





Andrei Platonov

COLLECTED WORKS

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the

foundation

pit

On the day of the thirtieth anniversary of his personal life Voshchev was given his walking papers by the small machine shop where he had been getting the means for his existence. In the document of dismissal they informed him he was being detached from production as a consequence of a growth in the strength of his weakness and of pensiveness in the midst of the general tempo of labor.

Voshchev took his things in a sack from his apartment and went out into the open air, the better to comprehend his future. But the air was empty, the unmoving trees thriftily preserved the heat within their leaves, and the dust lay there bored on the unpopulated roadway—such was the situation in nature. Voshchev did not know whither he was being drawn, and at the end of the city he supported himself with his elbows on a low fence of a certain residence in which children without families were being taught to work and be useful. Beyond this point the city ceased—and the only thing there was a beer parlor for migratory workers and low-paid categories which stood, like some official institution, without any courtyard; and beyond the beer parlor rose a clay knoll and an old tree grew on it all alone in the midst of the bright weather. Voshchev made his way to the beer parlor and encountered there sincere human voices. Here were to be found unconstrained people devoting themselves to the oblivion of their own unhappiness, and for Voshchev it was more sad and more easy among them. He was present in the beer parlor until evening fell, till the wind of the changing weather began to rustle; at that point Voshchev went over to the open window so as to observe the beginning of the night, and he saw the tree on the clayey hill—rocking back and forth from the bad weather and turning its leaves over and over out of clandestine shame. Somewhere, evidently in the park of the Soviet trade employees, a brass band languished. The monotonous, nagging music was being

wafted off by the wind into nature across the waste land this side of the ravine, because the

wind was supposed to feel gladness only rarely, but could accomplish nothing itself equal in meaning to music and spent its time in the evenings motionless. After the wind silence once more settled in, and a still more silent darkness covered it over. Voshchev sat there at the window so as to observe the tender darkness of the night, to listen to various sad sounds, and to be in a state of torment within his heart which was surrounded by hard and stony bones.

"Hey, you food industry fellow!" resounded in the by now silent establishment. "Give us a pair of mugs-something to fill up our empty insides with!"

Voshchev had long since noted that people always came into the beer parlor in pairs, like brides and grooms, and sometimes in whole marriage companies.

The food industry employee served up no beer this time, and the two newly-arrived roofers wiped off their thirsting mouths with their aprons.

"You bureaucrat! You ought to jump whenever a working man even raises his finger—but instead you act conceited!"

But the food industry employee saved his strength from being worn down at official duties so as to keep it for his personal life and did not enter into disagreements.

"This institution, citizens, is closed. Go find something to do in your own apartment."

The roofers each took from the saucer a salty cracker into their mouths and went their way. Voshchev was left alone in the beer parlor.

"Citizen! You ordered only one mug and you keep sitting here indefinitely! You paid for the beer not for housing!"

Voshchev picked up his bag and went off into the night. Up above Voshchev the questioning heavens shone with the poignant strength of the stars, but in the city the lights had already been extinguished: whoever had the possibility to do so was sleeping after having eaten dinner. Voshchev descended the crumbly earth

into the

ravine and there lay down with his stomach to the ground so as to go to sleep and bid farewell to self. But for sleep it was necessary to possess peace of mind, confidence in life, and forgiveness of experienced grief, and Voshchev lay there in the dry tension of consciousness and did not know whether he was useful in the world or whether everything could do quite well without him. The wind began to blow from an unknown place so that people would not suffocate, and a dog on the outskirts of the city gave notice of his service with a weak and doubtful voice.

"It's boring for the dog. He lives only because he was born, just like me!"

Voshchev's body grew pale from fatigue; he felt cold on his eyelids and closed them over his warm eyes.

In the morning the barman had already freshened up his establishment, the wind and the grass had already been aroused all around by the sun, when Voshchev regretfully opened his eyes into which moist strength poured. Once again he had ahead of him the prospect of living and getting nourishment, and therefore he went to the trade union headquarters—in order to defend his unnecessary labor.

