

NIKOLAI VIRTA

ALONE

A Novel

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PART ONE

INSURRECTION



Chapter 1

A chilly and desolate city, filled with cowardly whispering, was the provincial seat of Tambov in that autumn of nineteen-seventeen.

The wind surged through the streets with a wild howling and whistling, driving the clammy snowflakes before it, tearing great strips of paper from the walls and advertisement pylons and sending them soaring like birds through the air. The puddles, the bare branches of the trees, the wet sheet-iron of the roofs glistened in the uneven yellow light of the street-lamps. Waterspouts rattled, telephone wires groaned and the snow drifted down

and down, until the roads and pavements were covered with a thick mushy layer.

Fear and the inclement weather had driven the citizenry to their homes. Doors were fastened with heavy bars, windows blotted out with oaken shutters.

The city lay silent and empty; the railway station was dead and deserted. Only from the depot and the repair-shops came the sound of clanging iron, and a ruddy glow coloured their smoke-blackened windows.

Flotskaya Street was shrouded in darkness. Here, by the river, it was colder still; a chilly draught blew from the woods. The street-lamps had gone out long ago.

The tall green mansion of Lawyer Fyodorov stood secluded from the street by a high fence and a front garden. Not a ray of light penetrated through its tightly fastened shutters. It stood dead and silent, as though the lawyer's family were already deep in slumber. But appearances are deceptive—it was not the habit to retire early in this house.

The master of the house was out. In the drawing-room on a plush sofa, a man sat waiting for his return.

He was small and spare, with thick pale lips, sunken, angry eyes, and dark hollows on the temples. His hands were white and narrow. He

was dressed in semi-military style: tunic, breeches, neat top-boots of box-calf. He sat in silent absorption, his eyes staring straight ahead. The maid had passed through the room twice, but he had not turned his head.

This was a habit—Alexander Stepanovich Antonov had served ten years in a penal settlement. He was subject to fits of violent temper, and had been condemned many a time to the punishment cells. There he had sat like this, hands resting on his knees, staring ahead with unseeing eyes, groaning and sighing as his troubled thoughts oppressed him.

What was he thinking of now? The cares of today? The men he had met in far-off Siberia? Or was it his past?

There was a man in the convict prison with whom he had been friendly for three years—Pyotr Tokmakov. They had been tried in Tambov, on the same day and for the same deeds. Lean and sallow, Pyotr himself was not fond of talking, but when an argument was on, he would listen with keen interest, his eyes wide open, and a frown on his tall, bony forehead. Pyotr often chided his friend for his savage disposition and the malice he harboured for people, but Antonov would only smile ironically.

"But what will you do when the revolution

comes?" Pyotr expostulated. "What have you got to take back to Kirsanov? What have you learned in all this time?"

"Revolution!" Antonov snorted. "We'll be dead and rotting before it comes. I'm sick of that drivel, Pyotr. I don't believe in it, so stop talking about it!"

Pyotr shook him viciously and hissed:

"You don't believe in it, you doubt it! Then why did you get into this business at all?"

Antonov said nothing. And what could he say to good old Pyotr? He had often wondered himself why he had "got into this business," what could have induced him to give up the quiet, untroubled life of a village schoolmaster for the lot of a Socialist-Revolutionary—the constant anxiety over he knew not what, the waiting for he knew not whom, the lurking in ambushes, shivering with cold and fear.... Programmes and platforms had never meant much to him; he had never even read them properly or given any thought to them. Instead, he had read romantic novels and adventure stories in plenty. And how attractive they made the violent, reckless life of an S.-R. militant, with its raids, expropriations and shooting frays!

"But why had I joined them, what for?" he asked himself, but there was no answer. It

must have been simply that his young blood was afire, craving for excitement and for merry, riotous living.

But the fever was gone. They caught him one day. In the cold, clammy cell the fire in his blood subsided. Antonov knew that the fun was over and the bill had to be paid.

There came that grey cloudy morning—the day of reckoning. The bald-headed old man on the bench had asked him:

"You have robbed and taken human life—in the name of what? Who are you?"

Antonov had no answer; he stammered and stuttered incoherently.

"What party do you belong to?" the judge had asked.

"Party? I am a Socialist-Revolutionary."

They gave him twelve years.

"Oh, why did I get into this business?..."

Pyotr Tokmakov was transferred to another prison. Antonov was now alone. His eyes sank deeper into their sockets; he became more reticent than ever. But he had not forgotten his friend's chidings: when disputes arose, he did not turn away, but listened attentively, and from the threads of others' thoughts he wove for himself a tissue of dreams.

One winter day after work, his bunk neighbour—a Bolshevik from the Putilov Works in

St. Petersburg—sat down by his side. "Putilovets"—as he was called by the prisoners, political and criminal alike—was small and slight, but muscular and with hands of enormous strength; his handclasp was enough to make you cry out with pain, and an inadvertent push from those hands left a black-and-blue mark on a man's body.

"I'm always bruising myself," Putilovets would say, laughing. "Sometimes I want to kill a mosquito on my forehead and I almost knock myself senseless."

Antonov respected him, as he did all strong men. Besides, Putilovets was honest and forthright, and his authority with the prisoners was undisputed. Even the jailers gave him a wide berth.

"Well, why don't you ever say anything?"

"I'm no talker," Antonov answered brusquely. He was out of sorts and his head ached. "And what's the use anyway? All your arguing is just flogging the air. You stick to your point, and so does that fellow there, in the glasses. Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, S.-R.s—but when you get down to it, it's all a lot of rot."

"Listen, my lad, did you ever hear of a man called Lenin?"

"Yes, I heard of him and even saw him, when I was young."

"And I both heard him speak and read him. No comparing him with your wind-bags!"

Antonov shrugged contemptuously. Putilovets puffed at his makhorka cigarette; a violet pall enveloped the bunks.

"Still searching for the truth?" Antonov said maliciously. "Well, there are as many truths here as there are men. You argue till you're hoarse, you think up deaths for the tsar, but he's alive and has no thought of dying. He'll outlive you and me yet."

"You don't say?"

"I do say."

"Outlive you and me?"

"There's nothing to laugh about. The tsar, man, is a power. He owns these here—fetters!" Antonov shook his iron chains. "And all you do is invent words! You can't overthrow the tsar with words."

Putilovets threw a sidelong glance at Antonov.

"Well, teach us then, tell us how you would set about it."

"I would try it differently. I'd get hand-grenades and revolvers somehow and hit out at all that scum—tsars and sub-tsars."

"Lenin, now, has a different notion. He says it's got to be done differently."

"I know, I know. Three committees to every

two members? Reading jolly little leaflets at jolly little forest meetings?"

"Wait a minute, fellow. At our works in '98 there were about eight of us who gathered at those jolly little forest meetings. But in 1905 we were more than two hundred. And what fellows they were! You're not a patch on them. Take me—" Putilovets took off his spectacles and wiped them—"I'm fifty, and was thirty-eight when I learned to read and write. See? I don't sit around moping all day, like you. I study. Maybe I'll come in useful some day. Why, man, just listen to what's going on around. Our voice is sounding everywhere. And you talk of jolly little forest meetings and committees!"

Antonov interrupted him curtly.

"You make me tired, old man. How many years have I been listening to people like you —wind-bags, that's all you are, you bore me stiff! No, not a glimmering in sight; we'll all rot here...." Antonov fell back on the hard, foul-smelling mattress.

And suddenly, it had come! The journey home was one long trail of flowers, songs, bunting, rapturous faces bathed in tears. At the benefit bazaar in Tambov, Antonov sold his chains link by link. Fat, bejewelled fingers

dipped into bulging wallets and threw down ten-ruble notes.

Antonov was a hero those days, and the glory went to his head. "We suffered and endured," he thought, "now we've won our happiness!"

He saw old friends mounting the ladder to ministerships and vice-ministerships, grasping the most prominent, the most remunerative and honourable posts they could get. These one-time class-mates of his began to put on rosy cheeks, to strut about with an unhurried air; some developed paunches, others a new manner of speech—solemn, triumphant, grandiloquent.

Of course, they still acknowledged the greetings of friends who had not yet managed to seize something outstanding, but there was a condescending note in their voice. They were all so rushed, so busy, so burdened with concerns of state!

Some were quite unrecognizable. They had been civilians all their lives and now the devil only knew who they were in their tunics, breeches and top-boots, with holsters at their belts. Generals? Colonels? Chief Commissars, perhaps?

The Party press, too, was one shout of jubilation: "We, the Party of Socialist-Revolution-

aries," "We, the true knights of the revolution," "The free and victorious armies of Russia," "Freedom," "Power," "Land" and "Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" *ad infinitum.*

All this noise and glitter made Antonov tremble with eagerness. "Now," he thought, "our day has come! See if I don't get a provincial commissarship too! And then, up higher, to St. Petersburg, a position of command, right in the limelight. My name will ring too!"

And suddenly all his dreams were shattered. They appointed him to the militia in Tambov, assistant chief of the second district.

This was an outrage, an insult! The wind-bags were in the limelight, the wind-bags were in power both in the provinces and the capital, while he, like a dumb beast, would do for the militia? Flogging petty thieves—that's all the power *he* was to have!

For three months Antonov sulked in his district station, he signed papers he did not bother to read, he clenched his teeth and beat up thieves, he attended meetings and listened with a smirk to the speeches on freedom and equality.

And now he had been ordered by Bulatov, the provincial chief of the militia, a member of the S.-R. Committee, to come to the house of Fyodorov, the lawyer. Why, he was not told. And here he had been sitting a full hour, wait-

ing for his superior. Outside, there was wind and snow; here, in the lawyer's house, all was quiet.

The clock on the wall ticked monotonously, depressingly; and depressing thoughts weighed on his spirit.

The door bell gave two angry peals, doors creaked somewhere down the hall where, snorting and stamping, men were divesting themselves of their overclothes. Antonov smoothed his hair and pulled down his tunic.

The lawyer, a dignified and bearded man, dressed to the point of elegance, bowed to his visitor as he walked through the drawing-room.

"One moment, I shall be with you directly."

The thickset figure of Bulatov followed. He was accompanied by a man whom Antonov did not know: tall, hair already touched with grey, pendant eyebrows, moustache drooping in the Cossack manner.

"Let me introduce you, Alexander Stepanovich. This is Pyotr Ivanovich Storozhev, district commissar. He lives in Dvoriki. Take good note of him."

"Come and see us." Storozhev's voice was low, impressive. "You will always be a welcome guest."

"Now then, Pyotr Ivanovich." Bulatov turned again to Storozhev. "The Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg have taken over. We must be prepared for anything. You are a man of standing in your parts, go on to the village and get in closer with the men. You remember all the ones we talked about? Tell them, in the name of the Committee, that preparations must be made."

"Very well," Storozhev said quietly. "I'll go and speak to our host. I came about some land. I want to have the deeds filed. I bought a piece of property near the lake from the local squire."

Bulatov grinned.

"Why the hurry, Pyotr Ivanovich? The land will be yours anyway."

"That is so, it's got to be ours. But it's best to be on the safe side. The money's been paid, so it's all lawful and legitimate."

Storozhev shook hands with Bulatov, then with Antonov.

"Come and see us. It's a good place."

Bulatov and Antonov were left alone. The provincial chief of the militia lighted a stubby pipe, threw down the match, strode to the sofa and sat down.

"Do you know, Alexander, why I arranged this rendezvous here? The Committee met this

morning. They're entrusting you with an important job. You are to go to Kirsanov as chief of the district militia. Satisfied?"

A thick flush mounted to Antonov's cheeks, but he said nothing.

"Things are rotten," Bulatov went on. "The Bolsheviks are in control in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Tomorrow, if rumour is to be believed, we shall all be under their authority. We've received a directive to make ready, to build up reserves. You understand what that means? Now, Kirsanov is your home place, you know everybody there. D'you know Pyotr Tokmakov?"

"I should say I do!" Antonov answered with a mirthless smile.

"We are also sending you Loshchilin, Zuyev, Yegor Ishin, Pluzhnikov, Davydov—all fellow-townsmen of yours, if I am not mistaken."

Antonov nodded.

"Appoint them to the villages," Bulatov ordered. "Tell them to look for reliable people, and do so yourself. Collect weapons and hide them away securely. Make ready and we'll let you know when it's time. Look, Alexander, if you serve us well you can expect a lot from us. Understand? And out there you can do what you like—you will be lord and master.

But watch your step. You will be living among wolves, so you'll have to be a wolf yourself. Grab them by the throat if it comes to that, hold them tight, but whatever you do don't blunder!"

"I'll do my best," Antonov said grudgingly. "Don't worry, I am no fool."

"Another thing. There's a little operation to be carried out tonight—but it's got to be done neatly! They've got a hell of a lot of rifles stacked in the courtyard at the Town Hall. We must get them away today, for tomorrow will be too late. We'll have them sent out to your district, hide them away safely. I have spoken to Leonov, the officer of the watch, he will provide the men. They are to muster at your place at 2 in the morning."

The lawyer entered the room, bringing with him a faint odour of perfume.

"Well, I am free now and at your service. Masha," he called to the maid, "some drinks and a bite!"

"Oh no, old man, we can't drink anything tonight. Look, this is Alexander Stepanovich Antonov, and now let's talk it over quickly. No, we really couldn't, honestly," Bulatov pleaded, on seeing the maid enter with a decanter and food on a tray.

"From my own cellar! I keep it for my dear-

est guests," the lawyer buzzed. "One glass, just one glass!"

Bulatov did all the talking; the lawyer and Antonov listened. From this day on, Fyodorov and Antonov were to trust one another absolutely. And any instructions Antonov received from Fyodorov were to be carried out unreservedly. What was more, in order that Fyodorov might not land in trouble, he was henceforward to be known to Antonov not as Fyodorov but as Gorsky.

Hastily swallowing a parting glass, their fourth, the visitors made for the hall.

Fyodorov detained Bulatov on the way and whispered: "Man of calibre?"

"Him? Oh, he's a figure! Desperate character. Simply spoiling for a fight. We are keeping him back in the district until he's needed. Now we are sending him to Kirsanov as chief of the militia. He will have all the amenities: honour and authority, and so on.... That's what we call reserve-building, old man," Bulatov added with a deep chuckle.

In the hall Fyodorov drew Antonov aside and said:

"So you are going to Kirsanov? Well, there's a little business I am interested in. How is that place off for meat, say, or butter and eggs?"

Antonov smiled sourly.

"A hundred eggs or so can always be found for you."

"Tut-tut, I may want them by the thousand, you know. However, I shall be seeing you again. I'll take a trip there myself, or send one of my men."

"You're welcome," Antonov said, and thought to himself: "What a scoundrel!"

The next day the Bolsheviks announced that a large party of rifles had been removed by persons unknown from the courtyard of the Town Hall. There were stormy meetings, the papers minced no terms in abusing their political opponents, the party factions appointed commission after commission to investigate the theft.

The committee of inquiry set up by the Town Council included Bulatov, Antonov and a representative of the Bolsheviks. They sat three days, interrogating watchmen, railwaymen, militiamen. But the rifles seemed to have vanished into thin air.

"Were those rifles there in the first place?" queried the S.-R. sheet, commenting on the committee's report. "Is it not simply a Bolshevik hoax?"

A week later, when Antonov left for Kirsanov, Tambov was still silent, its streets swept by the wind and patrolled by armed guards. The Bolsheviks had taken over and a grand shake-up had begun, with searching inquiries into the political records of all and sundry.

In St. Petersburg, ministers and vice-ministers tumbled from their posts, and Kerensky, the wind-bag-in-chief, fled the capital disguised as a woman.

Chapter 2

Life in Kirsanov just shuffled along. It was an out-of-the-way place and nothing of note had occurred in it for a hundred years. Even the change of government had not stirred the waters.

In the office of the district militia, too, all was quiet and peaceful—the rooms dirty and unkempt, with dried-up ink-wells on the desks, the cupboards crammed with litter and old newspapers, a confused muttering coming from the cell where a drunk sat cooling his heels.

Antonov had no difficulty in settling down in Kirsanov. The new regime did not trouble him, for he was skilful in adapting himself and was very cautious as well—small wonder, with

such men to advise him as Tokmakov and Ishin. Tokmakov had become even leaner, and his pate, now quite bald, shone as if it had been polished. The Secret Service was in the hands of the merry, red-cheeked Yegor Ishin. A hard drinker, but he could keep a secret. Yes, many a secret was stored in that bold and enterprising head of Yegor Ishin.

A little secret like this, for example: what had become of the arms taken from that train of the Czechoslovak Corps which passed through Kirsanov? The arms and the equipment had been taken from the Czechs by Antonov and a Bolshevik detachment. But the weapons had been whisked off to the forests on the banks of the Vorona and Khopyor by men who were known to Yegor Ishin alone.

Another secret: what happened to the carloads of sweaters, boots, saddles, leather and other goods consigned from Moscow to Kirsanov? Antonov roused every militiaman in the district, he himself scoured the countryside for weeks on end, searching for the stolen property. But never a trace was found. Only Yegor Ishin knew the secret places in the forests and marshes where the stuff was cached.

In July 1918, militiamen from all the districts gathered in Kirsanov. Antonov had called them together for a special conference—army

deserters had begun to waylay food detachments and assault members of the committees of the poor. In the morning the delegates considered the question of the deserters, and in the evening they gathered at secret rendezvous to discuss S.-R. affairs. In the morning it was called a deliberative meeting of militiamen, and in the evening—a district conference of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party.

The conference lasted for four days. The delegates had been hand-picked by Pyotr Tokmakov. He himself never stayed long in Kirsanov, but was always scouring the district, travelling from village to village looking for men of the right kidney.

Antonov had a private conversation with each of the delegates. He studied them carefully and jotted down notes in a little book. He advised them to keep on friendly terms with the peasants, and to store away guns and cartridges.

"We haven't long to wait now. Make ready!" he said with an evil smile that revealed his blackened, decayed teeth.

Disaster came suddenly, like a bolt from the blue. Zuyev, one of their closest, most trusted confidants, mislaid a brief-case. There were all manner of things in it: the insurrection plans,

cipher keys, correspondence with the S.-R. Central Committee, directives, the programme of the S.-R. League of Labouring Peasantry.

It was evening when Antonov learned of the misfortune, and the same night he was no longer in Kirsanov.

All the district militiamen and all with whom they had been friendly, followed him into hiding.

Antonov spent that winter in the forests of Inzhavino. The time was not wasted. He trained a company in the use of arms. Commanders sufficed for the time being—non-commissioned officers of the old army, reliable men from rich kulak families, to whom the Soviets were a thorn in the flesh.

By spring Antonov grew bold and sallied forth on bandit raids, derailing trains and falling upon Communists and Committee men of the Poor, his stamping-ground stretching from Vyazha to Inzhavino, and from Razma to Krivolukino.

In June 1919 he sent Vasily Akimov and Fyodor Santalov to Uryupino and Balashov with orders to get in touch with Denikin and find out whether he could not link up with the general's forces and fight together.

The envoys returned empty-handed. The general could not be bothered with Antonov; the

general was marching on Moscow. Denikin had not much use for Socialist-Revolutionary Antonov in those days.

Antonov abused Denikin roundly, but actually he was not very upset. The winter had been good to him; he had rested up and put on flesh. And his friends were living in harmony so far; only Pyotr Tokmakov and Ishin quarrelled occasionally, and that mostly from boredom.

At the end of June, Antonov received a message from the S.-R. Committee through Lawyer Fyodorov, now known as Gorsky.

"Begin!" the paper said. "The time has come."

Chapter 3

The village of Treskino lay tucked away from the world amidst the marshes and rivulets in the south of the Tambov Province. The well-to-do peasants of these parts had hobnobbed with the S.-R.s even before the February Revolution.

In the forests around Treskino Antonov had often sought refuge from pursuit. He knew every footpath, every bend in the Lopatinka River, every island on the lakes, every man in the vil-

lage. And the Treskino men knew Antonov, and had helped him many a time in an hour of need.

It was here, in the safe meadowlands of Treskino, that he now banded together the vagrant deserters who infested these parts.

It was the month of July. The rye-ears were swelling and the scent of early-ripening apples wafted from the orchards. Over the river the gadflies ran riot. The days were close and sultry.

The crowd had been gathering on the right bank of the Lopatinka since the morning. Men in sheepskin coats or army topcoats, unkempt and unwashed, crept cautiously from the brushwood, looked around fearfully, and, seeing creatures of their own like, they joined them. By midday there were some two thousand hungry, vicious, haphazardly armed men in the meadow.

When the sun began to decline towards the west a troop of horsemen forded the river. This was Antonov's "company"—a body of about forty men, all dressed alike in leather jackets, red riding-breeches and scarlet forage-caps.

Having reached the lush grass of the meadow, the company dismounted from their dripping horses. Only Antonov, Tokmakov and Ishin remained in the saddle. The deserters flocked round the Antonovites, feeling the

quality of their leather jackets, stroking the croups of their horses and admiring their weapons. They clicked their tongues and swore lustily from sheer pleasure.

Antonov scrutinized the mob of foot-loose ruffians. They had lurked like foxes in their holes, hiding from Reds and Whites alike, and were prepared to stop at nothing for a bite of food and a gulp of moonshine.

"Raw stuff," Ishin whispered in Antonov's ear. "Can we lead a dance with this lot, d'you think?" And he laughed loudly.

"Perhaps you'd better talk to them?" Antonov said, turning to Tokmakov.

"Let Yegor, he's got a glib tongue in his head. Yegor! Talk to these swine, they'll understand you best."

Ishin's jaw set. "You mind your tongue," he snarled, "or I'll cut it out one of these days!"

"How do we know Antonov won't fool us?" one of the deserters cried.

"How can he?" someone rejoined. "Hasn't he promised us red breeches? Hasn't he promised us leather jackets?"

"Oh, hell! We'll fight for Antonov!"

"We don't care who we fight for, so long as we fight!"

"And won't we stuff our pockets!" a red-

haired fellow, ragged and tipsy-looking, cried excitedly.

"Get started!" shouted a lean unshaven ruffian in a torn Austrian army coat. "To hell with the generals."

"Bring out your spokesman!"

The deserters shouted and haggled. They knew what Antonov had banded them together for, they had heard that he needed men, and were out to get the most they could.

Ishin, reining in his prancing steed, began his harangue.

"Welcome, friends! What brings you here? What is it you want of us?" he asked with a grin.

"Fight! We want to fight!" voices shouted.

"Is that so? Before this you were fighting Antonov and now you've come to him yourselves, eh?"

"It was you who called us. Well, we've come," replied the fellow in the Austrian army coat. "And what's so queer about it? We're used to fighting—nothing else we can do. . . ."

"So you went and joined the Reds!" Ishin taunted them.

"Talk business! Get down to business!" the cry came from all sides.

"Why d'you look so grim and angry, boys?

What can be the reason?" Ishin chortled. "Isn't the government your own, doesn't it feed and clothe you? Or are the Commissars too damned strict?"

"You've got a sharp tongue, you devil!"

"You haven't forgotten how to fire a rifle, fellows, have you?"

"Stop grinning!" the fellow in the Austrian topcoat exploded. "We haven't come here to admire your teeth. Tell us straight out—will you take us or won't you? If you don't, we'll find another ataman. There are plenty around, and it's all the same to us who we go rioting with, you only swing once!"

Apart from the crowd, under a bush, sat a thick-lipped youth and a bearded peasant. The youth had his shirt off and was searching it for lice as he listened to Ishin's harangue.

"Look at that now," he reflected as he delved into his tattered garment. "See how lousy we've got! And I wouldn't mind a dish of soup with some good mutton in it either. But they'll swindle us, by God they will! What d'you think, Pyctr? Just look at his red mug, he must be guzzling it good and strong by the looks of it. Eh, Pyotr? You hear, they're promising us red breeches and leather jackets. Hell! Let's fight for him!

Hurrah!" he yelled suddenly, waving his shirt. "We're with you!"

And everyone joined in the shouting and yelling.... Ishin roared with laughter and shouted something into Antonov's ear which made him frown. After a while, Antonov ordered the officers and non-commissioned officers among the deserters to step forward. There were about twelve of them. Tokmakov and Antonov went aside with them to confer, while Ishin continued to talk to the deserters.

"Only bear this in mind, brothers," he said when the mob had quieted down, "we're not bandits, we're fighting for the Constituent Assembly."

"We don't give a damn what you're fighting for!" the deserters cried.

"But let's make this clear," said the fellow in the Austrian topcoat. "We're going to have both—leather jackets and red breeches. Understand? As promised!"

"Let him swear by God he won't fool us!" cried the thick-lipped deserter.

"Swear, ataman! No hedging!"

Ishin crossed himself fervently and said in an earnest tone:

"I swear by God I won't fool you, brothers!" But there was a cunning glint in his eye.

"The son of a bitch—he'll fool us after all!" the thick-lipped youth exclaimed in admiration.

"That's enough!" Ishin said peremptorily. "Now, all move over to the woods and we'll draw up the lists."

Antonov's men sorted the deserters into groups and began enrolling them in companies. Meanwhile Tokmakov and Antonov conversed with the officers.

"The Tambov Committee of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party," Tokmakov said, "has instructed Antonov and myself—the Chairman of the Provincial Committee of the League of Labouring Peasantry—to proclaim revolt against the Soviet Government. You have only two alternatives: to join us against the Commune or to perish in the forest. Well?"

The officers were silent. Tokmakov and Antonov waited, their horses moving restlessly under them, while the shadows lengthened on the meadow.

"Would you mind telling us—" the silence was broken by a man with greying hair, a scar across his right cheek, and wearing a neat topcoat—"what you intend to fight with? The Bolsheviks have guns, men and provisions. And what have you got?"

"Ten thousand carbines, pistols, machine-guns, ammunition. They're hidden on the lakes and in the forests," Antonov replied. "We know you can't handle fire with bare hands. And we'll have the men, too. The prosperous, sturdy farmers are being pared to the bone. The Commune means ruin for them, and they'll jib. And when they do, we'll be there to show them the way. And once the prosperous farmer goes with me—we'll have all the provisions we need."

"But will he?" asked the man with the greying hair. "That is the question."

"He has nowhere else to go. We are his party," Tokmakov pointed out.

"Oh well, we'll take a chance.... Let's shake on it!" exclaimed the officer. "As long as it's against the Reds, I'll go with the devil himself."

"You've something against them?" Tokmakov asked with a glint in his eye.

"Yes."

"Now that's a regular wolf!" Tokmakov whispered to Antonov. "What's your name?" he asked, turning to the greying officer.

"Safirov. Yakov Vasilyevich Safirov. Non-commissioned officer, Cross of St. George. I popped off a commissar in the heat of excitement and had to go into hiding."

"Why, Yakov, you don't want to recognize an old friend?" Antonov asked Safirov with a smile.

"Antonov! Alexander Stepanovich!" Safirov exclaimed in surprise. "God's truth I didn't recognize you. You've got so thin, man!"

"What brought you to these parts?"

"I was on my way to join Wrangel, but couldn't get through. Now I got tied up with this lot. I have been all over Russia, Alexander Stepanovich. I've seen them selling Russia piecemeal."

"Russia! Motherland!" Antonov's lips twisted in contempt. "A land of menials, Yakov. I've been through it all too, brother. In 1917 we thought at last our time had come and we were going to be on top. But see what's come of it?" Antonov fell silent. Then, turning to Tokmakov, he said: "Pyotr, talk it over with the commanders."

Tokmakov led the officers back to the crowd of deserters.

"Yes, that's how it is, Yakov. Well, I'm going to make you Commander of the First Regiment, Tambov Guerrilla Army."

"Thanks. Only those masters of yours are a swinish lot. Kulaks, savage wolves—the ravenous curs of scripture."

"Isn't it all the same to you?"

"Sure, I'll serve anybody, the devil himself, as long as it's not the Reds. They've sold Russia and I'll never forgive them for it!"

"Right you are, Yakov. Take over!"

Tongues of flame ran from village to village and the clash of battle resounded in the fields of the Tambov Province.

The appearance of a band headed by Socialist-Revolutionary Antonov was first reported to Moscow by the Tambov provincial Cheka in December. Antonov received from Gorsky the text of an intercepted telegram, the contents of which made him fume with anger.

"The sons of bitches!" he swore, turning to Tokmakov. "They call me a bandit. Me!"

"Hurts, does it?" Pyotr replied with a grating laugh. "Don't let it worry you. D'you know what 'bandit' means?"

"Of course—robber, rogue. . . ."

"Rot. 'Bandit' is not a Russian word. It means outcast, exile. It's an honour, and you talk as if it were an insult."

"You don't say? Exile? You're not lying?"

"Why should I? I read it somewhere."

When the peasants of Treskino presented Antonov with a grey colt which had been abducted from a state farm, he named it "Bandit"

out of spite, as if to say: "Swallow that now, and choke!"

It was on this grey colt that he led the men into battle against Shikunov, the Tambov provincial military commissar. Shikunov had received orders from Moscow to smash Antonov with whatever forces he could command. The Republic had too much on its hands to bother with such petty S.-R. trash.

The commissar mustered a thousand men, fieldpieces and machine-guns and marched south to hunt for Antonov.

They arrived at Treskino, but Antonov had left half an hour before the Reds entered the village. Shikunov followed in pursuit. Every now and again he caught glimpses of Antonov's troop, but these were freshly mounted and rapidly disappeared from sight.

Antonov knew every hill and dale, every copse and thicket. Five days of pursuit turned Shikunov's hair grey. He had fought on all the fronts, but here the front was all around, on every side.

The guns the commissar had brought with him had to be dragged by main force—the horses were too exhausted to pull them and would not be moved.

"Have you seen the bandits?" he would ask on arriving in some village.

"Bandits? Never heard of them."

"But here are their tracks, they passed through half an hour ago!"

"Why, man, what bandits?"

When Shikunov's men, utterly worn out, were fast asleep in a small out-of-the-way village, Antonov finished off the job.

Some of them agreed to join Antonov's troop; the majority preferred death. Shikunov and a handful of men succeeded in fighting their way out. His second-in-command was shot down in cold blood by Antonov himself.

As he wiped his smoking revolver, Antonov kicked the dead body with his foot and said:

"There, old fellow, take your rest, you must be tired!"

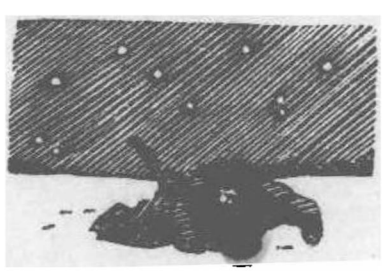
His men were wild with excitement. For three days Antonov gave himself over to feasting and drinking in honour of the first victory over the Reds. The wealthy peasants of Kamenka, where he set up his capital, gave him a royal banquet.

When the fumes of intoxication had passed, Antonov started getting ready for a grand campaign. The Committee of the League of Labouring Peasantry probed the sentiment in the surrounding villages, built up an underground organization, a liaison and intelligence service. Imperceptibly, its ramifications penetrated into

the placid life of the countryside, run by individuals known only to Tokmakov and Pluzhnikov. And it would have been hard to say which power was stronger—the open power of the Soviets, or that which assembled small meetings and explained that the Communists with their food requisitions wanted to make an end of the peasants. It would have been hard to say who was stronger—the authority elected by the village assembly, or the invisible committee men whom nobody had elected and nobody knew, or if anybody did know, would not betray, for all felt it was a case of stand together or hang together.

But Antonov felt cramped in the district of Kirsanov. He wanted to spread out north, west and east, to conquer the whole province. For this he needed strong and reliable men.

It was then that he remembered the man Bulatov had introduced him to at Fyodorov's house—Pyotr Ivanovich Storozhev of Dvoriki.



Chapter 4

Ivan Lukich Storozhev, a peasant of Dvoriki, had three sons: Semyon, Pyotr and Sergei. When the property had been divided, Semyon, the eldest, set up house by himself and soon fell into hopeless poverty. The man had no luck. Meek and hard-working, he toiled day and night on his strip of a field, worked himself to a shadow, grew sullen and morose, but want held him fast in its grip.

The youngest, Sergei, was conscripted to serve in the navy. His share of the family property had been half a house with a porch, and two sheep. These, when he joined the navy, he entrusted to his brother Pyotr for safe-keeping.

"We'll settle accounts later," he had said.

Pyotr was the only one who got on in the world. "Luck is a good friend of Pyotr Ivanovich's," the villagers used to say. And it was true, he knew how to succeed in life, he was a shrewd man.

Praskovya Vasyanina, whom he had taken for wife, came of a poor family. But he had not miscalculated.

Praskovya had no end of brothers and sisters. Pyotr Ivanovich found work for them all: some cleaned his pigsties and cattle-barns, others took his horses to night pasture, still oth-

ers nursed his children—indeed, there were jobs, big or small, for every one of them. It was a good arrangement: the young Vasyanins' bellies were filled with Pyotr Ivanovich's cabbage soup, while his barns were filled to bursting point with the fruits of their labour. And he himself was a hard worker too, rising early and retiring late. He was possessed by greed, a greed that was grasping and calculating.

On holidays he would drive to Gryaznoye to sell wool, onions, cucumbers and flax in the market-place. If he had nothing of his own to sell, he would buy produce from his neighbours and make a bit of a profit on the transaction.

He was also fond of making loans to meek and humble peasants—loans of seed, flour, or a horse for work in the field. The humble men would then pay off the debt with their labour and, moreover, would bow to him in gratitude and call him their benefactor and saviour.

Pyotr Ivanovich did not hoard his money in a pot—he lent it out for he liked the taste of the interest he received. Thus, kopek by kopek, ruble by ruble, he had built up a capital, and now he owned machines, thoroughbred horses and cows! His success took his neighbours' breath away!

He had long set his heart on a good piece of

land near Lebyazhye Lake. What tempting acres they were!

He looked at it this way: soon he would be in a position to leave the village and build himself a sturdy farmstead near the lake, surround it with orchards, plant a stand of birch timber, erect stables and barns and fill his bins with heavy rye, golden wheat, and brown buckwheat.

The land had a powerful attraction for him: it was so well located.

"Watering places right near by," he mused. "No need to fear drought, and there's no better soil for vegetables, for cabbage or carrots."

He would often drive to the place and, taking his stand on a rise, look down on the coveted acres.

He knew every balk, he had already decided what to sow and where, and where to place the watering-troughs and enclosures for his cattle. Land! His father, grandfather and great-grandfather had spent their whole lives on the land, and they all had clung feverishly to every patch they owned.

"We are men of the soil," he would say to his neighbours. "We live by it. Whoever owns land, holds power. If I had a thousand acres, I'd be king!"

He often saw these thousands of acres in his

dreams—a boundless plain of rich and fertile loam, intersected by streams and dells, and he, Pyotr Ivanovich Storozhev, its master, striding through this land which had no end and lay fulgent in the rays of the sun.

Land! He loved to plunge his hand into its friable soil, to squeeze the clods between his fingers, to sniff and even taste with the tip of his tongue the bitter, rich soil. It was everything—honour, money, power....

"Everything changes, flows away," he would argue in his mind. "People come and go. Land alone, in the hands of a good master, never dies.... Nothing is more precious."

Yes, he must get more and more of it in his grasp, hold it tightly, hedge it around with a strong fence, and have it guarded day and night by savage dogs that would tear to pieces anyone who dared to encroach on it—on his land, the source of his strength.

And he must have sons in plenty, to spread and settle, owners of land, before whom people would bow and scrape because they held this power.

He would often go to the pastures of his neighbours, sigh with envy and think: "If I could only get hold of this land, stand firmly on it with the heavy foot of a master! Then I would really be somebody. The peasants would

grovel before me, and the militiamen and rural officials would fawn upon me."

Pyotr Ivanovich despised them all—the peasants for their stupidity and the authorities for their greed. He liked to hear Sergei talk when he came home on leave from the sea. Sergei brought him forbidden literature to read, and Pyotr read it and interpreted it in his own way. In the day-time, out in the field somewhere, Pyotr would talk long with his sailor brother about the tsar, and he came to the conclusion that this dull-witted man would have to go and relinquish the reins of government to men who were strong and shrewd, like he was.

Wars irritated Storozhev. During the Russo-Japanese war, he laughed maliciously at the defeat of the tsarist armies. In 1914, he had no faith in victory.

He welcomed the February Revolution with open arms.

In May 1917, he went to Tambov and came back with a red bow on his chest and a District Commissar's mandate in his pocket.

"Our party," he said, "is for us, us landed peasants!"

He attended conferences and meetings, learned to talk and listen, to make promises and go back on them.

But despite all these cares and worries Storozhev kept a clear head about his own affairs.

When the coup d'état was still a whispered rumour, Storozhev called on the squire Nikita Modestovich Ulusov, frightened him with the imminence of Bolshevik rule, and bought from him some fifty acres of land near Lebyazhye Lake for a mere song.

The year had been a good one for him. His crop of rye and oats was such that his granaries were practically groaning with repletion. His cows had calved, the heifers were growing up nicely, his mares were sired by thoroughbred stallions, and his pigs were filling out with fat.

In the autumn Storozhev was elected to the Constituent Assembly. He made a trip to Tambov once again to meet the S.-R.s. He saw a number of people and remembered many of them.

He came back to Dvoriki feeling rejuvenated—the title-deed to the Lebyazhye Lake property reposed safely in his pocket. The deal had been put through by Lawyer Fyodorov, who had engineered it with finesse; it was watertight. A dream come true!

Rumours were current about the Bolsheviks, about a new coup d'état, but Storozhev did not

believe any of them—the year had been much too lucky for that. He strutted about the village sowing gracious smiles, he shook the men's hands and opened most of his conversations with them with a pompous phrase that ran something like: "We shall stand up for the peasantry of Russia...."

Storozhev preached against immoderate behaviour on the squires' estates, he delivered Ulusov from many an unpleasant situation, and averted disaster from his old friend Filip, the forester. The peasants wanted to set fire to Filip's place: he had been too exacting with them in his excessive greed and cruelty.

In December Storozhev learnt of the coup d'état, in January he went to Tambov to sit on the Constituent Assembly, but he came back quickly enough—the Bolsheviks had scattered the assembly.

And in February it began.... Sergei arrived in the village and demanded his half of the house with a porch, and his sheep. Oh, but what were mere sheep, blast them! It was his own authority the sailor instated, he and all sorts of poor trash and soldiery!

Pyotr Ivanovich had grown used to his house and considered all of it his own; as for the sheep, he had forgotten to brand them, so how

was he to divide them now? And his authority Pyotr Ivanovich refused to relinquish to the sailor and his friends.

But when Sergei mentioned the piece of property by Lebyazhye Lake, Pyotr Ivanovich became angry in earnest.

"What? Give up my land? To whom? What for?"

They took away half of his sheep and three of his horses, they carted out all his grain, relieved him of his arms and tore up the S.-R. Commissar's mandate.

The Vasyanin chaps would not work for him any longer. Lyonka was the only farm-hand who remained with Storozhev, serving him as before. He had been brought to Pyotr Ivanovich as a mere boy. His mother had gone down on her knees before him begging him to take pity on her in her poverty and bring up the boy to be a farm-hand. As a rule Storozhev disliked the riff-raff from Durachy End, the street where the beggars clustered in wretchedness, but he took a fancy to the boy—he looked a smart, quick-witted rascal. He hedged a little for effect, but eventually agreed to take the boy. Lyonka's mother put up three votive candles in church for Pyotr Ivanovich.

Storozhev thrashed Lyonka mercilessly whenever the boy was at fault, and even when

he wasn't, but just happened to be handy when Pyotr Ivanovich was short of temper.

"Flogging-boy! Flogging-boy!" the boys teased Lyonka until one day he dislocated Sashka Chirikin's jaw in a fight—a huge chap, Sashka was, and five years his senior.

Lyonka was treated like a son, the sixth, in the family.

Pyotr Ivanovich loved none of his sons as well as he loved his youngest, Kolka. The older boys found jobs for themselves on the farm and were working off their debt to their father. They all took after him—good farmers, large fellows, sturdy workmen. They all had a quick eye and deft, grasping hands.

"Produce more sons, Mother, more," Pyotr Ivanovich would say to his wife. "Look how soft and strong you are! Produce more sons, more workers for the land. We won't starve in our old age. One of them is bound to give us a corner."

Praskovya was delivered of her children swiftly, with a grim sort of hastiness.

"She shoots them out like bullets," Pyotr Ivanovich laughed. "My, what power you've got inside of you, woman."

But Kolka was a difficult confinement. Praskovya lay on her back, with a livid face and

staring eyes, her lips twitching with pain and her body writhing in dreadful agony.

Whether it was because Pyotr Ivanovich lost heart, or because something inside him trembled for his wife, whatever the cause, he forgot to say his usual words about a worker for the land when Kolka, with a shrill cry, blinded by the cold December sun, emerged from his mother's womb.

Genuine fatherly love filled his heart for the first time.

Pyotr Ivanovich was a morose man, morose and taciturn. Kolka alone, with his merry blue eyes and carefree laughter, brightened his father's days. Sometimes he would climb on to his father's knees, tickle his cheeks with a clumsy, loving little hand, and bubble over with laughter when Pyotr Ivanovich nudged him with his thick black beard.

Kolka was like a kitten, soft and affectionate. He would come up to his father and stand close to him with his head thrown back. And Pyotr Ivanovich would look into his child's blue eyes, and never look his fill: it was so serene and tranquil in their depths, like in a forest backwater, safe from any onslaughts of wind or storm, with nothing in it but sunlight and the reflection of green trees nodding from above.

For some reason Kolka loved the farm-hand better than anyone else in the world. And Lyonka loved the boy too, he looked after him and pampered him, and taught him to ride. The little four-year-old would gallop along, clutching at the horse's mane, and his mount seemed to understand whose sharp little knees were pressing into its sides.

Perhaps it was because of this love for his son that Storozhev did not throw Lyonka out when he learned that his brother Listrat had gone over to the Bolsheviks.

Lyonka stayed on with Storozhev as though nothing had occurred, as though everything was as it should be. He went on doing the work of three men, was as cheerful as ever, he loafed about the streets as usual and lured the girls into the haystacks.

Storozhev knew of Lyonka's devilry; he would shake his finger at him and say:

"Mark my words, they'll beat you up for those petticoats, you bastard!"

"No fear," Lyonka roared with laughter, "they're asking for it themselves."

Pyotr Ivanovich spat in disgust and walked away, grumbling angrily: "The devil's spawn, the rascal, the idler."

When the Bolsheviks came to power he

turned over the management of his farm to Lyonka and Andrian, his brother-in-law.

Old Andrian muttered and grumbled all day. Lyonka walked about the yard and sang songs, while Pyotr Ivanovich kept to the house, sitting on a bench under the icons, his heavy hands spread out on the table before him, reading the Bible over and over again, trying to find in it condemnation of the new order and policy.

"Here," he would say, "a prophet says: they will reign for a year and a half, and then a Prince Mikhail will come and drive them away. Well, there's Prince Mikhail now. Even if he is a Romanov, even if he is a degenerate, all the same I'd sooner have him than my brother Sergei."

He went nowhere except to church, snubbed his brothers and was short and harsh with his sons.

And no one loved him except Kolka.

Chapter 5

Sergei stayed but a short time in the village. He roused the beggars, emptied the bins of the wealthier peasants, and just then the generals bore down on the Soviets. Sergei put on his ribboned sailor's cap and away he went. . . .

Before he left he came in to see Pyotr.

"Don't be angry with me, brother," he said. Pyotr did not so much as move his head. "I used to think when I brought you those books to read that you'd follow the same road as I did, but instead you went and got yourself into the landowner class, crashed into the Constituent Assembly! Oh well! But look here, Pyotr, I'm giving you a piece of brotherly advice: try and break yourself or else we'll have to break you, and it will hurt...." And he left.

Pyotr said nothing, he merely frowned and crisped his fingers.

By the autumn of 1918 he came to life again on hearing that General Krasnov had risen somewhere, was breaking his way through and had come close to Tambov....

But the Bolsheviks turned the general to rout, damn it all!

After that, Listrat—Lyonka's brother—came back home. His soldier's heritage was a rifle and an empty trunk. One morning Andrian found Listrat, axe in hand, wrenching out the boards nailed down over the doors and windows of the Credit Bank building.

"What d'you think you are doing?" Andrian asked.

"I want to settle down here. The Red Guards are taking possession of these premises, see?"

"That's all very well, but I don't see any Guards. All I see is young Listrat standing before me, but there are no Red Guards that I can see!"

Listrat invited Andrian to sit down, took out his pouch and lit up.

Listrat was as handsome as they come: sturdy and well-knit, of medium height, with teeth as white as a bone washed clean by the rain, blue eyes, a silky fair moustache and a broad, cheerful smile on his face.

"Well, how are you treating that brother of mine?"

"He's right as rain." Andrian coughed. "My, what tobacco the Guards have!"

Listrat burst out laughing.

"And when will your Guards get here?" Andrian asked.

"You just wait, they're coming!"

One morning Pyotr Ivanovich came out and stood on his porch. Listrat was walking past.

"Morning," Listrat greeted the older man. Storozhev raised his cap grudgingly.

"Through with your fighting, are you?" he asked Listrat.

"We are," Listrat replied and sat down on the porch step.

Storozhev thought: "Making himself at home, is he? He'd better get on his way."

"I'm fed up with fighting, Pyotr Ivanovich. Krasnov now, that was more like it, that one I fought with pleasure."

"You've beaten the generals, so now you're starting on the peasants? Some Guards! You're just highwaymen robbing the people, that's what you are."

"But we don't rob," Listrat objected. "We're just teaching the likes of you to get used to us, it's we who are the masters now, you know."

"Well good-bye," Storozhev said brusquely. "You and I should only talk on a full stomach."

"Good-bye," Listrat answered. "Mind now, don't you start selling flour, you'll get it good and proper if I catch you at it. And don't you ill-treat my brother—I'll wring your neck if you harm Lyonka!"

Listrat and his Guards left the village soon afterwards; rumour had it that Denikin was marching on Moscow.

In August 1919 a Cossack detachment passed through the village. The commander put up at the priest's.

On hearing of the Cossacks' arrival, Pyotr Ivanovich smartened himself up, brushed his hair and went calling on his old friend, the priest. Father Stepan, a slight, grey-haired, wily little priest, was putting on a show of being

frightened. He had nothing to tell the lean officer. He suddenly and completely forgot how far it was to Gryaznoye and how to get to Klyuchevka.

"May I present to you one of our parishioners, a member of the Constituent Assembly, a highly respected man," he broke out into a titter, very glad that Storozhev had come.

The officer took Storozhev in from head to toe in one rapid glance and began questioning him about village affairs, the roads and the Reds.

"May I ask, if it's not a secret, to what army you belong?" Storozhev asked towards the end of the conversation.

"General Mamontov's cavalry," the officer replied curtly and made ready to leave.

"That's very good," Pyotr Ivanovich said quietly. "Does that mean the Bolsheviks are finished?"

"Perhaps," the officer drawled as he walked out. "Quite possibly," he added and leapt into his saddle.

The detachment rode through deserted streets, the village seemed to have died out. "The glorious troops were given a hearty welcome by the population..." the officer thought bitterly and spurred on his horse. "The scoundrels!"

Pyotr Ivanovich gave orders to start plough-

ing his fields by Lebyazhye Lake for winter crops the very next day.

Once again he strutted about the village; he got back his horses and sheep and carted back all the grain that had been taken from him, down to the last pound.

Within a fortnight the Communists were in the village again. Mamontov's army was defeated, the general ran helter-skelter from the Reds.

Once again they took away Storozhev's horses, sheep and grain and, moreover, threatened to lock him up as soon as they were through with more important matters.

Pyotr Ivanovich stormed and raged, but there was nothing he could do about it, he just had to stay mum, brooding and thinking....

It was then that a messenger arrived from Antonov, from the woods of Kirsanov in the far-off lake district, to seek him out.

Chapter 6

Storozhev had a long talk with the Antonovite in the privacy of the threshing-barn. In the dead of night he took the man out the back way to the road, then he woke up Lyonka and told him to have the horses ready early next morning.

"Where are we going?"

"Mind your own business," Storozhev replied. "Your job is to get the horses ready, and mine is to decide where to go."

"Gosh, how bad-tempered he is," Lyonka thought, "all he does is snap at you, the old devil."

Lyonka recalled with regret how Listrat had wanted him to come to Tsaritsin with him but he had not wished to go. He was used to the village, to Pyotr Ivanovich, to philandering with the girls late into the night, to climbing over the wall into the parish orchard with the fellows, shaking the apple-trees, crawling about on all fours in the dark, picking up the ripe, juicy fruit. Lyonka had refused to go to town with his brother, he was sorry to part with his village, but there was something else that held him back: he had a sweetheart in Gryaznoye, three miles from Dvoriki, a fair-haired girl called Natasha.

Lyonka used to go to Gryaznoye quite often before, either alone or driving Pyotr Ivanovich to market.

He had picked out the girl but his courting wasn't getting him anywhere. She was willing to go walking with him, she would listen to him play the accordion, she let him put his arm round her and was not averse to kissing,

but the haystack—no. She drew the line at that. She had prudence, that girl.

"What sort of a match are you for me?" Natasha would say. "What good are you? What have you got to offer me? You're a farm-hand of Storozhev's, do you expect me to go and be his scullery-maid or something? You'd better look for someone else!"

But she loved him, damn it! He knew she loved him, she was just stubborn and wilful and sharp with her tongue. Lyonka could not stop thinking of her, he could not forget her. He moped and fretted but could not give her up, no matter how he tried. He was willing to ride to Gryaznoye in all weathers, on any pretext, just to get a glimpse of Natasha.

A thin rain was falling, leaden clouds blocked out the sky, it was chilly out in the open that morning. A wind blew across the desolate field, jackdaws wheeled over the stubby cornfields, cawing noisily, quarrelling and fighting.

Storozhev, wrapped snugly in his fur coat, sat in the carriage, while Lyonka perched on the driver's seat, humming a song and thinking of Natasha. He had not seen her for a long time, five months it was, ever since Storozhev had stopped going to market. Lyonka missed her, he longed for his beloved and, what was

more, Natasha herself had sent him word to ask why he had stopped coming and if there was not someone else perhaps.

Who else could there be for him? Lyonka thought of no one but Natasha day and night, and yet he could not get away and come to Gryaznoye—that was a farm-hand's lot for you! But now he was going to see his darling! Lyonka had no idea where he was to take his master, but that did not worry him in the least for they would have to call a halt at Gryaznoye in any case, to feed the horses.

When they were close to Gryaznoye the rain came pouring down in earnest. By the time they reached the village, they were soaked to the bone. As usual, Storozhev dropped in to see the priest. After he had had a chat with him, Pyotr Ivanovich told Lyonka to saddle a horse for him. Three hours later Storozhev rode away, leaving Lyonka behind in Gryaznoye.

It was still raining. With a happy grin on his face, Lyonka watched Storozhev clamber clumsily into the saddle and set off at a trot, splashing through the mud.

Lyonka went and had supper. An hour or two later he foddered his grey colt and went out. An accordion was screeching at the other end of the village street and voices were heard

shrilling a song. Lyonka glanced up at the sky —ragged, smoky clouds were moving swiftly, the moon hid behind them one moment and came out the next to cast a dead white light on the thatched roofs, the muddy road and on the trees dismally shedding their finery.

Lyonka took out his pocket-comb, whipped up his curly front hair, set his cap at a rakish angle and started down the road. He knew he would find Natasha where the singing was.

He got to the end of the street and saw some girls and fellows sitting on logs in front of a lonely cottage. The accordion-player sat proudly in the centre of the group, surrounded by the soloists. With his ear close to the instrument he was softly playing a popular tune while Natasha sang the words:

Oh, there's trouble, always trouble,
Soldiers wanting all our bread,
But we've now another trouble,
Pay a three-pood tax per head!

Lyonka dropped down beside the lads, offered them his makhorka to smoke and they gave him some sunflower seeds to nibble. He sat and listened to their talk. A fellow in a tanned sheepskin coat was telling them in an under-

tone about Antonov: "Red breeches, red cap, and he rides an arab!"

"A general, is he?" a voice queried from the darkness.

"General—nothing, he's just an ordinary ex-convict, served a term in Siberia for robbery."

"And now?"

"Now he rides an arab, gets the peasants together and says: 'I'm for you,' he says," the same voice continued.

"Oh, to hell with them! They're all after our bread."

"Well then," the fellow drawled on, taking no notice of the angry retort, "he goes about, gets the men together, mounts them on thoroughbred horses and fights the Commune."

