiya did not want to get married, not yet anyway.

“Let her go on with her studies,” her father said. “Let her golden childhood last a little longer!” But Klavdiya did not particularly wish to go on studying either.

First, she wanted to sleep to her heart's content after the exams. Then to go to Terioki with the girls and boys. That trip had been planned during the exams. They set out for Terioki early in the morning on June 22. It was a cold morning, they shivered in the train, but by noon it grew very hot. They opened their lunch-baskets in the woods and ate everything they brought there and then. After that they wandered about the woods. Klavdiya always smiled at the memory of those moments: they had such a wonderful time with not a care in the world and so much fun! When they grew tired they went back to the station, ravenously hungry, but with just enough money for some ice-cream. They stopped laughing when they noticed the woman ice-cream-vendor weeping.

"What's the matter?" Klavdiya asked. "Why are you weeping?"

The woman wiped her eyes.

"You owe me three rubles and fifty kopeks," she said angrily.

Each of them took an ice-cream cone, dripping with sticky white liquid, and sat in the carriage, licking it and calculating whether they had enough money left over for the tram fare. In the train, from the frowning and distressed people returning to Leningrad after a Sunday trip to the suburbs, they heard the word: *war*.

Klavdiya's childhood ended that day.

She carried sand-bags to the attic, did her turn of duty on the roof, and went to Luga to dig trenches. She learned the rules of gas and chemical defence and first aid. Her hands got callous and blistered. She was always hungry, but gradually this feeling of hunger lost its acuteness. She stopped running and talking loudly and grew slow in her movements. When she had to bend for something, she grew dizzy and heard ringing noises in her ears. But she knew how to hide her weakness, and was spurred on by the thought that there were others

who could no longer keep on their feet. When members of the Komsomol made the rounds of the houses to help people who had collapsed from exhaustion, Klavdiya went to the uppermost storeys. The windows on the landings were screened with plywood. Rarely did she meet anybody coming down. Hers were the only steps that rang in the black well of the staircase. The climbs seemed endless, but she always reached the top. It was always some strange door and frequently nobody answered her knock.

Her father had not been at home for more than a month, he slept at the factory. The postman brought news of her brother's death. Klavdiya went to tell her father. He listened and said, "Go to your mother. I'll come home tomorrow." On the next day he and a group of other exhausted workers were taken to hospital. On the way he made the chauffeur stop the car, got out and made for home through the snow-drifts round Ligovka. That was the last anybody saw of him. At the end of January Klavdiya's mother died: she went to the baker's on Suvorov-sky Lane, sat down to rest at the corner of Zaichi Lane and quietly dropped off into eternal sleep. She was carried home. Klavdiya's neighbours helped her to dress the stiffened body in a pretty dress (the gay one with the lace at the collar) and took it to the cemetery. Klavdiya walked behind the little sleigh and thought, "Poor mother, it's more peaceful for you now, you don't have to go anywhere or do anything." Her mother had complained that it was hard for her to go to the baker's or to fetch water and had always been cross when Klavdiya stayed away from home for whole days. Another thought that passed through her mind was that the wind would not blow in her face on the return journey from the cemetery and that she would not feel so cold.

She was so tired when she came home that she fell fast asleep, but in the night she woke up. The moon was shining brightly, relentlessly piercing the thick ice on the

window-pane, lighting up the room. Directly opposite her, Klavdiya saw her mother's bed. The quilt was crumpled and there was a dent in the pillow as though her mother had just got up. Klavdiya sat up and screamed, "Mama!" so loudly that she frightened herself. The scream echoed—and again there was a deathly silence in this flat where people were dying. Klavdiya lay down, shivering, and pulled the quilt over her head.

Presently she realized that it would soon be her turn. It became obvious that her mother had been giving her a part of her rations; that, Klavdiya could see now, was the reason she had kept to her feet. Now she felt her strength leaving her with every hour, and one day she could not rise to go to the baker's. A neighbour bought the bread for her and gave her a mug of warm water. Klavdiya stayed in bed for four days. On the fifth day her Komsomol friends came to see her. When she recognized them, she whispered earnestly, "I don't want to die! Bear in mind that I don't want to die whatever happens!" She was taken to a hospital and in spring she was evacuated from Leningrad.

When Listopad met Klavdiya she was a tall, plump and healthy girl. Not a trace of that winter in Leningrad was left on her face. She laughed heartily, was trusting, generous and womanishly compassionate. She was a student at the Polytechnical Institute and studied shorthand in her spare moments, thinking that later that would add to her income.

She was among the group of students sent to the factory for practical studies. In those days the factory was very short-handed and Listopad paid particular attention to the students. He saw at once that Klavdiya would never be an engineer. She had no flare for engineering. Why did she go to the Polytechnical Institute? Probably because she thought she ought to be studying somewhere. After that she'd find something she'd like to do

and would start studying all over again. Extravagant youth! It did not know the value of time and was reckless, threw whole years to the winds. And suddenly he was attracted by her youth, her cheerfulness, freshness, and trust—

"Drop it, Klasha," Listopad said of her studies when they got married.

Klavdiya was sick of the institute, but she was too proud to give it up. She thought she would be censured and her friends would say: you see, the moment she married a general and factory director she became a housewife and showed how narrow she was. And she assured her husband that science, particularly engineering, interested her and that her aim in life was to be an engineer. Listopad laughed, stroked her head and said, "All right, do as you wish," and never again interfered with her studies.

Once Klavdiya told him how she had lived through that winter in Leningrad. His heart had contracted with pity:

"My poor, poor darling!"

He had held her tight with both his arms and kept repeating tenderly:

"My poor, poor darling—"

"I looked terrible—do you know what I looked like? My breasts simply vanished. I was like a thin boy. And my face was like an old woman's. And my hair did not curl—it would have been a wonder if it had—it was so dry."

"Don't, don't talk about it," he had said. "Everything's all right now, isn't it?"

"You know it is."

"And it'll always be like this. What are you looking at?"

She had been looking past his head. Looking back. And seeing it all again.

"Anna Ivanovna," Listopad said, "I think you can read shorthand."

He was holding a pile of note-books. Anna Ivanovna waited. What he had said was only an introduction. An order was bound to follow.

"I want you to read this," he said, turning over the pages of one of the note-books with a frown.

He threw them on the table.

"They're my wife's. That's all she left—that and her clothes. Well—sometimes—I might want to read them. They are her notes from the institute. She took down the lectures."

Anna Ivanovna made a neat pile of the note-books and said:

"All right, Alexander Ignatyevich."

She did not have a class with the engineers that evening. She came home earlier than usual and sat down to decipher Klavdiya's notes. But that proved no easy task. Firstly, Klavdiya wrote in a close and fine hand and the lines ran against each other: she must have economized on note-books. "She hadn't the time to get used to an easy life, to the opportunities she had," Anna Ivanovna thought. Secondly, Klavdiya's shorthand was faulty. Anna Ivanovna knew the system she had used, but Klavdiya had confused or omitted signs, invented signs of her own and sometimes used a crude and incomprehensible shorthand made up of consonants. "This must be read carefully over and over again," Anna Ivanovna said to herself, "I'll grasp her style gradually and find the key."

A painstaking comparison of the signs yielded some results. Anna Ivanovna established what Klavdiya meant by a circle with a slanting cross or by a circle with a straight cross. That gave her the key to read separate words. After guessing one word she guessed—more by

supposition as in a rebus—the words that followed; that, in its turn, led to further discoveries and conclusions. “I’ll suddenly find my open sesame one day,” Anna Ivanovna thought, “and read it as easily as if I had made the notes myself.”

She pored over them in the evenings and in her spare time. With an effort she managed to decipher the summaries of lectures on strength of materials.

At night she dreamed of Klavdiya’s twists and twirls.

It was all very boring and Anna Ivanovna was not at all interested in the work, but she wanted to finish it because Listopad had asked her to; it was his first personal request, and such an intimate one, too.

Thank goodness she was finished with one note-book. Anna Ivanovna took another one. She opened it at random and suddenly read the word “pillow.”

What was this?

“... we spilled some of it on the pillow.”

She turned over the page and read: “Sheer nonsense.” She read the words as though they had been written in ordinary letters.

Strange phrases. They had no business in a summary. Was it a diary?

Carefully, with superstitious awe, she put a clean sheet of foolscap in front of her. Would it really make coherent reading now? She could scarcely believe that her difficulties were over.

She ran her eyes over two or three other phrases and convinced herself that it was a diary, a page from a diary. This was much more interesting than strength of materials.

“I think it’s sheer nonsense,” Anna Ivanovna read, still afraid that the discovery would suddenly end and the unintelligible signs rise before her eyes again. “All this nonsense rushes to my head simply because I’m pregnant. Domna says that when she was pregnant she

often wept 'over nothing.' That is exactly how it is with me."

There was nothing to be afraid of now, the miracle she had been waiting for had taken place, the wall had moved aside. Separate conclusions suddenly formed like a bunch of keys: each key opened a lock; Klavdiya's Greek took the shape of a harmonious system; light fell on the dark pages and Anna Ivanovna had no difficulty in reading them.

"He came home from some conference after three o'clock in the morning. I stayed up to wait for him. He did not notice that and said, 'Sleep, go to sleep.' I told him that I would give him his supper before he went to bed, and he said 'All right,' and sat down on the sofa. I went to the kitchen and when I came back he was fast asleep, sitting on the sofa with his tunic and boots on. I tried to wake him up to make him lie down properly. But he did not wake up. Then I turned off the light and went to bed and when I woke up in the morning, he was gone, gone to the factory—"

Anna Ivanovna thought that when Listopad's sorrow had melted he would find this pleasant reading. Sad, but pleasant all the same.

"When we fell in love I could not make up my mind how I'd call him. I asked him and he said, 'Any way you like, only not by that name and patronymic combination.' I asked him how his mother had called him and he said, 'You won't call me by that name as it'll sound strange here.' (He was born in the Ukraine.) I began calling him Sasha.* It doesn't suit him; it's a name you'd give a boy or a young man, but I don't know what else to call him—"

"The stipends were paid out today. I still can't decide what to do. I have everything I need. It would be fair if

* Sasha—a diminutive of Alexander.—*Tr.*

I refused to take the money. They could give it to somebody who needs it. But if I refuse it they will think I'm a snob. And if I give it to one of the girls myself she'd think, 'She's a general's wife and wants to be philanthropic.' I asked Sasha what to do and he said, 'Take it, of course. Since it's due to you, you must take it.' I protested that I had everything I wanted, but he said, 'Well, I don't know. You're getting it from the state and the state is certainly in no need of your philanthropy.' He, too, did not understand that it's not philanthropy but simply the right thing to do. The short of it was that I took my place in the queue in front of the cashier's window, received my stipend, and was terribly ashamed."

Anna Ivanovna smiled and turned over several pages. "... Zoya and Lena came to me and we did our English together. It's hard for Lena and me, but Zoya knows German and some French and she's having no difficulty. It was very cold in our room. We took off our shoes and got under the warm blanket. We drank tea in bed and spilled some of it on the pillow and threw bread crumbs all over the bed. We had so much fun. Then they left. They wanted me to go to the cinema with them, but I did not go because Sasha said he'd be home early. I tidied up the room and waited. The phone kept ringing—people asking for him. Then he rang up and said he'd be held up at the factory and told me not to wait for him and to go somewhere to amuse myself. But it was already too late to go anywhere. I tried to study, but I gave that up. I started darning his socks, but my hands froze: the radiators are almost cold and my breath steams. I shan't feel so lonely when my son arrives. I'll be busy with him all day. I'll hire a nice old woman to nurse him and I'll have her to talk to—"

"... even if Mother were alive I'd have been shy to tell her. I'm chasing away these thoughts, but what can I do if they keep recurring. They're not thoughts really,

but a kind of oppression or sadness, I don't know what. And there's nobody I can tell this to, and even if there were I wouldn't know how to explain. Nina Sukhotina is the only person in the world who'd understand. But where is she??? I wrote to all her friends, but nobody knows. Their flat is occupied by strangers, and they, too, know nothing about her. She and her father joined the volunteers. That is all that people know. I wonder if we shall ever find each other and if she is alive?"

"Dear, darling Nina, hello! I'm writing to you even though I don't know where you are. But I've made up my mind that you are somewhere. You're not the kind of girl the Germans could kill! Dear Nina, life is kind to me—"

"... you must not blame me. Remember our promise? We swore we'd tell each other everything. I'll be frank with you. It was all my idea so that I could tell you I was in love with Kolya Z.; I could not start talking about it any other way. And you were angry and said that in the sixth class it was too early to fall in love and that Kolya Z. was detestable and rude, and gave himself airs. And on the next day you came very early, I was still asleep, and you asked me to forgive you. You said you had been insincere and confessed that you were in love with Kolya yourself. Dear Nina, how happy we were then!"

"... I love him and he loves me and we're going to have a baby. Everybody thinks I'm happy! But I'm not."

"Perhaps it's because we were brought up to demand a lot from happiness?—"

"... If, for instance, I finish the institute and they send me to work in another city (that will not happen, but I'm saying it just as an example), would he follow me? Never! Because he's tied to the work he's doing here. While I—I come amongst other things. I'm not important at all. If I die he'll get along splendidly without me."

"I thought that when people loved each other they'd be together all the time. But we live separate lives. Of

course, he's very busy; I understand and respect his work, I'd be foolish if I didn't. But if only he'd be sorry, you understand—if only he'd be sorry that we're living separate lives! Our short meetings are enough for him. He rarely tells me anything about himself. Once he spoke about his childhood. And he never asks me about my studies at the institute or my exams. I worried no end when I lost my Komsomol card. I wore my legs off running about looking for it and wept all the time, but he only joked about it."

"... it's not because of the war. The war will end, but our life will not change. He's that type, that's all."

The note-book ended.

"I'm ashamed of what I wrote," Anna Ivanovna read in another note-book. "When I finish the institute, I'll go to work and look after the baby."

"... he never tells me that I'm the dearest thing on earth for him! And he'll never tell that to his son. In a spare moment between work and sleep he'll see his son and remember: Oh, yes! I have a son—and he'll play with him a little."

"Yesterday I wept while he was at home. It frightened him and he asked me why. I said: 'If only you'd spend one day with me, just one day!' His face clouded, then he stroked me and said, 'All right, I'll come early tomorrow.' And, indeed, today he came home at two o'clock (in the afternoon, not in the morning). I was happy and ran to put on a new dressing-gown, but then I heard him say into the telephone receiver, 'Ryabukhin, come over to my place, I must see you.' Ryabukhin came just as we were having our dinner and talked shop until six o'clock. When Ryabukhin finally left, Sasha went to the bedroom, lay down on the bed and said, 'Well, now we're all alone. Do you want to go to the theatre?' But I saw that he was

falling asleep; his last words were spoken as he was dozing off. I sat for a long time, watching him sleep. I hated him then, hated him terribly: 'Why did you lie that you loved me? I was happy without you, and with you I'm unhappy.' He did not hear. He was sound asleep. I asked in a louder voice: 'Why am I sitting beside you? Was I saved to sit here beside you?' And I began to ask him question after question, 'Why did you marry me? Who are you to me? What am I to do?' I spoke loudly, so loudly that I was terrified, but he slept—"

"... forgive me if I'm asking more than I deserve, but I can't live without happiness."

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Anna Ivanovna typed the summaries of the lectures on her old-fashioned office Underwood. The Underwood had a big carriage and clattered like a goods train. Tanya slept soundly in spite of the clatter.

She did not type the diaries or letters. There was no point in letting Listopad read them. She left them buried in their incomprehensible scrawl in the old note-books.

"Here they are, Alexander Ignatyevich," Anna Ivanovna said, putting in front of Listopad the pile of note-books and a thick sheaf of typewritten sheets. "They're lectures on political economy, the science of metals, strength of materials and so on."

Listopad picked up one of the sheets and looked at it. He read a phrase which started a comprehensive list of world deposits of copper, and sank into thought. Klavdiya's hieroglyphics, transformed into neat typewritten sheets, were no longer mysterious or tormenting. They became accessible to all and prosaic.

"Thank you, Anna Ivanovna. How much do I owe you for the work?"

"Nothing, but I have a request to make, Alexander Ignatyevich. If you have a picture of Klavdiya Vasilyevna that you can spare, may I have it?"

He raised his eyebrows.

"I've spent a great deal of time over her note-books. And I feel as if I've become very intimate with her."

She said that without any apparent emotion and without sentimental affectations. She wore a grave and kindly expression. "What a fine human face," Listopad thought. "She's a very kind woman!" He was grateful to her and wanted to show her his trust and friendship. He drew an envelope with photographs of Klavdiya from the inner pocket of his jacket.

"Choose any one you like."

In six of the photographs Klavdiya was alive, laughing, her hair ruffled, her eyes bright, and in six she was dead, with compressed lips and big, stern eyelids.

"I'll take two, may I?"

"Yes, do."

He put the note-books and typed pages into a drawer of his desk and turned the key.

"At best," Anna Ivanovna thought, "he'll look through the notes sometime during a free moment. But I doubt even that."

She put both photographs in front of her and looked at them with a strange feeling.

"I have no secrets!" said the laughing, good-naturedly impish face of the living Klavdiya. "What secrets can I have when everything in life is so wonderful and clear!"

"Nobody is to blame for this," said the dead face, full of wisdom, sorrow and dignity, "I'm blaming no one, good-bye, I wish you happiness!"

"Oh, you poor girl!" Anna Ivanovna whispered and put her tear-stained cheek to the photograph of the dead Klavdiya.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EVE OF VICTORY

There were neither parades nor an artillery salute in the town to mark the twenty-seventh anniversary of the Red Army. The factories worked as usual; only red flags were hung out. Yet people were conscious of the holiday!

They were conscious of the holiday because the Red Army was dear to every heart, because the Red Army meant a son, a brother, a husband, a father, or a lover, because the Red Army meant the one to whom thoughts turn whether awake or asleep, from whom letters are expected and whose photograph is treasured as sacred.

People were conscious of the holiday because that morning Stalin's Order of the Day summarized the most recent battles fought by the Red Army.

Levitan, the radio announcer, whose voice was familiar to every Soviet listener, read slowly:

"In the course of 40 days of the offensive in January-February 1945, our troops drove the Germans out of 300 towns, captured about a hundred factories producing tanks, aircraft, arms and ammunition, occupied more than 2,400 railway stations, and recovered control of a railway network with more than 15,000 kilometres of railway lines. Within this short period over 350,000 German officers and men were taken prisoner and no less than 800,000 killed. During the same period the Red Army destroyed or captured about 3,000 German aircraft, more than 4,500 tanks and self-propelled guns and at least 12,000 guns.

"As a result, the Red Army completely liberated Poland and a considerable part of Czechoslovakia, took Budapest, forced Hungary, Germany's last ally in Europe, out of the war, occupied a large part of Eastern Prussia and German Silesia, and fought its way to Brandenburg and Pomerania, the approaches to Berlin."

"Berlin!" the chief designer repeated, listening at attention, his head held high. "We'll soon be in Berlin!"

"Complete victory over the Germans," Levitan's voice continued, "is now already near. But victory never comes of its own accord—it is achieved by hard fighting and persevering labour."

"I'm thirty per cent behind my three quotas for February," Mariika told Lukashin. "And there's only six days of the month left. Or is it five? Good heavens, Syoma, this isn't a leap year! I've got only five days left. Well it's good-bye now until the first of March. Don't forget me, write and send me telegrams. I'm going to keep at it until I get my three quotas out."

"Eternal glory to the heroes, who have fallen in the struggle for the freedom and independence of our country!" Levitan concluded in the solemn tone of a requiem.

"Eternal memory!" Nikita Trofimovich Vedeneyev whispered sadly, looking at Andrei's portrait.

The tall chimney-stacks of Kruzhilikha smoked day and night. The people worked shifts of eleven hours without days off. Trains were loaded at the little siding between the railway station and the factory. Powerful FD engines pulled guns to the West.

"Mariika's not an easy person to live with," Lukashin thought. "I've picked myself a difficult woman. Always shouting and chattering. You no sooner get her settled to talk things over seriously and think she's following you with interest and answering sensibly than up she jumps and runs away. That's no way for a wife to behave. She must hear her husband out. Maybe he wants to give her some advice. But Mariika's never there to listen.

"And she's always in other people's kitchens. It puzzles me how she finds time to work at the factory, stand in the queues, do the house-work and learn everything

about the neighbours—their love affairs, quarrels, and purchases.”

When the rapture of the first kisses passed, Mariika returned to the way of living that had prevented her from getting along with her father and stepmother. It was not that she took less care of Lukashin, but she could not make herself stay alone with him for any length of time. On his part, Lukashin had never known the meaning of family warmth, love and care. He grew attached to his small hearth. He was not ungenerous, but he was not inclined to share his hearth either with Mariika's girlfriends, or the neighbours, or anybody else. Mariika's sociability grieved him.

If Mariika had not kept on dampening his spirits, everything would have been all right. Lukashin liked the factory as soon as he started working. Everything there was big, massive and impressive. The machine-tool—you could see at once that it was sound. Previously, when Lukashin read newspaper accounts of workers overfulfilling their quotas, he pictured them bustling and running back and forth. Now he saw that they worked unhurriedly, with dignity. The foreman, an elderly man, shook hands with him when they met. Martyanov came up to him. They smoked and spoke of the fronts where Lukashin had fought. Martyanov told him of an incident that had happened during the imperialist war of 1914. The foreman was a little deaf. He put his ear close to the speaker and smiled benevolently. He assigned Lukashin to Martyanov and said, “Wish you luck.”

Martyanov led Lukashin to a machine-tool.

“Look here, Syoma,” he said, “this is the headstock”—he slapped the headstock with his hand—“and this is the tailstock. Here we have the spindle of the headstock.” He named the main parts of the tool. “Now, look carefully: this is—what?—the self-centring cam chuck. Now—what

am I doing?—I push the lever and switch on the tool. Look attentively, Syoma! What am I doing?" Lukashin stared but could make neither head nor tail of what Martyanov was doing. Fine metal shavings fell back on the machine. Martyanov brought something shiny close to Lukashin's face and said, raising a fat, grimy finger: "I've made a groove with the help of a traverse support!"

Lukashin was afraid that Martyanov would now tell him to make grooves with the help of a traverse support. So far he had grasped only what a groove was; the traverse support was something he did not understand, while of all the parts of the machine he remembered only three: the lever and the two stocks. He was ashamed to admit it. He made as if he understood and nodded, while all the time he trembled with fear lest Martyanov would suddenly believe him, and say, "Now, that's fine. Good lad! Carry on by yourself," and go away and leave him face to face with this infernal machine. But Martyanov did not go away. He patiently stayed with Lukashin until the lunch hour and after lunch. Towards evening Lukashin found himself able to cut a groove and drill a hole without help.

"A turner's trade is all right," Martyanov said when the shift was over. "It's a clever trade. Needs a soul and refinement. You'll have to give it your soul from the very beginning and you'll attain refinement with time."

The deaf foreman conducted technical classes. He could scarcely hear the questions he was asked and obligingly bent forward to listen. That caused difficulties, but there was no denying that he was a master turner and Lukashin learned much from him. At the factory Lukashin worked under Martyanov and gradually learned to recognize the different devices and to be quite at ease with the technical terms that had frightened him at first.

He thought he worked worse than the others and that troubled him. Sometimes the shop manager or the Party

organizer came up to his machine to watch him; he thought he was slow and clumsy and was ashamed. But one day a stranger entered the shop and Lukashin heard him ask the foreman, "Is this the man?" Getting an affirmative reply from the foreman the man turned to Lukashin and asked him some questions, then took out a note-book and pencil and wrote something down. Before leaving he said:

"Now we know each other. I'm the editor of the factory newspaper."

Then another stranger came into the shop and photographed Lukashin beside his machine.

In a few days the photograph was printed in the paper and the caption under it gave Lukashin's name, the shop he was working in and said that he had fought for his country and that now he was a turner and had quickly shown himself to be a disciplined and painstaking worker. He could see no reason for the praise; he was only a newcomer at the factory and it was embarrassing. Yet it was pleasant to know that everybody at the factory would read the article and see his photograph—very pleasant. Quite likely Mariika, too, was pleased when the newspaper was brought to her shop and she read it.

Lukashin and Mariika had grown so accustomed to flinging money about that now they could hardly make ends meet. After a talk with Mariika, Lukashin decided to sell his father's house. "We don't know yet if we'll ever need it," he thought, "but money is always useful."

He went to Rogachi at the first opportunity to look over the house and to tell the people in the Village Soviet that he wanted to sell it.

From a distance he saw smoke curling out of both chimneys. Somebody was living in the house. Lukashin went nearer. Behind the fence a woman was hanging out

washing on a line in the yard. Three small children were sitting on their heels and building a snow fort with a ditch round it. Lukashin stopped to watch. The ditch instantly filled with water; the melting snow was like wet sugar. The children stopped playing and stared at Lukashin. The woman came up and looked at him apprehensively. Her clothes, though worn, showed she was a townswoman, an educated woman.

"What can I do for you?" she asked.

"Nothing, really," Lukashin replied. "I was going by and stopped to look."

He wanted to enter the house, but with strangers living there he felt awkward about going in uninvited. He waited, hoping the woman would invite him in. But she said nothing. Through the window he caught a glimpse of an old woman, with a frying-pan in her hand. She looked bad-tempered.

"Well, good-bye," Lukashin said with a sigh.

"Good-bye," the woman responded. He turned and walked away and the woman gazed after him perplexed.

The chairman of the Village Soviet was a little discomposed when Lukashin came in, but regaining his balance, he said:

"You see, Semyon Yefimovich, we couldn't help it. Two families were left on our hands after the re-evacuation. Both had lost their bread-winners and their homes. We had to help them. You've got to see our end of it. For the time being we put them up in your house. Don't be hard on us for the liberty. We'll move them out whenever you say so, but that would put me at my wit's end to find a place for them. We gave them only the bare necessities of furniture and locked the rest in a little room. Here's the key."

"All right," Lukashin said after a moment's thought. "Let them live there. Never mind."

And he returned to Kruzhilikha.

Pavel finally arrived and the Vedeneyev cottage came to life. Nikita Trofimovich looked brighter and younger, Mariika hurried back and forth, chattering and shrieking with delight, and Mariamna busied herself with preparations for a party. Pavel was back, alive and well, and as for his artificial limb—well, there was no help for it now. He looked like everybody else, and you could not even notice that anything was wrong.

There was almost no change in Pavel, only he was a little stouter and his hair had begun to thin—it was retreating on his temples.

"I'm getting old, Father, yes, I'm getting old," he said.

"Nothing of the kind," Nikita Trofimovich objected. "All Vedeneyevs grow bald early, it's in the family." The old man scrutinized his son and was grieved to see some grey hairs. "Now *that* is not in the family. The war's given you a whitewash."

"Whom hasn't it whitewashed?" Pavel said.

He asked for Katerina's letters. Katerina, dear Katerina, his wife, was working in the Ukraine, in Mariupol, on a Party assignment. Pavel read her letters, holding Nikitka between his knees, as though meaning never to let his son leave him even for a minute. Nikitka was not yet bored by this do-nothingness; and he stood quietly, looking up into his father's face.

Then Pavel read Andrei's letters. Nikita Trofimovich kept them in a casket pasted over with sea-shells; besides the letters, the casket contained some drawings that Andrei had sent from the front. Pavel carefully put the letters back, released Nikitka and went silently out of the house. It was gloomy at home—the pain he had suffered at the loss of his brother and at having to live in separation from his wife came back to him.

In the evening the whole family gathered for supper. In addition to the hosts there were Mariika, Lukashin, and Martyanov. Pavel was affable, spoke of his experi-

ences in the war and at the hospital, and joked, but his heart was not in it; there was no flow of spirits. Even Nikita Trofimovich grew despondent as he watched him. Mariika drank two glasses of wine, put her elbows on the table, rested her face on them and fell soundly asleep. Martyanov alone went on talking.

"Our great tragedy," he said, "is that we'll all die one way or another. Who can guarantee that my death will be easier than the death of a soldier killed in battle? Maybe I'll suffer a hundred times more and make my exit, tortured by doctors and nurses. Then they'll take me off to the cemetery. I'll get no tombstone or salutes, nobody will carry medals in front of my coffin. Maybe a band will play some tune. But that's not what I wanted to say. What *did* I want to say? Yes—that is where human tragedy lies, and the task is to live. To know how to mourn, to know how to die gallantly, but also to know how to be happy that you're alive. We live only once! The Hindus believe in the transmigration of souls, but we, Orthodox Christians, do not believe in that. Our little house is only temporary, but never mind! Every day, absolutely every day brings us satisfaction, friends! Can you deny it? There we have a kitten playing. Little Nikitka, the adorable lad, has his arms round his father. Isn't it a pleasure to watch him? When you speak with a clever person you feel his intellect and yours, you feel a play of intellects, the might of the intellect—two rulers of nature are talking, two kings—isn't that a pleasure? Upon my word, every day of our life—is like a choice cucumber, like this beautiful cucumber—you're a good housewife, Mariamna, bless you. We've a fine temporary home for our souls in spite of all our sorrows."

Ryabukhin came in. He and Pavel had worked together for a short time; only for a few months in the summer of 1942; then Pavel was recruited into the army. But they had reminiscences in common about those days—both

had worked for the dismissal of the director of the factory.

Before the war the factory used to put out only machine-tools and everything had run smoothly. When the war broke out, most of the shops started working for the army and that placed a double load on the shops that were not; the southern factories, evacuated to the rear had only just established themselves here and their output was small; the local factories had to strain themselves. A high target was set, every month brought a new plan, and there was an unending stream of urgent and super-urgent orders. The director tried to hold his own but the strain was too much for him and at the bureau of the Party Committee he declared that the plans were too big and did not correspond to the factory's capacities.

Ryabukhin protested sharply and insisted that the capacities were big enough, only the people had to be taught to use them. Some members of the bureau were inclined to side with the director. They could not see why Ryabukhin was raising a row. He was new at the factory and hadn't yet found his ground, and, on the whole, what harm would it do if the People's Commissariat reduced the plan by about fifteen per cent? That would make matters easier! The factory's showings would be higher and it would stand well with the People's Commissariat. At the aircraft plant they were already saying that the machine-builders were floundering in the new conditions. That hurt!

"Comrades, we love our factory so much," Pavel Vedeneyev had said heatedly, "that it prevents us from loving our country."

The director left for Moscow and Ryabukhin went to see Makarov, the secretary of the town Party Committee. Although Makarov was completely on Ryabukhin's side, he refused to say anything definite. The matter was too subtle, he argued, and he preferred to let the People's

Commissariat decide. The People's Commissariat set up a commission to look into the situation at the factory, but by that time Ryabukhin had organized his own commission. He was helped by Pavel and old Vedeneyev, who had worked at the factory all his life and knew who could be depended on. They called in the best engineers and technicians, the foreman from the tool-shop and the Stakhanovite steel-makers and fitters; the aged chief designer emerged from his lair and shared in the work of the commission. When the comrades from the People's Commissariat arrived, Ryabukhin had all the necessary acts and conclusions ready for them and all they had to do was to verify them.

"The factory needs another leader," Ryabukhin said in the presence of the director. "We need strong and energetic leadership, a man who understands the situation."