"The administration says that you kept standing there thinking in the midst of work," they told him in the trade union office. "What were you thinking about, Comrade Voshchev?"

"About a plan for life."

"The factory works on the basis of the assigned plan from the trust. And you should have worked out your plan for your personal life in the club or in the Red Reading Room."

"I was thinking about the plan of life as a whole. I don't worry about my own life. It is not a riddle to me."

"Well, and what could you do indeed?"

"I could think up something like happiness, and as a result of emotional meaning labor productivity would improve."

"Happiness results from materialism. Comrade Voshchev, and not from meaning. We are unable to defend you. You are an irresponsible person and we have no desire to turn up at the tail end of the masses."

Voshchev wished to ask for some kind or other of the weakest work just so he would get enough for his nourishment: he would think in non-working hours. But to make a request it is necessary to have respect for people, and Voshchev did not see any sympathy from them for him.

"You are afraid to be on the tail end: it is an extremity, and so you are riding on peoples' necks."

"To you, Voshchev, the state has given an extra hour for your pensiveness. You used to work eight and now you work seven. You would have done better to go on living and keep your mouth shut! If all of us all at once were to start to ponder, who would act?"

"Without thinking people act meaninglessly!" Voshchev declared thoughtfully.

He left the trade union office without getting help. His way afoot lay in the middle of the summer; off to the sides they were building apartment buildings and technical public facilities—in those apartment houses the masses who till now had been without shelter would exist in silence. Voshchev's body was indifferent to comfort; he could live, in the open air without getting exhausted, and he languished in unhappiness when he was well fed on rest days at his former apartment. Once more he had to pass by the beer parlor on the city's outskirts, and once more he looked at the place where he had spent the night; something was left there in common with his life, and Voshchev found himself out in space, where before him lay only the horizon and the sensation of the wind in his face which was bent forward.

One verst further on stood the house of a highway supervisor. Accustomed to emptiness, the supervisor was quarreling loudly with his wife, and the woman was sitting at the open window with her child on her knees, and

she was answering her husband with screams of abuse: the child himself silently pulled at the flounces of his shirt, understanding, but saying nothing.

This patience of the child emboldened Voshchev. He saw that the mother and father had no feeling for the meaning of life and were in a state of irritation, while the child lived unreproachingly, nurturing himself for his own coming anguish. So then and there Voshchev decided to hitch up his soul, not to spare his body in the work of the mind, so as to return the more swiftly to the home of the highway supervisor and tell the meaningful child the secret of life which was all the time being forgotten by his parents.

"Their body is straying automatically now," Voshchev observed of the parents. "They do not feel the essence."

"Why don't you feel the essence?" asked Voshchev, addressing himself into the window. "Your child lives, and you scold, and he was born to complete the whole world."

The husband and wife, with awe of conscience, concealed behind maliciousness of faces, gazed upon the witness.

"If you do not have the wherewithal to exist in peace, you might at least have respect for your child—it would be the better for you," Voshchev continued.

"What business do you have here?" the highway supervisor asked with malicious delicacy of voice. "You are walking, so just keep on walking—the road was paved for the likes of you."

Voshchev stood in the middle of the road, hesitating. The family was waiting for him to depart and keeping its anger on tap.

"I would leave, but I have nowhere to go. Is it far from here to some other city?"

"Close by," replied the supervisor, "If you'll just stop standing there the road will lead you to it."

"Have some respect for your child," said Voshchev.

"When you are dead he will still exist."

After speaking these words Voshchev went on his way a verst beyond the supervisor's house and sat down on the edge of a ditch; he felt doubt in his life

and weakness of the body without truth; he could not go on working and keep taking step after step down the road without knowing the precise arrangement of the whole world and whither one must strive. Voshchev, weary of thinking, lay down in the dusty grass by the road. It was hot, a daytime wind was blowing, and off in the distance village roosters were crowing—everything was devoting itself to unresponding existence—and only Voshchev kept himself apart and separate in silence. A dead fallen leaf lay alongside Voshchev's head, brought by the wind from a distant tree, and now this leaf had ahead of it resignation in the earth. Voshchev picked up the dried leaf and hid it away in a secret compartment of his bag where he used to keep all kinds of objects of unhappiness and obscurity.