"You know, fellows, Pyotr from the settlement went and joined him and was never heard of since," a youngster who sat next to Lyonka spoke up.

"He did?"

"He did, I tell you. Took a horse and off he went."

Everyone lapsed into silence. The accordion rollicked on, the singers tried to outshine one another in their performance.

"What about a walk down the street, fellows? What's the good of sitting here?" the chap in the sheepskin coat suggested.

"Too muddy."

"Never mind the mud, we won't drown. Hey, girls," he called out, "let's go down the village."

The girls got up, the accordion-player took the lead, and the noisy, jolly crowd moved down the quiet street.

Lyonka sidled up to Natasha and tugged at the sleeves of her trim quilted jacket. She turned and gave a soft laugh.

Her anguish was over, her lonesomeness at an end, he was here, close to her, her sweetheart, her beloved! She had not seen him for five months! Natasha nestled close to Lyonka, fell back from the crowd and led him down the side path towards the haystacks.

"My darling," she whispered, hugging him, "Lyonka, my precious, if you only knew how I missed you! I thought you had forgotten me and didn't want to see me any more." She laid her cheek on Lyonka's breast....

They parted when day was just breaking and a rosy line appeared on the far horizon, steam rose from the fields and the wet grass sagged, weighted down by last night's raindrops.

"What shall we do now? What d'you say?" Lyonka asked, giving Natasha a parting kiss.

"I'll go to the ends of the earth with you, Lyonka, my precious.... I'll plead with Dad,

maybe he'll accept you for a son-in-law. But if he doesn't, I'll go and work on the farm for Storozhev, just to be with you.... Let me go home now ... don't Lyonka ... let me go ... Lyonka ... darling...."

At midday Lyonka went in to see Frol Bayev, Natasha's father. Frol looked Lyonka over the way a prospective buyer looks over a young bull.

"Frol Petrovich, I've something to ask." Lyonka reddened.

"I know what you're after, I know! As if there weren't enough wenches on your conscience already," Frol growled.

"But he's good really, Lyonka is," Natasha spoke up for her lover.

"I can't live without her!" Lyonka said.

"So I see, you've even lost weight! 'Can't live without her,'" Frol mocked. "Just listen to him! You mean you've sown your wild oats? No, you answer me now!"

"Yes ... I...."

"Don't you argue with me, understand? Don't argue, I said. You're unreliable, you know that."

"What do you mean—unreliable?"

"Now, now, don't boil over. You're a regu-

lar samovar, that's what you are. You're all smoke and no fire. I have no faith in you."

"I'll come and work for you if you let Natasha marry me," Lyonka mumbled in embarrassment.

"I've no faith in you, that's all."

"Dad!" Natasha beseeched him. "What's the matter with you, Dad?"

"Go away now! This is men's talk, no business for a woman to listen."

When Natasha was gone, Frol said:

"My household is poor—I've a miserable cow and a horse of sorts and a beauty for a daughter, that's all the wealth I possess." He laughed, showing his decayed teeth. "But the wench is pure gold! If you wrong a wench like her I'll wring your neck, you rogue. All right, marry her, I'm finding it hard to carry the sacks from the barn, you can do the carrying now."

And so it was agreed that they would marry.

Pyotr Ivanovich came back four days later, at midday. In all this time Lyonka never left Natasha's side. The Gryaznoye fellows made more than one threat to smash his ribs for him.

"Look at the gay dog," they leered at him. "They haven't any wenches of their own, so they come tagging after ours!"

"Give him one on the nut, that'll stop him coming."

"Give me one?" Lyonka snapped back. "I'll give you one so hard you won't need to call in the priest, just run and order yourself a coffin, that's all."

Towards the end of the day the master and the farm-hand started back for home. Storozhev placed a heavy sack on the floor of the carriage and swathed it carefully in straw. But Lyonka somehow managed a peep and spat in disappointment: the sack was full of books and sheets of paper with something printed on them in large black letters.

When they had gone a couple of miles Lyonka turned round to Storozhev and said:

"I'm going to marry, Pyotr Ivanovich."

"You are?" Storozhev said in surprise. "And what is the name of the countess who's tied down a fickle scamp like you, eh?"

"Natasha Bayeva," Lyonka answered proudly. "She's some girl!"

"She's some girl, that's right, but she's marrying a fool. A nice time you picked for marrying. We're going to fight first and dance at weddings afterwards. Is that clear? Put the wenches out of your mind, we're in for a hard time, war is coming, we've got to fight or we'll be ruined, completely ruined."

"But maybe I don't want to fight?" Lyonka said with sudden daring.

"You go where your master goes!"

"That's a good one!"

"Did I hear you talking back to me? How dare you? Don't want to fight, you say? Well, pay me back what you owe me and you're free to go wherever you like!"

Both fell silent.

"Don't take it so hard, Lyonka." Storozhev's manner softened. "We'll be fighting our own peasant battle. If you serve me well I'll reward you."

Pyotr Ivanovich wrapped himself closer in his coat and lapsed into silence. Lyonka was silent too, and suddenly he felt very sad. He fought down the tears that were threatening to overflow and yelled at the horses: "Hey you, get a move on." Then he began to sing a melancholy song:

They'll recruit me in the army,
But what about that wife of mine?
There's an old well in the garden,
Shall I push her down in that?

From that day Storozhev knew no peace, waking or sleeping. He informed the village Soviet that he was now employed by a Petro-

grad firm of horse buyers, produced a certificate issued by the Tambov representative of Gorsky's office (he had received the certificate from Antonov), and stayed away from home for weeks on end, travelling up and down the region. Lyonka often accompanied him. Occasionally Lyonka had to go by himself, delivering parcels to people he did not know, bringing back letters for Storozhev or repeating messages to him that had a very queer sound, such as "Rain is falling, the smith is forging," or "The bird has flown, catch it on the river."

Chapter 7

Storozhev very nearly got caught. A tiny screw went loose somewhere, the chain burst and the Cheka started roping in Storozhev's friends, right and left. Duly warned of the danger, he fled.

For two weeks he tramped the wooded countryside, feeding on autumn game and covering his tracks with cunning and care. The cold drove him into a dug-out in the bushes.

Often, when the weather was stormy and Storozhev had to crawl into his dug-out, he would laugh in sardonic amusement at the thought of having so cleverly outwitted the Communists. He nursed his spite and lived in

hopes of the armed strength which Antonov was mustering.

It rained incessantly for several days, dampness seeped into the dug-out, and one morning Storozhev woke up dripping wet. The floor was flooded an inch deep. In vain he tried to light a fire: the damp wood hissed, sputtered, and went out. He could not shake off the cold, his teeth chattered, he had a headache and a nagging pain in his legs.

Storozhev realized that he was ill, that he could not remain in the dug-out any longer, that shelter had to be sought for the winter. He decided to try and get to his friend, the forester Filip, whose home was not far from Storozhev's hiding-place.

He walked along barely marked paths, past quags and dense growths of rushes where he had often shot game with the forester; his legs sank in the quagmire, he fell on the cold, slippery ground, picked himself up and walked on, scenting his way along.

His head ached, he was hot one minute, freezing the next, his thoughts grew muddled, delirium was setting in.

He had not the strength to go on and, close by the forester's cottage, he collapsed.

Consciousness returned a week later. He saw

a woman's face bent over him. Storozhev tried to get up but strong hands held him down.

"Lie still, lie still, and don't move," the woman said gently.

Storozhev sighed faintly, tried to say something, but he sank into the grey fog of unconsciousness again. It was not till two days later that he came to his senses once more.

Everything was still about him, still and light. Storozhev raised himself in bed and looked around. He was in a clean, familiar room. He knew this large room, the faces of the saints on the icons, the tall windows and the smell of green pine. Holding on to the back of the bed, he let his feet down on the floor and, clutching at chairs, got to the window. Beyond the front garden, beyond the dell, rose the dark forest; dusky clouds moved along the sky, settling in tatters on the jagged treetops. Storozhev chuckled softly—this house was a safe refuge for him.

He took a fly-blown mirror from the wall and saw in it his thin waxen face and long beard.

The door creaked and a fat, red-faced man dressed in a sheepskin coat came into the room. This was Filip, the forester.

"Admiring yourself? Well, you must be coming back to life if you're concerned about your

looks." He laughed merrily and began to take off his coat.

Leaning on Filip's shoulder Pyotr Ivanovich staggered back to bed. The forester ran his fingers through his yellow hair, cut in a circle, smoothed down his luxuriant moustache and, sitting down on a bench close to the table, pulled out his pouch.

"So, that's how we meet, brother," he said, rolling a cigarette. "I never thought I'd see you alive again, you were in a bad way, my, how bad you were!" Filip licked down the edge of the paper and poured in some tobacco from the palm of his hand.

"I'm in your debt for ever," Storozhev said softly.

"Oh rubbish!" Filip waved him away. "We pray to the same God, we serve the same master. Try to sleep, brother, I'll go and have something to eat, haven't had any dinner yet. Sleep, it's good for you!"

His host went out. Storozhev pulled up his blanket, turned over on his side, and fell asleep. Through his sleep he heard the door being opened and closed, heard people walking about the room, talking in whispers, coming up to his bed now and again, gently straightening his covers. He awoke to find the room in semi-darkness, a sanctuary lamp burning be-

fore the icons, and someone's shadow flickering on the wall. He raised his head and saw his host in prayer. Then he dropped off again. In the morning Matryona, the forester's wife, brought him some tea.

"Filip Ivanovich left for the junction last night," she said, wrinkling her nose like a child. "I'm frightened to be alone. What if the Communists come down on us, they'll cut your throat, you know, my dear."

"Why, do they ever come here?"

"They did quite often in the summer, curse them. They thought a forester must be a rich man! They searched through every nook and cranny, they ransacked all our trunks. One of them threatened to shoot my man. He said: 'You're a red-headed swindler, you're a kulak, we know which way your eyes are fixed.' But it's not so easy to get here now, you must be sure of the paths or else you'll get lost in the quagmire."

"And what if they do come?"

"Oh hush! As it is I fancy I hear men's whispers when it's only a pine rustling in the night. I'm worn out with fright."

"I'm at your service!"

"Never mind the service! You hurry up and get well, Pyotr Ivanovich, and leave us. Take pity on us!"

The woman broke out into a wail, fell on her knees before Storozhev, beat her forehead on the floor in supplication, sobbed and cried, begging him to go away, to allay her fears.

Filip Ivanovich was an old friend of Storozhev's. He used to serve in the same regiment as Andrian, but was soon bought out by his father, who was a wealthy farmer. When Filip came back home, he took his share of the property, sold his livestock, his goods and chattels, and left for the neighbouring district where he got a job as a forester. He promised himself solemnly that he would become a rich man. He ruled his area with a rod of iron: you couldn't even steal a twig in the forest, let alone a tree. Filip tracked down the peasants who stole his wood and wrung exorbitant fines from everyone he caught. Tears left him unmoved and piteous pleas he would not heed. In 1917 they almost killed the forester. It was then that Storozhev came and rescued him. He placated the men by appealing to their conscience and by intimidating them. They were not the sort to harbour resentment; they shouted and cursed, but once it was over they seemed to forget their grievances.

Until 1918 Filip lived in peace and quiet. He had his bit of money hidden away, he sold his

livestock, so that when the Bolsheviks came they found he owned nothing. When the company rode away, Filip bared his milk-white teeth and gave a sly, low neigh.

He turned the screws on the peasants tighter than ever. "I'm serving the Soviet Government, you sons of bitches," he said. "It'll show you liberty—with a vengeance!"

Storozhev was thinking: "So now Filip and I are quits."

He comforted Matryona and put her mind at rest, and fell asleep again. His sleep was wholesome and good.

He grew stronger with every day. He could walk about the cottage now, he sat for hours at the window peering into the darkness of the woods. His ambling thoughts were mellow and restful, he did not want to think at all of the frost that would soon set in, of the ice-bound ponds, of the imminence of his departure from this clean, warm room.

Clammy, wet snow was falling. Pyotr Ivanovich went out into the yard and stood for a long time watching the woods put on their white winter mantle, and the meekness with which the firs accepted the heavy load of snow on their shoulders.

At last Filip returned. At evening tea Storozhev said to him:

"Friend, I must be going. Wait, don't interrupt. I have no wish to die nor do I want to bring death upon you. But we must expect callers any minute now. Tell me what I should do, where I should head my tracks."

Filip did not reply at once. He lighted a cigarette and said:

"I won't hold you, old man. It's time you went. We're lucky as it is that they haven't scented you out before now. Listen to me: there's a mud hut near by. A couple of men were in hiding there last summer. Deserters or some such, the devil alone knows who. It's a first-rate hut. If those men are still there—well and good, if not, you'll have to struggle on alone till spring. I'll be coming to see you, I'll keep you supplied with food and ammunition, don't worry about that. We'll wait for the frost and then off we'll go."

Hard frost set in at last. The pine-trees rang with it and the walls of the cottage crackled. Filip fitted Storozhev out with a pair of felt snow-boots, a fur coat, some underwear, a bag of rusks, and cartridges for his rifle. By morning the two men were already far away.

Towards midday a wind started up, the trees roared menacingly and snow-dust whirled in the clearings. Now and again their horse sank

deep into the snowdrifts. They drove on all day. When darkness began to fall Filip halted the horse, got out of the sledge, walked towards the trees and called to Storozhev.

"See that tall pine over there? Go on and on towards it. When you get to it, turn to the left and walk along the dell for half an hour or so. When you come to an oak wood, go straight through it. Once you're out of it on the other side, make across the clearing and then look for the hut. It's among the young firs."

He repeated the instructions once more and added:

"Mind you go straight ahead, don't swerve to the right, it's a wolfish spot, that's where they set the traps for the wolves. Well, God be with you!"

Storozhev slung his bag and his rifle on to his shoulders and walked away into the forest without once glancing back. The forester stood watching his friend for a long time, then he waved his hand, got into the sledge, turned his horse around and gave it a crack with the whip.

Storozhev located the tall pine-tree, turned left and walked along the dell overgrown with young shrubbery. The wind blew stronger in the open, it raised a cloud of snow-dust, chased

it, whipped it up, lashed at his face, cutting his cheeks and pinching his lips. The stars showed brighter in the sky. Suddenly he heard a muffled howl.

"Wolves," flashed through his mind.

He doubled his pace, but walking was difficult for the wind threw him off his balance. At last his ear caught the rustling of oaks ahead. The wind was softer here. Storozhev sat down on a tree-stump, wiped his wet face, broke the icicles off his beard and moustache.... And again, very close, he heard a drawn-out howl. He jumped up and made a dash for the oak wood. He walked a long way gasping for breath, sinking waist-deep into the snow, bruising himself against invisible stumps and storm-felled trees, and tearing his way through the brambles. There seemed no end to the forest, no glimmerings at all. He walked on and on, falling down and picking himself up, muttering curses and prayers. The mean, tenacious brambles lashed at his face and tore at his skin. Warm blood mixed with sweat streamed down his cheeks. He had no more strength, he took off his bag, dug it into the snow under an oak-tree and, relieved of his burden, he now rushed forward urged on by the howls. The wolves were coming closer. They howled behind him, they

ran ahead of him, and he could see their flickering forms quite close, only a few paces away. He would have liked to give them a scare with the rifle but he was afraid to shoot.

Whether it was the clearing mentioned by Filip, or whether Storozhev had come out on to another one, at any rate he was out of the wood now. A vast glade, flooded with moonlight, spread out before him. The wind, biting and cruel, was at its wildest here.

Breathing on his frozen hands to bring back warmth, he crossed the glade. His eyes searched for the young fir growth but could not find it. Old, gnarled oaks surrounded him on all sides.

In the middle of the glade Storozhev sank breast-deep into a hole. His rifle slipped off his shoulder and fell into the snow. He started climbing out of the snowdrift when suddenly his left hand was clamped in teeth of iron with terrific force.

A trap! A wolf trap!

He struggled in vain trying to get out of this captivity. His legs sank deeper and deeper into the snow, his hand was held securely by the trap. In vain he called for help—no one but the wolves responded.

His strength was spent, his voice grew hoarse—he gave in at last. He lay thus, motion-

less, bound by steel and frost. The wind drifted snow over him. The cold crept up to his very heart and chilled his blood. His senses were leaving him. Images, incoherent visions, people long since dead, took on life and whirled madly through his mind. And then he saw before him, as vividly as though it were not a dream at all, his piece of land near Lebyazhye Lake and himself amid the fields: a lonely man on his own land. And he grew so terrified of dying in this forest, alone with the trees, the wolves and the snow.

Storozhev opened his eyes for the last time—the stars shone coldly down on him.



Chapter 8

In the winter of 1920, in a snow-storm and blizzard, Antonov flew into Dvoriki with a small company of his men. He slaughtered the Communists, ransacked the co-operative store, and in the evening summoned all the population to the school-house. They came

reluctantly, some had to be encouraged with whips.

Antonov's cavalrymen locked the doors and stood guard with their carbines at the ready, all of them tough young fellows with murder in their eyes, all dressed in sturdy clothes of good cloth and leather.

The peasants exchanged whispered comments—what sort of an army was this? Antonov, on his part, studied the men before him with curiosity. In Kamenka and in all the outlying villages which he had passed through since the autumn, the people were his kith and kin, he knew them all. But here they were all strangers, it was his first experience of the kind and the devil alone knew which way their sympathies lay.

Yegor Ishin was the first speaker. The neck of his red cotton shirt was unbuttoned, his cheeks were ruddy and bursting with health, and a cunning glint shone in his small, oily eyes.

"Comrade Ishin will speak on behalf of the Provincial Committee of the League of Labouring Peasantry," Antonov announced. "Will you hear him talk?"

Ishin walked up to the table, stubbed his cigarette, ran his eye round the gathering and smiled:

"Hello, fellows!"

"Hello," they replied glumly.

"You're in two minds about it, aren't you? Look how bad-tempered and glum you are. Why, I wonder? You've got a government of your own; it feeds and clothes you, it's concerned with your well-being and sends you its commissars. What more d'you want?"

"You've got a glib tongue in your head," someone shouted from the back.

"Talk business, cut out the riddle stuff!"

Old Andrei Andreyevich rose from his seat on the front bench. He was a shaggy old man with a pointed red beard thrust forward, and his nickname was "Goat."

"What are you grinning about?" he muttered gruffly. "Tell us why you got us together, what army you belong to, who is your ataman? D'you hear? Don't dawdle."

The "Goat" angrily tapped his crutch on the floor, grunted, and sat down again.

Ishin listened to the men with a little smile as he sat playing with his strapped leather whip, cracking it against the top of his fine box-calf boot. This powerfully built man, a wit and a jolly good fellow, a former village storekeeper who got mixed up with the S.-R.s appealed to the wealthy peasants. It was small wonder that Antonov was easy in his mind

when he entrusted Ishin with the most difficult assignments: Yegor would not let him down.

Ishin had friends galore; most of them did not even suspect what this red-faced fellow was engaged in exactly. And meanwhile he took delivery of whole trainloads of weapons from Gorsky, dispatched cartloads of equipment from Tambov, and was never caught once.

All his life he had been lucky. And he went through life with a chuckle, in every village he had a widow waiting for him, in every farmstead a hiding-place that was proof against any search.

Before the war Ishin had kept a store in the village—such were the orders of the S.-R. Committee. He did not trade for profit; he had no end of debtors but he did not press them for payment—they'd come in useful some day. And indeed they did: one good turn deserves another. Who would ever give away a man who had once been a friend in need? Ishin was well skilled in worming his way into the hearts of his fellow-men. And now, too, as he sat before the gathering he sensed how black, how full of misgivings were the peasants' thoughts about the future. It was not a speech that was needed, but a fairy-tale to cheer them up and set their minds at rest.

"Men, I'll tell you a little story, a fable. Lis-

ten, you'll feel happier for it." Ishin moved the table lamp out of the way and perched on the edge of the table. "God sent the crow a piece of cheese. . . ."

The men began to talk and laugh, but Ishin continued:

"God is God but don't be a clod! Same thing here. That piece of cheese might well have been the crow's undoing. A brick nearly killed it when it was looking for the cheese in the yard, a cat almost had it in its clutches. That piece of cheese did not come easy to the crow. There it sat on a branch, wondering which end to start on, when suddenly the fox happened along. And the fox started playing up to the crow: 'Oh you're so beautiful, my dear, so clever and so wise, and I'm your truest friend for life! God had long ago ordered us foxes to stand up for you crows. And I've come looking for you only to ask if you did not want about ten more pieces of cheese. Say "yes" and I'll fetch them in a twinkling!' Ever hear this story before?"

"We heard it, we heard it."

"It's one and the same story but you're telling it differently."

"Well you know the end—the crow opened wide its beak, the cheese dropped out and the fox made off with it. That's right, isn't it?"

"That's right, that's right!"

"And now think, fellows, don't you see yourselves in that crow?"

And now there was no smile on his face as he ran his eye round the school-room. Dusk filled the corners. Cigarette smoke hung in a blue cloud. Antonov's cavalrymen stood motionless as ever, with their carbines at the ready.

"I'll say this to you, men: you are just like that crow. Isn't it about time you gathered your wits together? Isn't it about time you caught that wily fox and flayed it before it has flayed you? Have you got much left to give?"

"They took one and a half thousand poods to the station last night," Andrei Andreyevich hissed and rapped his crutch again.

"They'll take another hundred and fifty thousand," Antonov spoke up. "Brother peasants!" he cried. "Come and join us! We shall form a league of labouring peasantry—all for one and one for all! You, young men, take up arms, we've rifles in plenty. Let us fight the Commune! The Bolsheviks aren't too steady on their legs, we'll shove them down in no time!"

"Shoving them down, that's nothing," Frol Bayev interrupted Antonov's speech. He had walked all the way to Dvoriki from Gryaznoye to see his old friend Andrei Andreyevich for a good long chat, and had unwittingly been

drawn into the school-house. "We'll shove them down, that's true, but who are we going to saddle ourselves with instead?"

"No one," Ishin replied. "We'll govern ourselves. Whatever you reap will be your own, no more food quotas. If you want to go in for trade—go ahead! If you want to keep three cows—keep them, it's all to the good of the country!"

"It's devilish hard to tell how much truth there is in your words," Frol said sullenly. "And truth—where is it anyway? Perhaps it's all been gobbled away?"

"You said it, old chap, they've gobbled it up," Ishin responded with feeling. "You've said the words, old chap! Yes, it's a wretched life in our Motherland now, and all through the Bolsheviks!"

"Aren't the Bolsheviks going to do away with the food quotas?" Frol asked warily.

"Do away with them?" Ishin made a hopeless gesture. "The Bolsheviks are taking bread away to China and are bringing back Chinamen instead. They're somewhat short of soldiers, the Reds are, so they bring in Chinamen! And those, they hate us Christians like anything!"

"But then they'll make short work of us!" someone said with despair.

"What shall we do, tell us?" shouts came from the crowd.

"Listen, comrade peasants." Antonov eyed the gathering. "It's inevitable that we fight the Reds. The Reds have their own Commune and we'll have our own, a peasants' Commune. Once we unite, no power on earth can break us!"

"Phew, this is just tricky talk." Andrei Andreyevich was disappointed. "How do we know, maybe you yourselves are the foxes, and your talk is foxy talk?"

"I—a fox? My talk—foxy?" Antonov sprang up. He hammered his chest with his fist and, spattering spittle, he blared forth about the hard-labour camp and all he had gone through for the sake of the people.

His harangue set the men afire, they crowded round the table and all began to talk at once, drowning each other's voices.

"Sign me up," cried one young fellow in a neat cloth coat.

"Me too!"

"Hand out the rifles!"

Suddenly, the crack of rifle shots rang out and a machine-gun began to rattle out in the street. As though swept along by a hurricane, the men rushed to the doors, panic-stricken, blindly fighting their way through, cursing and swearing.

The alarm bell boomed....

Horsemen were galloping through the streets —who they were, where they were going, where they were from, no one could tell. With a tremendous effort Antonov got his company together and fled from Dvoriki. The Reds pressed after him in close pursuit for about thirty miles and, running him to ground in some out-of-the-way village, turned the company to rout.

Bad luck stalked Antonov till February. He had lost almost his entire strength and had no choice but to take to the Kirsanov forests with a couple of hundred of his loyal troopers.

Chapter 9

In the spring Antonov received a message from Tambov through Gorsky. A dispatch had come in from the underground S.-R. Committee stating that it was time to organize on a wider scale, that the moment was opportune, that the peasants were ripe for an uprising.

The Republic was at war. Pilsudski was marching on Kiev. Wrangel was getting ready for a sally from the Crimea. Peace with Finland had not been made. Moscow was fighting on numerous fronts.

Troop trains moved day and night—men go-

ing to fight the generals and the atamans. The people wanted bread. Soldiers and workmen wanted bread. Their children cried for bread.

But bread was in the hands of the wealthy peasants. It became harder and harder to get. In the villages of the Tambov Province talk was heard more and more often about a certain Antonov, a "peasants' ataman." His agents were spreading abroad the rumour that Antonov was coming to defend the peasants' rights, that he took nothing, neither horses nor bread, that he wanted nothing except men. And by spring the peasants began to seek Antonov out, to ask him to come to them, or went and joined his troops themselves. The first to make their stealthy departure from the villages were the more dogged kulaks, the ones who hid their corn from the Commune in hollows. They were resolved to defend their corn with a rifle in their hands, to try their luck with Antonov.

One by one the peasants left their homesteads and joined the ranks of Antonov and his atamans. They came from Khitrovo, Afanasyevka, Verkhotsenye, Ponzari, Pavlodar, Pustovalovo, from the prosperous villages of Borisoglebsk, Morshansk, Kozlov, Tambov and Kirsanov. Antonov formed his regiments in the forests, he called his old friends from the vil-

lages to join him. It was then that he remembered Storozhev.

Antonov had been told that some hunters ranging those parts had heard the howling of the wolves, had come upon man-made tracks and found Storozhev. They had taken him to the village and handed him over to the authorities. There he had been kept until spring, first in the jail hospital and then in the jail itself. The court acquitted him for lack of any direct evidence against him, for he had exercised cunning in handling Antonov's affairs, and as for his flight, he explained it simply enough: he had been afraid of the village Communists.

Storozhev came back to the village a subdued and quiet man. It seemed he would never forget that night in the forest, that his turbulent days were over, that he had surrendered, that his spirit was broken. He shunned people more than ever, and was even more taciturn than before.

He merely smiled sardonically and kept his silence when rumour swept Dvoriki in April that Antonov in command of his forces was on a march against the Bolsheviks. And yet once again strange men came furtively and met behind his house. But now everything was conducted in the dead of night, quietly and secretly. Storozhev had learned a thing or two while in jail.

One night in May he was awakened by Andrian.

"There's a cavalryman here from Kamenka, he wants you right away," he whispered. "They'll be the end of you, those scoundrels, I know they will. What's up—is it an open fight now?"

"Shut up," Storozhev whispered back, getting out of bed. Praskovya moaned in her sleep. Pyotr Ivanovich tucked the blanket round her, put on his clothes and went out.

"Well, what d'you want?" he asked the horseman testily. "What's the idea of crashing in here on horseback? If they catch you it's only one head less, and if they catch me it'll be a thousand, you fool!"

"Couldn't help it, it's an urgent message. I didn't make a sound, I came round the back, I know the place. I come from these parts, you know."

Storozhev raised his head and peered at the messenger—it was Sashka Karas from the neighbouring farm.

"Did you go and join Antonov too?"

"I did. Gosh, the crowd there, Pyotr Ivanovich, it's like a boiling pot."

Storozhev went back into the house, lighted a kerosene lamp, put on his spectacles and

read the message. It was signed by Tokmakov. Storozhev was ordered to form underground committees for the League of Labouring Peasantry from among the most trustworthy and loyal men. Instructions were enclosed, which set forth that the committees were authorized to command an armed troop, that villages quitted by the Soviets were to be scrupulously scoured for all unreliable elements, that anyone suspected of sympathy with the Communists was to be shot. Tokmakov further supplied detailed information as to ciphers, liaisons and meeting-places.

"Well, that means it's started. Sashka, ride back to Tokmakov and tell him not to worry."

Storozhev saw the rider off, barred the gate after him and walked back to the house.

The night was warm and still, a dog was howling somewhere in Durachy End, a cart rumbled in the distance.

Storozhev gazed at the world of peace around him, at the cottage slumbering in the moonlight, crossed himself and went indoors. Praskovya awoke when he was settling down in bed, and pressed her body close to his.

"Will I be sleeping in peace much longer?" Storozhev asked himself. And he recalled the months of anxiety, the meetings, his vacillations and doubts, and that night in the forest....

"God willing everything will come out right," he said softly and put his arms round Praskovya.

Rumour that Antonov was near by grew stronger every day. The peasants working out in the fields were often approached by horsemen with green cloth bands on their caps, who spoke to them about Antonov, and went into explanations about the food quotas, bread and land. They would ask for a drink of water and ride off.

Then fires broke out in the village—barns and cottages belonging to Communists were set ablaze. The culprits were never found.

Young men, sons of wealthy peasants, began to disappear from the village one after another.

Unknown men in plain clothes seized Communists out in the open and beat them within an inch of their lives.

One day Andrei Andreyevich came running to Storozhev and said:

"I was coming back from the lake, carp fishing I was, I just love carp, well, I was coming the back way and suddenly I saw a man stealing up to your barn. He looked about him and dived into the barn, through a hole it must have been. I swear to God he wasn't one of our chaps, it was a bandit, he was!"

Pyotr Ivanovich set his mind at rest, gave

him an old rooster for a present and told him to keep his mouth shut about seeing the man, because you never knew what people might not think. And as for the hole in the wall of the barn, he stopped it up.

And then came autumn.

In November the village Communists held a meeting in the school-house. They invited the Poor Peasants' Committee and some of the war veterans to attend. Listrat came too. He had arrived in the village some five days previously and had got stuck there. Lyonka's friend Sashka Chirikin—a dashing young chap, always ready for a scrap, and a good accordion-player—was there. So was the coachman, Nikita Semyonovich, and his son Fedka who was a member of the Komsomol.

Nikita Semyonovich had at one time been a member of the Bolshevik Party, but he had not managed to remain one long. He was expelled for drunken brawling. Nevertheless he went on attending meetings, gatherings and the Party unit as formerly, and was elected to various committees.

The meeting of the Communists was also attended by men who came from afar, from villages beyond the Balashov railway.

In those parts Antonov's men had more than once disrupted traffic, derailed trains, assaulted

the train crews and pilfered bread bound for Moscow, whisking it off to the villages.

In Sampur, the girls had been singing the Antonovite song for a long time now.

In Dvoriki, too, the Communists were now looked at askance—better not say anything about the bread, don't mention the food quotas, or else they'll give you such a set-back, it'll send you flying, you'll never show your face in these parts again!

"You hear, Antonov takes nothing from the likes of us," Danila Naumich, the former village elder, said to Nikita Semyonovich. "He's not a patch on you, grabbers. Antonov's giving us free trade, and what have you given us?"

It was as a result of all these talks and rumours that the Dvoriki Communists called a meeting in the school-house that night. Everyone present reported what he knew or had heard, and it became clear to all that the thing to do was to leave the village and move up closer to the main forces of the Red Army. The railway line from Tambov to Tsaritsin and the stations along it were the place to go. Antonov's feelers had not reached there yet. And so it was decided to leave Dvoriki. Sashka Chirikin alone broke out into loud protest about the disgrace of it and so on and so forth, but Listrat cut him short quickly enough:

"Don't you go calling us cowards, you fool. Our Party teaches us that there are times when retreat is no disgrace. In this case it's clear enough: we've got to get away to the railway junction or else the scoundrels will slaughter us like so many chickens. So get ready! If any of you are afraid to leave your wives here, take them along. We'll form the First Communist Detachment!"

There and then Listrat was elected Commander of the detachment and Sashka Chirikin—chief of the reconnaissance. The meeting broke up in the small hours. Red-faced Fedka trudged behind his father and whimpered:

"You old fox, you're going off yourself and I have to stay behind! Dad, I say, Dad, let me join the scouts!"

"Shut up, you fool!" Nikita barked back. "Scout, hell!"

"How about Vanka Frushtak? He's my age, but he signed up with Sashka!"

"Shut up, I said."

When they got back to their house, however, Nikita Semyonovich announced to his wife that he and Fedka were leaving for the station.

Next day Storozhev knew everything that had been said at the meeting, word for word,

for he had one of his men planted among the Communists too. Towards evening a large mounted company of Reds entered the village. The emaciated horses could hardly drag their legs through the muddy streets, the exhausted men swayed in their saddles. Without unsaddling their horses, they gave them some hay (there wasn't a grain of oats in the village Soviet), then they straggled along to the cottages. The commander of the company summoned the Communists to his temporary headquarters. Listrat reported to him for orders. When he came out again he was wearing a leather jacket and was fully armed: Mauser pistol and two bottle-grenades at his belt. His spurs jingling, Listrat strode to the village Soviet. An hour later all the Communists were assembled. Nikita Semyonovich arrived in a carriage drawn by two lively horses, with a red flag fixed to the front seat and a machine-gun sticking out behind.

That evening, Listrat and two cavalrymen walked into Storozhev's house. Without greeting the master of the house and ordering everyone to stay where they were, Listrat proceeded to make a search of the living-room, bedroom, kitchen, loft and cellar, and sounded the walls.

Storozhev sat in his chair with a wide grin on his face.

"Why so happy?" Listrat asked, as he dusted his jacket.

"Because you're not," Storozhev replied.

"Where's Lyonka?"

"Away on business," said Storozhev and laughed. "He left for Gryaznoye at dawn today, he's got a sweetheart there."

"You and I will meet yet, Pyotr Ivanovich."

"Sure, we won't pass each other by. Any message for your brother?"

Listrat slammed the door.

The company of Reds rode away in the night. Their womenfolk, who stayed behind, sobbed in their cottages. Their hearts told them that difficult days lay ahead.

Lyonka came back from Gryaznoye the same night, and early next morning he accompanied Storozhev to Kamenka, to see Antonov.

It snowed, a chill wind blew. The ground was beaten down hard by the frost. Storozhev rode ahead in silence and Lyonka trotted as silently behind.



Chapter 10

Kamenka—a village lost in the wilds of the Tambov Province—lived a trubulent life those days. Glens and coppices surrounded Antonov's capital, the countryside was cut by a network of gullies, one deeper than the other, each more dangerous than the next. A stranger to these parts, even with map in hand, would hardly be able to get through these fortifications, erected by nature itself.

Armed men roamed the village, thronged the streets and lanes; dirty and sportive, they accosted the women, brawled and fought.

Their clothing was motley to the extreme: army coats of every possible variety, leather jackets, tunics, pea-jackets, sheepskin coats, fur-lined coats, greasy, torn, peakless caps, Red Army, Cossack and rabbitskin caps—all this looked as if it had been brought to Kamenka for a fancy-dress party.

Their weapons, however, were more motley still: some were armed with swords, others with hunting rifles, carbines, rifles of all makes, Mauser pistols without holsters, stuck in their belts, unsheathed hussar sabres, navy dirks, axes and home-made daggers.

Every one of these men had a horse and a whip. Pink and blue pillows, with the feathers

coming through, adorned the backs of a great many of the horses. Only a few animals, powerful and beautiful, boasted a proper military harness. These horses were tethered close to a large brick building and were guarded by a well-armed, bearded sentry.

A man wearing a uniform which was better than that of the others, appeared on the porch now and then, shouted something in a hoarse voice, and a few minutes later a group of horsemen mustered by the porch, a dispatch was handed to one of them, and the horsemen rode away from the village at a round trot. The man in uniform would then go back into the building.

Indoors, armed men scurried up and down the corridors, doors banged incessantly, and a damp, cold blast swept into the house with the men. Clouds of smoke clung to the ceiling. Wan-looking, perspiring clerks, suffocating in the stench, pored over their papers, while others sat typing on battered Underwoods. A bearded man in pale-blue riding-breeches was yelling into the field telephone.

A tall shaggy youth came in search of a man named Semyon Ivanovich; he elbowed his way through the crowd, swore lustily, stepped on everyone's toes. At last he located his man who

was engrossed in a card game in the corner, and dragged him away.

Every two minutes or so men appeared from the inner rooms, they thrust dispatches into their coats, tightened their belts and strode out of the building with a clang of sabres and spurs. Horsemen clattered past the windows.

Storozhev and Lyonka rode up to Headquarters under an escort of armed Antonovites. A mounted patrol had held them up in the woods when they had some four miles to go. The Antonovites, armed to the teeth, led them up to the porch just when three men in blood-stained army coats were slowly coming down the steps. These men were barefooted, hatless, with sunken eyes and bloodless lips. A guard of six men with rifles atilt escorted the prisoners. A man in a khaki-coloured tunic, with a curly little black beard, was calling out to the officer of the guard:

"Don't waste any time on them! Our hands are full as it is. Have all the fellows back here in half an hour!"

When the man caught sight of Storozhev he smiled and waved to him. Storozhev dismounted from his piebald mare, slowly walked up the steps, smoothed down his moustache and shook hands with Grigory Pluzhnikov, Tokmakov's second-in-command. Pluzhnikov pushed

his way back into the building and drew Storozhev along to the inner rooms.

"Come for good?"

"For good," Storozhev said with a smile. "Our Commune has fled, we'll fight in the open now."

"Fine. You know, Alexander Stepanovich kept asking me about you all the time. You go in to him, he'll be very glad to see you. And I've got so much to do. I'm quite run off my feet. Believe it or not, I haven't slept for three nights. Today, for instance, I've been questioning commissars all day. See the birds led out just now? Oh well, go on, go on in to Antonov."

Pluzhnikov ordered the sentry outside Antonov's room to let Storozhev in and went out of the building again. Storozhev took off his hat, smoothed down his hair, gave his greying moustache a twirl, and entered Antonov's presence.

Antonov had aged. The hollows of his eyes were deeper than ever, his cheek-bones more pronounced, and lines creased his forehead. He was sitting at a table with a plate of black bread in front of him. He ate the bread, sprinkling the thick slices liberally with salt, and washing it down with very weak tea, and listened meanwhile to what a man, who sat with his back to the door, was saying to him. When

Storozhev walked in, Antonov nodded to him and with his eyes indicated a chair. Pyotr Ivanovich sat down. Antonov poured out some tea in silence and motioned to Storozhev to join him. Sipping the hot water which smelled of steamed carrots, Pyotr Ivanovich listened to what was being said.

The man who spoke was a stranger to Storozhev. He was tall and lean, with a mane of black hair and a long beak of a nose. He kept fidgeting as though he could not keep still for a moment: he tugged at his moustache, scraped at a little spot on his coat, or smoothed down his hair. His manner of speaking was deliberately "popular" and he evidently enjoyed hearing himself talk.

"Look here, Alexander Stepanovich, 'tis this way, my good man, our peasant is nobody's fool, you can't ride round him on a goat, man. He doesn't give a damn for what you or I say, I'll tell you straight—he wants to see the colour of his money."

"Well then, bring up the state farms, tell them we'll share the state property out to the peasants, that we'll throw down the Communists, we'll set up our own government and settle about the land," Antonov said. "Here, Pyotr Ivanovich, meet Nikita Petrovich Kagarde, a

school-teacher from Pakhotny Ugol, he's one of our men."

Pyotr Ivanovich shook the long, cool hand of the teacher, who went on to say:

"Begging your pardon, Alexander Stepanovich, but that's a point you can't convince me of. Can a state that lives by farming alone do without state-owned land? There's a link missing in your argument here. You've got a rent there, pardon my saying so. The peasants can see the rent, they're clever devils! That's why they won't come round."

Antonov was making a tremendous effort to listen to what the teacher had to say. He was unwell, his eyes were bloodshot, his cheeks sunken and blotched with feverish colour, his lips parched, and sweat stood out in large drops on his forehead.

"Hm, yes," Antonov drawled and wiped his forehead with his hand. "You and I've been talking for five days now and it's got us nowhere. You'd better go and expound your theories to Ishin, he's a past master at talking. I suppose I could make it all clear to you too, but I'm sorry, I'm ill, haven't slept for three nights, and to be quite frank, I can't be bothered with theories now. The problem of fodder alone is enough to drive one frantic, God knows. Listen, Nikita Petrovich, I'll

say this to you and it must also be said to the peasants: we must be patient a little longer. Once we get the Constituent Assembly together, they'll work it all out. That is my opinion. But if my words do not convince you, go and speak to Ishin. You will excuse me, I can't talk to you any longer, I'm ill."

The teacher got up and left the room, shaking his head and muttering angrily under his breath.

"I'm pestered by such quibblers every day, Pyotr Ivanovich, 'why' and 'what,' God damn them, I've got a bellyful of them!" Antonov gave himself a smack. "Well, I'm glad you're here. Good. It's going to be an open fight now."

"We'll fight," said Storozhev.

He suddenly felt he wanted to ask Antonov about the land, but he held back the words. "I'll ask him another time," he thought.

"We'll fight," Antonov repeated. "We're up against a force that's colossal. Our only hope is that this force has feet of clay. If Wrangel succeeds in holding his own, then the Reds may as well bid Moscow good-bye. In Siberia, too, our men are raising their heads. I hear they're setting up a League of Labouring Peasantry there as well."

Antonov took Pyotr Ivanovich up to a huge map tacked on the wall, and said:

"All we want now is to get to the south-east line; that would clinch it, Moscow would be cut off from supplies. If we could break the way open to the southern branch, we'd be masters of the situation, and then there's Makhno, we'd link up with him."

Sweat beaded Antonov's forehead again, his voice was growing weaker, he coughed and, sinking into a chair with a hopeless gesture, he drank his lukewarm tea in greedy gulps.

Storozhev remained silent.

"If I had more men like you!" Antonov said at last. "I've already written about it to our chaps in Moscow and Tambov. Send me men, I wrote, and instead they send me proclamations and ask *me* for men! God's truth! Of course we make use of their proclamations too, there's no one to write them here and no one has the time. My young brother pens them, but he's a hell of a writer! He's an apothecary, so he writes like one, makes you sick to read them." Antonov heaved a sigh. "That's how it is. They send us their proclamations, you see, but no men. Something tells me our atamans will sell me out. They've got a good old habit: if a man's in

luck they can't make enough of him, 'he's our man, we taught him, he carried our blessing with him.' But if the man's luck turns, they'll disown and slander him, they'll talk their way out and will issue a proclamation: 'He's nothing to do with us, we're no atamans of his, we never shook his hand, let him perish for all we care.'" Antonov paused. "Well, there I've gone and told you all this rot." He laughed a forced laugh. "I told you as a friend, you're one of us, you know! Now tell me about the peasants in your parts, what are they thinking, what are they saying?"

Storozhev told him of the villagers' sentiments, mentioned that the Communists had left the village and had entrenched themselves at the station along the south-east railway.

"They're not particularly strong, the men are greenhorns mostly, only a few real soldiers among them. They get their supplies from the villages. You ought to make a move in that direction, to our parts. Once you annex the district the Communists will have to draw in their bellies right away."

"That's what we shall do, Pyotr Ivanovich. I am appointing you commander of the frontier district."

Antonov went up to his desk, pulled out a

letterhead stamped with the words "Russian Democratic Federal Republic. Field Staff Headquarters, Guerrilla Forces of the Tambov Province," dated it at the top and wrote a mandate authorizing Storozhev to form guerrilla detachments in the frontier district.

Antonov signed it with a flourish and, handing it to Storozhev, said:

"Go and see Yegor Ishin. He'll endorse the mandate on behalf of the League. After that go to Pluzhnikov, he'll pick out some men for you. I've spoken to him about it, he'll give you some good fellows. And then, well, just rule the district, Pyotr Ivanovich, do whatever you think necessary and report to me direct, to hell with those staff officers of mine. Oh, by the way, I've almost forgotten, we're holding a meeting soon. We're expecting a bird from Tambov, let's hear his song!"

Antonov laughed and offered Storozhev his hot, damp hand. He was ill.

"Send Pluzhnikov in to me."

Storozhev left the room. Antonov undid the neck of his red flannel tunic, lay down on his bed and fell into a doze.

Shortly afterwards Ishin and Pluzhnikov came in. Antonov stirred.

"Don't get up, don't," Pluzhnikov said. "We'll have some tea."

But Antonov's drowsiness was gone. Worry and uncertainty thronged his mind.

He was often troubled by the thought of what he had started, of the men he had roused up in arms against the Soviets. He had mounted, armed and formed into units thousands of young and healthy men, had found commanders for the regiments from among the officers and non-commissioned officers who came swarming to him from Central Russia, men who had not managed to fight their way south, to the Crimea, or to the Far East.

Antonov's personal Kamenka Regiment—guardsmen of the insurrection—was formed of S.-R.s, Right- and Left-wing, of old friends, and of men who had nothing to lose. Non-commissioned officer Yakov Safirov was commander of this regiment.

Antonov believed he had no truer friend than Safirov, a friend for life. Antonov trusted no one but Safirov and Tokmakov; he knew that once his luck turned, the rest would renounce him.

Even now, with fortune smiling upon him, there was no peace in either Headquarters or the League. The truculent Tokmakov and the brawler Ishin had for a long time now been looking daggers at each other. Tokmakov was always suggesting that Antonov chop off

Yegor's drunken head, while Ishin, in his turn, would point out to Antonov the branch on which Tokmakov ought to be hung.

In the League of Labouring Peasantry the odds were for Ishin. There was no love lost between the peasants and the despotic Tokmakov, and they were busy digging pitfalls for Antonov as well. At Headquarters, too, there was talk that Antonov was putting on airs, that he swaggered too much, that he was not the brains but only the hands, and a pair of hands could always be found so long as there was a good head of brains to guide them.

Antonov would have gladly done away with the whole gang, but he could not do that for they were indeed the brains and he was the hands. They knew the words that could best touch the peasant's heart, they had their feelers out in all the villages, big and small, in farmsteads and settlements, they had their own scouts, and what sort of a Staff Headquarters would it be without scouts? No, he'd have to endure it, to listen, to obey them with his teeth clenched, to follow their course.

"There goes my luck, my dream, there goes my glory...."

Two ravenous wolves—Pluzhnikov and Ishin—were sitting side by side sipping their tea, whereas they would have gladly devoured

one another if their hands had not been tied behind them with a thousand knots.

And there was no one, no friend he could tell of his sinister thoughts. Maria Kosova was in love with him, but then Antonov had no love for her, he disliked her boldness, her strong and racy language. The woman of his dreams was different but he had not found her, and so he let Maria come and share his nights with him. Only this morning she had flattered and fawned upon him, grovelling at his feet like a little bitch....

Harassing thoughts followed one another and made his head ache more and more. Antonov winced with pain, he tried to think of something different, to forget Maria, the committee, but he could not. Rancour welled up within him, rancour against those who were yelling and quarrelling in the next room. The house grew particularly noisy just then. Antonov sprang from his bed, thrust his head out of the door and bellowed, so that even Pluzhnikov was startled:

"Who the devil is yelling out there? Shut up!"

A burst of laughter drowned his voice. Beside himself with fury, Antonov grabbed his pistol from the table and fired two shots at the ceiling. Everyone was struck dumb.

"Get out!" Antonov screamed. "Well, what are you waiting for, you sons of bitches, you miserable scum? Get out of here!"

Backing away, trampling on each other's toes, all the men who had been loafing about the next room made for the door.

"Send the doctor in," Antonov moaned, sinking back on his bed again. "And find a place for Storozhev. Ishin, you'll have to go back to the village with him, the peasants are too slow-witted there. And that village is a thorn in my flesh."

Pluzhnikov left the room. Antonov raised himself in bed, reached for the sheepskin coat lying at his feet, and pulled it over himself. His teeth were chattering. He was livid. A bout of malaria was setting in.

Chapter 11

Storozhev stayed in Kamenka for almost two weeks. Even written orders from Antonov did not particularly impress his staff officers. And while suitable men were being picked, and arms found for them, maps and plans drawn up for Storozhev—time went on and on. Pyotr Ivanovich felt homesick, he missed Kolka, his nerves were frayed, he swore at Lyonka for no reason at all, while Lyonka, on his part, paid

no attention to this abuse, he was so carried away by all the clamour, din and bustle around him.

Lyonka spent all his waking hours out in the street. Indoors he felt depressed. On the way to Kamenka he had called at Gryaznoye and had seen Natasha and her father. "When will the wedding be?" Frol had asked.

"Oh that cursed war!" Lyonka was thinking. "How can one marry with all hell dancing? But marry we must—it's hard on me and it's hard on her."

More and more people kept coming to Kamenka: deserters, devil-may-care sailors, war prisoners who had not managed to get out of the country, and wealthy peasants who came bringing their whole families along. All these people demanded something, all of them expected something, they all found something to eat and somewhere to live. All this tattered rabble of humanity that had lost its bearings was shaped into regiments and detachments. They made their way into forests, villages and farmsteads, disarming small companies of Reds and scattering at the very first offer of serious resistance, only to muster here again, where life ran an unbridled and heedless course.

Never before had Lyonka seen such a crowd

of people loafing about the streets, boasting of the number of men they had killed, of the spoils they had won in battle, or had simply looted while they were at it.

But this idleness soon bored Lyonka. He felt down-hearted. For lack of anything to do he began to help Yevsei, the man who had put them up at his cottage, in tending his livestock, cleaning the yard, and carting manure out to the fields. Yevsei was making ready for spring. He looked on Lyonka with mistrust at the beginning, but he soon came to appreciate his presence, stopped minding him and complained to him in a whisper of life's hardships.

"There we are, Lyonka my boy," he would say, "who'd ever think or guess this Kamenka of ours would rise up to be a capital, curse it. Can you stomach it, they're changing my horse for me three times a day, I've even given up counting. Only this morning I had a red mare, and look, it's a piebald stallion now! Some 'capital,' I don't think! No, Lyonka my boy, war is plain ruin for a peasant. It'll be time to start sowing soon, but the devil alone knows what we're to sow, how to plough the land, and what land at that? It's a ruddy shame, it is!"

Yevsei spat angrily, muttering curses, tight-

ened the belt round his torn old coat, slung a sack of chaff on his shoulders and trudged out into the yard.

Lyonka would go out into the street and see the same thing all over again: horsemen galloping back and forth, a regiment marching past with its banner fluttering in the wind, bearing the inscription: "Land and Freedom! Long Live the Constituent Assembly!" the accordion-player singing a rollicking song.... The same thing, day in and day out. This morning, too, there was a regiment marching out with fieldpieces and ammunition cases rumbling behind.

Now they were bringing out those Communists they had seized, leading them out to shoot them. The escort of Antonovites were busy wrangling: they were already dividing up the clothes and boots they would take off the condemned men, while the men sentenced to death huddled close in their army coats and talked to each other in low voices.

"Gosh, they shoot them like sparrows," said someone behind Lyonka.

Lyonka turned and saw a huge husky chap in a sheepskin coat, his jaw tied up with a red handkerchief, a whip in his hand.

"It's the third lot today. They say they caught two airmen yesterday and the fellows

got stars cut out of their backs. That's what Antonov said: 'They fly close to the stars, so let them get their heavenly brands.' " The chap roared with laughter. "And who are you?" he asked Lyonka.

"We come from Dvoriki. I'm with Storozhev."

"You mean you haven't joined up?"

"No, but we're. . . ."

"Ho! We've been fighting for over a year now!"

"It shows, the peasants are in a state, there are no horses left at all."

"Enough to last our lifetime."

"And is that lifetime long?" Lyonka asked. "Or do you think this war will go on much longer?" And once again the thought of Natasha wrung his heart. "She's all by herself, she must be lonely, she's crying probably," Lyonka thought. "Oh hell, what a life!"

The chap stood lost in thought, staring at the ground.

"Hell knows if this war will go on much longer or not. They say it'll go on till victory is ours."

"Well, in that case don't expect the end too soon."

"Never mind. Our commander said the Cossacks are close to Moscow. The Com-

munists will hold out another month or two, no more."

"And what parts do you come from yourself?" Lyonka asked.

"From down Sampur way. Kuznetsov is our commander, gosh, what a fighter!"

"D'you drink here?"

"Why not? Sure we do. They're all distilling moonshine around here, why keep the corn, what for? If the Reds come they'll take it away from us. Sure we drink. The commanders do too. Antonov himself gets good and plastered, and he and that Maria woman of his dance about in their skin!" The chap roared with laughter again.