The director was relieved of his duties and Listopad appeared at the factory.

Old Vedeneyev had hesitated to invite Ryabukhin to the family festivities, but Ryabukhin learned of Pavel's arrival and came himself.

"Well, you've certainly put on flesh, old man," he exclaimed, shaking Pavel by the hand. "You look as though you've just come from a holiday home! We shan't let you idle about; your father, here, will bear me out in this. You war veterans are in a habit of taking things easy when you return and don't go to work at once. You like to wait for the highest bidder. I don't see that you need any rest—look at all that brawn on you."

"You're quite right," Pavel agreed, "I had all the rest I wanted in hospital. But I'll have to go away."

"Where to?"

"To Mariupol. Why do you look surprised? My wife is there. His mother," he pointed to Nikitka. "I'll take

him along—do you want to go to Mother, Nikitka? It's time we saw each other."

"You'll not come back," Ryabukhin said with disappointment. "I'm quite sure you'll settle down in Mariupol. I can see right through you."

"I might. People live in Mariupol, too, you know. They're restoring the factory. I'll get a job there."

Old Vedeneyev sat back in his chair as though struck by a bolt of lightning. He knew now that that was exactly what would happen. Why hadn't he guessed before that Pavel would not remain here without Katerina, that he would follow her and take Nikitka away. It was only his pride that had made him say he wanted to see her—he wanted a door open: Katerina's feelings might suddenly have changed—anything could happen during these confounded separations. But Katerina's feelings hadn't changed, she was not that kind of woman; and Pavel would not return from Mariupol. Why was it such an immutable law? People were like birds. There was wisdom in that law, and terrible sadness as well. You spend years bringing up your children and giving them all the strength of your mind and heart, all your thoughts, all your life—and when they grow up they look around them and fly away to build new nests, and the old nest grows empty.

From the way Pavel prepared for the journey, packing all his and Nikitka's things and taking leave of his old friends at the factory, it was clear that he was leaving for good or, at any rate, for a very long time.

"Maybe they'll let Katerina go," Mariamna stammered. She could not bear to look at Nikitka these days and kept turning away her head.

"Maybe," Pavel said.

He went to see Nonna Sergeyevna, although he knew

that his father would be displeased. But Pavel refused to indulge the old man's feelings.

"I was quite sure that you would come to see me," Nonna said, welcoming him.

If anybody had changed during the war, it was Nonna Sergeyevna! Instead of a pretty girl, Pavel saw a tired woman with shadows round her eyes.

"Sit down, Pavel, tell me about yourself. I'm glad to see you. What are you staring at me like that for? Have I lost my looks?"

No, she had not lost her looks. She was prettier than she had ever been.

"Simply I noticed that you're wearing your hair differently."

"You look fine. What are your plans?"

He told her.

"Yes, of course, it couldn't be otherwise. Katerina saw me before she left and I told her you'd go to her. But it's another blow for your folks."

"I heard, Nonna, that you're the chief designer's right hand now."

"That's stretching it, Pavel. I can't see how anybody can be his right hand. I'm the only one there able to stand up and argue with him when he becomes perfectly unbearable. My audacity astonishes him so much that he puts up with it—solely out of astonishment."

"Is he as unbearable as in the old days?"

"Terribly! But when he leaves us, and he will soon, we'll all remember him for a long time."

As he spoke to her his eyes wandered over the walls and the writing desk, seeking Andrei's photograph. But there was no photograph and there were no drawings, although Andrei had given her many. Pavel remembered a landscape that used to hang over her dressing-table.

"Are you looking for Andrei's drawings? I've sent them all to Moscow. There was an announcement in the

papers about an exhibition and I sent them to the Union of Artists. Things like that cannot be used by just one person. I left myself only my own unfinished portrait."

Pavel was surprised at her calmness. He was almost certain that she had never cared for Andrei right until the very end.

"Vladimir Ippolitovich, perhaps you can tell us what we ought to prepare ourselves for?" Nonna asked the chief designer.

"What do you mean?"

"What will we have to think about when the war ends?"

"As far as I know you're no newcomer here. The factory has definite assignments."

"But our technical capacities are now much greater," she said. "We could at the same time master the mass output of, say, parts for tractors. Have you given that any thought?"

"Until I hear Stalin tell us that the war has ended and that we're going over to peace-time production I do not consider it necessary to distract myself from my work with projects of that kind. And I suggest that you do the same. Are those measurements I asked for ready?"

"Yes, they're ready," she replied, giving him a sheet of paper covered with figures and walking out with a light sigh.

When she spoke to the designers about her idea they said that they would be ridiculed if they took it up. There was no sense in meddling with such trifles. The factory would go over to bigger things; nobody wanted to hear of tractor parts.

In a conversation with Grushevoi, she asked him:

"What will your shop put out when there's no more use for fuses?"

"Well, we'll put out something else," he replied.

"What, for example?"

"We'll get our instructions from Moscow, from the Central Administration."

Lately, it had become impossible to speak to the chief designer about anything except military successes. His mood changed as April weather. He was sociable, cheerful, almost friendly after listening to the communiqué. There was something sunny about him. But he would soon cool off again, remembering that he would have to retire soon, that he would have to go away. He did not want to go.

"Margarita, where would you like to live?" he asked his wife one day.

The question was so unexpected that she started.

"Where I'd like to live? I'm sorry—I don't understand."

"Well, would you like to live in Moscow or Rostov-on-Don? If I remember correctly, you liked Rostov-on-Don."

"Yes, very much. They grow such lovely roses there."

"Or, maybe, you'd like to go to Yalta, the roses are much better there. Or to Gagri or Sukhumi. But I'm forgetting that you can't endure heat nowadays. Well, we could go to some place in the north. There are some remarkably beautiful spots on the Karelian Isthmus. Remember, before the other war we spent a holiday in a boarding-house in Kuokkala. Closer to Vyborg would be even better. True, it's damp there. Our best choice would be something like Odessa. Do you want to live in Odessa? Kursk? Poltava? Vologda? Simeiz?"

He went on enumerating cities maliciously. Margarita Valeryanovna looked at him with horror. Finally she understood.

"Are we going away?"

"We certainly are. Did you think we'd live here for ever?"

He said something else, but she did not hear what it was and went on nodding mechanically. It was all so very sudden. He should have prepared her for it. She was growing very nervous and surprises upset her. A sudden cough was enough to make her start. And now this surprise.

By degrees she again began to grasp his words. He was saying that they would live quite differently, in complete retirement. That was necessary. Peace and quiet were necessary for an elderly man like him.

"And you'll rest, too, Margarita."

Well, at her age it was too early for rest.

"My legs will get better and we'll go for walks."

She managed a convulsive smile and imagined the torture that these walks would bring her. He would drag after her, nagging and grumbling.

"That's settled, then. I told you so that you'd think of moving and get ready for it. Quite a few things can be packed beforehand. The bulky furniture will have to be sold—I'll leave that to you. Only remember—no extras. We'll have a small cottage for two old people, no big receptions, we'll live very modestly; that's something for you to go by."

He kissed her hand and went to his study, while she remained sitting, thinking of the coming change.

For the first time in her life a storm of protest rose in her heart.

She did not want to go away. She wanted to stay there. Who could forbid it? She would not go. She would say, "Vladimir, dear, do as you wish, but I'm not going." Nobody could drag her away by force. There was no law that gave one person the right to drain another's life-blood! There was no such law in our day!

The flat would be given to the new chief designer. But she didn't care. Alexander Ignatyevich would always find a room for her in the settlement.

Heavens, she needed so little! She would take only the little sofa, the table and a few chairs—and her dressing-table, and the small cupboard, and the coat-stand, and that arm-chair, and this bookcase—there was positively nothing else that she'd need. She would live alone, go out whenever she liked and give all her time to social work!

Then her mind turned to Vladimir Ippolitovich. He was ill and very old and had no one but her, and she realized that she would go with him, because she had to. If she didn't, it would be unkind, even dreadful, for they had lived their lives together through thick and thin. She curled up on the low arm-chair and wept bitterly.

Pavel went away and took Nikitka with him. And in the Vedeneyev cottage there were now only the old man and Mariamna on the ground floor, and Nonna Sergeyevna, the unloved boarder, upstairs.

Sergei Ryabukhin's mother was a weaver, like his grandmother and great-grandmother. His father was a machine-tool fitter, while his sisters, all weavers, were working to this day in Ivanovo at the factory where the Ryabukhin working-man's family had always worked. A hereditary textile worker, Sergei alone had torn himself away from his native town and family trade; life took him to different parts of the Soviet Union. He graduated from the institute in Ivanovo and the Higher Party Courses in Moscow. He worked in Kramatorsk, Perm, Sverdlovsk. He never placed a high value on conveniences and did not care if he lived in a hostel or in a separate room. Even when he lived in a hostel nothing prevented him from going on with his work, reading, writing and preparing reports. He seemed to have a door in his brain

which he could slam so as to become oblivious to everything around him; neither conversation, nor laughter, nor music and singing disturbed him.

Ryabukhin lived the life of the Party. He felt at home in Party Committees, at meetings, as the chairman of the presidium or in the last row at the back of the auditorium—everywhere he felt good and at ease.

Party life brought him into contact with many people. He had a tenacious memory, remembering their faces, names and positions, but he took practically no interest in how they lived. If a man did his duty, behaved in a dignified manner and no scandal was attached to his name, Ryabukhin did not care to look further.

The war took him to the Ukraine. He was appointed divisional commissar and carried out his duties with the same self-denial and orderliness as in peace-time. But he was not given a chance to carry out these duties for long; he was wounded by a German mine near Kiev. Besides his wound, he was severely shell-shocked and lost sight and hearing for two months. Blind, deaf, and affected by gas gangrene, he was taken to a hospital deep in the rear.

His stay at the hospital was a strange experience for him. When his fever dropped and the attendant delirium passed and he realized his position, he was not horrified; he was quick to understand that if his eyes were unhurt and did not pain him, he would be sure to regain his sight; all he had to do was to wait patiently; his hearing would return, too. It was difficult to be patient at such a time, but Ryabukhin kept himself in hand. He asked someone who took his temperature, "Have the Hitlerites been driven out? If they have—press my hand." He held his hand outstretched, but nobody touched it. He was terrified. "Is Moscow ours?" he asked. "If it is, press my hand." This time the person he could not see took his hand and pressed hard.

In this way Ryabukhin got the war news.

There was nothing but darkness before his eyes, red during the day-time, and black at night. His ears seemed filled with water. When he smelled food, he knew it was dinner-time. A spoon would be brought to his lips. He would open his mouth and they would feed him. Quick, deft hands changed the clothes under him and on him. When he was put on a stretcher, he knew his bandages would be changed. "Comrades," he sometimes said into space, "will anyone among you who can walk give me a cigarette." In the silence surrounding him, someone would put a cigarette between his lips, bring up a lighted match—he would feel the heat on his face for an instant—and he would start smoking.

Ryabukhin lay on his back and thought. He thought about everything in the world! He pictured the front-lines and the correlation of the forces pitted against each other; he pictured the devastation and misfortune inflicted upon us by the fascists, and calculated our resources. He thought of how the Kremlin looked this winter and imagined himself somewhere in blacked-out and snow-covered Moscow. He thought of Stalin, of his family and of the people he knew. He saw them and heard their voices. He thought of the human heart, of life and death. Waking up one morning, he opened his eyes and saw in front of him a white wall and a small snake-like crack on the plaster. He turned on his other side and saw a bed with a man sleeping on it. Ryabukhin thought the man had the most beautiful face he ever saw, and that impression remained for the rest of his life. From the night-table he took a cigarette and a box of matches—he shook the box and the matches rattled merrily—and lighted the cigarette. An elderly nurse entered the ward.

"Good gracious, he can see!" she exclaimed.

"And I can hear," Ryabukhin said. "How beautiful you are, nurse."

"We'll all seem beautiful to you now," she said. "You've waited so long to see somebody and that's why we're all beautiful."

More than three years went by. Ryabukhin forgot what it was to be blind and the thoughts that had visited him then; he was completely immersed in his work and cares. But to this day everybody he saw looked beautiful to him. If anybody told him that Uzdechkin, for instance, was ugly, or that he, himself, was ugly, he would not have believed it.

When he was discharged from the hospital the Central Committee of the Party sent him as Party organizer to Kruzhilikha. What he saw there strengthened his faith in men, in the beauty of the human soul. The people did not spare themselves; they sacrificed everything to help the Red Army to crush the enemy. Ryabukhin knew that they were having a hard time; he knew it from what he was experiencing himself; but nobody complained and nobody even dreamed of peace without victory.

And now the great day for whose sake this tremendous nation-wide exploit was being performed was dawning; the Red Army was approaching Berlin.

On March 1 the factory received an order from Moscow for equipment for the K. munitions plant; it was almost twice as big as the orders the factory usually received.

"I can well understand the reason for it," Listopad said to himself, reading it.

He rang up Ryabukhin.

"Sergei, it's going to be baking hot."

"Hot for whom?" Ryabukhin asked.

"For the Germans. The fascists. Come into my office."

They talked for half an hour; then the shop managers, called together for a conference, entered. They had to

discuss how to arrange their forces so as to fulfil the order in time.

The conference was stormy. Grushevoi, the manager of the special shop, was the only person to sit still, bored and indifferent. The special shop was turning out fuses for trench mortars; the order for equipment did not concern him. Grushevoi was annoyed that somebody else would get all the attention of the factory and town organizations and all the rewards.

"We'll have to borrow some people from Comrade Grushevoi's shop for the loading," somebody said.

Grushevoi almost fell off his chair at the words. This was something he would not stomach! They were slighting him already. One might think that his workers were sitting with their arms folded.

"I doubt whether we'll be able to do that," Listopad remarked. "I expect Grushevoi's shop will also have to carry a double load this month."

He was right. Two days later the factory received an additional order for fuses.

Grushevoi cheered up and demanded more man-power. He was used to having all his demands met immediately. But this time Listopad said:

"Just can't do it. You'll have to manage with what you've got. The situation in all the shops is as tense as in yours."

Never in all the years of the war did the factory face such a big task.

Mariika came home late, unusually silent and thoughtful. She took a piece of paper and a pencil and began to write down some figures; she moved her lips as she wrote.

"What are you counting?" Lukashin asked.

"Oh, Syoma, don't bother me."

She kept at her figures for a long time, then threw down her pencil and said:

"It just doesn't work out. What shall I do?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Ryabukhin said he's sure I can tend three machines," Mariika said, her eyes filling with tears. "But my calculation shows that I can't. If only I wasn't an instructor. I waste half the day with those young scamps. No, it's out of the question."

She was upset and Lukashin longed to help her. But he did not know how. He would have known what to do if it had been some domestic trouble, but he was powerless when it came to helping her in her work at the factory. He had only just begun to put out his own quota. There was respect in the glances he stole at Mariika.

"I don't know where he got his idea about me tending three machines," she complained. "'You're a Stakhanovite,' he said, 'a worker of the communist future.'" She laughed. "He convinced the foreman that I could do it and the foreman told me that he'd put me on the Bird tools tomorrow and that I should give everything I've got. Well, I'll give everything!" Mariika burst out suddenly. "Only let them keep those boys away from me!"

She spent a restless night and in the morning arrived at the factory in a bad temper and said to her apprentices:

"Don't pester me today. I've got to set a new record. See that there's no noise." And to foreman Korolkov she said, "All right, I'll take over those three tools."

Mariika's apprentices, who included Tolka, were temporarily placed in charge of another instructor.

"Look fellows," Sasha Konevsky told them, "young people like us make up thirty-five per cent of the workers at Kruzhilikha. If we don't approach our work with full responsibility the order may not be filled in time, and you yourselves know what that means."

"A pep talk's all very well," said Vasya Surikov when Konevsky left, "but when you look into it practically, the machines that we're making are turning out shells and these shells are going to fly to Berlin."

"Right in Hitler's eye," Alyoshka Malygin commented with a whistle. "I'll show Vedeneyeva," he said fiercely after a pause, "that I can get along without her. All she does is to yell at us!"

"That helps her to do her job," Vasya, the boy with girlish features, said in a matter-of-fact tone. "But when *you* yell it's all to no purpose. What are you staring at me for? Clear the shavings from your machine!"

Before the end of the shift Mariika ran into Lukashin's shop and said:

"Syoma, don't worry if I stay at the factory tonight. You'll find some rissoles between the window-frames, warm them up and have them for supper. Here's the bread card. You can get the bread on your way home. I'll come in the morning, but I'm not sure, so don't worry."

Mariika's overalls were saturated with oil from the machines after the day's work. There was a brown smear of oil on her temple—she must have touched it with a grimy hand when she pushed her hair back under her kerchief. And Mariika herself seemed somehow different and touching—pity there were people here and he could not put his arms around her.

"All right, come as soon as you can," he said off-handedly, hiding his feelings.

That was the first day that he had put out one hundred and ten per cent of his quota. He had not worked better than usual; he did not know how to do that as yet. But he reckoned that if he took half an hour instead of an hour for his lunch and smoked not more than three ciga-

rettes during the shift he would save time and put in more work. That was what he did. Instead of lunching at the dining-room he sat down near his machine and ate some bread that he had brought from home. He smoked only three cigarettes during the day. And he was as pleased with his little success as others were with their three or four quotas, for however you looked at it, it was no longer one hundred per cent, but one hundred and ten.

He was wiping his machine when Uzdechkin came up to him:

"Are you going home?"

"Well, I was," he replied. "Why?"

"I'm getting a team together to load a train. You're not too tired, are you?"

"No, I'm all right. I'll join you as soon as I get my bread."

"You've got mittens, I expect?" Uzdechkin asked. "There's a cold wind on the tracks, very cold," he shuddered and moved his shoulders.

"Never mind," Lukashin said. "I've got a warm pair of mittens."

"And who made them for me?" he thought, gratefully. "Mariika. While I'm the one who's always grouching."

At the door of the shop he was overtaken by Martyanov, who was buttoning up his sheepskin coat as he walked.

"Are you off to bed, Syoma?"

"No. We're going to load a train."

"Good luck then. I'm going for a bracer. I can never manage to work through the night if I don't have my dram. I'm a slave to a rigid habit."

And Martyanov disappeared in the dense darkness of the evening.

"He's also staying behind for the night," Lukashin thought. "What if I, too, stay tomorrow? Of course I'm not as much use as Martyanov or Mariika, but—"

As he was going out of the factory gate somebody called to him:

"Syoma!"

Mariamna was standing under the street-lamp with a lunch-basket in her hand.

"Have you seen the old man?"

"No," Lukashin replied. "I work in a different shop."

"Bother him," Mariamna said. "He asked me to bring his dinner and forgot about it. It's nearly always like that. He tells me to bring it, forgets, and goes hungry until morning."

"I'll definitely stay for the night tomorrow," Lukashin thought.

There wasn't much of a frost, but there was a piercing wind and it was cold. The stars were out. From time to time the wind brought scraps of sentences that came resonantly from the loudspeaker; the radio announcer was reading a communiqué. Lukashin walked on, swinging his arms, his hands warm in the big mittens, and thought of his comrades-in-arms with whom he had fought his way to Stanislav. He wondered where they were now. Some were no longer living, while others were thousands of kilometres from here, in a foreign land, in Germany, and perhaps closing in on Berlin. Did they remember their sergeant? Quite likely they did and now and then somebody would remark, "Remember the chap we used to call Grandad? I'd like to know if he's alive?" Yes, chaps, I'm alive all right!

The siren whistled at Kruzhilikha, calling people to work. There were some who stayed in the shops for weeks on end, and when anybody felt his strength ebbing he would lie down somewhere in the shop and sleep like a log. But the moment he woke up he would go back to his machine and give it all he had!

Grushevoi's nostrils kept distending, his eyes glowed; he'd show that he wasn't worried over that refusal to let him have more workers; all the more credit to his shop—the March order would be filled in time all the same. He could even give the precise date; it would be filled by March 28, if nothing happened to Lida Yeryomina. He wished the girl happiness. She was a regular sheet-anchor for the shop.

The things she did with those marvellous hands of hers! The higher-ups came to see her from town. Makarov had stood for half an hour at the assembly line, watching her hands. "Amazing, amazing," he had said to himself as he left. Lida never so much as looked at him. She raised her eyes only once, for a second, when Sasha Konevsky came up.

On March 5 Lida knocked at the door of Grushevoi's office. He offered her a seat and she sat down, modestly smoothing the skirt over her knees.

"I thought I'd tell you, Comrade Grushevoi," she began, "that I've decided to raise my quota to sixty thousand, although that has a bad effect on my health."

Grushevoi had a calculating mind. He was instantly on his guard.

"What if you turn that quota out for two or three days and then drop to thirty thousand?"

"Why do you think so, Comrade Grushevoi?"

"You said yourself that you can't manage more than two and a half quotas."

Lida compressed her pretty lips.

"I can't manage it all the time, but I think I can keep it up for a month. It's simply that I saw we'd fall behind with the March order if I don't turn out sixty thousand. But will you guarantee a smooth delivery of detonating caps? They must come in without interruption, otherwise I'll be forced to slow down every time."

"Yes, yes, we'll guarantee you that!"

"Can I depend on it?"

"Of course."

"May I go, Comrade Grushevoi?"

Lida decorously bowed her head, and went out.

That same day she made a scene in the shop when the detonating caps were not sent up in sufficient quantities. Next morning a mountain of cases with detonating caps was piled up beside her bench and she sat down to work with a satisfied air.

A pale-blue kerchief, tied tightly round her head, covered her hair, making her thin face and delicate neck look like a child's. Biting her lip, she placed a case within convenient reach and with an almost imperceptible movement of her fingers tore off the seal.

"Ready!" she called out sharply and threw the certificate on to the belt with the careless triumph of a card-player throwing down the winning card. The grey belt carried the certificate to the far end opposite Lida, where it was caught up by another girl. The loaded fuses sailed after the certificate.

"Lida dear, what's the matter with you?" her mother asked in alarm when she came home. "You're so pale."

"It's nothing, Mother," Lida replied calmly, unbuttoning her blouse, "I'll be all right after I've had some sleep."

From that day she stuck to a quota of sixty thousand loaded fuses until the end of the war. She never dropped below that mark and the overfulfilment was negligible—a hundred to a hundred and fifty fuses. Those who saw her at work were amazed most of all by her ability to adapt her rhythm to the task with such precision.

Ryabukhin felt an intense pain in his leg and he had a fever. He was afraid he might have to undergo another operation for that confounded phlegmon! Nevertheless,

in the evening he set out as usual to help to load the trains.

On his way he stopped at the machine-shop. Here he was told that old Vedeneyev had had a letter from Pavel from Mariupol. Ryabukhin wanted to learn the news about Pavel, but Vedeneyev was asleep. Like the others, he slept on the floor. It had been scrubbed and he had an old, clean quilt under him and his head rested on a pillow with a dark print pillow-case. The old man's machine shone, all the shavings had been cleared away, and his tools were arranged in strict order. Mariamna's neat housewifely presence could almost be felt even here. "How delightful!" Ryabukhin thought and walked away, careful not to disturb the old man.

Three lads overtook him. He recognized them. They were from Mariika's class of apprentices. Stout lads, they hadn't let the factory down at a difficult time. They had kept up with the grown-ups. Even Tolka Ryzhov, the most undisciplined among them, was doing his best. Now, they, too, weren't turning to the right, to the gate, but to the left, to the railway tracks—that meant they were going to help with the loading. They passed a high illumined wall. The slogan on it, "All out for the country's defence," had been written three and a half years ago. The shortest of the lads pointed to the slogan and said something. They stopped and argued, waiting for Ryabukhin to come up.

"Comrade Ryabukhin, may we ask you something?" gravely asked a small fellow with a girlish face.

"What is it, boys?"

"We need some paint for a new slogan."

"All right, I'll see that you get it," Ryabukhin said. "Are you going to help with the loading? Come along then, we'll go together."

But the lads were not keen on walking beside the Party organizer. They were shy to talk about their affairs

in his presence. They waited for somebody else to join them and tactfully lagged behind, leaving the grown-ups together.

That somebody was Martyanov. He greeted Ryabukhin respectfully, but with a shade of familiarity. They had met at the Vedeneyevs.

"What's the news from Pavel?" Ryabukhin asked him.

"I'm afraid I don't know. I hadn't the time to see Nikita Trofimovich during the day and when I looked in just now he was asleep. I didn't wake him up. He always feels unwell if he doesn't put in three hours of sleep. We're no longer young, you know."

Ryabukhin looked at him with mixed feelings. Ryabukhin had been brought up to detest exploiters of all kinds and categories, and Martyanov's past disgusted him as it did Pavel, who openly called him a blood-sucker. But, on the other hand, he had stopped being a blood-sucker long ago. He was a splendid turner and people respected him as a competent worker. Ryabukhin liked his athletic build as well as his manner of comporting himself.

"Before starting to load we must clear away the snow," Martyanov said. "I'd like to draw your attention to the fact that the last time we cleared the snow we hadn't enough shovels. We had a huge crowd out, but nothing was done about shovels. It was like a school *subbotnik*:* one man working and two watching."

They reached the warehouses at the siding where the loading was to be done. A freight train was waiting. A large number of workers had already gathered. Ryabukhin ran his eye over the familiar faces. He saw Uzdechkin in his army greatcoat, surrounded by women—a meeting had quite likely sprung up spontaneously about the vegetable gardens. Farther on there was Sasha

* *Subbotnik*—voluntary labour given to the state on off days.—*Tr.*

Konevsky with a group of young fellows. Nonna Sergeyevna, her legs carelessly crossed and wearing neat dark felt boots, was sitting in the open doorway of one of the cars. She, too, was surrounded by young people. Among them was Kostya Berezhkov, now a student. He was the chap who had stunned the book-keeper by earning nineteen thousand rubles one month. So Kostya had come, too. Everybody was coming here. All roads led to Kruzhilikha.

"Doing nothing again?" Martyanov shouted in a commanding tone. "Again no shovels? Where are our chiefs? What are they thinking of?"

"You'll get your shovels, don't worry," young voices shouted in reply. "There, they're bringing them! Use your eyes!"

A five-ton lorry rumbled heavily towards them. Some of the boys climbed on it before it stopped and started throwing down the shovels. Ryabukhin bent down, grimacing from the pain in his leg, and chose a shovel for himself. Listopad appeared from somewhere and took Ryabukhin by his elbow.

"You here again?" he said sternly. "What have you forgotten here? That woman doctor of yours has been waiting for you for days!"

"Let her wait," Ryabukhin muttered with a weary but cheerful grin. "Let me go! You don't understand. Come on, comrades, let's start!"

Next morning the chief designer appeared at the factory and the first thing to catch his eye when he alighted from his car was a ladder standing against a high wall. Two boys were steadying it at the bottom, and a third stood on the top rung. He had a paint-brush and was putting the finishing touches to a slogan in bright red paint:

"On to Berlin!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

MOTHER

The great ordeal ended. The enemy laid down his arms. The thunder of the victory salutes died away. There was peace!

There was still the probability of war with Japan but that war would stand no comparison with the fierce hurricane that had swept over the Soviet Union! The people felt the peace with all their being, with every breath. They cleared the cities of ruins, finding lost kinsmen, and building bright plans for the future. Wheat was forming ears on fields soaked in blood. It was blissful June.

Listopad came out of the forgery. The heat there was unbearable—his shirt stuck to his back and red circles swam before his eyes. In the open he felt the fresh breeze blowing from the river. He took off his cap and let the breeze caress his heated brow. And by some elusive association he recalled a summer's day long ago.

He was seven, perhaps eight years old at the time. He was walking with his mother along a road in the steppe. As far as he could remember, they were returning home from church. It was a sultry day without a breath of air, and the horizon shimmered in the heat. They went on and on along the quiet, dusty road. There was nothing to be seen save the mown meadows. Sashko, as they called him, trudged along with silent patience, but from time to time he could not help sighing deeply. He was thirsty and there seemed to be no end to the road. A pinkish strip—a buckwheat field—loomed into view on the right. As they approached the field they could see heavy bees hanging over the pink flowers as though held to them by bits of thread. A scarcely perceptible path cut obliquely across the field. "There it is!" his mother exclaimed, and they turned off the road and followed the path. Sashko did not know where they were going, but

he did not care—he was too hot and tired to ask. The path led downhill. A breath of fresh air reached them. And suddenly they saw before them a clump of willows and felt a coolness about their feet. Somewhere among the willows a spring gurgled softly but distinctly. Sashko and his mother knelt down in the dusky shadow of the willows, in the cold, crazily tangled grass, and quenched their thirst and sprayed themselves with water from the spring. His mother spread her skirt wide and Sashko lay down with his shoulders and head in her lap, and instantly fell asleep. He fell asleep with a sense of delight in the peaceful coolness of this unexpected paradise. His mother told him afterwards that he had slept for more than an hour and had smiled all the time.

For almost forty years the memory of that day had lain dormant in the secret recesses of his mind. Why had it surged to the surface today, at this hour? Life was full of curiosities.

He went home to have a shower and change his clothes. The smell of sweat always nauseated him.

The door of his flat was ajar. Domna was standing on the threshold, bending forward. Her posture showed that she was annoyed. Something must have happened. What could it be?

Domna turned and he saw that she looked hurt. She let him pass without a word. A travelling box with a linen cover and tied with a new cord was standing in the corridor. Listopad entered and to his great surprise he saw his mother.

She was scrubbing the floor in his study; she had taken off her outer woolen skirt and rolled up her sleeves almost to her shoulders. While she wrung out the floor cloth she said something caustic to Domna, but when she heard footsteps she threw down the cloth and stood up.

“Hello, Sashko,” she said.

"Mother!" he exclaimed happily.

She put her wet hands behind her back so as not to soil his clothes. He embraced her and they kissed. She smelled of milk and bacon and clean clothes rinsed in the river and spread out on the grass to dry in the sun—of all the dear smells of his childhood.

"Let me look at you!" she said, closely examining his face. Her eyes told him that he had aged and that she did not particularly like what she saw. Obviously, she meant to tell him what she felt.

"O-oh!" she said, shaking her head. "You look old and nasty." She bent down again to the pail. "Sit down, Sashko, there, in the corner, I've washed that part. Wait until I finish, and don't step in the water."

Obediently, he stepped across the pool, sat down on a chair and at once felt himself a little boy again.

"What I did wasn't good enough," Domna said, looking crushed. "I always gave good service, but I couldn't please her and she went and started to wash the floor herself. As though I couldn't have done it."

"You go about your own business," Listopad's mother cut her short. "You don't know how to look after him. A beautiful flat like this, but look what you've done. Dirt and rubbish everywhere."

"Why should I be blamed for it?" Domna complained. "That stupid Melanya was on duty these last three days, and she always—"

Listopad burst out laughing.

"All right, never mind," he said. He was sitting with his feet round the legs of his chair. "How about some tea, Mother?"

"I'd like a cup and something a bit stronger if you'll treat your visitor to it," his mother replied. Straightening up, she admired her work. "Say what you like but there's nobody who'll scrub your floor as well as your mother," she said.

Listopad had always been proud of his mother.

It was a man's pride. He liked the way she talked, and the way she walked. And he liked her face. Her voice was low; she lowered it purposely, giving the impression that she could speak louder but had no wish to do so.