"You had no meaning in life," Voshchev imagined to himself with meagerness of sympathy. "Lie here, I will learn wherefore you lived and perished. Since no one needs you and you are straying about in the midst of the whole world, I will preserve you and remember you."

"All live and suffer in the world without being conscious of anything," said Voshchev at the roadside and got up so as to walk on, surrounded by universal, patiently suffering existence.

"Just as if some one person or a few had extracted from us our feeling of conviction and appropriated it to themselves."

He continued walking along the road to the point of complete exhaustion; and Voshchev got completely exhausted very quickly, whenever his soul recollected that it had ceased to know the truth.

But the city could already be seen in the distance, smoke rose from its cooperative bakeries, and the evening

sun illuminated the dust which rose above the houses from the movements of the population. This particular city began with a smithy and in the smithy at the time of Voshchev's passage by it they were repairing an automobile from roadless travel. A fat cripple stood near a tethering post and addressed the smith:

"Mish, give me some tobacco: if you don't I'll break the lock again tonight!"

The smith who was under the automobile did not reply. Then the cripple banged

him on his rear with a crutch:

"Mish! You'd better drop your work and give me some tobacco: I'll smash something up!"

Voshchev stopped next to the cripple because along the street from out of the depths of the city was marching a formation of children, Young Pioneers, with weary music leading them.

"I gave you one whole ruble yesterday," said the smith. "Give me some peace—for at least a week! Otherwise I'm going to bide my time, bide my time, and then I'll burn up your crutches!"

"Go ahead and burn them!" the cripple consented. "The boys will push me about on an amputee's cart—and I'll rip the roof off your smithy!"

The smith was distracted by the sight of the children and, becoming more kind, he poured some tobacco into the cripple's tobacco pouch:

"Go ahead and steal, you locust!"

Voshchev directed his attention to the fact that the cripple had no legs, one of them gone entirely and in place of the other a wooden stump. The maimed man supported himself on his crutches and on the wooden extension of his severed right leg. The cripple had no teeth at all, he had worn them to nothing on food, and on the other hand he had an enormous face and a fat remaining torso; his brown, narrowly opened eyes kept a watch over the outer world with the greediness of deprivation, with the longing of accumulated passion, and in his

mouth his gums rubbed together, pronouncing the inaudible thoughts of a legless man.

The Young Pioneer orchestra, passing into the distance, played the music of a young march. Past the smithy, with consciousness of the importance of their future, the barefoot girls stepped in precise step; their weak, maturing bodies were clothed in sailor suits, on their thoughtful, attentive heads red berets lay freely, and their legs were covered with the down of youth. Each girl, moving within the rhythm of the common formation, smiled with a sense of her own significance and with a consciousness of the seriousness of life which was

necessary for the continuity of the formation and the strength of their hike. Any one of these Young Pioneers was born at a time when out in the fields lay the dead horses of the social war, and not all of the Pioneers had skin at the hour of their origin, because their mothers were nourished only by the stores of nourishment of their own bodies; therefore on the face of each young Pioneer girl there remained a trace of the difficulty, the feebleness of early life, meagerness of body and beauty of expression. But the happiness of childhood friendship, the realization of the future world in the play of youth and in the worthiness of their own severe freedom signified on the childish faces important gladness, replacing for them beauty and domestic plumpness.

Voshchev stood shyly before the eyes of the parade of these excited children whom he did not know; he was ashamed that the Young Pioneers, in all likelihood, knew and felt more than he did, because children are time maturing in a fresh body, while he, Voshchev, is cut off and set apart in the silence of obscurity by hastening, active youth as being a vain effort of life to achieve its goal. And Voshchev felt shame and energy—he wanted immediately to discover the universal, lasting meaning of life so as to precede the children in life, to live more swiftly than their swarthy legs so full of firm tenderness.