He offered Lyonka to come with him to a certain widow called Katrya, who lived out on the meadow. Lyonka agreed out of boredom and trailed after him. They went along paths past vegetable fields, past stacks of straw from which came muffled voices, laughter, groans and squeals, past threshing-barns and past cottages that had been burnt down or demolished by gunfire.

Katrya's cottage stood apart from the others, like a sore thumb. No lights showed in the windows, but when they came up closer Lyonka heard drunken singing, noise and laughter. He went up to a window and peeped through

a slit between the curtains. Some ten men and women were chanting a song in discord, each one singing as best he could; the very tipsy Antonovites had the women sitting on their knees. Lyonka, who during the fortnight he had been there had come to know many of Antonov's personal staff, recognized several squadron and platoon commanders among the revellers.

His companion knocked. For a moment the noise within grew still, then the party again took up its tuneless singing.

"Who's there?" a woman's voice asked.

"Katrya, open the door, it's us."

Lyonka was about to follow the chap in when suddenly he sighted a small mounted detachment approaching the cottage at a round trot. He at once slipped away into the backyard. The horsemen halted and surrounded the cottage. A few minutes later the drunken party was trudging along to Kamenka under escort.

The escort dismounted at Headquarters. One of them went indoors and reappeared at once, followed by Safirov, whom he had called away from a conference. Hatless, and buttoning up his coat on the way, Safirov came up to the porch railing and asked:

"Who have you caught?"

The man who had gone in to fetch him gave

Safirov the names. He listened, angrily biting his lips.

"What's that? Carousing in battle trim?" he shouted at the drunkenly swaying mén.

"Freedom and liberty now, so we drink," someone said.

"Silence!" Safirov shouted, his fury mounting. "Silence, you swine! Twenty-five lashes each! And I'm telling you once more, if I catch one of you drinking again, I'll have you flogged without mercy. Get started!" he ordered.

A huge crowd collected round the drunks. Some voiced their sympathy for the victims, others shouted: "That's right! That's the way!" while the peasants stood a while in silence and then walked away.

Chastisement began. The dismounted cavalrymen knew no pity in whipping the drunks who struggled and fought, screamed and cursed Safirov.

"You just wait, Yashka," yelled one of the the commanders, who was less drunk than the others, "we'll pay you back for this! We'll give you a taste of our whips, too!"

Safirov silently watched the flogging for a few minutes, and when he had had enough of the noise and the abuse, he went back to his conference.

Chapter 12

For some time now Antonov had been expecting the arrival of the representative of Tambov's S.-R. underground committee, for Gorsky had written him a whole month ago that the man was due. The lawyer often sent people to Antonov. They brought various important documents from the Central Committee—copies of orders issued by the commanders of Red Army forces acting against the insurrection, and other reconnaissance data. Where and how he got hold of it, Gorsky alone knew.

In the morning Tokmakov, just up after an illness, his face sallow and pinched, his red hair standing on end, came to see Antonov.

"Why so gloomy?" Antonov asked. "What's wrong?"

"I don't even know how to put it, Alexander. Now you've been singing Storozhev's praises to me, and I had a talk with him. He's a smart man, there's no doubt about that, but have you asked him his reason for joining up with you? Well, I'll tell you the reason: his chief concern is to get back his land, and as for the rest, he doesn't give a hang. That's what it is."

Tokmakov cast a rueful glance through the window—the same ragged mob was loafing

about the yard, nibbling sunflower seeds and brawling.

"That's the way it is, brother," he sighed. "It's no great achievement getting rid of all that scum and riff-raff out there. Pyotr Ivanovich will remain, of course, you're his last hope of salvation. But then what's the good of Pyotr Ivanovich? The peasants will say: 'So it's Antonov that's being straddled by Storozhev, is it?' and the peasants will tell us to go to hell, and our whole Party too."

"But in my opinion," Antonov replied, "a powerful kulak is something we need. It's the smart, wealthy peasant who keeps the universe from toppling. Let the Bolsheviks struggle along with all sorts of scum and idlers. At the moment, of course, it's the poorest the Bolsheviks are riding. They have a greedy eye, but once they've grabbed and looted enough, they won't find the Bolsheviks to their taste either. I know the peasants. Every one of them's got a dirty, mean little soul—there's no hiding it. Every one of them's got a Pyotr Ivanovich in his heart, believe me. That's the way the world is made, brother."

"That's right too, but not all of it is right. I've got such a headache, Alexander, and I'm all burning up inside, I can hardly stand it.... Anything new?"

"I received some papers. Take a look at what they're saying about us."

Tokmakov always read the Moscow papers, kept abreast of the political situation and knew what was going on. And therefore his life was not a happy one. Peace had already been made with Poland, now the Reds had Perekop, and Wrangel had taken to his heels in the Crimea. Tokmakov heaved a deep sigh, he said nothing and kept his troubled thoughts to himself. Perhaps even then he saw the senselessness of the struggle, but he was hauled along by the inevitable logic of events: you've started the business, so you must carry it through to the end.

"Alexander," he said to Antonov, "have you ever thought what we should do later on, what we were heading for?" Tokmakov had never spoken so despondently to Antonov before.

"Why, Pyotr!" Antonov sat up. "Why this alarm?"

"Oh nothing—" Tokmakov waved him away —"just thoughts. Well, I was going to say that here the Reds are beating the Poles too, they're in luck, Alexander. Next they'll start on us, we've got to watch out...."

There was a knock on the door and Pluzhnikov came in together with a thickset man wear-

ing the black sheepskin coat of the railroad staff.

"My name is Firsov," he introduced himself to Antonov, "representative of the Central Committee of the S.-R. Party, on a special mission." And he produced his documents.

Antonov stood up, pulled down his tunic and smoothed the bed covers.

"Call in Safirov, Storozhev, Kosova and Ishin," he called, thrusting his head out of the door. "And let no one else in here, understand?"

Ishin came in, hastily chewing something down. He was followed by Storozhev, Safirov and Maria Kosova. All took seats.

Firsov pulled out a handkerchief, wiped his neck, and said addressing Antonov:

"On instructions from the Central Committee of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, I'm bringing you greetings from them, comrades!"

"Thanks." Ishin smiled ironically. "It's considerate of them. Have they, by any chance, sent us some weapons with you too, dear friend?"

Antonov and Maria laughed.

The representative of the Central Committee of the S.-R. Party eyed Ishin up and down contemptuously and said:

"I've been sent here for a particular reason. The world and the home situation has taken on an unfavourable turn for us. The present policy of our Party is to preserve our manpower. And you say 'have they sent you weapons'! You, warriors! You've lost your heads! You don't understand a damned thing and you're bashing your heads against a stone wall. At the moment you are interfering with the Party's plans, understand?"

"Go on," said Antonov, fuming with rage.

"Comrade Antonov! We suggest that you put an end to the insurrection in order to preserve the ranks of trustworthy men. If you do not obey, we shall have nothing further to do with you."

Antonov blanched, his lips began to twitch and his cheek-bones stood out sharper than ever.

"Ah, you swine!" he shouted. "I knew you'd sell me! Yegor, Pyotr, why don't you say something?"

"Tell me, my good man," Storozhev asked Firsov, "why the devil did we get the whole business started? To bleed the people dry and then surrender with nothing achieved?"

"You don't understand the situation, you don't understand the historical course of events," Firsov spoke coldly, with set teeth.

"Floundering about in this hole of yours, you can't see farther than your own noses. The Bolsheviks cannot be fought in the open now. We've got to preserve our strength, our arms, and go into the underground. Such is the resolution passed by the Central Committee!"

"And quite reasonable too," remarked Safirov. "The people don't want war now. They've started calling us bandits. The people want peace."

"Yakov, are you selling me too?" Antonov cried in despair. "You, too?"

"No, I'm not selling you, Alexander Stepanovich, I'm using common sense, that's all. The alarm bell's died away, war is over, peace is taking sway. . . ."

"He's taken to poetry, the fool," Storozhev said with malice. "Commander of the Guards, curse you!"

"Pyotr Ivanovich, be quiet."

"Don't you believe Yakov, don't believe him, Alexander," Maria shrieked, "he's selling you out!"

"He's no Alexander to you now!" shouted Safirov, who hated Maria for her lewdness. "He is Antonov, Commander-in-Chief of the Insurrecting Armies. Grave matters are being decided, and a dame has no business here!"

"I'll kill you, you beast!" Maria pulled out her revolver. Antonov hit her arm and the weapon clattered on the floor.

"Alexander Stepanovich, don't listen to them," said Storozhev, "we'll fight till we get our land back, and our power. We've got strength enough yet!"

"Right! Right! We'll dance a solo dance from now on," Ishin supported him.

"They'll crush us! Everyone is against us now!" Safirov warned.

"So what do you suggest, Safirov? Shall we go and pay our respects to the Reds? Beg for their mercy?" Tokmakov asked glumly, giving voice for the first time since the argument started. "Feel like having a little swing from a tree, do you?"

"No, no, no, never, no!" Antonov kept shouting.

"Now then, this is my last word: hide your men, cache your weapons." Firsov rose to go.

"Get out of here!" Tokmakov snarled. "Get out! Or else. . . ." And he pulled out his gun.

Firsov shrugged and walked out.

"They've sold us, sold us!" Antonov moaned, fell across the table, wheezed and writhed in convulsions, foaming at the mouth. Everyone rushed to him.

"Again." Ishin waved his hand hopelessly.

"What's the matter with him?" Storozhev asked.

"Epilepsy."

Within an hour Antonov came back to his senses.

"Liquour," he croaked, "and call a meeting of the League tomorrow. . . ."

They drank heavily that night in the dark corner room at Headquarters, behind tightly shuttered windows: Antonov, Ishin, Maria and Gherman Yurin, the young, handsome and hot-blooded Chief of Antonov's Intelligence Service.

Antonov drank out of a tumbler in great gulps, he laughed a mirthless laugh, kept striving to go somewhere, to bash in somebody's skull, groaned and gritted his teeth, hugged Maria one moment and suddenly pushed her away with foul curses the next. He slapped her face when she refused to leave his side.

"Hit me, hit me," she cried shrilly, letting down her hair. "Hit me, Alexander, you'll love me one day, you have no one but me!" She laughed drunkenly, tipped the bottle of moonshine into her mouth, swore and wept. From time to time Antonov, his face unshaved and

pale-green, his bleary eyes fixed on one point, burst into song with his favourite tune:

Transvaal, Transvaal, my land so dear,
You're all aflame with fire....

In the middle of the night, when Ishin had fallen asleep, Antonov, whose sanity had quite deserted him, together with Gherman Yurin and Maria crept down the stairs and made their unsteady way to the barn where the Communist captives had been awaiting their doom for two days. Antonov pushed the sentry away. Gherman, who was not as drunk as the others although he had had more to drink than they, unlocked the door of the barn and lighted the candle in the lamp hanging beside the door.

The Communists—there were three of them, two men and a young girl, a school-teacher—crowded in a corner and, huddling close to one another, awaited death.

When Antonov saw the prisoners he fired a random shot into their corner. The girl cried out.

"You don't know how, let me," Maria said.

Swaying drunkenly, she took aim—the pistol misfired, she aimed again.

Suddenly, a short, dark man sprang forward from the corner and shouted:

"Murderers! Kill me!" And with his hands he ripped open the shirt on his breast.

Gherman pulled his pistol out with shaking hands and fired at the white spot. The man fell and crawled away into the corner to his own people.

Antonov took another shot at the living, stirring and moaning huddle.

Suddenly, a human form began to emerge from that huddle: clutching at the timber wall, the girl was getting up, she turned to face her murderers. The wavering light fell on her face streaming with blood, on her hands which she held out in front of her....

Maria shrieked wildly and, dropping her pistol, rushed to the door. Gherman stumbled out backwards, his face contorted with terror. Again, as on that morning, Antonov began to wheeze, he collapsed on the floor and beat his head on the boards, writing in a fit.

Men rushed into the barn.

Chapter 13

The meeting of the League of Labouring Peasantry Committee, guarded by a reinforced watch of Antonov's personal regiment, was attended by some thirty men—all the top men of the insurrection, members of the Committee,

and unit commanders. Antonov appeared with a bandage on his head; he had lacerated his forehead during his fit and did not dare look at Tokmakov. The latter knew of the previous night's business, he did not greet Antonov but sat glumly in a corner, his head cushioned in his arms, apparently deaf to everything round him.

Storozhev, who had been invited to attend the meeting, noticed how the leaders of the insurrection were playing up to the peasant delegates from the various districts. Antonov addressed the peasants by their full names, pushed the best dishes closer up to them—a meal of mutton, aspic and beer had been served. The men, dressed in their richest clothes, were gravely noncommittal, they listened to the speeches with impassive faces, stroking their beards sedately.

"Brothers!" Ishin began with enthusiasm. "Comrades! That man over there," he pointed to Firsov who sat like a stone image without looking at anyone, "has brought us an order to lay down arms, to put an end to the insurrection!"

An excited whisper ran among the delegates.

"Is that what we have struggled for, that we should give in now? We know our leaders well

enough, they ve betrayed more men than one. But they won't sell us by auction, they'll come a cropper, it's not us they're betraying but the peasants!"

"The swine!" a loud cry broke from a bearded man in a new cloth coat.

The meeting grew noisy and disordered, everyone left their seats and crowded round Firsov. He said nothing and merely watched the commotion with a smirk on his face.

Tokmakov sat engrossed in his musings: which way to go, who to follow? But when he thought that he would have to surrender, a shudder ran down his spine—no, no, he wanted to live, and to live meant—to fight!

"The swine!" the same bearded man yelled again. "They've stirred us up and now they're abandoning us! We're with you, Alexander Stepanovich! Those food quotas of theirs will ruin us, we stand to lose everything we've got with those new rules of theirs. Lead on! I'll mount a horse myself. I'll fight to the end! Here, let me kiss you."

The peasants crowded round to kiss Antonov.

"See how it is?" Antonov's brother, Dmitri, a foppish, pimply young fellow, said to Firsov. "You go back and tell them what you heard here. Hey, brother, send them to hell, you've

fed them long enough, they've bled us enough, we'll go on by ourselves now, it'll be more fun. Robbing and looting in a big way. . . ."

The delegates were suddenly hushed. Antonov threw his brother a furious look. Then one of the peasants, interrupting Dmitri, said to Tokmakov:

"Who is it Dmitri Stepanovich wants to rob now? I can't make it out."

The delegates began to rumble, they clustered together and held a whispered discussion. Dmitri, realizing that he had been stupid, sat down. Firsov was smiling. Tokmakov hissed angrily into Antonov's ear. Antonov strode up to his brother, took him by the scruff of his neck and pushed him out of the room.

"He's young and stupid," Antonov addressed the peasants gloomily. "Forgive him, I beg you. We are now tied with the same string to the end of our days. I'll stand firm to the end. And you! Tell your atamans that I spit into their mugs! I shall not lay down arms! I shall fight to the last drop of blood in my veins! I'll shoot, burn and flog . . . but I won't be caught! I'll break the Commune's back!"

"Fool," Firsov muttered scornfully.

"I have two armies," Antonov bellowed, "I'll have three if I want them. I'll steep Russia in blood, I'll drown all the Bolsheviks in blood.

And your atamans too, the scoundrels, the traitors! Selling their hides to the Soviets! Selling their souls! Men, we shall fight, don't give in!"

But the glum delegates were silent. They began to make their way out without any parting words.

Firsov sat laughing gleefully, jerking his shoulders and wiping his sweating neck. Ishin, furious and red in the face, came up to him, picked him up by the collar of his coat and shook him like a puppy.

"Wipe that laugh off your face, you son of a bitch!" And crashing Firsov mightily against the wall, he strode out.

That evening Storozhev ordered his horses to be made ready. Lyonka, homesick and longing for Natasha, ran happily to the stables, for their way home lay through Gryaznoye.

It was night when they set off. Out in the open the wind was cold, chasing the snow and piling up snow-banks.

December was snowy that year, the eve of the new year—1921.





PART TWO

DEFEAT



Chapter 1

One evening in January Andrei Andreyevich's neighbours and relatives gathered together in his cottage to hear what Ivan Tugolukov, just back from the Red Army, had to say. They sat without lights. Andrei Andreyevich lay on the stove-ledge together with his son Yashka and his three-year-old daughter Masha. He had been a widower for over two years now; his wretched cottage was warped and sagging and its boarded-up windows gazed blindly at the street. In the winter the corners froze right through. Great big rats made their home under the stove; they were starving and attacked one another at night.

Andrei Andreyevich was thinking of the horse which Nikita Semyonovich had left him when he went off to the station. He cared for the horse as he had never cared for his sick wife, he went from house to house begging the people to spare him a handful of oats, he built a sledge, wove a harness out of thin rope, and even took to humming a song.

This had never happened to him before. He had all his life been struggling in poverty, and poverty does not sing songs.

The men sat and smoked, a thick blue cloud rising slowly towards the ceiling. Masha coughed in her sleep. A snow-storm was whirling outside—January was cold and stormy that year.

"Well, Ivan, how are things in Russia?" asked Father Stepan. Boredom had also driven him to Andrei's cottage, he was curious to hear what was going on in the world.

Ivan, invisible in the darkness, took a pull at his cigarette, spat and said:

"Bad, Father, bad! It's ruin! Russia has become real poor. We thought we'd eat our fill when we got home, after all this is Tambov Province—a land of rye!"

"It *was* a land of rye. All sold out now," someone sighed.

"It beats me," Ivan continued, "what is to

be done? So many years of war, well, this is what it's come to!"

"And what's new about the uprisals?" asked a voice.

"Well, on our way down here we heard shooting every once in a while. There's no peace."

"I see. So Storozhev wasn't lying when he said they were not alone, that men were rising everywhere."

They sighed and lapsed into silence. Cockroaches could be heard rustling behind the stove.

"Listen, fellows," someone said, "how is it then the Bolsheviks are letting their soldiers go home? If they're disbanding their army, it means that Antonov doesn't stand for anything by himself. They'll give him a shaking and throw him out."

"Army!" Ivan smiled. "An army's got to be fed, you blockhead. That's why they're disbanding it. What else can they do with an army?"

Silence fell again. Each one of them was afraid to put his thoughts into words—it was a hell of a time, you never knew who was around.

The other day Matvei Besperstov, whose son Dmitri had gone over to the Reds, had told the peasants:

"There's talk that the Soviets are going to put an end to their food quotas soon."

The following day, two cavalrymen took Matvei away to Gryaznoye, where Storozhev had established his headquarters, and the old man was flogged so cruelly that to this day he lay motionless on his stomach. Just try and speak your mind! "Liberty," they babbled.

In the darkness the tips of their cigarettes flared up and died away. Suddenly, the sound of horses' hoofs rent the stillness of the night, someone knocked on the window, and a loud, harsh voice shouted: "Hey, men, get going to the school-house, there's a meeting on!"

"Pyotr Ivanovich has come, let's go and listen, old chaps."

The men filed out of the cottage. Andrei drew an old bit of sacking over his children, looked in at the stable, fondled his horse's neck, and shuffled on to the school-house. He felt uneasy, the future seemed so obscure.

The people were in no hurry to get together. Some fifty men were sitting on the school benches carrying on a lively conversation. When Ishin and Storozhev appeared they all fell silent.

"Well, how are things?" Ishin asked the men cheerfully and lit a cigarette. "Reds been here?"

"Just flew in, once or twice," a reluctant voice sounded from the back rows. "They took some flour from the mill and changed three of their horses."

"Our own Communists came," a young black-haired peasant put in. "Listrat came, Fedka, Vanka Frushtak, about ten altogether."

"They'll have you right under their thumb, soon," Ishin continued. "No, fellows, I see you'll have to be organized. There's no getting away from us—" he laughed—"we'll plague you till you are."

"We're plagued enough as it is," the same young man replied gaily, "but the rub is how to get organized."

"You don't know? Well, let me tell you. We must have an organization of our own—a peasants' organization. I told you once, remember? A peasants' league. The majority of people in Russia are peasants; if we all unite, no power on earth can break us."

"There are different kinds of peasants," remarked Andrei Andreyevich. "Some are like me, and others are like Pyotr Ivanovich there. All the livestock I've got is a chain dog, but Pyotr Ivanovich, I expect, has a whole herd."

"Try working as hard as I do—you'll own a herd too," Storozhev flared up. "All you do is loll on your belly all day."

"We've got eyes, we can see who does your work for you," Andrei Andreyevich retorted sharply.

"Who does?"

"The ones who've always been doing it."

"And who's that?"

"Cut it out," Ishin interposed. "What are you haggling for? Pyotr Ivanovich, too, is badgered by the Commune, and it hasn't exactly showered gold on you either, as far as I can see," he said to Andrei Andreyevich.

The men laughed approvingly.

The school-house was filling up. It grew hot, sweat poured down the men's faces. Lyonka lighted a kerosene lamp and pushed a table and a chair into the centre of the room.

"Listen, men," Storozhev said, "we've got Yegor Ivanovich Ishin with us tonight. Antonov himself has sent him here. He wants to talk to you."

"Look here, Yegor Ivanovich," the black-bearded peasant addresed Ishin, "don't bother to tell us about the Commune. We know all about the Commune ourselves. You'd better tell us about your own business. What sort of folks you are, where you come from, what kind of laws you want to set up?"

"Semyon's right! We know all about the Commune!"

"Tell us," the peasant went on, "what sort of government you're getting up, what you are going to do about the land? Because it may be that we shan't even want to talk to you at all."

"Listen, men. I didn't come here to make pretty speeches. To begin with, Alexander Stepanovich sends you his kind regards." Ishin bowed low to the men. "Secondly, I want to tell you about a dream I had. It's a long time since I saw it, but I remember it to this day. Come up closer, fellows, I can't talk loud, I've got a sore throat."

The men moved up nearer, surrounded Ishin in a close circle, and everyone came to the private conclusion that the man seemed all right.

"Well then, chaps, I had a prophetic dream: it was as if I had been whisked across to a kingdom beyond the seas and oceans, to the other end of the world. There I was walking along the road, and on both sides of the road stretched cornfields, with the corn taller than a man. It rustled and swayed, and the ears must have weighed over a pound each. 'That's some harvest,' I thought. And then I saw some men working in the fields, dressed in clean clothes, like townspeople. I came up and asked one old man, who was sitting like a lord under a tree, doing nothing, holding a sunshade

to protect himself from the sun: 'What kind of people are you? Whose land is this, who's your master?' The old man replied: 'We have no masters, you dunderhead. All the land belongs to us peasants.' I walked on and came to a town. People were sauntering up and down the streets, kids were playing ball, and the grass looked fresh and green. 'What town is this?' I asked. 'Is it your capital?' And one lady—all dressed in silk, and she had two fat little children with her—replied: 'You dunderhead, can't you see this is just a miserable village?' 'And may I ask who you are, my lady, a lord's wife perhaps?' And the lady said: 'You must be crazy, I'm just an ordinary peasant woman, and my man is harvesting corn in the field, while I'm taking a stroll down the street.' And I asked: 'But how can you go strolling in the street at this hour, you foolish woman, who'll cook your man's dinner, wash his pants, scrub your floors and dig up your vegetable patch for you if you don't do it?' And she stared at me pop-eyed and burst out laughing. 'You must really be a fool, where on earth do you come from? In our peasant kingdom we womenfolk have nothing but fun. They say that now the learned men are racking their brains to find a way to hatch our babies in heated

barns, like chicks, so we won't have to go through labour any more.' "

General laughter followed this and then the comments began:

"Just listen to that, she thinks child-bearing hard!"

"That's what I call living, brothers!"

"It's not living, it's the kingdom of heaven."

"Well then," Ishin took up again, and a smile hovered at the corners of his mouth. "In that village I saw cows and horses that made our horses look like sheep in comparison, honest to God! And the wool on their sheep was a yard long, dragging along the ground. Well, when I got to the capital—the beauty of it took my breath away! Then they led me to their governor. I walked in and saw a little red-headed chap sitting there, tugging at his beard. 'Are you the governor?' I asked. 'Aye,' he replied, 'they elected me governor for five years. Only I get nothing out of being governor. I'd make much more money working out in the fields, and the work is easier too.' "

The men burst into a chorus of laughter. Ishin and Storozhev were the only ones who did not laugh. When silence was resumed, Ishin continued:

"Then I asked the chap to tell me how they had set up a life like that. He said: 'Well, to

begin with, we shoved our tsar off the throne. And then dissension started among us people—everyone pulled the cart in different directions. And while we wrangled and quarrelled and took no heed of what the wise men told us, Antichrist came! He had a leather jacket on his shoulders and a red star burning on his forehead....'"

A chuckle—not so merry this time—ran along the rows of listeners.

"'And Antichrist sidled up to us, took us in his power and started sucking our blood. He invented food quotas too, and began to jeer and sneer at God. The peasants set up a howl. And then a good and brave lad came to us and told us how we could do away with Antichrist. So we took his advice and all rose up in a body and threw him off. We threw him off and then our elders called a meeting to decide how we should live now. And the decision they came to was that first and foremost all the land should be given to the peasants. They divided the land equally, and the ones who wanted a bigger share had to pay a tax, and if anyone wanted to employ farm-hands he had to pay a larger tax. So that's how we came to this wonderful life of ours. Now,' he said, 'the poorest peasant has meat cutlets for dinner and cake for tea. Come on,' he invited me, 'I'll treat you

to some of our peasant soup.' I entered the palace and there stood tables groaning under the weight of all sorts of dishes. I was simply famished. I came up to the table, poured myself a glass of wine, brought it up to my mouth ... and woke up."

The men roared with laughter again.

"Some dream, that!" a shout came from the back rows.

"There'll never be a life like that."

"Why not?" Storozhev asked. "If a peasant owns land, he has strength. And where there's strength there's power...."

"And as far as we're concerned we don't care who has the power, so long as we have an easy life," Andrei Andreyevich put in.

"Wait, wait, fellows, I haven't finished my story yet. I woke up that morning and told Antonov my dream. That's the sort of life we should strive for, I said. And then Antonov shows me a book and reads. And according to that book it's a sure thing that a life like that will come if the peasants want it."

"I should say we do," a number of voices called together.

"It's all fibs!"

"No, fellows, it's not fibs! No one's going to build our life for us if we don't do the building

ourselves. The way of the Commune is not our way. Rise up! Join us! Take up arms!"

Ishin, sweating with excitement, sat down and wiped his face with his sleeve. The peasants, who had laughed so unanimously only a minute before, now sat silent and frowning. They refused to say anything. In vain Pyotr Ivanovich urged them to speak up, in vain Ishin took the floor again. No one put any questions to the speakers, nor did anyone leave the meeting. Finally, when Storozhev had come to the end of his patience, Andrei Andreyevich stood up.

"This is a serious business," he said. "A business like this can't be decided in a minute. I think we've got to wait a bit. Think it over. Am I right, men?"

"You've said it, that's right," the gathering rumbled.

"Let Antonov himself come here," someone shouted. "We'll have a chat with him."

The peasants got up and began to leave.

The night was cold and starry.

Storozhev walked home, vexed and gloomy; the stubbornness of the peasants amazed and annoyed him.

"Well, what shall we do now?" he asked Ishin.

"Why don't you put a bit of fear into them,

Pyotr Ivanovich? The peasant's back is tough, it's been whipped before your time, and if you add a few more lashes it won't spoil matters."

Next morning Storozhev, his resentment rankling, allowed his men to do a "spot of looting" in the village. The horsemen invaded the households; women screamed, children cried out, hens cackled, ducks quacked and sheep bleated.

Storozhev carried Andrei Andreyevich and Matvei Besperstov off to Gryaznoye with him.

The following day the two were brought back home. They said nothing but just lay numbly with their eyes closed. When their friends took off their clothes for them, they saw that the skin hung on their backs in blue tatters and blood streamed from the wounds. The peasant who had driven them back repeated Storozhev's words to the crowd:

"Pyotr Ivanovich told me to say that until you join up with Antonov, he'll go on flogging you without mercy."

A day later a party of Storozhev's men descended upon the village again. They carried off two more men: Frushtak, the school watchman, whose son had gone over to the Reds, and the black-bearded talkative peasant. These two were also brought back home beaten to within an inch of their lives.

The peasants surrendered. They sent delegates to Gryaznoye to fetch Storozhev. He was having dinner when they arrived. He ordered the delegates to be flogged and thrown out. They went back, however, and implored Storozhev to have mercy on their village.

Once again the people gathered in the school-house and once again Ishin took the floor.

"Well, how's life?" he began, addressing the sullen gathering. "It's no joke being between two fires, is it? Crowding you in from both ends? You just wait, when the Reds come they'll show what real crowding is. They won't care that you're peaceful folk carrying on quietly by yourselves. They don't mince words—they shoot every tenth man."

Ishin went on to tell them of the Reds' atrocities. The terrified men gasped and paled.

"We see it all clearly now," said Danila Naumich, a sedate peasant who took the floor after Ishin had finished. "It's all been explained to us, thank God. But what we'd like to know is how do we benefit from that Antonov of yours? Tell us, my good man. We'll have to provide for an army now, won't we, send up our men, our horses and our bread?"

"So what?" said Ishin and laughed. "We'll strike a bargain with you."

"That's better now," offered the black-bearded peasant, the one who had been flogged on Storozhev's orders, and who now sat in the front row. "So far it's been nothing but words and threats."

"That's right, that's right," people shouted from the back.

Ishin made only casual mention of Antonov's demands; instead he lingered on the subject of the clothes and other merchandise stored in stacks at the station, which was now in the hands of the Reds.

"Once we take that station we'll have a hell of a lot of boots and clothes and everything! But we can't take that station without your help—your village is acting like a stopper."

At the mention of merchandise, his listeners' faces brightened.

"We want nothing from you," Ishin said in conclusion. "We've been supporting our army for more than a year now. Our army's no drain on the peasants who are with us."

Danila Naumich stood up again.

"So that's that, Pyotr Ivanovich. It seems we have to join up, one way or the other. The way of the Reds doesn't agree with us. So this is what the community has decided: to ask Storozhev to persuade Antonov to come here, we want to talk to him ourselves, because all

of you are serving under him. And then we'll give you our final word: either we're with you or against you."

Ishin made a hopeless gesture. Storozhev swore roundly. But there was nothing for it. Dvoriki stood in the way of their advance on the south-east railway. They had to give in. Storozhev left for Antonov's Headquarters to try and convince him to come.

Chapter 2

Two days later Antonov in person arrived at the village. He rode a prancing dapple-grey stallion, his saddle, horse-cloth and all the trappings sparkling with silver. Antonov wore a pair of red, gold-striped parade breeches tucked into his box-calf top-bcots, and a fur Cossack cap pushed well back on his head.

He brought his best men, his personal guard and the whole of his Headquarters Staff to impress the villagers who vexed him with their stubbornness.

Both old and young rushed out into the street. The village elders watched gravely from their windows. The day was warm, and a soft, gentle snow was falling. Antonov and his staff were quartered in Danila Naumich's house.

The cavalrymen put up in different homes. They refused their hosts' offers of hay for the horses for each one had brought his own supply of fodder; this particularly impressed the peasants. After dinner Antonov took a stroll down the village, he stopped the peasants and talked pleasantly to them.

Towards the end of the day, the villagers witnessed a gruesome spectacle.

For a long time Antonov had been trying to lay his hands on Kolka Pastukh—leader of a rebellious detachment. In the beginning Kolka recognized Antonov's authority and took his orders from Headquarters, but then he rebelled. He scoffed at Antonov, stopped obeying orders, refused to lay down arms and looted and raped wherever he could. Eventually, by fair means and foul, Antonov managed to lure Kolka to Dvoriki. And now, drunken and bound hand and foot, Kolka lay prisoner in Danila Naumich's barn.

The same evening Antonov gave orders for Kolka to be shot in front of all the villagers. This was one of Tokmakov's brain-waves. Ishin opposed it angrily, but Antonov shouted him down, and Kolka's fate was sealed.

The youngster walked without understanding where he was being taken, yelling obscene songs and vomiting by turns. When they got to

the church, they stood him up against a stone wall and shot him. Antonov commanded the firing squad himself. Kolka never came to his senses at all.

Antonov addressed the villagers as he put his pistol back into his holster:

"Now you've seen it—with my own hands I killed a scoundrel who was a bane to the peasants. Likewise, and with no compunction, I shall kill anyone who betrays us to the Reds."

The frightened peasants signed a statement pledging their adherence. True to form, however, they haggled over terms with Antonov first.

On behalf of the community Danila Naumich requested that the neighbouring villages should be made party to the insurrection, not as Storozhev's unit, but as a separate company formed of village volunteers; that the Dvoriki men should be permitted to change their horses in these villages; that there should be no requisitions or violence whatsoever; that the land which belonged to the Communists should be given to the community and divided at the community's discretion. He further requested that in the event of the station being taken, Dvoriki should be allotted half of the merchandise found there.

Antonov agreed. Then the villagers detached a force of fifty strong, fully equipped and even armed with a machine-gun.

Antonov left that night. Storozhev slept in his own home, for the first time after a long break.

The new moon rode high in the sky, sprinkled with large, wintry stars. Dogs barked at the rare passers-by. At Headquarters, signallers on duty dozed, curled up on the tables. Armed sentries walked the village outskirts. Far out in the countryside mounted patrols scoured the roads. Lights burned in the cottages—rifles were being cleaned, saddles, whips and harness made ready. The village, roused to revolt, did not sleep all night.

Chapter 3

Life at the village underwent a change. The streets were strangely quiet, both day and night. The girls and lads no longer gathered for merrymaking, the people no longer sat chatting on logs in front of the village Soviet. The womenfolk would meet by the well, whisper and sigh a little, and slouch home. Life became sinister and alarming.

The Village Committee of the League of La-

bouring Peasantry sat day and night. The new village government was made up of: Danila Naumich, the former elder, for chairman, Ivan Semyonovich, the Baptist blacksmith, in charge of supplies, Alexander, the priest's son, for scribe, and Danila's son Ilya, the former sergeant with the flaxen moustache, as chief of the village militia.

Specially selected men were picked for the militia: the two sons of Vasily Ivanovich Molchanov, a stalwart kulak; the three sons of the farmer Sergei Vasilyevich Zagorodny; Ivan Tugolukov, recently back from the army, and as used to a rifle as a blacksmith is to his hammer, and about five others.

In spite of all Ishin's bragging promises of an easy life, in actual fact life was far from easy: they either had to supply meat for the detachment, or hay for the horses, or the militia had to be provided for, or carts were needed. Danila Naumich had his hands full—he carried the brunt of the whole committee. The mills, the millet threshers and creameries started working again. The owner of the mill—Ivan Pavlovich, a former shopkeeper—charged a new measure for grinding, fixed by the committee. Trouble broke out in the village over this charge because Ivan Pavlovich demanded as much as a tenth share.

"This is no Soviet state for you," he said, "it's my mill, so I charge whatever I like!"

"Have a heart, Ivan Pavlovich," the men implored. "We didn't have to pay that much before the war!"

"But the Soviets charged you too little! You've played about enough. If you don't like it you can go to the mill twenty miles away."

The villagers approached the committee. Danila Naumich sent for the fish-eyed miller and said:

"What's this, free-booting, are you?"

"Hold your tongue, you old greybeard," Ivan Pavlovich grumbled. "You've started your own millet thresher going, I wonder how much *you* are charging? You're not losing on it, I don't suppose."

Danila Naumich told the villagers there was nothing he could do for them, the miller would not give in, it was his right.

The elders appealed to Storozhev. Pyotr Ivanovich called both Danila Naumich and the miller.

"Charge a twentieth share," he told them, "or else I'll report to Antonov."

The miller eyed Storozhev spitefully and declared that he would close down his mill. Storozhev crisped his fingers—that wouldn't do. If the mill was closed down how would they

feed the troops? He argued with the two proprietors for a whole hour and barely succeeded in bringing them to reason. They finally agreed on a sixteenth share.

The committee proclaimed free trade, but the villagers merely laughed—what was there to trade in, milk or what?

The school had been closed down. Danila Naumich called the men together and spoke to them about the necessity of reopening it. But what was to be taught? And then there was the question of Scripture—they had received no instructions from Antonov as regards God. The men grunted and sighed, smoked in silence, and went their various ways.

Nevertheless the committee did settle quite a number of different matters: by joint consent of the community ninety acres of land belonging to the church were restored to Father Stepan, the deacon and the psalm-reader. It it true, the community greeted the decision with foul language at first, but when Danila Naumich mentioned what a close friend of Storozhev's Father Stepan was, the old men had to change their tune. They learned obedience at last, the devils!

Danila Naumich showed great zeal in cleansing the village of every temptation. One evening he and two young fellows called on

Pelageya, the wife of Nikita Semyonovich, who had gone away to the station. The men ordered Pelageya to start off to join her husband the very next morning, threatening to blow her home to smithereens if she disobeyed. Pelageya, weeping and sobbing, beseeched the men to cancel their order—there would be no one to look after her home, her cows, sheep, geese and chickens. But the men left her without another word. Pelageya made a bundle of all the best things she had in the house, clothes and linen, and started on her way. When she neared the cemetery she was held up by militiamen. They took her bundle away and, giving her back two of her dresses, ordered her to be on her way without turning round.

In similar manner the committee rid Dvoriki of Matvei Besperstov and all those who at one time or another had been suspected of friendship with the Communists. All the household possessions of the banished men were delivered to District Headquarters by Danila Naumich, but he did not forsake his own interests either, reimbursing himself for all the losses inflicted upon him by the Reds.

A sentry kept watch on the belfry all day, night-watches were stationed all round the village. Whenever Red Army detachments were sighted at the approaches to the village, the

mills stopped working, a horseman bounded out from the end nearest Gryaznoye and, spurring on his horse, sped to give warning of the coming Reds. Militiamen hid their arms and saddles and took to their respective homes to act the part of placid peasants. When the Red detachment entered the village, all would be peace and quiet, no one appeared to have seen any bandits for ages, and had never heard of a committee in their lives.

The Red Army commanders were in a quandary. Every cottage might be concealing an enemy, every barn might have men lying in ambush behind it.

Pyotr Tokmakov ranged the villages of the Tambov Province, waving a copy of *Pravda* in his hand, telling the men about "wrangles in the Party," inventing stories, one more appalling than the next, prophesying new wars between the Bolsheviks and Europe, and new forms of requisition. The peasants surged to Kamenka, to Antonov. In him they sought salvation, believing that he could help them to overthrow the Commune.

More villages rose up in arms, and the hot blaze of rebellion flared over the province.

Chapter 4

Antonov's armies grew fast. He certainly had plenty of men, whatever else he lacked. Antonov formed new units, regiments and brigades. He was short of commanders at first, but these, too, were soon found.

In December, Safirov caught about fifty men near Kamenka. Grim-looking, dressed in old, dirty army coats, the men told him they were on their way to Kamenka to see Antonov.

"What d'you want in Kamenka?" Safirov asked them.

"We want to fight," replied one ruffian in puttees and torn shoes, with a bristly red beard covering his face.

It turned out that the men were demobilized Red Army soldiers. Antonov received them personally. Accompanied by Pluzhnikov and Ishin, he came out on the porch to meet them.

"Hello, friends," he greeted the worn-out men. "What have you got to say?"

"Here we are, that's all."

Antonov turned to Pluzhnikov, said something to him in an undertone, and went indoors. Ishin followed. A few minutes later the newcomers were interrogated at Headquarters. They were called in one by one, but not all of them were signed up. Discretion was used: men

of stalwart and trustworthy kulak stock were enrolled readily, the others were given the third degree by Tokmakov. Without demur he took the former officers—and there were not a few—into his army. He went through their papers thoroughly, deciphering the signatures on the seals and stamps. The papers were not returned to their owners. Tokmakov said with a nasty smile:

"You'll have no use for them, whereas we may need them. Hey, send in the next one!"

The demobbed men were put in different regiments, the officers had orders to form detachments in their own areas.

By that time Antonov had two armies at large in the Tambov Province. He had placed his closest henchmen in command—Tokmakov and the young, fiery Boguslavsky.

The Tambov Red Army forces fought half-heartedly: they would take a village and send in a glorious report. They bragged of victory. And two days later they would abandon the rebellious village, where once again S.-R. Committee men and militiamen crawled out of their hiding-places and things went on as before.

Occasionally a Red Army detachment managed to get one of Antonov's regiments in a tight corner, but, although to all appearances

the enemy was defeated, the scattered Antonovites would flee from the Reds, change their horses in the villages and vanish into thin air.

It was no use going after them, there was no catching them! It was no use looking for them either—try and find an Antonovite among the villagers, with his uniform and his rifle hidden away!

So went the war.

Chapter 5

A messenger from Gorsky arrived in Kamenka one day with a private letter for Antonov.

Destiny had tied those two together, and however hard Antonov struggled, he was unable to rid himself of the importunate "representative of a Petrograd firm of horse dealers." Their mutual dependence upon one another persisted. Gorsky went on supplying Antonov with copies of stolen strategical orders, reports and communiqués, and demanded in return butter, eggs, fowls and whole trainloads of goods. Most of what Antonov expropriated on the state farms, such as meat, butter, eggs, bronze and silver, was delivered to Gorsky's agents.

On this occasion Gorsky demanded horses. Antonov had been aware for a long time that

Gorsky was trading freely in anything he could lay his hands on, from spy communiqués to museum pieces. But what could he do? There was rumour in the air that large-scale military preparations against the insurgents were under way in Moscow and Tambov. Antonov needed Gorsky desperately.

"My dear," the lawyer wrote, "there are two hundred horses at the Ivanovka state farm. Take them and divide them equally between us —a hundred each. Our brothers in arms have need of the horses. (Antonov swore angrily.) Hurry while all is quiet. Certain rumours are current, I shall keep you posted, but I must ask you to carry out this request of mine."

Early one frosty morning Antonov's men surrounded the Ivanovka state farm, whose man-power was a handful of Red Army men and Communists from the neighbouring villages. For a whole year now these men had been holding the farm like a fortress. They were starving, but they stood firm.

On this occasion Antonov announced that he himself would lead the assault on the farm. He took Storozhev's frontier regiment, two long-range guns and ten machine-guns, and at midday ordered the men to open fire on the farm. Soon the thatched roofs of the farm buildings blazed up. Antonov then led the men into the

attack. Machine-guns spurted fire. The Communists reciprocated with a volley of rifle-shots. Storozhev's regiment, unused to open fighting, turned and made for the woods. The artillery commander had thirty shells aimed at the farm, but the gun crews had bucked themselves up with a good deal of vodka that morning, and the shells went astray.

Now Storozhev himself led his regiment in for a second attack on the farm. He jogged in front on his piebald mare, shouting and whirling his sword in the air. Antonov rode beside him.

Antonov taught his men that in guerrilla warfare the commander should always be in front, and he was always the first to enter the fray. But then he was not afraid of death. Life held no joys for him in spite of his run of good luck. His committee men and Headquarters Staff continued to dig pitfalls for one another and tear at each other's throats. Officers of noble birth wormed their way into Headquarters, crawling from hell knows what chinks, profiteers rummaged in the villages, the kulak crew ran matters in their own way, and Antonov had not the strength to get rid of them.

Whooping wildly, Antonov galloped across the virgin soil to the state farm where rifle-shots cracked and white clouds of smoke rose

and dispersed slowly in the air. The Communists opened fire. A bullet hit Antonov's horse; limping and stumbling it shied away. Bodies of men and horses lay about.

The regiment was turned to rout. Antonov, livid with fury, ordered retreat. The Reds did not pursue the Antonovites, they had other things to do.

Next day Antonov dispatched Storozhev to the province of Saratov to find the horses demanded by Gorsky, but near the Khopyor River the regiment met a company of Reds and was wiped out.

Coming back with what remained of his troop, Storozhev, maddened by failure, fell upon a small state stud-farm. It was night. A warm, light snow was falling.

The Antonovites broke into the farm, slaughtered the sentries and took the farm authorities alive. The manager had not been given time to dress; he sat in his underwear, blood streaming down his face. One of Storozhev's men had hit him with his rifle butt when he was disarming him.

Storozhev received a shoulder wound during the skirmish and his arm hung limp like a rag. Rage welled up in him.

"Are you a Communist?" he asked the manager.

The man nodded.

"We'll give them a trial," Storozhev decided. "Get everybody together!"

The horsemen clattered through the farm waking up those who were still asleep, others dragged in people from the next village. The alarm-bell tolled. They pulled the priest out of bed, blear-eyed with sleep. He came along in his stole, bearing a chalice.

The villagers were driven into the office building. Frightened and frozen they shivered and swore under their breath. Two lanterns brought from the stables lit up the filthy, bespattered premises which looked like a shed. After a whispered conversation with the priest, Storozhev appointed three judges—men recommended as trustworthy by the priest. Two were old men, and one a middle-aged peasant with a clean-shaven face.

Storozhev called the "judges" aside and they stood at attention, pale and sullen, listening to his instructions.

"Let your conscience prompt your verdict," he told the men. "And as for the rest, you know it yourselves: five Communists stood up against the wall will only help to lighten the peasants' lot."

The men who managed the farm were brought in. They had their arms pinioned, an armed Antonovite standing guard behind every one of them.

The interrogation was opened by Storozhev. He began with the manager of the farm. All movement and whispers ceased. The flame could be heard sputtering in the lanterns.

"Do you believe in God?" Storozhev asked.

"I believe in neither God nor Satan. I shall not speak."

Storozhev pulled his revolver out of its holster.

"I won't tell you anything!" the manager cried out.

"You will, just you wait!" Storozhev hissed. "Hey, you fellows, give him a flogging!"

Five hefty men rushed at the manager, threw him down on the floor, one sat on his legs, another on his head, and lashes whistled through the air. They whipped him long and silently. The manager remained as mute as if he were dead.

"Water!" cried Storozhev.

They threw icy water over the man, lifted him up on to a bench and he opened his eyes.

"To the wall!" Storozhev ordered.

The man was forced up and propped against the wall. Storozhev fired at close range. The

man lay on the floor before them all, blood gushing from a hole in his head.

"Get started!" Storozhev shouted to the judges. They remained silent.

"Who are you?" Storozhev asked a slight, grey-haired, clean-shaven old man.

"I'm the agriculturist."

"Bloody Jew, are you?"

"I am a Jew."

"Was it your forefather who sold Christ?"

The old man said nothing.

"Why don't you answer? It's you I'm asking! How much land has the state farm?"

"Eleven thousand acres."

"What was this place before?"

"Bezrukov's estate."

"How big was it?"

"Eleven thousand six hundred acres."

"Here's a sample of the Bolsheviks' law and order for you men: the state farm's share is eleven thousand acres and yours is only six hundred. Take it and lump it, so to say!"

The men were silent.

"How would you rather die? Perhaps we should hang you? Judges, what do you say?"

The judges sat shaking with fear. Suddenly a middle-aged peasant in a sheepskin coat stood up from one of the front seats.

"This man should not be tried at all," he said. "Isak Isakovich is a good and just man. We all get colts in plenty from the state farm. And he always deals fairly with us, too."

"Come here, you!" Storozhev growled.

The man stepped forward. Storozhev eyed him from head to toe, took a swing and brought his whip down on the man's face.

"That's what you get for standing up for Communists!" he said. "They will hang him now and you will prepare the noose for him. And if you don't like it, I can hang you too, to keep him company, as a warning to the others."

Shouts and curses broke from the crowd. The Antonovites, who stood in a circle round Storozhev, levelled their rifles at the men. The men were silenced. The gasping breath of the peasant in the sheepskin coat and the sputtering of the flame in the lanterns were the only sounds to be heard.

"Well, old man, it's your last chance. Speak up!"

The agriculturist stood up.

"You are a bandit!" he said very low. "I have nothing to say to you—do beasts understand anything?"

Storozhev stood looking at this grey-haired, puny, but proud old man whose eyes were shin-

ing and whose withered cheeks were suffused with colour. And suddenly Storozhev felt frightened. "There they sit," he was thinking, "and none of them beg for mercy, none of them weep. What makes them so strong?" And he felt more depressed than ever, this night of butchery appeared more gruesome still, this whole senseless trial he had started seemed even more senseless: he had convinced no one, intimidated no one.

No one!

"Hang him," Storozhev ordered, trembling all over. The agriculturist was led out together with the peasant who had spoken up for him. One after another the Communists faced Storozhev, and one after another he sentenced them to death.

The flame sputtered on serenely in the lanterns while men staggered up to the wall, and blood flowed.

Storozhev rode away in the morning, taking fifty horses and setting the place on fire as a parting gesture.

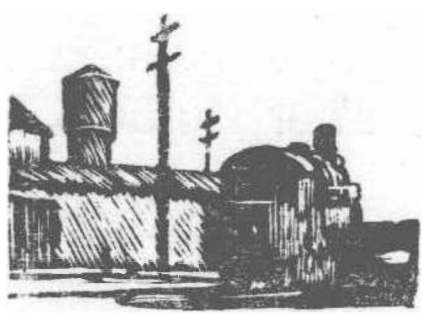
Antonov ordered him to deliver the horses to Gorsky's representative at an appointed place. This evoked the first quarrel between Storozhev and Antonov.

"What is this?" shouted Storozhev, who was

a quiet-spoken man as a rule. "Did I have to lose four hundred men for the sake of that swine of a profiteer? I'll hang before I let him have the horses!"

"You *will* let him," Antonov spoke with an effort, the muscles of his jowl working. "You will take them to him yourself. If you don't, someone else will. And if you start squealing I'll have you up against the wall. You're getting too smart, you son of a bitch."

Storozhev bit his lip and went out. That was the end of his friendship with Antonov.



Chapter 6

The villagers poked fun at the Antonovites after their attempted assault on the Ivanovka state farm. Girls made up couplets, one more stinging than the next, and went about the streets singing them at the top of their voices:

See that bandit with the whip,
He's so scared he's shivering,

Riding on a scouting trip
Slobbering and snivelling.

"Oh you, warriors!" Danila Naumich said to Storozhev. "And you want to make a march on Moscow, too! Well, you must be a slobbering sort of army all right if you couldn't get the better of a state farm!"

"When are you going to take the station?" the peasants gave voice at meetings. "You're good at promises, aren't you?"

"What station?" the others jeered in reply. "They're scared to ride up to it. God, what an army! Riff-raff, that's what they are!"

The taunts and spiteful jokes finally reached Antonov himself and he decided to set matters right. On his orders a joint army, three thousand strong, commanded by Storozhev and Pluzhnikov, left Kamenka early in February 1921 and advanced to storm the station which was in the hands of Listrat's detachment.

Towards daybreak the Antonovites approached the station and halted at a village near by. Storozhev gave the troops a final inspection. In front of him loomed the station, invisible in the darkness. A single little light, burning high up on the grain elevator, pierced the dense grey of the dawn.

No sound came from the station—the tired

men were fast asleep. Life at the station was hard. Surrounded by Antonov's troops, this handful of soldiers held on with neither bread for themselves nor fodder for their horses.

Antonov was holding the road above Mordovo and the station had been cut off from help for a whole month now. The fighters lived on starvation rations. The men scowled and the horses collapsed. Nikita Semyonovich alone did not lose heart. Listrat and he spent all their days ranging the countryside and bringing back what food and fodder they could get at the villages.

But the ring grew ever tighter. There was talk among the less spirited men that an attempt should be made to break through to Mordovo. Listrat kept his opinion to himself. He knew very well that they would never get through with their families, that they could not get away from Antonov on their tired, emaciated horses.

The attack on the station took Listrat by surprise, too. His scouts had missed the movement of Antonov's troops. Sashka Chirikin came back from his reconnaissance trip towards daybreak, deceived by the stillness and emptiness reigning in the villages closest to the station.

That morning Storozhev's advance detachments noiselessly stole up to the station. The Reds woke up to the sound of machine-gun fire and the roar of exploding grenades. Men came running out of the houses, their clothes half on, shooting their way to the railway depot. Mounted Antonovites galloped through the streets.

Screened by their cavalry unit, the Communists were getting away from the station. The Antonovites, however, soon abandoned their pursuit of them. Storozhev, Pluzhnikov and the commanders were unable to hold the men under control: the victors were too busy looting. Towards midday the peasants from the near-by villages arrived at break-neck speed in their carts. Doors were broken in, bolts wrenched out with the wood, shattered glass was sent flying. They searched feverishly but could not find the promised merchandise. Apart from a hundred rifles, two machine-guns and a few cases of ammunition, the station had nothing to offer.

"Hand over the goods!" the women shrieked wildly. "Where have you hidden them, you lousy devil? Grabbed them for yourself, have you?"

In vain Storozhev ransacked the cottages and warehouses, in vain he horse-whipped his prisoners and the wives of the Communists:

they knew nothing about the leather and textiles, they insisted that there had never been anything at the station at all.