She was sixty-two, seventeen years older than her son. Her dark plaits were heavily streaked with grey. Her hands had aged most—they were knotty and ugly. And yet she did not look over fifty, she was still comely.

And what a fine-looking woman she had once been!

She was the right height, rather thin, long-legged, light and agile. Her features were aquiline and her complexion was a mellow olive with no colour in it. She had long brown eyes under long dark brows. Her mouth was of a delicate colour, her teeth were perfect. When she let down her hair to plait it, it reached her knees.

Women did not consider her pretty. There was no roundness in her figure, her cheeks were colourless, and her voice was low. But when she became a widow they kept their husbands away from her. She was not very talkative, but there was something in her voice that made all men turn to look at her. Then, there was her manner of speaking: when she spoke her face was always stern, and drawn into a slight frown, but suddenly her eyebrows would rise and she would smile, showing her teeth, and the faces of all the men round her would instantly light up with submissive, responsive smiles.

She grew up in a big, poor, and easy-going family. At sixteen she was married off to a prosperous farmer. He was head over heels in love with her and married her against the wishes of his parents. Her son, Alexander, was born in the first year of wedlock, and she never bore any other children.

Three years after her marriage her husband was bitten by a mad dog and died. She was left with little Sashko. Grief made its mark on her; she grew careless about her

appearance and always wore a grey shawl drawn close over her eyes like a nun. Her husband's family disliked her. Her own kinsfolk swarmed round her asking for presents. Indifferently, she gave them everything her husband left her. The farm began to run to waste. Whenever she was disinclined to weed the garden she stayed at home, and the garden grew over with weeds. She did not bother herself about the hens and they grew wild and roosted on the trees in the garden. Her whole life was centred around Sashko. She fed him all he could eat, walked with him, and remade her blouses and petticoats into clothes for him.

This sleepy and humdrum widowhood lasted for four years, when suddenly she was visited by a relative, the husband of one of her aunts. He was the head of a large family, respected, dignified, and pompous. She had called him Uncle Oleksi as long as she could remember. He called her little Nastya. He had been caught in a down-pour while passing by the village and had to spend the night somewhere. It was then that he remembered that his wife had a relative in the vicinity, a widow he had known as a girl, whose husband had died of hydrophobia. He scarcely looked at her when she met him at the door dressed in coarse linen clothes, with the grey shawl coming down to her eyes. But when she served him his supper, she took off the shawl and smiled with a lift of her brows—and, for the first time, he saw her! He instantly dropped his dignity and laughed and joked with her like a young man. She gazed at him with surprise, her eyes radiant—she, too, saw him for the first time as he really was. The love that they carried through life was born at that moment.

He left all his property to his wife and children and moved into Nastya's farm. This middle-aged married man was the talk of the whole district when he went to live as a dependent of a poor, lonely young widow! The families of Oleksi, Nastya, and her deceased husband raged and

stormed. The priest came to see them. They were exhorted and put to shame. The deserted wife, Nastya's aunt, threatened to throw acid in her face. Oleksi's children disowned him for insulting their mother and disgracing the family. The only people to visit Nastya's house now were those who cared nothing for scandal.

Nastya laughed and took it all easily. But Oleksi was not used to living like this and he suffered. He sold Nastya's house and bought a house far away from their native places, in the village of Brateshki, near a railway station. The house was bought on Nastya's money and it belonged to her and her son. Oleksi refused to be dependent on Nastya. He took a job as coupler on the railway in order to remain his own master. People said that he waited on Nastya hand and foot, even plaiting her hair for her. Gossip like that did not trouble him when he was his own master!

There was nothing of the stepfather about him. Sometimes, when he went to the fair, he would bring back a toy for Sashko. Sometimes he would say, "Sashko, run and buy me some tobacco." That was all. As before, Sashko grew under his mother's care. She brought him up. She would tell him stories about goblins and mermaids, but they were so muddled and disconnected that he could never see their point. When he was ill she was his doctor. If he had a fever she would make him lie on the stove and apply mustard plasters to the back of his neck, and the fever would pass.

When he turned nine she made him a new shirt, took him by the hand and led him to school.

"You're a sensible lad, Sashko," she said to him, "and you must go to school. A sensible person has a hard life when he's not educated."

She herself could barely read and never took up a book, but she loved to hear people read aloud and Oleksi sometimes read to her in the evenings.

There were times when she would fall into childish reveries. Of a summer's night she would go to the middle of the yard and gaze at the bright stars, her arms crossed on her breast and her head thrown back.

"Look, Sashko," she would say, "look how many stars there are. I wonder if there's anything on them? How can we find out, eh, Sashko?"

One day when Sashko ran home from school, he found his mother sitting on the door steps. She was doing nothing, simply sitting there with her hands between her knees and keeping her eyes fixed on one spot on the ground.

"Sh-sh," she said, "don't make a noise or you'll frighten it."

He followed the direction of her gaze and saw a small fat caterpillar crawling with painful slowness towards the steps, its whole body quivering convulsively.

"It's crawling up, it's crawling up," his mother whispered. "It's been at it for a whole hour now, the poor thing. Who knows where it's going and what it wants? Oh, but Sashko, you must be hungry!" she recollected suddenly and rose reluctantly. She picked up the caterpillar and carefully put it in the grass.

"Stay here, you've got no work to do in the house."

When Sashko Listopad was fifteen he often went to the wooden platform of the Brateshki railway station and watched the trains. Military trains sometimes stopped and for a few minutes the small station would be filled with khaki shirts, with the talk of soldiers and with the smell of their bodies. Long-distance trains sped by without stopping. He could see the passengers looking out of the windows. Lives, destinies, and hopes flew by. Sashko loved to watch the passenger trains!

Silvery poplars grew along the platform, where in the summer evenings the young people used to stroll up and down. Volodka, the station dispatcher, used to play the

mandolin and sing, "I recognized my sweetheart by her wa-alk—" In the dark and languid Ukrainian night, under the rustling poplars, that silly song sounded mournful, and the lantern of the plate-layer, dwindling into the distance, brought a pang to the heart.

Sashko's mother was fond of coming here, too, although it was not what a woman of her age was expected to do—she was already past thirty and only young people came here. She would sit by herself on the farthest bench, eating sunflower seeds, talking to no one and taking no notice of her son, who would stroll about the platform with boys and girls of his own age. She took no notice of him on purpose to avoid embarrassing him, and he realized that she was not there to keep an eye on him. That would never have even entered her head. She came here to listen to the mandolin and to watch the lights, and she felt the same pang in her heart and had the same indistinct thoughts as he did. Ah, how he loved her for that!

At seventeen he left Brateshki and in all the twenty-eight years that he was away he visited his native home only four times.

His last visit had been in 1936, after Spain. He worked for more than a year in a factory in Catalonia, picked up some Spanish, wore a blue beret, and in the strong sun of the Pyrenees his skin turned olive like a Spaniard's. He liked that country, its mountains, its courageous, liberty-loving people, its women, and its music—but his contract ended, he was recalled to Moscow and given leave. On an early summer morning he stood by the well in his home yard. He was barefoot, the ground by the well was wet and pleasant to stand on. The sky was turning blue. There was a cool rustle in the apple- and cherry-trees that he had once planted near the house. A stork was standing on the thatched roof. The bird was a true friend. It spent every winter in Africa, crossing sea

and desert and seeing everything in the world, and returned to Brateshki, to Nastya Listopad's roof—and Nastya was sure it would return, and looked after its nest.

During that visit Listopad was profoundly touched by the old couple—his mother and his stepfather.

He was touched by Oleksi's fine old age. He was now very old, but his memory was sound and he had not lost his capacity for work. As always he was dignified, neatly dressed, and ate moderately. He had given up his job at the railway station and now worked at the collective farm, tending the horses. Every morning he woke up at three o'clock and went to the stables. He came home for his lunch at midday, slept for an hour and a half, and then went out again, staying with his charges late into the evening.

Listopad's mother was a member of the collective-farm management. She was in charge of the dairy and at loggerheads with the chairman. From her heated and confused stories Listopad gathered that she wanted to improve the cattle-sheds but could not make the chairman see her point and give her the necessary money.

"But I shan't be silent about it!" she cried. "He'll have to wait a long time for that! Oleksi! On your next day off I want you to write to the district land office!"

She ordered him about as before and he was always ready to do her bidding. There was not a shadow of senile grumbling or irritability. They remained young in their relations with each other.

"Has Oleksi returned?" his mother would ask, when she came in from the dairy.

"Has Nastya returned?" Oleksi would ask the moment he crossed the threshold.

Listopad watched his mother and wondered where she drew her energy, this new vital fire from?

During his lifetime he had watched people grow, watched their political consciousness take shape and seen

them become public leaders. He had taken that for granted. But it struck him as extraordinary that his mother read Stalin's speeches and attended conferences in Kiev and Moscow.

"Mother, how did you change like this?"

She realized at once what he meant.

"Why do you ask? Don't you like it?" she asked with a suspicion of a smile.

"Of course, I do. Only I don't understand how you came to it."

"Tell me, how did you come to this?" she asked, touching the Order on his breast. "Everybody, Sashko, walks along his own path, but comes out to the same highroad. There's only one highroad, but as for paths there are millions and millions of them. There are as many paths in our country as there are people."

"Mother, you're wonderful," he said, looking at her. "And those words you're using are wonderful, too!"

... His visit lasted nine days and then he left—for nine years.

During the first year of the war she sent him word that she and Oleksi had evacuated to the Altai. He had one more letter from Barnaul. Then she wrote from Brateshki to say that they had returned, that before leaving the fascists had burned down the village and plundered the collective farm; there were many difficulties ahead of them, but they were glad to be home again. When Listopad wrote to tell his mother about his marriage, she sent him her blessing. But there had been no reply to the letter informing her of Klavdiya's death. She had come herself and was scrubbing the floor in his study.

"I'm not staying long," she said finishing the floor and sitting down at the table beside him. "A week, ten days at the most." Her eyes grew stern as she looked at

Klavdiya's portrait hanging above the sofa. "Did she have an abortion, or what?"

"Nothing of the sort! She starved in Leningrad during the siege. That brought on her illness. She died in childbirth."

"Oh, those damned fascists, may they rot!" she said in a passionate whisper. "They've been defeated and destroyed and yet we keep on feeling the effect of their villainy. So young and beautiful—I thought I'd have a houseful of grandchildren."

"Let's not talk about it," Listopad pleaded. "Why have you come for only ten days? Why do you put a limit to your stay? I'd like you to live with me for the summer."

"The summer? Are you making fun of me, Sashko? The reaping will start in about two weeks' time. I'm chairman of the collective farm now, you know, and you haven't even asked me about it. And not a word about Oleksi, either. You don't know anything about us, Sashko, nothing at all."

He felt so ashamed that he even flushed.

"How is Uncle Oleksi?"

"I'll soon be parting with him," she said with a slight throb, throwing her head back and straightening herself as though putting her breast forward to meet a blow. "Soon, very soon. He's eighty-eight and you can't expect him to last much longer. He's still working! He whetted the scythes for the whole team. Oh, Sashko, you have no idea how painful it all is—he's quite blind, you know. His fingers were all bleeding by the time he had finished whetting the scythes. He mentioned something about smelling blood, but couldn't see that it was on his own fingers." Tears ran down her cheeks and with a touch of sad jealousy Listopad thought she had never loved anybody in her life as she loved Oleksi. But then nobody had

ever loved her as Oleksi did, and this inevitable parting would be her heaviest blow.

"If it happens," he said, "you'll have nothing to keep you there. Come and live with me. We'll be together wherever I may be."

Through her tears she smiled the same old smile, raising her brows and showing her even teeth, which had turned a little yellow.

"But what would I do here, Sashko?"

"What all elderly women do. You'll keep house for me and rest. You'll have peace and quiet! Have you ever been to a theatre? I mean to a real theatre?"

"You may be sure I have!" she said quickly, with a sly smile. "And not once, but at least six times. Every time I go to Kiev or Moscow they take us to a theatre. And I've been to a museum and the botanical gardens and goodness knows where besides. Sashko, remember how we used to go to look at the trains? I used to wonder if I'd ever get into a train and travel far away. Now I'm used to it and think nothing of it. I wanted to come to you by plane, but there's no line from our farm."

Suddenly her face grew solemn and she asked:

"Sashko, have you ever seen Stalin?"

"Yes."

"So have I," she said quietly and proudly.

Now that her thoughts were diverted from Oleksi, she livened up again and the old play of emotions that flitted like light over her face returned.

"How can people want to sit idly at home these days, Sashko?" She fell silent. "If you only knew how well our people live in the Altai! O-oh, you'd be surprised. But at home it's hard, very hard."

"Are you still living in dug-outs?"

"No, very few live in dug-outs now. Most have some sort of dwelling. Some have put up sheds, others huts. We've got neither horses nor tractors. The spring work

exhausted us! We were sent some German cows, fine cows they were, fattened by Hitler on our Ukrainian fodder. We couldn't help but put them to the plough. How the women cried, but we had no other choice. But the worst of it is that we've not got enough people for the work. You can't find hands to save your life! Our people are almost all either very old or very young, with hardly a real worker among them. And here I see something that's unfair—such a strong woman and what does she do? Nothing at all. Scrubs the floor and wags her tongue all day long."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Your Domakha."

"Who?"

"Domna, your office cleaner, the one I told off for the dirt."

"If you had the authority you'd take all our city Domnas to your collective farm."

"But your Domakha eats bread, doesn't she? You've got somebody else here, called Melanya, who I see is also a shiftless good-for-nothing. If I were you I'd make that Melanya do Domakha's work and send Domakha to our collective farm! If she wants bread let her come and lend a hand. I'm the chairman, but I do my bit of reaping as everybody else."

"But Mother, dear, dear Mother, you're past sixty! How long do you think you can last if you carry on like that?"

"I've begun to wonder that myself. But that's something nobody likes to talk about. Is your factory big, Sashko?"

"Yes, very big."

"Our collective farm, too, was very big."

"Your collective farm's all right in its own line, but my factory—I'll take you there to give you an idea of what I mean. No theatre can show you anything like it."

Listopad's mother and Domna were drinking tea and talking about their lot as women.

"And he says to me, 'I must live with you, I can't live without you any longer'," Domna said, blowing on the tea in her saucer. "His wife's a quarrelsome woman and the daughters she brought up are hell-cats. But he's an easy-going sort, drinks away all the money he earns, doesn't take anything from anybody, and means no offence. He's having a dull time of it with them. He wept so much when he went away—it was awful!"

Domna put down her saucer and wiped away a tear.

"But what could I say to him? Am I the type of person who breaks up families? Go back, I told him, we love each other but we're not destined to be together. You have daughters and a wife. You must justify yourself in their eyes. 'That,' he said, 'was my mistake; you're my destiny.' Where, I asked, where's your mistake? Nobody forced you to marry. You made your bed, now lie on it."

"So that's how you look at it!" Listopad's mother said, blowing on the tea in her saucer.

"Yes, that's how I look at it," Domna replied, proud of her generosity. "My husband was terribly rough and it was like penal servitude living with him, yet I lived with him. And I would have gone on living with him if the Lord hadn't taken him away. It was my duty as a wife to be faithful to him to the grave."

"Did you love your husband?"

"Love him? I've just told you it was like penal servitude."

Silence. They let their tea cool.

"I can't understand you," Listopad's mother said in her restrained tone. "It's beyond me: you disliked one man and yet you lived with him, now you love another and you chase him away. If we women don't seek out and seize our happiness we'll never have it."

"Such is my fate—to live my life without happiness," Domna said tearfully.

"I'm mistress of my destiny," Listopad's mother said, her eyes sparkling.

"You were lucky, Nastasya Ilyinichna, that you met a good man."

"I had to fight tooth and nail for that good man and cast spells on him. My own mother cursed me and the neighbours spat on me when I passed. But I was afraid of no one and I didn't give him up. That was my luck in life. I've fought for every day of happiness, do you understand?"

Silence.

"I don't respect what you're doing," Listopad's mother continued. "Nobody will bring you anything in a bag. Everything we have was not presented to us, it was fought for and won."

"To break up a family is not much of a conquest."

"It's a poor family that can be broken."

They had quarrelled. Both helped the tea to cool by blowing on it.

"Try this honey, Domakha Vasilyevna. Please, try some."

"Thank you very much, Nastasya Ilyinichna. I've had some already."

"Have some more."

"Thank you."

This conversation, though begun with a quarrel, was sweeter than honey to Domna, and she began from the beginning:

"As I was saying. 'You,' I said, 'have daughters. You must take them as they are, they're your own flesh and blood. You must support them and bring them up.' And he listened and wept and wept—the tears ran down in streams."

Listopad's mother went through the yard of the factory with her arms crossed on her breast as though she were out for a walk. A white spotted kerchief, tied carelessly but in a becoming manner under her chin, shielded her eyes from the blazing sun.

The summer was at its height! The sun shed its heat on everything—stone, metal, and human bodies—everything was hot, and the sun's sultry breath was felt everywhere. There were short black shadows at the foot of the fire-breathing shops—but who had the time to enjoy the coolness of those shadows? The life-giving shade was wasted.

"It's hot here," Listopad's mother said. "However hot it may be on our farm, it's easier to bear than this. We've always got a breeze."

They approached the sawmill.

"We've got a sawmill in our district, too," Listopad's mother remarked.

"I imagine it's smaller than ours," Listopad said.

"A little smaller," his mother agreed, "but do you know why? Because we haven't got much timber. We use bricks. If we had as much timber as you, we'd have built a big sawmill, too."

The wood did not exude heat; it rejoiced the eye with its bright, fresh colour and smelled of the resinous coolness of the forest. Listopad had the motor saw switched on to show his mother how it worked. The operator turned on the crane; it turned, bent down, and raised a huge log—four pairs of arms could scarcely have girthed it—and carefully carried it to the vice. Listopad's mother watched with narrowed eyes. The motor started to hum. Glistening steel touched the log and started to sink into it. Cream-coloured sawdust flowed in streams on both sides of the log. Minutes passed. The steel was already somewhere deep in the log, cutting through its

last fibres. A section of the log fell away like a piece of butter cut off with a knife, and the motor grew silent.

"Well!" Listopad said. "Are you sure the sawmill in your district is as good as this one? We make these saws ourselves."

His mother made no reply, but left the sawmill unwillingly, and even cast a glance back at it. After they had gone some distance, she said:

"If only we had such power."

"You mean you want a saw like ours?"

"No, the machine that carried that heavy log."

"To carry cows into the steppe?"

"You're always joking, Sashko! Don't talk to me like that. We'd use it to carry grain from the weighing scales to the granary, and not cows."

"I admit you've got something there. Only a crane would be too much to carry grain to your granary. Build a grain elevator first."

"Do you think we don't know? We had it in mind, I can tell you! Just before the war. We planned a real elevator with concrete chambers for different grain. We'd have had it long ago, Sashko, if it hadn't been for the war!"

In the foundry they were preparing to receive the molten metal. The ladle had already been brought to the furnace; the foreman was checking the moulds.

"Look, Mother, the steel will be coming out now!" Listopad said, holding her by the shoulders to stop her from going nearer.

A worker swung the tapping-iron and a fiery stream rushed into the ladle. A dazzling glow danced on the walls and ceiling.

"There she goes, our beauty!" Listopad exclaimed into his mother's ear, unable to take his eyes off this glare, this heavy, rich stream rushing into the ladle irresistibly,

royally, and freely. A fountain of sparks shot upwards towards the metal beams; there was a hot, bitter, and terrifying smell. Listopad always imagined that this was how the earth had smelt when it was a molten mass. The ladle, a fifty-ton giant, precise and careful in its movements, sailed over the moulds. After letting his mother see how the moulds were filled, Listopad led her out of the foundry. He wanted to ask her jokingly if she needed a ladle like that for her farm, but he was stopped by the expression in her eyes. She was under the spell of some new impression. She looked thrilled and awed. He saved his joke for another time.

On the way to the assembly shop they met Nonna. She greeted Listopad, looked attentively at his mother and went on with a backward glance. Listopad's mother, too, glanced back at her, saying:

"That was a fine woman that went by."

"You like her?" Listopad asked with a grin.

"A real she-eagle," she said, "a queen. If she gets you in her claws, that'll be the end of you."

They stayed at the factory till the end of the shift and looked into every shop. The assembly shop left her indifferent.

"A dull business," she remarked, "the same thing over and over again; it's not in keeping with my character."

Similarly, to Listopad's surprise, the automatic machine-tools, which he thought would amaze her, made no impression upon her. To save him from disappointment, she stood and watched the movement of the parts of a black machine, shining with oil, and saw a tiny metal funnel fall into a groove from time to time. "I saw automatic machines in Moscow," she said, "in the Metro stations. You drop two fifteen-kopek pieces in the slot and it gives you a ticket. If you put in only one coin, it won't give you a ticket—you can't fool it."

As she left the factory she took off her kerchief, looked

at it and shook her head. The kerchief was black with soot.

"I've been very impressed by it," she said, a soft light shining in her eyes, "it's heavy but holy work." She walked in silence, thinking. "Sashko," she said finally, "never forget Klavdiya."

"But, Mother, I've already asked you not to talk about her, please."

"You listen to me. Live as you wish, you're still young, you'll marry—but don't forget her. Think of her sometimes. She died for something, too. She died so that we might live, so that our work would not be in vain. Yes, think of her, Sashko. Now and again. You mustn't forget her."

He did not reply. He felt himself choking with emotion. They went home in silence.

Two days later she went away.

He took her to the town railway station and put her on the train. He sat down beside her, but they could not get a conversation started. The guard glanced into the compartment and said, "The train's due to pull out." They kissed hastily, shy of strangers. Listopad left the train.

His mother gave him a last smile through the open window. Suddenly she frowned and wiped her eyes with the edge of her kerchief.

"What a place to live in, the coal gets into your eyes," she said.

The train started. Listopad walked alongside the carriage. His mother was standing by the window, looking at him. Then the train picked up speed, moving away faster and faster.

Listopad watched the train go. Maybe this was their last meeting. Partings, always partings. This parting—was it to be their longest?

The train became a tiny dot in the distance where the rails converged. A shunting engine appeared on the track, shrieking and letting out bursts of curling smoke that blotted out the black dot far away.

Mother, Mother. I want you to be happy. Thank you for everything, dear heart!

CHAPTER NINE

NONNA'S BIRTHDAY

It was Nonna's thirtieth birthday.

That morning she sat down before her mirror and contemplated her face. She found that she was looking much better since she had been getting enough sleep. Only on two or three occasions during the whole war had she had a real good sleep. She had always looked despondent and tired.

The factory's programme had been reduced in August and the working day was now eight hours. Some of the workers had gone to the subsidiary farms and many of the young people had returned to school. Here and there the roofs already wore a new coat of paint and the streets were newly paved. Every day one heard that somebody had returned from the army or that some girl had gotten married. Peace!

But it would be a long time before the people finally settled down. They came and went and moved into new flats, seeking something better, starting life anew in a land where now tranquillity reigned.

The chief designer had gone away, too.

His leave-taking had been unexpectedly pathetic. He called the designers together. They all rose to their feet when he faced them, standing by his desk, looking small and even more shrivelled since the summer. "Comrades," he said, "I am leaving you with the firm belief that you

will get along as you did when I was with you—" It was like the speech a teacher in an elementary school makes when his pupils pass to secondary school. And the designers, like school pupils, suddenly forgot their teacher's eccentricity and harshness and remembered only how much they owed him and how much knowledge he had given them. They went up in turn to shake his hand and he kissed each one Russian fashion. They were all sorry to part with the old man.

He went to a place in the south, where they had mud baths, to cure his rheumatism. He thought of settling there permanently. His wife was to come back for their things. His flat was still locked up, the models, telephones and books—he had given his library to the factory—had been taken out. The designing department had been moved back to its old premises. As yet nobody had been appointed to take the old man's place. In the department the atmosphere was equable and friendly.

But what were the plans for the future? What would the factory be putting out and what would its place in the country's economy be? Those questions were uppermost in the minds of the designers; they wanted to know beforehand what they would be expected to do.

Nonna looked at herself in the mirror.

She was thirty.

There was a glass vase on either side of the mirror. She remembered her birthday before the war. When Andrei brought her enough flowers to fill a flower shop and they had to raid Mariamna's kitchen for all her clay jugs and glass pots, besides borrowing all the vases in the house. He went out of town for the flowers; the kind he brought were never on sale in the shops. Now the two small vases were empty. They were reflected in the mirror, giving the impression that there were four empty vases.

The door-bell rang twice. That must be Kostya. They had arranged for him to come at ten; it was ten minutes

to ten now. Nonna went downstairs and opened the door. Yes, it was Kostya. He was always punctual. She let him in.

"For heaven's sake, Kostya, your feet!" she exclaimed. "I'll get hell from my landlady."

He smiled and carefully wiped his feet on the door-mat. It had rained during the night and his boots were muddy; lads like him never wore overshoes.

Kostya was carrying a briefcase—she had given it to him when he went to the technical college. He opened the briefcase, drew out several small, cheap mirrors edged with paper and put them on the table.

"Just think of it, they proved to be quite expensive," he said, "twenty-three rubles altogether. But I chose the best they had. And I've brought a hammer and some nails with me."

"Good that you thought of it," she said, "because I have neither hammer nor nails. When I need to hammer something, I use that paper-weight."

While he busied himself at the window, measuring the mirrors to the frame, she studied him and was pleased with what she saw. He was neat and modestly confident, and his big boyish hands were clean, his nails well-kept. He had a crease in his trousers. The lad was living in a hostel, but his trousers were pressed! So they had bought themselves an iron. Good lads!

"Kostya," Nonna said, "you look simply wonderful, stunning!"

He flushed.

"I think that's how you wanted the mirrors. Take a look. You can see the front door and some of the street. Or do you want to see more of it?"

The idea of the mirrors struck Nonna three days ago, when she realized that Grushevoi was completely out of his mind and that his visits sickened her.

When Nonna began returning home early and many people got into the habit of visiting her, old Vedeneyev stuck a paper on the front door with the legend: Vedeneyev—1 ring. N. S. Yelnikova—2 rings. By that he let Nonna know that he and Mariamna refused to open the door to her visitors. Nonna decided that he was quite right.

Her visitors were young people from the factory and from the technical college—she asked them to come to see her because she liked their company. They included designers who worked with her, and women who regarded her as a close friend. These women were given to kissing as a form of greeting, a habit Nonna could not tolerate. For people who used lip-stick it just wasn't decent, she thought.

They were all made cordially welcome. After the strain of the war years Nonna was glad of this opportunity to talk to people. With Grushevoi it was different. He was like a dove with a bunch of forget-me-nots in its beak. After one of his visits, when he had stayed till two in the morning, telling her about his life, beginning with tender childhood and ending with his first love, Nonna went to work in a black mood and thought of an antidote.

"Under the circumstances," she told herself with a yawn, "he's got enough autobiographical data to keep him going for a year. And he's in such a trance that even if he were told to clear out he wouldn't understand. It will be still worse when he gets started on confessions. What if I fix a sort of periscope on my window to see who's at the front door? Then he can ring as long as he wants. The Vedeneyevs will not answer two rings even if he were to ring till morning."

On the way to the factory she met Kostya Berezhkov.

"Oh, Kostya," she said, "I'd like you to do something for me."

She told him what she needed and gave him some money.

"It's wonderful, Kostya," she said, surveying his work. "That'll be your present for me: it's my birthday today."

He grinned broadly.

"Congratulations."

Then they had coffee. It was a pleasure to make sandwiches for a lad like Kostya.

"If you meet anybody asking for me as you go out," she warned, seeing him to the door, "say that you've been to the Vedeneyevs and haven't seen me. Tell them to ring the bell twice."

Her premonition was justified. The moment she took up her pen—she decided that today she would answer her half-year's collection of letters from relations and friends—the bell rang twice. She looked into her system of mirrors carefully, so that she could not be seen from the street: Grushevoi was standing on the door step. He looked every inch the impatient suitor. From time to time he pressed the bell-button.

"He called for me at the office," Nonna thought, "and they told him it's my birthday today. And he rushed over at top speed. He's assuming that I'm all in a flutter, waiting for him."

She locked her room in case the ringing might prove too much for Mariamna and she opened the door.

"Dear Sonya," Nonna wrote, coolly disregarding the furious rings, "I haven't answered your letter so long because—"

Mariamna had cast-iron nerves. She did not open the door.

You scarcely know what to write to people you haven't seen for years.

Nonna loved them all and wished them success and happiness. Many a delightful memory was associated

with them. But memories are not life. The sun rises and proclaims the birth of a new day. You rise from sleep and think of what lies ahead and not of what happened ten years ago. You think not of the people you were with then but of the people you meet today and will meet tomorrow. The people you used to know might seem dearer, but it's with those you know today that you have to live. That alone makes them much more necessary.

We all treasure blood relationships! But forgive me, dear sister, if today I care more for the woman who is using my blueprints to work out a new technology than for you. She and I are absorbed in one and the same task. We make up a single organism. But you're not interested in all that. You wouldn't be thrilled at all if I told you that I had devoted the past month of my life to a bit of mechanism called a crank.

You have charming children; I wish them all the best! How are they getting along at school? How is your husband? Has he recovered from that inflammation of the middle ear you wrote me about? I'm quite well. I've got my work. I'm still working at the factory. Married? No.

"Dear Liza, I haven't written to you for such a long time because—"

Nonna had come to Kruzhilikha six years earlier, when she graduated from the Polytechnical Institute. She did not choose where to go. She got the appointment at the institute. Any place was the same to her. She was eager to be on her own. At the factory she was assigned to the department of technology.

Her search for lodgings took her to the Vedeneyevs, who were letting a room on the second floor. She liked the house as soon as she entered it. Andrei, who happened to be at home for the holidays, opened the door.

The room was cheerful and sunny. She saw at once that she could put a wash-stand and a primus stove in

the little dark hall that led to it. The window gave a view of the old settlement and a strip of forest on the horizon. Nonna sat down in an old-fashioned arm-chair and knew that she wanted to live there. Mariamna appeared and they quickly agreed on the rent and how much Nonna would have to pay for fire-wood and for the housekeeping. "It's very clean in your house. Will it be the same in my room?" Mariamna's only response to this was a sniff. Andrei watched Nonna all the time she talked to Mariamna.

She quickly got used to the family. Nobody disturbed her in any way. Mariamna tidied up her room when she was out, and in the evenings Katya, Pavel's young wife, would knock at her door and invite her to share the family dinner. She would bring along whatever eatables she had and join them downstairs. During dinner Andrei never took his eyes off her. Then he returned to the Academy. The next year he finished his studies and came home to stay.

It had been a tormenting year for Nonna.

One of the first questions the chief technologist asked her was:

"What was your graduation thesis about?"

"Connecting rods."

(Her graduation thesis had been excellent; to write it she had studied magazine data on the experience of the leading factories.)

"Have you ever made devices for machines?" the chief technologist wanted to know.

"Yes. We had a special course on that."

He told her to make a revolving device for boring holes in pistons. She tackled the job and found that the sciences she had been taught at the institute—theoretical mechanics, metallography, the course in machine parts, and so on—were of no practical use here. She had to see a model

that was something like the device she had to make. But she could not find the right kind.