One Young Pioneer girl ran out of the ranks to the rusty grainfield next to the smithy and picked a plant there. During her action the little woman bent down, disclosing a birthmark on her swelling body, and then with the deftness of imperceptible strength she disappeared past them, leaving regrets in the two who had observed her, Voshchev and the cripple. Voshchev looked at the cripple: his face was puffed up with an influx of blood which found no outlet; he groaned out a sound and moved his hand in the very depths of his pocket. Voshchev observed the mood of the powerful cripple, but was glad that this monstrosity of imperialism would never get hold of socialist children. However, the cripple watched the Pioneer march to the very end, and Voshchev had fears for the safety and purity of the small children.

"You should look in some other direction," he said to the cripple. "You would do better to smoke!"

"Go take a walk, bossy, cow!" retorted the legless man.

Voshchev did not stir.

"What did I tell you?" the cripple added. "You want to catch it from me, do you?"

"No," answered Voshchev. "I was afraid you would say something to that girl or do something."

The invalid in his customary torment bent down his big head to the earth.

"Just what would I say to the child, you bastard? I look at the children for memory's sake, because I'll die soon."

"It was probably in the capitalist battle that you were wounded," Voshchev said quietly. "Though it is true that cripples are also old people too, I have seen them."

The maimed man directed at Voshchev his eyes in which at that moment there was the fierceness of surpassing mind; at first the cripple even kept silence out of anger at the passerby, but then he said with the deliberateness of embitterment:

"Old people are sometimes like this too; but such cripples as you there are not."

"I was never in the real war," said Voshchev. "If I had been, I wouldn't have returned from there whole either."

"I can see that you weren't: why are you such a fool! When a man hasn't seen war, then he's like a woman who hasn't given birth—he lives like an idiot. You are always to be seen through."

"Ekh!" declared the smith regretfully. "I look at the children and I myself want to shout: 'Hail the First of May!' "

The Pioneers' music took a rest and then off in the distance played a march. Voshchev continued to languish and went into this city to live.

■ ■ ■

Right up until evening Voshchev walked silently about the city, just as if he were waiting for the world to become common knowledge. However, just as before things on earth were unclear for him, and he felt in the darkness of his body a

silent place where there was nothing and where nothing prevented anything from swinging back and forth. Voshchev strolled past people as if he were living out of sight of them, feeling the rising strength of his burning mind and becoming ever more separate and isolated in the darkness of his sadness.

Only now did he see the center of the city and structures in the process of construction. The night time electricity was already lit on the construction scaffoldings, yet the quiet of the light of the open fields and the fading smell of hay crept in here from out of general space and stood untouched in the air. Separately from nature, in the bright place of the electricity, people labored eagerly, raising up brick walls, marching with burdens of freight along the plank nightmare of the scaffoldings. Voshchev watched for a long time the

construction of the tower which was unfamiliar to him; he saw that the workers stirred about evenly, without abrupt efforts, but something had already risen within the construction project for its completion.

"Do not people lose in their feeling for their own life when construction projects gain?" Voshchev hesitated to believe. "A human being puts together a building — and comes apart himself. And who then is going to exist?" Voshchev mulled over his doubts as he walked about.

He left the center of the city for its end. While he moved on an unpopulated night descended; only the water and the wind inhabited this darkness and this nature in the distance, and only the birds were capable of singing of the grief of this great substance because they flew above and for them it was easier.

Voshchev wandered about in a wasteland and discovered a warm pit for the night; lowering himself into this cavity in the earth he put beneath his head the bag in which he had gathered together all kinds of obscurity for souvenirs and vengeance, fell into a sadness and with that went off to sleep. But some person came out into the wasteland with a scythe in his hands and began to cut down the grassy thickets which had been growing here from the beginning of time.