The men heaped savage oaths on Antonov and all his armies, the women attacked Storozhev, threatening to scratch his eyes out. Again and again warehouse walls were battered in, again and again cellars were rummaged through—they yielded nothing but five barrels of kerosene!

With his own hands Pyotr Ivanovich doled out the kerosene to the men and women. No delight was displayed however: the men were rancorous and every word they uttered was a sneer.

Storozhev held the station for four days. On the fifth, an armoured train arrived and with ten shots turned the "crack troops" to rout. Listrat came back to his headquarters, and things went on in the old way.

"So that's that, Alexander Stepanovich," Ishin said to Antonov. "We've got to think something up. We must bind the people to us somehow."

At that precise moment a message came through from Gorsky saying that a strong army had arrived in Tambov, sent to put an end to the insurrection.

Chapter 7

This was the first large formation dispatched by Moscow against the kulaks of Tambov.

The Commander-in-Chief commissioned the District Command of Orel to dispose of Antonov. The Orel Command set to the job eagerly, but hastily.

And the same mistakes were repeated: once again, in pursuit of quick victories, they took the insurgents' strongholds only to abandon them; once again they scattered Antonov's regiments only to see them come back to life, sprout up from the ground as it were, to form new companies, big and small. It is true the Command was planning to go through the rebellious district with a fine-tooth comb, to advance across it in a wide front, to run Antonov's main forces down to earth somewhere, to deal them a shattering blow, disperse them, exterminate them....

Thus they planned in Orel.

But Antonov, dully warned by Gorsky, was not sitting idle. A cunning scheme was afoot. Antonov was determined to involve thousands of peaceful men and women in this scheme, to raise the whole province up in arms, to retreat from the Reds in whole villages, to show them what sort of a welcome they were getting from

the peasants—joining up with Antonov, fleeing the Reds, running away from them as from a pack of wolves!

While the Reds were on their way to Tambov and alighting from their troop trains, Ishin, Pluzhnikov and some men they had recruited from the League of Labouring Peasantry and from Antonov's Staff Headquarters, were busy spreading a rumour in the villages that a certain Savage Division had arrived, made up of Chinamen, Latvians and Jews.

The agitators, yelling themselves hoarse, held forth on the Reds' atrocities, read testimonials and statements supposedly signed by the victims and survivors, they told of families that had been burnt alive, of tortures, rape and fire.

Storozhev received orders to call a meeting at Dvoriki. The day was a Sunday—bright and cold. The school-house could not hold all those wishing to hear Ishin talk once again—the peasants liked his merry, rollicking speech, his little jokes, proverbs and sayings. And so the meeting was held outside the church. People thronged the porch, feeble old men and women stood on the top steps, leaning on their sticks.

Ishin, his eyes flashing, gave the people an inspired talk about what the coming of the Bolsheviks would mean to them. Sparing no

words he told them that Antonov was forced to retreat before the Reds, to temporarily abandon the villages, leaving them unguarded, although he was well aware that the Communists had butchered the entire male population in the areas they had annexed, beginning with mere boys of fifteen.

"They are coming!" Ishin said. "They come robbing and shooting men, women and children. In Zagryatchina the bodies of the shot and tortured to death lie piled higher than a house. Men, there's only one way out for you: retreat together with us! Citizens, the Reds are near! Hide your corn and your oats as far as you can, send your young girls and women away to the farms. Let's show these tormentors that we don't even want to meet them, we don't want to set eyes on them or hear what they have to say!"

The meeting was drawing to a close when several horsemen galloped into the village. Their horses were hard-ridden and gasped for breath.

Close on their heels came two sledges, their cargo covered with sacking.

"Brothers!" cried a lean, bronze-faced man, without dismounting from his prancing steed. The men instantly recognized Gherman Yurin, Antonov's Chief of the Intelligence Service.

"Here, take a look at the Communists' handiwork!"

Gherman leapt down from his horse, walked up to the first sledge and threw back the sacking. People crowded round. One of the women sent up a heart-rending wail, slumped on the snow and writhed there, sobbing. More women started shrieking and wailing.

The crowd round the sledges grew thicker and closer.

Storozhev barely managed to push his way through to one of the sledges; what he saw in it made him blanch, his knees gave way suddenly, his jaws clamped together.

Yellow straw covered the floor of the sledge and on it lay bodies. They were naked and they stared at the world with hideous black hollows —they had no eyes, which had been gouged out and hung down on their cheeks. Their hair was singed and stood up like miserable, rusty stalks of grass in a parched field. The noses had been cut off, the mouths slit open from ear to ear.

"Citizens!" Gherman bellowed, standing up on the sledge. "Take a look! The swine have been torturing our brothers—here, look at the rusty needles under their nails, look!"

The women broke out into sobs again, the aged shed soundless tears.

"They tortured them for three days on end," Gherman went on, "and for no reason at all! They were all peaceful folk, women, old men, and this one here was a mere kid!" He pushed a body that was smaller than the rest. "Citizens! That's the sort of thing they're doing to us! We must leave before they come, hide from them, run from them! Get ready! They are near!"

Another horseman, covered with hoar-frost, raced into the village. He handed Ishin an envelope and sped away. Gherman went with him: he was taking the gruesome remains to the other villages.

Ishin broke the seal on the envelope and, with the message in his hands, addressed the gathering:

"Men! The Reds are only fifteen miles away. Antonov is on the retreat! He will be here tonight. When we sound the alarm-bell, start off!"

It seemed that a hurricane had scattered the crowd.

Storozhev, pale and green at the gills, stood leaning against a lamp-post, sick at the stomach.

"Yegor Ivanovich, tell me, did the Reds really do all that?" he asked Ishin.

Ishin made no reply and walked away with a

foul smirk on his face. He knew well enough where the bodies had come from. He knew well enough that Gherman Yurin had caught five Communists somewhere (and were they really Communists?), had killed them and ordered Vanka, the executioner in Safirov's regiment (Antonov had executioners appointed to each detachment), to make a good dress-down job of the bodies.

"Fix them as garish as you can," Gherman had instructed him. "Make everyone break out in cold sweat at the sight."

"Don't worry, it's not my first job," the executioner replied. He was a butcher by profession, a slight, wrinkled, red-eyed little rotter nicknamed "Ox."

For six days Gherman carted the disfigured corpses about, for six days women wailed in the villages and men trembled with fear. Those two cartloads accomplished what all of Antonov's agitators put together could not do—they made the people start up and fly from the Reds.

Antonov chuckled with self-complacency and shook Gherman's hand. "Good chap! That idea of yours was really brilliant!"

Andrei Andreyevich, shaking and frightened, came running to Storozhev that evening. He had already been around to some ten of his

friends, but they all drove him away. No one wanted to bother with him, busy as they were with their own affairs, their own worries.

He was not afraid for his own sake, it was his horse, his priceless piebald mare, nursed and tended with his own hands, that was his chief concern.

"Pyotr Ivanovich," he almost sobbed, "would they really molest me too?"

"And what makes you any different?" Storozhev sneered in reply. "Didn't you sign allegiance to Antonov?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, that means you're one of us. They'll confiscate your horse and slaughter your pig. And you too, for good measure!"

"They will?" queried Andrei Andreyevich in infinite despair.

"They won't bat an eye! It's all the same to them whether it's you or me, we're all tarred with the same brush, you know," Storozhev replied with conviction.

Chapter 8

That night Andrei Andreyevich slaughtered his pig, dressed it, and slung it into his sledge, covering it with straw and tying it down securely.

The weather turned cold and windy. But all night long troops marched through the streets, sledges poured in from remote villages. The men were on a move into the unknown. They were taking away their trunks, their pigs, their wives and children. Blinded by the snow-storm, the horses plodded along at random, across fields of virgin soil and down roads, bumping into one another, jamming the way, while more and more sledges pressed on behind them. The panic-stricken men slashed at their harness, abandoned their sledges and, mounting their horses, fought their way out of this incredible confusion.

The alarm-bell boomed at dawn, its sound tugging at the very soul.

Storozhev's cavalrymen knocked on windows, yelling:

"The Reds are close! Take to your horses!"

Their hands trembling with fear, the men harnessed their horses. They darted about from house to sledge like ghastly shadows, cursing, weeping and praying.

Andrei Andreyevich wrapped his children in a torn old coat and rushed off together with everyone else. Out in the open he met Frol Bayev, who was also beating a retreat from the Reds. The two friends drove on together.

Somewhere in the distance a machine-gun

spat fire, alarm-bells clanged strenuously, and men fled, losing their families in the commotion, falling behind, crashing their sledges in the jam, hoisting up their fallen horses, galloping on and staring about them wild-eyed.

In the dark, some three miles out of the village, one of Antonov's regiments ran up against the tail end of the fleeing sledges. The horsemen rode straight ahead, clearing their way with horse-whips and rifle butts, trampling down the people with their horses. The firing sounded nearer. Thousands of sledges sped across the fields. Whipping their horses to death, men fled from death.

This was a mass retreat of thousands of peaceful people. Fathers lost sons, sons lost fathers.

The snow-storm did not abate all day, the roads were drifted over, but no one looked for roads anyway. The fugitives rushed pell-mell into villages and were off and away again, joined by thousands of new refugees.

At a spot some fifteen miles from Dvoriki they heard firing very close on the right somewhere. They swerved their horses sharply to the left and met a headlong surge of sledges coming straight at them from the opposite direction. They clashed, crowding one on top of

another, wood splintered, whips cracked, there were howls, groans and savage curses.

Andrei's horse broke its leg in the mêlée. His sledge was in splinters. By some miracle, Andrei and his two children came through alive.

Men leapt on horses and made off, abandoning their trunks, clothes and harness.

Frol Bayev lost his old horse too. He was thrown clear of his sledge on a sharp bend and his horse had galloped off.

For a long time the two friends stood and looked on while Andrei's horse lay dying and the storm drifted snow over the slaughtered pig that had tumbled out of the sledge.

Then they wrapped up the children closer, each man picked one up in his arms, and they started back for Dvoriki. They walked in silence. Andrei Andreyevich wept for his shattered dreams, for his mare gazing so piteously into his eyes in its agony, he wept for the wretched life that was his. Ahead of him lay poverty again, the frozen corners of his miserable hut, the ferocious fights of the starving rats....

When they had about six miles to go, they met a mounted patrol of the Red Army cavalry unit. A young, jolly looking chap, who was neither like a Chinaman nor a Latvian, lifted

the two children up on to his saddle in front of him. He asked Andrei Andreyevich and Frol about the retreat, shook his head sadly, and simply could not understand why and where the people were fleeing.

They gave them something to eat at the nearest village, the commander dispatched a patrol into the field, the abandoned pig was located and brought back. By the end of the day, Andrei Andreyevich was back in his own village again.

A Red cavalry unit was in occupation. The soldiers and officers were utterly confused. They had come through a great many villages and the only people they ever came across were terrified old men and women, who met them with humble bows, burst out into a lot of drivel when asked about the menfolk, wailed and cried, but finally told them about the retreat.

The commander of the unit went from house to house, consoled the weeping, asked them questions, and with his gentle manner touched a chord in their hearts. They told him everything frankly: their panic, their confusion and their fear of the Reds.

He also went in to see Andrei Andreyevich, the first man back in the village. Red soldiers were busy in his yard, repairing the door of

the shed and sweeping the place out. They eagerly grasped at these homely jobs, after months on the road in pursuit of Antonov.

Andrei Andreyevich told them about his horse, his pig, and about all that he had witnessed in these days of despair, and he hugged the young commander. The latter ordered one of their spare horses to be given Andrei Andreyevich.

One by one, on horseback and on foot, the men were coming back, furious and shamefaced, for Antonov had done his trick: under cover of the confused crowding of peaceful citizens he had slipped through unnoticed and escaped the Reds, leaving the peasants stranded in the open country.

They all approached their homes with sinking hearts, but smiling Red soldiers welcomed them back, the womenfolk rushed out to meet them, while the notorious "Latvians and Chinamen" pottered about the yards with spades and hammers. They all behaved decently, and only shook their heads and looked reproachfully into the returning men's eyes. The commander of the unit summoned all the men and women to the school-house that evening. The very old came too. The villagers marvelled: no one stood guard at the doors with rifles at the ready, no one promised to

show them what a real flogging was, no one yelled, cursed or threatened.

"What sort of a Savage Division is this?" Demyan Kosoi asked. He came to the meeting in a temper for he had lost a trunk of clothes during the flight. "They don't look like savages, do they?"

"It was all a bunch of lies," Andrei Andreyevich whispered timorously.

"Shut up!" He was hissed into silence. "Let's see what's coming first."

The commanding officer and the commissars of the Red Army unit came to the school-house without a guard.

They looked with curiosity at the faces of the men who had risen up in arms against their own country. The strength and scope of the insurrection amazed them. The peasants listened to the speeches made by the commissar and commanding officer attentively but grimly. None of them would speak up or ask any questions, they sat silently pulling at their cigarettes. Andrei Andreyevich was the only one who ventured to speak.

"I beg your pardon," he began, fumbling with the cap in his hands, "begging your pardon, comrade citizen. Hear anything about the food quotas? Or, say, a bit of free trade? The people have worn themselves pretty shabby."

Danila Naumich threw Andrei Andreyevich an evil look. But Andrei was not frightened and went on asking the officer questions.

The commander spoke at length about the difficulties that had to be met, about the devastation, but since he himself was out of touch with the centre, he could say nothing definite about the food quotas.

The men sighed and grunted and started moving in a body towards the exit, as if to say: "You want us to talk, do you? When Antonov comes, he'll make us pay for these talks."

In vain the commander appealed to the poorer peasants and the war veterans to stay behind—one might have thought there weren't any in the village at all.

"You see how it is, Alexei Petrovich?" the commissar said to the unit commander when they were left alone. "D'you know what this is called in our language? It's a breach in the union of the working class and the peasantry."

The commissar lit a cigarette. The commander sat lost in thought. To tell the truth he had pictured the Antonovites somewhat differently.

"D'you know," he said, "it's a hell of a situation. When I remember what we were told about Antonov I feel ashamed."

"Hm . . . yes," the commissar drawled.

He, too, remembered the way Antonov, his followers, and the insurrection generally, had been painted for him at Tambov: "a rabble of illiterate drunkards and thieves. A group of deserters and kulaks' sons armed with whips and axes." And only now the commanders saw the extensive plans made by sharp and unscrupulous politicians. Now the commanders realized that the struggle had to be planned and worked out anew, that war had to be waged differently.

"Alexei Petrovich, I'll go and write a report to the centre. I'll put down all these ideas, and so forth. . . ."

They parted.



Chapter 9

Lyonka stayed at Gryaznoye with Natasha for weeks on end now. He had a bed made for him at the back of the brick stove, and when Frol fell asleep, Natasha crept over to him quietly and, with a blanket over them, they talked in whispers about life and love, they kissed, and their sleepless nights sped quickly by.

Frol knew why Natasha's bed had not been slept in, it worried him and he thought: "Those two kids are living out of wedlock. He's an unreliable fellow, what if he doesn't make good his promise to Natasha?"

But he kept putting off his talk with Lyonka, while the lovers never gave marriage a thought. Often, during the night, Lyonka explained to Natasha what Antonov stood for as best he could and as he himself had heard it. He brought her pamphlets and booklets, she read them and became convinced that she would gladly follow Lyonka, the Antonovite, to the end of the world.

"I'll sign up with the army," she told him once.

Lyonka raised himself on his elbow and replied crossly:

"I'll show you the army! Want to be a whore, do you?"

"But Maria Kosova...."

"Maria Kosova is a rotten piece, she carries on with Antonov, it's all washed up with her anyway. Her father and her brothers are in the army, she's got no other way out. But what's there for you?"

"To be with you.... Lyonka, what if the Reds kill you?"

"Never fear! My blood's charmed!"

"If they kill you, I'll go and join up," the girl whispered, her eyes blazing. "I'll slash the Reds' throats with my own hands! The swine, I won't let them off, even though I am a mere woman!"

And then Lyonka would feel frightened and ashamed that he had brought confusion and turmoil into this girl's placid existence.

Natasha became pregnant. She was glad of it, she loved Lyonka with a love that was passionate and greedy, she forgot everything except Lyonka, his beloved arms and his pungent kisses.

She told him one day. She laughed a soft, happy laugh when for the first time she felt her baby kicking boisterously within her. Lyonka took Natasha's head in his hands, kissed her and whispered: "A boy, Natasha, our own son!"

And she laughed with him. Frol heard them, crossed himself and groaned.

The lovers fixed a day for their wedding, they would live as decent people should, but fate decided differently.

Some five weeks after the retreat staged by Antonov, Listrat took his first lone ride to Dvoriki to see his mother.

In this hostile village was his home—a three-windowed cottage perched above a miserable little stream. Listrat knew that his lonely old mother never left the white, frost-painted window, waiting for her sons, her brave lads, straining to hear the sound of horsehoofs in the grim and wakeful silence.

Listrat was aware that Storozhev had gone far beyond Sanatov and was not likely to be back soon, that the village was safe, but, nevertheless, he approached it warily. It was so quiet, it seemed dead. Listrat tethered his clumsy, grey colt to a pole in the dilapidated shed.

"Everything's gone to rack and ruin," the thought passed through his mind, "a home without a man just hasn't a hope."

He poured some oats into the crib, blew his nose, and quietly walked into the cottage.

His mother was sitting by the window, gazing into the distance beyond the river, fum-

bling with the fringe of her old shawl in her usual way.

"Hello, Mother!" Listrat said.

The old woman turned round, burst out laughing and crying at once, and plentiful tears poured down her sallow cheeks.

"Listrat, darling!" she whispered. "Here's Listrat now!" She jumped up and fluttered about her son, incoherent with joy.

"Now, now, stop your cackling," Listrat said with gruff tenderness, "you'd better give me something to eat."

"Listrat, my darling, my boy! What could I give you now? There's some cabbage soup, and I'll give you a dish of porridge and milk."

"What a life," Listrat thought. "Slaving and scraping all her days to bring us up, and never a glimmer of happiness."

His mother placed a bowl of soup, a spoon and a loaf of bread on the table, and sat gazing at her son with tears of joy in her eyes.

Hers had been a sad life, indeed. Her name was Aksinya, but people had long forgotten it. They called her "old croak" for her hoarse, broken voice, or "old drudge" for her ill-starred, miserable lot.

Life was at odds with her, that was all. A drunkard for a husband, a scoundrel and a bul-

ly, who had pommelled her very soul out, and then her two sons going away to war....

Her narrow bony shoulders shook with sobs, her grief would not be washed away in tears. Life grew more wretched, and fortune smiled ever rarer.

Listrat sat eating his soup in a leisurely way and asked his mother for village news. He felt at peace; he did not want to remember that an hour from then he would be riding through the quiet streets again into the cold and the mist, that he would have to be on the alert once again, on the look-out for the enemy.

Suddenly the door flew open and Lyonka strode in—tightly belted and armed, and wearing a fur cap with a piece of green cloth across the front. He walked in and pointed his revolver at Listrat.

"Stop your fooling," Listrat snapped at him and scooped up some porridge with his spoon. "Stop it, I tell you, I can shoot too."

Their mother, struck speechless at first, now gasped, jumped up, darted here and there, bustled about and smiled, and tears once more rained down her pallid cheeks.

"Lyonka, Lyonka son, darling boy! Heavens, here they are, my brave lads, here they are, both of them.... Take off your coat, son. He

won't touch you, Listrat won't. Don't touch him, Listrat son. You won't, will you?"

She glanced beseechingly at Listrat, tugged Lyonka, her younger boy, red-cheeked and smooth-skinned, by the coat, started unbuckling his belt for him with shaking fingers, and darted again towards Listrat.

Listrat wiped his moustache and looked sternly at his brother.

"Well, what are you standing there for? Sit down. You're hungry, I s'pose. Well, it seems a guest has blown in to dinner. We won't shoot it out in the house, will we? It's ready to collapse as it is."

Lyonka gave his brother a suspicious glance, pulled off his cap hastily, thrust his revolver back into its holster, and said to his mother:

"Gee whiskers, I never expected to meet him here! Well, what about a drink now?"

"I've got a bottle put away, I'll fetch it," Aksinya offered.

"Didn't you see my horse in the shed?" Listrat asked.

"No, I came the front way, my horse's stuck out there."

"The son of a gun!" Listrat scowled. "Coming into the house while his horse is 'stuck out there.' Don't you suppose the horse wants some grub, too? Never mind, stay put," he shouted,

seeing Lyonka start for the door. "I'll take it into the shed. You've got no oats?"

"We don't steal oats from the peasants, it's your job to rob and steal. We don't molest the peasants."

Lyonka's mouth twisted spitefully; Listrat merely smiled and shrugged.

"Now, now, keep your shirt on, you defender of the peasantry. And by the way, oats have been provided us." He laughed and walked out of the house.

"Why did I have to barge in here?" Lyonka thought aloud. "Well, we won't part in peace, that's certain."

"Never mind, Lyonka son, never mind. I'll speak to him. I'll tell Listrat to leave you alone," his mother tried to comfort him.

Lyonka pulled down his cross-stitch embroidered shirt, combed his curly fair mop in front of a bit of cracked mirror, threw an oblique glance at the Browning pistol which Listrat had carelessly left lying on the table, and with a swift and furtive gesture pulled his own miserable Smith from its holster and thrust it into the pocket of his leather breeches.

When Listrat came back into the room, Lyonka was gulping down his soup, their mother was slicing pickled cucumbers into a bowl, and a bottle of moonshine stood on the table.

"You've got a good horse," Listrat said, chafing his frozen hands over the fire. "Had it long?"

"Since fall. I was out scouting near Sampur. I popped off one of your men, so I got the horse, saddle and all. It stumbles, though."

"A good horse," Listrat repeated and, taking in the whole of Lyonka's figure in one rapid glance, said: "Still swaggering, you defender? Tell me, did the peasants ask you to defend them, or are you doing it of your own free will?"

Lyonka reddened and replied:

"We're fighting for the peasants' liberty."

"Are you now?" Listrat smiled ironically. "So you're after liberty too, are you? Just look at that, what a coincidence—you're fighting for the peasants' liberty, and so am I. And we're fighting one another. How can that be?"

Lyonka said nothing.

"Well, Lyonka, now tell me what sort of rank Antonov has given you, what is your particular office in this banditry? Eh?"

"You hold your tongue. Mind what you say about bandits. I'm in the reconnaissance," said Lyonka, licking his spoon. "Our commanders know their jobs, they're not like yours. Our commander is Storozhev, Pyotr Ivanovich. I'm in his service."

"I see. Serving your old master, are you? You're always on the look-out for masters, can't get along without a master, can you?"

Lyonka again made no reply. Listrat was fuming with anger.

"You said you were fighting for liberty. Are you fighting for your Storozhev's liberty too while you are about it? So he'll be able to hire four men instead of three, and we should become his flunkeys again?"

Hurriedly, as if afraid they would not hear her out, their mother began to tell them how Storozhev gave her three poods of flour when their village went over to Antonov, and although the flour was rancid, he wouldn't let a day go by without reminding her of her debt to him and abusing her with vile words.

Blood rushed to Lyonka's face, but Listrat merely twitched an eyebrow and looked at his brother obliquely.

"Let's have a drink, shall we?" he said in a loud voice. "Let's drink to liberty, what d'you say, brother?"

Lyonka poured some moonshine into the thick, cloudy glasses. Listrat slowly raised his glass, sniffed at the contents, threw back his head, and poured the strong, smelly liquid down his throat. He then put a slice of cucumber into his mouth.

"Gosh, you drink well!" Lyonka marvelled.

"Habit." Listrat winked at him. "I learned something in the six years I was plumber at Tsaritsin. Those people are damned good drinkers. The dust out there just plugs your throat, you've got to soak it off. In Tsaritsin, brother, they know how to drink and how to fight."

The brothers lapsed into silence.

"It's a pity you didn't come to Tsaritsin with me," Listrat went on to say. "I mean it, honestly. If you'd gone to Tsaritsin two years ago in the autumn, you'd have seen some real people. We had Stalin with us there, brother, that's a man of steel for you."

"And his name sounds kind of strong, too," Aksinya put in. She was sitting in a corner, listening to her sons' talk.

"You wait, he'll take your masters in hand, he'll turn your precious kulaks inside out in no time, he'll mow them down. Oh you, riff-raff!"

Lyonka would have liked to give him a cutting reply, to say something that would anger Listrat, make him explode. He screwed up his eyes, twisted his mouth in a sneer, but could not find anything cutting to say.

"How did you happen to blow in here?" Listrat asked. "We've chased you off quite far, you know."

"The people are for us," Lyonka replied. "And we are for the people. We're fighting for the land. There!"

Listrat guffawed. "That's a good one!" he roared. "Fighting for Pyotr Ivanovich's land!"

"For all the people's land," Lyonka frowned. "You took the peasants' land away from them and gave it to the state farms."

"Have we deprived you of your land too? Has your land been taken away too? You had plenty of land of course, didn't you? Here, Mother, take a look at the champion of the peasantry! You brought the fool into the world, worse luck for you. In the other provinces they're busy ploughing the fields the way they should, while here, with you fools, no one has a chance to do anything but try and put an end to your riots. Oh, you warriors!"

Lyonka flared up. "Leave us alone!" he shouted, rage welling up in his eyes. "I'm letting yours alone and you let mine. Gulp your moonshine and hold your tongue. In the other provinces, too, your government will be made an end of soon. Give them time—they'll string you up as well."

"Oh?" Listrat laughed and poured some moonshine into his glass. "You don't say! Be a good brother, Lyonka dear, and allot one of the prettier hanging-posts for me. Mother here

adds her pleas to mine. Mother, bow to your good son, he's decided to hang his brother."

Listrat laughed such a merry laugh that Lyonka grew more cheerful too. Their mother sat listening and understanding nothing of their conversation, but how could one understand anything at all nowadays? What with people coming and going every day, each hating the other and each painting his own as the rightful cause!

But when Listrat mocked at Pyotr Ivanovich, Aksinya both shuddered and rejoiced. To her, Pyotr Ivanovich was a master for life, a master whom her children were bound to serve as labourers all their lives: Listrat had toiled for him for five years, and Aksinya herself had to go and scrub the floors in Storozhev's house for a living.

"All the men are in his debt," she warned Listrat in an overawed whisper. "If he wanted to, he could crush the whole village in his fist like this." And she clenched her fingers into a weak little fist.

Listrat smiled scornfully at his mother, so pitiful and cringing, and remembered how many years ago, when he was just a kid, she had taken him one morning to Storozhev, who stood so large and forbidding on his porch, hardly listening to Aksinya's pleas to make a

man of her little boy, and enunciating in a bland baritone:

"It's a losing proposition. What his food alone will come to! Oh well, I'll take him, you really seem out and out. God tells us we should not forget the beggars. But see you behave yourself! I won't stand for any nonsense—I'll flog you so you won't be able to sit down!"

Listrat remembered this and winced; his jaws twitched wrathfully, and he said:

"If that Pyotr Ivanovich of yours is given a good squeeze he'll ooze muck. You make your own masters and then they lord it over you to their heart's content!"

Lyonka, more drunk than sober, slowly sipped his moonshine. Listrat rolled a cigarette mechanically.

"Are there many of you in Storozhev's detachment?" he asked Lyonka.

Lyonka started, then he chuckled softly.

"Seen the smartie, Mother? Trying to make a spy out of me over a bottle of moonshine, and he's supposed to be my elder brother, too!"

Listrat flashed an angry look at him.

"Why d'you kill people?" Lyonka shouted.

"We weren't the ones who started the fight, you bloody fool," Listrat said, "it was your Storozhevs who did. They lost their heads from malice and started thinking with their bellies.

The sons of bitches, they scented that their prosperity was coming to an end. So they wanted to start a little fight! Well, since they've forced the quarrel on us they better not complain. At first we thought we'd just slice a bit of fat off them, but now we'll bleed them dry of all their filthy blood."

Listrat brought his fist down on the table and, bruising his hand, got angrier still.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Lyonka laughed. "Look at the orator! We'll see what you have to say when it comes to a show-down. You're pretty good at robbing and talking about being all for the poor."

"And who are you for? You said you, too, were for the poor?" Listrat asked, without turning his head.

"Of course, we are all for the poor."

"Is Pyotr Ivanovich for the poor too?"

"Stop harping on Pyotr Ivanovich! It's not Pyotr Ivanovich who is the leader. We have Antonov, haven't we? He's gone through jail and hard labour for his convictions."

"But Antonov has a master too, and his master is Pyotr Ivanovich." Listrat winked at Lyonka again. "It's people like Storozhev that kept your Antonov on a chain like a little dog, until the time came. And now they've let him off the chain. There, you may yap and snap at

the Soviet Government! But Antonov—bah! He wouldn't get very far, this Antonov of yours, if it weren't for the kulaks, and fools like you."

Listrat grunted, finished off his moonshine, gathered up the last bits of cucumber in the bowl and thrust them into his mouth. Then he smiled and said to Lyonka casually as it were:

"D'you remember the flogging you got from Pyotr Ivanovich once? That was the time he caught you picking his plums, eh? And Mother whipped you after that for stealing. Then I put in my bit. You've got to hit back when they hit you, you know. Oh you, flogging-boy!" Listrat smiled crookedly. "Do they still call you 'flogging-boy'?"

Lyonka's face was purple.

"Stop it!"

"Flogging-boy, flogging-boy, ha-ha-ha!" Listrat roared with laughter. "Gosh, how funny! Pyotr Ivanovich used to flog him and now he's fighting for liberty for that same Pyotr Ivanovich, that's a good joke!"

"Stop it," Lyonka screamed, clutching at his carbine. "Stop pestering me or I'll blow your brains out!"

Listrat suddenly felt sorry for his brother.

"All right, I'm sorry. Goodness, what a nervy chap you've become, a mere kid like you,

just a cub! What you ought to do is get married, stupid, and leave the fighting to others."

"That's what I want to do," Lyonka responded sullenly.

"You do! Mother, listen to this, Lyonka is thinking of marrying! Who is she, Lyonka? Tell us," Listrat spoke with sincere warmth.

"A Gryaznoye girl, Natasha, Frol Bayev's daughter."

"I know her, sure," Listrat said. "She's one of the best, Mother. And Frol is a good chap too."

"I've come to talk it over with Mother," Lyonka added, reddening. "Couldn't I bring her here? She's pregnant."

Aksinya was all smiles. Listrat stroked her hair and pressed her to him tenderly.

"Marry her, that's good," he said softly. "We'll put an end to this war soon, I hope, and everything will come back to normal. I'll marry too, when we're through with this mess. I've got a girl in Tsaritsin." Listrat smiled shyly. "We fixed the wedding-day five times, but every time—bang, off we'd go to the front.... Well, never mind, we'll have our day yet." Listrat paused. "And now, brother, let's go and look at the horses, time for me to be off."

Inside the dilapidated shed, a heifer was munching straw. Two harnessed horses stood quietly side by side.

Listrat slapped Lyonka's dapple-grey mare and said:

"See you water her in time! Rotting alive will be too good for you if you ruin a horse like that! Why, she's a real find for farming. You take ploughing for instance, look at that chest of hers—she'll pull anything through with a chest like that!"

When Listrat said this his voice seemed to grow warmer and dearer, and Lyonka felt that his brother was very homesick for the land, and Lyonka himself wished he could walk behind a plough down a cool, friable furrow one dewy morning.

"Why do people have to fight?" he whispered.

"You ask your people, you ask them what they are after. Who do they think they're fighting? And you with them too, you fool! 'I'm fighting for the poor'!" he scoffed.

"I *am* for the poor," Lyonka repeated, but he wished Listrat would say the thing that had been left unsaid; what it was, he himself was not sure, but he knew it was very important.

"You dunderhead! If you think you're fighting for the poor, then you've joined the wrong crowd," Listrat said with a note of bitter jesting and patted Lyonka gently on the back. "You should come and join us if you *are* for the poor. You just figure out how many poor there are among you!"

Lyonka said nothing. He watched Listrat deftly adjust his saddle, slacken the saddle-girth, and feel his horse's belly, chest and legs with knowing hands.

"First-rate old horse," Lyonka said. "A good horse. I wasn't going to change it either." He suddenly wanted to do something nice for his brother. "I say, Listrat," he said, "give me your horse! I might spoil the mare and you may be able to save her till after the war."

Listrat looked at Lyonka with scorn.

"God, what an army! How can anyone want to change his battle horse? I'm used to my horse, we can't be separated, he knows me through and through, he knows what I want him to do without me saying a word, and you talk about changing! What do they teach fools like you anyway?"

Lyonka, unable to restrain himself any longer, shouted:

"Why d'you keep on abusing us? Calling me a fool and a fool?"

"I am abusing you," Listrat said sternly, "because you are fools, that's what you are. Who are you trying to fight, I ask you? Suppose you have taken this province, suppose you take three more—we still have fifty provinces left for us. We don't want bloodshed. We're waiting for the peasants to get to the bottom of you, to learn what wolves in sheep's clothing you really are. You wait, we'll squash you down, we'll hear your squeals yet."

"You're good at squashing people!" Lyonka yelled wildly again. The heifer stopped its munching, and Listrat's high-strung horse twitched an ear.

"Just look at him!" Listrat taunted. "If we didn't squash your sort down, we'd sure come to grief."

"You won't laugh your way out of this." Lyonka was purple with rage. "Don't you try to bamboozle me. You keep making fun of me but you won't tell me: what is it you are fighting for? What is it *you* want?"

Listrat pulled a bit of straw from the crib, broke it with his teeth, and said thoughtfully:

"That's true, I didn't tell you. I was thinking since we came out of the same nest we'd see things the same way. But apparently different chicks can come from the same nest. We want a lot, Lyonka. You've seen Mother shed-

ding tears all her life? We want to collect all those tears in a tub, and drown Pyotr Ivanovich in it, with nothing left of him for stock either, do you understand?"

"And us," Lyonka asked, "drown us in the tub too?"

"What for? You're like a lot of blind kittens, floundering about, and always hitting your poor little mugs against a wall. That's what." Then he added: "Well, Lyonka, we've had a chat and now it's time I went. Tell me, are there any of your people round here?"

"Pyotr Ivanovich has gone to Chernyanka," Lyonka replied. "You go the way of the Molchanov farm, it's all clear there."

The brothers came back into the cottage, buckled on their belts and Lyonka, with a sheepish look, took his Smith out of his trouser-pocket. Listrat said:

"Oh, you skunk! See, Mother, that little horror of yours was afraid of me and kept his revolver in his pocket!"

Lyonka laughed a forced laugh and said:

"You never know! They say you people promise to do no harm to those who surrender, and then you stand them up against the wall and pop them off! There's no believing you!"

"Try it, come over to us—" Listrat's eyes

narrowed humorously—"maybe they lied to you about the wall!"

Lyonka chuckled. "You're some persuader. But I know which way my road lies."

"Oh, you pup!" Listrat said kindly. "There are roads and there are roads, Lyonka. Some are straight, others are crooked.... Well, let's get going. Good-bye, Mother, good-bye, Lyonka. In case we meet in battle, don't hold it against me—you know how it is, one gets lightheaded in a fight and blood doesn't tell." Listrat smiled.

But then a thought flashed through his mind: "He's young, the bloody fool, he'll come to grief for nothing!"

Their mother stood in the door and watched her boys disappear from view behind a curtain of falling snow.

The brothers got to the river and parted with a smile.

Lyonka's heart missed a beat and a hot lump welled up in his throat. He rode away slowly, sighing heavily and thinking of his meeting with Listrat. He felt as if something had suddenly snapped within him. And the thought came to him that now he would not be able to preach Antonov's teachings to the peasants.

Take Pyotr Ivanovich now—Lyonka had known him for a long time and was used to his harshness, as if it were something inevitable and inherent in a master. But now that his mother had told them about the flour, a feeling of hostility stirred in his heart.

Now Lyonka tried to recall how and why he had joined Antonov. Until then he had never given it a thought. There seemed no need for thought, he had fancied it was the obvious thing for him to do. After all, he was just a stripling when he was taken into Storozhev's house, he had worked for him since the age of seven! And so when Storozhev joined Antonov, taking his nephews and friends along with him, Lyonka went too. But why—that was something he had never tried to understand. He did not want to think of it now either, but the thoughts would not leave him. Listrat's simple but cutting words kept ringing in his ears.

"Damn it," he said, "why did we have to meet?"

Lyonka turned round. He could see Listrat far off on his right, riding towards the Molchanov farm. Lyonka stood up in his stirrups and saw that Listrat had dismounted and was doing something to his saddle. Then he straightened and seemed to stand lost in thought for a moment, he shrugged his shoul-

ders and, taking his horse by the bridle, walked slowly on.

"Has something broken or what?" Lyonka thought. He was about to ride out after his brother, when he caught sight of a group of horsemen in the distance. He recognized his own detachment, with Storozhev riding in front on his piebald mare.

"They're after Listrat!" he thought. "They'll kill Listrat!"

He dug his heels into his horse's side and galloped towards the men.

Storozhev reined in his horse, looked at Lyonka, pursed his lips, and asked: "Loafing, are you?"

"You sent me yourself," Lyonka snapped. "What's eating you now?"

Storozhev's breathing was laboured and jerky. Steam rose from the horses: they had been ridden hard, the riders were evidently in a hurry. The men, glad of the halt, lit cigarettes and watched Lyonka.

"Listrat been in the village?" Storozhev demanded.

"It's come!" flashed through Lyonka's mind. With a sudden stony calm, he replied: "He has. At Mother's."

"And you been there too?"

"I too."

"Oh, is that so? So you've seen your dear brother, kissed at parting, no doubt. . . ."

"Would you have me shoot it out with him in the cottage, or what? It's ready to collapse as it is," Lyonka repeated Listrat's words. "What with all this fighting. . . ."

Storozhev scanned Lyonka's face keenly, but the latter sat calmly fingering his bridle.

"And where did he go?" Storozhev threw out casually as it were.

"Who, Listrat? He's gone to Gryaznoye."

"He's not lying," decided Storozhev, and gave rapid orders:

"Make for Gryaznoye, boys, perhaps you'll catch the bird, and I'll go along to the village. You're coming with me, Lyonka, it won't do for you to go hunting your brother."

They rode in silence. In his mind's eye, Lyonka saw Listrat slowly walking beside his horse.

Pyotr Ivanovich asked without turning round:

"Your mother still alive? Still croaking? When will she pay back her debt? You tell her to hurry up with it."

Lyonka made no rejoinder.

"D'you hear? I'm talking to you. You're all good at borrowing, but when it comes to paying back, you start hedging."

"Think you'll make your fortune out of those three poods or something?" Lyonka muttered angrily.

"What did you say?" Storozhev asked sharply and stopped his horse.

Lyonka rode on ahead of Storozhev and turned round. He could see his detachment riding away at a round trot, hidden from view by a cloud of snow.

"You heard what I said!" Lyonka boiled over. "You're too greedy. You shouldn't bully an old woman. You should have some pity."

"Show pity for dogs like you," Storozhev flared up, his left cheek twitching, "you'll break our necks for us! We took pity on you in 1917 and can't get out of the mess to this day!"

With shaking fingers he pulled out his tobacco-pouch, rolled a cigarette, lighted it and, after inhaling deeply, said:

"People like you shouldn't be pitied, you should be taught a lesson!"

"And who's chosen you for teacher?" Lyonka asked. "Teacher, my eye! The Reds have teachers like you shot by the hundred, so they'll teach no more."

Storozhev gasped and dropped his cigarette. A spasm clamped his mouth.

"Oh, you bastard, you!" he bellowed. "Been

listening to your brother, have you? Haven't I flogged you enough? Take some more!"

Storozhev swung his whip and struck Lyonka across the face with all his might. Then he picked up his bridle, spurred on his horse, and threw back over his shoulder:

"Do you good, you bastard, you flogging-boy!"

"Flogging-boy!" Lyonka thought. "Flogging-boy, flogging-boy!" he remembered the shouts of the boys. "Flogging-boy, hey, flogging-boy!" His blood up, Lyonka looked after Storozhev and thought: "If I ever catch him alone, I'll blow his brains out, that's all."

But suddenly his excitement passed. Lyonka felt a weight lifted off his mind, he felt free, liberated, and to whatever had been torturing him he had the answer, had it very simply and, what was more, very quickly.

"The swine," he muttered, feeling the cut and smearing blood all over his face. "Look how hard he struck me! What a heavy hand he's got."

Late that evening Lyonka caught up with Listrat near the Molchanov farm.

"Well?" Listrat asked when he saw the purple welt on his brother's face.

"Let's go," Lyonka said gruffly. "I surrender."

Pale dawn was breaking through the thick grey fog when Lyonka and Listrat first caught sight of the grain elevator looming in the distance. It winked its red eye at them, showing them the way to a place of longed-for rest.

Lyonka rode in silence in front of his brother. Listrat twirled his moustache pensively.

"You're not afraid?" he asked.

"No," Lyonka replied simply, "you only die once."

"How is it you didn't kill him?" Listrat asked. "I would have, I'm sure. Were you sorry for him or something?"

Lyonka held in his horse and said:

"I didn't want to kill him, Listrat. I didn't want to shoot him in the back. I want to catch him. And then I'll look him in his face and shoot him. I want to look into his eyes when he'll be dying."

And now the grain elevator was quite close. Lyonka reined in his horse, took off his cap, his carbine, revolver and hand-grenade, and handed them to Listrat.

"Here," he said gruffly. "Listrat, you tie my hands behind me, for Christ's sake. Tie them, or I'm afraid I may turn back. . . ."

Listrat saw the earnest and beseeching look

in his brother's eyes. He took a leather belt out of his pocket and bound Lyonka's hands securely behind his back.

"Ready," he said. "Let's go!"



Chapter 10

Antonov was bringing his winter campaign to a successful close. He had cut off the bread-bearing regions of Saratov, Balashov and Kamyshin from both Tambov and Moscow, he had disrupted regular communication by the south-east railway, derailed several trains, taken the largest and the wealthiest village in the province by storm, plundered it and divided its stocks of salt, kerosene and piece goods among the peasants. On more than one occasion he had threatened the security of Tambov itself.

Spring favoured Antonov that year: abounding in water, generous with mud and impassable roads.

The rivers swelled mightily that year, snows melted rapidly in the hot sun. brooks streamed down the valleys, and when the driving ice had rumbled its last, spring waters flooded the fields, villages and farmsteads to an unheard-of extent.

And like the spring flood, the insurrection spread wider and wider. Pluzhnikov and Ishin darted from village to village, formed committees, stationed scouts, tracked down supporters of the Reds....

"Look at the Bolsheviks," they said to the men. "They're boasting that the war is over, that they made an end of the capitalists, that we are all they have to beat now; but if they say the war is over, why don't they lighten the lot of the peasants? Why don't they do away with their food quotas? All right, granted bread had to go to the front before, but now—where does it go now? I'll tell you where, brothers. It goes to the towns, the working class is striking, the working class is mad now, the working class will rise up in arms any minute! It's the mouths of the workmen they have to stop, that's why they're driving the peasants so hard, and there'll be no end to it!"

News of the Kronstadt mutiny arrived most timely just then.

On the 5th of March, a messenger came galloping to Kamenka. He leapt from his saddle and ran up the porch steps, but before he got to the top, his hard-ridden horse swayed and collapsed. The messenger was pale, his clothes were spattered with mud, his yellow hair stood out in tufts from under his cap.

He handed Antonov a dispatch from Gorsky.

"On March 2nd," Antonov read aloud to his hastily summoned men, "a Provisional Revolutionary Committee was formed of sailors, Red Army men and workmen, proclaiming itself government. General Kozlovsky ("Here, too, a general has wormed his way in," Antonov thought) has been appointed Defence Commander of the fort. The insurgents demand: a Constituent Assembly, Soviets without Communists, and free trade. An army led by Voroshilov has been sent to suppress the mutiny."

"I've been to Kronstadt," Antonov shouted, "they won't take the sailors, the bastards! Brothers, make for the villages at once, spread the news!"

Alarm-bells boomed in all the villages, summoning the people, and a battle-cry swept the province: "Petersburg is ours! The Commune is beaten!"

People strolled about the streets in their

holiday finery, accordions rollicked songs, moonshine was drunk by the pail, and the air reeked heavily with it.

"No use saving corn now, since the whole of Russia is ours."

The village wenches sang couplets about the sailor lads, moving their shoulders saucily and stamping their feet.

One would begin:

Oh, my friend, just let me tell you
Something that's befallen me,
My young sailor, my beloved's
Gone to sail across the sea.

And another replied:

Oh, my friend, just let me tell you,
Don't you worry now or fret,
Your beloved, your young sailor,
He'll win Russia over yet!

Brazhny, a sailor, arrived in Dvoriki with a party of friends, just when the merrymaking was at its gayest. They all wore sailor caps with ribbons streaming behind and bell-bottomed trousers; all of them were drunk, armed to the teeth, and rode fleet-footed horses. They galloped down the village streets, brandish-

ing their horse-whips, made advances to the girls and bawled obscene songs. Ilya, Danila Naumich's son, stopped them at the gate of his house.

"Father is inviting you to dinner!" he said.

Brazhny jibbed a little, but accepted the invitation, and the whole crowd trooped into the house.

Danila Naumich had put on his blue cloth coat and hung his medal round his neck—he wasn't anybody's fool! he'd been to His Majesty the Emperor's Court together with the other village elders, he'd had the honour of being in the gracious presence, too.

His top-boots creaked and smelled of tar. He summoned all his daughters and daughters-in-law to the dinner and seated them—rosy-cheeked and demure—next to the sailors, who huddled close to them, caressing the girls' fat thighs and sweating profusely.

Danila himself proposed the first toast.

"To victory, brother sailors!" he said unctuously. "For ever and ever, that is."

"Hurrah!" roared Brazhny and pinched Ilya's wife. She let out a screech, but Ilya merely frowned—what could he say to his honoured guests?

"Kronstadt—d'you know what that means?" Brazhny held forth, although, it should be men-

tioned, he had never been to Kronstadt in his life, or in the navy either. "Why, it's a fortress! A regular bastion! We're all brothers there! We won't budge! We'll take one swing and the whole of Russia will go to hell! Two—and there'll be nothing any more at all! That's what Kronstadt means!" he concluded. He had been drinking heavily in every village on the way—five, or perhaps it was seven—and, quite drunk now, he put his arms round Ilya's wife and grew maudlin.

Ilya felt affronted and started up, but the sailors began to worry and pester him, they all wanted to hug him and have a drink with him. Danila Naumich, very much the worse for drink, his face red and his spirits high, started dancing in the middle of the floor.

Curious, laughing faces pressed close to the windows outside, girls and fellows, flattening their noses against the glass, watched the fun.

"A thanksgiving service should be sung!" Danila Naumich bellowed. "An occasion like this!"

"Bring in the priest," Brazhny yelled, waking up. "I'll make mincemeat out of the long-haired scamp! Let him sing a requiem, bless him."

A horseman was dispatched for the priest.

Father Stepan arrived in no time at all, for the horseman had been speeding him along with his whip.

Storozhev, too, came to attend the service. Father Stepan and the deacon held a long whispered talk with him—how best to conduct the service, for what government to pray?

Storozhev, well versed in matters of the church, instantly composed a prayer for long life to be granted to "the national hero Antonov and all his brotherhood" and "the invincible peasant armies."

Brazhny behaved insolently during the service. He tried to sing something, the priest was annoyed and shook his head.

When the service came to an end the sailors filed up to kiss the cross. Brazhny nearly vomited all over the priest's cassock and stole, but he ended up by throwing his arms about him and getting him so drunk that the priest fell asleep under the table.

In the evening the sailors made merry in the village streets, smashing windows somewhere, whipping someone with their horse-whips, and raping somebody's daughters. Next morning, the sailors were found beaten to within an inch of their lives, while Brazhny lay with his skull broken in—his merrymaking over.

A day or two later, Storozhev had to go to Kamenka on a matter of business.

What he saw there disgusted him. Antonov was sitting in an armchair, the neck of his tunic undone, a wild look in his eyes, his hair standing up on end and his feet bare. Before him stood a man with his hands tied behind him—a commissar of some detachment defeated by Safirov near Kamenka.

"What d'you want, eh?" Antonov was asking him through his hiccoughs. "Here, kiss my foot, I'll let you go home, word of honour I will."

"I want to die," the man said quietly, with anguish. "Kill me, don't torture me with your taunts."

He was tall, lean, unshaven and bleeding, and his long nose had become sharp like that of a corpse.

"Grant him long leave of absence!" Ishin laughed heartily.

Gherman was shrilling a bawdy song. About twenty staff officers were singing, kissing and fighting, and the very walls of the house shook with the uproar. Pluzhnikov alone sat watching this spectacle with his shifty little eyes, oily from moonshine.

Tokmakov was away—he had marched off with his army to the east.

"This won't do, Alexander Stepanovich," Storozhev said. "As it is, the peasants are beginning to object, it's an outrage, they say. You know they've cracked a sailor's skull open for this, and look what you're doing!"

"Shut up, you bastard!" Antonov screamed and tried to get up.

"Give them both long leave of absence!" Ishin giggled. "Think you're smart, you old devil?"

"Come along," Storozhev, pale and furious, said to the commissar. Behind the barn in the vegetable garden, he shot him.

The Kronstadt mutiny turned Antonov's head. He made fantastic plans and projects, paid no heed to the looting that was becoming a practice with his men, and wrangled with Tokmakov, Pluzhnikov and his other henchmen when they tried to warn him of approaching disaster.

Antonov grew arrogant, and now his ambition was to become leader of a nation-wide insurrection.

He put some shady characters in command of his regiments, about whom disgraceful reports were circulating; he took under his wing anyone Gorsky sent him, anyone who was try-

ing to save his hide from the Soviets; he surrounded himself with ex-officers of the tsarist army and now threatened to appoint as Chief of Staff some sort of general, a relative of Gorsky's, who had found his way to Kamenka. To all of Tokmakov's objections, Antonov made one and the same answer:

"Enough! Now I shall command!"

Once, in conversation with Pluzhnikov he said haughtily:

"You? What would you have done without me? Who would have been your leader? You bloody crew of writers and babblers! I am the commander of the people's armies, and I shall ask you to hold your tongues!"

A week after the Baltic Sea situation had been made known in all the villages, Storozhev grew bolder. He arrived in Dvoriki one day, summoned a meeting of the villagers and declared that he would shoot with his own hands anyone who dared show up with a plough on his land by Lebyazhye Lake. The men listened to this brief speech in silence and went their various ways.

Land belonged to him again! Once again Storozhev plunged into preparations for sowing: sorting out his seed with greedy hands, examining his ploughs and repairing his carts. He was impatient, he scolded his sons when

he thought they were not eager enough in making ready to till the land.

Hardly able to believe that the land was his again, he was in a hurry to sow the corn, to tell the world again and again: "My land! I bought it! I'm tending it! Hands off my land!"

Fury seized him at the very thought that someone else might come to his land, tread on his acres and balks, proclaim himself master, and snatch the land away from his family.

And the more he dreaded it, the more he clung to his land, and the more untrammelled became his hatred for mankind.

He came to resemble a hungry dog, snarling to keep possession of a juicy bone.

If it were possible he would never leave his land, he would lay down his life fighting for his field, his crops, his right to order the lives of the weak and the destitute, to command, to rule, to amass wealth, putting away rubles and kopeks into the bank so as to acquire new acres, new estates, new wealth.

Part of it was accomplished already, the land was his! He had already attained power and esteem—he was feared, voices were hushed

when he walked past a cottage, and people envied him.

But there was no stability in this power, in this strength.

He was thinking: "Men are on their way from the north, from Moscow, they are after my land, they want to wrench power out of my hands, the way they snatched away Lyonka, my workman. They are coming in order to shatter my authority, to set up over me, over Storozhev, some miserable wretch, the rabble from Durachy End, or Mitka Besperstov, or my dear brother Sergei. Am I to submit to their rule? Be subordinate to them? Give up my land?"

The thought of it all scorched him, his fury mounted, and his hatred never died down for a moment. He became even more indefatigable in hunting down the enemy, he went off scouting all by himself, he descended upon villages with a handful of men wherever small Red detachments were heard to have passed through, he interrogated, flogged or put to death anyone suspected of connection with the Reds; he formed underground S.-R. committees in villages which had not joined the insurrection.

He grappled for his land, he fought for his power.