She went to the technical library and pored over a pile of books. There was a drawing in Grünhagen that looked as though it was what she needed. But that drawing was only in one projection—the book was intended for experienced designers.

She took the book to the department and drew the piston in three projections. Then she drew the base. When that was finished she set to thinking about the fixation. The configuration of the device took shape in her mind, but—what about the dimensions of the details and their proportions? It was like groping in the dark.

How could she determine the proportions when she had no spatial idea of the thing?

She worried a whole week until she handed in her drawings of the device and its parts. Any designer would have done the job in two days.

Some time later she was called into the shop.

“Recognize it?” asked foreman Korolkov, a fair, quiet man with the presence of mind and humour that is often met with among veteran workers.

She did not recognize her device. It did not in the least resemble her drawing and was very bulky—she saw that at once. And here it had been set on the floor intentionally to show how ridiculous it was.

“Extra man-power is needed to lift it,” Korolkov said.

The device was obviously unsuited for machining light details. Besides, its size was enormous.

“Never mind,” Korolkov continued gravely, “I’ve seen worse.”

“The main thing,” one of the workers remarked, “is that while you’re using it to make one detail you can make ten without it. You’ll work yourself into a sweat just to get it installed!”

The workers did not accept the device and Nonna burned with shame for a long time.

However, that taught her a good lesson; she realized that she could create something new only on the basis of accumulated technical experience. She had to draw boldly on old designs—every bolt did not need to be invented anew. To become a good designer she had to learn to work creatively, and skilfully to utilize everything that had been created before her. Nonna began to watch the workers and to study the devices they used: she found that the greatest demand was for devices that accelerated machining processes.

These were months of intensive research. Every detail was an enigma down to the thickness of the washer and whether the detail itself had to be fastened by a nut or a hinge with a quick-acting clamp. Then, there were the dimensions.

“Why do you choose just those dimensions?” Nonna asked her fellow designers.

What could they reply? Dimensions are born in the designer’s head like rhymes in the head of a poet.

“For reasons dictated by the design,” was all they could tell her.

Her comrades gave her all the help they could. After that first unhappy experience she pocketed her pride and consulted them every time she was in difficulties. But the technical library was where she settled all her doubts. She called it her first-aid station.

She felt how she gradually grew out of her swaddling clothes.

She was told to design an arbour for grinding gears. This time her work did not draw laughter. The arbour was followed by a blueprint of a device for machining cylinders.

She no longer felt embarrassed when she talked to the more experienced designers. As yet she did not have their skill, but she found that she could talk their language.

"The girl's got pride and character," old Vedeneyev said in those days.

They were the happiest days in his life. Life was smooth both at the factory and at home. Pavel had been elected to the bureau of the Party organization and was confidently on his way to high positions. Little Nikitka was growing up to be a likeable and healthy boy. Andrei had become a painter. He was painting a picture that would make Kruzhilikha famous. When he finished it he would go on a trip abroad. He would marry Nonna Sergeyevna and what a fine couple they would make!

Mariika was the only one who spoiled the picture. Her marriages and divorces disgusted the old man. He could not see how she had turned out like that with the upbringing she got from Mariamna. To make up for it he would be proud of both his daughters-in-law: Katerina was a nice, hard-working girl, and Nonna Sergeyevna—He admired Nonna Sergeyevna. She would attain heights dear simple Katerina never dreamed of. She was Andrei's equal.

The old man remembered with shame how he had opposed Andrei's desire to be a painter. He had started drawing pictures when he was still a little boy. He would draw them and leave them about the house, while Mariamna, at her husband's bidding, would pick them up and hide them. When there were visitors, Nikita Trofimovich would bring the pictures out and say with feigned indifference:

"Here are some more of Andrei's pictures."

They never failed to excite wonder.

But when Andrei began to ask to be sent to an art school, the old man grew alarmed. He did not want the boy to leave, to break away from the family. He'd have

shiftless friends, and that was the worst company to have. He'd take to drink, become a drunkard, and go no farther. There were many talented people in the world. Take himself, Nikita Trofimovich, for instance. As a young man he had had a leaning for music and played the cornet, but did he become a musician? There were more worthy occupations for men, particularly in our day when everybody had to make himself useful to his country and people. The boy was free to draw as much as he liked, but he had to choose what he intended doing in life and devote himself to it. Drawing pictures was no profession! Of course, the old man admitted, there were geniuses in that line, but they were exceptions.

"No," Andrei had replied with a thoughtful smile, "you *can* make painting your profession."

The boy insisted and went to study first in Moscow and then in Leningrad. Pavel took his brother's side in the argument. That hurt the old man and he was cross with his sons for a long time, but later the memory of those days embarrassed him.

Every year Andrei spent his holidays at home and when he graduated he did not remain in Leningrad though he was offered a good position there. Instead, he returned home and was now talking with Nonna Sergeyevna about something so clever and important that old Vedeneyev did not understand some of the conversation although he was listening intently in the adjoining room.

"The only method in art is truth," Andrei said. "All other methods are vile."

"He's quite right," thought old Vedeneyev. "Everything that is not true is vile."

"Truth means realism," Nonna replied. "I'm afraid it might be a little flat."

"Don't be afraid," the old man thought. "The boy knows what he's talking about. You've got nothing to be afraid of."

"Life cannot be flat," Andrei maintained. "Our life is like a noble tree that grows freely. It's absurd to hang decorations on it; it's beautiful without them."

"I think you're impoverishing art," Nonna said.

"But I think you're passing unconsidered judgement," Andrei returned vigorously.

"How's that for an answer?" thought old Vedeneyev.

"Perhaps," Nonna replied languidly. "My mind's on other things."

"Realism," Andrei continued, "is so broad and powerful that there's room in it for all the other methods."

"I wish you'd use simpler language and not flaunt your knowledge," Nonna said. "What did you want to prove by that?"

"Oho, you've given in," thought old Vedeneyev. He took off his spectacles and wiped the sweat that hard thinking had brought to his brow.

The old man was impatient for some sign of an agreement between them. They saw each other every day. They talked for hours. Talking, walking—that was all very well; but the girl was waiting for Andrei to ask for her hand.

Andrei was painting a riverscape: a river with a pinkish mist hanging over it, and the chimneys of Kruzhi-likha looming through the mist on the far side of the river. Every day he left the house before dawn, crossed the river and worked at his picture until noon. His skin grew as bronzed as a fisherman's, and during a conversation he would suddenly grow thoughtful and bite his lips: he thought of his picture.

One day he showed it to Nonna.

"Well?" he asked. "How do you like it?"

"Andrei, you know very well that I'm an ignoramus in that sort of thing," she said.

"Do you like it, or don't you?" he demanded curtly.

"Yes, I like it," she said.

"What do you like most about it?"

"This cloud," she said after some thought.

"Well, I know now that you really don't understand a damn thing," he said and covered the picture with a cloth.

"But do you think you can marry me?"

"Are you sure you want me to?" she asked, laughing.

"Quite sure," he said. "I left Leningrad because of you." He put his arms around her, "Nonna!"

She pushed away his arms.

"No, please."

"No?"

"No."

... Some people don't appreciate ordinary friendship. If she liked to walk about the countryside and admire the landscape with him it did not in any way mean that she was ready to spend her whole life beside him.

Mariamna had ears like a cat: she heard everything. She was in another part of the house but that did not prevent her from hearing Andrei make his proposal and Nonna turn him down. That same evening she told Nikita Trofimovich about it.

The old man was furious. What did that girl think she was? What sort of a husband did she want? Was Andrei not good enough for her?

"Andrei," he said, when he and his son were alone, "I don't know about you, but I don't want that girl in the house."

Andrei gazed fixedly at his father, then said:

"Here's what, father—" He was silent for a moment. "Let her stay. Can you do that as a favour to me?"

"Listen, son," Vedeneyev said softly, "I can see that your whole life is bound up in her. I'm hurt because you're hurt, you must understand that."

"Let her stay," Andrei repeated and left the room.

The old man watched sadly: nothing changed. Nonna talked and laughed as before, while Andrei stuck to her like a leech.

"How many words have been spoken," thought Nikita Trofimovich, listening to them talking, "how many words, good words—and all in vain, and such a fine lad as Andrei making himself miserable for nothing."

There was no further mention of a trip abroad. The picture was taken to Moscow and there was no reply, while Andrei—the fool!—painted Nonna Sergeyevna's portrait.

"If she was a good girl," thought old Vedeneyev, "she would have treasured his love. Love like that does not lie around to be picked up by just anybody."

Andrei suddenly received a telegram; his picture, *Factory by a River*, had won a prize. Then they saw the picture reproduced in the newspaper, accompanied by a long article. The article called Andrei a young and talented painter. Old Vedeneyev threw a big party, the biggest since Pavel's wedding. The party was spoiled by Nonna. She was late and Andrei was moody until she came. When she finally arrived you had to see in order to believe how Andrei brightened up; he grew talkative, moved about, and laughed. Nikita Trofimovich never forgave Nonna for that evening.

Nonna was late because she had been held up at the factory. She had been held up by one of those conversations that are milestones in a person's life. In the morning she had handed in her blueprints of a device for machining motor saw details. At the moment the motor saw was the factory's new child, the child of the chief designer. After working hours the chief designer suddenly sent for Nonna.

"Have I made a mess of anything?" she wondered.

At that time the chief designer was in good health and worked in his office at the factory. She went to his office at once.

"Sit down," he said. "I wanted to talk to you about your future. Are you quite serious about wanting to be an engineer?"

"I don't understand what you mean."

"What do machines mean to you? A page in your biography or your life's work?"

She smiled at his bombast.

"I never thought of it."

"I thought as much," he said, glowering at her. "Today you show promise and tomorrow you'll go on maternity leave. And then the baby will have whooping cough, measles, and all those—what do you call them—and you'll throw up your work. I've seen it happen often, you have my word for it!"

To tell the truth, she could not see what that had to do with her.

"Now, what I want to know is: are you serious about your work or are you here because you've nothing better to do?"

"I've always thought," Nonna replied coldly, "that I take my duties seriously enough."

"That's not the word!" he pounced on her. "Duties—that's not the word. Our work, like all art, demands devoted service."

For her part, she was ready to concede him that.

"What is a real designer? He must be an expert in metals, a mechanic, a modeller, and a founder. He must know thermal processes, electric-welding, and tools—and he must be an artist. Yes, yes, he must be an artist! There's no science of designing, just as there's no recipe on how to write *War and Peace*. We follow the road of creators."

The conversation was growing interesting.

"An artist," the chief designer went on, "is a person with a feeling for the beautiful. It's a feeling a designer of machines must have. A sense of proportion, forms and dimensions is as vital to me as it was to Raphael."

Nonna remembered her first device.

"The feeling for the beautiful has to be developed, it comes with experience on the sole condition that you devote yourself wholly to your profession. I saw your latest job. I was told that you are making rapid progress. I'm offering you work in my department."

Nonna sat with lowered eyes, saying nothing.

"Have I your consent?"

"It's very unexpected," she said.

"Does technology appeal to you more?"

She was now used to her work in the chief technologist's department and set great store by the reputation she had earned there. Here she would have to begin from the beginning. Besides, people said that the chief designer was hard to get on with.

"You don't know yourself," the chief designer continued. "You have ability and you'll get an opportunity to develop it in my department. You have new ideas. I'm offering you the best you could wish for yourself. Go now and think it over, and let me know your answer tomorrow."

That was why Nonna was late for the party. She was thoughtful that whole evening, making up her mind whether to work under the chief designer or not.

Next morning she rang him up and told him that she accepted his offer.

That was how matters stood with Nonna on the eve of the war.

"Give me your word that you'll let her stay here until she herself wants to go," Andrei pressed his father as he was preparing to leave for the army.

"All right," the old man promised.

"No matter what happens to me," Andrei said.

"All right," Vedeneyev repeated quietly.

"And that she'll get the respect and sympathy she deserves."

The old man put his hand on his breast.

"Son," he said, "respect—yes; but you can't ask me—"

Andrei smiled wryly and stroked his father's shoulder.

"I understand," he said. "You're making a mistake. Oh, well. Let's consider the subject closed."

Once again old Vedeneyev was filled with bitter resentment when he watched Nonna say good-bye to Andrei; not a tear showed in her eyes! And she did not go to the recruiting station with him, only walked with him up to the wicket-gate.

She got a letter from Andrei every two or three days, sometimes they came in batches. His letters to the family were incomparably rarer. That, too, hurt the old man and made him jealous.

After Nonna refused to marry Andrei, Nikita Trofimovich always spoke to her in a dry official tone, while Mariamna scarcely answered her questions. Nonna did not have to be told what that meant. When Andrei left she stopped going downstairs, and they did not ask her to.

They did not want her in the house. That was their right. She knew she would be sorry if she was asked to vacate her room. She had grown to like it. But nothing was said about it.

Mariamna continued to tidy up the room when Nonna was away and as before she found the fire-wood neatly piled in front of the stove so that she could light it before going to bed. But her intercourse with the family did not go beyond that.

"This is better than effusion or reproofs," Nonna thought. She left the money for the rent on her writing-

desk, with a note saying what month it was for. The money disappeared together with the note. Nonna paid the rent punctually—the Vedeneyevs were sticklers for order.

She had no time to ponder it all out. Sometimes she had no time even to read Andrei's letters. They would lie unopened for several days until she could spare fifteen minutes in which to read them. And, it went without saying, she could not write to him frequently or make her letters long.

The usual notions about working hours, days off, and various duties were confused in those years. The days were no longer divided up into hours, and the nights did not mean sleep. The vitality of the people increased tenfold and everybody lived on news from the front, tensely awaiting the inevitable turn in events. And Nonna, like the other engineers, spent her evenings working in the assembly shop and helping to clear the snow from the railway tracks. Like everybody else, she saw nothing extraordinary in this, accepting it as a sheer necessity. In the daytime she was a designer and her chief was none other than Vladimir Ippolitovich, who had an amazing faculty for draining his subordinates of all their strength. There were days when Nonna hardly left her desk—her feet grew numb and her head would droop with weariness.

During the second winter of the war she was given the task of improving a separator used for refining fuel oils. The separator in use at the time was designed for refining oil in three cycles. The oil had to be passed through the apparatus three times before the required results were attained. Now the process had to be reduced to two cycles. Nonna worked for more than a month over the job. Test after test proved unsatisfactory; the problem was not an easy one, but Nonna finally solved it.

She finished the last drawing late at night. That same

night the country heard the broadcast of the Stalingrad victory. The people felt as though a heavy burden had dropped from their shoulders.

Nonna was very tired, but she remained at the factory. She was in no mood to sit in her room. She left the factory at about five o'clock the next afternoon.

The air was still and frosty, daylight was ebbing fast, and the fluffy snow was piled up high in the drifts. Nonna felt no weariness, only gladness, as she walked home; gladness over the victory at Stalingrad and over her own small victory. The two joys complemented each other. They filled her heart.

She saw little Nikitka near the house. He was holding his small sledge and looking as though deciding whether he ought to go on playing or return home.

"What's the matter, Nikitka?" Nonna asked gaily, taking her hand out of her muff and patting the boy's cheek as she passed him. "What is it, dear? Why don't you ride your sledge? Look how fine the snow is!"

He looked up at her in bewilderment and said:

"Uncle Andrei's been killed."

Nonna took off her coat and went downstairs.

It was a year and a half since that door beyond which she had once been so welcome had shut behind her. She knocked.

"Come in," old Vedeneyev's voice sounded.

Nothing had changed in this familiar room and Nikita Trofimovich was sitting in his favourite chair. The lamp had not been switched on and the old man's shoulders and head were silhouetted against the dusky background of the window. Beyond his shoulder a narrow brown strip of twilight was burning out. There was a soft rustle of paper—Nikita Trofimovich was rolling a cigarette. Nonna stood at the door and waited for him to finish.

"Come in," he said, lighting the cigarette.

Nonna went up to him.

"I've heard the sad news," she said and was frightened by the words; they sounded affected in this room.

It would have been better if she had said nothing.

"Please sit down," Vedeneyev said with dry courtesy, moving a chair up for her.

She sat down. The cigarette between his lips glowed intermittently, lighting up the frowning, frigidly wrinkled face.

"Yes, it's a hard blow," Vedeneyev said hoarsely. "What else is it when they're destroying—" He did not say what was being destroyed. "Twenty-eight years old. Why, it's—"

The cigarette fell out of the holder and the sparks scattered about the floor. He bent down and for several minutes felt about the floor with his hand, putting them out and looking for the stub.

A woman's figure loomed out of the back room, stood for a minute and asked in a deep voice:

"Shall I turn on the light?"

"Say hello," Vedeneyev said without answering the question. "Nonna Sergeyevna is here."

Mariamna approached—Nonna did not see her face—and said:

"How are you?"

"This woman," Vedeneyev suddenly shouted in a thin high-pitched voice, pointing to Mariamna with his hand outstretched, and in the twilight they saw that it was trembling, "this woman took the entire load of my widowhood upon her shoulders! She took my orphaned children under her wing and has looked after them ever since as though they were her own—she'll continue looking after them until the day she dies. But you, you are an educated woman in a man's jacket—from your height you look down upon women like her, you regard them as worthless

and below you—that's what you think, that's your way of thinking! You never stop to think that she keeps to her feet all day long to give the working-man a cosy home! You don't know what it means to have three children clinging to your skirt, when one needs to have his nose wiped, the second has to be taken to the doctor's, and the third's torn his pants; they all have to be fed, clothed, and washed! It's difficult when the children are your own, but what if they are not? Even a saint rebels at times. Why should I do it? she'd say. Another woman conceived them, gave birth to them, while I have to give them my life! But you can't understand all this! You don't think it's important. But let me tell you that I regard her as the finest woman in the world, because she worked her fingers to the bone for my children, gave them everything she had! Do you know that she refused to have children of her own? She was afraid that a child of her own would make her a stepmother to my children! (Mariamna stood motionless by the stove, leaning against the tiles.) She demands nothing: not a thank you or any other reward! But I, I am duty bound to wash her feet eternally—for Marya, for Pavel, and for Andrei—dear Andrei—my dead son!"

He lowered his head and burst into sobs.

The women made no move, their breathing could not be heard. It had grown quite dark. The strip of sunset had gone out beyond the window. Mariamna moved away from the stove, went up to the old man and stood behind him.

"Go and lie down," she said quietly with a tenderness that surprised Nonna. "Lie down. There's no help for it."

"She doesn't care for him!" Vedeneyev cried, turning to Mariamna. "Do you think she came because she cares? It's good breeding that brought her! It's the thing to do, so she did it! She hasn't a tear for him! But she, she was everything to him."

Nonna got up and went upstairs.

It was dark in her room, too. She lay down on the bed without taking off her shoes and let her feet hang over the side so as not to dirty the quilt. She felt exhausted. She did not have the strength even to bend and unbutton her shoes.

The house was perfectly still. Nonna stared in front of her and suddenly Andrei's face stood out clearly in her mind. "Life is like a noble tree that grows freely. It's absurd to hang decorations on it; it's beautiful without them," she heard the young voice repeating the words that came back to her—

She began to weep. The tears were not for him. Were they for the precious lives sacrificed in the name of the beautiful? Were they for old men crushed by sorrow? Did she weep because there was so much grief in the world when there should have been only happiness? Or did she weep because the great love that had surrounded her like air, which she had felt even at a distance, was now gone for ever and there was now emptiness in her heart and she felt alone?

The rush of all these thoughts made her weep.

CHAPTER TEN

NONNA'S BIRTHDAY, CONTINUED

It was all past and gone. "What's past is an old story," and "The good old days," is what people usually say. But not all old days are good. There are days you wish to obliterate from your memory. You make believe they are not part of your life.

The girl with anomalies—was how she was called in the family. The boys built models and the girls played with dolls or sewed dresses for them. But this girl

built models, too. Properly speaking, the boys built the models, while she ordered them about. Bits of iron and wire were strewn all over the house. They built a system of lights in the window: when father was at home a red lamp burned. They built a bridge that swung open like a real one. Their mother told them to take it off the piano and to carry it into the hall. Sister Sonya stumbled over it and tore her silk stocking. In a fit of temper she threw the abominable bridge down the backstairs. Nonna and the boys teased her and called her a lunatic. Who cared about that silly stocking! If they wished they could build ten new bridges.

Hers was the usual childhood. There were her father and mother, her school, the *dacha** in the summer, and skates in the winter. They lived in a quiet street in Moscow near Tverskaya, before it was re-named Gorky Street. Tverskaya was always full of people and in the evenings it was bright with sparkling shop-windows, while in those years their street looked very provincial: the houses were old, there were few pedestrians, the snow was tinged with blue, and the sun, crimson like fruit drops, rose beyond the dilapidated little church. Moscow was her native home. She knew everything that went on: that a shaft had been sunk for the underground railway; that they were charging more for bullfinches in Trubnaya Square; that Moskvín, the actor, had fallen ill and that it was still uncertain if *The Lower Depths*** would be replaced by some other play.

Oh, those sweet dreams of youth, the bugles and the red ties, and the old house in the street with the dilapidated little church!

At fifteen it suddenly became clear that engineering was a waste of time as were bullfinches, bugles, and

* Country house.—*Tr.*

** A play by Maxim Gorky.—*Tr.*

sports. There was only one thing worthy of thought and that was love. The sweetest and bitterest verse spoke of love. Love looked at you out of the pages of any book you opened, while in the theatres they spoke of love, sang of love, and their dances expressed love. Lensky lost his life because he loved. Love made Onegin suffer. Demon killed Tamara with the lethal poison of his kisses. Othello strangled Desdemona. Anna Karenina threw herself under a train. What was love? "A breeze, whispering among the roses. No, a golden fluorescence of blood—" Sulamith, Isolda, Juliet, Lady Hamilton, Isadora Duncan—Thousands of years ago it was the same as today, and today it was the same as thousands of years ago.

Love appeared before the beloved.

When Nonna was alone in the house she would look at herself in the mirror for hours: her eyes, her lips, her smile; she would sit back, her arms over her head, and lower her eye-lashes.

She was lovely. She did not so much see it as feel it with every fibre of her body. Love me, love me, she whispered, I'll make you divinely happy! But all her loveliness was being wasted, she felt. The boys who used to bring bits of wire and nails into the house now kept at a distance and eyed her with deferential suspicion. They were not at all like the lovers in novels.

It was summer. Flowers, sprinkled with water, were being sold in Pushkin Square, which smelt of hot asphalt, petrol and flowers. Pairs whispered in Tverskoi Boulevard. There was love in the whispers, in the smells, and in every bud. She threw herself impetuously into the embrace of the first man who opened his arms to her. She did it blindly, trustingly.

She came to her senses as though from a heavy blow. She felt sick, could not concentrate and would have liked

to shut eyes to everything. Was that love? "A breeze whispering among the roses—" Oh, how vile!

Was everything a lie? Were books, music, human eyes, and human voices only a mask to hide the beast, the zoological individual?

That could not be true! No, no! Here she was trembling, disgusted with herself, and yet she felt she was a human being! A human being and not some animal from the zoo! She had paid dearly for that knowledge; it cost others less. Well, what was done could not be undone; it would be a lesson for the future. First and foremost she was a being with a capacity for thought. Yes, yes! She would prove it!

"My dear," her mother said, "when will all this tomfoolery end? When will you steady down? It's extremes, anomalies all the time. It's getting to be tiresome."

Nonna watched the life around her with an absent gaze. But that had been in summer. In the autumn everything changed. She buried herself in text-books. She asked her father to help her with her German. She refused to go to the theatre. Suddenly she grew indifferent to the Bolshoi Theatre and to the Art Theatre, and even to her stage idol—Alice Koonen. She even refused to go to a showing of *Adrienne*, when the family wanted to make an outing of it. She lost weight and grew pale—her mother was afraid it might be her lungs.

The man Nonna took up with was no youth. Vain and suave, he was used to favours from women. He had deserted many of them without caring how that would affect their lives. And when he was sent packing by a girl in her teens he was puzzled and insulted; she turned him out at the very dawn of their intimacy! "I don't ever want to see you again," the crazy little fool had said when he came to her house. "Be kind enough to keep away from me, otherwise I'll tell Father." Her father was this man's superior and he did not want a scandal. He swallowed

his rage and indignation and Nonna never saw him again.

Not all old days are good. Some memories lie at the bottom of the heart like bitter lees, and you shiver with disgust at them.

Fourteen years had passed since then. She was now a designer at a big machine-tool-building factory. She had lost nothing during this time, neither strength nor youth. No matter how much she gave, she still had as much. On the contrary, every day enriched her, she grew more and more self-reliant and the war cemented her self-reliance.

The war also taught her to give more breadth to her thoughts, to think on a big scale. She had to think in terms of vast territories, immense material values, and destinies of nations. Nothing now was measured in kopeks, the count ran into millions and thousands of millions, no matter what it concerned. The way people thought gave them all a share in the affairs of the state.

It was splendid when you had the opportunity of knowing what the morrow would bring you and your country. That gave you a magnificent feeling of independence. You could be kind and friendly to whoever you chose and when you met somebody you didn't like, you could treat him with scorn and lock him out without caring what he thought of you. You didn't have to take your cue from anybody. You cannot please everybody.

She had to stand quite a great deal from the chief designer. He humiliated the designers by chaining them to his own person and making them work in his flat. It was one of his stupid whims. The chairman of the factory trade union committee was quite right when he heatedly spoke against this outrageous conduct before the Party active. He could have his office at home and keep in contact with the department by telephone. That was what

some people were doing. His subordinates ought to work at the factory and they could go to him for consultations two or three times a month. They were designers and not shoemaker's apprentices. For eight months their standing had been that of shoemaker's apprentices. It degraded you and made you sick to come and ring the bell at this door with its thick grey felt padding. And how often the designers had to run to the factory and back during the course of the day! To the measuring laboratory or the testing station, or to answer a call from one of the shops.

Nonna bore it all till the very end because otherwise she would have had to leave the department. Nobody would have sheltered her from the wrath of the chief designer. The director always laughed and found some justification for him; the Party organizer never interfered; the chairman of the factory trade union committee—one man could not make head against many. She would have had to leave and lose a superb teacher. So she bore it and even accompanied him on his visits to the factory in an idiotic role which lay somewhere between an aide-de-camp and nurse to a sick child. She did it not because she was afraid of him. She was not the ingratiating type. She did not make the slightest attempt to set up a closer working contact although sometimes she felt it was what he wanted. She put up with his insolence without batting an eyelid. When the other designers complained she shrugged her shoulders and said that they had a tongue in their heads with which to speak up for themselves.

She was glad when he went. Naturally, she was sorry for him. She realized that for a man like the chief designer, who had worked for fifty-five years in production, it was difficult to find himself suddenly in a small health resort with time hanging on his hands. Yet it was good that he was no longer with them. You weren't encumbered and you were bolder in your approach to the

task before you when you didn't have that constant finical supervision.

He narrowed down his subordinates' perspective—that was where his mistake as a leader lay. It was a manifestation of old age. She remembered how he had cut her short when she had approached him about the tractor parts. He held they were artists and nothing else. But she had different ideas about her work.

There was still time to bring that question up. The factory was living an unusual life. The People's Commissariat kept sending monthly plans for so many machine-tools of this or that type as it had during the war, but for the time being the plans were small. The tense atmosphere which kept you taut had disappeared. The rhythm was different. The five-year plan gave an almost physical feeling of having attained the goal: one more effort, then another—only a few steps, just one step more and you've breasted the tape, you've done what you set out to do! Then you toe the line at the new start and begin another race at top speed.

Nonna thought it might be a good idea to go on leave. But nobody got leave yet. They were holding back the man-power although there was an obvious surplus of it at the factory. Grushevoi's shop was putting out odds and ends. There was a feeling of expectation in everything and in everybody.

The machinery was being reconditioned and the reconstruction of the foundry had been started: Chekaldin's plan had been approved. Greater emphasis was being placed on technical training. The more highly skilled workers were competing for top place in their various trades. The air was filled with anticipation.

The director went to Moscow and returned, evidently without achieving anything. It was interesting to know what the heads of the departments thought about the factory's future.

She decided to speak to the director. He was the most important person there and she didn't mind if he raised the question of putting out tractor parts in his own name. From what she knew of him he was proud beyond measure. She would give him her initiative as a present—it cost her nothing. Her ambition lay in a different direction.

He was quite a good organizer. He responded quickly to new ideas and promoted people boldly. The workers liked him. They regarded him as one of themselves in spite of his high-sounding rank of major-general of artillery engineers. How quiet and unsophisticated he had looked when he had walked beside that country-woman in a kerchief. She was his mother, Nonna was told. He was showing her round the factory. He was almost always at the factory, in one shop or another and he had a habit of brushing back his thick straight hair with his hand. His manners were not very good; frequently he passed without a word of greeting. But she did not think he was coarse at heart. Once she saw him squatting on his heels—a big man always looked funny in that position—gripping his knees with his hands and peering into a *New Britain* automatic tool. At that moment he had looked so much like a child with a new toy.

She rang up his secretary to ask for an appointment. The secretary told her that the director was expected at the bureau of the town Party Committee but would see her tomorrow if two o'clock was convenient. His secretary was charming.

Nonna set out for the factory at a quarter past one. At three minutes to two she entered the director's outer office. Anna Ivanovna, grey-haired, a high colour in her cheeks, and with a dark growth on her upper lip, met her kindly.

"Please, take a seat, Nonna Sergeyevna," she said, disappearing through the door of the director's office. She reappeared almost immediately and said, "You may go in."

Anna Ivanovna imparted a highly respectable tone to the director's sanctuary.

Listopad was sitting at his desk, reading a newspaper. He did not look up when Nonna entered, but took a few seconds to finish reading an article. He stood up when she was almost beside his desk and put down the newspaper with obvious reluctance. Under his jacket he wore a Russian shirt; the top collar button was undone. The general effect was not at all respectable.

"Sit down, Comrade Yelnikova."

He might have called her by her name and patronymic—everybody at the factory called her Nonna Sergeyevna.

"What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to speak to you about our production prospects."

The indifferent light in Listopad's eyes did not change. She, too, was after the same thing! He had already lost count of the number of people who had come to him "to speak about our production prospects"! Each had his own plan; each wanted to push through his own pet idea. One dreamed of excavators, a second, with a taste for elegance, fussed about with handy little machines, while a third, for some reason, wanted the factory to go over to articles made from plastics, suggesting that consumers' goods such as soap dishes, cups and saucers could be made in Grushevoi's shop, which was now available for the purpose. Was this young woman here about soap dishes, too?

"Grushevoi's shop is being used without any system," she said. "We're letting them put out parts that need no particular qualification."

Wasn't she a little presumptuous with that "we"? "We're letting them—" indeed!

"The shop hasn't a perspective. It would have it if it specialized in some particular line and that would be important for the plant as a whole."

She has no business to teach me what to do. I know it without her telling me. The cheek of it!

"To my mind it would be most rational if Grushevoi's shop went in for tractor parts."

A spark of interest came into his eyes. She was a subtle one to have hit upon an idea like that. It was a good idea, very good, and it wasn't easy to give her a reply.

"Of course you know that we're filling orders for tractor parts at the moment," he said carelessly.