By midnight the mower got to Voshchev and gave him instructions to get up and go away from this housing.

"What are you talking about!" Voshchev said unwillingly. "What housing are you talking about here? This is just a surplus place."

"And now it's going to be housing, a masonry building is scheduled to be erected here. Come in the morning to look at this place, for it is soon going to be covered beneath a structure."

"And where am I to go then?"

"You may be so bold as to finish up your sleep in the barracks. Go on over and sleep there till morning, and in the morning you can clear everything up."

Voshchev walked on ahead as the mower had told him and soon noticed a board shack in a former vegetable garden. Inside the shack seventeen or twenty persons were sleeping on their backs and the half-covered lamp illuminated unconscious human faces. All of the sleepers were as thin as if they were dead people, the crowded space between their skin and bones in each was taken up with vein tissue, and from the thickness of the veins it could be seen how much blood they had to give passage to during periods of intense work. The cotton of their shirts transmitted with precision the slow freshening work of the heart—it beat close by within the darkness of each sleeper's wasted body. Voshchev looked into the face of the sleeper closest to him—to see if it expressed the unresponding happiness of a satisfied man. But the sleeper lay there like dead, with eyes shut deeply and sadly, and his cold legs were helplessly extended in old workers' trousers. Other than breathing there was not a sound in the barracks, no one was having dreams or speaking out with recollections—everyone existed without any superfluity of life, and in sleep only the heart remained alive, caring for and preserving the human being. Voshchev felt the cold of weariness and lay down for warmth between two bodies of sleeping workmen. He went off to sleep, unacquainted with these people, his eyes shut, satisfied to be spending the night near them—and so it was that he slept, without feeling the truth, until the bright morning.

In the morning some sort of an intuition struck Voshchev; he awakened and heard, without opening his eyes, someone speaking:

"He is weak!"

"He is irresponsible!"

"That's all right: capitalism made fools out of our kind, and this one here is also a

remnant of darkness."

"If only on the basis of his class origin he were to fit in: in that case we could use him"

"Judging by his body his class is poor."

Voshchev in doubt opened his eyes to greet the

light of the beginning day. Those who had been sleeping the previous night stood over him and observed his feeble position.

"Why do you come here and exist?" one of them asked, the one whose beard grew sparsely because of exhaustion.

"I am not existing here," Voshchev pronounced, feeling shame for the fact that at this moment many people were sensing him alone. "I am only thinking here."

"And for the sake of what are you thinking, tormenting yourself?"

"Without truth, my body grows weak, and I cannot keep myself nourished on labor. I would grow thoughtful during work, and I was dismissed."

All of the workmen were silent against Voshchev; their faces were indifferent and bored, and a sparse thought exhausted ahead of time illuminated their long-suffering eyes.

"So what about your truth!" said one of them who had spoken previously. "You are not working, you do not experience the substance of existence, so where from is it you recollect a thought!"

"And what do you need truth for?" asked another person, cracking open lips which had caked dry from silence. "Things will be good for you, only in your mind, and outside they'll be rotten."

"You probably know everything?" Voshchev asked them with the timidity of weak hope.

"How could it be otherwise? We give existence to all organizations!" replied the

short person from out of his dried out mouth, about which the beard grew sparsely because of exhaustion.

At this moment the entry door opened and Voshchev saw the nighttime mower with the artel teapot: the water was already boiling on the stove which had been fired up out in the barracks yard; the time for awakening had passed, the time to be nourished for the daily work had come.