Chapter 11

And now the earth had discarded the last of the black spongy snow, the swollen brooks no longer rang down the dells, the rivers retreated into their banks, and the spring floods were over.

Beyond the villages lay rich, black, steaming fields. The Tambov peasants gazed at them with despair—the fields lay unploughed since autumn, and now there were no horses to pull the ploughs, no seeds to sow.... Their shaggy, hard-ridden, scabby horses wandered blindly about the yards, and even those were only a few. Antonov's armies grew in number, his regiments had to be mounted, Antonov had had no luck in the Saratov Province, he was therefore obliged to take "his own" district to task.

The peasants became resentful, they sneered and glowered when the agitators explained to them that the horses were being requisitioned for their own good.

The war orgy was coming to an end, flood waters were abating, the day of retribution was at hand!

On the 17th of March, the Red Army, with Voroshilov in command, made a final assault on Kronstadt.

The delegates to the Tenth Party Congress, which was in session at the time, led the men on. One cool, foggy morning the fort surrendered. When reports of this reached Kamenka, Antonov took to bitter drinking. He drew further and further away from his comrades-in-arms, spent long hours alone in the forest, his mind dwelling on something that was vague and depressing.

A week later, Pyotr Tokmakov was wounded in battle near Chemlyk. When they brought him to Kamenka, he was already dead. He had closed his yellow eyes for ever. He no longer had to think or worry about anything at all.

Antonov stayed beside his friend's coffin all night. The following day he wept, his head cushioned in Maria's lap. The woman got what she was after, Antonov came to love her, but his love was malignant and baleful, as though he were revenging himself on her for all his grievances.

Grieved though he was by Tokmakov's death, Antonov had to think of the matter at hand and find a new commander for the First Army. And once again dissension flared up between the League and Staff Headquarters.

Urged on by the Commander of the Second Army, Boguslavsky, and some former officers,

Antonov was about to appoint a certain general, another of Gorsky's relatives. His reasoning in favour of this nominee was that the Reds were making ready for decisive battle and therefore men with a good knowledge of warcraft should now be put in command of the armies.

The League was up in arms. Ishin was loud in his objections.

"Whenever there's anything cooking, the generals are always there. Savinkov started the affair in Yaroslavl, but no, they had to dig up Colonel Perkhurov; in Siberia it was Admiral Kolchak they brought to light, in Kronstadt, it was General Kozlovsky who came to the surface. To hell with all the bloody lot!"

Pluzhnikov supported Ishin's view:

"Once the generals come to the fore, they'll chuck us out to the devil. We'll make the broth and they'll gobble it up! No, sir, we won't stand for it!"

Feelings ran high for a whole week. Antonov often called meetings to which the committee men were not invited. Ishin threatened Antonov with revolt.

"Look out, Alexander, one of these days you'll go too far!" he said truculently.

The problem, however, was solved quite

unexpectedly. Safirov put a bullet through the general's head: he had caught him in a vile business with a youngster.

Kuznetsov took over the command of the First Army.

He quickly picked up the reins, but matters soon took a menacing turn The force now set in motion against the Antonovites surpassed all their expectations.



Chapter 12

One day in spring, Frol Petrovich came to Dvoriki to see Andrei Andreyevich. They talked far into the night, sitting on the earthen mound round the house, and by morning they were both gone from the village. Aksinya, the "old croak" to whose care Andrei Andreyevich had left his children, was unable to tell the neighbours anything about their disappearance. And meanwhile, the two friends were making

their way along dells and through shrubbery to the railway station, which was held by Listrat and his detachment. Sashka Chirikin found them near the station and brought them to Listrat's headquarters, housed in a baggage car made into living quarters of sorts.

Nikita Semyonovich was sitting beside a telephone. Frol took off his hat and looked round for an icon.

"Don't bother to look, Frol Petrovich, we've none in stock." Nikita Semyonovich laughed.

"You're a backslider, Nikita, that you are!" Frol faced the corner of the room and crossed himself; Andrei Andreyevich followed his example.

They sat down and said nothing.

"What has brought you to us?" Nikita Semyonovich asked.

"I've come to the end of my rope, Nikita! I haven't slept for five nights!" Frol said despondently.

"Ill, are you? Why, we'll have the doctor in right away," Nikita Semyonovich started up. "Hey, Fedka," he called to his son dozing in the corner, "here, run along and fetch the doctor!"

"My ailment is something no doctor can cure, Nikita. Antonov has deceived me. He has, he has, don't you argue with me, Andrei!" Frol

snapped at Andrei Andreyevich, although the latter had no intention of arguing at all.

"It took you a long time to figure this out, Frol Petrovich," Nikita Semyonovich replied with a little smile. "It took you a long time to see it, brother."

"And what are you smirking about, Nikita? I came to you so that you'd show me the right path, and you'd jeer at me, would you? Answer me!"

"You're stupid, that's what my answer is."

"You're right there, we really are fools," Andrei Andreyevich assented meekly.

"Oh no, we're not!" Frol objected vehemently. "We're not fools. We don't know the truth because we've had no learning." He paused. "And where's Listrat Grigoryevich?"

"He'll be in shortly, he's just come back from Moscow, he was a delegate to the Party Congress."

"Is that so? So he's been to Moscow?" Frol squinted suspiciously at Nikita.

Listrat walked into the room.

Frol answered his questions about Gryaznoye and the Antonovites, and then said:

"Tell me, Listrat Grigoryevich, is Moscow still yours?"

"Are you crazy or something?" Listrat stared at him in bewilderment.

"Answer me, I tell you! There's talk in our parts that Moscow is up against you, that one of the Bolsheviks has taken a stand against Lenin, that the priests are singing thanksgiving services and there's the devil to pay."

"Ho! They're wasting their breath," Listrat burst out laughing. "They ought to be singing requiems instead, Frol Petrovich."

"Oh, and who for?"

"For Antonov, Frol Petrovich, that's who! He's at his last gasp."

"Stop your fooling," Frol scowled. "Antonov, indeed! He's alive and kicking."

"Never mind," Listrat replied, "let him have his fling before he dies! We'll make the place pretty hot for him soon."

"You sound mighty brave all at once," said Andrei Andreyevich, looking at Listrat's well-knit figure with admiration. "You haven't gone and brought an army from Moscow, have you?"

"What's an army! Guess again, Uncle Andrei!"

"Don't know what it could be. Tanks, perhaps? Or is it aeroplanes, eh?"

"I've brought back an armoured car and machine-guns; but that's not what I mean, Uncle Andrei. I've brought something else that's worth more than the aeroplanes! What I

brought will put an end to the war! But no, you couldn't guess it yourselves."

"Good Lord, what could it be?" Frol burst out. "Have a heart, tell us!"

"There's nothing to compare in might to what Lenin has entrusted me to bring. Men, I've brought the resolution passed by the Party Congress!"

Frol's brow darkened. "Oh my," he said, "so you had a good laugh at us."

"But listen to what I've got to say! That resolution states that the union of workmen and peasants is indissoluble, that all rights are reserved for the avenage peasant. There's one thing, however," Listrat smiled, "you've got to watch yourselves.... Lenin said about you people that with one part of you you're striving for truth, and with the other you're clinging to the likes of Storozhev."

"He guessed right there" Andrei Andreyevich agreed in the simplicity of his heart. "That's right! We go both ways...."

"So here's our problem: to make you go with us the whole way, with never a thought left for Storozhev at all."

"Go on, what else did Lenin say?" Frol urged Listrat impatiently.

"Food quotas abolished, free trade permitted, the workmen told to start their factories

going at once, and all sorts of merchandise to be sent to you!"

"That can't be." Frol shook his head. "Can't be, I tell you. Don't argue with me, Andrei! Tell me, Listrat Grigoryevich, what of it is true and what you made up yourself?"

"Why the deuce should I make anything up, tell me now? What good would it do me to deceive you? That is the resolution passed by the Congress. Lenin has worked it all out, see? Gosh, how well he put it!" Listrat said to Nikita Semyonovich with feeling. "The working class together with the labouring peasantry, he said, present such a tremendous force that we'll make an end of all our enemies and will not only put our devastated country back on its feet, but will rebuild it all, the whole lot of it, and will make it powerful as it's never been before. As soon as we exterminate the Storozhev breed, a beautiful life will be ours!"

"That's wishful thinking." Frol sighed. "Cross your heart you're not lying."

"Why should I cross my heart? I don't believe in God. And what are *your* relations with God? Has Antonov abolished Him, or has he put Him back in His place?"

"There were no instructions about God that I know of," Andrei Andreyevich said in all seriousness.

"In other words, please your own damned self? Want a smoke?"

"I don't smoke tobacco, Listrat Grigoryevich, I've lost the habit. We smoke beetroot leaf. It's better for the health."

"Is that so? Is that one of Storozhev's inventions?" Listrat asked gravely.

"It is."

"Have a proper smoke anyway. Here, take the pouch."

Andrei Andreyevich rolled himself a cigarette and, lighting it, said casually as it were:

"You know, Frol and I have made up our minds to try and get to see Lenin."

Listrat whistled.

"What do you want to see Lenin for? Here's the resolution!" He took the paper out of his desk and began to read it aloud. "'The surplus food appropriation system is to be replaced by a tax in kind. All foodstuffs which are left over after the farmer has paid his tax, are to be used by him at his entire discretion....'"

"That means we can do what we like with the bread?" Andrei Andreyevich asked.

"Exactly! That's what it says here. And it's signed by Lenin himself. There's no need for you to go to him."

"That's so." Andrei Andreyevich grew animated. "Let's go back home, Frol, let's call

everyone together and tell them that's the way it is, here's the paper."

"No, there are no end of papers in the world," Frol replied thoughtfully. "There are plenty of papers, but only one Lenin. I must hear him speak the word."

"My, you're obstinate, Frol," Andrei Andreyevich chided him.

"What are you arguing with me for? Don't go, that's all there is to it. You don't have to go, but you needn't argue either. I have no faith in any sort of papers, I must hear his own voice. I said I'd do it and I shall, there's no shaking my word!"

"Why not?" Nikita Semyonovich joined in the argument. "Let them go. Go to Lenin, Frol, go ahead, lots of people go to him."

"And so I will," Frol said stubbornly. "I'll get there even if I have to beg on the road to keep body and soul together."

"What bothers me is, will they let us in to him?" Andrei Andreyevich voiced his doubt.

"They'll let you in all right," Listrat replied. "I saw a man in his reception-room, that fellow's cow had been confiscated, so off he went to Lenin. And Lenin called the offenders to answer. He sure gave them a hard time!"

"You mean he's a bit strict?" asked Andrei Andreyevich, who had all this time been listening to Listrat with rapt attention.

"And what did you think? He's a statesman, he goes into all sorts of matters, big and small alike. He's feared by forty countries, yet he's a simple man, he's not tall, and he's fond of playing ball games."

"Look at that!" Andrei Andreyevich gave a shout of delight. "Lives in a palace, I expect?"

"Palace, indeed! They say his flat is just so-so, nothing out of the ordinary. But he is strong-willed! He says: have that scoundrel Antonov finished off in no time, he says."

"Listen to that!" Andrei Andreyevich responded delightedly. "What is he, a Communist or a Bolshevik?"

"I'll explain it all to you right away," Nikita Semyonovich volunteered. "Now a Bolshevik, my dear fellows, is one thing, and a Communist is another thing again. Lenin, he's a Bolshevik, but Listrat here, being younger, he's a Communist. But I'll say this: they have the same reasoning, both this one here and that one there. You go ahead and see him, Frol, don't be in two minds about it. You go and ask him about everything properly. Ask him, say: Comrade Lenin, when will peace be announced? The people are fed up with fighting...."

"All right, all right!"

"Perhaps you want a lift part of the way?" Listrat suggested. "There's a train going to Gryazi tomorrow, and from there it's no distance to Moscow."

"No, Listrat Grigoryevich, we'll trudge along on foot," Frol replied. "As we walk along we'll find out what troubles the peasants are having, and then we'll set it all out before Lenin. And don't you try to talk me out of it and don't argue. Well, let's sit down together."

They all sat down without speaking. Then Frol rose, crossed himself and walked out of the car. Andrei Andreyevich shuffled out after him.

Lenin summoned to Moscow the Secretary of the Tambov Provincial Party Committee. Previous to that, at the Political Bureau and the Council of Labour and Defence, Vladimir Ilyich often raised the question of suppressing banditism. He watched developments in the Tambov Province keenly and studied the Tambov newspapers. Glorious communiqués came pouring in to him from the Tambov Commander-in-Chief; they spoke of battles and victories, and yet the movement grew stronger and wider, nurtured by some mysterious source. Now the Secretary arrived from Tambov. Lenin

held several long conversations with him and obtained from him comprehensive information about the true state of affairs.

A telegram was sent flying to Tambov with orders to abolish the system of surplus food appropriation in the province ahead of the set date. This was the first herald of the forthcoming changes, far-reaching and important; this was the first mine laid by the Party beneath the structure of the kulaks' insurrection.

At that time some eight hundred Tambov peasants were being held in custody in Moscow and in Tambov. They had been arrested for various deeds and shady deals, for assisting Antonov, for espionage, and for armed revolt against the Soviets.

There were all sorts among them: kulaks, peasants who had enlisted in Antonov's army not entirely of their own free will, and men like Vasily Bocharov from the Bakharevo village. Now this is why they had roped in Vasily: he was the poorest of the poor, he lived alone with his old woman, fed on nothing but potato all the year round. When Antonov arrived in Bakharevo he came to call on Vasily in his hovel. The old man was struck speechless, he fell to kissing Antonov's hands and begging favours. Antonov ordered a cow to be given Vasily, one of the cows expropriated from the Commu-

nists. Vasily received his cow, but a week later the real owner showed up and took the animal away. The old man would not forget it. One day, when a company of Antonovites rode into the village, the owner of the cow, who was a member of the Soviet, did not get away in time and hid in the tall hemp. The old man saw him, shuffled all the way to Headquarters, and gave his enemy away. The man was shot to death there and then. And the cow, by the way, was never returned to Vasily—the Antonovites slaughtered it and ate it.

Such was the reason for old Vasily's arrest. He had been in custody for almost three months, cursing himself for his greediness, praying, and heaping all the oaths he could think of on Antonov, the swindler.

"It's him that's brought me to this, the son of a bitch," he muttered. "Oh poor, poor me."

Vasily was called to the office one day and told that he would be taken to Lenin.

"Well, my end has come, Lenin will kill me for sure." The old man shook with fright, but the warder slapped him on the shoulder and calmed his fears.

In the Kremlin that day, Lenin was receiving a delegation of Tambov peasants. Frol and Andrei Andreyevich—who had succeeded in getting to Moscow after all—were admitted at the

same time. In the room with Lenin were Stalin, black-moustached and thickset, Kalinin, smiling and bespectacled, several Army men, and the Tambov Secretary.

Frol Petrovich, looking handsome with his hair plastered down with grease, was timidly asking the man next to him: which one was Lenin? Was it that man over there? He pointed to a huge, fat man in uniform.

"No," he was told, "that one over there."

"Oh no." Frol could not believe him. "You're lying."

The speaker crossed himself. Frol shook his head in wonder. "Just look at that! So this is what he's like!" he thought.

Lenin tore himself away from his papers piled high on the table in front of him, leaned back in his chair and caught the lapels of his waistcoat in his hands, smiling pleasantly at the peasants.

"He's got a shrewd twinkle in his eye!" Frol thought.

Kalinin laughed and said: let the dead past bury its own dead. Frol, too, laughed in relief. He never took his eyes off Lenin and his comrades.

A peasant Frol did not know, began to speak; he talked about the state farm that had ap-

propriated the lands of the Prince of Lichtenberg. Lenin made notes while he listened.

"That's the way it is, Mikhail Ivanovich," the peasant spoke simply and composedly. "You are asking us why the discontent, why the Antonovites? Well, I'll tell you. This Prince of Lichtenberg, now, owned eight thousand acres in our village. The state farm got five thousand four hundred acres. Well and good, the state must have bread of its own. We see that. But they're ruining the land, that they are. They've made a muck of it. The way it is now, it does no good to anyone. And then again, they're taking our potato lots away. They take it and rot it. There's no salt to be had. The villagers are in a fair state about it. Salt's been handed out just once, and that was all. There's no clothing, no boots. That is why there is discontent. As for Antonov, now, he's got cunning, that man, he took it all in...."

Lenin, leaning towards the man sitting beside him, was asking him something; the man opened his notebook and replied. Stalin jotted down notes while he listened. Kalinin sat studying the faces of the delegates. The peasants stood up and spoke one after the other. They complained of the surplus food appropriation, explained their troubles and lamented about the hard time they were having farming. Frol

Petrovich spoke too: he told of what he had seen on his trek across Russia, of the devastation and grief all round.... Lenin was considering all he had heard, screwing up his eyes in thought, and exchanging whispered remarks with his comrades. Towards the very end of the interview, Lenin himself spoke. Frol listened with his ear cupped in his hand.

"Comrade peasants," Ilyich began ... and Frol was amazed. Lenin spoke simply, with a slight burr—Frol was wrong once again, it seemed: he thought Lenin would roar rather than talk.

Lenin spoke so plainly that Frol understood everything: what sort of a war had been forced on Russia, how the generals had led armies against it but had broken their necks, and why the surplus food appropriation could not have been avoided, and about the swindler Antonov, and how they were racking their brains in Moscow about the difficulties facing the peasantry.

"Well then," said Lenin, "we must try and meet the demands of the peasants who are not satisfied, not content, and who are justified in their discontent, and *could* not be content.... Yes, this state of affairs cannot continue."

And Lenin began to tell them what the Party planned to do and had done already to assist the war-scarred villages.

Andrei Andreyevich closed his eyes voluptuously—everything this man was saying now was so very much like what he himself had often had in his own thoughts, but had never been able to give shape to.

"The tax which we are introducing instead of the food quota," Lenin was saying, "has been determined at the lowest possible rate."

The peasants stirred, smiled and broke into exclamations. The men sitting beside Lenin smiled too. Kalinin then said:

"Every one of you will know beforehand what he has to give to the state towards the support of schools, hospitals and the army."

The men clapped their hands. Andrei Andreyevich clapped and laughed as he had not laughed in a long while.

"And as for the rest of the bread—do whatever you like with it. Put your farms in order, buy yourselves boots or clothes. It's up to you."

Kalinin ended up by saying that all the convicted peasants would be set free and sent to their respective homes. He asked them when they returned to their villages to tell the people everything they had heard and seen in Moscow. The men, happy and jolly and feeling as

though years had slipped off their shoulders all at once, applauded again. After that, Lenin had his photograph taken with them. The photographer adjusted his camera, clicked a gadget of some sort, a ball of fire flamed up and the old men jumped. The peasants had dinner with Kalinin who talked in a friendly way to all of them, and said to Frol:

"When you come home, tell the people—this is what the truth is really like."

Frol Petrovich was moved to tears, he tried to kiss Kalinin's hand, but this angered Mikhail Ivanovich.

They did not start on their way home right away. While their papers were being put in order and tickets secured, they strolled about the town choosing things to buy. At last they left. Pamphlets about the tax in kind were given to them to take back to their villages, it was explained to them that the surplus food appropriation was over, that the Party Congress had passed a firm resolution about it, and that there would be no deceit.

It was early dawn when Andrei Andreyevich and Frol walked homewards from the railway station. The fields, denuded of snow, lay steaming and warming themselves in the sun, which rose bright and clear over the world. They

walked straight across puddles of melted snow, splashing happily in their new waterproof top-boots. Andrei Andreyevich was muttering something and smiling. Taking off his cap, he gazed about him at his native plain spreading vast and endless before him.

Rolling from hillock to hillock it stretched far, far away towards the hills in the west. Woods and coppices stood out in sharp relief here and there, and at the foot of the hill a little river was winding its way. Ducks were quacking in the ponds. When the low-roofed, grey little village church came into view, with the sun-rays playing on the crosses, the men kneeled down, said a prayer, kissed their native soil and strode quickly towards the village. It was just waking up from sleep, smoke rose from the chimneys—the housewives were already up and about....

The alarm-bell broke the morning's stillness.

The men, fuddled with sleep, buttoned their clothes as they came pouring out of doors. The skies were clear and the sun was shining, but fear gripped the hearts of the men as they hurried towards the church. Why the alarm again? Where was the enemy?

Then they saw Andrei Andreyevich up on the belfry, looking cheerful and years younger, with his bald pate gleaming in the sun. He stood

there waving a paper, shouting something, breathless with joy .He wanted to kiss everyone, to hug the whole world. The dumbfounded men listened to Andrei Andreyevich in disbelief: could it be that they would once again be able to plough, sow and harvest, pay their taxes and do whatever they liked with the remaining crop? Could it be that their days of misery were over? Could it be that shops and markets would be reopened? Could it be that the dissension, the fighting was over?

"Lenin goes about in an ordinary coat, fellows, he's got sort of reddish hair, he's a good, simple soul. A man like that won't deceive us, he'll never deceive us, why, I saw him as close as I see you now!"

Frol displayed to the gathering his new top-boots, breeches and coat. The school-teacher climbed up on the church porch and read aloud the paper brought by Frol and Andrei Andreyevich—about the new taxation, about Antonov.

The whole of that day and night and the following day the men discussed the new taxes, prospects of trade and the new way of life. Antonov's committee men were afraid to show themselves in the streets. Militiamen disappeared, too.

Frol returned home to Gryaznoye and here, too, he spoke of what he had just told in Dvoriki: about Lenin, the kindness with which he had spoken to them, about the other provinces which were peaceful and quiet, with never a sound of any insurrections or fights....

And early next morning Storozhev arrived from Dvoriki where he had just had Andrei Andreyevich flogged within an inch of his life. Storozhev scoured the village like a hungry wolf, searching for pamphlets brought back by Frol and, failing to find them, flogged man after man. He drove away to Kamenka, taking Frol along—on Antonov's order.



Chapter 13

Storozhev arrived in Kamenka towards evening and went straight to Headquarters. In the door he came face to face with Safirov.

"What's going on?"

"Drinking!" Safirov swore roundly. "Enough! It seems the time has come to end it all!"

"And you said you'd never forgive them for Russia!"

"What does it matter what I said?" Safirov walked away.

When Storozhev opened the door of Antonov's room, he heard Maria Kosova say:

"Safirov's trying to show off that he's smarter than anybody! The dirty swine! I'd kill him!"

Storozhev greeted them coolly.

"Brought the old man?" Antonov asked. He was drunk.

"I have. He's in the lock-up."

"Bring him in here! You say he's been to Moscow, to Lenin? All right, I'll have a little chat with him. I'll make things clear to him. We'll use the truth he's brought back from Moscow to our own advantage. I can do anything! Lead him in, Pyotr Ivanovich!"

Storozhev walked out.

"Truth, did you say? What is truth?" Maria screamed. "There is no truth!"

"That's true, Maria," Ishin said, hiccoughing. "There's no truth or happiness in the world. I say, Alexander Stepanovich, d'you want me to tell you a story about truth?"

"Go ahead," Antonov agreed. He lay sprawling on his bed in his boots, his tunic undone.

"Once upon a time," Ishin began, "far beyond the seas and oceans, beyond a black, charred forest, there lived a king. And that king had a hundred sons and they all loved the same woman—as vile a woman as they make them ... like you, Maria." He guffawed drunkenly.

"Easy, Yegor!"

"As vicious as you, Maria...."

"Yegor, I'll shoot your soul out!" Maria clutched at her revolver.

"All right, I was only joking.... And that woman sold her soul to the devil. Now the king calls her to him and says: 'My sons are violent-tempered fellows, they're fighting over you with axes. Choose one of them to love or else all of us will suffer.' And the woman replied: 'I shall love the one who does the most horrible thing that man can do.' The brothers went their different ways all over the great wide world, they killed people, burned their homes, ruined their fields, they cut off the women's breasts and ripped the babies' stomachs open. But the woman merely laughed. 'No,' she said, 'that's not the most horrible thing yet.' And then the youngest of the brothers went out into the world. He was the most ferocious one of the hundred.

He searched for and found Truth, he dragged it along to that woman, and throttled it before her eyes. And the woman said: 'Now this is the most horrible thing anyone could do. But I cannot love you, my brave lad! Since there's no Truth there can be no Love either!' The brothers were furious with the woman, they cut her up into a hundred pieces, chucked them out into the world, and a hundred dogs devoured that woman, and when they had swallowed the last piece, they all died."

"Alexander darling, what is he trying to tell us?" Maria cried.

"Laughing at me, Yegor?" Antonov wheezed savagely. "I'll hang you!"

"There's no truth in the world, you won't hang me!" Ishin roared with laughter.

Just then Storozhev led in Frol.

Frol walked into the room fearlessly, took off his cap, crossed himself and bowed to Antonov.

"Was it you who'd been to Lenin?" Antonov asked, playing with his whip. "Well, tell us, what wine you drank, what food you ate, how much they bought you for?"

"They bought me with the truth and with their kindness," Frol replied. "Truly they are good people, Alexander Stepanovich. I'll say that for Lenin and for Kalinin, as well as for

the others there. They explained to us what we were too foolish to understand."

"Stop babbling!" Antonov shouted. "They lied to you fools, and you lapped it all up!"

"Why lied?" Frol objected. "Coming back from Moscow, we never saw any trouble or riots on the way. The peasants are all busy getting their ploughs ready for the spring. And when we mentioned you, they laughed. 'Never heard of any such bandit,' they said."

Antonov stared hard at Frol in silence, while Frol stood calmly before him, looking straight into his face with unblinking eyes.

"Brought the paper?"

"I have. It says in it the food quota goes out and the average peasant comes to the fore."

"Give it here!"

Frol carefully pulled out the paper from an inner breast pocket. The words were almost obliterated: hundreds of people had read them, thousands of hands had held this scrap of grey paper.

Antonov read extracts of Lenin's speech about the taxes.

"You dogs, you curs!" he screamed. "They lied to you, they cheated you once in 1917 and they'll cheat you again! Do you really believe them?"

"Why, bless you, how you've frightened me,

Alexander Stepanovich!" Frol muttered, crossing himself. "Try to understand--who should we believe, you or Lenin? Why Lenin, he's, oh, my Lord! He's got the whole of Russia! And what do you have? A tuft of hay to sit on; and even that you won't have much longer!"

Antonov, his mouth clamped shut, tore the paper into bits, swore vilely and, rushing at the old man, struck him with his whip across his gleaming bald head again and again.

Frol fell down, blood and tears pouring down his face. But Antonov went on striking him, kicking him and aiming the tip of his boot at his face.

Maria fired at the old man.

Mustering the last of his strength, Frol raised himself up.

"Murderers!" he wheezed. "At my hour of death I'll stand by my words: you'll perish like dogs, and people will spit on your graves."

Antonov snatched the revolver from Maria, but Storozhev rose up before him.

"Stop this vile spectacle! Come on, put your revolver away or I'll have your guts out on the spot! You watch out, you dirty bitch!" he shook his fist at Maria, picked up Frol and carried him to the door.

"Here, take him somewhere," he ordered the sentries, his breath coming in gasps.

Storozhev's cavalrymen heaved Frol up into a cart that was handy, and took him to the far end of the village to the leech, Anna. There Frol remained for three months.

Storozhev felt downcast. He recalled the wantonness he had witnessed at Headquarters, Maria's wicked, scratched face.... He thought of Lyonka.... He could not reconcile himself to Lyonka's flight. Lyonka had been with him for fifteen years! He took him into his family and home as though he were his own son! But no, there's no gratitude in this world. Yes, men were turning their backs on Antonov now.... And those rumours about the abolition of food quotas.... The peasants would turn right about if it was true. But how to keep it from them? How to hide it? Truth cannot be pommelled out, it cannot be killed!

"The end's come," Storozhev was thinking, "the end of the whole thing." And he wanted to confide his black thoughts in someone....

On his way back to Dvoriki, Storozhev stopped to see Lyonka's mother. He knew that Natasha had moved in with her after she had seen her father off to Moscow. Maybe she would understand, maybe she would comfort him. With Lyonka away, she must be finding it hard too.

Natasha was glad to see Storozhev. "Here's someone who knows everything about Lyonka," she thought.

Rumour was current in the village that Lyonka had been taken prisoner. Natasha did not even know if he was alive. The Reds did not penetrate to Dvoriki, for Antonov's frontier regiments still held the villages in a firm grasp. Lyonka had no way of getting a message through to Natasha. He grieved and pined for her, but what could he do, he couldn't batter a stone wall down with his head.

Natasha had filled out, pale-brown smudges stained her skin, her eyes had a gentle, calf-like expression, she carried her rounded stomach with care. She tried to bear up, but her nights were sleepless, she was alone with her thoughts of life, of Lyonka.

She was very glad to see Storozhev, she bustled and fussed around this welcome guest. They sat in silence, she—waiting for him to say what she wanted to hear, and he—expecting something from her.

"Lyonka," Natasha began and burst into sobs. "Did he surrender, or did they take him prisoner, or have they killed him?" she asked.

Anger against Lyonka welled up in Storozhev's heart. "He has surrendered, of course he has," he resolved in his mind.

"We must suppose he surrendered," Storozhev said casually. "It came through from Ivanovka, he'd been there, bragging that he got married. . . ."

"Married? Who?" Natasha gasped.

"Some Communist woman," Storozhev said quietly, with his eyes averted. He could not bring himself to look into Natasha's eyes.

Children were out playing in the street, the roads were drying fast in the sun. Storozhev felt drawn to the black fields.

"A Communist? So he's forgotten me?" And Natasha broke down, wailing and sobbing as though Lyonka were dead.

"We must suppose he has. He bragged about you: I have a fool of a girl, he said, any time I whistle, she'll come running."

Storozhev gave a short, crisp laugh, rolled a cigarette and lighted it.

"The Reds have led the boy astray, they've ruined your life." He sighed. "And your father, too. . . ."

"What . . . what about my father?" Natasha said breathlessly.

"He's gone to Lenin to find some blasted truth. Frol Bayev is no more, the Reds must have slaughtered him. I'm sorry for you, my girl, very sorry, you're so meek and quiet,

can't stand up for yourself. Another girl wouldn't let a wrong like that go unavenged."

Natasha turned her face to him, her eyes dry.

"Never you fear!" she brought out. " 'Meek, quiet, can't stand up for myself'? How little you know me, Pyotr Ivanovich!"

"Good-bye, Natasha, I have to go now."

He hauled himself up into his saddle with difficulty and rode away.

"Here I've led another one astray," he thought. "What for?" And for the first time in two years he felt he wanted to go to the widow who lived on the edge of the village. He stayed at Katrya's for three days, drinking, smoking and saying not a word, or suddenly bursting into mirthless, imbecile laughter.

Chapter 14

Time dragged for Natasha now, day after miserable day. Before she used to wait for Lyonka, waking up at the sound of every horse-hoof, at every knock, thinking it was he. She used to weave dreams of a life of peace: the war would be over, the storm spent, she would give birth to a fair-haired little boy, he'd be the image of his father, and the little cricket would chirp so cosily in their cottage....

She used to think that Lyonka simply did not have the time to ride into the village to see his beloved, ranging the country as he was with his detachment.

But now—why wait? It was all perfectly clear. He had gone away, betrayed his cause and abandoned her. He had forsworn his honour. Oh, the traitor!

Why think of him now? He's kissing and caressing another, he's calling her his little sunbeam, he's spending his nights with her, resting his fair head on her breast....

Alone, alone in this world flooded with the bright spring sunshine, disgraced, heavy with child, ridiculed by all....

"Good God, what shall I do? How am I to live, how shall I bring up my son? And Dad, too ... my Dad...."

Aksinya shed tears of pity for Natasha, but the girl would not accept her loving kindness, she avoided her and kept her silence....

"Good God, what shall I do? The noose perhaps?"

Thus day followed day, night followed night, with nowhere to go, no one to comfort her in her anguish and her tears. But there were no tears, her mouth was parched, her head ached, her heart was scorched with pain.

Perhaps she should go to church and pray?

But she couldn't. The women's malignant looks, their spiteful whispers followed her everywhere.

"Strumpet! Neither wife nor maid, the little bitch!" that's all they ever called her.

"Lyonka, oh, Lyonka, what have you done? If I could just look at you with half an eye, if I could just hear one little word from you, I'd know whether you loved me or not!" And sometimes she thought: "I don't love you, I hate you now, you've ruined all my life for me, you've shattered it. I shall forget you." And she tried to think only of the child she was carrying beneath her heart, clamouring for freedom, the darling. "It's not time yet, don't kick so with your darling little feet, wait a bit, my sweet, don't be in such a hurry, the world is grim and unkind, and you have no father waiting for you, he's gone, he's vanished, your daddy!"

But she could not drive the memory of Lyonka from her heart. His image rose vividly before her, as vividly as those clear, hot days in summer, and she recalled their nights in the hay, his arms, his lips, all of him, her very own stubborn, passionate, greedy Lyonka!

Hatred grew in her for the people who had lured Lyonka away.

She once heard someone say, when she was

still a child, that if you killed a spider you had thirty-three sins forgiven you.

"The spiders have lured Lyonka away," she was thinking. "And perhaps they are sucking, drinking his warm blood...."

"Now if those spiders were killed, how many sins would be forgiven for every one?" Natasha asked herself as she stood kneeling before the icon. "How many sins will you forgive me, O Lord? Will you forgive bloodshed? Will you forgive and forget my sin with Lyonka?" And she beat her head on the floor in supplication.

She was alone. The windows stared blindly into the fog. And Natasha fancied that Lyonka was peering in at every window, laughing, beckoning to her, saying something, but she could not make out the words.

"Louder, louder, I can't hear you!" Natasha cried to him, but he just laughed as before, and talked and talked, and she could not understand what he was saying. But if only she could, then all her anguish and torture would pass away in a moment, the black cloud of despair would lift, and her heart would beat with carefree happiness again.

The windows stared blindly into the fog. There was nothing beyond them but the deserted streets, there was no sound beyond them.

Natasha often went out into the fields, to the

straw stacks, she sat there fingering the straw, seeing nothing, her bloodshot eyes staring, and only her fingers moving faster and faster through the stalks.

In this state of semi-coma, she performed her household tasks: lighting the fire, cooking the meals and milking the cow.

Time went on: some days dragged on with such heart-rending slowness that night never seemed to come, while others raced on madly —where? Wait, time, don't fly so swiftly, stop a while, let me think, let me make up my mind, what I should do, what now?

Sometimes in her waking hours, she raved that she was slaughtering the spiders, she dashed herself against the walls or, climbing on to a bench, she clawed at the emptiness and laughed a dry, callous laugh. Then she would suddenly pause and remain standing on the bench for hours, without moving or swaying, repeating the same words over and over again:

"I'll kill them, I'll kill them, I'll kill them..." and, screaming, as she leapt down: "Aha, I got you! Where's my Lyonka? What have you done to him? So you tangled him in your net, sucked out his blood, destroyed him? God damn you!"

Calm and clear thinking returned to her but rarely. And then came tears. Natasha would

weep bitterly, sobbing and moaning, inventing new pet names and nicknames for Lyonka, and it eased her pain. More and more often now the same dream came to her at night: she dreamt that she saw Lyonka on a bright day, standing in a meadow amid yellow flowers. He was coming towards her, Natasha so wanted to see him, she wanted it so she could hardly bear it. She wanted to tell him so many, many things, to tell him something that was tremendous and very important. She was going forward to meet him, fanning herself with a bunch of flowers. How hot it was! And Lyonka was walking towards her too. He seemed so very near, another moment and she would take him by the arm, press him to her, kiss him.... But suddenly her feet seemed glued to the ground, lead seemed to pour into her legs, she could not lift her feet or make a step.... Every step meant indescribable agony. But every step brought her nearer to him, every step brought him closer! She lifted her feet, one after the other, groaning with the pain, and it was getting harder and harder—God, what agony! He was near, he was almost beside her, he was stretching his hand out to her....

Then he vanished....

A twinkling star peeped into the little window. Aksinya moaned and gritted her teeth

in her sleep. A cock crowed. The morning was cool and dewy. Steam hung in a cloud over the river.



Chapter 15

Early one spring morning when the sun was still cold but long shadows were already stretched across the ground, Fedka and Listrat came galloping through Ivanovka towards the farmstead of Alexander Kosobokov.

Listrat looked at Fedka, twisting about in his saddle, looked at his red face and shining eyes, and remembered the day when Fedka went off to join the Reds.

Although the youngster had been in the reconnaissance for many a month now, he still could not reconcile himself to the humdrum side of army life. These chilly dawns, the lying low in bushes, the hostile villages where death lurked behind every barn, were to Fedka as

novel and exciting as ever—they made his young, warm blood course faster through his veins.

Listrat lighted a cigarette and, looking for a bit of fun, said:

"My, look what a dandy sword-knot you've got! Where did you get it from?"

Fedka gave a tug at the bright-red sword-knot on his shortened sword and replied with dignity:

"I got this little sword-knot from a bandit Chirikin and I popped off just a little while ago, my dear brother. Like it?"

Listrat's mouth curled in a smile that was hidden by his moustache, and blowing out a cloud of smoke, he said:

"Look at that now, how is it I never heard that you and Chirikin had popped off a bandit?"

"You just haven't," Fedka replied. "Dandy little sword-knot, eh? And let me tell you, my dear brother, that the bandit must have been Storozhev's right hand man, no less. I sure chased him, gosh, did I chase him!"

"You liar, you!" Listrat shouted. "You're lying, Fyodor Nikitich. It was Olga Kosobokova who made the sword-knot for you, and there never has been any bandit in this at all!"

Fedka turned and snapped angrily:

"People told you lies. They're jealous, that's why."

Fedka was about to say something else but suddenly a tall, black-bearded peasant appeared from beyond a turning and stopped the two riders.

"Have you got a light, soldiers?"

"Here you are, Vasily Vasilyevich," Listrat said. "Don't you know us?"

"Why if it isn't Listrat Grigoryevich! I thought there was something familiar about you. You've taken off your beard, that's why you don't look like your own self now."

The man stroked his greying black beard sedately and his speech was unhurried.

"Well, how is everything?" Listrat asked him. "Have the Antonovites given you back your mill?"

"They have. A mill can't be left without a master, you know."

"Oh, I see," Listrat drawled, then turned to Fedka: "Let's go, come on, Fedka."

"And where are you going now, Fyodor Nikitich?" the miller asked.

Listrat made no answer, he tugged at his rein and rode off. Fedka dug his heel into his horse's side and threw over his shoulder:

"We're going to Kosobokov's farm, to our

kinsman. We're dead tired, all worn out. Easy, Tatarin!"

The miller gave the riders a look and slowly turned his steps towards the mill.

"You bloody fool, who asked you to talk?" Listrat said angrily, as he reined in his horse. "And you're supposed to be a scout too! You ought to have your block knocked off!"

"What's eating you?" Fedka retorted. "What if I did tell him? There aren't any 'Greens' here for fifteen miles around. And the man is one of our own, he's Father's friend."

"You fool! He's as much a friend of your father's as I am of Storozhev's. Your father requisitioned three of his cows and four horses for the Soviet in 1919, and Vasily Vasilyevich will never forget a grudge in a hundred years."

Fedka cringed, and Listrat felt sorry for the youngster.

"Now, now, cheer up, you soldier," he said. "We're almost there. Come on, show Olga how the Red scouts can ride." He winked at Fedka. "And straighten your sword-knot, let her look at the sword-knot!"

Fedka whipped up his forelock with his hand and sat up straight in his saddle.

Old Alexander Afanasyevich Kosobokov gave the scouts a smiling welcome.

"Welcome, my dear young visitors," he said.

"You've grown so tall and thin! My, it's this war, it's nothing but grief. Now let me take your horses to the stable. Sorry, my dear boys, I have no oats, but I'll give them a bit of hay."

When Listrat and Fedka had dismounted, their host slapped and fondled Tatarin's neck, scraped off a lump of mud that had dried on the horse's back, and led the two mounts away into the stable, calling back over his shoulder:

"Go in, go into the house, boys, make yourselves at home."

They went indoors. Fedka opened the door into the front room slightly and saw no one there.

"Scouting?" Listrat teased.

Fedka mumbled something in reply. Kosobokov came back. Listrat produced his pouch, a shred of old, yellow newspaper, and invited his host to join him in a smoke.

"You've got pretty good tobacco," the old man said. "And my crop was poor this year. First it was the commotion, and then it was all sorts of people coming here, thinking they owned the place. Well, and how is our dear Nikita?" he asked Fedka.

"He sends you his regards," Fedka replied. "He's all right, nothing wrong with him. We ride, that's the way we live."

"That's it," Listrat agreed. "We ride. Some are ploughing their fields and we're busy ploughing the saddles with the seat of our pants. It's a joke." Then he added: "Your house seems pretty quiet?"

"I've packed my family off. My old woman's taken Olga to Tambov to an uncle of ours, just to be on the safe side. He works in a factory there. What do you say, Listrat Grigoryevich, things are flaring up, aren't they?"

"I'll go and look at the horses," said Fedka, his disappointment rankling. "Jabbering away and forgetting the horses, some soldier!"

Kosobokov took a last draw on his cigarette, flipped it through the window and smoothed out his moustache.

"People are getting used to bloodshed from the cradle. What will it bring, eh?"

"Nothing very bad," Listrat replied. "It's rotten blood we're shedding, you know."

"Rotten blood, there's plenty of it, you can't bleed it all dry."

"We'll do away with as much of it as we can."

"I wish you'd hurry," Kosobokov said ruefully. "The land is lonesome, it's lying empty, barren, the land is yearning for the peasant. When you walk out into the open, Listrat Grigoryevich, your heart turns bitter within you,

there's no end of land and yet we're always fighting over it. Couldn't we all live together without quarrelling over it?"

"*We* could," Listrat said bitterly, "but there are others who soon begin to feel cramped, others who want to rule the world. That's the sort we're doing away with."

A fly was buzzing tiresomely in the room. A wall clock ticked monotonously. Kosobokov drummed his fingers pensively on the table. Listrat smoked his cigarette and watched the bluish-grey rings of smoke. The crystal-clear day was tranquil and serene.

"Now what we want, Listrat," Kosobokov said, and his eyes shone, "is a government that would be more stable, with more justice in it, with no sort of nonsense, no violence, with none of this riding there and back, trampling on our fields, giving the peasant a hard time."

"There's no government that's more stable than ours," Listrat replied. "Our government—that's us, whoever owns a pair of toil-hardened hands."

Kosobokov raised his hands from the table: they were broad and rough, with a network of swollen blue veins, his fingers bent and calloused.

"Does anyone molest you?" Listrat asked.

"God forbid, Listrat! But then who am I

to molest? I'm neither rich nor poor, I'm a middling sort of man," and he added with longing: "If only we could work in peace, plough and sow. . . ."

"Never mind, we'll soon give you this peace. The food quota is abolished, the average peasant is to be given his due. Just you go ahead and work, in other words. Lenin has signed the decree already, they say, we'll be getting it any moment now."

"Now that's good," Kosobokov said.

Katerina, the old servant, brought in a dish of fried eggs.

"Try some," she said. "The eggs come from our own place, they're not bought. Have some, bless you."

She placed some spoons on the table and brought out a dirty-green saltcellar.

Listrat took out his knife, cut the loaf of bread and opened the window to call Fedka to come in and eat. Just then he saw several horsemen spring out of a thicket some three miles away and make straight towards the farmstead at a gallop. . . .

Fedka's Tatarin was a mettlesome horse, a jibber. And this time, too, he refused to leave the stable. Listrat had long since leapt into his saddle, his horse was dancing impatiently under him, but Fedka was still fussing with his.

Tatarin kicked, rolled his eyes, writhed and trembled, but would not budge. Fedka pulled and tugged at the bridle, pushed, cajoled and shouted—but Tatarin refused to leave the stable.

Fedka let out a howl of rage and despair and was himself amazed at this bestial, heart-rending howl, which had broken out from somewhere within him, from somewhere deep down where fear was seated.

In ten minutes at most Storozhev would be there. Fedka knew that Storozhev had once sworn he would skin alive any scout from Sashka Chirikin's detachment that he could lay his hands on. Storozhev never made vain threats, and Chirikin's men knew this to their own cost. This detachment was a thorn in Storozhev's flesh. He would say, biting his moustache angrily: "You'd think everything was peaceful and quiet to look at it, and suddenly they jab you in your backside. My, what bastards!"

If Storozhev caught Fedka, he'd think up a special death for him. And the youngster burst into angry tears because he had to end his life so senselessly—just think of it, he couldn't make his horse leave the stable!

"Oh, you dirty dog," Fedka snarled at Tatarin. "I could shoot you, God damn your hide!"

Random shots were already coming from afar—it was Listrat, who had ridden on ahead, firing at the Antonovites, keeping them at bay, waiting for Fedka. And Fedka slashed Tatarin across the back with his sword, he pulled off his rifle, threw it into the crib, covered it with straw, and decided he would lie in ambush in the stable, shooting for his life (he still had fifty cartridges and two hand-grenades left). Suddenly Kosobokov appeared in the door.

"Run," he whispered, "run into the garden, there's some old straw there, crawl into it, hear me? Do what I tell you, run, save your skin!"

Hunched awkwardly, holding up his swinging hand-grenades, Fedka started running towards the garden, and at that precise moment Storozhev appeared on the hillock. He shook his fist at Listrat and turned towards the farm.

Storozhev rode up to the house at a walk. He took off his cap, smoothed down his hair, drew his palm across his moustache and climbed down from his horse. He threw the reins to one of his men who came running up, once again drew his hand across his moustache, curled up the ends, and offered his hand to Kosobokov.

"How do you do, Alexander Afanasyevich. How's life?"

"If you can call it life," Kosobokov replied, slowly rolling a cigarette. "There was a life of sorts, and even that's been spent."

"Has Listrat been here?" Pyotr Ivanovich asked. "So they come here sometimes, do they?"

"The road is not barred. Listrat's gone and you've come, you'll go and some other guest will come. But what are we standing here for? Come in, I had a few eggs fried for Listrat, now you'll have to do the eating." He laughed without malice.

Storozhev gave orders to his men, wiped his feet carefully on the door-mat, and followed his host into the house.

In the doorway he took off his hat, shook it and placed it out of the way, and, turning to the icon, he offered a fervent prayer. After that he sat down and ate the fried eggs. He ate slowly and sedately and when he had finished he wiped the bread-crumbs off his beard and said, as though continuing an interrupted thread of thought:

"There's no catching up with Listrat! He's got the best horse in the province. He got himself a good horse, the scoundrel."

"Good horse," Kosobokov echoed, breaking

off his persistent, smothering anxiety for Fedka. "One of the best!"

"He stole our regiment commander's mare from under his very nose, the son of a bitch," Storozhev said admiringly. "A regular gipsy he is, honest to God."

"Will you be making peace soon, Pyotr Ivanovich?" Kosobokov asked forlornly. "The people are worrying themselves to death, we should be ploughing and sowing, fighting wars is not our business. Now tell me, do we plough and tend our fields just to have armies galloping over them?"

Storozhev cleared his throat, he was about to give an answer when a snub-nosed young fellow in a torn old army coat walked in. This was Afonka, Storozhev's new orderly, whom he had taken on after Lyonka had gone over to the Reds.

Holding his hand to the brim of his straw hat, through the holes in which his bleached hair stuck out in tufts, Afonka bent down to Storozhev's ear and began to whisper something. All at once Storozhev grew stern, his face turned grey and the lines on his shiny forehead deepened. He wiped his mouth and moustache dry, picked up his cap and said:

"Pity it turned out this way. I accepted your hospitality, I've been a guest in your house, it doesn't do to settle scores with your host after you'd eaten his food, but it can't be helped."

He threw a grim look at Kosobokov, speechless with unaccountable alarm, and coming up close to him, asked raspingly:

"Who are you hiding from your guests? Who was here with Listrat? Well?" And Storozhev's voice rang like a taut string.

Someone shouted from the yard: "Pyotr Ivanovich! There's a horse standing in the stable. The fellows say it's Fedka's horse!"

For a moment Storozhev remained where he was, then he turned and treading heavily walked out of the room. In the doorway he shouted an order: "Lead it out!"

Afonka glanced at Kosobokov, whose shoulders had suddenly sagged, spat on the floor and pushed the old man towards the door. Kosobokov came out on the porch.

A group of Antonovites, swearing and cursing, were trying to pull Tatarin out of the stable. The horse jibbed, kicked, tore at his bridle, jerked his head, and glared wildly at the crowd with bloodshot eyes. All of a sudden, Tatarin backed into the stable, rushed impetuously forward, flinging all the men thronging about him

on the ground, and with a flip of his tail darted away beyond the trees, turned to the right, to the left, and vanished behind a growth of osier before anyone could pull out his revolver.

"Fedka's horse! That's his Tatarin!" the fellow in the torn army coat yelled shrilly. "He's here!" He stood at attention before Storozhev, saluting him with his rough, bent fingers. "Shall I question the old man about Fedka?"

Storozhev threw away his cigarette, looked at Kosobokov standing on the porch without a hat, wearing a long white shirt, his trousers falling over his bare black feet, and uttered gravely:

"It won't do for me to talk to him, I have taken food in his house. But you may, there's no reason why you shouldn't have a talk with the old man. Let him tell you where he's hidden Fedka. I have my own account to settle with Fedka, he threw a bomb into my house. If you don't find him for me, you son of a bitch, I'll have raw hide belts cut out of your back!"

"May I whip him a little if his tongue won't loosen?"

"Why not?" Storozhev replied, sitting down on the step. "Whip him a little if necessary. But don't kill him, he's a hard-working man!"

Afonka took a swing with his long whip, whooped wildly, and, rolling his eyes to make

his face as frightening as possible, rushed at Kosobokov.

"Has Fedka been here?" he bellowed.

"He has," Kosobokov replied softly and shuffled his feet. "He and Listrat were here together."

"Then why didn't you say so, you old dog?" Storozhev shouted. "Why didn't you say so, you scoundrel?"

"You didn't ask me about Fedka, Pyotr Ivanovich. You asked about Listrat, that's true, and I told you. But you never mentioned Fedka, so why should I babble?"

"None of your jiggery-pokery now! Just listen to him trying to use double talk on me, the old devil. He's turned Communist! Speak up, where's Fedka?"

"I don't know," Kosobokov replied firmly.

Afonka took a swing and struck the old man.

"Going to talk?"

"No."

The lash of the whip once more rent the stillness of the clear, blue day. Kosobokov stood magnificent in his inflexibility. A single large, bitter tear trickled down his withered cheek.

Storozhev pulled out his revolver with shaking fingers, darted up the steps and, thrusting the muzzle into the old man's stomach, muttered hollowly, sputtering with rage:

"You scum! Holding back? I'll find him myself. I'll skin him alive before your very eyes!"

Kosobokov jerked his head. Storozhev crashed the butt of his revolver into his face and across his ribs. The old man gasped, crumpled up and sank slowly to the floor, bumping his head on the porch steps and smearing them with blood as he rolled down to the ground.

Storozhev stood swinging his revolver, then turned about sharply to his men and ordered:

"Raze it to the ground!"

The fellow in the torn army coat made a leap for the door, but Storozhev intercepted him and, breathing heavily, said:

"Turn everything upside down, but make sure you find Fedka! I'll kill you if you turn up without him!"

The fellow bounded over the fence into the garden.

Fedka lay buried in the straw and it seemed to him that the minutes dragged on endlessly, that this frightening silence was immeasurable.

The straw pricked his face, midges swarmed in his ears, but he could not stir because he thought a crackling din accompanied his every movement. Blood was pounding in his head, it

flooded his consciousness in a hot wave, and then everything went dark before his eyes, and his thoughts huddled into a vague black ball. Then his heart seemed to stop beating and the silence was fraught with an unbearable crackling noise. His mother's kindly face flitted by, there rose before his eyes an image long forgotten, a fragment of something once seen or experienced. Thoughts grew tangled and beat about in his consciousness, which could not contain them all, nauseating him and making him quiver with loathing.

In this watchful silence, in the infinite soundlessness of the clear, soft day, Fedka heard the sound of footsteps.

Men were groping through the bushes, they looked into the buildings and sheds, they examined every hollow and overgrowth. They searched through the whole of the garden, they came down to the pool and at last reached the grey stack of straw.

With bated breath, straining his muscles himself not knowing why, so that his whole body ached, his teeth clenched, Fedka listened to the voices, muffled by the straw.

"Shall we pitch it up?"

"To hell with pitching it. Let's poke through it. If he's there, he'll squeak."

"Hey, Afonka!"

"What?"

"Maybe he hasn't been here at all, eh?"