She shook her head.

"My point is that I'd like to see tractor parts on our permanent catalogue and not as something that we put out casually."

He sat silently with his legs crossed, swinging his foot. There were things you couldn't very well say out loud. It did not do for a Party man in production to rap out, "Don't bother me with trifles." He could have said that about the soap dishes, but he could not say it about spare parts for tractors. Of peasant stock himself, he knew better than any engineer at the factory what tractor parts meant for post-war agriculture. Yet, why should this unimpressive item be turned out by *his* factory? Let others do humdrum jobs like that; he wanted to produce machines that would be of decisive importance in the colossal construction work that was being planned for the post-war years—lathes, excavators, and motor saws (that was when Vladimir Ippolitovich's motor saw would come into its own!).

Nonna continued coolly: it was just the time to re-equip Grushevoi's shop and get it ready for the production of spare parts for tractors. The factory had the time and the people to do it. All the orders for spare parts could very easily be concentrated in Grushevoi's hands once he got the necessary machines.

"Have you spoken to Grushevoi about it?"

"I have."

"What did he say?"

"Naturally, he wouldn't hear of it! I'm quite certain you know what the attitude to spare parts is. I could have avoided disturbing you and sent my plan through the usual organizations. But that requires perseverance and I haven't got the patience for it."

You've got the patience all right. If I'm any judge of character you're the sort that fights to the bitter end.

"If you take up my idea please do not mention that it comes from me. Otherwise, as the initiator, I might have to carry the entire burden."

That's good sales talk. You're offering me your idea as a present, but do I look as though I need it so much, as though I've been waiting for just this sort of thing all my life? Wait, I'll pay you back in your own coin.

"That is only natural," Listopad boomed genially. "There's no help for it! As the initiator, you'll naturally have to play first fiddle! We'll let you take full charge of the spare parts from the designing end."

Take that for your pains!

"No," she said, "I'm not prepared to do that. I could give it some of my time if you wish, but I refuse to work exclusively on spare parts. That doesn't enter into my plans."

"Why not?" he asked in the same genial tone. "It's a sound idea and I wouldn't grudge you a whole shop for it. Why don't you agree?"

They exchanged fixed looks and smiled. Somehow with those looks they glanced into each other and one saw the other in a different light.

"I am a designer of machines," she answered. "It wouldn't be logical to use me on spare parts."

That would show him that she knew what she was worth.

"She's frank at least," Listopad thought to himself. "I've known all along that she has a high opinion of

herself. A very high opinion! Just proves how well I see into people."

The internal telephone rang. He picked up the receiver, "What is it? Ring me up in half an hour, I'm busy."

Nonna rose.

"I've said everything I wanted. The rest is up to the management. In my opinion," she said, pulling on her gloves, "it's not our job just to make a name for the factory. We've got to think of the requirements of the state first. You know yourself the condition of our tractor park after the war."

She went out. She had taken her leave with a few dry generalities. But they made him think. He thought of the boundless spaces of his country laid waste by the war, of the burned granaries, of the ravaged collective farms. "How the women cried, but we had to harness the cows to the plough," his mother's quiet voice sounded again in his ears. This woman had made a very practical suggestion, a suggestion that was important for the Party. But she herself did not want to go over to spare parts. She had said as much without superfluous modesty: I'm made for bigger things, let somebody else potter about with trifles! No, he could not commend her attitude. If you're enthusiastic about something, you'll do all you can to see it through. Otherwise I'll not have faith in you! Suddenly he had an impulse, he even made a move, to go out after her, and make her come back and thrash it all out properly, without mincing words. But he checked himself. Ryabukhin was due to come in at any minute now.

Ryabukhin locked the door and had a long talk with Uzdechkin.

"I can't understand it," he was saying. "Your personal animosity is blinding you."

"Don't you think there's a reason for this personal animosity, as you call it?" Uzdechkin returned.

"People aren't angels."

"He's an individualist."

"No, he isn't. You simply don't understand him. He's all right."

"If he's all right to you you're welcome to him."

"He's worth his salt. He understands life, and big things may be expected from him. A man like that must be forgiven petty shortcomings for the sake of his finer qualities."

"You call them petty shortcomings?" Uzdechkin raised his gloomy eyes.

"Yes. There's nothing petty about him. Still, I maintain he's a man who can be forgiven big shortcomings as well and that you ought to live in peace with him."

"I grew up at the factory," Uzdechkin said in a stifled voice, "the older workers knew me when I was a kid. I remember what used to stand in the place of every new house that I pass. I used to run around here when I was a Young Pioneer, and it was here that I joined the Kom-somol and the Party. Then a new man comes along and puts himself above everybody else. He comes along and shoves you out of the way: you can't do this and you can't do that, and that doesn't concern you and this is not your business. And because he gives himself airs and thinks the world of himself he makes mistakes that a lot of other people will have to pay for. Just you wait and see how this business about the vegetable gardens will end."

"How will it end? They've started harvesting the potatoes and taking them to the storage sheds."

"Who's doing the harvesting? The workers themselves. Naturally nobody sent him any prisoners for the job—

it was all a piece of his fantasy. The hilling was done in a slipshod way, there weren't enough people. The potatoes are practically worthless, no size to speak of. It was lucky for him that peace came and people could be spared for the harvesting. If it hadn't been for that I can't imagine what would have happened. Our director would have been in a fine mess with his thousand hectares! A fine mess, indeed!"

Ryabukhin watched Uzdechkin as he spoke. His face was yellow with weariness and his temples had fallen in.

"Fyodor Ivanovich," Ryabukhin said softly, "are things going wrong at home? You don't look well."

The blood rushed to Uzdechkin's face.

"Some people poke their noses everywhere," he said irritably.

"Wait, don't fly off the handle. Listen. I'm asking you as a comrade. If there's anything I can do to help you, let me know."

"I don't need anything. I'm all right." He moved back with the chair and stood up abruptly. "Is that all?"

"I can't make head or tail of it," Listopad said after listening to Ryabukhin. "Can't you stop bothering me about your Uzdechkin? Can't you? What are you clucking like a hen for? Am I holding him back from his work? Better tell me this: what if we were to give the whole of the special shop over to making spare parts for tractors?" Ryabukhin looked at him in surprise and opened his mouth to say something. "Wait. I know what you want to say. Listen to me first."

And he began to talk of the thoughts that passed through his mind before Ryabukhin arrived: of the vast expanses left desolate by the war, of the razed granaries and of the ruined collective farms.

When Nonna got home she lit the stove. It was something she liked to do by herself. At first she took some thin kindling and lit it, watching the tiny furtive flames grow. Then she put in several dry pieces of fire-wood. She knelt down in front of the stove and watched them catching fire and throwing up light sparks. As soon as they began to burn properly she would put in those thick logs—they were damp and covered with bark and moss and would burn long and slowly with a smoky bluish flame. The fact that they were damp made no difference—it was birch-wood, and birch-wood always burned well, leaving a golden warmth. The damper could not be closed at once—the fumes were poisonous. How pleasant it was to light a stove in a cosy room on an autumn's day!

Nonna got up from her knees and turned on the loud-speaker—it was the music hour—and sat down at the table: those letters had to be finished. Two or three accords of a melody she knew from childhood flowed from the black loudspeaker and far, far away in her beloved Moscow a familiar tenor sang, "A birch-tree stood in the field. A birch-tree with a curly top—" The singer had been unknown until recently; he had been an ordinary chap, a soldier in the Red Army; Nonna first heard him over the radio and liked his singing more than anybody else's, and learned his name only after he had already become famous. There was the Russian ardour, and the Russian melancholy, and the Russian expanses both in the voice and in the song. Nonna dipped her pen and put it on the table—a blot appeared and spread on the unfinished letter. The mellow voice sang sadly in far-off Moscow. Nonna thought of the man she had talked to two hours ago. A big man, ill-mannered, and somewhat naive. Some time would pass and they would be together, she and he. She was sure of it. The moment their eyes met she knew that that was bound to happen.

SUNDAY

"Good people, just think what's happening!" Mariika cried, bursting into her kitchen. "Fyodor Ivanovich's ready to drop, washing clothes. He's thrown the old woman's print dress into the trough together with his underpants. And now he's wringing green water out of them. They've turned into a lettuce green and he says he can't help it and will have to wear green underpants now. I told him to boil them but he says there's nothing to boil them in. They *did* have a clothes-boiler, you know. I remember Nyura buying one. It's all that Tolka's handiwork, damn him—the boiler's gone, he eats sweets, and Fyodor Ivanovich has to wash clothes in Anna Ivanovna's trough."

Mariika picked up her clothes-boiler and ran out. It was Sunday morning, a day of rest. The kitchen stove was burning and the pots, big and small, ranged on it contained the Sunday dinner. Mirzoyev was shaving at the little kitchen table. Holding up his lathered chin and plying his razor, he glanced sideways at Lukashin, who was washing his false teeth under the tap. Lukashin compressed his sunken lips and stole a look at Mirzoyev. The men understood each other.

"It's rotten when a big man has to mess about with the trivialities of life," Mirzoyev sighed.

He finished shaving, swiftly cleared away his shaving kit and stopped in front of Lukashin—tall and smart and wearing brand new braces.

"Oh, well," he said cheerfully. "What do you say to paying neighbour Uzdechkin a visit, eh?"

Lukashin finished washing his teeth and, shyly turning his back to Mirzoyev, fitted them into his mouth. He regained his gift of speech.

"I don't mind."

"In the evening, then."

Lukashin remembered promising to take Mariika to the cinema that evening. But that same moment he decided he'd teach her a lesson. It was only once in a long while that she had an opportunity to spend the day with her husband, but instead of doing that she had gone to Uzdechkin. Last Friday, or was it Thursday, she had spent her time with the neighbours, telling them how much she admired Mirzoyev's teeth.

"Suits me," Lukashin told Mirzoyev. "It'll cheer the fellow up."

Uzdechkin started washing clothes early in the morning.

There wasn't a change of clothes in the house, everything was dirty. It was no use sending the washing to a laundry; they'd have to wait too long for it and, besides, he had had a piece of bad luck and there was not a kopek in the house to pay for it. He decided to wash the clothes himself.

"Fyodor!" Olga Matveyevna groaned. "Stop it, son, I'll wash it as soon as I feel better."

"When will that be?" Uzdechkin growled.

In the army he had washed his own clothes often enough and it had never seemed difficult. He bravely hauled a bundle of dirty clothes out of the box-room, scattering the old woman's blouses, children's dresses, which were so dirty you couldn't tell what colour they were, and children's bodices, so small that he didn't know what end to pick them up from. Confound it. Here he was thinking that there was nothing to wear when they had a whole pile of clothes!

Tolka's white jersey and greasy overalls were in the bundle. Uzdechkin threw them back into the box-room. The lad could wash them himself.

Hugging a toy bed, little Olya watched her father lighting the stove.

"I'll help," she said.

"Of course, dear, of course," Uzdechkin replied. "In about five years' time."

Anna Ivanovna, cigarette in mouth and wearing violet pyjamas—you couldn't tell whether it was a skirt or trousers the woman had on—came into the kitchen when Uzdechkin was soaping the clothes in a small enamelled basin.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "You don't expect to do your washing in a small basin like that, do you? Take my trough. You'll find it in the box-room. You can't miss it."

"I didn't dare take it without asking your permission," Uzdechkin said.

"How silly of you," she said and brought him the trough herself.

She dragged a bench to the middle of the kitchen and put the trough on it with some thick pieces of wood under it to make it higher. It did not occur to Uzdechkin to help her. He just stood there with wet hands and thought that when she was lifting those heavy objects and bending over the stack of fire-wood, picking out straight pieces, you forgot about her unusual dress and red nails and her mumbo-jumbo in English when she talked to Tanya and saw only a broad-shouldered working-woman who'd do any kind of work.

"Now, that's better. At least you can soak the whole lot in one go," she said and began to wash her face at the tap, splashing water in all directions, soaping her ears with both hands and throwing back her head in a funny way as she gargled her throat.

Uzdechkin took her advice literally, throwing all the clothes, both the coloured and the white into the trough. He realized his mistake when the clothes turned green

from an old dyed dress of Olga Matveyevna's. At that moment Mariika came in for a moment to see what her neighbours were doing.

"Goodness!" she cried, glancing into the trough. "What a mess!"

She brought a clothes-boiler and helped Uzdechkin to wring out the clothes.

"If I'd known, I'd have changed my clothes," she said, eyeing her new pink blouse with regret. "If I spoil it, you'll have to buy me a new one, Fyodor Ivanovich."

"It'll be all right if you go," Uzdechkin was embarrassed. "I think I'll manage now. Or you'll really spoil that nice blouse."

"Was it made to be put in a glass case?" Mariika shouted at him.

"I knew it was Mariika," said Anna Ivanovna returning to the kitchen. "Where there's shouting there's always Mariika. I've come for a cigarette, Fyodor Ivanovich, mine have all run out."

Olya stood in the kitchen, watching her father and Mariika wash the clothes. When she got tired of that, she went away.

There was nothing for her to do in her room: Valya was away visiting friends; the grandmother was dozing, and there was nothing tempting on the table—only bread crumbs, the salt-cellar and the remains of porridge in a pan. Olya sighed and went to Anna Ivanovna's.

Only Tanya was there, kneeling on a chair reading a book with her elbows on the table. Her black plaits lay on the white table-cloth on either side of the book. Tanya raised her eyes and asked absent-mindedly: "Is that you?" "Yes," Olya replied in a thin voice, closing the door after her as Anna Ivanovna always instructed her to do.

Tanya paid no further attention to Olya, and the little

girl tip-toed about the room to see if there was anything new in it. There was. A big red apple was lying on a shelf. The best view of the apple was to be had from the rocking-chair. Olya stood still beside the rocking-chair, her eyes fixed on the apple.

Tanya finished the book, shut it, closed her eyes and put her cheek to the binding. *How the Steel Was Tempered*, said the title on the cover. Tears shone under Tanya's eye-lashes. She raised her head and saw near her a profile and a bright, clear, earnest eye, gazing in ecstasy at the shelf. Tanya burst out laughing and climbed down from the chair.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

Olya looked up at her.

"Who's the apple for?"

Tanya took a comb and started combing Olya's straight fair hair.

"The apple is for a very good little girl, who is always obedient—"

"Always?" Olya demanded.

"... and never naughty."

"Never, never?"

Her gaze grew sad: the apple was obviously not meant for her.

"You silly darling," Tanya said in the tone Anna Ivanovna usually used, cut the apple in two, and gave one of the pieces to Olya.

"We'll leave the other half for Valya," she said.

Olya held her half in both hands and hurried out of the room, forgetting the toy bed on the rocking-chair: Tanya might change her mind and take the apple back. When she reached the corridor she realized that it was unfair to leave the other half for Valya: for all she knew Valya might be eating apples at her girl friend's; Tanya ought to have given her the whole apple. Olya felt so miserable over the injustice of it that she began to cry. Nobody was

attracted by her crying: Mariika was shouting in the kitchen, drowning every other noise. Olya cried while she ate the apple and for a long time after, smearing the tears over her cheeks with dirty little fists. Finally, she said:

“Maybe there aren’t any apples at the party.”

And, blowing her nose into the hem of her frock, she went about the flat in search of new adventures.

It was a happy day for Tolka today: his turn had come for *The Count of Monte-Cristo*.

Alyoshka Malygin had brought the book to the team—he never said where he got it from. It was a thick book, so tattered from the many hands it had passed through that not only the margins but the ends of the lines were frayed. Alyoshka carried it with the utmost care—wrapped in a newspaper and tied with a bit of string. He said that once you started reading it you would not sleep or eat until you reached the end and that the chap who wrote it was a king among geniuses. In a trice there was a waiting list for the book and to make it fair the boys drew lots. Those who drew the last numbers indignantly announced that they were not willing to wait so long. They almost had a fight about it. There was such an uproar that the workers entering the shop had to stop up their ears.

“What’s the row about?” Korolkov demanded, going up to them.

He got no reply—nobody heard him. Mariika came up and even she could not shout the boys down. The noise continued until Vasya Surikov suggested splitting the book into three parts so that three boys could read it simultaneously: one would read the beginning, another would read the middle, and a third would take the end; then they would change among themselves. That way the book would go round three times as fast.

"See what a saving on time," Vasya said.

At first Alyoshka was hoggish about the idea, declaring that he would not allow anybody to split such a valuable book. But they proved to him that he was only being silly about it as the book had no cover anyway and the pages were falling apart. The book was divided on the spot, at the bench. The parts were numbered with red pencil, wrapped carefully and handed to the three lucky fellows who had drawn the first three lots.

The team fell ill for a whole month! After sleepless nights spent in reading, the boys came to work pale and physically worn out. All their talk was about the Count of Monte-Cristo. Many pages were missing and some of the boys could not follow the thread of events, but the others understood everything and excitedly offered explanations to those who did not understand; the latter listened spell-bound. Those who had not started it yet listened avidly, too.

Korolkov tried to restore order. Sasha Konevsky had a serious chat with the boys. Ryabukhin spoke to them and they were called to see the shop manager—nothing helped. There was some talk about the book having a harmful effect on production and that it might be a good idea to withdraw it altogether. But that only started another row.

"Over our dead bodies," said small Vasya Surikov, who had not yet read it and whose turn was next.

In the end Korolkov decided to let the boys' excitement run its course, there was no help for it—it was like an epidemic of scarlet fever.

"Only read it faster," he said. "It might help if you split that damned book into five parts!"

If you stayed at home on Sunday you might be asked to go to the baker's, the kerosene shop, or the chemist's; or Fyodor might ask you to help chop fire-wood; Valya and

Olya would be sure to yell and make a general nuisance of themselves, and Mother would groan. There was no peace there for a working-man.

So as soon as Tolka woke up, he slipped away to his tried friend Seryozhka.

Life was a bed of roses there. Seryozhka's father was now a lieutenant-colonel and was stationed in Tallinn. He had written to ask Seryozhka's mother to come and see the place; if she liked it the whole family could move there. Seryozhka's mother went to Tallinn, leaving Seryozhka and Genka in charge of the house. That was life!

Tolka brought *The Count of Monte-Cristo* wrapped in a newspaper. Seryozhka was standing over the electric range, cooking farina for Genka. He had promised his mother to look after Genka and was scrupulously keeping his word.

"Did you bring it?" he asked Tolka.

"Yes. Finish your cooking."

"In a minute. We've got to have our breakfast."

The farina was puffing laboriously, the bubbles rising and bursting noisily. Seryozhka added sugar, stirred it, and switched off the range.

"It's ready," he said, licking the spoon.

Genka was sitting on the floor, cutting out the figures from a pack of cards. He had finished with the kings and jacks; only the queens were left. They gave a lot of trouble—each had to be given a beard and a moustache, otherwise the platoon would not be complete.

"Genka, eat your breakfast!" Seryozhka said.

Genka lazily ate several spoonfuls and returned to his game with the cards. Seryozhka and Tolka made a hearty meal of it. When they had finished they found they were still hungry and ate some sauerkraut dressed with vegetable oil. That made them thirsty. First they drank cold water from the tap and then warm milk.

"I've arranged about the milk pretty well," Seryozhka said. "I don't have to go to the market for it—the milk-woman delivers it to the house. You see, Genka needs milk."

"Drink that poison yourself," said Genka, busily working with the scissors on the floor. "I want aerated water with syrup."

"Look how cheeky he's become lately," Seryozhka said. "I just don't know what to do with him."

Tolka took out some money.

"Here, Genka, do you hear me? Go and buy yourself some of that water. And some ice-cream."

"They don't sell ice-cream around here," Genka said, taking the money.

"There's an ice-cream stall near the market," Seryozhka said. "You know, just before you get to the market, there's a woman selling it. Only be careful and don't get under a car."

"I'll be careful," Genka promised, putting on his coat and walking out.

Tolka and Seryozhka were left alone. Tolka unwrapped *The Count of Monte-Cristo*.

Lukashin was sitting on a couch, bored and angry.

The room had a Sunday look about it—the table was covered with a richly designed table-cloth and there were new paper flowers, luxuriant roses and poppies, in the vase. Where cosiness was concerned Mariika had the magic touch. She had scrubbed the floor, put on a pink blouse and told Lukashin to put on his best suit; he obeyed. He had polished his boots and shaved. Now he was sitting alone in front of the flower vase like a fool while Mariika was still at Uzdechkin's.

He meditated terrible vengeance. All right, do as you wish, I'm not tying you down. But in that case allow me

to consider myself free, as well. When she comes I'll meet her with a frigid, "Well, at last! I've been waiting to talk seriously to you. We don't get along, whatever you say. You're not a steady sort of person. You haven't the makings of a wife! I'm moving to your old folks right away. And, please, no tears. Be good enough to give me my things—I didn't want to rummage in the chest-of-drawers without you, it isn't mine any longer."

At this point Mariika would burst into tears and try to persuade him to stay. But he would take his things and spend the night at Nikita Trofimovich's. He would have to stay there a week. No, a week was too long: three days. Every day Mariika would run to him at the shop and beg him to return. He would be inexorable for two days and relent on the third. But his terms would be stiff: she was not to run to other people's flats and if anybody wanted to borrow her clothes-boiler he was to come for it himself. Secondly, she was to be more tactful: it wasn't fair to admire the teeth of a bachelor neighbour when your husband had false teeth. Stuff and nonsense, you'd say. Morbid reaction, you'd say! Well, I'd like to see your reaction if *you* had false teeth.

Mariika flew into the room, a high colour in her cheeks and smelling of bleach and warmth. Lukashin threw a cursory, piercing glance at her and saw that her hands were red and the skin swollen. "She's been washing!" He was stung with pity. "Helping Uzdechkin!"

"Syoma, my dear, dear suffering husband, you must be dying of hunger and on top of everything you're sitting in the dark. You could at least have put the light on," she said from the threshold and rushed to the cupboard. "I'll have everything ready in a jiffy, the soup's hot on the stove; my darling, you must be starving—but just imagine Uzdechkin's predicament. A leading worker and not a living soul to look after him." Plates, spoons and glasses appeared on the table as if by magic, Mariika

dashed into the kitchen and raced back, and before Lukashin could remonstrate he found himself seated at the table, drinking vodka and eating a piece of pie.

"Just imagine!" Mariika said, her kind eyes opened wide. "He gets a good salary, his rations are all anybody would want and yet he can't make ends meet! That's the way all you men are—you don't know how to live! I don't care what you say, Syoma, but a woman in the house makes all the difference."

The pie was stuffed with potatoes and mushrooms. The potatoes had been grown by Mariika and the mushrooms dried by her. As he chewed the pie Lukashin thought that he would not go to Nikita Trofimovich's today after all. The opportunity for a serious talk had been lost. He would bring it up some other time. Mariika had hurt his feelings unthinkingly, without malicious intent. Lack of thought did not deserve such stern punishment. Then, he was too lazy to drag himself to the other end of the settlement after a good dinner, especially as he would have to carry a heavy suitcase.

Mirzoyev came in.

"Bon appetit."

"Would you like some pie?" Mariika asked. "Forgive me for not offering vodka, but Syoma's drunk it all."

"I've brought some of my own. Look," Mirzoyev said and showed two bottles, pulling them by the necks out of his pockets. "Don't forget our plans, neighbour."

"Plenty of time," Lukashin said, chewing. "A little later. I want to lie down after dinner."

"What are you up to?" Mariika demanded.

"We thought we'd give Uzdechkin a look in," Mirzoyev replied. "Of course, you know the kind of life he's got!"

"What about the cinema?" Mariika cried, turning angrily on Lukashin.

"That's out," Lukashin said, very pleased that he could

get even with Mariika for her giddy behaviour. "You can go without me if you want. We're getting up a stag party for tonight."

"Daddy," Olya asked, "is it true that we had a mother?"

"Yes, it's true," Uzdechkin replied. "That's her, as if you didn't know."

Olya, in a night-shirt, was lying on the bed and he was cutting the nails on her feet. Nyura's portrait hung on the opposite wall—she had a permanent wave and her simple eyes, bewitchingly bright under the plucked eyebrows, were raised with a dreamy expression.

"You're like a mother," Olya said. Half of her face was buried in the pillow, giving the impression that the other half was somewhat swollen. That made her small lips seem crooked and a little swollen, too. "You do everything for us. I don't remember Mother, I remember only you."

She said that to creep into his good graces.

"I love you," she said.

"Are you going to keep quiet or not?" Uzdechkin demanded. He stroked the silken hair on her warm little head and wanted to leave.

"What about the sweet?" Olya asked.

"You give me a headache, daughter!" Uzdechkin said, giving her a sweet.

The door-bell rang. Mirzoyev came in, followed by Lukashin. Mirzoyev looked as though he had come to a birthday party. Lukashin shyly kept behind his back.

"We've come to see you, neighbour," Mirzoyev announced. "We're not intruding, I hope?"

Uzdechkin led them into the room. He was sure they had come on business, with a request or a complaint.

"Good evening, grandmother!" Mirzoyev cheerfully greeted Olga Matveyevna. "Would it be too much trouble to put the kettle on? You know how it is, a glass of hot tea after a bottle or two."

"What bottle?" Uzdechkin asked in bewilderment. "What's it all about, comrades?"

Lukashin backed away to the door.

"I hope," pleaded Mirzoyev, putting a hand over his heart, "that you will not take it as a lack of respect or something of the kind if we ask you to join us."

"I don't drink."

"Even a siskin drinks," Mirzoyev said, gently touching Uzdechkin's elbow. "Excuse my saying it, I naturally didn't mean it as a comparison. You see, Comrade Lukashin and I thought we'd like a drink seeing it's Sunday, but we'd soon bore each other stiff if we had it alone. So I suggested asking the neighbour to make up a threesome."

"You've made a mistake, comrades. I can't join you."

Uzdechkin vacillated. He wanted the men's company very much, but he was afraid. Mirzoyev was Listopad's chauffeur. What if later Listopad were suddenly to say, "The chairman of the factory committee gets drunk with my chauffeur."

Mirzoyev was puzzled. He could not understand how anybody could be inhospitable to men, who came with open hearts and their own wine! Lukashin, who was already in the corridor, called:

"Let's go."

"Fyodor Ivanovich," Mirzoyev said, "you're joking. There's no harm in having a drink."

"I haven't the time, comrades," Uzdechkin said. "I've got work to do."

Mirzoyev had made such a grand entry; what could he say now to cover his retreat?

"Is that a fact?" he said lamely. "Indeed, you don't even get a chance to rest."

"It's the kind of job I have," Uzdechkin responded, feigning a smile.

"Yes, indeed," Mirzoyev offered, managing a smile,

too. "Well, it can't be helped, I suppose. Good-bye. Excuse us for intruding."

They returned home in silence.

"Back so soon?" Mariika said, opening the door for them. "He didn't let you in, or what?"

"An unsociable sort," said Mirzoyev.

"We didn't hit with him," put in Lukashin. "But, then, why should he drink with us? All right, he's a neighbour, but what of it? After all, he's one of the higher-ups while we're only small fry. What about the vodka, is it to be wasted?"

"Why should it be?" Mirzoyev said, knitting his brows. He was in no mood for drinking. "We'll drink it."

They sat down at the table in Mariika's room and gloomily drank the vodka.

CHAPTER TWELVE

TROUBLES AT HOME AND AT WORK

One day during the summer the collector of trade union dues from the tool-shop ran in to see Uzdechkin and told him that he had a stomach-ache and the doctor had advised him to go home. He begged Uzdechkin to take the dues—the cashier was at the bank and he did not want to carry the money about with him. Uzdechkin took the money, promising to turn it over to the cashier as soon as he returned. It was a thick package, wrapped in paper with the sum scrawled on it in pencil. In fact it was so thick that he could hardly stuff it into his trouser pocket. At first it felt awkward because of its bulk, but soon he forgot about it. He had never carried trade union money about with him. He remembered the package in the crush in the tram and touched his pocket. It was empty.

He broke out in a sweat. The crowd pressed him and swept him out of the tram. It went on and Uzdechkin stood at the corner, unable to pull himself together.

He had been in a hurry to get to town, but now he could not even remember why he had come. He saw a bench in the square in front of him. He dragged himself to it and sat down.

It would be very hard to return that money.

He was so morbidly touchy that it never occurred to him to report the loss and to ask for a loan which he could pay back in installments. The stolen money had been collected ruble by ruble from the workers. It had been stolen because of his absent-mindedness.

He got up from the bench and walked out of the square—his legs felt as though they were made of cotton wool. He sold his wrist-watch at the nearest watch-maker's. Then he went to an old acquaintance, who generally had money to spare. They went to the savings bank together and the friend lent Uzdechkin two thousand rubles. His mother-in-law had four hundred rubles put away for a rainy day. Uzdechkin took that money as well. He borrowed from the mutual aid fund. Pay day came round just then and that helped. Three days later he gave the cashier the full amount received from the collector. The collector had been ill and had not made enquiries so the incident passed off quietly and unnoticed. But Uzdechkin found himself heavily in debt. Since then he had been paying the money back with three-fourths of his salary. The remainder was not enough for the barest necessities and he had no alternative but to sink deeper and deeper into debt.

On V-J Day Uzdechkin's feelings were badly wounded by Listopad.

That evening he returned home late from the House of Culture. A hamper, standing on the table, caught his eye

as soon as he turned on the light. It was neatly packed in glossy white paper and tied with a white string. Under the string was a card with "Fyodor Ivanovich Uzdechkin" written on it in a fine, beautiful hand—nothing else.

Who was it from? Why had it been sent to him?

He roused Olga Matveyevna.

"Who brought this?"

"The director's chauffeur. A present from the director for the holiday."

Before the war Listopad loved making small presents to his subordinates on holidays. And now, after the war, he decided to revive his old custom. Why not show a little attention to people; it would please them. Nothing special, just a few nice things: some fruit, snacks and a bottle of good wine. He would send presents to the assistant directors, shop managers and his good friend Ryabukhin, a lonely bachelor, who had nobody to brighten his holidays for him, save his landlady who sometimes treated him to dumplings. When the list was ready, it suddenly struck Listopad that he might cheer up Uzdechkin as well. Let him, too, receive a share of the director's attention.

The presents were delivered by Mirzoyev. It was something he didn't particularly care to do—he had to rush from house to house, playing the generous uncle and giving out presents. He delivered the last parcel to Uzdechkin on his way home to rest after the day's labours.

Uzdechkin stared at the parcel as though it were a time-bomb and he wasn't sure when it would explode. He touched it—there were tinned food, fruit and a bottle. Suddenly he felt terribly hurt. He seized the parcel and dashed out to Mirzoyev's flat.

No one answered the bell for a long time. Finally, Mariika sleepily opened the door.

"Which is Mirzoyev's room?" he demanded.

Mirzoyev was sleeping as soundly as a baby and did not wake up when Uzdechkin entered and switched the light on. He only smacked his lips and softly mumbled some incoherent words. Uzdechkin had to shake him by the shoulder for about two minutes before he opened his eyes.

"Listen," Uzdechkin said, bending over him, "tomorrow—do you hear?—tomorrow morning you'll take this back to the director. Understand? Take it back and give it to him. To the director. Understand? First thing in the morning."