A country clock hung on the wooden wall and patiently kept ticking away with the strength of dead weight; a rose was depicted on the face of the mechanism in order to comfort everyone who saw the time. The workmen sat in a row along the length of the table; the mower, in charge of the women's work—housekeeping—in the barracks, cut the bread and gave each person a piece, and added to it a piece of the cold beef from the night before. The workmen began to eat seriously, ingesting the food as something they deserved, without enjoying it. Although they possessed the meaning of life, which is the equivalent of eternal happiness, nonetheless their faces were gloomy and thin; and instead of the peace of life they had exhaustion. Voshchev with meagerness of hope, with fear of loss, observed these people existing sadly, capable of keeping the truth inside themselves without celebration. He was satisfied himself merely to know truth existed in this world in the body of a human being near to him, who had only just a bit before spoken to him and what that meant was that it was sufficient merely to be near this person in order to become patient towards life and fit for labor.

"Come and eat with us!" the eating people summoned Voshchev.

Voshchev rose and, still not possessing complete faith in the general necessity of the world, went to eat, feeling shy and languishing.

"Why are you so meager?" they asked him.

"It is so," replied Voshchev. "I too now wish to work on the substance of existence."

During the time of doubt in the correctness of life he had rarely eaten calmly, always conscious of his languishing soul.

But now he ate coldbloodedly, and the most politically active among the

workmen, Comrade Safronov, informed him after nourishment that, if you please, Voshchev was now suitable for labor because people had now become precious, on an equal level with material;

for many, many days now the trade union representative had been going about the outskirts of the city and the empty places so as to encounter poor peasants who had no farms of their own and to organize them into permanent workers, but it was only rarely that he brought anyone with him—all the people were busy with life and labor.

Voshchev had already eaten enough and he arose among those seated.

"Why did you get up?" Safronov asked him.

"When I am sitting my thought develops worse. I am better off standing up."

"Go ahead and stand. You are probably intelligentsia—all they want to do is to sit and think."

"While I was irresponsible I lived by manual labor, and it was only subsequently that I did not see the significance of life and grew weak."

Music approached the barracks and started, special vital sounds in which there was no thought, but on the other hand there was in them a triumphant presentiment which induced in Voshchev's body a clattering state of gladness. The exciting sounds of the sudden music gave a feeling of conscience, they proposed that the time of life be thriftily preserved, that the far distance of hope be walked to the very end and attained, so as to find there the source of that rousing song and not to weep in the face of death from the melancholy of futility.

The music ceased, and for all life settled down with its former heaviness.

The trade union representative, with whom Voshchev was already acquainted, entered the workers' quarters and asked the whole artel to walk once through the old city so as to see the significance of that labor which would commence on the mowed wasteland after the march.

The artel of workmen went outside and came to a halt in embarrassment opposite the musicians. Safronov coughed artificially, ashamed at the public

honor directed

towards him in the form of music. The digger Chiklin looked with surprise and expectation—he did not feel his own merits, but wished once more to hear the triumphal march and silently to be gladdened. Others shyly let fall their patient arms.

The trade union representative was accustomed, because of his concerns and activity, to forget to sense himself, and that way things were easier; in the hustle-bustle of rallying of masses and the organization of auxiliary joys for the workers, he did not remember about satisfying with satisfactions his personal life, and he grew thin and slept deeply nights. If the trade union representative had reduced the excitement of his own work, had recollected the lack of domestic property in his family, or had caressed at night his shrinking, aging body, he would have felt the shame of living off of two percent of languishing labor. But he could not come to a halt and possess a contemplative consciousness.

With a speed originating in restless devotion to the workers, the trade union representative stepped out in front so as to show to the skilled workmen the city which was made up of individual private residences, because today they were to begin the construction of that one single building in which the entire local class of the proletariat would take up living quarters—and that common building would tower above the entire city made up of separate residences and courtyards, and the small individual homes would fall empty and would be covered over impenetrably by the plant world, and there people of a forgotten time, wasted away, would gradually cease breathing.

Up to the barracks came several masons from the two newly-building factories, the trade union representative pulled himself erect out of joy at the last minute before the march of the builders through the city, the musicians put their band instruments to their lips, but the artel workmen stood scattered about, unready to march. Safronov noticed the false enthusiasm on the

faces of the musicians and took offense for the humiliated music.

"What kind of toys are these that you have thought up now? Just where do you

think we are going—what's there to see!"