"Not here at all! You village idiot! Whose horse is Tatarin then? Everyone round about here knows his horse. And Vasily Vasilyevich, too, said he was with Listrat."

The men climbed on to the stack. In a flash the keen steel of a sword cut through the caked thickness of straw—Fedka felt the coolness of its touch close to his leg. He shrank into a ball and lay with staring eyes, remembering nothing.

Swords pierced the straw with a crunch, they cut through it, they slithered about Fedka's body, slipping past his arms or touching his hair. They writhed like snakes, hemming Fedka in with a vicious, spiky palisade.

His head was a ball of fire, his jaws paralyzed, his body numb.

"Don't scream, don't scream," thought hammered. "Don't scream," cried his heart. "Don't scream, don't give yourself away to be torn apart, to be tortured savagely and hideously, to die. . . ."

And then, just as his mind stopped working and Fedka began to sink into the grey, swirling fog of oblivion, a sword pierced his sleeve, passed through the living, brawny flesh of his

left arm and plunged deep into the ground. A hard tug—and the sword, wiped clean by the straw, glided up and away again.

Fedka had not screamed, he had not given himself away.

Storozhev, beside himself with rage, beat up Afonka, set fire to the farm and rode away.

The flame was devouring the house, the barn and the outhouses. Brilliant tongues of fire were leaping up high into the sky when Fedka crawled out from under the straw.

Kosobokov stood a little distance away from the fire, ghastly in the blood-red reflection cast by the flames. Tears were falling from his eyes. Somewhere among the trees Katerina was sobbing hollowly and hopelessly. Shreds of clothing, bedding, shattered tables and benches, and broken pots were strewn all around. Kosobokov saw Fedka, turned towards him and said:

"Fedka, son, you've turned grey!" And clinging to the boy, the old man broke into sobs that shook his whole body.

And Fedka remembered Vasily Vasilyevich, the miller. He bandaged his wounded arm, tucked a muffler round it, made sure his revolver was loaded, and started off for Ivanovka, through the shrubbery and across the fields.

Day was breaking when he knocked on the

miller's door. The miller opened it and saw Fedka.

"Walk ahead," Fedka said, "and say your prayers while you walk, I have no time to waste."



Chapter 16

The spring that year was warm and radiant. The soil, rich and sweating, had drunk its fill of spring waters, and in the mornings dense fog hung over the fields. The sun caressed the earth and smiled graciously upon the world.

Curly young grasses stretched up to the sun, a lark burst into song in the blue expanse of sky, in the woods the firs and pines shook off their drowsiness of winter, they spread out their branches and droned importantly, in conversation with the sun.

The breath of spring was sweet.

In the mornings, when rosy dawn lay in un-

even patches on the fields, the woods woke up to the passionate cries of birds.

It grew warmer with every day; timid, sparse winter crops now sprouted greenly on the hillocks.

The black, rich soil yearned for the peasant with a plough or a harrow or a seeder. And the peasant, not unlike the hunter seized of a spring with a nervous fever, came out into the fields, wandered over the dampish acres, picked up the heavy clods of earth in his hands, and breathed in the hot, succulent smell of the soil grown languid in the warmth of spring.

The peasant came out into the fields and went away again, sadly shaking his head—the fields had not been ploughed in the autumn, they would grow over with weeds and goosefoot.

Now would be the time to plough—the very time. But how could one plough, with regiments and detachments riding rough-shod over these sweating fields, this moist soil, with guns roaring and machine-guns spitting fire where nothing but a ploughman's song should be heard?

One fair day in March a messenger from Gorsky made his way to Kamenka. He rode through fields, across rivulets which had suddenly become swollen and boisterous, along dells flooded with spring waters. He changed

his horse in every village, riding it hard across the fields with disregard for roads, following byways and back alleys, and sleeping by fits and starts.

Antonov's face darkened when he read the lawyer's message.

"Dear friend," Gorsky wrote, "I am sending you some bad news. Lenin has abolished the food quotas in the Tambov Province in advance of the due time. Sorry to say the New Economic Policy has been put into life. The Party Congress has passed resolutions which are altering the whole turn of events. Stand firm! I have received certain instructions and am passing them on to you: it is essential and urgent that you spread out beyond the boundaries of the Tambov Province and, what is most important of all, rouse the Don to action. The present situation makes it necessary to join forces with the Cadets temporarily, and we must reconcile ourselves to this."

The Provincial Committee of the League of Labouring Peasantry rejected the S.-R. Central Committee's directives to unite with the Cadets. The Committee's bosses were afraid that once the peasants learned of the union between the S.-R.s and the Cadets, they would turn away from them, for the peasants had a strong dislike for the Cadets. Besides,

the kulaks still took a hopeful view of a possible war between the Bolsheviks and Europe.

"War will soon break out," Pluzhnikov tried to convince the committee men. "And once it does, the Bolsheviks will be bound to reinstitute the system of surplus food appropriation. Let's hold out till then."

And once again, agitators of the League of Labouring Peasantry, staff officers and unit commanders made for the villages and farmsteads in order to incite the peasants to rebel, and secure their help.

"We must introduce conscription," Antonov, pinched and hoarse from worry and loss of sleep, tried to convince his henchmen. "Since it's a peasants' war, let all the peasants go and fight it. Anyone able to carry a rifle must take one up. And if they refuse—shoot them to death! This is no time for fooling, there's real strength bearing down upon us."

The peasants remained stubborn, they would not listen to the agitators, they would not join the army and jeered at the conscription. At meetings they questioned Antonov's agents without batting an eyelid:

"Is it true that the Commune has abolished the surplus food appropriation system?"

Men came all the way to Kamenka to ask:

"Alexander Stepanovich, there's talk that

you are concealing those papers about the food quotas. There's rumour that the Bolsheviks want peace and you're obstructing it. Put an end to the fighting, it will soon be over anyway. Take pity on the people!"

Storozhev, like one insane, rushed about the district, setting fire to villages that refused to supply man-power for his regiments, flogging some of the disobedient and shooting others. But more and more often now he heard men shouting after him:

"Dirty dogs! Hiding the truth, are you? Afraid of it? You wait, Lenin will show you!"

Chapter 17

Antonov realized that the armed forces of the insurrection would be inevitably doomed to destruction if they were deprived of their supply bases and the support of the peasantry or at least some part of it. This support could only be shaken by new resolutions passed by the Party and the Soviet Government. Lenin's words about the indissolubility of the union of the working class and peasantry, about the interests of the average peasant being maintained, struck at the very principles on which the insurrection had been based. The Party pointed out Storozhev to the peasants and said:

"This is your real, your old-time enemy. It's people like Storozhev who invented bondage, than which there is nothing more frightening in the world. It's people like Storozhev who want to seize the land, the banks, the machinery, the power, and, ruining you, become rich themselves. It's they who nourish Antonov, so fight them both, the one and the other! The workman, and the poor and average peasants have one common enemy: the exploiter and his hireling. Let us exterminate the exploiters and their hirelings, and let us live the way people ought to live! Let us live in freedom, work in freedom, and be masters of the fruit of our labours. . . ."

But the words of the Party, Lenin's words spoken for the peasantry, never reached the villages of the Tambov Province. The whole country was aware of the resolutions passed by the Tenth Party Congress, but the peasants of Tambov only knew of the new decrees by hearsay. The whole country lived by these decrees and talked of them, but the decrees never penetrated to the Tambov Province. And wherever the peasants, on learning something, began to stir, Antonov's agents instantly appeared on the scene and once and for all plugged up the mouths of those who knew the truth and wanted to share it with the peasants.

The question was: how to begin the drive against Antonov? There were many plans and projects. The Party said: first and foremost, the people who had been enticed into participation in the insurrection by deceit, cunning or unscrupulous agitation, should learn of the New Economic Policy, of what Lenin had said and what the Party Congress and the Soviet Government had resolved. At the same time, the Party cautioned that it had to be borne in mind that this insurrection was an intricately woven affair, headed by sharp and unscrupulous men, that the knots tied by them could not simply be slashed—what could be easier? —they had to be disentangled; that the average peasant was not to be frightened away, but his confidence had to be won, he was to be helped to understand by what foul means he had been roped in to become one with the S.-R.s and kulaks....

Soon after the suppression of the Kronstadt mutiny, over a thousand Party members—agitators and propagandists—arrived in Tambov, sent by the Central Committee. Kotovsky's units, infantry, aeroplanes, armoured columns, artillery, and machine-gun carts followed close on their heels. The troops were stationed in strategic points from which they were to go into action.

The plan of the military operations was discussed thoroughly with the Communists of the Tambov Province, and only after a month, when it had been corrected and approved by the Party, it was put to the test.

It was decided to encircle the rebellious district with a ring of steel and, tightening the ring, to leave behind them in the occupied villages Red Army platoons reinforced with armed detachments formed of local Communists and volunteer peasant troops. These joint detachments were to reinstate Soviet rule, comb the forests, dells and shrubbery hunting out Antonovites, destroy their small bands and disarm them, confiscate the property of Antonovite commanders, and constantly keep in mind the essential point—the necessity of acquainting the peasants with the new resolutions passed by the Party and its new decrees.

In the meantime, armed forces were to annihilate Antonov's regiments, apprehend the bandits, shuffle the cards in Antonov's plans, prevent his units from leaving the Tambov Province, harass them continually, follow in close pursuit, crowd them up to river-banks, and force them into open battle.

And now Tambov was seething with activity. This old town, which had more than

once been threatened by Antonov's armies, still remembered the strenuous blast of the factory whistles sounding the approach of the insurgent troops.

Men were now arriving from out-of-the-way districts, from railway junctions and villages, from towns and work settlements, to attend the conference of the Provincial Party Committee. Hundreds of men who longed for a life of peaceful labour gathered together.They arrived from districts which were turbulent with strife, from the remote corners of the harassed province. Their speeches rang with passion and a will to conquer.

Five districts in the Tambov Province were ablaze with revolt. Forty thousand armed rebels roamed the fields that were covered with rank weeds, the uncared-for acres, the mute, deserted villages.

In May the Bolsheviks began their minutely thought-out campaign, both military and political, against Antonov. Aeroplanes came flying over the villages. People scurried to their homes for shelter, but the pilots dropped no bombs. Pamphlets came fluttering to the ground instead. These pamphlets told of the new taxation law, of the abolition of the surplus food appropriation system, of free trade. They were picked up with lightning

speed; they were smuggled into villages where the aeroplanes had not been, by men who came in secret for them.

Antonov gave peremptory orders to bring down the aeroplanes. Near Sampur one machine received a direct hit and crashed in a blaze of flames in the middle of a field.

Antonov's agitators drove the people to meetings with horse-whips, and blatantly harangued the new "swindle."

"Lenin has issued a new decree," Yegor Ishin yelled. "Don't you believe them, it's all a lot of lies! They'll squeeze you dry with this new taxation of theirs! Keep in with us, men. If die we must, let's die together!"

The Reds, meanwhile, were advancing steadily, taking one village after another. They appeared both during the day and at night, in the enemy's rear and flanks, in large formations and small companies, harassing Antonov and giving him not a moment's respite. The front line was everywhere, each village was a stronghold.

The troops advanced, leaving an armed guard behind them in the villages, elected Revolutionary Committees, and moved on, tightening the ring and driving Antonov's main forces into the centre of it.

The Revolutionary Committees hunted out

the emissaries of the League of Labouring Peasantry, confiscated the property of kulaks who had played an active part in the insurrection, and distributed it among the robbed families of the partisans. Newspapers made their appearance on every farm. They told of the new decrees, the new order and the new way of life.

The peasantry realized that this time Antonov would not slip away, could not escape. They saw a power that was stern towards the rebellious, indulgent towards the deceived, and tenderly solicitous towards the injured. They knew that Antonov's regiments were being annihilated one after another. And with every day they grew more firmly convinced that the new decrees were not lies, not trickery.

"They're out for Antonov good and proper, brothers!" Andrei Andreyevich exulted. "Lenin himself is after him. Antonov's cooked!"

People hissed Andrei Andreyevich into silence, they fled him like the plague, while he went about from house to house jubilantly shouting: the Bolsheviks are coming, coming to stay, the fight is over!

The peasantry began to waver.

The doom of the insurrection was sealed.

Chapter 18

Military Academy units arrived in the south, in Kirsanov, the wooded country whence Antonov had originally started out. Crack troops were stationed in the Inzhavino, Ramza and Kozlov villages and encamped in the meadowlands of Treskino, where two years before Antonov had risen to notoriety.

Antonov was compelled to quit Kamenka.

For the last time at the head of his own picked regiment he rode through the sombre streets of his capital, for the last time the peasants heard the rollicking accordions and the Antonovite couplet:

Open fire for the fray,
Alexander yells: "Hurray!
In the blood I'll stand knee-deep
But my power I will keep!"

Antonov still hung on to his power with a fast grip, he still wrote rousing appeals, he still bragged of his strength. But even the most loyal of the villages and farmsteads eyed him grimly now, and more and more men deserted his regiments and fled homewards. The stalwart crew of kulaks had no thought of surrender, of course, but was that man-power? With

the money-bags alone, the struggle would soon be over. Antonov was well aware of that.

Towards the end of May, he requested that a meeting of the committee be called.

Members of the committee, arriving from the more remote villages, informed the meeting that they had been asked by their villagers to solicit for cessation of the insurrection. Antonov bawled out the gathering in no uncertain terms. The delegates walked out in anger. Antonov's henchmen looked gloomy. Even Ishin was morose. Antonov was alone.

Hard times were setting in. Whole villages were breaking away from Antonov. His troops had nothing to eat and no horses to ride. He gave orders that horses and provisions be seized no matter what the cost, so long as they were obtained. And there really was no other way. For some time now the Reds had the provinces of Voronezh and Orel blocked and were keeping Antonov out of the province of Saratov. An impenetrable wall of guns and armoured cars was bearing down on the insurrectionists, the Red armies hemmed Antonov in towards the lake district, and he fled there like a wolf to his lair, to rest up, lick his wounds, muster his strength and stalk out on the kill again.

The top men of the insurrection met together and resolved to fight to the last, to continue

hammering it into the peasants that the latest decrees were a new bit of trickery on the part of the Bolsheviks. Ishin proposed cleaning out the more remote districts. Towards the end of May, Antonov ordered Maria Kosova to take over the command of Storozhev's frontier regiment. Storozhev handed over to Antonov all the armed forces stationed on the border-line of the Communist zone and delivered to him the corn and provisions, fodder and arms, which he had brought away from there.

One evening Storozhev presented himself at Headquarters, now hidden deep in a forest on the shore of Lake Ilmen. Antonov received him morosely, with a sullen frown creasing his forehead. He had been drinking hard lately.

He ordered Storozhev to make ready to go all by himself into the district bordering on the enemy zone; he was to maintain contact, to get the men together if possible, to make them hold out while there was breath left in their bodies, to make them remember that Antonov was alive, he was still struggling, he was still mighty.

Chapter 19

On the same day, the Provincial Committee of the League of Labouring Peasantry resolved to come to an agreement with the Don Cadets.

The conference between the Cadet representatives who arrived from the Don and the S.-R.s from Antonov's Staff lasted two whole days.

According to the agreement reached, Antonov was bound to dispatch a unit, seven thousand strong, to the Cossack settlements on the Don, where underground work was being carried out by the Cadet organizations.

The Cadets, on their part, bound themselves to help Antonov as best they could, if the undertaking proved successful. In that case, the area swept by the insurrection would be extended to several thousand square miles.

Antonov put Boguslavsky in command of the army formed of picked regiments. He had offered the post to Storozhev, but the latter had refused, preferring to accompany the troops as political commissar of the League of Labouring Peasantry.

The army reached the Khopyor, crossed it, and entered the Mikhailovsky farm near Uryupino. That same evening, Storozhev called a meeting of the Cossacks. Cadets crept out from underground to attend. The Cossacks were not open to persuasion, the meeting dragged on and, suddenly, out of the blue came the Reds.

For twenty-four hours, Boguslavsky resisted the onslaught of the Reds, but his strength was

running short. Driven hard against the river, he turned coward and fled. The Antonovites were beaten; some three thousand dead and wounded lay on the shores of the Khopyor.

Storozhev took over the command of the remaining force. He tried to get in contact with Shamov's Cadet unit, which was roaming the Don in those days, but in vain.

His army was melting away before his eyes: the Antonovites were felled by peasants and Communist detachments, their horses collapsed, the men were hungry and rancorous.

This ignominious battle lasted a fortnight.

Storozhev came back to Headquarters with two thousand men—survivors of the army of seven thousand.

Antonov heard his report in silence, chewing his thick, cracked lips, then turned and left him without a word.

Storozhev remained alone. He mounted his horse and rode away, himself not knowing where.



PART THREE

THE WOLF



Chapter 1

The village was deserted—everyone was out working in the fields. Only the old woman and the children remained at home. The sun was slowly setting on a mellow evening. Inside the church it was cool. Twilight filled the cupola. The waning sunlight lay in patches on the floor; a breeze carried in the sounds of evening through the open windows and door. Father Stepan was intoning the prayers quietly, as though to himself, seconded unhurriedly by the psalm-reader.

Storozhev stood hunched up in a corner. It was strange to see him there. People who had come to evening service with their own wor-

ries on their minds, looked at him askance and sighed deeply.

But he did not see their looks or hear their whispers and their bitter sighs. He was lost to the world, engrossed in his own thoughts.

When the service was over, Storozhev went out into the street, shuffling his feet as he walked.

A flock of sheep was making its weary way home, sending up clouds of warm grey dust and filling the village streets with their shrill bleating. A lonely cart loaded with fresh hay creaked after them. The sun spilled the last of its light on the cart. A dog was barking lazily, a cow plodded past, rolling her eyes fearfully, and a woman's piercing voice called:

"Vanya! Supper!"

Shadows lay across the grass-grown road. The setting sun seemed to gild anew the old cross on the belfry.

Close to the watchman's lodge a horse was lazily nibbling grass, twitching its ears and chasing off the evening's midges with its tail.

Storozhev adjusted the bridle, grunted, and climbed into his saddle. He picked up the reins and was about to ride home to supper, when suddenly a tow-haired boy sprang out from somewhere and thrust a letter at him.

"A horseman brought it," he said breathlessly.

The boy touched the brass fittings on Storozhev's sword-sheath, clicked his tongue in admiration, and vanished as suddenly as he had appeared.

Storozhev put on his spectacles, ripped open the envelope and read the letter. It was from Antonov. It said that the time had come for Storozhev to leave the village. He read:

"...Take to the forests and fields, destroy what the Communists are building, blow up bridges and roads, burn and kill. Let them know that we are alive, let them remember that soon we shall give the sign and once again the flame will sweep the country from end to end...."

"It's the end!" said Storozhev.

He knew that many regiments were already smashed, that his friends had perished, driven up to the Vorona and Khopyor, smothered by furious machine-gun fire. Kotovsky's divisions were sweeping down in a vast, irrepressible avalanche. Armoured cars and guns rumbled close behind. The Reds were close to Dvoriki, and so he had to creep into the woods and lurk in burrows, only to come out in the dark of night, set the villages alight with the blaze of

fires, hide in the ravines and forests again, and wait for the next signal.

The sun dived into the black clouds and for a moment the horizon was alight with a blood-red glow, then night descended. Storozhev rode home, took a change of clothing and two bags of rusks, bade his family a gruff farewell, and was gone. Soon after he left the village behind, he reined in his horse at the spot where, a mouth before, he had cached his ammunition. He carefully covered the hollow, strewing grass over it, stood beside it thinking a while, heaved a sigh, and rode on.

His horse, with drooping head, stepped slowly through the soft dust.



Chapter 2

Things began to look up for Listrat that spring. He established a liaison with the regular units of the Red Army, secured provisions for the men and fodder for the scrawny horses, which had become almost too weak to stand.

The men brightened up, the hardships of the winter began to recede into the past, and the future appeared more hopeful.

When the horses had put on some flesh, Sashka Chirikin resumed his former duties. With his troop of twenty young dare-devils, members of the Komsomol for the most part, Sashka raided the villages which had gone over to Antonov, hunting down Antonov's militiamen and committee men. He smuggled pamphlets and newspapers into the villages, occasionally venturing as far as Kamenka itself.

After what happened on Kosobokov's farm, Fedka became reckless to the point of foolhardiness. Listrat was often compelled to put him under restraint, but Fedka, as soon as his punishment was over, would once again plunge into the most hazardous exploits. Sashka Chirikin took a mild view of the youngster's rashness, he had a soft spot for people with spunk.

"He's growing into a valiant communard! A brave lad!" he would say to Listrat.

"Bravery is not brains," Listrat replied with a frown. "The fool will get caught before he knows it, you mark my words. I need every man I've got, and here he goes dashing about

like a madman. Blast him! I'll have you both locked up, you'll see!"

Sashka wanted Listrat to allow Lyonka to join his troop, but Listrat stubbornly refused. Truth to tell he did not quite trust his brother yet. Lyonka was eating his heart out for Natasha, he was longing to go to her, and might be capable of any foolishness just for the sake of a meeting. Listrat fancied that Lyonka was not even past going back to Antonov, if only he could see Natasha.

"He's an unreliable fellow," Listrat thought. "A scapegrace. Reeling this way and that. No, he can't be allowed to go scouting, he's got to be watched all the time."

And Listrat did not let him out of his sight, keeping him occupied with various fussy household jobs. Lyonka was busy all the time.

Listrat's volunteer Communist detachment numbered as many as a hundred and fifty men by that time. Many of the Communists had their families staying with them at the station. All of them had to be provided with food, lodging and fuel. Lyonka, whose duty it was to see to the people's needs, had a hundred jobs to do, and this took his mind off his own cheerless thoughts about Natasha.

Lyonka did not know what was happening in Dvoriki, they were cut off from the village

which was still held firmly by the Antonovites. Men came to Listrat from the villages neighbouring on Dvoriki, but as ill luck would have it, none of them knew anything about Natasha Bayeva.

Lyonka was tormented not only by thoughts of Natasha. At times it seemed to him that he had acted ignobly when he ran away from Antonov, at others he fancied that his brother and all the Communists mistrusted and resented him, that they did not consider him one of themselves, and shunned him.

To Fedka alone he could talk without reserve. Unembarrassed, he would ask the grey-haired youngster to explain to him all the things that were not clear, that he could not understand. And Fedka would read the Tambov newspaper to Lyonka, and share with him all that he himself had heard from the older men. There was the ring of passionate conviction in his words.

"Antonov will be done for, soon," Fedka said with the light of confidence in his eyes. "Lenin made such a speech at the Tenth Congress, it'll put the lid on Antonov!"

"Come off it, brother," Lyonka scoffed. "He made a speech and Antonov's done for? Speeches can do nothing to him."

"Idiot! It depends on the speech. Some speeches are worth a whole army! The war's over, food quotas are no longer necessary, crops are your own to do with as you like, the average peasant is offered friendship, confidence and respect—what more do you want? Antonov was using the surplus food appropriation as bait for the average peasant, and what's he got to catch him with now? Who should the peasant better stick to, d'you think: the working class or Storozhev?"

"Storozhev is a force, too," Lyonka mumbled.

"That's right, he is a force," Fedka shouted, "but he's got a triple force against him: the working class, the peasants and the Party! You just reckon what that comes to!"

But Lyonka did not see Fedka often, they talked in snatches and after these talks Lyonka longed for Natasha more than ever. From afar she appeared to him more sensible, wise and good than she really was.

Listrat had no time to talk with his brother. After its enforced idleness, the detachment was now becoming active. The influence of the Communists was spreading, the zone widening, and a busy time was ahead. Listrat could seldom be found at headquarters. He was wearing himself out with sleepless nights and with receiv-

ing peasants who came to see him more and more often now.

The peasants came in search of truth. Lenin's words to Andrei Andreyevich and Frol Bayev were repeated in all the villages. They stirred up the people and revived their hopes. They usually came to the station at night, stayed the following day and started back home the next night.

Listrat would look at them with a little smile, twirl his moustache, and ask them with a chuckle:

"Life getting a bit hard, eh? What brings you here, I wonder?"

At this the peasants groaned, instantly forgetting the speeches they had prepared beforehand, and broke out into a lot of drivel. This annoyed Listrat, who shouted at them:

"What are you babbling about? What do you want? If it's the truth you're after, why don't you say so?"

Although there was much he did not know himself, much he was not quite clear about, nevertheless he explained to them the resolutions passed by the Party Congress, and the new decrees issued by the Soviet Government.

The peasants departed homewards with pamphlets hidden in their hats. These pamphlets were afterwards passed from hand to

hand, read into holes, and they restored to the Soviet Government hundreds of men who had been deceived and led astray by Antonov's topmen.

One day, Frol Bayev came to the station. He had aged and looked very gloomy. He barged into Listrat's room when the latter was busy writing.

"Look who's back again! Frol Petrovich! What have *you* come for?" Listrat laughed when he saw Frol.

"I've come to ask you to give me a rifle. I want to fight for the Soviets in my old age."

"No, I won't give you a rifle, Frol Petrovich."

"Why not? You don't trust me?"

"I almost trust you," Listrat answered seriously. "I trust you and so it's not a rifle I'll give you, but something more important. You've got to stay on at the village. Is Storozhev still running riot?"

"He left the other day. He's been sitting in the belfry like a barn-owl, staring his eyes out, but the other day he rode off and never came back. Andrian let slip something about his going off for good, that he won't come back at all."

"Well that's fine. In other words you're free to act. Go along to the villages, Frol Petrovich, take Andrei Andreyevich to help you, and

start setting up Soviet rule little by little, bit by bit. Those are my instructions. If you carry them out, my trust in you will be complete."

"Something like a commissar I'm going to be, eh?" Frol asked with a smile.

"Try a higher note—you'll be a representative of the Soviet state. Pick out some troopers for me among the peasants, so that when we come back you'll have a regular platoon. We shall hunt out the Antonovites."

The telephone rang, Listrat picked up the receiver. The news he heard delighted him.

"Just listen to this, Frol Petrovich! Sergei Ivanovich Storozhev is on his way here. He's been to Moscow, they say. Drop in here this evening and hear what he's got to say. You must excuse me now, I've got to go."

Listrat hastily pulled on his black sheepskin coat trimmed with grey, his Cossack cap, tightened his belt, slung the leather strap of his pistol on his shoulder, and went out.

Frol Petrovich followed him out and in the door he came face to face with Lyonka.

"Hello, you warrior," Frol said glumly. "My, what a brave lad! So you skipped, eh? Ruined the girl and slunk away? I'll learn you.... Storozhev was mad at you, terribly mad!"

"I've done no wrong! It's not Natasha I ran away from, it was Antonov I fled! I just

couldn't stand it any more. Forgive me, Frol Petrovich. As soon as this war is over, I'll make it right by Natasha."

"Good for you, I'll say—leaving Antonov and not getting tangled in a petticoat," Frol said, appeased; "out for what you did to the wench, I'll give you a hiding."

"Give me a hiding, I won't mind," Lyonka said humbly.

Frol laughed.

"How is she?"

"She's all right. She's staying with your mother, growing herself a belly. But you'll see, God will make you pay for this."

Lyonka looked downcast.

"Now, now, don't take it so hard, my lad. Don't worry, everything will come out right."

Lyonka made no reply. "Everything will come out right," he thought. "But when?"

Frol stood beside him for a moment, then put on his cap and left.

Chapter 3

Wherever the Party sent Sergei Ivanovich Storozhev, wherever he happened to be, he always fought well, conscientiously and composedly. He regarded war as a means to an end,

he saw War Communism as a necessity which, after it had served its purpose, would have to make way for a different order of things. He heard Lenin's statements and public addresses, and in Lenin's words he found an explanation for what he had not completely understood before.

Closely connected as he was with the village, he realized that the Party's policy of cementing the friendship and unity of the working class and the peasantry could not have been more timely.

The speech he addressed from the platform at the Congress created a great impression. During the interval Lenin called him and asked:

"One minute, one minute, have I heard right? Your name is Storozhev, isn't it? Do you come from the Tambov Province?"

"That's right, Comrade Lenin."

"And the village?"

"Dvoriki, Comrade Lenin."

"Wasn't there a Flegont Lukich Storozhev among your relatives?"

"He was my uncle, Vladimir Ilyich, the youngest son of my grandfather, Luka Lukich Storozhev. Both Flegont and Luka Lukich used to tell us about you often."

Lenin put his arm around Sergei Ivanovich's shoulders.

"My dear, how is it I didn't think of it before? You are very much like Flegont Lukich!" He paused and his eyes grew sad. "Your uncle was a devoted member of our Party, one of its builders." He then said: "All his early youth passed before my eyes, and mine before his. Yes, he was an invaluable man. In the underground we used to call him our 'brave man,' he was my loyal helper for many years.... You have brought back to me the memory of my early days, those early years of trial and struggle.... I remember your grandfather too: he was a powerful man, I saw him twice and I still have a vivid recollection of him—a man of the people, who had come to understand so much, and who laid down his life for the people...."

"And my brothers—Semyon and Pyotr? You must remember Pyotr, he once came to see you in Petrograd about a lawsuit ... that was a long time ago!"

"Certainly, certainly, I remember him, such a sinewy, dark young man."

"He's with Antonov now, Vladimir Ilyich."

"Is he really? And what's his rank?"

"He's commanding a regiment."

"In other words—an Antonovite general, eh?" Lenin smiled bitterly. "Just think—what

a family! That's revolution for you. Three brothers—three destinies. Three generations—three purposes, three different roads! I have spoken to the Tambov peasants, the things they tell me are dreadful."

"The situation there is very grave," Sergei Ivanovich said.

"Of course. Well then, when the Congress is over start for home. Before you leave, come and see me, will you?"

Lenin shook Sergei Ivanovich's hand and went back to his chair at the conference, which was resuming its session.

Sergei Ivanovich could not go back to Tambov immediately after the Congress was over. Together with the other delegates he led the men to storm Kronstadt, was wounded in the final battle, spent a fortnight in hospital, and it was not till the beginning of April that he reached Tambov.

Having been appointed chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of the district of Dvoriki, he visited the station held by Listrat and his detachment of Communists.

That evening Sergei Ivanovich spoke at a meeting of the communards. He was received with enthusiasm. Everyone knew him there: Listrat, Chirikin and Nikita Semyonovich had

fought side by side with him against Denikin and worked with him in the Dvoriki Soviet. They knew his stern inflexibility, his sensible bravery, his powers of concentration, through which flashed an occasional gleam of the typical Storozhev temperament. Here, as in his own family, he was generally called "Sailor," just as Listrat was called "Soldier" by the majority.

Everyone wanted to come up closer to Sergei Ivanovich, to hear the news he brought from Moscow, from Lenin himself.

Tall, like all the Storozhevs, thickset, even corpulent, his face tanned bronze, resembling his elder brother in many respects, the Sailor stood surrounded by his countrymen. He loved all these people, his old friends and comrades-in-arms; he had to keep his emotion in check, for he was deeply moved by the reception he was given. Although he was modest by nature, he found the affection shown him by these men very pleasing. His eyes misted over and his voice broke when he spoke.

Frol Petrovich stood beside him and repeated over and over again:

"Look at that! Just look at that! Good old Sailor, he got as far as Lenin himself!"

The fact that Frol Bayev happened to be at the station pleased Sergei Ivanovich more than

anything else. He saw before him that very same "middle peasant" over whom all the trouble had broken out, he was an apparition from the "other world"—a world in which he had seen Pyotr but yesterday, a world where only a short while ago he had seen Antonov....

As he scanned Frol's weather-beaten face, Sergei Ivanovich found himself thinking that he was beginning to understand peasantry in a novel sort of way. Lenin's words about the tragic destiny of three brothers came back to him. He had not thought about it before, but when Lenin said that short and never-to-be-forgotten sentence, Sergei Ivanovich saw himself and his family with the eyes of a stranger, as it were.

His grandfather—Luka Lukich—a huge old man of powerful emotions, who had seen Lenin in his youth, a fighter for the rights of the peasants, a man who had spoken to the tsar, had been flogged on the tsar's orders for revolt in 1902, a member of the First State Duma.... He rose up against the tsar and died.

Uncle Flegont left his family in 1892. He went in search of truth, in search of the link that would unite the workmen and the peasants in a common struggle. He came to Lenin and became a true soldier of the young Bolshevik Guards. He had guided Sergei, his

youngest nephew, in his footsteps, and had shown him Lenin's way....

Sergei remembered his meek, sickly father, Ivan Lukich, who died in 1903, after whose death, the Storozhev family scattered in different directions, each one taking a different road.

Pyotr had gone his own way—greedy for acquisition, a strong-willed man who admitted of neither pity nor hesitation in attaining any goal he set for himself. An inveterate oppressor, a kulak through and through....

His brother Semyon—a gloomy, enigmatic man—whom was he for? Whom did he side with? What were his thoughts? What did he want, what were his views? Perhaps in his heart he, too, was like Pyotr?

And finally there was himself—Sergei Ivanovich Storozhev—an irreconcilable enemy of Pyotr and his like, merciless towards them and resolute in his convictions.

The Sailor saw the Revolution, its past, present and future, reflected in his own family as in a drop of water, he saw all the magnitude of the struggle, all its grandeur.

He saw his brother Semyon—enigmatic, glum, for ever nursing some grievance—as a representative of a certain type. Suddenly the word "ally" lost its abstractness for him. Semyon Ivanovich Storozhev—here was the

typical "ally." And the scales of the revolution oscillated, depending upon whether Semyon became the ally of his brother Pyotr or his brother Sergei.

Frol Bayev was an almost perfect copy of Semyon. How profoundly contradictory were the sentiments rooted in that man! He seemed to be one of them, "our man," yet he had followed Antonov for many months, and had believed in him. But today he wanted to come in with the Bolsheviks. Or take that coachman, Nikita Semyonovich, for instance—a lover of choir singing, member of the first peasants' committee in the village which was led by the S.-R. school-teacher, Olga Mikhailovna.... That was a long time ago, nineteen years past. Nikita Semyonovich's career was a complex one. A squabbler and a brawler, the bigwig at meetings, he had been unable to subject himself to the discipline of the Party. And now he was a volunteer, a scout, a communard, who nevertheless still hankered after the choir. Or take Lyonka, who had run away from Antonov.... Or Fedka, avenging his grey hair.... All of them were part of the great struggle, the triumph of the will and the spirit.... But would there be no more trials for the revolution? Would there be no other war, a hundred

times more cruel, complicated and frightful, perhaps? These men will come with us!

As these thoughts whirled through Sergei Ivanovich's head, it seemed to him that only now he had taken a real look into the innermost secrets of the struggle, only now he had seen the entire clot of contradictions, the most intricate movements of the human soul; and only now that he had gained complete understanding of Lenin's words he had traversed that sphere of life in which everything was naive, cut into squares by a puerile hand, distributed upon little shelves of labelled social conceptions and diagrams.

Although a grown man, he seemed to become a grown man once again, but of a different content now. Everything that appeared simple to him before, became complicated. He began to perceive that which gave life movement, which brought man close to one class or another, or removed him from it.

While delivering his address to the communards, in which he spoke of the Congress, and the means which the Party had resolved to use in order to defeat Antonov, Sergei Ivanovich studied the faces before him with ever keener attention.

What a variety of thoughts, desires, characters and moods! And all of it had to be united

in the name of one great cause: in the name of the struggle against the evil personified by his brother Pyotr, in the name of the revolution and its victory, in the name of the future of these people, the future of generations to come....

That night Sergei Ivanovich came into Listrat's baggage car and held a long conversation with Frol Bayev in Listrat's presence.

It seemed to Listrat that what Sergei Ivanovich asked Frol about were mere trifles, such as: where the peasants were getting their salt and matches from, how much rye had been sown in the autumn, how much the miller was charging them, whether the millet thresher was working. As for Antonov and his henchmen, Sergei Ivanovich asked only one or two questions, and listened to Frol's replies somewhat absently.

"It's all very well, him being our ally and so forth," Listrat thought as he listened to the two men talking. "An ally he may be, but you've got to watch him like a hawk. And anyway the devil alone knows them. Frol Bayev was the first of the Gryaznoye men to sign the protocol of allegiance to Antonov. He used to work on Antonov's committees, had retreated from the Reds, had gone to Lenin in search of truth, had been flogged by Antonov.... The

mind of man is inscrutable indeed! Of course, it's better that Frol should belong to us wholeheartedly and not to Storozhev, there's no question about that. Say what you want, he'll be a great help anyway."

Sergei Ivanovich let Frol go at about two in the morning and, to Listrat's amazement, gave him no instructions whatsoever. But when Frol turned to say good-bye to him Listrat saw how changed the man was, he looked as if he had just received a cartload of gifts.

"So that's the way things are," Sergei Ivanovich said pensively. "The most difficult times are only just beginning, Listrat Grigoryevich."

"And we thought they were over."

"They won't be over very soon. We have no end of enemies."

"Never mind, we'll hold out," Listrat said confidently.

Next morning Sergei Ivanovich proceeded to organize a Revolutionary Committee. A week later, Listrat's detachment, reinforced with an infantry company, left the station and took up its position in the village of Semyonovka, some sixteen miles from Dvoriki.

On the very first day, Sergei Ivanovich called a meeting of the Semyonovka peasants and

requested them to elect a village Soviet. On his suggestion, this newly formed Soviet got busy at once making preparations for late autumn sowing and carrying out the necessary repairs on ploughs and sowers.

A few days later, the peasants, with an armed guard of Red Army soldiers and commanders, set out for the ploughfields.

The detachment stayed only a short while in Semyonovka. The Revolutionary Committee moved on, leaving behind them small groups of Red Army men and volunteer troops formed from among the peasants.

Sergei Ivanovich spent all his time in the village Soviets, or out in the ploughfields, or with Listrat's detachment. He went out on reconnaissance trips with Sashka Chirikin, entered and searched the homes of Antonov's active supporters, and interrogated those of his henchmen who had surrendered.

The detachment reached Dvoriki on a bright day in April. Listrat and Lyonka rushed home to their mother.

Aksinya told them that Natasha had gone back home a week before. Lyonka almost burst into tears.

"Wait a bit, you ass," Listrat comforted his brother. "We'll be going to Gryaznoye in just a week. Stop worrying."

Sergei Ivanovich went home too, and had a long private talk with Andrian.

Andrian, a dried-up old man with an austere, brown face, berated Sergei Ivanovich harshly for the enmity that had come into their family, for the fact that brother had risen against brother. He was demanding something from Sergei, but what it was he did not know himself. Then he suddenly asked Sergei to do no harm to Praskovya, Pyotr's wife, and the children.

"But we don't fight children," Sergei Ivanovich said peaceably. "Children don't necessarily grow up to be like their fathers, you know."

Andrian hugged him at parting.

In the evening there was a meeting in the school-house. Andrei Andreyevich was elected chairman of the village Soviet, and Semyon Ivanovich Storozhev and Nikita Semyonovich as its members. The community, however, rejected Sergei Ivanovich's proposal to compile lists of Antonovites and of all those involved in the insurrection.

"We are all involved," said a black-bearded man, who had once been flogged on Storozhev's orders, "what lists could we compile?"

Sergei Ivanovich smiled wryly, and Listrat whispered in his ear:

"And you talk of allies.... Gosh, what wily devils!"

"Never mind," said Sergei Ivanovich, "not all at once ... they'll come round."

Chapter 4

Listrat kept putting off going to Gryaznoye for he had no connections in the village and, being circumspect, he did not want to run the risk, although Lyonka, with his longing for Natasha, would not leave his brother in peace, pestering him to go.

At last a message came through from Gryaznoye to say that a Red Army detachment had stopped there on its way from Sampur and was cleansing the place of Antonovites.

Listrat reported to the Revolutionary Committee, talked something over with Sergei Ivanovich, and gave orders to get ready for the march. He told Lyonka that they were going to Gryaznoye to reinstate Soviet rule and would remain there a long time. Lyonka practically yelled for joy, hugging Listrat and badgering him until he made him angry.

Lyonka was on duty at the Revolutionary Committee. He was alone except for Listrat who was holding forth on the porch with the aged Andrian for an audience.

"And you were always in doubt—where are the Guards, you said." Listrat prodded Andrian's ribs with his fist. "I was the only one in this building, and look how many we are now! The Guards! Here are the Guards for you!"

"Yes, that's true, you are many." Andrian sighed.

"What about that brother-in-law of yours, still out on the roam?" Listrat asked after a short silence.

"Still out." Andrian sighed more deeply. "He's the ruin of us, the old fool."

"Oh no, don't say he's a fool. He's a bloody scoundrel, and not a fool."

"They're finished?" Andrian asked.

"They sure are."

"You'd better go and get ready," Lyonka called to Listrat. "Sitting there, chatting away."

"Yes, I'd better. Come on, Andrian old man, let's have a smoke. I've got some first-rate tobacco."

Lyonka was left alone. The sun was creeping down to the west, the day was exceptionally mellow and sweet. As usual Lyonka's mind was on Natasha, he was counting the months and it worked out that she was to be confined any day now.

Suddenly, he heard the clatter of hôrsehoofs

outside. The rider came to a stop in front of the building and shouted, calling whoever was there to come out. Lyonka hurried out.

"Where's Sergei Ivanovich?" the man asked, hoarse and panting.

"Having supper."

"Give him this message, it's urgent. It's from Gryaznoye, there's trouble there."

"What's happened?" Lyonka asked.

"Some girl, Natasha Bayeva, strangled a Red soldier. She's sitting in a straw stack with a revolver and howling: 'Don't come near, I'll kill you,' like a beast." And whipping his horse hard, the man rode away.

Lyonka paled, trembled and cried out.

"What are you yelling about, stupid?" asked Sashka Chirikin, who had come to relieve Lyonka.

Lyonka made a dash for his house. Sashka, utterly puzzled, sat down on the porch steps and lighted a cigarette. Lyonka bounded into his house, grabbed his saddle, undid the straps with shaking fingers, led his mare out from the shed, saddled it, sprang back indoors, snatched up his revolver, leapt into the saddle and galloped away in a flash.

"Where are you off to, hell, stop!" Listrat shouted after him.

Lyonka did not hear or see anything, he kept striking his mare in a frenzy. One thought alone drilled into his brain: she killed him, she killed him, she killed him. . . .

"She killed him," he groaned. "What will I do now?"

The horse raced on at break-neck speed as though she too had been infected with her master's frenzy, as though she too understood that they must hurry, hurry. . . . Straining her neck, the mare flew along with Lyonka, and the wind whistled in her ears.

It was twilight when Lyonka reached Gryaznoye. He rushed into the house—it was empty. He heard frightened whispering in the yard, where the pale, shaking men had crowded.

Frol was among them.

"Well?" Lyonka, fuming with rage, advanced on them and pulled out his revolver. "What do you want here?"

"You son of a bitch!" Frol screamed. "It's all because of you, you scoundrel, you flogging-boy!"

"Get out of here!" Lyonka said harshly, with icy determination.

"We're watching her," responded a puny peasant armed with an axe.

"Did you hear me tell you to get out?" Lyon-

ka's eyes flashed. "I'll watch her myself, understand?"

The men, glancing about them warily, went out and took Frol with them.

Lyonka found Natasha in the field. She was sitting close to a straw stack running her fingers through the stalks with lightning speed.

"Lyonka!" she shrieked wildly and fell fainting into the straw.

She came to with her head on Lyonka's shoulder. Her pinched and pallid face was dreadful, there was nothing of the old Natasha left except her huge black eyes, and they were mad now.

"Lyonka, Lyonka, Lyonka," she repeated rapidly, her whole body shaking. Lyonka felt himself shaking too. "Now they're coming. Now they're going to take me! Now, now! They've sent for you, Lyonka, Lyonka darling, help, hide me, dearest!"

He put his arms about her, kissed her, stroked her hair the way he used to do in those long past, happy days; she quieted down and stopped shaking.

"They told me, Storozhev told me you found someone else, a Communist woman." She suddenly burst out sobbing and slumped back on the straw again.

. .

"Hush, hush," Lyonka whispered, "hush now!"

She clung to him, pressing her large stomach to his body. She told him of her scorching bitterness, her hurt and anger, of the days and nights dragging so slowly, of the hatred she had come to feel for the one she was carrying under her heart, of the coming of the young Red soldier the night before—he was as young as Lyonka—of the way she had filled the room with charcoal fumes, and his suffocating in his sleep.

"It's you I was thinking of, Lyonka. It was they who led you astray, they who unsettled you, they who made my life a curse.... If there had been five of them, I'd have killed all five...."

"Hush, hush, hush," Lyonka whispered through clenched teeth, "hush!"

"You'll stay with me, won't you?" Natasha went on talking. "You've run away from them, haven't you? You'll take me away from here? They're coming to get me! Lyonka, they're coming!" A look of utter madness came into her eyes, she tossed and beat about, moaning and gnashing her teeth.

After a while she calmed down, oblivious of everything but Lyonka. She kissed and caressed him passionately, she took his hand

and placed it on her stomach, and he could feel the heart-beats of new life within....

But madness possessed her once more and she cried out, and then it passed again and she lay quietly beside Lyonka. She fell asleep at last, sobbing, shuddering and muttering incoherently.

Lyonka watched her and wept bitterly; his tears rolled down his face and fell on her cheek. Lyonka wept for his murdered love, he wept because he would probably never be able to forget, never forgive her. He was thinking that any moment now they would be here to take her away, and everyone would know what sort of a girl, what sort of a wife he had, they would point their fingers at him, and his comrades' eyes would be angry, accusing.

Lyonka pulled out his revolver and felt for Natasha's heart with his hand. He heard it beating evenly and loudly, and pressed the muzzle to it.

But he could not pull the trigger.

All at once, Natasha's entire life stood clearly before his eyes, and the whole of his own. easy, carefree life passed in review before him.

"Then who is to blame for this misfortune," he thought, "for this wretched calamity? Who is responsible for Natasha? Wasn't it I who praised Antonov's teachings to the skies and

then abandoned her without telling her the truth, the real truth by which I now live? Wasn't it I who granted Storozhev his life so that he could ruin my own life and Natasha's?"

Natasha slept. Holding her close to him, Lyonka stayed up all night in the straw stack, until the arrival of Sergei Ivanovich.

In the morning Natasha had another seizure. When the fit passed, she lay pale and wan, recognizing no one, softly crooning a lullaby.

They took her to the hospital. The same day she gave birth to a boy, and her sanity returned to her.



Chapter 5

Well-nigh on three weeks now Storozhev had been wandering through the shrubbery and coppices, passing his days and the fleeting summer nights in the glens and gullies.

Summer lightning flashed in the sky and the world went on its way while he sat by his fire with emptiness in his heart.

His horse plodded heavily on, slowly munching grass, a dog barked somewhere very far away, the new moon shed a cool light on the earth.... And stillness reigned.... It was as if there never had been any battles, as if no shots had been fired, no alarm-bells, no blazing fires, as if the world had been safe in the arms of loving peace for a long, long time....

Sometimes, in the night, Storozhev would steal up to a village. The Reds were already there. He peered for a long time into the darkness, trying to pierce the profound silence and the gloom to see what sort of life was going on there. Sometimes with malicious daring he crept close to a village, and then crackling flames would flare up, the alarm-bell boomed and shots roared.

And after that—obscurity again, with nothing but a gentle breeze playing in the rustling aspen leaves.

Once, when watering his horse, he saw his own gaunt, unshaven face reflected in the still pool. His hair had turned to silver on the temples and the white threads were crawling upwards.

"A wolf," he thought. "I'm getting old!"

He had indeed aged during those twenty days, his cheeks had fallen in, his eyes had sunk deeper into their sockets and flashed with malignant fire from under his eyebrows. He fed on rusks. His sons did not often bring him food to the appointed places. Longing for a drink of milk, he once came up to a herd of cattle. The deaf and dumb cowherd began to mutter something, wave his arms about and shout. Storozhev flew into a rage, beat him up with his whip, picked out a cow, milked it and drank his fill of fresh milk.

Rye was already filling out and he was still roaming around his native village.

There were other men like Storozhev, remnants of defeated regiments, lurking in the shrubbery, in the ravines and the distant, abandoned ploughfields. He came upon their tracks: stamped out fires, scraps of food, shells and torn footcloths. But he never came across a single one of them; he searched for them long and wearily, but never found them.

Thus time went on, tedious, wordless, sultry days. At night he could not sleep, tormented by memories of his lost piece of land near Lebyazhye Lake, the flourishing estate, his shattered

dreams. A scorching, barren fury welled up in his heart, and then the light of the fire could not pierce through the black wall of nostalgia and despair.

One night he rode up to his home. His strength was spent, his reason could not overcome desire. He left his horse in the bushes and noiselessly, like a wild beast, he crept along paths and balks. He lay taut as a wire, listening to the sounds of movement in the night, then crawled on, wriggling on his belly, his eyes wide open, his face and hands burning from the sting of nettles and the luxuriant growth of red thistles.

Close to the threshing-barn, where his wife and little Kolka were wont to sleep in the summertime, he stumbled over a shaggy body. It was a dog. It woke up scenting a man and growled. Storozhev seized it by the throat and strangled it.

His senses reeled, stunned by this encounter. Nausea gripped his throat; Storozhev nearly collapsed. He pulled himself together, his blood throbbed faster, every cell in his body thirsted for battle and for life! And to collapse meant—to perish.

With trembling hands he smoothed his hair, opened the door of the barn and walked to-

wards the far corner where a bed had been made in the sleigh.

Covering Praskovya's mouth with his hand, he woke her up.

"It's me. Don't talk. I can't ... I can't go on ... Parasha ... it's torture...."

He dropped his head on her breast and the two of them sobbed without words for a long while, close to each other.

Tramping through the shrubs and gullies one hot day, Storozhev came upon a man. He was lying on his face, his legs apart and his arms bent grotesquely. A clot of blood had dried on his temple, and worms were swarming round it.

With the toe of his boot Storozhev turned the man's face up. He flinched as if an icy rod had been pressed to his spine: the man was Karas, his assistant, his friend and adjutant, Karas, the jolly accordion-player, who had deserted from the army in 1917. He had evidently been killed quite recently, the day before perhaps, this lover of gay streets, a brawler and a trouble-maker, a drunkard who had always been the executioner in his regiment. The body was fresh, untainted by decay.

Buckling suddenly as under a great load, Storozhev walked away, got into his saddle

and rode off without looking back. His mare carried him through glens, hollows and fields, giving a wide berth to villages and farmsteads, instinctively aware that death was watching for them there.

And now fires broke out in the villages every night. Storozhev slipped past sentries like a shadow. He stole towards the cottages of the Communists, to warehouses, to the village Soviets and the co-operative stores, he fired out of the darkness and, hiding on a hillock in the bushes, watched the panic die down gradually, cooling off.

Near Sampur he bound and gagged the railway guard and dispossessed him of his tools. He tampered with the railway line and then watched the cars crowd one on top of the other in an animate, frenzied madness, while sparks flew from the fire high into the sky.

But his look grew ever more sombre and the fire was waning in his black eyes. The loneliness and silence about him remained unbroken. His friends, scattered about the shrubbery and ravines, were not to be found—were they all killed, or seized in a fight? Had they surrendered to the Reds?

"No, not that," he thought, "not that. . . ."

Tomorrow new trains would run down the line, new cottages would spring up next to those he had burned down. And the villages maintained their gruff silence—you could not tell whom they were for, with whom they sided, why didn't they rise against the Communists? Where were the leaders of the insurrection? Where was Antonov? Where was he hiding, what was he waiting for?

"Has the sound of alarm died down for ever? Will cavalry units no longer come galloping across the meadows and fields, will their horses no longer trample down the crops? Can it be that peace has come to stay in the villages, that the war is over? Can it be that the land by Lebyazhye Lake will for ever remain in the hands of others?" Storozhev asked himself, and all his nights long he searched his mind for an answer to these questions, and could not find one. He felt that an invisible ring was drawing closer and closer about him, that the fields and dells left free for him to roam were growing fewer and fewer.

He became nervous and apprehensive, he sat up nights listening hard to the sounds of a peaceful world, and he could not sleep.

Chapter 6

He woke up late, it was quite light. The morning, bright and fresh with dew, was welcoming in the sultry day with its high dry wind.

An ocean of green rye rolled away to the far blue horizon, the sun was shining upon the fields which had awakened cooled by the night and moistened with dew.

A man in a Red Army cap was riding along the balk, swaying in his saddle. He held a rifle on his knees and sang a song:

In Taganrog, in Taganrog,
A grievous thing occurred,
They killed a Cossack young and bold
In far-off Taganrog.
A shroud of linen, white and thin,
Across his face they drew,
And 'neath a shrub they buried him,
A lonely, yellow broom...