Mirzoyev sat up in bed and gazed as though through a mist at the heavy object placed on his knees. At first he thought he was dreaming. He had spent half the day delivering presents and now he seemed to be dreaming that somebody had come to him and brought him a present, too. Then he grasped what was the matter and said, "All right, Fyodor Ivanovich." "You needn't worry," he added when he saw that Uzdechkin was still there, repeating what he had already said. But the moment Uzdechkin left, sleep overpowered Mirzoyev. He lay down on his pillow, his leg twitched—the parcel dropped to the floor—and he fell fast asleep without caring if nobody closed the door after Uzdechkin.

All the shops, except Grushevoi's, overfulfilled their plan in September. Somehow Grushevoi could not get started. He delivered his orders behind schedule. At the factory people were already saying that under peacetime conditions Grushevoi was not up to the mark.

Uzdechkin was the first to utter that phrase—he had drawn attention to Grushevoi a long time ago! But Listopad was still impermissibly liberal with him.

It was easy to be a good shop manager when everybody danced to your tune. When you're given priority on

equipment, personnel and materials. When you're respected and given awards and wage increases. Show that you're a good manager now, on peace-time production, when there's no advantage in the orders you get.

Uzdechkin called a meeting of the factory committee, which heard the report of the trade union organizer of the former special shop and wrote down a stern criticism of Grushevoi in the minutes.

Tolka had been moody for a fortnight now.

Seryozhka was gone! His mother had come for him and Genka and had taken them away to Tallinn, to their father. Tolka had helped to carry the luggage. Seryozhka's aunt came from the country to see her sister and nephews off.

"So you didn't come back to stay with me, after all," she said, when she saw Tolka.

The very sight of the aunt made Tolka feel wretched—she had become a memory, associated with Seryozhka.

That was how cruel fate broke up the finest of friendships. You know a splendid chap who can always be relied on—and then suddenly he is gone.

Life became empty without Seryozhka. They promised to write to each other, but what were letters—

At home things were going from bad to worse. True, his mother was up and about and had begun to look after the household, but that did not make it any easier. She was always losing things, either the potato knife or the broom or the kitchen towel. She had but to pick something up to lose it the next moment. She would look suspiciously at Tolka and ask:

"Tolka, you didn't by any chance take the knife?"

Fyodor was like that, too. If the girls took his pencil or if the axe was misplaced, his first reaction was to ask, "Tolka, did you take it?"

"What do they want?" Tolka thought. "Why are they picking on me? I haven't taken anything of theirs for ages. Not since I chummed up with Seryozhka, but they're still after me."

Tolka was arriving at the painful conclusion that it was easy to get a bad name and very hard to get rid of it.

Lately the family found itself very hard up. Tolka could not see why. Debts and loans were all they spoke about these days.

It was a dismal life.

Anna Ivanovna and Tanya were kind to him now. Once they used to lock their room for fear he would go in, but now they were always inviting him in and treating him to something, "Come in, Tolya. Try some of this. If you wish you can stay here and read." But there was nothing there that interested him. They had their own lives to lead and he had his. He preferred to go to the young people's settlement, to the fellows.

It was fine there now! The whole place had been painted, inside and out. New stoves had been put in and the yard was stacked with fire-wood. The fellows heated the stoves themselves, as much as they wanted. Each now had a bed, a night-table and a wooden chest for his clothes. In every room there was a big table with a lamp above it and chairs around it. Two of the houses had verandahs. These had been made habitable in winter and equipped as gymnasiums. The girls lived like princesses in their hostel. They had even put up curtains that they had made themselves and had pots of flowers on the window-sills.

The director promised the young people that next summer all the houses would have verandahs equipped as gymnasiums and that trees would be planted round the houses and flower-beds laid out.

The boys liked their houses and did everything they could to keep them clean, appointing monitors for the

purpose. In their preparations for International Youth Day they scoured the floors cleaner than any ship deck. That day the director sent a truck-load of presents, and each got a fruit cake and a packet of biscuits and sweets as though he were a child in a kindergarten, while a library of five hundred books was presented to the settlement. He was a good sort, the director was.

There were some decent fellows in the settlement, but who could replace Seryozhka? Who had his all-round and profound knowledge of life and his broad, clear mind? With whom could he share such mutual understanding and sympathy that even when they said nothing to each other they were still good company?

"Come and live at our place, Ryzhov," said fair-headed Vasya Surikov, the one with the girlish face. He played the guitar and was the life and soul of his dormitory. "Petka Cheremnykh will soon be getting a room—his family is coming from the village to live with him—so move in or some bore might be foisted on us."

Tolka looked about him. It was bright and quiet, the radio was on and the room was so warm you could walk around in your singlet. Nobody bothered you, all were busy with their own affairs: Vasya Surikov was patching his trousers, two fellows were reading and two others were playing draughts. Tolka sighed. He wanted to stay here. He did not want to go back to his hateful family where they were always nagging each other.

"Adrian Adrianovich," Tolka said to Korolkov, "will you please ask them to let me live in the settlement. There'll be a vacancy soon."

Korolkov was a member of the factory committee and knew of Tolka's relationship to Uzdechkin.

"As far as I know you're living with your family," he said with a puzzled look.

"I'd rather live separately," Tolka said.

"You're a funny chap," Korolkov said. "It's beyond me how anybody could prefer that!"

"It happens," Tolka replied, "that strangers are sometimes better than your own family."

"Think what you're saying," Korolkov snapped. "Sometimes you blurt out things like that without thinking that people are listening and can cause unpleasantness for Uzdechkin."

"Do you for a moment imagine that Fyodor would be against it?" Tolka asked. "He'd be only too glad."

"Nonsense," Korolkov said. "I refuse to listen to you. You're too young to go about disgracing respected workers. You must learn to live together! When something happens that you don't like, have patience, keep your mouth shut and give way to your elders. No, I shan't make any applications on your behalf. If you can't live with your own family you'll certainly not get along in the hostel. You may go."

Tolka came home from work in a hideous mood. His mother and Valya, who now went to school, were at home; Olya had not yet returned from the kindergarten. His mother did not ask him if he was hungry. Her idea was that Tolka could look after himself. Besides, the family was in difficulties.

"You might change your boots," she said in that tone of timorous dislike and irritation that she always used when she spoke to her son. "My back hurts from sweeping the room and here you're dragging dirt in. Put on your felt boots! If Fedya comes in he'll start a row."

For her Fyodor was Fedya, Nyura had been darling Nyura, and their children were dear Valya and dear Olya, while he, her youngest son, was simply Tolka.* The reason was that Fedya and darling Nyura fed and

* The endearment is Tolya.—*Tr.*

clothed her and she was the housekeeper in a prosperous household. Tolka gave her nothing. As far as Tolka was concerned she was a slave who sold her affection to the highest bidder.

He blinked angrily and went to the window, turning his back to his mother. It was wet and muddy outside. Though he did not particularly want to go out in this weather, it looked as though he would have to change his clothes and clear out—to the young people's settlement, the cinema, anywhere as long as he did not have to stay at home with them. If only it would snow soon! He could go out for walks in his warm felt boots. He was fed up with autumn. He was sick and tired of this foul, dirty-grey, ragged sky—you could not tell the clouds from the factory smoke.

He thought he would like a cigarette. He slapped his trouser pockets like a grown-up, took out his cigarettes and lit one. At that moment Uzdechkin returned home from work.

He had often seen Tolka smoking and had paid no attention to it. But today, the sight of the lad standing with his back to him and smoking infuriated him. He rushed to him, seized him by the collar and dragged him to the door:

"Go and smoke outside, you young rascal!"

"What are you doing!" Tolka muttered between his teeth, struggling. "What are you doing!"

"Fedya! Tolka!" Olga Matveyevna cried plaintively, half-rising from her chair.

She was afraid that they might fight.

When the outer door slammed behind Tolka's back and Uzdechkin returned to the room, she calmed down. Fedya of course had been wrought up, but no harm would come to Tolka. He would have his cigarette outside. Fedya was right. He had no business filling the house with smoke.

The next morning Ryabukhin walked into Uzdechkin's office.

"Fyodor Ivanovich," he began quietly and seriously, "this looks bad. That boy relation of yours is asking for a place in the settlement. Have you turned him out, or what? I don't care what you say, but we cannot tolerate such things among us."

Uzdechkin felt as though he were choking—heaven knows, he had enough troubles.

"Wait," he said. "What's all this about? I never turned him out. I told him to smoke outside."

"Well, while you were pushing him out Mariika Vede-neyeva was going up the stairs and saw everything. Konevsky saw me about it—he was quite upset I can tell you. That boy of yours isn't studying, didn't even finish middle school. How is that, Fyodor Ivanovich? How did you let matters reach such a pass? How did it happen that this boy, living at home with his family, was left entirely to his own devices, and even had his meals separately? You're a man of high standing. I simply can't understand it!"

Uzdechkin made no reply, collecting his thoughts. The attack had been unexpected.

"Now he's asking to be allowed to live in the settlement and won't hear of going back home," Ryabukhin went on. "You've embittered him. He says that at home you all regard him as a thief though he never stole anything."

"He's lying!" Uzdechkin shouted, bringing his fist down on the table.

"Well," said Ryabukhin, "if he was a thief that doesn't do you any credit, Fyodor Ivanovich. But why isn't he studying?"

Uzdechkin was silent.

"Why was he separated from the family as far as meals are concerned?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," Uzdechkin said in an

embarrassed tone. "It all started before I came back. I know nothing about it."

Ryabukhin looked into his eyes.

"You don't know? But you're the chairman of the factory committee, a prominent person at the factory! The boy spent the night with his friends in the settlement and they've spread the story all over the shop. After work he went to see Konevsky and Konevsky came to me. I had a talk with the boy and asked him to hold his tongue. I'm saving your reputation! Do you realize what people are thinking? A leading worker, called upon to train non-Party workers—and his own son runs away from home because he's treated badly."

"He's no son of mine!"

"That makes no difference, Fyodor Ivanovich. You understand that perfectly well yourself. We're persuading people to take in orphans from children's homes, but look what's happening right here in our midst."

Ryabukhin stopped talking for a moment.

"You go about finding fault with Listopad. If he makes you angry that's your business. If you fight him and the fight is over a principle, I don't mind. I agree that he's mistaken about a lot of things. But when it comes to being human—I can forgive him a hundred sins if only for his attitude to young people, never mind anything else!"

"I must reconcile the two of them," he thought to himself as he left Uzdechkin. "I'll get Makarov to talk Listopad into it."

"Alexander Ignatyevich," Makarov said, speaking over the telephone, "will you please come to see me. It's urgent."

Listopad was busy at the factory, but he put aside his affairs and drove to the committee office. He was on good terms with Makarov. The latter rarely interfered in his work and when he did he was very tactful about it. Grad-

ually Listopad formed the opinion that Makarov was clever and very careful, one of those men who measures his cloth ten times, knowing that he can cut it only once. "The very opposite of Ryabukhin," thought Listopad. "The minute anything strikes Ryabukhin, he lets you know about it. But Makarov saves his breath and when he says anything you can be certain that it's necessary and he's sure of himself."

Makarov was a tall man, but he stooped and that made him look shorter than he really was. His face was broad and pale, his voice even. He had the white hands of a man who had not done manual labour for a long time.

Listopad did not quite understand him but he tried to get along with him.

Makarov was not alone. Ryabukhin was seated in an arm-chair opposite him. That put Listopad on the alert. As he shook hands with Makarov he said casually:

"On the way I tried to guess what the urgent business might be."

"I have to speak to you, Alexander Ignatyevich. Please sit down," he indicated an arm-chair with a slow movement. "About life and work, and the soul, and other similar things. We have to speak about Uzdechkin!" he concluded abruptly in a sharp tone, rapping the table with his knuckles.

Listopad was stung to the quick. Nobody at the town committee had ever spoken to him in that tone!

Everything depended on your relations with people from the very beginning. There were people who were always saying sharp things to your face and you felt no worse for it; you even liked it. But his relations here were different. In the course of three years he had grown used to polite and tactful treatment. This sudden change of tone surprised him.

Were they out to heal the breach between him and Uzdechkin?

Listopad sat down, resting his elbows easily on the arms of the chair.

"I see!" he said. "Who is supposed to apologize to whom? I to Uzdechkin or Uzdechkin to me? And are we to kiss or not? I can't make a step without having Uzdechkin cast in my teeth."

"No matter where we step," said Makarov, "we are confronted with the question of man, our Soviet man, the builder and defender of our future."

"That's too general," Listopad remarked. "That definition fits every Soviet citizen."

"Including Uzdechkin," Makarov said.

"The whole difficulty, as I see it," Listopad said, "is that actually nothing is happening between Uzdechkin and me. We don't understand each other, but that's because our natures and tastes are different. I doubt if anything can be done about it."

"This business of 'not understanding each other' as you put it, has different forms," Makarov said. "And no matter what form it takes the Party cannot tolerate it. No matter how natures and tastes differ there is always a basis on which two Communists can see eye to eye. That basis is their membership in the Party and their duty to it. The Party cannot order you to like Uzdechkin. But it is your duty to create normal conditions for his work."

"The more so as he is a man who deserves it," Ryabukhin put in.

"Friends!" Listopad said with good-natured helplessness. "Supposing I have his office done up in marble—he likes marble—will that make him feel better?"

"Alexander Ignatyevich," Ryabukhin protested with a frown, "this is serious. He felt differently when he first returned from the army."

"I don't have to tell you," Makarov said, "into what channels the strength of the whole people will now be directed. And if your new era begins with misunderstanding-

ings between the management and the trade union, all I can say is that it's a very poor beginning. You allude to different tastes and inclinations—I don't know. It's not my business. I cannot go into such subtleties. But speaking objectively, it looks as though you cannot take self-criticism and sometimes deviate from principles."

"That's a grave accusation," Listopad pointed out.

"Many things assume a different light when viewed objectively," Makarov said. "I could bring another, no less grave accusation against you."

"Why don't you?"

"Because I know how stubborn you are. If I tell you, you won't believe me and you'll argue. You'll soon see your mistake."

"What mistake?"

"You're making a whirlpool of your life, Alexander Ignatyevich. You don't give yourself the time to look around. Find yourself a moment's breathing space and you'll see your mistake."

"We all make mistakes. Tell me what you mean."

"I mean your method of managing the factory. You don't seem to have noticed that the war is over."

"So that's it—I haven't noticed?"

"Or you haven't attached the proper importance to it. You can't go on running the factory as it was run during the war. Of course, it's very spectacular when a machine can't be set going without the director. But objectively speaking, that verges upon suppressing, upon usurping the functions of others."

Listopad, who had turned red, looked at Ryabukhin.

"Is that what you think, too?"

"The moment a new five-year plan is announced," Ryabukhin replied quietly, "we'll have a flood of initiative! You won't be able to run things singlehanded."

Listopad got up, moving back his arm-chair:

"Then give me stronger people! The kind who could teach me something."

"Uzdechkin is a selfless and honest worker," Ryabukhin declared with conviction.

"The Party organization," Makarov said, "cannot go into natures and tastes—that material is far too brittle and dubious. But the Party organization can and must shield a comrade. You will have to live in peace with the man who, by the will of the workers, is working at your side and who has no stain on his name."

"All right," Listopad said with a hard glint in his eyes, "I'll live in peace with him."

"Ryabukhin," Makarov said, his glance following Listopad as he went out, "you're too angelic for Listopad!"

"When I was trying to get the last director removed," Ryabukhin retorted lightly, "nobody seemed to notice my being too angelic."

"You're too soft for him. A man like that needs a Party organizer who is as hard as flint. You like him and you're biased."

"He's got talent," Ryabukhin said. "Do you by any chance remember the Gospel?" Makarov looked up in surprise. Ryabukhin burst out laughing. "When I was a young chap I knew it by heart. I studied it to be able to carry on anti-religious propaganda and to prevent the church people from taking me unawares with their quotations during debates. Well, there's a remarkable parable of the talents."

"I remember it," Makarov said.

"That bit about the man who hid his talent in the earth—it calls him a 'wicked and slothful servant!' Good, eh? Can you think of words as forceful as those?"

"Wicked and slothful servant," Makarov repeated with satisfaction. "Well put!"

"Listopad does not hide his talent. He's no servant and he's neither slothful nor wicked. He burns with enthusiasm and is not consumed by the flame."

"We have talented people all around us," Makarov said. "They, too, are not slothful or wicked and are not a whit less enthusiastic than your Listopad. But that's not the point. The point is—" Makarov thought for a moment. "The point is that while carrying out their duties some people sacrifice something of their own. They do it readily and understand the object, and every minute they are conscious that they are doing their duty. But people like Listopad don't sacrifice anything, they do not consider they have a duty to fulfil, they do not feel themselves bound by any obligation; they are organically, almost physically merged with their work. You see, he takes the success of a job as a personal success and it's the same when something fails, not from any thought of his career, but because he has no life other than his work. Other people think of the five-year plan in terms of the factory, while for him it's five years of his own life, his destiny, his life's interest. That gives him his purpose and passion, his sweep, his zeal and scope, anything you like."

"You'll find there are many people like him," Ryabukhin said thoughtfully.

"Quite right," Makarov agreed, rising and arranging the papers on his table. "But not everybody gets the elbow-room his temperament needs." He assumed an official tone, "And Listopad has plenty of elbow-room."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LOVE

The chief designer had been right when he had compared himself with Raphael.

"Logically speaking," thought Nonna, "the process of creation in an artist must be the same as in a designer of

machines." That, she thought, was particularly applicable to poets.

Whatever Nonna did it had to be founded on an inner feeling that it was essentially necessary. "That," she thought, "is the seed of a new machine, of a poem, and of all life on earth." That feeling worried her, prevented her from thinking of anything else, and forced her to seek a way of satisfying it. Consolidating and taking shape, it formed an idea. The designer dresses his idea in metal and a poet dresses his in words. The metal combines to form machine units, and words—stanzas. Finally, comes the turn of the last nut or last full stop, and the creative idea is brought to life, becomes a thing which goes to people and takes its place in the world of things—a machine or a poem, it makes no difference since the process of creation is the same.

"And how strange," she thought, pressing her hands together, "that love should follow similar paths."

It all began with a feeling, sudden and sharp as an injection—two people impulsively looked into each other's eyes and—

She had been carrying about with her a sense of uneasiness for several days. It prevented her from thinking about anything else, and sought an outlet.

The only way out was to see him.

She saw him on very rare occasions. Sometimes he came up to her and they exchanged a few commonplaces. Most often he did not come.

Sometimes she heard his footsteps in the corridor. They were fast and firm—she learned to distinguish them from the others.

And when she heard those footsteps or when somebody spoke of him in her presence she felt her whole body stiffening and a warmth creeping into her breast.

She never went out of the designing office when she heard his footsteps. Her feminine pride, stronger than love, forbade her. But she knew he wanted her to go out. And she trembled with joy. She knew he felt just as she did. How did she know? Who told her? How do these things happen?

Will the day come when without fear, care or thought—without worrying whether we may or may not—we will glance into each other's eyes? What will you say to me? This is what I shall tell you, but what will you tell me?

The footsteps came to a stop at the door of the designing office, but he did not enter. Men, too, had pride. Then, perhaps, he wasn't so confident of their future as she was.

But one day he entered. The designers were busy over their T-squares and slide-rules.

He said:

"Good morning, comrades."

They responded to his greeting all together.

He took one or two steps and stopped, an unlit cigarette between his fingers. Nonna fought hard to restrain a smile.

"How are you getting on without Vladimir Ippolitovich?" he asked. "Are you missing him?"

Somebody laughed. Someone else struck a match and held it out to him. Nonna sat at her desk without turning her head. He asked when they expected the drawings for the hot-cutting saw to be ready and spoke about the weather, stealing a fleeting glance at Nonna. He said the office would soon be heated better and stopped near the model of a machine he had seen dozens of times. Then he went up to one of the draughtswomen:

"What is this?" he asked, spending several minutes over a drawing of a machine unit.

But there was nothing to keep him there, although he tried to find an excuse. The visit, therefore, did not drag out.

"Well, comrades," he said finally, "so everything is all right here?"

They assured him that it was and he went away.

The designer with whom he had spoken about the saw and the weather, said:

"Can anyone tell me why he came?"

Nonna laughed loudly, giving an outlet to her joy. Nobody joined her. They liked the director and thought it was bad form to laugh at him. It was remarkable, Nonna reflected, how much people thought of him.

That meeting was like a crust of bread to a hungry man.

The plan finally arrived from Moscow. It was called the Plan of Development of the Factory for 1946-50. But from the very start everybody called it the post-war five-year plan.

At the factory all the talk, official and private, was about the plan. January 1, 1946 loomed before everybody's eyes as a door opening into a big road.

Martyanov, who was in on all the news at the factory, said to Vedeneyev:

"Grushevoi, the manager of the special—"

"What about him?" asked Vedeneyev.

"He's packing his bags."

"Why?"

"He was saying the other day in front of everybody that if he's forced to put out spare parts he'd go to Zotov, to the aircraft plant."

"Let him go," Vedeneyev said coldly. "Nobody'll cry."

"Don't forget that during the war he soared like a falcon," Martyanov remarked.

"You see," Vedeneyev began tutorially, "people used

to say that a war at once sifts the good from the bad. But let me tell you that in these days we've got the same and maybe a sterner test before us. The new five-year plan will re-tag everyone of us—it will separate the creator and the builder from the miserable hanger-on. Grushevoi, quite naturally, will now start a rush to look where the work is easiest and where the Orders lie closest. During the war everybody nursed him and so he soared like a falcon. Under peace-time conditions he is quite definitely below the mark. Let him go to Zotov."

Nikita Trofimovich very much wanted Grushevoi to leave Kruzhilikha.

Not because Grushevoi was below the mark. Nikita Trofimovich regarded those things philosophically. In the Soviet Union there were hundreds of thousands of directors, assistant directors, shop managers, assistant managers, heads of departments, chief book-keepers, and business managers. Was it possible to demand that all be up to the mark? Nikita Trofimovich did not think so.

During his time the factory had had eleven directors. Those who coped with the work were given higher appointments and transferred somewhere else. Those who did not were transferred too. There had been a similar stream of assistant directors. Sometimes an assistant proved much more capable than the director. Nikita Trofimovich remembered a case when an assistant and a director changed places. The result was that both coped with their work splendidly and a year later they were promoted and transferred. One, if he remembered correctly, was transferred to the Party apparatus, and the other to the Supreme Council of the National Economy—that was a long time ago.

Nikita Trofimovich had no use for Grushevoi because of his visits to Nonna. "You're a married man," Nikita Trofimovich thought jealously, "and you shouldn't be running after unmarried women. It's embarrassing, makes

people talk, and is a bad example for the youth." He was dead set against Nonna marrying. He realized that it was unreasonable and cruel, but he could not help it. He was willing to let her stay in his house for good as Andrei's widow. Sometimes he thought she repented but was too proud to show it. Oh, how he hoped she had repented, mourned for Andrei and decided to be faithful to his memory all her life! She would then be dearer to him than any daughter, as dear as Pavel.

One fine day Grushevoi rang up the designing office and asked for Nonna.

"Nonna Sergeyevna," he said abruptly, "you're avoiding me, you don't answer the door-bell when I know that you're at home. But I seriously beg you to receive me to-day on business that concerns my entire future."

She attentively listened to the voice. The man sounded angry—there would be no confessions of love.

"Couldn't we have a talk in the office?" she asked.

"No! Spare me that at least. I shan't take more than ten minutes of your time."

"All right, I'll be expecting you."

Of course, he stayed not ten minutes but two hours—but never mind, that was his last visit. He was bitter in his reproaches, saying that she had ruined his future. The director had told him today that his shop would be equipped to produce tractor parts on a mass scale. His shop would be making things called sprayers! A shop that had distinguished itself over and over again during the war! He would be manager of a shop making sprayers! How would he face people who respected him? It was the end of him, of everything! And who was responsible for it? She! She, whom he had idolized! There was nothing in the factory's five-year plan about spare parts! The director said: "It's Nonna Sergeyevna's idea."

"Did he say that?" Nonna asked and stopped listening to Grushevoi.

Just before he left he shouted that Zotov would have him now and that Listopad had no right to detain him for the devil knew what, and ran out of the house like a madman. Nonna thought he was on the verge of tears as he ran. She followed him downstairs and locked the door after him—he was nowhere to be seen. She did not think of Grushevoi but kept repeating to herself, "It's Nonna Sergeyevna's idea," and tried to imagine the voice that said it.

The next morning Listopad rang her up at the office. "Nonna Sergeyevna," he said, "good morning, Nonna Sergeyevna. I've troubled you to tell you that I've decided to take your advice and to put Grushevoi's shop on to making tractor parts."

"That's not what you rang me up for," she thought, "you're glad you've got this excuse."

Aloud, she said:

"I'm very happy. It was the right thing to do."

"I'm not sure," he said, "the shop people aren't very happy about it. Like you, they dreamed of something bigger." He sounded excited, happy. "So you see, Nonna Sergeyevna—"

"I'm very happy," she repeated.

She waited for him to say something else. He, too, was silent and waited for her to speak. But what could she say? She couldn't very well carry on a flirt over the telephone. After a few seconds she said:

"Thank you, Alexander Ignatyevich. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he replied.

That was all the conversation. How long did it last? A minute?

They met once at a turning in the corridor in the management building. She was turning a corner quickly and he almost bumped into her, started and forgot to greet her. She smiled and went on. Hearing his footsteps receding behind her, she thought:

"Before we know it the winter and the summer will pass without bringing about what ought to happen. Since it has to be why postpone it? I'll go halfway out to meet my destiny."

Lida Yeryomina tortured Sasha Konevsky by all the rules of the cruel science of love.

She began torturing him from the moment she noticed he was in love with her, and gave him no quarter. Boys had to be tortured otherwise they'd grow vain.

To Sasha's suggestions that they go together to the House of Culture or to the cinema, she would say:

"I don't know, I think somebody's already invited me."

When Sasha tried to persuade her that her happiness lay in marrying him, she said:

"No, no! I'm too young, I have to study. I think I'll go to a school in Moscow."

"Why," he asked earnestly, "why can't you study here?"

"Because I'm sick of everything here!" Lida replied.

When she saw that Sasha's patience was about to burst and that his young pride would triumph over love, she would wear the blue frock that set her apart from all earthly beings and abstractly say that only girls were capable of a deep and selfless feeling while with young men it was all words. That invariably put Sasha where she wanted him. Courageous, honest and well-read Sasha Konevsky, member of the bureau of the town Komsomol Committee, was helpless before a slim girl with blue eyes.

He might not have loved her so dearly if he heard her shouting in the shop just once. But he did not hear and when anybody told him he refused to believe it.

Lida was shrewd. When Sasha fell in love with her she stopped her shouting, although these days there was any amount of justification for it and it wasn't easy to keep a check on herself. The shop was being re-equipped. Some machines were moved aside and sealed; others were

brought in and installed. They no longer worked for the army and that constant tension and beautiful rhythm that Lida adored had disappeared. Sometimes no material was delivered for days on end and the workers had nothing to do. Grushevoi would then let them go home, saying:

"Take a day off."

Lida's father had been demobilized and was back again at his old job of engine-driver, so if Lida wished she could have given up her work at the factory and gone to school. But she was reluctant to leave the shop.

The things that were happening there now did not suit her at all; still it was only temporary, they said. Everybody would find his place in the five-year plan. Meanwhile, Lida spent her free time looking over the machines. She liked the turning and milling machines, particularly the portable turning machine. "Made specially for my hands," she thought, admiring it. Nevertheless she decided she would operate a stamping machine—after getting into the rhythm, she could develop a high productivity. She was used to playing first fiddle and had no intention of retiring into the shade.

A girl she knew in the management rang her up and told her that the planning department needed a typist and she thought Lida might want the job. The work was easy and Lida could learn to type very quickly.

"Not on your life!" thought Lida with a pretty grimace. "Not much fun being a typist." Aloud she politely thanked her friend. The latter urged her to accept, "Just think, Lida, you'll work in a clean room free of grease and dirt, there'll always be educated people about and you won't spoil your nails." The bit about the nails was very tempting, but Lida refused the offer. She thought typing a miserable job with no future.

But there was a great future for her in production. True, there was a temporary stalemate, but they'd soon

get started. She'd have to make up her mind about Sasha Konevsky.

She had never been serious about her affairs with the boys from the naval school. They courted her shyly and treated her to ice-cream; and as far as kissing went she had not kissed more than three or four times in her life and only because it was what the science of love demanded. Boys had to be kissed sometimes to prevent them from falling into despair.

But Sasha—Sasha was real. He would make a reliable and respectable husband and would take good care of her. He loved her and it would be easy to keep that love alive all her life.

True, she had dreamed of something else. She had dreamed of falling ardently, madly in love. She wanted to burn with love, to risk madness! But though she had many friends she had never loved passionately. There had not been so much as a tiny flame.

"Perhaps," thought Lida, "I'm incapable of passion, perhaps it's all just dreams. Then what am I waiting for? I might never meet another man as good and handsome as Sasha. It's very pleasant when, besides all his other qualities, your husband is handsome. Some girls I know go about with men so ugly that I'd never let them near me."

Then again—she was already twenty and would soon be twenty-one. Her youth was slipping by! She knew she was only seeking refuge behind her girlish look every time she told Sasha she was too young to marry him. In reality she already had to make a secret of her age. She would soon be an old maid. Oh, how terribly unjust it all was!

She had to get married. There was no help for it.

"Mummy," Lida said one morning in a thin little voice, "will you disapprove if I marry Sasha Konevsky?"

At home, nobody, not even her father, dared contradict her, but she scrupulously observed the respectfulness expected of a daughter.

Her mother knew Sasha well—for several months he had been a frequent visitor—and she had daily expected that question. She wept a little, then said:

"You mean you'll leave us, dear? Don't you think you might live with us," and kissed Lida.

Lida arranged her curls about her shoulders and went to the factory.

In the evening she returned with Sasha. He was still in a daze from this sudden turn and he answered questions readily and at once, in a very absent-minded way. He had the look of a man ready to go out single-handed against a pack of wolves, fascists, or anybody else. With an innocent smile Lida set the tea things on the table.

Sasha would have remained until morning, but she gave him to understand that it was time for her father and mother, particularly her father, to go to bed—he had just come from work. She saw him to the porch. He put his arms around her and kissed her. She gently pushed him away.

"Enough, enough—"

"Tell me," he said, holding her tenderly by her shoulder and looking closely into her eyes, "why did you torture me if you loved me?"

"Did I torture you?"

"Yes, very much," he said frankly and sadly.

She put her head charmingly on his chest.

"Sasha, I did not understand myself then."

"But do you understand now?"

She nodded.

When he finally left she stood on the porch, wrapped in her mother's shawl, and gazed after him. She fancied that some day she would remember this evening, this porch, and Sasha's rapturous, trusting whispers, and

that it would be a very important memory for which she would have to pay dearly. She suddenly became conscious of her responsibility for his destiny, a destiny which she had so wilfully taken into her own hands. With this new consciousness she thoughtfully went indoors.

"I'll go halfway out to meet my destiny," Nonna decided.

After work, when everybody went home, she remained behind in the office. She left the door half-open to let the light from the room fall on the corridor.

He would see the light and come in.

She stayed in the office until ten o'clock—but he did not come. In the morning she learned that he had taken a plane for Moscow the evening before.