The melody glided over the green waves, it left the waves behind and soared up to the sun.

The sun was smiling down on the man, playing upon the steel of his rifle. The breeze softly fluttered a strand of his grey hair, which had escaped from under his cap. His horse, in har-

mony with its master's mood, stepped merrily, nibbling the roadside grass and munching it languidly, to satisfy a whim rather than hunger, it seemed.

The song was sung by a man who was feeling light-hearted and happy that bright morning. He had many such green, sunny, beautiful days ahead of him, and so he sang.

A shot rang out.

The man seemed to crawl reluctantly down from his saddle. The horse shied and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Storozhev came out from the shrubbery. He saw a youngster lying on his back amid the tranquil green, bathed in dazzling sunlight. A smile had frozen on his face. He was dead. Blood spurted from a wound in his head and trickled down in a little warm stream.

He stood gazing at this youthful, hairless face, into the deep blue eyes, as blue as Kolka's, and at the grey hair.

"Why, it's Fedka!" Storozhev recognized the murdered boy. "Fedka the scout!"

He knelt beside him and looked closely at Fedka's grey hair, crushing it in his fingers. Then he remembered that clear day in spring, Kosobokov's farmstead and the long tongues of fire. He remembered how he had searched for Fedka that day and failed to find him.

"And now I've caught him and killed him," Storozhev thought. "Why? Why do I kill and burn? Why do I prowl the countryside like a lone wolf, hunted down by men?"

He squirmed out of the bony, tenacious clutches of fear and forcefully called up the image of Karas with his livid face and grotesquely bent arms.

"To hell with you," he croaked. "One dog less."

Suddenly a song floated in on the wind from afar: a cavalry unit was singing it.

Storozhev slipped into the bushes.

Chapter 7

That day they killed the horse under him. He was alone.

Chapter 8

He was making away from his pursuers when a chance shot hit and pierced the throbbing heart of his mare. She crashed down and breathed her last rattling breath. Storozhev looked at her and winced, as if a nerve in his tooth were raw, and a dim tear rolled down his cheek.

The mare had served her master loyally for many years. Her mighty shoulders could have worked much longer, pulling a plough. Her end came on a balmy day, on a balk grown over with whitish wormwood, dusted, it seemed, with powder.

Storozhev lost a true friend. He had grown accustomed to her rhythmic gait in the hours of mute expectation, for he still expected that night would pass, and in the morning the world would wake up to the roar of guns, his old atamans would come out of their hiding-places and muster thousands of men under the banner of "Land and Freedom," the banner of the Constituent Assembly.

Land! The coveted land near Lebyazhye Lake spread out before his eyes. He came there often. This rich soil might be his again, it might yield its wealth to him alone if only he were free to regain possession of it, to plant his feet firmly on its balks once more, to fence it in with a strong wall. If only he had this freedom!

"But I am not striving for freedom for myself alone," he thought. "Let anyone who wins the right, tend his land and cling to his rich new acres, the only thing is not to let it out of your grasp, or let another take it from you. And if you don't have a grip of steel or the

fangs of a wolf in your mouth, then go to the one who is greedy and powerful, go to him as farm-hand, and water his cornshoots with your own sweat, learn how to be a master even though you're fated to die a beggar and a fool. . . ."

Thus mused Storozhev. And meanwhile the rolling acres near Lebyazhye Lake were weighted down with heavy clusters of millet and a golden expanse of ripened rye—others' millet, others' rye!

"No," he screamed, "the land will be mine again!"

He fell on the ground, clawed the dry clods with his fingers, buried his face in the warm furrows, jumped up and screamed wildly again:

"You will be mine! Mine! We are not dead yet!" And the wind picked up his cries and carried them away.

One evening, a man in a long white shirt appeared on the field near Lebyazhye Lake. He walked through the rye, cleaving its dense green wall with his chest and, thrusting his beard upwards to the sun, he smiled. The breeze played with his long hair, the setting sun warmed him, and the world, fecund and abundant, was serene and happy.

Storozhev saw the man and hid in the violent growth of burdock and bitter wormwood by the roadside. When the man came nearer, he saw it was Andrei Andreyevich. He was walking along the balk and the smile on his face, covered with a grey stubble, reciprocated the smile of the setting sun. He was barefooted, the neck of his shirt was undone, and he was talking aloud to himself:

"Bless them! The ears are good, oh how good they are, the dears.... What a harvest! Not a bad piece of land the state has given us."

Andrei Andreyevich paused a moment almost beside Storozhev, scratched his ribs and started off again with a skip.

"Good land, is it?" Storozhev snarled. "So you think you own my land, you swine? Stop, you!" he roared after Andrei Andreyevich, jumping out of the grass.

The old man whirled around as though a spring had been released, saw Storozhev and started crossing himself and muttering a prayer very, very rapidly.

"That's right, cross yourself, you scum! Is this your lot?"

"Mine," Andrei Andreyevich whispered in a barely audible voice. "It's a good piece of land, bless it."

"It is a good piece of land, only it's not for the likes of you!" Storozhev grew purple with rage.

"Why, we are all of us people, aren't we?" Andrei Andreyevich said, recovering from the shock. And suddenly he was quite calm. "The land is there for everyone, isn't it, Pyotr Ivanovich?"

"It's there for men, not for scum like you! You beggar! As far back as I can remember you always were against me!"

"Not I alone, Pyotr Ivanovich," the old man replied. "The whole community was always against you ... and not only our community, but your grandfather too, God rest his soul, cursed you for your cruelty. Forgotten, have you, how you rode rough-shod over us when you were running the quarry? Forgotten, have you, how hard you drove us when you were at one with the squire Ulusov? How you and your blasted steward, that cursed German Karl Frescher, slipped nooses over our heads, one after another? But now your day is over, you greedy wolf! It's over! You've nothing left but that rifle of yours."

"And you, did *you* get rich?" Storozhev asked savagely. "Your day has come and yet you go about barefooted, and before it came,

you went about in your bare feet too! You tramp, you dirty beggar!"

Andrei Andreyevich looked down at his rough, black feet.

"I did have a bit of land, Pyotr Ivanovich, but it was quite a way off, and it was a poor plot the community gave me, too. I didn't have any sort of horse either. You could dig for all you were worth on that land and you'd never dig up a treasure. But we'll straighten up now, I guess, the Government is sticking up for us now."

Andrei Andreyevich spoke calmly, standing in front of Storozhev and chewing a blade of grass.

All was quiet. Church bells were ringing for evening service in the village. A little breeze carried in the distant sound.

"You shan't own this land," Storozhev cried distractedly. "It's my land, you hear? My land, mine!"

"There's nothing of yours in the village. You'd better go, Pyotr, while the going is good. Go while the going is good, I tell you. They're out to catch you. They'll catch you and they won't let you go."

"Well, catch me then, catch me!" Storozhev shrieked wildly, his eyes flashing and his

bloodless lips spurting a jet of spittle. He raised his rifle. A shot rang across the fields.

Andrei Andreyevich fell on the cool, dewy balk.

The acres near Lebyazhye Lake were yielding a great wealth of crops, and others were going to gather it in. "But then why are they so slow in coming?" Storozhev was thinking. "Where are they? Why the quiet in our villages and farmsteads?"

Days gave way to cool nights. Dawn broke in purple and gold, day blossomed out, and then came the pale, warm shadows of evening and the timid glimmer of the first stars.

And quiet, perfect quiet reigned supreme.

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Chapter 9

Antonov mustered the last of his remaining strength in the lake district, in the woods. Here, in the swamps and quagmire, amid a net-

work of rivers and streams, he shuffled and reshuffled his detachments, removing those unfit for the decisive battle, for Antonov was out to sell his life dearly.

At times his spirit broke and he sat spellbound, waiting for the Red Army to come, hardly taking part in the work going on at Headquarters, raging and storming by fits and starts, cancelling orders, putting to death those who disobeyed him, and then suddenly going back to the watchman's hut, to sit there and listen in morose silence to his brother Dmitri's poetry.

On the 24th of May, 1921, Antonov's armies once again clashed with the regiments of the Military Academy, which had driven him out of Kamenka. And now they hurled Antonov back to the south.

His commanders, exhausted and resentful, demanded that Antonov should either direct his military operations personally or appoint another Chief of Staff. Antonov looked at the gathering with unseeing eyes. Once again his insane energy and his ambitious dreams revived in him, once again he saw himself the leader of picked troops, marching down Russia's roads.

On the 29th of May, Kotovsky's shock troops

met a large formation of Antonov's armies, consisting of picked regiments, near the village of Mozharovka.

Once again Antonov wanted to bring back the good old days, to indulge in a bit of cat-and-mouse game, to lead the Reds a jolly dance, to wear them out, to weaken them and smash them. He covered as much as a hundred miles a day, changing horses in the villages. But the Reds pressed on. Not trusting in horses alone, they had armed all the available motor-cars and lorries with machine-guns, and this motorized column followed close on Antonov's heels day and night. Horses snorted, and frightened by the whirr of motors, they threw their riders, but the Reds pressed on and on with their iron-clad cavalry, tormenting, shooting and hemming in Antonov's forces.

When Antonov realized that he could not get away, he fled deep into the forest near the River Vorona, lay low there, rested up, and resolved to give battle.

The battle lasted five days. Field-guns thundered, aeroplanes wheeled over the forest, bombs exploded, the patter of machine-gun fire was repeated and borne away by the echo.

That night Antonov, having lost a third of his men but not his self-confidence, mustered together and led away his Fourth Parevsky,

Third Nizovskoi, Naru-Tambovsky, Verkhotsensky, Semyonovsky and other regiments to Yelan in the province of Saratov. Boguslavsky was ordered to go up to Sampur with a strength of two thousand sabres and deal a blow to the Red's rear-guard.

However, Antonov was out of luck in Yelan, too. On the 12th of June, Kotovsky caught up with him there, turned him down towards Tambov, ran him up close to the river and destroyed half of his regiments.

On the 19th of June, a new catastrophe befell Antonov: Kotovsky smashed and turned to rout Boguslavsky's army near Solntseva Vershina.

Boguslavsky, with a strength of three hundred sabres—all that remained of his army—fled from the Reds and went into hiding in the woods.

After his victory over Boguslavsky, Kotovsky returned to the Military Academy units which were continuing their pursuit of Antonov's main forces. The Reds resolved to sweep the River Vorona, the outlying woods, swamps, lakes and villages clean of Antonovites.

Meanwhile, Antonov lay low in the woods in the lake district, together with his two and a half thousand men—weary and indifferent to their fate, the remnants of the insurrection.

Antonov called his commanders together. The position was clear: they either had to seek support elsewhere and continue the struggle, or fight their way through to the south, to Makhno. The forest was alive with an ominous din, aeroplanes droned in the sky, and the guns of the Reds boomed incessantly.

The commanders arrived looking grim and morose.

Antonov refrained from asking his henchmen about the state of mind of the peasants. He knew what was happening in the villages. He saw how avidly the men seized their ploughs, how they started out before dawn, as though afraid that once again their peaceful labour would be denied to them, and once again they would have to gaze in despair at their desolate and dismal acres, once again they would have to take cover when troops rode in, peering from their windows to see who was coming—friends or enemies.

Red Army men kept guard over the peasants working in the fields, and the soldiers themselves not infrequently threw off their topcoats and, spitting in their palms, grasped the handles of the plough as competently as they grasped the butt of their machine-guns.

Antonov knew what was going on in the villages. He knew that in every home they

were studying the new taxation law, that every honest peasant's heart rejoiced at the changes, that men were counting on their fingers how much they would have to pay, and it worked out that they would have to pay the Soviets half of what they had to deliver before, in the days of surplus food appropriation, that they could do what they pleased with the corn left over in their bins—sell it or eat it.

The men cast evil looks at Antonov when he passed through their villages now. They clenched their fists grimly when he carted out their oats, took away their horses and meted out death in return for every word of protest, every look of hatred.

The girls sang as he passed them:

Corn is ripe and gathered in,
All the bandits are done in.

Antonov also knew that the peasants were forming volunteer troops as reinforcements for the Red Army, and there was no power on earth that could shatter the stubborn daring of these muzhik troops.

"Well, my commanders, what shall we do? Which way shall we go?"

His commanders advised Antonov to call in Ataman Kolesnikov for help. He was ranging

the Voronezh Province, and had more than once offered his services, wishing to join the insurrection. Until then the committee of the League had stood firm against it, for Kolesnikov was a highway robber through and through.

"To hell with what he is! Right wing or Left wing, I'll join up with the devil himself so long as he's against the Reds," Antonov said.

Pluzhnikov made no comment, and what was there to say? He had long since made up his mind to leave Antonov, to hide in a dug-out he had fitted up that spring.

Antonov sent his messengers to Kolesnikov, but Kolesnikov had already been defeated by the Reds. He sent messengers to Makhno, but they did not get through to him. He sent them to Ataman Voron, who tramped from province to province with an army two thousand strong, called his staff headquarters the "Central League of Russia's Salvation," set fire to villages, looted and raped. Voron hanged one of Antonov's messengers, and the other he sent back with a reply: "I have nothing to do with convicts and swine."

The Military Academy troops and Kotovsky encircled Antonov's forces near Lake Ilmen. Antonov took battle, but suddenly he gave orders to turn to the Chernavka woods.

On June 26th, the woods were surrounded and artillery fire opened. After twenty-four hours of shelling, the infantry moved in to comb through the forest. Communist detachments and volunteer peasant troops took the way along the Vorona, while the Military Academy troops made for the lake. That day Antonov lost two hundred and seventy men. Kozlov, his adjutant, and his commanders Popov and Mansurov, doctor Tanayev and Santalov, the one who had gone to Denikin, were seized.

Antonov escaped free with his brother Dmitri, stealing past the sentries at night.

He was run to ground in the Ramza swamps. The Military Academy troops stayed in the bog for eight days, often without food or sleep and sometimes waist-deep in water. They had Antonov trapped like a bear. It seemed he could not possibly get away. Boats manned with machine-guns sailed up and down the Vorona, brave and experienced scouts kept watch along the forest paths, and aeroplanes circled over the swamps. But the swamps seemed dead, there was not a soul, not a rustle in the reeds, the forest was still, not a ripple disturbed the surface of the lakes and pools. And now the Red forces converged in the centre of the ring. They discovered enormous stores of provisions and arms cached in the undergrowth.

They captured Trubka, the commandant, and Alyoshka, Antonov's orderly.

But once again Antonov slipped away with Dmitri, and the Reds lost track of him.

Kotovsky, in the meantime, was finishing off the remnants of Antonov's band. In early July he annihilated the 14th Zolotovsky and the Naru-Tambovsky regiments. Vorozhintsev's and Karasyov's groups were smashed at about the same time. Small detachments of Antonovites now roamed the woods and fields.

It was defeat but not the end of the insurrection. Thousands of men, dangerous and embittered, were still at large, waiting for an opportune moment, waiting for a signal. They had to be removed.

On the 20th of July, the Tambov Provincial Party Committee published a statement which soon became known in all the villages. It read:

"Antonov's gangs are destroyed. The bandits are surrendering and giving away their top men. The peasantry has of its own volition renounced the government of the S.-R. bandits. The peasantry has taken a firm stand in the struggle against this gang of robbers. The final and complete annihilation of S.-R. banditry and the full co-operation of the peasantry in the struggle against it, has made it possible

for the Soviet Government to suspend the application of extraordinary measures."

The Soviet Government once again reminded the Antonovites that all those who surrendered voluntarily would have their punishment mitigated and their lives spared.

Shortly after the publication of this statement twenty-six thousand men gave themselves up into the hands of the Soviet Government. They surrendered thousands of rifles, fifty machine-guns, one hundred and seventy machine-gun barrels, their swords and revolvers. Towards that time, some nine thousand men had been taken prisoner and about a thousand killed in battle. Every day saw ragged and sullen men making their way to village Soviets and Headquarters. They took off their rifles, sat down, asked for cigarettes and smoked greedily.

It was the end of the insurrection. The flame had gone out and only the last of the coals still smouldered.



Chapter 10

The wind howled and whistled in the glens and open spaces, and ragged clouds concealed the sky; they came from the north in an endless stream, floating low over the ground; they twined and untwined, ever moving southwards.

As though pursued by the wind Storozhev fled from his home village, avoiding thoroughfares, down balks and paths, through the desolate shrubbery. He paused in a remote little village, which clustered close to the forest. He studied the terrain of bypaths and back-yards, and knocked at a door to ask for a drink of water.

The owner of the cottage received him indifferently, and offered him food with the same indifference. The heavy dinner made Storozhev feel languid. He found his way to the hay-loft, dug into the straw and fell asleep. It was almost dark when he awoke; the wind still howled and whistled, but the village was alive with voices, laughter and the clank of arms.

Suddenly the doors of the hay-loft flew open and someone shouted, with a burr and stutter in his speech:

"Hey, what's your name, get up, the ataman wants you to come to him."

With shaking hands Storozhev pulled out his revolver and cautiously climbed out of the straw. He saw a bearded armed man in a red sateen shirt.

"What ataman?" Storozhev asked, and a happy thought struck him: "One of us."

"You'll see when you get there. Go to the chief. Don't you shake your revolver at me, or I'll crash you one in the teeth. Come on!"

A fat man was sitting at the table in the spacious front room. He was wearing a tunic with grimy captain's epaulettes, his red beard grew out from under his collar somewhere, his face was white and fleshy. He sat drinking tea, blowing and puffing into his saucer.

He gave Storozhev a keen look and nudged a tall, lean man sitting beside him. Storozhev instantly recognized the school-teacher who had together with him allied Dvoriki to Antonov. Nikita Kagarde smiled, he remembered Storozhev too.

"Know each other?" wheezed the fat man with the epaulettes.

"Good Lord, of course we do! It's Pyotr-Ivanovich, I think, isn't that the name? Sit down, do. I hope they haven't been rude to you? But look, I'm sorry, you haven't been introduced yet—meet the peasants' ataman, Voron. That's for the world in general, but for you he's Afa-

nasy Yevgrafovich Simakov, or Grach. Sorry, sorry, Afanasy Yevgrafovich, please don't mind! A nickname is only a second name after all."

"And what's your name?" Voron asked. "Who d'you belong to? What faith do you preach?"

"I'm a partisan of Antonov, commander of his frontier regiment."

"Oh, I see... an S.-R.? God, how I dislike you S.-R.s, ugh, how I dislike you!"

"Afanasy Yevgrafovich and I have organized the Central Committee of the League of Russia's Salvation," the teacher explained. "We are mustering all honest men under our banners. It's true, Pyotr Ivanovich, the S.-R.s have outlived their time. I realized it and so I left you, and here I've found a new refuge. Believe me, my dear man, the truth lies to the right of us...."

"On my right hand," Voron muttered.

"Of course, in your opinion, I am a traitor, a renegade," the school-teacher continued, "but what could I do, what could I do if I could not get on with Alexander Stepanovich? I was not understood, I was offended, insulted!"

A pince-nez, attached on a cord, kept slipping down the teacher's nose; he jerked his head up just before it fell, and settled it back

into position. This so amused Storozhev that he could not hold back a smile.

"And how many are you—honest men?" he asked.

"We were two thousand," the fat man replied, opening the collar of his tunic and wiping his neck. "But God was unkind to us, God was, and now there's some fifty of us left."

"They flee," Kagarde put in, his face darkening. "Your brother Sergei Ivanovich dealt us quite a blow the other day. A very harsh man. They say he's trying to get at you. We have forty-two men left, the most trustworthy ones. You'll make it forty-three. . . ."

"I see," Storozhev thought miserably. "My brother showed up again! Hell!"

Voron went on sipping his tea and throwing sidelong glances at Storozhev.

"Well, and how are things with you?" he asked at last. "They're not any sweeter for all I can see since you've come running to me, eh? I've got all sorts of people. I've got the teacher here, he's clever, that man, you should read the appeals he writes! I weep, honest to God I weep, they're so moving!"

"Afanasy Yevgrafovich is a sentimental man, he's weak and tender-hearted, but he's a great leader. With him to lead us, we'll turn the Bolsheviks to rout!"

"They're crazy," Storozhev thought. "Stark, raving mad—both the teacher and Voron."

The man in the red sateen shirt, who had brought Storozhev in, tiptoed into the room and put a gallon bottle of moonshine on the table.

Nikita poured some out for himself, for Storozhev and for the ataman. Storozhev refused his. Voron downed glass after glass. Half an hour later both the ataman and the teacher were drunk They complained about each other to Storozhev, then hugged one another, and Kagarde tearfully beseeched Pyotr Ivanovich to go to Pakhotny Ugol and rescue his little boy, Leo, from the Reds, his son Lev Nikitich Kagarde, his little lion cub.

"I abandoned him, Pyotr Ivanovich, I abandoned him. He's sixteen, the little one. I brought him up, I reared him. He kept begging to join up with me. He's all alone now. He'll perish! Save him!"

Storozhev got up, shook off the arm of the ataman who was embracing him, and walked out.

He went back to the hay-loft, lay down in the straw and gave himself up to his cheerless musing. Suddenly he heard stealthy whispering behind the wall. Three or four of the ataman's men were plotting to seize both Voron

and Kagarde that night and deliver them to the Reds.

"I've been to Headquarters," a husky voice said, "they believe us there, honest to God. Give us Voron, they said, and you'll be forgiven for good. Brothers, where will it get us if we stick with the old bastard? At least we'll save our own skins."

Storozhev got as far as the forest, crawling on all fours, and once again he trudged towards his own parts, his own village.

He came as far as Dvoriki, but he could not get through the piquets and turned south to the forests. And there on a lonely path he came face to face with Dmitri, Antonov's brother. Dmitri told him that Antonov was on a lake not far away, and was going to speak that day for the last time to those of his commanders who had survived, and after that he would go into hiding, to bide his time.

Dmitri took Storozhev along barely perceptible paths towards a little lake tucked away in the woods. Weeping willows bathed their green branches in the transparent water, ducks quacked in the reeds, while huge pine-trees stood listening gravely to the chatting of the forest inhabitants.

Close to the water, on a large tree-stump

sat Antonov—lean, ragged and bearded. He was engrossed in a book he was reading: *Taras Bulba.*

The commanders, all the man-power that remained of the insurrection, were making their way to the lake one by one.

They stood round Antonov leaning on their rifles. Their clothes were torn and hung in tatters, grimy toes stuck out of their gaping boots. Long unwashed, they stank of sweat, their wan faces were burned black by the sun, filthy rags covered their wounds and scars, many had their arms in slings.

They stood in a semicircle, mutely.

Antonov scanned the faces of the men and thought: "But where is Pluzhnikov? Where is my jolly Ishin? Where's Tokmakov? Where is that hothead Gherman? Where are Leonov and Bulatov, the men I started out with? Where's Fyodorov-Gorsky? Where is my dashing orderly, Alyoshka? Where is that last love of mine?"

And his mind supplied the answers. They shot Grigory Pluzhnikov in his dug-out near the forest, the drunkard Ishin was seized by the Cheka together with Gorsky, a bullet killed Tokmakov, the peasants shot Gherman for robbery and rape, Shamov drowned in the bog, Alyoshka surrendered, the Reds shot Leonov

and Bulatov, and a miner called Pankratov caught Maria in the Kambarshchina village.

And now the last survivors were gathered here. Antonov looked at them in silence; they stood with downcast eyes.

"You're here, are you?" he said harshly.

"What have you brought us to, Alexander Stepanovich?" said Storozhev. "We believed in you, you were our last hope."

"They sold me," Antonov replied. "The chiefs sold me. Have you heard? Chernov had the gall to call me a murderer! But they knew, the scoundrels, how far I'd go. They themselves urged me on! And you money-bags, you sold me, too!" He shook his fist at Storozhev. "You wait, you'll remember me yet, but too late, for they'll grind you into fine dust!"

"Never mind," said Storozhev, "we're a strong breed, we've got a hard bite, and our sons are growing up in the villages."

"I shall go into the woods, into the very depths," Antonov motioned with his hand. "I heard, Lenin said that Wrangel is mustering forces for a new war. I'll bide my time, I'll rest up and then I'll have another fling, I'll find new friends.... And as for you, you may do whatever you like. If you want to fight—go ahead, if you want to sell out—it's your own affair. I'll go alone with my brother,

I do not need anyone else, you're free to fly with the four winds."

"Good-bye, Alexander Stepanovich." Storozhev bowed. "No hard feelings." He came up and kissed Antonov.

One by one, the commanders bade Antonov farewell; all came up and kissed him.

"Goody-bye," said Safirov, "I served you loyally."

"Good-bye," Antonov replied.

Safirov had gone as far as the trees when Antonov called to him:

"Yakov, why didn't you kiss me?"

Safirov came back and embraced Antonov.

"Judas, how many silver pieces have you sold me for?" Antonov whispered in his ear.

"What's that? You're crazy!" Safirov recoiled from him. "I'm not the kind that can be bought, you know that yourself!"

Antonov waved his hand despondently. His instinct told him that he was facing the end, his death.

Safirov walked away, with the sun bright upon him and his short grey hair gleaming silver.

"It seems I'm not an eagle but only an eaglet, the eagle is still at large!" Antonov said with a deep sigh.

Storozhev remembered Ataman Voron and

wondered if he was still at large. A sharp pain wrung his heart. "Good God, that this should be all that remains of a great cause!" he thought.

Antonov bowed and said:

"Good-bye, my commanders. No hard feelings."

They walked away, dragging their heavy feet. Antonov remained alone, alone in the dark, glum forest.

He wrapped himself in his torn army coat and lay down on the grass. The end!

But then, in the name of what were those thousands of lives sacrificed? Who needed those rivers of blood and tears, those blazing homes?

And his own life, stained with human blood, what was the sense of it, who wanted it? People, many people eddied about him all his life, yet he was alone.

Antonov remembered the dreams he used to weave as he stood on the porch of Staff Headquarters in Kamenka, watching his armies pass in review before him.

"I'll start out with these forces," he used to think. "I'll collect hundreds of armies on my way to Moscow, I shall lead millions of peasants up to the walls of the Kremlin. The Bolsheviks are shouting about class struggle in

the villages. What class struggle? Every peasant who owns nothing but a torn home-spun coat dreams of buying himself a rich cloth overcoat, of grabbing a bit of land, fencing it in, unleashing watch-dogs to guard it, putting away his rubles in a pot, and for the rest of his life sleeping next to his pig and calf. That's all the class struggle there is, that's the essence of the peasant for you. Since time immemorial he's been fighting for his own skin, for ever on the look-out for a chance to skin his neighbour."

"Well, and what then?" Antonov often asked himself. "What shall I do with the men after I have brought them to the walls of the Kremlin?"

Antonov pictured but vaguely what he would do then. He thought that once he got to Moscow he would be chosen leader of the people and everyone would bow down before him.

"Well, and what then? Supposing they do choose me, supposing they tag me with a rank or title, what then? What is to be done about the land, about the workmen?"

But there was nothing Antonov knew or thought of beyond that, there was no answer he could give himself.

And then he pictured the way his friends and henchmen would grapple for power, how sav-

agely Pluzhnikov and Ishin would snarl at one another, he imagined how redly Storozhev's wolfish eyes would glow.

"They'll eat me alive. Tokmakov was right when he said they'd eat me alive and then they'd start gobbling up one another," Antonov thought in alarm.

He chased away all these frightening thoughts of the future. He would leave it all to the Constituent Assembly, let them assemble and solve and untangle all these intricate tangles, make peace between the workmen and the factory owners, the farmhands and the kulaks, the sheep and the wolves.... Let them....

And now he did not need to think of anything at all—he was alone, he had no army, no comrades-in-arms, and even his horse, on which he was going to ride into Moscow, was killed in battle....

"Let's go." Antonov touched his brother's shoulder. "It's damp, and late!"

Chapter 11

Once again Storozhev came to his native parts. He spent days trying to find himself a new horse, but in vain. The villagers knew

who was lurking in the gloom, who was prowling close to their fires at night, and they kept a close watch on their herds. Sergei Ivanovich ordered the peasants' volunteer troops to patrol the most remote meadows and fields, to thoroughly search the dells, and if Pyotr Ivanovich's tracks were found, to seize him dead or alive.

Storozhev gave up his hunt for a horse. He lay low in the wildest shrubbery; he grew cautious, sleeping in snatches and waking up to the faintest rustle or the cry of a night-bird.

He woke up one sultry midday, when the distance seemed to waver and float in a haze. Before him sat a fat frog, staring at him with its stupid eyes. He started, sweat drenched his back, his legs went numb. The frog, frightened by the awakened man, vanished in the grass. But Storozhev could not get over the shock for a long time, his hands shook, his eyes wandered vacantly, his thoughts jumped from one thing to another, his head ached and there was a buzzing in his ears.

That night he had a dream.

He dreamt that dying of thirst after a day's hard work, he came up to a brook, gushing vigorously from under a hummock. But when he bent low to plunge his parched lips into the

cool water, he saw a frog staring at him from the brook with wide-open eyes. It nauseated and disgusted him to drink, but his throat and chest felt racked with thirst. Suddenly everything vanished. Mud rose from the bottom, a murky froth swirled and grew, whipping him furiously and flooding him in a wave of dry heat. He tried to run, but his feet sank in the thick, swirling mud. He fought and struggled, but the scorching whirls of mire grew thicker and thicker, throwing him off his feet, flooding him, and rolling over his head. And then came frogs, they touched his face with their feet. He could not chase them away because his hands, too, were immersed in the hot, thick silt, and he was plunging them deeper and deeper.... His eyes refused to close, to shut out the soulless, heavy stares of the frogs. And then he saw Kolka, beaming with smiles. He stood pointing his little hand at his father, hurriedly saying something to a crowd of people thronging around him. But they did not move, they looked on with curiosity, and he was dying, choking in the suffocating fumes, held in this soggy, hot vice.

He woke up with a start. He sat up and stared about him. A whitish steam rose from the ground, the tops of bushes were sprinkled with silver and rustled softly. A thin yellow streak

of dawn was breaking through on the horizon: it would soon be day. A sudden gust of wind, arising he knew not from where, enveloped him in the damp coolness of the morning. He shuddered: the cold, stark eyes of the frog were there before him still....

And as suddenly as the gust of wind, there rose before him images of people he had killed, the hot crimson blaze of fires, and human blood—in clotted, chilly pools.

Frol Petrovich was showing him his welted, horse-whipped back, the flesh standing up in bloody tatters on his ribs.

Alexander Kosobokov—huge and lean—was weeping wrathful tears of pain and humiliation. His farm, which had sheltered the two Communist scouts, was ablaze with fire.

And now these ghosts visited him more and more often. They came to him waking or sleeping, they touched him as they moved past, and he fancied that his cheeks and brow were smeared with their warm blood. He would rush to the water, wash away these scorching stains, and then his reason would come back to him.

"I'm going out of my mind," Storozhev thought aloud.

He no longer kept to the same spot for long, he darted from one bush to the other, he

climbed up and down gullies, but he could not tear himself away from these parts and go far from the village, although he realized that his end was near, that his brother Sergei was hunting him like a wild beast, that he was on the point of falling into the clutches of the Reds. Storozhev often had thoughts of stealing into the village and killing Sergei. No one but Sergei! Him, at least. He fancied now that the Sailor was the cause of all his troubles, that the Sailor was to blame for the decline of the Storozhev family, that it was the Sailor who had set his brother Semyon, the whole village, all the world against him, that he and he alone was the cause of all his, Pyotr's, misfortunes and mortifications. Kill him! Burn him! Saw him into pieces! But Storozhev could not steal into the village—he was afraid. Sometimes he made up his mind to go away altogether. He would trudge day and night, another day and another night, towards the border, towards the west.... But then he would turn around abruptly and hurry back to his own village, his own parts.

He could not stand his loneliness any longer. Anxiety for his family, nostalgia for work, for people, for the voices of men, at times grew stronger than his hatred and his fear.

And then he would crawl out towards the fields and watch the peasants swinging their scythes and the yellow rye falling on the ground.

One day, choosing a distant field belonging to the next village, where four men were cutting the rye and some chattering women were binding the sheaves, Storozhev came up close to these people.

They saw him and huddled together, dropping their scythes. The sight of him was frightening to people who were beginning to forget the war. His clothes were torn, his eyes sunken, his bronzed face grown over with a greying black beard, and his rifle hung awkwardly.

"Go away," a tall, grey-haired man said sternly. "We'll kill you."

Pyotr Ivanovich looked at them. Their angry eyes were hidden beneath their sullen, scowling eyebrows.

"Get away from here, stop prowling like a hungry wolf," the old man continued. "Leave us alone, don't tempt us. We want peace, we want to work, we have to gather the crops in. Go back where you came from."

Storozhev said nothing. He turned and walked away. The peasants stood for a long time looking in the direction he had taken, listening to the rustling of the bushes, as they

parted to let this strange and frightening man through. Then they spat in their palms and swung their scythes again.

It rained incessantly for three days. As far as the eye could see, uncut corn, beaten down by the rain, lay low on the ground. The wind chased swollen rain clouds close over the ground, the sun came out for a moment, but the angry wind brought more and more dirty-grey clouds from beyond the horizon, they blocked out the sky, and rain pattered in the fields.

Mist and dampness clung to the balks and roads.

A cart came lumbering heavily past the bushes. A small boy, with an old sack over him, was driving. A priest sat behind him in the straw, like a huge blackbird. Storozhev heard from afar the squelching of wheels in the mud and the angry shouts of the driver. He came out on the road. A curtain of rain hid everything from view, all he could make out was this cart. He stopped the horse. The boy seemed turned to stone.

"Bless me, Father Stepan. I want to confess and partake of the Holy Communion."

Father Stepan made the sign of the cross over Storozhev and muttered:

"Go in peace, go, I have no time, I'm going to a dying man."

"But what about the Sacrament?"

"Another time, another time," the priest said hurriedly. "Go on, go on, God bless you, God forgive you."

Storozhev looked at the priest and felt unaccountably gay.

"But why so worried, Father? The Reds won't touch you, I am armed, tell them so, say I forced you."

The priest flapped the wide sleeves of his cassock.

"Go away, Pyotr! You know it yourself—we're fighting the same cause. But you've got to use your head, you ought to know what is permissible and when. You've got to be shrewd, my friend."

"All right," Storozhev said after a pause. "You're clever, Father. And I was afraid you'd changed colour too. But let me confess my sins, Father. Death is stalking me, close on my heels. You can see her hiding in those bushes over there, the bony old hag. She keeps clawing at me, she won't leave me alone. Let me confess!"

The small boy sat motionless, only his chin quivered and soundless tears ran down his face. Suddenly he shouted. Storozhev hit him and the boy grew still.

With the thin, warm rain falling upon them, under the pall of the wet, grey day, Father Ste-

pan hurriedly granted Storozhev absolution of all his sins and thrust the Holy Sacrament into his mouth.

After that, he hastily climbed into the cart and urged the horse on.

Storozhev looked after the cart, and his heart felt so heavy he wanted to scream so that the whole world and all the people in it should hear him.

They had all renounced him, even this priest! In a frenzy he stamped his feet in the mud, blasphemed, and howled with wild, frantic laughter. Then he grew quiet, fell into the tall wet grass and lay thus without moving till late that cold night.

Once he came across Andrian, his brother-in-law. The old man was sitting on a balk tying the strings of his footcloths, when Storozhev leapt out from behind a haystack. Andrian started and shrank back in fear. When he got over his shock, he looked wrathfully at Storozhev.

Andrian had been an inveterate drunkard in days gone past, but chance cured him in 1905 when the village was set on fire by order of the tsar. Since then, Andrian could not stand the taste or smell of wine or vodka, he gave up eating meat, and grew morose and taciturn.

For the last five years, he had been looking after Storozhev's farm.

"They're searching for you. Look at you, you're so shaggy. Oh, you dirty bandit!" Andrian always affected a harsh, straightforward manner when talking to Pyotr Ivanovich, even though he was a little afraid of him.

Storozhev sat on the balk. The light was waning. Night was coming from the east, cloaking the fields in darkness.

"Why don't you give yourself up?" Andrian went on, rolling a cigarette. "They might forgive you. Sergei Ivanovich came to us the other day. If you surrendered, he said, perhaps they'd even pardon you. Semyon came too, he's in the Soviet now. He kept urging Praskovya to go and find you, to tell you to come home, they'd pardon you."

"They won't pardon me," Storozhev said hollowly, and added with venom: "And I shan't pardon them. I'd roast those lousy devils alive, even though they are my brothers."

"Stop this talk!" Andrian shouted angrily. "You'd roast them! Think of yourself, think of your children. You left your home, abandoned your children, you old devil. Is it for you to fight?"

Storozhev motioned him to silence. "Don't talk drivel! If I don't fight, who will? You

wouldn't be any good, would you? Well, tell me how is everything at home? They've robbed and burnt it, I expect?"

"No, they only took what was yours. They touched nothing that belonged to the children. Praskovya was locked up, but they released her at once, they say they don't fight women. The men are sick of fighting, they're working like devils, Pyotr. And life is easier now, too. The food quotas are no more; and we have free trade now. I tell you, give yourself up, perhaps you'll live yet. Because there's disaster, there's grief in the family, Pyotr." Andrian's voice shook.

"Grief? What grief?" Storozhev's heart hammered.

"Kolka. . . ."

"Kolka? What? They killed him?" Storozhev cried in a strange, ghastly voice. He stood up and, gripping Andrian harshly, shook him in a frenzy.

"Are you crazy or something?" Andrian swore and freed himself from Storozhev's grasp. "You devil of a bandit! Who'd raise his hand against a child? They're not beasts, are they?"

"Speak up, don't babble, tell me what's the matter with him?"

"A horse kicked him. Kicked him straight on the forehead, the devil must have got into it."

Andrian lighted a cigarette.

"Killed him?" Pyotr Ivanovich barely breathed the words.

"The doctor says he'll live." Andrian was about to say more, when he heard a cart rumbling in the distance.

"Be off, they'll kill you. The people are mad at you. Oh, you wolf, I wish you'd go away for good...."

"Where could I go?" Storozhev asked with infinite sadness. Night was coming, he would be all alone again....

"Go to another country, it's all up with you here, anyway."

The cart drew nearer. Storozhev disappeared. Andrian looked about him, rose, and walked away quickly. He was soon lost to view in the dell.

All night long, Storozhev lay face down in the grass. He wanted to weep, but his bloodshot eyes yielded no tears, and there was nothing but a rasping pain smothering his heart. He could not believe that a horse had killed Kolka, no, a horse couldn't have killed him. He remembered how he used to lift his son, a mere toddler, on to the mare's back, and the boy would ride along clutching the mane with his little hands, bubbling over

with his baby talk, aglow with a smile of radiant joy.

"They killed Kolka! They killed my heir! I wanted to have him schooled, make a success of him, so he could add wealth to his father's possessions, so he could increase his father's land by hundreds of acres, so the whole countryside would bare their heads and bow before the Storozhevs.... They killed my heir, my youngest, my Kolka. But maybe he's alive?"

Clouds crawled soundlessly on, merging in fantastic shapes, and jackdaws cawed dismally and hopelessly.

Chapter 12

The weather was warm and dry. White clouds sailed across the sky, slowly dispersing as though melted by the sun, reappearing again to go their languid way; the stalks of oats rustled in the fields dotted with lonely, tousled crows.

Storozhev was alone in the vast expanse of ploughfields teeming with men. Unseen in the shrubs and tall grasses he watched them work with keen attention. He never strayed far from the village, trudging in circles around it. All his waking hours, until he fell into his longed-for sleep, he thought of nothing but Kolka.

"Is this delirium? What does it matter if he is alive or dead, I can't set it right or help him, anyway."

But still he could not go away.

"Is he alive or not? I must find out, I must know the answer!" Anxiety gnawed at him relentlessly.

At last he resolved to go and ask about Kolka. He remembered that his brother Semyon tilled a strip of land in a distant field. The sheaves were still standing there, they would cart them away after they had finished with the nearer fields.

Early one morning, when day was just breaking and the chill dampness rising from the gully crept through the sheaves of rye, a cart came lumbering across the old bridge.

Storozhev peeped out from behind a bush and saw Semyon's bony, red horse. Sashka, Semyon's son, was sitting in the cart, dangling his bare feet and bouncing at each bump. The cart slowed down, and now the horse, breathing heavily, began to pull it up the rise. Storozhev came out of the bushes suddenly. Sashka saw his uncle and screamed. Storozhev stopped the horse and came up close to the cart. The boy was shaking like a leaf and muttering incoherently.

"Here, I won't do you any harm," Storozhev

shouted at him. "Shut up, you fool! Tell me what's happening at home? How is Kolka? Shut up. I tell you, you dirty...."

The fourteen-year-old boy was pale under his freckles, he bobbed his head and mumbled confusedly. At the sight of this boy shaking in mute terror, Storozhev felt a sudden surge of hatred for his brother, for everything that lay beyond that invisible yet distinct line. It was as though a voice was whispering to him:

"There he is, the son of your brother, who was a member of the Poor Peasants' Committee, the one who helped Sergei divide up your cows and your grain with the beggars and riff-raff. There he is, his brat! He is alive and shaking with fear, while your own Kolka has perhaps been rotting in his grave for a long time, his body a mass of swarming, greedy worms."

Blood pounded in his brain, flooding out the last of his reason in an orgy of madness and hatred.

"Speak, you bastard!" he roared insanely and cracked his whip against the wooden boards of the cart.

Sashka jerked his head and, falling over backwards, screamed:

"Uncle, don't hit me! Uncle Pyotr, don't, don't!"

Storozhev swung his whip. The boy howled

like a beast. The horse, placidly munching grass, started at this howl and shied backwards. The blow of the whip cut its croup, it tore off, darted left and right, and bounded away at a gallop, raising clouds of dust, while Sashka tossed helplessly in the cart, knocking his head against the sides.

Storozhev ran after the cart, shouting. He tried to pull his rifle off his back, but his shaking hands got tangled in the straps. At last, his strength spent, he fell into the dust.

Storm clouds were gathering; the wind blew.

Next morning at sunrise he was in the far fields once again. And once again a cart lumbered across the bridge.

Storozhev looked out and saw it was Semyon himself, red-haired and gloomy. The sun had just crept out of its purple lair and its first ray played on the steel of a rifle. Holding it across his kness, Semyon was peering hungrily into the shrubbery.

Storozhev went through two more days of torment, darting frantically from shrub to shrub, but inevitably coming back to his village.

Then all at once, he was decided. He would make his way home, and drive the Reds out of the village, if only for an hour or two.

"Who knows," he thought, "perhaps they are not many."

He dug up his machine-gun, hidden away together with his ammunition, got some hand-grenades out of the same secret hollow, and that night crept close to the village.

It was quiet, the tired men were deep in slumber. There was no sound of the watchmen's clappers, no dogs barked. With bated breath Storozhev crawled on.

Two threshing-barns, the wooden walls dried out by the sun, flared up, one after the other. A minute more and the great alarm-bell was tolling. The villagers woke up to the glow of blazing barns. The bell died away, only to start up again with a deafening boom.

Suddenly a bomb burst in the very thick of the crowd surging towards the fire. A blinding flash followed the explosion, and instantly all sound was dead. Then someone whimpered piteously.... Immediately, two more grenades burst. The crowd gasped, cringing and huddling together. And now it scattered, dissolved, as though some force had thrust it apart: Storozhev, with set mouth and deadened senses, was spraying the streets with murderous machine-gun fire.

A peremptory command sounded near Headquarters and for a moment all movement was

suspended. Everything grew still. Then the Reds returned fire with rifle volleys and machine-guns.

Storozhev felt the thrust of a red-hot needle in his right foot, the boot immediately filled with blood, and his reason cleared. He ceased fire, flung away his machine-gun and carbine, and slunk away into the night, dragging his wounded foot. He crawled into the first cellar he came to, and lay there getting his strength back, while the Reds chased in search of him along the distant gullies and lakes, and beat through the bushes.

Chapter 13

All he had now was a revolver loaded with two bullets, and his sword, on which he leaned for support. All hope was lost, it seemed; he never heard the sputtering of machine-guns or the metallic din of artillery fire anywhere any more. The flame of the insurrection had gone out, hissing and smoking like wet firewood.

With peace restored, the villagers were busy threshing, for the harvest was rich that year.

Time went on slowly, and the circle within which Storozhev prowled was closing imperceptibly.

For almost a week he was in fever. The

wound in his foot festered, depriving him of movement and sleep. With a tremendous effort he boosted his body along as he crawled; he was starving; he raved of battles and victories. The fire of unquenchable rancour still smouldered in this defeated wreck of a man.

Was it hopefulness, or was it a mixture of hatred and fear joined in affinity with his way of thinking, with the whole of his mind? What made him cling so desperately to life, crawl along the dusty ploughfields, soothe the pain in his wound with grasses, and drink mouldy green water from the stagnant pools?

Fainting from hunger, he would fall into the hot, dry furrows or close to a foul-smelling puddle in the gully, and thoughts, endless and incoherent, glided by, barely touching his conscious mind; then they would fade away and images from the recent past rose up before him again.

In vain Storozhev tried to force his mind to pause on something that was stable, whole and tranquil—his morbid thoughts meandered on without respite. Sometimes, this hopelessly dismal stream of vague images and memories gave way to visions of the future, and Storozhev would draw up fantastic pictures of revenge, when he would once again ride into his village, omnipotent and proud.

He recalled the names of the people who would have to pay with their blood for the disgrace of his defeat: sisters and brothers, sons and nephews of Communists, their friends and acquaintances, members of the Revolutionary Committee. . . . He remembered them all perfectly, and in his mental lists he entered them into different columns, marked: death, flogging or torture.

He talked aloud to himself in a hoarse whisper as he sat in the field somewhere, his eyes fixed on one point, while a bewildered jackdaw hopped about a little distance from him. He passed whole days in this delirious state. Only the pangs of hunger roused him from this semi-coma, and then he went in search of food.

However, he could not come close to the gardens and vegetable fields any longer, for after that memorable night the Reds kept outposts stationed, formed of village volunteers. The crops had been gathered in, the sheaves carted away, and he was obliged to seek food in the outlying fields. But soon the grain was taken away from there as well.

He was starving. One thought alone occupied his mind now—food. He went in search of it and could not find it, only rarely did he succeed in stealing a potato or a handful of grain.

In a dried-up gully close to the pool, he

found a landing-net one day. He was delighted and began to fish for food. He had no matches to start a fire with and so he ate the small carp, which smelt of slime, raw. And then a few days later the net was missing from the spot where he usually hid it.

It was evening. Mosquitoes whined tiresomely in the gully. Beating them off, Storozhev crept noiselessly through the scorched reeds towards the pool and saw a shaggy, tattered man catching fish with his landing-net.

Squelching through the mud with his bare feet, the man waded to the shore and shook out several carp, together with clumps of tangled weeds.

When the man bent down and started digging a hole in the grass and lichen with his hands, Storozhev aimed his revolver at him and fired. The gully echoed the shot several times over, then it rolled away in the fields and faded. With a perfectly natural movement, as if the bullet had not touched him, the man slowly turned around to face Storozhev. A big, fat fish was clenched in his hand. Storozhev rushed at the stranger, and the man fell. He had not tasted food for two days; he snatched the fish out of the stranger's hand and turned away, when suddenly his wounded foot was jerked back violently and he fell into the grass.

He whirled round savagely and saw the stranger aiming his sawn-off rifle at him.

Storozhev was dumbfounded. The seconds seemed to stop, time slowed down in its flight. A bee, catching up with its swarm, droned by. A bird jumped out from the reeds and the flap of its wings was like a thunderclap. The languid clouds seemed to grate harshly against the sky as they journeyed to the east. A solitary frog was croaking on the opposite shore, and there was something eerie in its croaks. . . .

But the hand aiming at him all at once began to droop, the wounded man was huddling into a ball, shrinking, and then his fingers unlocked and the rifle fell on the grass.

Storozhev wiped his cold, salty sweat. His parched tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth.

The stranger turned over on his back, and blood gurgled from his stomach.

"Burns me," he wheezed, and a pink froth appeared on his lips. "Finish me off . . . please . . . it's hard. . . ."

Storozhev raised the man's rifle. There was but one cartridge in the breech. He pressed the muzzle against the man's forehead, shut his eyes and pulled the trigger. It misfired. Storozhev swore a foul and lengthy oath, raised the cock again and fired.

The man gave a jerk, stretched out and lay rigid. His fingers fumbled through the grass as though feeling for something. They found the carp which Storozhev had snatched away and clenched it in a last spasm.

Storozhev went through the deadman's pockets and found a piece of dirty paper, a box of matches carefully wrapped in a rag, some salt and an old piece of dry bread. Then he seized the body by one foot and dragged it away farther into the reeds. Once there, he forced the rigid fingers open and pulled out the carp.

That night Storozhev lived again as he had done two months before. Entirely forgetful of the man he had killed, as if he had not existed at all, with never a thought of who he was or where he came from, Storozhev made a fire, roasted the fish scrappily over it, and ate it half-raw with bread and salt. He felt lightheaded after a meal so plentiful and so long untasted and, lighting a cigarette, he dropped into a dreamless sleep, as suddenly as if a blow had knocked him out.

A scorching pain in his hand woke him up. Fire was creeping up to his sleeve, the grass was smouldering, burning his skin. He leapt up. Flame was devouring the dry reeds; the landing-net and the rag, dried by the closeness of the fire, were burning merrily. The box

of matches flared up and the bottom of the net burnt through before he could stamp out the fire.

Morning came, damp and cold. Frogs and birds were awakening. Ahead loomed days of hunger again—one day, two, three, five—days without end.

Two days after this, he met an old beggar woman in the field. Frightened out of her wits, she gave him all her bits and pieces of dry bread. For three days he ate. And then again came wearisome days of food-hunting, a useless and agonizing hunt. At last his hunger got the better of his fear. Storozhev made up his mind to go to his cousin's farm, a prosperous farm it was, standing on a rise away from the village, well back from the high-road. His approach was evidently noticed for he saw shadows of people darting about swiftly in the windows, and a huge black dog, which was usually kept on a chain, attacked him near the threshing-barn.

Storozhev unsheathed his sword. The dog snapped at it furiously with its teeth, cutting its mouth and going mad with rage. Exasperated, Storozhev decided to fool the dog. He pressed the sword to his chest and when the dog sprang at it, he plunged the blade into its side. Whimpering softly, it whirled around and

slunk away in a trail of blood. Storozhev crept stealthily to the house and tried the door—it was locked on the inside. He knocked—the sound echoed hollowly; behind the curtained windows all was still. He walked to the outbuildings and the barns—heavy, grim locks hung on all the doors. Back to the house he went, he banged on the door with his fists and his sword-hilt. Not a sound. He shouted, he called, he begged, he sobbed in his despair and helplessness. In vain!

In brutal rage he smashed a window with his sword—the glass fell in with a tinkle. And then the front door was thrown open and a large, bearded man armed with a fowling-piece came out on the porch.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"For Christ's sake, I beg you, give me some bread, Pantelei Lukich," Storozhev said, "I'm starving. . . ."

"What I'd like to give you is a volley of shot in your belly, you robber," the man muttered angrily. "Arisha, hand him a loaf," he called back into the house.

Storozhev saw a hand thrust out with the bread—so his cousin would not even look at him? Pantelei Lukich put the loaf on the railing.

"Take it and go! And never come back again! If they see you they'll chop your head off. Your

dear brother Sergei is running the place. God, he's a hard nut!"

"So you've sold out to my dear brother, have you?"

"He hasn't got the price that would buy me. However, we've got to look after ourselves first. You've got the rope waiting for you anyway, and I don't want to die yet!"

"Expecting riches from my brother? Grace from him? He'll shower riches on you! He'll give you grace!"

Pantelei Lukich bent close to Storozhev's ear and whispered:

"It's rankling with us too, Pyotr old man, but we've submitted. You've got to sing their tune if you want to live among them. We must bide our time, sharpen our teeth, and when the time comes, we'll fight with more wisdom —we know better now. You'll be needed yet. Understand? Here, take the bread and go."

Pyotr Ivanovich looked at the loaf. His mouth watered. Then he pulled his hand away from the bread, turned, and walked off.

"Hey, Pyotr!" Pantelei called. "Amnesty's been granted people like you! Give yourself up, do that, you'll live yet. Today's Monday, the time'll be up on Saturday. Hurry!"

Storozhev looked back, spat in the direction of the house and limped away.

At the cross-roads, he saw a sheet of paper nailed to a post. This was the amnesty order, promising pardon to all those who surrendered of their own free will. He tore off the paper and made for the gully.

And now his hour was striking. He had not eaten a scrap of food for four days. He lay in a stupor in the tall grasses close to his own village, reading the amnesty order over and over again. The time limit would expire on the morrow, Saturday.

He sat up, his reason cleared, his thoughts became consecutive, calm and lucid.

His life over the past few months appeared to him as a huge noose. He dashed from one side of the noose to the other, trying to loosen it, to break through it, but it went on tightening about him relentlessly. He recalled that winter day two years ago when he was caught in a wolf trap and the wolves howled close to him. But that time the teeth of steel unclenched. And now the hand that controlled the noose, someone's powerful and inexorably stern hand, had drawn it tight and there was no slipping through, no leaping over, no breaking it.

"What now—what shall I do?" the question confronted him grimly.

And he realized that he must find the answer right away, because tomorrow or a week from then, they would put a bullet through him in a desolate field, unless he perished of hunger first.

A cluster of blinding sparks would burst from the round, black hole, and that would be all—the end.

"Wouldn't it be best if I put an end to my wanderings myself, just raised the revolver to my head and pressed the trigger?"

"But would that settle my score with life? Am I to depart this life without finding out what is going on there, beyond the line, in that other world, in the victors' camp? Is their confidence unruffled or are they still expecting a blow to be struck?"

"... Perhaps I shall find friends there—it cannot be that all have renounced me, all have sold their hides?"

"On no," Storozhev's thoughts ran, "whoever clung to his land, to his power over people, could not be so easily coerced. I know my friends, I know the men they are—wolves every one of them.... If only I could have a heart-to-heart talk with them, find out what they are living by, what they are waiting for, what they are thinking, what they are planning to do.... Surely they have not submitted?"

And suddenly Storozhev remembered Pantelei Lukich and what he had said: "It's rankling with us too, Pyotr old man, but we've submitted." He laughed out loud.

"He's a wily old dog! So he's changed into sheep's clothing, has he?" And he felt sorry that he had not taken Pantelei's bread and had called him a traitor besides. "Apparently Pantelei was playing a subtle game. He may be wise, perhaps his calculations are correct. Maybe I should change my skin too?"

"All right," he decided, "we'll see when the time comes what skin suits me best—a fox's or a sheep's."

"It may be that once I'm there I'll learn that somewhere near by new forces are being mustered, that other leaders are active and are making ready for a decisive battle that will win the day? Perhaps the quiet village streets are only a sham? Perhaps the people are waiting for a call to arms, for strong, courageous men like me?"

"What shall I decide then? Surrender with a rifle in my hands? Or shall I beg them for forgiveness, say that I came to them starving, tell them they are free to do what they like with me, so long as they give me a crust of bread and a slice of life?"

"Well then, which is it to be? Surrender or

wait? Wait for what? There's nothing but night ahead, then a day of hunger, days and days, and then it will be autumn, rains, snow ... death.... Yes, death. Death—whichever way you look at it. But it's never too late to kill myself. Wouldn't it be better do die on a full stomach, after I had held my children, my wife, my Kolka close to my heart?"

It was not death he feared. He dreaded facing his brothers, Sergei particularly. Why? That was something Storozhev could not tell. Perhaps it was because Sergei's warning was justified, and he was forced to break himself now? The Sailor's image suddenly rose before his eyes: it was not just his brother Sergei, but a man of another faith, other convictions. The figure became symbolic. In it he perceived the whole of that world which was set on overthrowing him, Storozhev, annihilating his strength and his might, obliterating the word "mine" from common usage, the word that was the cornerstone of his existence and the existence of thousands, hundreds of thousands of men like Storozhev. In that symbolic figure he saw the people who had taken away his land near Lebyazhye Lake, the beggars who would till his land now, the men who searched for him through the shrubbery, who were looking forward to his death, who hated, watched

for, and shot at him. He saw the world that hated him—the miller, Andrian, his brother Semyon, and the Red Army men were all part of that world. All this he saw personified in his brother's figure, looming bigger than life-size. He was the force that had roused the people, the villages, his friends, and had broken down his spirit and his strength.

"Where can I run from Sergei? Where?" he asked himself. "There's no escaping him. But what am I to do? Where am I to go? O God! Where are you? Teach me where to go, where to hide from people and from my brothers?"

The field was desolate, the skies were silent, and God gave him no answer.

He fell asleep, and when he awoke, he instantly came to a decision—surrender.

"I'll give myself up, but I'll come to the Revolutionary Committee a day after the time limit has expired. I'll go to the village on Sunday and not on Saturday. In any case I'll never make it in a day with my sore foot. That will show them, too, that I'm not afraid of their verdict."

"They'll put me to death," he thought, "they'll kill me, but I will have eaten first. I will have seen my family, my people. Who knows, they may pardon me," a thought occurred. "Oh well, it makes no difference."

"And so good-bye, my land near Lebyazhye Lake, good-bye!"

On Sunday evening he cleaned up and washed in the pool and limped towards the village.



Chapter 14

The peasants' hard-worked horses, crippled and starved in battle, were strenuously hauling cartloads of heavy rye from the fields to the threshing-barns. The smell of freshly baked bread wafted from the cottages.

Red Army men, strong and efficient, eagerly helped in the fields and threshing-floors, cutting rye, binding it in sheaves, threshing and winnowing it. The soldiers harnessed their own saddle-horses into ploughs, reaping-machines, threshers and seeders, and the horses, in fine mettle, carted sheaves of rye to the threshing-barns, and the grain to the bins.

The Secretary of the Tambov Provincial Party Committee received daily reports on the number of horses and soldiers helping the peasants, on the hundreds of acres cleared of the harvest and ploughed anew. He smiled in satisfaction, for this combined effort strengthened the peasants' confidence in the Party and the Government.

A small infantry detachment was stationed in Dvoriki. The Red Army men were quartered in different cottages; by imperceptible degrees they merged into the village life, they made friends and ties, and some were even thinking of settling down for good on this rich, black soil. Every morning, half of the soldiers set out for the ploughfields, and carts creaked and rumbled through the village streets. With merry chaff and banter, flirting with the girls, the soldiers took up their appointed tasks, which they performed neatly and efficiently.

They gave priority to the fields belonging to widows and old people who had lost their sons in the war, and many a widow sighed as she looked at these jolly, ruddy-cheeked fellows with such strength in their arms. And many a girl fretted and smiled, hoped and despaired, wondering if her tow-headed soldier would come back to her when his service was over. . . .

The nights were hot, the threshed rye gave off a heady fragrance, the yellow straw in the stacks was so soft and enticing, it rustled so caressingly, so sweet were the passionate whispers and the sighs. . . .

During the day the village was deserted except for the very old, the children and the Red Army men whose turn it was to clean out the cattle-sheds, stop up the holes with manure, and do odd jobs in the yards.

They put up a new house for Nikita Semyonovich, the Red partisan, but he was past enjoying it. When his son Fedka was found murdered in the woods, he shut himself away in grief and silence. He either sat glumly on his porch and watched life eddying in the village, or went to the Revolutionary Committee for a chat with Sergei Ivanovich, the Chairman.

Sergei Ivanovich did not seem to have changed at all in the four years he was away from Dvoriki: he had the same black moustache, the same steel-grey eyes, the same curly black hair. The only difference about the Sailor was the way he dressed now. He wore a wide-brimmed brown hat, yellow boots laced up to the knee in front, and a grey jacket of a foreign cut. But underneath the jacket he still wore the same old sailor's striped jersey, and a small toy-like revolver at his belt.

"How are you?" he asked Nikita Semyonovich, taking the stubby pipe out of his mouth. "Still grieving hard?"

"I am, Sergei Ivanovich," the coachman replied and his eyes glinted. "It was your brother who killed Fedka."

"It probably was," Sergei Ivanovich said.

"The wolf is prowling the countryside, and you can't catch him," Nikita Semyonovich muttered.

"We staged three raids, you know it yourself. Pyotr is no child, he's an old wolf, he knows how to hide. You wait, when autumn comes he'll creep out. We'll catch him, unless he's gone far away."

For weeks on end Nikita Semyonovich tramped through the dells and gullies with his rifle, looking for Storozhev. He examined every hummock, he footed every path, but there was no trace of the wolf, he had vanished.

And then he would fall on the ground and sob long and brokenly. One night he lay prone on the damp, cold ground till daybreak; there was a chilly tang in the air, autumn was coming and the golden summer, grown languid and weary in the heat, was fanning itself with the breezes, glad of the morning coolness.

The old man caught cold and died.

The Red detachment in a body and the whole village escorted him to the cemetery. His wife sobbed distractedly, for now she was all alone in the new house.

Men and women, young fellows and girls were in the habit of gathering outside the Revolutionary Committee of an evening. Sergei Ivanovich brought the latest newspapers, read Lenin's speeches aloud to them, and helped the men to calculate the tax they were due to pay.

When the gathering broke up, Sergei Ivanovich would lock himself in his room, which served him as bedroom and study, lift his straw mattress, pull out from underneath his dog-eared textbooks on science and chemistry, and sit late into the night reading, writing, rewriting, and filling whole pages with formulas and figures.

Before going to bed, he made the round of the village and checked the outposts, or sat on his porch smoking and watching the Milky Way fade and morning come in from afar.

He would sit for a long time listening to the jolly sounds of the accordion, the songs and laughter, the sharp tapping of dancing heels, and a smile broke on his face. Gradually the voices and the accordions grew hushed, shadows moved swiftly and lightly through the

streets, and he could hear the sounds of muffled, happy laughter and kisses.

The world lived, worked, loved and increased—the blessed world!

And now all sounds were hushed. Only the leaves rustled in the tree-tops, and the watchmen's clappers beat hollowly in the distance.

Sergei Ivanovich rose to go in, stretched and flexed his limbs, and then paused a little longer out of doors. The image of a young and charming girl rose vividly before him. He laughed softly because the storm that swept his country had abated, because the people were asleep in peace after a good day's work, and because the girl in that far town was counting the hours, waiting for him....



Chapter 15

The day was clear and mellow when Storozhev walked into his home village. Once again he saw the streets stretching before him, the

distant alleys wrapped in the gossamer cloak of twilight, the line of purple on the horizon and great heavy clouds blotting out the sky above, he saw a flock of sheep hurrying along the road, raising the dust, and he felt the chill breeze wafted in from the vegetable fields.

He saw the same rows of houses down below, trailing up the hillock and running down to the little river again; he saw the blaze of sunset in their windows, the church cross sparkling in the blue.

He saw, too, that life was different in the village.

The wary silence of the spring was gone. In those days it seemed that any life there was, plodded on its muffled way behind the walls, inside the yards and cottages: you did not hear the sound of happy songs then, nor any noise or laughter. The villagers would make their furtive way through back alleys to the water well and talk there in whispers about the terrifying turn life had taken.

And now, before he even reached the village proper, he heard the jolly sounds of accordions, voices singing songs, bursts of rollicking laughter; he saw that life was in full swing.

As Storozhev passed along the street, the singing and talking was hushed, children

darted indoors, pointing their fingers at him. He walked with a limp, leaning on his sword, his eyes cast down, while people silently peered from a distance at this apparition from another world.

No one stopped him, no one called him by name, no one greeted him, but the news that he had come flew across the village in a moment, even to the farthest cottages.

The door of the Revolutionary Committee was pulled open and Sergei Ivanovich came out towards Storozhev.

Pyotr Ivanovich limped to the porch and sank down on the steps in utter exhaustion. The pain in his wounded foot tormented him, he was tired and what he wanted most was sleep.

He felt no surprise at coming face to face with his brother so unexpectedly, it seemed that this was the way it should be, that this meeting was preordained.

Sergei Ivanovich took the pipe out of his mouth, knocked out the ashes against the heel of his boot, put it away in his pocket and only then spoke to his brother.

"So you've come after all?"

Pyotr Ivanovich nodded in reply. He felt he was seeing this clean-shaven man with the chin hewn out of stone for the first time, this man at once familiar and strange.

"Come to give yourself up?"

Pyotr Ivanovich dropped his head and made no reply.

"Tired, are you?"

"Tired. I want to sleep..." Pyotr Ivanovich mumbled.

"All right, we shall talk tomorrow."

Sergei Ivanovich called a soldier and said: "Take him to the barn."

Pyotr Ivanovich stood up with an effort and could not hold back a groan.

"Wounded?"

"Yes," he replied. He took off his revolver, drawing the strap over his head, handed it to his brother and limped after the soldier.

Sergei Ivanovich looked after him and said aloud to himself: "So that's that, the wolf has come...."

Next morning Storozhev woke up with a start, as though someone had given his sore foot a push. He opened his eyes. He felt clear-headed, refreshed after his good long sleep. A ray of sunlight lay on the floor. Dust curled up, shimmering in the patch of light. He made out voices talking quietly on the other side of the wall.

"Is he asleep?" a child's voice asked.

"He's asleep, darling," a woman replied.

"Where's Dad, in the barn?"

"He's in the barn, darling."

"Is he asleep?"

"He's asleep, Kolka dear, he's asleep. You'll see your Dad as soon as he wakes up. He's grown old and grey, our Dad!" The woman gave a little sob, and the child grew quiet.

"He's come too late, your Dad, too late to give himself up," a voice Storozhev knew muttered just outside the door. "He didn't come on time, the bandit. You're right there, he is grey, all wolves are grey."

Pyotr Ivanovich shook off the remnants of sleep.

"Who's there?" he called.

"Pyotr!" the woman shrieked.

Storozhev sprang off the bench, limped quickly to the door and pushed it open with his good foot.

The bolt clicked, the door was wide open. Sunlight streamed into the barn. His heart beat faster—on the lawn in front of the barn he saw Kolka, his son, his heir. There he was—alive! Praskovya was sitting on a tree-stump crying, with her face in her hands, and Kolka, barefooted, wearing nothing but a pair of pants, gazed fearfully at the man silhouetted against the dark rectangle of the door.

Pyotr Ivanovich leaned against the door-

frame for support: his head was spinning and his legs were numb.

A second later, when his faintness passed, he rushed to Kolka, dragging his aching foot, but the boy did not recognize his father in this grey-haired man with a tangled beard and deep-sunk eyes under gruff, overhanging eyebrows. He ran screaming to his mother.

A Red soldier stood carving intricate designs on a willow stick with his knife, and watched this meeting with curiosity.

Storozhev seized the trembling, weeping boy in his arms. A recent crescent-shaped scar showed pink on the child's forehead. He clasped his son close to him, showering kisses on his bleached yellow hair, on his eyes filled with salty tears. Praskovya wailed brokenly beside him.

When tears had washed the shock away, Praskovya told him how long and tormenting Kolka's struggle with death had been, how unbearable were her sleepless nights until the boy recovered. She went on to tell him that crops were good that year, that they had finished threshing the rye, that food quotas were abolished, and that Andrian said he thought life was easier now, no comparing with the old days.

And then she wept again for this calamity that could not be remedied, she wept because

he would be put to death, coming to surrender when the time limit was up, she reproached him for forsaking his home and family, for not minding his own business.

Storozhev listened absently to his wife's reproaches while a queer feeling of embarrassment and uneasiness welled up in him. This was not what he had expected to hear from her. She was *not* asking *him* to go and beg them to pardon him, to spare his life, she did not tell him that their home would fall apart without him, all she did was reproach and blame him.

"Enough now!" he rudely cut short his wife's lamenting. "It's not for you to judge. Whatever's done can't be undone. And then it seems you don't really want me very much," he added maliciously. "You'll get on without me. You'd better go and fetch me some clothes and underwear, see how ragged I am? It's too early to think of death—it may or may not come. And what's the difference, we only die once!"

Praskovya hastened to untie the bundle she had brought, but the bearded soldier with a bandage round his jaw, who had until then watched them in silence, came up to her and took the bundle away.

"Not allowed," he said calmly. "We'll give him whatever's necessary ourselves. And anyway, enough! Go, Praskovya, he'll come home

this evening. Sergei Ivanovich has given his permission. And now it's time we took him to the bath-house."

Praskovya went away. Kolka, clutching his mother's skirt, trailed behind and kept looking round at his father.

The soldier took out the underwear, trousers, coat, cap and boots, and handed them to Storozhev. Some meat and a pie were left in the bundle. Storozhev asked:

"Give me some."

"You're not allowed to eat much," said the soldier, breaking off hunks of bread and meat. "You might die, and we've got to question you first."

"You're a strict one all right. In other words there's nothing left but the questioning?" Storozhev said, greedily eating the bread. "And what's in that left corner there?"

"We'll see later on what's in those corners." The soldier drew Storozhev's hand away from the meat. "I told you: it's not allowed. That's all there is to it. Heard me, Pyotr Ivanovich?"

Storozhev looked up in wonder at this bearded man in a military tunic and long army coat slung on his shoulders. He thought there was something very familiar about those eyes, the turned-up nose, and those spiteful, cunningly smiling lips.

"Look how high-hat you've got!" the soldier laughed grimly. "Don't want to know your own people, do you? And yet we rode side by side for a whole year, and you saw me every day for twelve years before that!"

Storozhev did and did not recognize Lyonka.

"Lyonka! You!" he whispered, bewildered.

"So we meet, Pyotr Ivanovich. And I was thinking they'd done you in already, and was I sorry! You and I have to settle up accounts. You've got a little debt to pay me!"

"Debt? What debt?" Storozhev asked.

"You don't remember? But I do, Pyotr Ivanovich, I haven't forgotten your debt, gosh, how well I remember it!"

Lyonka threw back his hair: a red scar coiled down his forehead.

"Your whip left this mark, remember, out in the field last winter?"

Storozhev recalled the day. It had been frosty and sunny, that day when Lyonka left him.

And now here he was standing before him with sternly compressed lips and deep lines across his forehead. He was no longer the kid Lyonka, you could not shout him down any more, you could not strike him with a whip, he had grown older and harder.

All through these last four months, ever since Natasha gave birth to her little boy,

Lyonka's one thought was to find Storozhev, to tell him of his violent hatred for him, because he alone was to blame for everything.

And now the moment had come. Storozhev read a bestial, inhuman hatred in Lyonka's eyes, and shuddered.

"Well, Lyonka," he said hollowly. "Well, are you going to kill me, or what? Kill me, you've got the upper hand."

"No, we're not allowed. It's strict with us. But I've got it strong against you—it takes all I've got to hold back from settling that score with you right now. For Natasha, for myself, for everything. Oh, never mind, they'll settle it for me."

Lyonka pulled himself together.

"Come on to the bath-house. You're lousy, you say?"

The streets they walked through were empty, the threshing-barns were the busy spots. Clouds of dry grain dust hung over the drums rumbling and roaring hungrily, over the whistling drivers and the flails beating rhythmically. Threshing was in full swing, the sun was coming to the end of its blessed reign, soon the wind would come driving wet and flabby clouds across the sky, tearing leaves off the trees, and the cold, autumn rain would drench the naked branches....

Storozhev paused to watch the men working in harmony on the threshers, he saw the drums gobbling up the heavy, caked sheaves and belching out with a roar the mass of chopped straw. He looked at the growing mounds of well-grown grain and the huge stacks of yellow straw.

It occurred to him that on the morrow he would no longer see the sun and the sky, that never again would he take the polished flail in his calloused hands, never again wipe the sweat pourng down his face.

On the morrow—the end, death.

His forehead gathered in a deep frown. He waved his hand hopelessly and, hunching his shoulders, limped quickly towards the bath-house.

It was quiet here in the deep green of the gardens, far away from the barns. Seen against the blue of the sky, the trees seemed to droop limply from the dry, unbroken heat.

He walked into the bath-house, bending his head low in the doorway, and was instantly enveloped in warm steam. Lyonka, closing the door after Storozhev, sat down on the threshold and took up his work again, cutting a fancy design on the young green bark of the willow branch.

He could hear Storozhev snorting and

splashing in the water, rubbing down his body with a soaped piece of bast. Lyonka listened, shook his head, and a grim smile curled his lips.

"To listen to him, you'd think he was getting set for his wedding!"

"I say, Alexei Grigoryevich." Storozhev thrust his tousled, wet head out of the door. "D'you have a razor on you? How I hate a beard!"

"Hm, he wants a razor! Where would you get one now? There was one in the detachment, but they made a mess of it, it's as sharp as a hammer now. I, for one, used to shave myself with my knife. I'd whet it and shave, but I've given it up now, can't waste the time. . . ."

Lyonka twirled the knife in front of his eyes and wiped it lovingly on his sleeve.

"Want me to fix it up?"

"Be a pal, Lyonka," Storozhev said, toning down his voice. "Fix it up for me, I haven't had a shave in five months."

"No, I'll never be a pal of yours, but I'll fix the knife for you. Mind you don't try and cut your throat now!"

He took off his belt, buckled it on to the door handle, and whetted the blade with quick, sure motions. He then gave the knife to Storozhev.

"Take the mirror while you're at it," Lyonka muttered, pulling a square mirror pasted on to a piece of cardboard out of his tunic pocket. "It's handier with a mirror."

"Look how generous you are!" Storozhev smiled. "I expect you're not a Communist yet?"

"Go on, go on! There's no need to stand chin-wagging with you, God damn your soul!" Lyonka said, and his chin quivered. "Messing about with your sort!"

Storozhev disappeared within. Lyonka sat down, grumbling under his breath. His rancour against Storozhev grew. He was afraid he would not be able to control himself, his hatred might burst through, and then Storozhev would be done for. But he remembered his talks with Sergei Ivanovich, and the promise he had given him to keep himself in hand—he remembered, and gritted his teeth.

"Hey, you, hurry up there!" he shouted. "They'll give your body another wash tomorrow anyway!"

Storozhev heard him and the thought of death pierced his heart again. He compressed his lips in a stern line, quickly whipped the soap into a lather, soaped his face and, standing the mirror up on the window-sill, began to remove his long, tangled beard. The knife cut easily and cleanly, strands of hair fell on the floor.

He washed his face in warm water, put on his clothes quickly and came out of the bath-house. After the hot bath his foot began to bother him again, he could hardly step on it.

"Here, take the stick," Lyonka offered.

Storozhev looked at the pretty design.

"You're quite an artist, it seems. I never knew."

Lyonka cut him short brusquely: "I'm not giving it to you for keeps. I didn't make it for you. Tomorrow you'll have no further use for it, I'll take it back. Come on now!"

Red, murderous sparks flamed up in Storozhev's eyes. "Knock him a blow on the head and run," the thought raced through his mind, but just then Lyonka took his rifle at the ready and put his finger on the cock. "Get a move on!"

Storozhev quelled his rage and, leaning on the stick, walked towards the barn. Once inside, Lyonka gave him a little bread, meat and sour milk. Storozhev ate ravenously, picking up each crumb that fell into his lap, gnawing the meat and sucking out the amber-coloured marrow from the bones.

A minute or two later, Lyonka looked into the barn. Storozhev was snoring loudly, his arms spread on the table before him and his head cushioned in them.

Chapter 16

Rain came without warning. Heavy clouds gathered on the horizon. In a rolling mass they rose higher and higher in the sky, drew the sun into their midst, and the day's golden setting melted away. A violent gust of wind—herald of a thunder-storm—flew down the road, whipping up the dust, playing mischievously with the trees, ruffling the straw in the barns and sheds. And then, as though catching up with the wind, the first bouncing drops of rain struck the roofs and the roads.

Men working in the threshing-barns darted about excitedly, rescuing the grain and the straw stacks from the rain. The old men carefully covered the mounds of grain with sacking, while the young chaps and girls climbed into the soft heaps of straw squealing and laughing.

Horses, still harnessed into the threshing-machines, stood with drooping heads, their hot, sweating backs steaming in the rain. And now the wind pushed the thunder-clouds away, and the sun peeped out timidly at the world, not quite certain yet whether it was really free to shine.

Below lay the earth, refreshed, washed by the rain. Heavy steam rose from it. The earth

was breathing in the clean, sparkling air with abandon.

Puddles dried in the sun, and only in the shade raindrops still glistened on the burdock leaves.

And once again the threshers started rumbling in the barns.

Someone woke Storozhev up. It was his brother Sergei.

Shaking off his sleep, Pyotr Ivanovich took the bowl of sour milk from the table and gulped down the slippery slices.

"Sleep well?"

"Very," Pyotr Ivanovich replied.

"We shall talk after supper tonight," Sergei Ivanovich said. "Talk seriously."

Sergei Ivanovich eyed his brother glumly. Pyotr was sitting on the bench, both elbows on the table. a frown on his high forehead. The thought of death crept into his heart once more.

"Why not?" he said, and his voice broke. "We'll talk, and then I'll be marched up against the wall, right?" Without answering, Sergei Ivanovich took out his pipe and stuffed it with tobacco.

"We'll talk tonight." He raised his thin eyebrows high over his steel-grey eyes. "And now

you may go home for a while. Lyonka," he called, "take him there!"

"I wish you'd relieve me, Sergei Ivanovich," Lyonka said scowling. "I can't trust myself, my heart is sore against your brother, it's eating me up—I'll kill him. You hear, Sergei Ivanovich, I'm afraid it'll get the better of me. It's burning me all up."

"I forgave you once, and I won't forgive you again. Understand?" Sergei Ivanovich gave Lyonka an icy look. "We are no bandits. Take yourself in hand. Well! Tomorrow you'll be relieved." Sergei Ivanovich strode to the door. "Tomorrow morning you'll go out and work, and now do what I say."

Lyonka saluted, raising his palm to his old cap, faded almost white, with a peeling crimson star in front.

"The fuss, the god damned fuss," Lyonka muttered savagely when Sergei Ivanovich had gone a little way from the barn. "The fuss they're making over you, I mean. They say they're waiting for orders. If I had my way I'd knock your soul out right now. Never mind, they'll knock it out of you in the morning."

That meant—tomorrow!

Tomorrow—that mant a handful of short and
ly precise hours. They could not be
d or stopped. Every heart-beat brought

closer the moment when it would stop for ever, rent asunder by a searing bullet....

Tomorrow...:

That meant only one night, the last night in this warm, blessed world.

How good the world was! There was that dog now, stopping in front of the barn, wagging its tail in such a friendly way. Tomorrow the same dog would sniff at his corpse....

That platoon now marching down the road, the men's shoulders sprinkled with grain dust. Tomorrow they would fire at his heart....

"Well, get along," Lyonka snapped, breaking off his train of thought. "What's the good of coming there at night? I won't leave you to sleep with your woman."

Pyotr Ivanovich stopped and shuffled his feet on one spot, turning round and round as if he had lost something, afraid to believe that he was going home, that he would see his family, and Kolka.

His five-walled stone house, with a rooster carved in the roof edging over the porch, stood near the church.

A dog barked and snapped at Storozhev's leg. Lyonka swung his rifle at it, and the dog jumped back, yelping.

Storozhev's heart beat madly as he stepped

over the threshold. His family were sitting round the table—everyone was there; they were having supper. The door let him through without a creak. The room was filled with twilight. He crossed himself.

"Good evening to you all!" he said and did not know his own voice, the way it trembled and broke.

The clatter of spoons ceased.

"Dad!" shouted Ivan, the eldest.

They all stopped eating, but no one stirred, no one jumped up towards him, their father. He stood in the middle of the room and there was nowhere for him to sit. At last Andrian asked curtly:

"They set you free?"

And Storozhev fancied he heard a note of something bad in his voice, something not unlike apprehension.

He made no answer. Praskovya, who sat motionless as if she were beyond understanding, burst out crying. So did Kolka.

"Now, now, stop howling!" Andrian shouted peremptorily. "Are you burying him, or something? Come on, sit down, Pyotr."

This very masterly tone of Andrian's surprized Storozhev. He came up to the table and wanted to sit down on the bench, but it was occupied by his sons. The chairs were taken

by Andrian, Praskovya, and her sister Katerina. There were no more chairs, benches or stools in the house.

"Move up!" Andrian growled at his nephews.

Pushing one another they moved up and made room for their father on the bench. It was cramped and uncomfortable sitting like that.

"Give him some porridge!" Andrian gave the command again. "A man's come home, and they've all lost their heads."

Praskovya picked up a bowl and dashed to the stove, tripping up the chair she had been sitting on and overturning it with a clatter. Pyotr Ivanovich started, and Andrian mumbled something derogatory about the clumsiness of women. Praskovya placed the bowl of steaming porridge in front of her husband and went to the dresser to get him a spoon. She rummaged long and noisily through the drawers, but there was no extra spoon. She waved despairingly and ran out of doors. A minute later she came back bringing a spoon, which she must have borrowed from the neighbours.

The boys ate in silence, their eyes fixed curiously on their father.

"Well, what's new with you?" Pyotr Ivanovich asked, breaking the uneasy silence. "How were the crops?"

His sons and Andrian seemed to have been waiting for just this question. They all started talking at once, discussing the new tax, free trade, their rye and oats, some heifer they wanted to sell to Ivan Fedotovich, and as for their father, they seemed to forget him entirely.

A loud argument arose between Andrian and Alexei about whether they ought to sell the heifer or not.

"What heifer is that?" Pyotr Ivanovich asked. "Why sell it?"

They all suddenly remembered their father, that he was right there beside them, and they lapsed into bewildered silence.

Alexei was the first to speak:

"We've got to sell the heifer. She's no use. No good will come of her anyway."

"A skinny heifer she is," put in Ivan.

"Silence!" Pyotr Ivanovich roared. "It's not for you to decide! You'll squander and sell everything in no time, you'd do better if you tried to buy something!"

"But we did buy her," Andrian said. "We bought her in Dukhovka in exchange for straw. And now they're rebuying her for meat. It's true, we've got to sell her. Ivan, run along to Ivan Fedotovich after supper, tell him to come and fetch the heifer..." and once again they were busy discussing the heifer.

Pyotr Ivanovich sat in silence and his heart felt heavy, oppressed with a baffling anxiety and a profound uneasiness. He wanted to shout them down, to send all their decisions to the devil, but somehow he could not stand up and shout at them.

The discussion continued. Kolka alone, without listening or understanding what the grown-ups were shouting about, peered like a little beast at his father. Pyotr Ivanovich wanted to take the child on his knee, but Kolka slithered away like a snake and crawled under the table. His father tried to catch him. Kolka shrieked at the top of his voice and rushed to Andrian. His uncle sat him on his knee and tried to soothe him, but Kolka went on sobbing and, pointing his hand at his father, he cried through his tears:

"He's a stranger, I don't want him!"

Pyotr Ivanovich felt so ill at ease and embarrassed that he left his seat and walked towards the door, throwing over his shoulder:

"I'll go and take a look at the yard."

"Go ahead, go ahead," Andrian said in a loud voice. "Take a good look at it. Go with him, Vasya, show your father how we're working here."

Storozhev, Vasya and Lyonka went through the yard.

They saw clean, spacious sheds, where sheep were moving about, a cow turned round at the sound of their approach, lowed and turned away again.

"Where are the horses?"

"Out on night pasture. A soldier watches over them now," Vasya boasted. "Because it's not safe. They say there are some bandits on the prowl."

"You dirty brat!" Storozhev yelled. "You ought to be flogged, you fool!" Vasya stood facing him, blinking his eyes in fright and chewing a blade of straw. "The son of a bitch, 'bandits' he says!"

Storozhev raised his hand to box his son's ears, but Lyonka stepped in:

"Stop it now! Oh, you, think you can get bossy, do you? Move on!"

Limping and leaning on his stick, Storozhev angrily made a round of the farm. There was nothing to find fault with, nothing at all.

On their way back to the house, he stumbled on a nosebag in the dark and almost fell down. Glad of a chance to vent his bitter rage he bellowed:

"Fine farmers you are, damn you all! Scattering property all over the road, you bastards!"

He strode into the house, slamming the door,

and was about to go on shouting inside the room, when Andrian cut him short brusquely:

"Stop yelling! You'll wake Kolka. You warrior! You'd better learn to yell no more, brother, your day is over, you've yelled your last."

Andrian's harshness had a sobering effect on Storozhev. He looked about the room: Praskovya was fussing near the bed, comforting Kolka who whimpered in his sleep; the other boys were not in the room, there was only Andrian smoking in the corner. He thought he saw Lyonka's face in the darkness, close by the stove. Someone was playing the accordion in the street, a crowd of young people walked past the windows, singing.

"Well, master, that's that. We told you so!" Andrian took a pull on his cigarette.

Storozhev winced at the words and sat down by the window. A fly was beating against the glass. He caught it and, tearing off its legs, threw it on the floor. The fly went on buzzing tiresomely. Storozhev crushed it with his foot. The room grew perfectly still, the only sound was Kolka's even breathing.

"He's fallen asleep," Praskovya whispered and came close to her husband. "Pyotr dear, what's going to happen now? They'll kill you, you know." And she wiped her streaming tears with the edge of her apron.

Storozhev said nothing, he merely clenched his hands so hard his joints cracked.

"What can we do?" Andrian said softly. "There's no escaping fate."

Storozhev remembered Kolka's screams: "He's a stranger, I don't want him!" and thought: "They're not sorry for me, not sorry for me at all."

Ivan came in and whispered with Andrian, asking his permission about something or other, and then, without a glance at his father, went out. Praskovya wept quietly.

"Oh well." He sighed. "I'll go. Good-bye."

"Good-bye." Andrian offered him his calloused, hard hand. "Perhaps it'll be all right, they don't shoot everyone, perhaps they won't touch you either. You did give yourself up after all...."

Lyonka muttered angrily from his corner by the stove. The merry crowd went past the windows again.

"Take care of the children," Storozhev said, frowning, "the farm, Kolka...."

"You tripped there, Pyotr, you certainly did. Your reckoning was all wrong." Andrian sighed suddenly.

"All right." There was a ring of steel in Storozhev's voice. "I knew where I was heading."

"You say you did, but do you now?" Andrian took a last pull on his cigarette, flipped it through the open window and spat. "And now you'll have to stand to answer, they'll question you about everything.... Well, I'll go and take a look at the sheep. I'll come tomorrow."

"Tomorrow ... tomorrow," the thought raced through Storozhev's mind.

He walked out of the house, slamming the door. Praskovya thrust a little parcel at Lyonka and whispered through her tears:

"Give him those apples, do...."

Chapter 17

Storozhev sat down wearily, smoothed down his hair and yawned. He felt composed and tranquil, thoughts of the dreaded morrow melted away and clawed at his heart no longer.

His whole life, right up to this moment of musing, appeared to him as a thing apart, as if he were seeing the life of another man.

One experiences this feeling of split personality when one lifts the veil and peers into the innermost secrets of one's mind and heart. Engrossed in this profound contemplation of one's most hideous and happiest secrets, the way it was with Storozhev, one is split in two:

reason, unhampered by the scum of passions, watches without prejudice, like some stern and unapproachable judge, the ball of vacillation, love, hatred and fear writhing before him, all that comprises the stuffing of man's life.

All through those soundless, misty nights when he lurked in the shrubbery, when bitter disappointment gave way to ghostly visions of the past, when hatred flooded his being, blotting out all other feelings, Storozhev still had a tiny guiding light and towards this light he strained with the last of his waning hopes.

Men took away his right to rule the lives of the poor and the weak. Together with his land those people took away his strength, but he had tasted the sweetness of power, the right to rule the lives of others. He could not relinquish this power!

His friends had betrayed him, surrendered their arms, gone into hiding, broken the pledge of loyalty to the end; they had deceived him with visions of future revolt.

And he had deceived his own self, roaming like a hungry wolf, prowling close to the crimson blaze of fires he had set, killing and crippling men.

God had deceived him: in vain were all his fervent prayers, his devotions and his votive candles.

Amid this world of suffering, devastation and black malice, his home lay like a hallowed little island, where—so he thought—he was awaited, he was needed, where poverty and ruin were knocking on the windows, because he was away.

When he resolved to give himself up in order to die, he never doubted that during the twenty-four hours before they put him to death he, though deceived by everyone, betrayed and beaten, would in his home see people whom he loved, whose eyes would speak their deep-felt grief for him. He thought he would relax, forget all that he had gone through, all his bitter thoughts, and then, purified by the boundless sorrow of his dear ones, would depart this life.

And now this dream was shattered.

Kolka, small, foolish Kolka, the most beloved, showed him where he stood with that one phrase, expressing the secret, though unshaped, thought of the whole family.

He was a stranger—unwanted.

He was a stranger to all men, a stranger in his own home. And only now he understood clearly and knew definitely that his family had no need of him.

And, after all, it really was a long time since he had taken a hand in the management. It was Andrian and the boys who had been look-

ing after the house and the farm for quite some time. And it wasn't any worse without him than with him there.

Now take that heifer, for instance. Storozhev recalled how in the spring, Ivan, his eldest, and Andrian had found a heifer that was going for a low price in the neighbouring village, and had decided to buy it. Pyotr Ivanovich had objected loudly, calling them greenhorns, he forbade the purchase and went away. But they bought the heifer just the same and it was a clever thing to do, there was no denying it, it was clever of them. They paid next to nothing for it—ten poods of straw—the heifer fed out in the pasture all that summer, and now they were selling it to the butcher at a good profit.

Storozhev realized that the years of insurrection, battle and tramping had made him lose his farmer's instinct. The very axis on which his whole life revolved, the way a wheel revolves on its axle, was broken.

If you send a wheel down the road, it will at first roll straight and sure, by force of inertia, but then, deprived of the axle's support, it will begin to wobble right and left, bouncing ridiculously at every bump, until at last it turns over, flops and lies still some distance away from the road.

Storozhev's life, too, had broken away from

its axis, from his farm, from his accustomed and orderly way of life where everything revolved on more wealth, more crisp new banknotes, more acres of land, more horses, cows and sheep, more farm-hands, and more sons. And his life went on reeling and staggering, bouncing and wobbling, until at last it fell down dead in this strange barn which smelt of rancid grain and mouse dung.

The streets grew dark. Voices came from outside.

He lay prone on the bench and thoughts thronged his mind, thoughts that had no sequence.

Ill-feeling was mounting up in him towards his sons who had forgotten him, their father, towards Andrian who had usurped his farm. But reason prompted him—was it not he who first forgot his sons, was it not he who put Andrian in charge?

Bitterness flooded his heart because he had to die without bequeathing to anyone his hatred and rancour for men who wore red stars. And once again he was possessed by hatred and a savage desire to avenge his lost acres, his lost power. He regretted his surrender and began to invent ways and means to escape so he could kill and burn again. Then again he was locked in apathy to everything, to what

was happening now, to what was coming....

His reverie was interrupted. A hand fell on his shoulder and a voice told him to get up.

He came to. Long shadows were leaping up and down the walls of the barn. Standing beside his bench was his brother. With him was a tall, fair-haired man, wearing a leather jacket and tall boots, a man Storozhev had never seen before.

"Interrogation," he thought, and suddenly he felt light-hearted. The end was nearing—fatal and inevitable.

Sergei Ivanovich and the stranger sat down.

"Now then," Sergei Ivanovich said. "Let's talk frankly. Don't tangle up or confuse the issue. You are a clever man, and we are busy. Don't keep anything back."

"I have nothing to keep back," Pyotr Ivanovich replied. "I'll tell you what I can, what I don't know I cannot tell you. I shall not say anything about my friends."

"Well ... let us talk about you," said the fair-haired man. "We should like to know why you gave yourself up a whole day after the time limit had expired."

"I didn't give myself up," Storozhev snapped.

"You didn't?" Sergei Ivanovich asked.

"No, Sergei. One gives oneself up in battle

if one expects mercy. Even if you are a brother of mine, it would have never entered my head to beg you for mercy or ask you to pardon me."

"It would have been no use," Sergei Ivanovich said coldly.

"I knew that."

"But then why did you come?"

"I came to die," Storozhev replied glumly. "To die in my home village. I didn't want to die like a stray dog."

Sergei Ivanovich glanced rapidly down a sheet of paper lying in front of him.

"Tell me, were you in any way involved in that affair near Sampur when a train was derailed? That was a month and a half ago."

"It was I who did it."

"Alone?"

"Alone." Storozhev's voice was hollow. "Alone then and now."

"Were you aware," the fair-haired man interrupted Sergei Ivanovich, "that the train was taking bread to Moscow for starving workmen and their children?"

"No, I wasn't," replied Storozhev, and added with venom: "But had I known it I would have derailed ten more trains."

The stranger was startled by this unexpectedly brutal avowal.

"It's good that you're telling the truth. One more question: was it you who raided the village last July? Two barns were burnt down, three women wounded and two children killed."

Storozhev paled and cringed.

"You're lying!" he shouted suddenly. "You're lying! You're trying to blacken my conscience before I die!"

Sergei Ivanovich selected a paper from the pile in front of him and handed it to his brother. In the smoking and flickering light of the lantern he read the statement made by Matryona Savina, written in a jerky, uneven hand. The woman told how her two children—a boy and a girl of seven and eight—died that memorable night, killed by grenade splinters.

"Well?"

"I ... I ... didn't want to do that," Pyotr Ivanovich mumbled, stuttering. "I wanted to get to Kolka. My son lay dying...."

"Did you kill Andrei Andreyevich?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I won't tell you."

"Too bad. Don't you realize, Pyotr, that your fight is over, that even those who had helped you have renounced you? You have no allies in the land."

"It makes no difference."

"But if it makes no difference to you, why don't you talk, why do you keep things back?"

Pyotr Ivanovich suddenly remembered Pantelei Lukich, his words, his secret hopes. He chuckled drily.

"You'll have a hard job exterminating our breed, Sergei. It's a tenacious sort. I shall die, but others like me will remain. They're just lying low for the moment."

"You mean you are still hoping for something, still waiting for something? It's no use, Pyotr. Didn't you see the life that's going on in the village?"

Sergei Ivanovich spoke of the pepole who had fallen so greedily and eagerly upon their work, who wanted nothing but peace in the world and peace in their own lives. He spoke of the oceans of tears, of the curses heaped on Pyotr Ivanovich and his friends by widows and orphans, of the beggars and farm-hands who only now saw their first glimmering of light. He spoke passionately, as though he wanted those who still roamed the dells and shrubbery to hear him. He seemed to have forgotten that only three men were listening to him: Storozhev, his former farm-hand Lyonka, and the fair-haired man from Moscow.

Pyotr Ivanovich listened to this ardent

speech with drooping head; this was his brother talking, they came of the same mother, the same blood coursed through their veins.

"Remember, Pyotr, I once told you to break yourself or we'd have to break you. Well, now we've met—you have been broken. . . ."

Sergei Ivanovich stood up.

"In other words," the fair-haired man interrupted, addressing Storozhev, "there is but one last class of exploiters left in Russia. You belong to that class. You will die tomorrow, and your class will not outlive you long."

Pyotr Ivanovich rose. His hands were shaking; he bent close to his brother and said to him, breathing jerkily and feverishly:

"All right, to hell with you! I'll tell you why I killed Andrei the Goat. He planted his feet on my balks! The land is mine! Why was it taken away from me? Then let him rot there! Go now, I've told you everything."

Storozhev clutched at his chest, racked with a long, heart-rending cough, and his strength spent, he fell back on the bench.

The kerosene lamp was smoking, a patch of yellow light lay on the floor. The village was deep in slumber.

Sergei Ivanovich slowly gathered up his papers, thrust them into his folder and a worn leather brief-case. He pulled forward the hat

which had slipped to the back of his head, put his pipe into his pocket, took it out again, tried to light it, moved his portfolio to the other end of the table, and paused.

"It would have been better if you had shot yourself," he whispered. "I would have, rather than go to the enemy with thoughts such as yours in my mind."

Pyotr Ivanovich raised his dull eyes and was surprised that the two were still there and were still talking to him.

"What do you want now?" he asked wearily and indifferently. "There's only one thing I want—death. Can't you understand me?" he shrieked wildly.

Even the fair-haired man from Moscow had never seen a prisoner like that before. He had seen different men: some grovelled on the floor, shaking with fear, catching hands to kiss, begging for their lives to be spared; others, weary and stunned, stood up to the wall indifferently, while still others admitted their mistakes with frankness and sincerity, and it was evident that these last had been deceived and had been drawn into the insurrection spontaneously.

But this one . . . this one was like none of them.

"A beast," the man was thinking. "It's obvious he's a beast and a dangerous

enemy. But perhaps he's just a madman?"

"But supposing you were pardoned after all?" he asked. "We don't want your blood, you know, we don't seek revenge. Supposing your life were spared, what would you do?"

Storozhev thought: "Now, really, supposing they did release me tomorrow and told me to go and work, what would I do then? How would I live?"

This question had never occurred to him before, and he was unable to find an answer to it. How was he to live in a community half of which hated him and the other feared and shunned him? How could he live if he had to crush all hope of ever becoming the first in the foremost rank, of owning nothing but what he already owned, forgetting the words: "my land," "my farm," "my power"? Perhaps he could go a thousand miles away, disappear from his own parts? But even there, cold steely eyes would feel him out, eyes like that man's, his brother's, and they would point to him and say: beware of that man, he killed our people and burned our homes!

Storozhev remained silent.

Sergei Ivanovich and the fair-haired man stood there a long time, waiting for an answer. The clock in the tower struck ten. Sergei Ivanovich heaved a sigh of sorrow; for a mo-

ment his heart was wrung with poignant pity. He remembered a dewy morning (why? what for?), it was a long time ago, he was only a kid then. He and Pyotr were on their way to Lebyazhye Lake. The sun was rising. Sergei was tired, he whimpered and stumbled. Pyotr picked him up and carried him to the lake, the way a mother carries her child. And now he would die, Pyotr, his brother, his enemy....

Sergei Ivanovich took out a sheet of paper and a pencil from his brief-case, cleaned the lamp wick, and said:

"We're going. Here's some paper for you, you may want to write to us or to your family. Good-bye."

"What about doubling the guard?" Sergei Ivanovich whispered to the fair-haired man as they walked out of the barn.

"Don't worry," the man replied. "Lyonka won't let him out. You told me yourself there's no better guard than Lyonka for him."

The door creaked and slammed. The men who were his last tie with the world, with life itself, were walking away. Storozhev sprang from his bench to go after them, but pulled himself up with a hopeless gesture. What was the use? What would he say to them? What?

A newspaper, dropped by Sergei Ivanovich, was lying on the floor beside the bench. Storo-

zhev picked up the crumpled old sheet mechanically; with little interest he read through the news he did not understand, articles, notices and telegrams.

Only at the very foot, among a jumble of different rubbish and trivialities of life in the other world, he saw mention made of Makhno and Petlura. These two names, Makhno's particularly, were known to Storozhev.

"They're still alive?" a tired thought trailed through his mind.

Abruptly somehow he forgot all about those people. The newspaper fell from his hand, and he sat for a long time, thinking of nothing at all.

Chapter 18

Suddenly his ear detected a crunching sound beyond the wall. He stole to the door. The crunching came louder—it was Lyonka eating apples.

Storozhev remembered that his wife had sent him some apples. Lyonka told him about it when they were on their way back from the house, but had not given him the apples then.

"Give me an apple," he said to Lyonka through the door.

"Where will I get them from?" Lyonka snapped.

"You told me yourself my wife sent me some."

"You're too late—the fellows have finished the lot. There's just five left, and I've got the whole night ahead of me. You can sleep, but I've got to watch you. I want to sleep too, so I'll munch the apples to keep me awake."

"Give me a couple," Storozhev asked.

"All right," Lyonka said and unlocked the door. "Here, eat your last, say good-bye to your apple-tree."

Storozhev slammed the door hard and swore. Lyonka locked it again.

This fit of anger lifted the weight from his heart and cleared his thoughts of apathy.

"Give me those apples," he shouted. "They're mine, you scum!"

"Hey, not so loud! Yours.... All that's yours now is seven hours to live. You'd better say your prayers instead of yelling," Lyonka replied and set to slicing the apples with his knife, and Storozhev again heard the juicy fruit crunching on his teeth.

Seven hours.... That meant they'd shoot him at dawn. Seven hours from now rifles would crack and break off his life.

Now, for the first time, he really understood with every cell of his body that in seven hours' time he would be no more, he would die.

"Die!" his blood, his heart, his senses clamoured.

He screwed up his eyes, a shiver ran down his spine, his knees gave way. Terror such as this had never possessed him yet.

In battle he had been frightened in a different sort of way—there, in order to save his own life, he destroyed the lives of many others, and then, too, death would come suddenly.

And now?

Now he had to brood on it for seven hours, hear the hours crawling away, then walk out of the barn and plod a long weary way somewhere beyond the village, in front of a group of armed men, his enemies, stand facing them and wait tormentingly long for the firing squad to fall in, hear the command, and only then—die.

"No!"

Storozhev, who only half an hour ago did not know how he could go on living, realized that he had been wrong, that he wanted to live. Of course he wanted to live. To live! To live and fight—that's what he wanted—not death! He had been wrong, he had been worn out, he knew he wanted to live and only to live.

He darted about the barn. He paused in the middle of the floor muttering incoherently, or sat down on the bench, and then jumped up again, ran up and down the room, came close

to the door and heard Lyonka munching his apples placidly.

His apples!

Hatred mounted in him together with a great lust for life.

"There are people out there, on the other side of the wall," he thought bitterly. "They have turned away from me. They have seized my land, tilled the acres where my estate was to have been, and gathered in the crops from my fields into their bins."

"There, beyond the wall, is my family that does not care for me. To hell with the family!"

"The leaders have sold themselves, we'll find others, there are some still, they're alive, alive!" this thought, which had waned half an hour ago, flared up in his mind again. He snatched up the newspaper and, crumpling it in his feverish hands, read once more the lines about Makhno and Petlura.

"They're alive.... Perhaps Antonov is there too? Our own men are still there. And there are some left here as well. It doesn't matter that they've changed their skins. It's good. It's clever of them, that's the way it ought to be. Pantelei Lukich, it seems, has a good head on his shoulders. Oh well. It means we're alive, it means we still have strength. All we must do is bide our time. Pantelei said I had to lie low,

go into hiding, they'd need me yet. Of course, he's right, of course I must lie low. But where? Where could I hide? I couldn't go prowling the gullies like a hungry wolf again?"

He suddenly recalled Andrian's advice there on the balk that he should go to another country.

"Of course, of course, I must go to another country," his thoughts throbbed. "Of course. I must walk day and night, day and night, I'll get across the border. I won't die there, they'll take me in, they'll feed me there. And I'll come back when the time comes. Then we'll settle our scores...."

And once again he raved of retribution, once again he was possessed by hatred, hatred and a lust for life.

The clock struck eleven. This muffled sound sobered Storozhev. Six hours left till dawn. Even with his sore foot he could make more than fourteen miles in that time, get away from the village, and if he did not have the strength to go on, he'd crawl into familiar hollows, rest up in the distant shrubbery.

And then he remembered that Nikita Kagarde's son Lev lived in Pakhotny Ugol, some ten miles from Dvoriki.

"I'll bring him his father's blessing," Storozhev thought, "perhaps he'll hide me, give shelter to his father's friend...."

The thought of pursuit suddenly occurred to him.

"Never mind," he decided, "if they catch me, if they find me, at least they'll kill me on the spur of the moment. Anything is better than this insufferable, creeping night!"

He quickly gathered up and thrust in his pockets pieces of bread and meat, shook his fist at someone and, with a soundless chuckle, blew out the lamp.

The bleak yellow light went out. A trembling seized Storozhev but he mastered his faintness and called:

"Hey, Lyonka! My lamp's gone out. I've got to write a letter to my wife. Light it, have a heart."

Storozhev stood close to the table. Lyonka rattled the bolt and opened the door. Night, brilliant with stars, swept into the barn with him.

In one hand Lyonka held the apple, in the other his knife, wet and shining with apple juice. He groped for the table, mechanically put down the apple and the knife on the edge and felt in his pockets for matches.

Storozhev stretched out his hand from the darkness and when Lyonka struck the match and bent over the lamp, he drove the knife into his back.

Lyonka groaned hollowly and slumped across the table. His rifle slid off his shoulder and clattered to the floor. Storozhev, his teeth chattering, picked it up and tore the bandoleer off Lyonka's belt.

He fancied, suddenly, that Lyonka's heart was beating faintly. He froze up. "Shall I finish him off?" He stopped breathing. "No, I'm just imagining it," he thought and listened hard again.

Somewhere a dog barked.

Storozhev shuddered and knew he must hurry.

With shaking hands he searched through Lyonka's pockets, took out some papers and matches.

On the tree-stump near the door, where Lyonka had been sitting, he found his army top-coat, slung it on his shoulders and vanished into the night.

1934—1935