What if he were transferred to some other factory? What would she do? She would go to him and say, "Take me with you."

He returned in about four days.

Somebody said, "Listopad's back." And just then the telephone rang. She instantly got up and went to pick up the receiver, knowing that the call was for her.

"Hello, Nonna Sergeyevna. How are you? I've been to Moscow. Do you know what for?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

"About the additions we want to make to the plan and, in particular, about the tractor parts. We'll be getting the main orders. Grushevoi's leaving us and I've arranged with the People's Commissariat for you to take his place. You'll be manager of the spare parts shop. No, I'm only joking. That's no job for you. Nonna Sergeyevna, how are you in general? Is everything all right?"

"Yes."

"I suppose I'll have to say good-bye, then."

"Yes, good-bye, Alexander Ignatyevich."

There had been no children during Mariika's two previous marriages and she was now almost sure there would never be any. But suddenly she thought she was pregnant!

"Syoma, dear," she said to Lukashin, looking at him with mysterious triumph, "do you know what?"

"What?"

"I'll never tell, not for anything! It might be unlucky."

The next minute she told him. She could never keep a secret, especially from Lukashin.

"So you see," she concluded. "I'm not certain, but somehow—"

Lukashin grew thoughtful. For a minute he pictured how crammed Mariika's little room would be. Then he was sorry he had given away his house. And, on the whole, children were enough to drive anybody mad—you had only to see how harassed Uzdechkin was.

But the next minute a different picture formed in his mind. He saw something small, with a fluffy head, like Uzdechkin's children, running around the table, and it would be his, Lukashin's, child, his flesh, preserved by fate in bloody battles, and his warmth. And a tenderness he had never experienced swept over him and rose to his throat.

"Never mind, Mariika," he said, turning away. "Eat more, look after yourself and don't worry."

She noticed the tears sparkling in his eyes and wept with emotion. And because of those tears they forgave each other many a slip that they might make in the future!

"I'll have you stop working as soon as I earn more," he said, "and you'll stay at home to look after me and the children."

Instantly Mariika stopped weeping and shrieked that nothing would make her leave the factory. What did he take her for? She had never been dependent on anyone!

Everybody at Kruzhilikha knew her and she knew everybody and she would die of boredom if she were made into a housewife! The baby would be left in a crèche during the day, and she would work as she had always done. Did he think it would be otherwise? So he needed a nurse now, did he?

The news was well received by the Vedeneyevs.

"We must assume that the baby will have a strong voice," said old Martyanov.

"Well, Marya," Nikita Trofimovich said, "I shan't allow you to live away from home any longer. When my grandson comes you'll move into our house. Indeed, what sins have we on our heads that our old age should be lonely?"

But Mariamna was silent. She went to rummage in the chests. Nikitka's baby things had been put away somewhere—his first little shirts, caps, and knitted boots. They would all come in handy again! From time to time they heard Mariamna's quiet, low laughter. They had received a letter from Mariupol at noon. It was from Pavel and Katerina and they had enclosed a short letter from Nikitka written in Ukrainian. Pavel wrote that Nikitka went to a school where they taught both Russian and Ukrainian and he had written to his grandfather and grandmother to show his progress. Mariamna sorted out the tiny, doll-like caps and laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks. Mercy on us, fancy little Nikitka writing in Ukrainian!

That evening Nonna remained behind in the designing office again; this time Listopad came.

She heard his footsteps far down the empty corridor, looked up at the door and waited. Her destiny was approaching.

"Am I disturbing you?" he asked from the threshold.

"No," she replied.

"May I?" he rested his hand on the back of a chair.

"Yes."

He sat down and put his elbows on her desk.

"Nonna Sergeyevna—" he fell silent.

"What is it?" she asked, her voice gently ironical.

"We left our argument unfinished," he said. "Remember?"

"Did we argue? What was it about?"

"About what is considered small and big in production. You said that you were a designer of machines and wanted to be left in peace."

She watched him and thought to herself, "Why are you saying this. It's not what you want to say. Here you are alone with me. I'd give anything in the world to get up and smooth your hair away from your brow."

Suddenly, as though taking a reckless plunge, she said:

"What are you talking about? That is not at all what you wanted to say."

The unexpectedness of it threw him off his guard. She looked at him without flinching.

He took a cigarette and lit it.

"Did you know?"

"Yes," she said, continuing her mad plunge. "I knew from the very-beginning."

The desk stood between them, neither moved and neither knew what the other would now say because neither was choosing the necessary words.

"From the very beginning," he repeated, trustfully gazing at her. "When you came to my office?"

"Yes."

She, too, trusted him implicitly. Not for a moment did it occur to her that he might think she was flirting, throwing herself at him, or something else of the sort. That was excluded.

"I don't know," he said, "whether it's for good or evil, but that is how it is."

She went up to him and smoothed the hair off his brow with both her hands.

On a sombre day in November Tolka walked out of the house, carrying a small suitcase.

He was moving to the young people's settlement. He had been given the place vacated by Petka Cheremnykh.

Tolka told his mother he would live in the hostel. His mother wept—not because she grieved, but because she was bewildered. Her tears did not soften Tolka.

In the street he looked at the familiar houses around him and suddenly felt as though they were gravely watching him. The street, the autumn sky, and the factory chimney-stacks, smoking in the distance, looked somehow gloomier today, more mature. And Tolka realized that at this moment his life was beginning in earnest.

A cold wind was blowing. He set his suitcase on the ground for a minute, lowered the ear-flaps of his cap, picked the suitcase up again, and walked quickly to the tram stop.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AT NIGHT

The settlement was wrapped in sleep.

Here, the street-lamps do not stand in even rows, but are scattered irregularly; one at the tram stop, another over the gates of the fire station. The only lighted window was high on the top floor of a five-storeyed house. It was pitch dark, and in the darkness the houses were silent and asleep and here and there you could catch a glimmer of the tram rails.

By this time the last tram had long since passed and

the night shift had started work long ago. Except for the night-watchmen, the House of Culture and the cinemas were deserted. All the merry-makers had gone to bed. And there were no lovers whispering in the doorways.

The houses were still. The people were sleeping, each dreaming his own dream.

Mirzoyev had had a busy day.

In the morning he had driven the director to the town Party Committee. The director told him to wait, but an opportunity to earn some money turned up. A pretty young woman with a sewing-machine wanted a lift and he drove her to the world's end, to the outskirts of the town. To show her gratitude his pretty passenger invited him to breakfast. The sewing-machine needed repairs and Mirzoyev could not resist the woman's charm. He repaired the machine and wooed its owner. Then he raced his car back at top speed. A militiaman stopped him and took down his number, and he was almost late. But his luck held. He rolled up to the entrance at the very moment the director was coming down the steps. Mirzoyev drove him to the factory, laughing and revelling in his luck.

The director was expecting some engineers for a conference and gave Mirzoyev permission to use the time to visit a compatriot, who was being treated in hospital for severe shell-shock. He had been under treatment for almost two years. Everything had been tried—electricity, bath-cures, hypnosis, and health resorts, but the attacks persisted. There was no particular intimacy between the two men, but Mirzoyev would have thought himself a swine if he did not visit his compatriot at least once a month and bring him a present.

At the hospital Mirzoyev asked the porter to keep an eye on his car, put on a white smock with great enjoyment and went to the second floor, feeling very much like

a doctor. He walked leisurely to let the girls he met on the way take a good look at him. He realized that girls working in a hospital for neurotics were glad to see a handsome, normal man for a change. Mirzoyev's compatriot and the other patients welcomed him warmly. They sat down in a close circle, ate the snacks Mirzoyev brought and washed them down with wine. A nurse who entered the ward pretended not to notice the party. Mirzoyev filled a glass for her, giving her a playful look, but she turned away and went out. Then the Russian patients sang in Russian, and Mirzoyev and his compatriot sang in Turkic. After that Mirzoyev sang a moving Russian song: *I Walk Along the Road Alone*. "The night is still, the desert hearkens to the heavens, and star whispers to star," he sang in a high, weak tenor, tears of emotion filling his eyes—it was a beautiful song!

He left the hospital in good humour and decided to drive to the railway station to meet the Moscow train.

On the way he picked up some passengers—a family with bundles and suitcases. A pale twilight had just set in when they arrived in the station square. The family wanted to pay for the ride with some small change, but Mirzoyev gazed at the children and at the bundles, and said, "No, you needn't pay me."

Presently, people began coming from the station—the Moscow train had pulled in. A man in an autumn coat and a warm cap limped up to Mirzoyev's car. In one hand he carried a suitcase, the other was hidden deep in his pocket. He wore smoked glasses.

"How much to the town Executive Committee?" he demanded.

He was obviously here on business. They agreed on the fare, the man sat in the back seat, and they moved off.

Mirzoyev was never indifferent to his passengers. They and their affairs always interested him. He had already made up his mind to turn to his passenger and ask

with fellow-feeling, indicating the hand in the pocket and the glasses, "The war?", when suddenly the passenger placed his sound arm on his shoulder and said:

"Akhmet."

Mirzoyev turned, and started in his seat. He recognized the voice as soon as his name was called.

"Comrade Battalion Commander!" he shouted.

The car swerved and almost rammed into a passing tram.

"Steady, you devil," the battalion commander said, smiling. "You'll make mincemeat out of me a second time!"

Mirzoyev gasped for breath. Tears welled in his eyes.

"Wait a minute," he said. He stopped the car by the curb and turned to the battalion commander, and passers-by slowed down in amazement to watch a chauffeur and a passenger kissing long and tenderly.

"They're getting maudlin," somebody remarked.

"You're alive!" Mirzoyev exclaimed.

"Yes, I pulled through," the battalion commander said. "But look here, we've got to move on. We've collected quite a crowd."

"I'll take you to my place," Mirzoyev said, putting his hands on the steering wheel.

"Some other time," the battalion commander said. "I've got urgent business at the town Executive."

"Tomorrow!" Mirzoyev was emphatic. "I'll take you down tomorrow as soon as they open. The town Executive is out for today. I dreamed of you so many times. We'll only stop for a minute at the provision shop."

"All right," the battalion commander said, "only I'll have to make the town Executive all the same, say in about three hours. I've only come for a day. We'll have a drink together, like in the old days."

Mirzoyev did not say that one of his kidneys had been removed and that that was the reason he abstained

from alcohol. He was ashamed to break in with a remark about a kidney to a man who had gone through so much. He stopped at the shop and spent all the money he had on him on snacks and wine. Then he drove the battalion commander to his room, left the car in the garage at the fire station so that it would be near when he wanted it, and ran home. He was so intensely happy that he had to make an effort to talk coherently.

"Here, take some of these soothing drops," the battalion commander said, filling a glass for him.

Mirzoyev took the glass with both hands and swallowed ecstatically. It was a long time since he had tasted vodka and it burned his throat. But it calmed him somewhat.

"Now, tell me, how are you?" he asked happily, affectionately gazing into the battalion commander's glasses. "How are you? Where do you live?"

The battalion commander told him he was working in a building organization in Moscow. To the question, "But how is life in general?" he replied:

"What can I say? The times are difficult, we've no need to hide the fact. You know yourself what the international situation is like. Never mind. We'll outlive it. We've outlived greater difficulties, just throw your mind back a bit." He smiled in his calm way.

"The international situation—yes," Mirzoyev said. "No, I mean the way you've arranged your private life. Your private, purely private life."

The battalion commander frowned slightly.

"Well, as far as my private, purely private life is concerned," he said, "I'm living like everybody else." He cast his glance about the table. "You, I see, are managing not too badly."

"Quite well, in fact," Mirzoyev said. "Not worse than the director, but that's just between you and me."

"Making money on the side," the battalion commander observed. "I see."

"You know," Mirzoyev said, growing alarmed at the turn the conversation was taking, "when a chap has a car and a director like I have, he must be a downright fool not to take advantage of it."

He picked up some of the packages and put the food on a plate.

"Things are coming your way far too easily," the battalion commander commented. "It's bad for you. Frankly speaking," he added, "I did not fight to let a few merry chaps make money on the side and live without cares."

"I understand your idea," Mirzoyev said, flushing. "I fought for the same thing as you."

"Wait," the battalion commander interrupted, leaning back in his chair and scrutinizing Mirzoyev through his smoked glasses, "aren't you a combine operator? Yes, of course, you are. Well then, where's your combine, you lazy ne'er-do-well? Why are you wasting your time here, as a director's chauffeur?"

"Do you for a moment imagine that he'd let me go? Not on your life."

"Have you asked him?"

"Many times," Mirzoyev said without batting an eyelid. "He gives me the deaf ear."

"You're lying," the battalion commander said. "I can see that you're lying."

He glanced at his watch and rose, adjusting his jacket military fashion as though it were a tunic.

"Time to go. Get your car."

"Stay another fifteen minutes!" Mirzoyev cried. "You must hear me out! Sit down, please, do! We haven't finished our dispute."

"Did we have one?" the battalion commander said

warmly. "That was no dispute and there couldn't have been one."

He was quite right but Mirzoyev's wits were so addled by embarrassment, disappointment and the vodka that he thought they had been arguing fiercely for hours.

"You must hear me out," he repeated, seizing the battalion commander by the shoulder. "Everybody is entitled to his own way of thinking. You must let me tell you my point of view."

"All right, I'm listening. Only be quick about it."

"I want you to sit down. This isn't the sort of thing I can be quick about."

The battalion commander patiently sat down. Mirzoyev drew a long breath and began to talk with inspiration.

He was a dreamer. He built up visions in a flash. And when he spoke he let his dreams carry him away.

Why are some people dissatisfied with life? Because they are not sufficiently active.

Was the Soviet power telling me: "Don't think, let me do your thinking"? Nothing of the sort. Only fools were told: "Behave like this or you'll perish." To a clever man it said: "Do your own thinking. Consider everything well and I'll help you." I'm no fool and I do my own thinking.

Take a young man who wants to be an engineer. He sits for the examinations and flops. He looks about him and sees that this year there is still time to enroll in an agricultural school. There are vacancies, you see, and nobody cares if he is weak in algebra. To cut a long story short, a fellow who can't distinguish between a radish and a head of cabbage gets to be an agronomist for the sole reason that he doesn't know algebra. There, if you please, is another life spoilt. He'll cultivate radishes and his mind will be full of radishes when all the time he hates their sight. You'll tell me that in spite of everything he is still

young, has a capacity for love, that he can go in for sports, that he can still enjoy fine weather and that he'll be happy with his radishes all the same. But that's not my idea of happiness.

I'm asked why I don't get married when there are so many girls to pick from. I'm holding back because I know the kind of girl I want to marry. I haven't met her yet. If I meet her tomorrow, I'll marry her right away. And if I don't I'll stay single. I'm not swimming with the current. I'm choosing my own way of living.

He fell silent. His eyes shone with a passionate light. When he began his speech he had it all ready in his mind and thought it sounded consistent and convincing. Suddenly he lost his train of thought and could not find what to say.

"Do you understand what I want?"

"Yes," the battalion commander replied. "Another drink. To get you completely under the table."

He poured out some more vodka for Mirzoyev.

"I want men to live without sponging," Mirzoyev said solemnly, raising the glass, "I don't want them to swim with the current. I want them to think and to choose. For heaven's sake, are we the ones to complain when there are so many opportunities in our life? When all the roads are free to our youth."

"That's enough," the battalion commander stopped him, resolutely standing up. "For half an hour you've been teaching me how to live and now you'll probably start agitating for Soviet power. It's time to go."

Mirzoyev despondently pulled on his leather coat. He had said nothing to convince the battalion commander. What he said had only made matters worse. The battalion commander's face was stern. He looked angry.

A wave of pity for Mirzoyev surged in the battalion commander's breast. He put his sound arm round his shoulder.

"Akhmet," he said, "listen to me. What you've been saying is all gibberish. The wanderings of a mischievous and idle mind. Everything is as clear as can be. Terrible wounds have been inflicted upon us and our work of construction has been interrupted. Now we're healing our wounds, and resuming our work. All of us have one road and that road leads to a communist society. There'll be neither happiness nor real order for the people without that. There's no use muddling it. And if I'm to take what you said seriously, then I must tell you that the sponger is not the man who does his job without looking for side earnings, but a man like you. You are a real and undisguised sponger. You're swimming with the tide. I'm not! Do you understand? Think and you'll understand. You've just told me that you're no fool."

They drove into town in silence and parted with a quick kiss. The battalion commander declined Mirzoyev's offer to drive him to the railway station the next day, saying that he would ask the town Executive for a car. They wrote down each other's addresses and promised to write. Mirzoyev returned home very late.

When he entered his room he did not take his overcoat off or turn on the light, but stood motionless for a long time. He could hear the soft and rapid ticking of his wrist-watch.

"Enough of this," Mirzoyev said.

He had tried to shake off that hateful mood by walking, by wandering about the whole settlement till a late hour, but the mood remained.

He felt as though somebody had slapped his face.

Properly speaking, why was he making a tragedy of it? He had always regarded this life as temporary. A man had a right to a little rest and some light work when he

came from the wars. He had a real place in life. He might make up his mind to study. To be an engineer.

How many years would that take? About two at the technical school. Then four (or was it five?) at the institute. A minimum of six years. Hm.

How much was the student's stipend?

He thought of his easy life here, of the different earthly temptations, of the woman with the sewing-machine—oh, how pretty she was.

The battalion commander had asked him to write and tell him his plans.

Ought he to return to the state farm? The earnings of a combine operator were very, very handsome. For a moment he pictured a triumphant home-coming.

Or, would it be better if he became a student?

"I'll talk it over with the director," he decided. "I don't want decent people to spit in my face. I'll corner him in the car and tell him I want to study. I've spilled my blood, defending those technical schools and institutes, and I have a right if it comes to that."

"You'll have a hard time of it, you lazy devil," he thought he heard the battalion commander say in the darkness.

Mirzoyev grinned.

"Dear Comrade Battalion Commander, it may be hard for some people, but for Mirzoyev it'll be wonderful anywhere. He's that kind of a person."

Lukashin dreamt of the war. He was lying in a narrow trench, with mines bursting round him. At every terrifying whine he flung himself face downwards on the dry, prickly, rich-smelling earth, and thought that this time he'd be blown up, that he could count himself as dead.

Suddenly, in front of him, a loose mound stirred and swelled, clods crumbled into the trench and human fingers appeared out of the earth. Then a head began to rise. Lukashin was so terrified that he stopped thinking of death.

"Well, Syoma?" asked the head with a merry wink. "When are you going back to the office?" Lukashin screamed and woke up. Mariika, looking frightened, was sitting beside him.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked. "Did you have a nightmare?"

She kissed him, tucked the blankets about him and pressed close to him, murmuring something in a sleepy, warm voice. But he did not want to go to sleep for fear of having another nightmare.

"Don't go to sleep," he pleaded. "Talk to me."

"What shall I talk about?" she laughed. "Recite some verses, maybe?"

But he said:

"We haven't yet decided where we're going to put the baby's bed."

"Yes, we have," Mariika said brightly, "we've decided to put it between the chest of drawers and that little table. If we move the table nearer to the window, it'll fit just right. And then, I don't care what you say, Syoma, but we'll have to buy a zinc baby bath. It'll last us for something like ten years. A basin's good for the first three years and no more."

"You can bathe the baby in the wash-tub," Lukashin pointed out.

Mariika clasped her hands.

"In the wooden wash-tub that we wash clothes in? Oh, Syoma!"

Lukashin sighed. Baby baths were outside his province.

"Whose surname will the baby have?" Mariika asked and then laughed—the word "surname" seemed so out of place when speaking about the baby. "Yours or mine?"

"Naturally, mine," Lukashin said. "And I don't see why you, too, should have any other name either." He wanted to kiss her, but thought of the many times she had hurt him and he changed his tone. "You must bear in mind, Mariika," he said weightily, "that if a family is to live happily both husband and wife must see eye to eye. If I let you have your way once, you must let me have my way next time. With us it's me who gives way every time, while you do as you please and don't give a hang for me."

"Syoma dear," Mariika said in a quick whisper, pressing still closer to him, "angel, darling, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for saying that. When did I ever slight you?"

"Often I asked you to do little things for me—that leather jacket, for example—and you refused. Then I asked you to stop running to the neighbours when I'm at home, but evidently you just can't. That's another example."

He went on listing what he considered were Mariika's misdeeds, telling them off on his fingers to keep count in the darkness. Mariika listened patiently, then interrupted him merrily:

"Syoma, dear, I'm always wanting something spicy these days. I could live on pickled cucumbers and herrings. I'm just dying for them!"

"You're a silly girl," Lukashin said, losing count. "What am I to do when you're so silly?"

Two old men, Vedeneyev and Martyanov, talked late into the night.

Martyanov was drunk. His big, fleshy face was red. The stove had gone cold—no real frosts had as yet set in and Mariamna was economizing on fuel—but Martyanov felt hot. He unbuttoned his shirt, revealing his broad chest.

"That was how I lived," he said, breathing heavily. "It was a dissolute life, Nikita, dissolute and rotten."

Screwing up his eyes, his neatly trimmed grey head bent, Vedeneyev thoughtfully moved a thin wine-glass on the table.

"The only thing I didn't do was to spill blood—no one can point a finger at me there—but why? Was I afraid my conscience'd bother me?"

"No," Vedeneyev said softly, "not your conscience."

"Yes, I was afraid of breaking the law. Formally, my hands are clean. But actually, how many sins are there on my head?"

"You needn't count," Vedeneyev said as softly as before. "We've counted them without your help."

"Tell me just this," Martyanov demanded, resting his big, shaggy head on both hands and moving close to Vedeneyev, "have I worked off my rottenness or not?"

Vedeneyev did not reply.

"Yes or no?" Martyanov demanded passionately. "Tell me!"

"What do you think?" Vedeneyev asked. "What do you feel?"

"I don't know!" Martyanov said breathlessly, spreading his hands out. "I don't know."

"Work cleans a man's name of everything," Vedeneyev remarked drily. "I judge a person by his work."

"Well! Well!" Martyanov urged with a mixture of bitterness and hope. "I've heard you say that before. Tell me about myself. Have I worked off my sins or not?"

Vedeneyev got up, thrust his hands in his pockets and paced the room thoughtfully. He went up to the stove and touched the cold tiles. From there, from the stove, Martyanov heard what he wanted:

"Yes."

Night had descended over the little southern town, too. The big window, looking into the garden, was open. It was dry in the garden and the leaves of some tree rustled with a metallic sound.

The metal wreaths laid by the crosses in a cemetery made exactly the same sound on a windy day.

He had been thrust into this grave and those that did it felt glad. They lived but he had to rot away and die.

"Margarita! Be so kind as to close the window."

Margarita Valeryanovna hurried in from the adjoining room and shut the window.

"How you bang it! Can't you shut it without all that noise. Why on earth must the window be kept open when it's so damp?"

"But the doctor said that while it's warm—"

"Warm? It's damp, horribly damp. I wonder how you can miss noticing that the quilt gets quite damp by morning."

"I'm sorry, but I—"

"You never notice anything when it concerns me. You're blindly following the doctor's prescriptions. You must use common sense. These health resort doctors know nothing."

"I think of Ivan Antonych every day," Margarita Valeryanovna said wistfully.

"That's very sweet of you, but unfortunately it doesn't do me the slightest good."

Vladimir Ippolitovich sat up in bed and groaned as he started re-arranging his pillows.

"No, I'll do it myself. Please don't interfere. Nobody cares about me. I've asked over and over again but nobody worries about arranging my pillows the way I like them."

It was true, there wasn't a soul there who sympathized with him. No one even to arrange his pillows.

Margarita pretended she was on the verge of collapse. But why should she collapse? She wasn't sixty yet. And that strapping young Oksana snored so loudly you could hear her in the bedroom. The walls in these small cottages were disgracefully thin. It wasn't much pleasure to lie awake all night listening to people snore.

Through the open door he could see an empty valise on the floor and women's garments thrown over chairs.

"Haven't you packed yet?"

"Not yet."

"How you love complications! You're only going for a week."

"I can't make up my mind what I ought to take. It's warm here and Oksana ironed some summer frocks and when I started packing I suddenly remembered they've got frosts there."

"I could have told you the same. You're like a baby, Margarita. You must take your fur coat, your felt boots and some warm clothes."

"Yes, my felt boots," she said. "I must get them out of the moth balls." She left him and he knew she was glad of the excuse.

They were all glad to leave him.

In all this time Listopad had written only once. And there had been one letter from a group of designers—it was dull and constrained. People were brought together by joint work, all the rest was sentimental foolishness. When a man's work was done he was bundled out of the way into retirement. And they felt glad.

It now seemed to him that he had been in a hurry about this little cottage.

He felt much worse here. Incomparably worse. Those doctors were fools, they didn't understand.

The momentum of his work had kept him on his feet. He would have kept on them for another ten years. But no, some evil genius had prompted him to throw every-

thing up, to change his habitual rhythm of life. And immediately the whole mechanism began to fall to pieces.

Take the window, for instance. It was shut but the quilt was damp all the same.

In the north they were heating big stoves. Heating them with wood. It was warm.

So this was retirement! Nobody expected anything of you and nobody came to see you. You could lie in bed all the time for all anybody cared. In the garden the dry leaves went on rustling with a metallic sound.

Margarita was anxious to bring the furniture here, to give a town air to their home. Margarita was sly but foolish, and her slyness did not run deep. She had no use for the furniture. All she wanted was to get away from this graveyard for a week or two.

Well, that was understandable enough. But it was outrageous that she should want to get away from him.

She missed her social work and committees.

He would have to tell her to sleep in the room that used to be his study. It was the warmest in the apartment. The stove there was very good. Two designers' desks still stood near the window. Somebody would move into that study, carry out the desks and put in a dressing-table or children's beds.

His legs and the small of his back ached, his head felt heavy, and he could not fall asleep. That was what those famous mud baths did to you!

The times were different! There was nobody to stretch out an arm over you and say, "Arise and walk!" You had to do that yourself. You had to resurrect yourself from the dead.

Margarita could argue until she was blue in the face, but the quilt was damp.

"Margarita! Margarita! Get my felt boots out of the moth balls, too. We're going together."

The interminable wonder of it! You were nobody to me and now you are the nearest and dearest person in the world. I cared nothing for you, but now my whole life is wrapped around what you tell me and what I want to tell you, what I think of you and what you think of me. You're the finest and handsomest of men. If I had doubted that for a moment do you think I would have stretched my hand out to you as I did or taken pride in my right to lean on you? Why don't the others see that you've no equal? Why didn't I see that before myself? Why do I see it now? Why were my eyes opened? Surely not because I had looked for love? I had *never* looked for love! If I had I would have found it long ago. It lay at my feet and I did not bend to pick it up. No, that is not true. I must not be dishonest with myself, I *did* look for love. But why did I stop at you? What did you do to earn it? Why am I dressing you in all this splendour? I am at a loss to understand and it's making my head swim.

Listopad and Nonna walked slowly. Both were tired. They were tired from sitting in a smoke-filled office late into the night, from sitting all these hours and never once really drawing close to each other.

He was saying something. She broke off her thoughts and listened.

"I hope my digs won't give you a shock," he said lightly, but his voice trembled. "They're cold and empty and look like a barn."

"It really makes no difference," she answered in almost a whisper.

They had arranged that she would come to see him. When? "I'll ring you up," was all she had said. She felt his shoulder through the sleeve of her coat. She felt as though she were on a swing, rising higher—higher—higher.

"Boats," she said.

"Boats?" he repeated, glancing at her. "What boats?"

She shook her head. She did not want to explain. The swings they had when she was a girl resembled boats and were fixed to a thick beam with steel cables. The girls and boys used to stand in the boats in pairs and, clinging to the cables, swing them with all their strength. When they reached their full momentum the boats described a full circle round the beam. It was not a game for the faint-hearted!

"You must be tired and sleepy," he said. "You're almost asleep now." He tenderly folded her in his arms.

They reached the hill and the little staircase leading up to the Vedeneyevs. They'd have to part now! She stopped and raised her face to his.

"Nonna, my darling," he said, kissing her closed eyes.

"Hold me, hold me," she said, her eyes closed.

At last they parted. She unlocked the door—a whole bunch of cunning keys were needed for the countless Vedeneyev locks—and went in. He turned back, walking from the old settlement to the new, along the broad and deserted street, lined by tall houses.

But why was he taking the wrong road home? It was too late for a visit. It would only alarm the hosts, cause embarrassment and displeasure and make him fair game for derision. But he strode along confidently. He was impelled by a joyous upsurge—he was sure that anything he did now would be right! He stopped for a moment to look at the number of the house. The white enamelled plaque was clearly and trustingly illumined by a small electric lamp. Listopad stepped into the semi-darkness of the entrance and went up to the fifth floor. Yes, that was the door. He pressed the door-bell. There was no ring. Listopad knocked.

"Who is it?" Uzdechkin called.

He had just been getting ready to go to bed. As before he had been unable to make headway with his work

in the mornings, but by the evening he had felt an influx of strength, livened up and worked with relish to a late hour. When he finished and prepared to go to bed, he heard a knock. He listened to make sure it wasn't his imagination. There was a second knock. Who could it be at this hour? He went out into the corridor and asked softly:

"Who is it?"

"Fyodor Ivanovich," he heard Listopad's voice saying, "it's me, open the door."

For a second Uzdechkin kept his hand on the lock, uncertain if he ought to open or not. He opened the door. For the next few moments they stood facing one another, Uzdechkin in the hall and Listopad on the landing. Finally, Listopad grinned, lightly moving Uzdechkin aside and walking in.

"Still up? I'm glad you are. May I come in?" He went to the lighted living-room, took off his overcoat and threw it on a chair by the door. Uzdechkin followed him in, gazing steadily at him. Listopad sat down at the table:

"May I?"

Uzdechkin did not reply. "What are you up to this time?" his eyes demanded fiercely.

A paper folder was lying near the lamp on the table. Listopad opened it, picking up one paper, then another—they were all applications from the workers: for loans, coupons—

"Up to your neck, eh?"

"After the war everybody is finding some gap that needs filling," Uzdechkin managed to make himself say.

"And you propose to fill in all the gaps out of your factory committee budget, is that it?"

Uzdechkin's eyes grew dark. "In a minute," he thought, "I'll take that folder out of his hands and tell him I want to sleep now and that if he wishes we can have a talk at

the factory tomorrow." But Listopad put the folder aside and asked:

"Are you going to offer me some tea? You're not being very hospitable. Frankly, I'd like a cup."

"I can offer you tea," Uzdechkin said, "only I don't think there's anything sweet in the house."

"As far as I'm concerned," Listopad said, "people must always manage to have something sweet. Always."

"Always?" Uzdechkin asked.

"Yes."

The late hour and the stillness round them made them lower their voices and the words dropped with nocturnal slowness.

"So you say always!" Uzdechkin repeated with a wry smile.

"I'd still like some tea," Listopad said. "I don't mind if it's not sweet so long as it's hot."

He needed to be alone for a moment. He did not seem to be able to start a conversation with Uzdechkin. It was difficult for a man to get the better of his own nature. Possibly, there wasn't anything harder in the world.

Uzdechkin, too, wanted to be alone to pull himself together. He played for time, heating the kettle. "What does it mean?" he wondered. "Why did he come here in the middle of the night and why should I give him a cup of tea? I'm a fool to do it!" He trembled and smarted. He poured out a cup and carried it into the living-room.

Listopad was standing in the doorway of the bedroom, looking at the sleeping girls. Quilts covered them up to their necks. The tops of two fair heads was all he could see in the faint light coming from the living-room. He heard their sound, tranquil breathing. He turned at Uzdechkin's footsteps and there was a gentle, bewildered look in his eyes.

"Here you are," Uzdechkin said curtly. "It's hot, drink it."

Listopad went back to the table but did not touch the tea. He put his elbows on the table, frowned, then gazed at Uzdechkin with a puzzled expression. Suddenly, he said gently:

"What's the row between us? Can you explain?"

"I don't think it needs explaining, it's so plain. You and I have an account to settle. I haven't presented my account yet."

"Neither have I!"

"Yes, you have. You haven't the firmness to keep a secret. I know everything you think of me. You think I'm giving the Party and the people too little. You think you're giving a lot while I'm giving little and you look upon me as though I were a worm or something. You needn't argue, I know."

Listopad did not argue. He was silent. Uzdechkin drew a deep breath.

"That's the root of everything. What grounds have you for thinking that I don't give enough? Is it because I work quietly without getting into the limelight? I don't need the limelight."

"What do you need?"

"A good deal, only not the limelight."

"So you think you give a lot to the Party? Can you tell me what you're giving?"

"Everything!" Uzdechkin exclaimed. "Everything, absolutely everything I have. If I had to give my last, I'd do it. How much of yourself are you giving? Three-quarters? Half?"

"I think I'm giving everything, too."

"No, you're not. Do you mean to tell me that what you're giving is all you have? You have more!"

"Thanks for that, at least. Allow me to take it as a compliment."

"Maybe you are giving all you've got," Uzdechkin said after a moment's reflection, "but you don't feel it. You

get pleasure out of it in return. For you it's a good bargain."

"You're talking like a shopkeeper! There's no one to stop you from getting pleasure out of it. Pleasure isn't rationed. Take as much as you can carry! You can't? Then say so. Somehow you're making a jumble of your life."

"I'm not asking for sympathy. That's sheer nonsense. Go away with your sympathy."

"I shan't go, Fyodor Ivanovich. Because if I do I'll never come back. I came to make peace with you, once and for all. And you're throwing me out."

Listopad's expression had something desperately stubborn and boyish in it. Uzdechkin smiled in spite of himself and suddenly felt relieved, as though twenty years had fallen from his shoulders and he, too, was a boy again, a boy who could quarrel fiercely and make up in good faith.

"You came here," he said, "and branded me in a trice. You say I'm making a jumble of my life. How long have you known me? Less than two years? Have you ever talked to me as one man to another and not as a director?"

"But neither did you come to me except as the chairman of the factory committee," Listopad wanted to say, but he stopped himself, realizing how weak that argument was and that since Uzdechkin had started talking it wasn't worth-while interrupting him.

This was as good a chance as any for him to blow off his steam.

"I grew up at the factory. I remember the pre-revolutionary machinery that used to be here . . . how they started to build new shops and brought in up-to-date equipment. The new open-hearth furnaces were built by members of the Komsomol and I was one of the team leaders. There used to be waste-land and bare fields

where the new settlement now stands. I remember them digging every foundation trench. Now, of course, we have many new people, but before the war you'd come to work in the morning with a stiff neck from nodding—you knew everyone you met on the way. And everyone knew your name and patronymic and they all needed you. What's Kruzhilikha to you! Before coming here you probably worked at a dozen other factories. This is my home, I was born here, I raised a family here, my father's grave is here, everything I have is here! If tomorrow they told you you're being transferred to Chelyabinsk or Sverdlovsk, you'd go. It'd make no difference to you!"

"Wait a minute!" Listopad could not help interrupting. "Do you think that because I wasn't born here I don't love the factory as much as you do?"

"Not because of that. But because you're the sort of person who feels at home anywhere, whether it's here or in Chelyabinsk. As far as you're concerned, Kruzhilikha is just another section of the line between one station and another, but for me it's my whole life."

"Not so fast!" Listopad stopped him. "Judge my attachment by my work. What you're saying is all humbug."

"What if it is?" Uzdechkin said. "We invent a lot about each other, I daresay. A man isn't a book you can read at a first glance, so you look at him and make things up. But you made me forget what I wanted to say. Wait, I'll remember." He shut his eyes, resting his head on his hand, and looked very tired. Listopad watched him with a mixed feeling of remorse and interest.

"Oh, yes!" Uzdechkin suddenly exclaimed, and his face brightened. "I was talking about the reconstruction period. That was when I needed a lot from life. A tremendous lot! Up till then I had an abstract idea about socialism and communism, as though it were not meant

for our country, but for some other place—almost on an interplanetary scale. It was something I couldn't quite grasp. Well, I was only a boy in those days. But when the scaffoldings rose everywhere round us, I realized that it was not meant for Mars, not on your life, but for us, here. Here!" He stamped on the floor. "And as soon as I realized that I got impatient. I wanted the building to go on faster, faster! We worked to fulfil the five-year plan in four years and I was sorry we couldn't do it in three."

He spoke with animation, his eyes shone.

"You must have had a hard time bridling that impatience of yours," thought Listopad, watching him.

"Then I stopped liking everything old," Uzdechkin went on, looking in front of him. "Everything that stood in our way, you understand. Life at home, for instance, it's like a dead-weight on your feet."

"But what is life at home?" Listopad said soothingly. "It's part of your whole life. You drink tea, don't you? You shave? You've got children? That's all life at home. There's nothing so terrible about it."

"I want happiness for everybody," Uzdechkin said, paying no attention to him. "I want life to be bright and happy for all."

He went on talking, while Listopad studied him with a paternal eye, thinking: what you need most at the moment is to get your health back; I wonder what health resort would suit you best? Once your nerves are steadied you'll make a fine worker. "So this is the kind of chairman we have at the Kruzhilikha factory trade union committee!" he thought in his cheerful, half-bragging way. Makarov was right, after all.

"Listen," he broke in on what Uzdechkin was saying, giving his shoulder a friendly pat, "that's all very well, but tell me are you thinking of doing anything about your health?"

Night hid the settlement. Night watched people's slumbers and listened to their conversations. The lights had been switched off and the radio was silent. It was the hour of repose for people tired after labour and for children tired after play. Good night, good people!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ENDS AND BEGINNINGS

A telegram announcing Margarita Valeryanovna's arrival was delivered in the evening the day before. Listopad ordered a car to be sent to the airdrome and a charwoman to be told off to heat the apartment. The car was sent, but they forgot about the charwoman. The chauffeur drove to the airdrome alone; Listopad would have gone, but he could not spare the time, not even half an hour. He had to prepare a report for the factory Party conference. He needed many figures and facts and the planning department, the business manager, the social welfare department and the editorial office of the factory newspaper worked to exhaustion getting him the material for his report. And then there was that interruption from Makarov, who rang up to ask for the theses. Half a day had to be spent just to dictate them to a stenographer.

Mirzoyev could not find the opportunity to speak to the director. That night, after meeting the battalion commander, he had made up his mind to study, but, failing to realize his decision in time, he began to waver and from day to day his fear grew that he might give the idea up altogether. He needed somebody's moral support and that somebody had to be a person whom he respected as much as the battalion commander. Looking about him, Mirzoyev found that the only person near him who had that respect was Anna Ivanovna. In the morning he got

up earlier than usual in order to speak to her before she went to the factory.

"Anna Ivanovna," he said, stopping her on the landing, where he had been waiting for her, "have you heard the news? I'm going to an engineering institute."

"Good for you!" Anna Ivanovna said. "I'm very glad."

"That's that," thought Mirzoyev, sighing. "I've burned my bridges at least."

Margarita Valeryanovna entered her former dining-room. It was cold and dreary; the furniture was covered with newspapers and there was a layer of dust on them. Keeping her downy gloves on, she took a dusty newspaper off a low arm-chair—it was the one in which she had sat and wept at the news of their departure—and sat down. She was still feeling sick after her journey in the plane. "I'm back again in this room and in this arm-chair," she thought. "Let me live here till I die, don't take me away from here, I'm an old woman now." That was the first time she had called herself an old woman. It did not frighten her—you couldn't help it, everybody grew old. Her only grief was that the apartment had no telephone and she could not ring up the factory committee to ask about the news there.

Nonna rang up Listopad at about two o'clock in the afternoon.

"Will you be free this evening?" she asked.

He was not, but on hearing her voice he felt so happy and carefree that without hesitation he replied:

"Yes!"

"I'll come to you at about nine. Will that be all right?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" he repeated fervently.

When she hung up the receiver he went back to his report and worked with redoubled haste. He had to hurry if he wanted to be home at nine!

Suddenly he threw the report aside and called up the manager of the dining-room, remembering that he had to order the dinner.

He finished the report by eight. There was still time to prepare for Nonna's arrival. He hurried home.

What ought I to wear, after all? That black dress with the high collar suits me best. And the shoes I keep for gala occasions. This is *my* red-letter day!

Nonna's face burned, she even felt feverish with nervousness. That was only natural! She was leaving her retreat, that was neither a maiden's nor a widow's; you couldn't tell what it was.

I'll take his hand and put it to my cheek. He'll feel the fever and it will communicate to him.

What did he call her? "Nonna, my darling—"

She shut her eyes and heard his voice saying: "Nonna, my darling—"

What time was it? If she did not make up her mind about the dress and stop her ravings she would not be ready by midnight.

Her watch had stopped. She had forgotten to wind it—for the first time in eight years.

She rummaged in the chest of drawers, choosing her best clothes. The shoes were wrapped in a piece of silk. She put them on.

The front door banged loudly and cheerfully.

What ought she to say—*au revoir* or farewell? Perhaps she would never return. If she did, it would be only for a minute—to take away her things.

If he asked her, she'd stay with him in his big, cold flat that looked like a barn.

Ask me, ask me to stay in your big, cold rooms!
You shall ask me.

It was dark outside. She did not notice it. For her it was light. She was not conscious of walking. The bright night seemed to carry her on its wings.

It was snowing. Black smoke hung low over the chimneys, foretelling a snow-storm. But this was no snow-storm, just an ordinary fall of snow.

There was no sense in waiting for a tram. They were always crowded. She only had to go three stops; in this wonderful weather it would not take her more than twenty-five minutes. There was a light frost, no wind, and the snow was falling gently.

She walked slowly, intentionally slackening her pace—let it take not twenty-five but thirty minutes, even thirty-five. She knew that her happiness was safely waiting for her at the end of the road and it would still be there if she reached it not on the twenty-sixth but on the thirty-sixth minute.

Never in her life had she felt such strength and lightness in her arms, her legs, in every muscle. If she had to she would have walked to him a hundred miles on her high heels and she would not have been tired. The windows of the tall houses loomed in the distance through the falling snow, and they seemed farther than they really were. There were lights in the windows; there were people in the houses; but before her eyes there was nothing, nobody: only he, who was waiting for her, and she, who was going to him.

Hardly had Listopad returned home and made a few preliminary preparations for the evening than the door-bell rang.

"So she's just as impatient as I am!" he exulted, rushing to the door. "Decided to come earlier. Good girl!"

He opened the door.

"Good Lord!"

A small black figure with the head thrown back defiantly stood in the dim light of the corridor.

"*You* here?"

"Are you receiving visitors?" asked Vladimir Ippolitovich, stepping into the hall.

His long neck was wrapped in a scarf that reached to his ears and the ear-flaps of his sealskin cap were held down by a ribbon tied under his chin. The dry, clean, rancorous little face was pink with the frost.

"I took a chance coming here, and when I saw the light I thought I'd go in."

He stood his cane in a corner and slowly unwound his scarf, holding his chin up and shaking his head.

"I saw the light—so I knew you were in. And here I am."

Who could have credited the old man with a prank such as this?

"Vladimir Ippolitovich," said Listopad, pleased, moved, and interested, "why wasn't I told about your arrival? Why wasn't I warned?"

"The explanation is very simple. I told them not to say anything and they obeyed me through force of habit. I wanted to surprise you. It is a surprise, isn't it?"

"Yes," Listopad laughed.

"I knew you'd be surprised," the old man said with satisfaction, rubbing his hands as he entered the room. "I see you're expecting somebody to dinner. I'm afraid I'm intruding."

"Not at all, Vladimir Ippolitovich," Listopad said, moving an arm-chair to the table. "Please sit down. I've been waiting for you, you know. Excuse me for a minute."

He rang up the dining-room and ordered dinner for three. Yes, quite right, he had ordered dinner for two, but

he wanted that order changed. Yes, immediately. In thermos flasks and please see that everything is done properly.

"While we're waiting, will you join me in a drink, Vladimir Ippolitovich. A toast? To the five-year plan of our factory. Bottoms up?"

"To the five-year plan of our factory," the old man repeated, tasting the wine and smiling, "Sweet wine. For women."

Listopad returned his smile. He was a little embarrassed.

"Yes, for women."

"Doesn't she drink anything else?"

"Apparently not."

"I don't, either."

Vladimir Ippolitovich cast a cold glance about the room. Evidently, he was thinking, "You lived with another woman in this very room. My dear fellow, it's hardly a year since you buried her—that's the duration of your love and grief."

"Let the dead sleep peacefully in their graves and let the living enjoy life," Vladimir Ippolitovich commented drily, clipping each word. He gazed at his wine-glass as though he read those profound and healthy words in it. He drank the wine slowly, put on his spectacles and drew a thick note-book from an inner pocket. "Now then, Alexander Ignatyevich. As regards *our* factory, with your permission I'll take the liberty to draw your attention to certain observations, plans, calculations—"

Nonna arrived at about ten.

"Nonna Sergeyevna, you'd never guess who I'm entertaining!" he exclaimed joyfully, letting her in.

She stopped—this was something she had not expected.

"You'll see for yourself! You'd never guess!"

Assuming a haughty expression, she entered the room and saw Vladimir Ippolitovich.

He rose to meet her. There was a vigour in him that she had not seen before his trip to the south.

"I'm glad to see you, Nonna Sergeyevna."

That might have been said with malice or it might have come from the bottom of his heart, but that was not the point. The point was that a third person was here and his presence broke everything up.

"Vladimir Ippolitovich, well, of course, I'd never have guessed! How are you?"

He said something in reply, but she did not hear what it was.

"Are you here for long?"

He exchanged glances with Listopad and both grinned like little boys.

"I don't know. I'm not making any plans. That's being decided there," he pointed to the ceiling.

A glass of wine appeared in front of her and she took a sip. It was as bitter as quinine.

Vladimir Ippolitovich was asking her something. It was about the work in their department. It struck her that her answers were coherent.

"Yes, and what about Chekaldin's plan?" he asked Listopad. "I remember it was quite talented. Was anything done about it?"

"Of course. It was included in our general plan and the first wing of the foundry will be reconstructed by forty-six."

That was Listopad talking. He enthusiastically went into the details of the technical conference that discussed Chekaldin's plan and told Vladimir Ippolitovich how the men assigned to the work had insisted on more time and how he and Ryabukhin had backed Chekaldin—heavens, how he was dragging it out. The clock was strik-

ing the hour. Somebody rang the bell, entered and brought in plates and things and there was a nauseating smell of food. And the conversation went on and on. She had never suspected the old man of being so talkative. She, too, spoke and forced herself to eat something. She did not want them to notice that she was feeling faint.

The clock struck again. Nonna rose.

"Are you going?" Listopad jumped up.

"Yes," she said. He looked so crushed that she was sorry for him. She gave him a tired smile. She shook hands with Vladimir Ippolitovich and went out into the hall. Listopad followed her. He was utterly bewildered. He had hoped she would wait until Vladimir Ippolitovich went. "I'll come tomorrow," she said in a tone usually reserved for children.

"Don't go!" he pleaded. "He'll leave soon."

"I'll come tomorrow, dear," she repeated. "We'll arrange it by telephone."

"I've got to read my report tomorrow," he said.

"Well, it can't be helped. We'll see each other the day after, then," she said in the same tone.

She felt ill and could not remain here.

"At least wait until I get you a car."

"No, no!" she said. "I'll walk home. I like walking and then I have to drop in at the office."

She picked on that excuse because she wanted to be alone, to piece together her scattered thoughts.

He helped her with her coat and held her in his arms.

"Till the day after tomorrow?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!"

She went down, clinging to the banisters and feeling for the steps with her foot.

She opened the heavy front door—the snow-storm blew in her face; the wide steps at the door were piled with snow. She went forward without noticing the storm.

She moved painfully, struggling over the frozen ruts.

They were filled with fresh, untrampled snow. Her high heels were an added difficulty.

From time to time a terrible weakness came over her, and she would walk on as in a dream. And when she came to her senses she did not at once realize where she was or what was happening to her.

"I've fallen ill, that's all," she guessed suddenly. "I have a fever. I must have caught a cold."

Her one thought now was to reach home and to lie down. To lie down anywhere, even on the floor.

At the foot of the hillock on which the Vedeneyev house stood she thought she would fall. She mustered all her remaining strength, climbed up the snow-laden wooden steps and reached the door. She rang the bell once, for the Vedeneyevs. She hadn't the strength to get the keys and open all the intricate locks.

When Mariamna opened the door, Nonna said, "I'm ill," and sagged to the snow.

She lay with her eyes closed, her head burned with fever and in her spine there was a feeling as though somebody were sprinkling snow over her. Once, when it became unendurable she opened her eyes and said crossly to Mariamna, "Stop throwing snow at me!" Mariamna did not reply. She put something big and heavy over Nonna's quilt and Nonna suddenly thought she was sinking into a dark void and fell asleep. When she awoke she found Ivan Antonych, the doctor, sitting at her bedside.

"Are you out to frighten people, madame?" he demanded, holding her hand. "That won't do. I'll have to send you to hospital."

"That's not necessary," Mariamna put in.

"What do you mean by that, madame?" the doctor asked.

"I've been in a hospital and I know what I'm talking about," Mariamna replied. "They scrub the floors from morning till night, but when you want something there's never anybody around. Let her stay here."

Nonna had never stayed in a hospital and for a moment she imagined that it was unbearably dull, lonely and dismal.

"I don't want to go to hospital," she said weakly, bursting into tears. Mariamna wiped her wet cheeks with the hem of her apron.

"Oh, madame, madame," sighed the doctor, "this is all so very trying."

He sat down at the table to write a prescription and Nonna did not hear what else he said or when he went away.

She woke up on two other occasions. The first time she was awakened by the sound of voices behind the door. She recognized Mariamna and Kostya. Mariamna was mispronouncing the name of the medicine. Kostya could not understand what was wanted and together they distorted the unfamiliar word.

"Sulphathiazole, sulphathiazole," Nonna corrected them.

She imagined that she had shouted the word, for the conversation ceased as though the speakers had been frightened by her voice, and she again relapsed into unconsciousness.

The second time she opened her eyes she saw Nikita Trofimovich, big, dark and stooping, pass between her and the lamp burning on the table. He tip-toed out of the room and only Mariamna remained at the foot of the bed.

"How wonderful," thought Nonna, turning to the wall in order to go to sleep again, "how wonderful of the old man to come here—that means he's no longer angry. Oh, how wonderful."

She regained consciousness in a sweat. The crackling of the wood in the stove sounded like explosions. The room was bright with the early sun and the frost-painted windows sparkled. Real winter had set in while she was asleep.

"What day is it today?" Nonna asked.

"Thursday," Mariamna replied.

She had been in bed for a day and two nights. She thought of the evening at Alexander Ignatyevich's and remembered every detail.

"Did anybody come to see me?" she asked.

"Some young fellows asked for you. The doctor came twice."

Mariamna changed Nonna's shirt and the cases on her pillows, washed her hands and combed her hair. To take her mind away from that evening, Nonna asked Mariamna to bring her a book.

"You'll probably die with a book in your hands," Mariamna grumbled, but she went downstairs and returned with a thick, tattered book.

"It's tattered because there's always somebody reading it," she said. "They say it's good."

It was Goncharov's *Precipice*, a book she had read as a girl and almost forgotten. She opened it in the middle. It was heavy. Nonna let it slip, and fell into a light sleep. Waking up she took the book up again. The day passed quietly. Twilight began to fall. Mariamna went to her cooking in the kitchen and there was nobody to light the lamp. Nonna lay on her back and looked at the windows, made distant by the blue twilight, and thought how life had changed since the time of Raisky and Vera*—love's place in life had changed as did people's attitude to it. The barriers that had stood between Vera and happiness

* Raisky and Vera—two of the principal characters in Goncharov's *Precipice*.—Tr.

did not exist for Nonna. They had been removed by time. But, evidently, there was still a price for happiness, a different price—a person had to sacrifice something of his own at the altar of love; it was almost a physical law—where there's plenty of space for one, two persons naturally have to make room for each other. So Nonna thought as she lay alone in the stillness of the twilight. The bell rang. Indistinct voices reached her, then she heard footsteps on the stairs. She felt so weak she was ready to faint. Mariamna walked in.

"The director's here, asking to see you."

"Tell him to come in," said Nonna, putting her hand over her heart.

Mariamna turned on the light, tidied up the bed and went out.

He was here, at last, big, terribly big, in her little room! He sat down, running his palm over her forehead. There was a smell of leather gloves on his hand.

"I can't understand it!" he said, speaking in a low voice. "You did not send anybody to let me know—you simply disappeared. I was busy with that report yesterday. Today I rang up to say good-bye and they told me you hadn't turned up for the second day. Here they tell me you've got pneumonia and I knew nothing about it. That's not fair!"

She recoiled at the word "good-bye."

"Are you going away?" she whispered.

"Yes, to Moscow. I've been sent for by the People's Commissariat—by the way, Vladimir Ippolitovich will have to be put back on the staff. There's a restless old man for you. He went into retirement and now he wants to start all over again. I don't want another man in his place. Let well alone, says the proverb." A jubilant light shone in his eyes; obviously, he had taken the chief designer's return very close to heart.

"Will you be away long?" she asked in a submissive tone.

"Four days altogether," he replied. "Well, I might be held up a little longer. On the whole, not more than a week."

He was not the sort of person to sacrifice something of his own for love. She would always be giving something up, making room for him, yielding, and waiting. He would fly to Moscow, go to the People's Commissariat, boast of his motor saw, draw a picture of the possibilities it was opening in the timber industry, and describe how he was mastering the production of a thread-rolling machine; and everybody would like him and enjoy listening to him. In the evening he and his friends would dine in a restaurant and he would again boast of his factory, of the young people there, and of his chief designer—and they would make much of him. He would remember Nonna and that she was ill and send a telegram, "Send news of health." She took the big hand that lay on her hair and kissed it.

"Nonna dear," he said helplessly, "I love you very much, Nonna—"

Mirzoyev coughed as he passed by the door left open by Mariamna. Justified curiosity was wearing him down like a disease. That morning he had decided to have his talk with the director. He would ask to be relieved of his job. But he could not resign without learning the reason for the director's haste to see Nonna Sergeyevna.

After some meditation, he left the car in charge of some boys and went into the house. The director's presence did not embarrass him; he coughed to warn the lovers of his approach—they had all the time in the world for kissing, they had all their lives before them.

"What is it, Akhmet?" Listopad asked cheerfully. "Wait, I'll be down in ten minutes."

"How are you, Nonna Sergeyevna?" Mirzoyev asked gently, smiling at her from the threshold. "I was very distressed to hear you were ill."

"That's it, be respectful!" Listopad shouted. "Understand?"

"Perfectly well," Mirzoyev said meaningly, half closing his eyes.

Showing in every way his sympathy and good wishes for the lovers, he smiled again and went downstairs—to get some details from the Vedeneyevs about the girl who would soon be the director's wife.

Listopad could not smoke in the sick-room and when he left Nonna he lit a cigarette with pleasure. Holding the cigarette between his lips and buttoning up his overcoat as he descended the stairs, he reached the street and glanced up at her windows.

A soft light shone through the white curtains. It was good when that clear light was shining. It was good to know that somebody would think of you, wait for you, forgive everything—

Nonna, my dear, my darling.

It was good to leave a heated room where you could not smoke and to go out into the open and let the snow fly in your face. To breathe the frosty air, which was as pure and heady as wine. To inhale the tobacco smoke to your heart's content. To look round at the friendly windows—and to be your own master again.

A flurry of snow extinguished the cigarette. Mirzoyev was waiting in the car. The engine purred.

"Let's do the circle," Listopad said.

Mirzoyev knew what that order meant. Every chief had his own idiosyncrasies. "Doing the circle," meant going the whole length of the highway, round the entire town and back to the factory. It meant that the director wanted

to think and was not to be disturbed. His attention was constantly distracted at the factory and he could concentrate only in the car.

This was a stroke of bad luck—he would have to postpone his talk till tomorrow.

The car glided smoothly up the steep road, reached the turn in the highway and tore away from the settlement.

A tram was climbing the hill slowly and painfully, so slowly that it seemed to be standing still. It looked tiny in the distance. It was packed with people, who lived in the settlement and worked in the town. They were going home.

If a person works in the town, Listopad thought, he ought to live there; the settlement should be reserved for people working at the factory. A man working in town had to go through this ordeal twice—the long wait in the frost and the clinging to the steps while his hand froze on the hand rail. Yes, but what if the wife worked in town and the husband at the factory—where ought the family to live? That was a problem.

Both ought to work at the factory. People of dozens of professions were needed at Kruzhilikha. They had whole families working there. The Vedeneyevs, for instance.

More houses were needed. Only not ugly ones like those huge blocks of two hundred flats each. They were building five-storeyed houses without lifts. They ought either to have lifts or to be no higher than three storeys. The best would be two-flat cottages, with a separate entrance for each flat. Where had they hidden the project for a new street; it had been put aside when the war broke out. The time had come to build. He would see to it when he returned from Moscow.

Why did you have to fall ill, Nonna dear? If you hadn't I would have had you here by my side listening to me. And your eyes would have shone from under your little

fur hat. I would have taken your hand and put it in my sleeve to keep it warm. It would have been a wonderful ride. I would have tucked this rug about you.

"Akhmet," Mirzoyev turned. "Tell Averkiyev to get a new rug. A good one, made of wolfskin."

"All right," Mirzoyev grinned slyly into the darkness.

They sped downhill, racing past the iron rails of the bridge. There had once been a stream there, but it had dried up. Only when the snow melted in the spring did the old bed fill again. In the summer the bed was muddy, filled with slime and swarming with mosquitoes. He'd have to consult the hydrologists and get them to calculate the cost of filling the watercourse. There ought to be a river and he could have a park laid out on the bank, which was now used as a dumping-place for rubbish. There ought to be a river and trees round the settlement. They would have swimming-pools and a yacht club. He pictured white masts with scarlet pennants, young people in sports vests, and rowing and swimming contests. Lower down, on the other side of the bridge, they could have good rafts for housewives who liked to rinse their clothes in the river. The rafts could have tarpaulin shelters from rain and sun. The housewives would be pleased!

How long do you mean to live, Alexander Listopad? Parks do not rise out of rubbish heaps at the wave of a magic wand. Millions of persevering hands toil for years, untiringly and patiently, to improve life just a little. It would take time for the hydrologists to work out their plans and calculations and to fill the dry bed with water. And after that school children wearing red Young Pioneer ties, would come and plant puny saplings that came up to your shoulder. You're a funny chap! There's no room for saplings in your vision. You picture tall, heavy-crowned birches and limes, you hear the rustle of their dense foliage and the cool of the deep shade on a summer's day—how far into the future have you taken yourself?

Well, and what of it? Yes, I am looking far ahead, but what of it? What conclusion am I to draw from that? That I, Alexander Listopad, will no longer be there when the saplings that have not yet been planted have grown into trees? I know, when I was a student we used to sing, "When you die you'll be buried as though you had never lived on earth." Life is short—if only it could be twice or three times as long. Yes, it is short, no doubt of it. Still, you could manage to do a thing or two. I'll finish building the settlement. And I'll see a new river and the trees planted by the Young Pioneers, and, perhaps, I'll see that shady park! How do you know that I won't live till I'm ninety? We're a tenacious lot.

But if I don't live to see it, others will. Chekaldin will see it, Konevsky will see it, and so will Tolka Ryzhov and the children of those who have just gone from work, clinging to the rail of the tram with numb fingers. Did you say "as though you had never lived on earth"? Liars. I am living on earth. And I have left my trace on this earth for all time to come!

Nonna, dear, you'll understand if I tell you all this, won't you? I never spoke to anyone in this way, I never had the time and if I had I'd have been embarrassed. They'd say, "What are you agitating for Soviet power for, we know all this without your telling us." I never told Klasha, poor girl, but I want to tell you, I want you to understand. You will understand.

You're clever, Nonna. Thank heavens for sending me a clever friend. You must have seen right through me. People think I'm a cunning sort, but, Nonna, I'm the simplest of fellows. I have an unsophisticated faith in my purpose, in your purpose, in the purpose of my people and country. They want my faith to have a scientific foundation. A foundation is all very well. I have a foundation, but that has not made my faith any less simple, it did not forsake my heart for my mind—my faith is sincere! And

I preach it in simple words without scientific phraseology. Soldiers went into battle with the words, "For my country, for Stalin," whether they had a scientific foundation for their faith or not. I live with simple slogans although I am grounded in historical materialism and many other sciences. Nonna, dear, I come to you with an open heart! Together, we'll build machines, fill the stream with water, lay out a park—my darling!—we'll build happiness for the people, Nonna dear, that's the simple name for it!

The car was speeding through the town. He saw the big houses through the veil of snow. The dark, massive block with columns was the opera theatre, built long ago by serfs. The university with its clean-cut, graceful parallel lines was built about twelve years ago. Here, side by side with the Russian students were children of the northern nomads, the hunters and deer herders who had never known how to read or write. They passed the hospital where Klasha had died. Then followed other streets with their blocks of flats, traffic lights, shops, telegraph poles, cottages, and scaffolding round new buildings begun last summer and postponed for some future date—the variegated and complex human community which is eternally dissatisfied with itself and which is called a town!

Will the day ever come when man will say, "I am satisfied with everything, I am very grateful, I need nothing more"? No, that day will never come. The earth is always ready to receive more seed and the scaffolding will never come down for the builder. And whoever utters such words is dead, nothing living need be expected from him.

The town was now left far behind. The snow-storm had attained its full force. Mirzoyev drove recklessly. A white whirlwind tossed against the wind-shield. At rare intervals the head-lights of a car flashed past with a swift burst of sound and a glare, leaving nothing but snow all around and the white bands of crazily dancing flakes. Dance,

dance, have your day, you wild, irresistible, beautiful Russian winter!

At last vague lights appeared through the snow-storm, vague noises rose above the hum of the engine; my place on earth, my drop of blood—Kruzhilikha. What made me love you, Kruzhilikha? You did not nurse me, you did not rear me, and yet I am yours!

Tall windows became visible through the snow-storm. They passed a street-lamp. It threw a sharp light on the falling snowflakes. Soft fluffy snow lay everywhere. The domain of Labour, the ruler of the world, stood as white as a swan. And over that white domain the generous Russian winter lavished its sparkling, flying gems.

“We’re home, Alexander Ignatyevich.”

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