The trade union representative lost his readiness of face and felt his soul—he always felt it when he had been offended.

"Comrade Safronov! The district trade union bureau wanted to show your first model artel the pitiful character of the old life, various impoverished houses and depressing conditions, and also the cemetery in which were buried the proletarians who came to their ends before the revolution without happiness—then you would see what a doomed city stands in the midst of our country's plain, then you would find out immediately why we need a common apartment house for the proletariat which you will begin to build after those..."

"Don't you overdo things with us!" Safronov objected. "As if we have not seen petty houses in which various authorities live! Take your music off to a children's organization, and we will cope with the building solely on the basis of our conscientiousness."

"Does that mean that I am an overdoer?" the trade union representative was frightened, ever more clearly divining the situation. "We have in our trade union bureau a certain overpraiser and so I, it seems, am an overdoer, am I?"

And with pain in his heart the trade union representative went in silence into the trade union institution and the orchestra went behind him.

On the mowed empty lots it smelled of dead grass and the dampness of exposed places, from which the common sadness of life and the melancholy of futility were felt the more clearly. Voshchev was given a spade, he gripped it with his hands just as if he wished to dig the truth out of the earthly remains; homeless Voshchev was agreeable not to possess the meaning of existence,

but wished at least to observe it in the substance of the body of another person near him, and to be near that person he could sacrifice in labor all his weak body, exhausted by thought and meaningness.

In the midst of the wasteland stood an engineer— a person who was neither old nor gray as a result of his reckoning up of nature. He pictured the whole world as a dead body—he judged of it by those parts which were turned to him in the process of construction: the world everywhere submitted to his attentive and

imaginative mind, limited only by consciousness of the sluggishness of nature: material always surrendered to precision and patience, and that meant it was dead and deserted. But the human being was alive and worthy in the midst of all the weary substance, therefore the engineer immediately smiled politely at the workmen. Voshchev saw that the engineer's cheeks were rosy, but not from being well-nourished, rather from a surplus of heartbeats, and Voshchev liked it that this person's heart was aroused and beating.

The engineer told Chiklin that he had already laid out the excavating work and measured out the foundation pit—and pointed out the pounded-in pegs: now they could begin. Chiklin listened to the engineer and double-checked his layout with his own mind and experience—during the work of excavation he was the senior in the company of workmen, earth work was his best profession; when the period of setting in the foundation stone began, Chiklin would subordinate himself to Safronov.

"There are too few hands," said Chiklin to the engineer. "This is not work—but slow starvation. Time will destroy any benefit."

"The employment office promised to send fifty persons, and I asked for one hundred," answered the engineer. "But you and I will be held responsible for all the work in the subsoil: you are the leading brigade."

"We are not going to lead, but we will keep everyone

up with us. Just so there are more people coming."

And having said this Chiklin shoved his spade down into the top soft layer of the earth, concentrating downwards his indifferently-thoughtful face. Voshchev also began to dig deep into the soil, putting all his strength into his spade; he now admitted the possibility that childhood would grow up, gladness would become thought, and that the future human being would find his peace in this firmly built building so as to look out from the high windows into the world reaching out for him and awaiting him. Already he had destroyed once and for all thousands of blades of grass, rootlets, and tiny shelters of hard-working vermin in the soil, and he was working in layers of dreary clay. But Chiklin had gotten ahead of him, he had long since left the spade behind and taken up the crowbar in order to break up the lower compressed strata. Doing away with the ancient natural structure,

Chiklin could not comprehend it.

Out of consciousness of the small numbers in his artel Chiklin hurriedly broke up the age-old earth, channeling the entire life of his body into blows at the dead places. His heart beat as usual, his patient back grew weak later on, Chiklin had no protecting layer of fat beneath the skin—his old veins and innards closely approached the surface, he perceived the environment without calculation or consciousness, but with precision. Once he had been younger and the girls loved him—out of greediness for his powerful body which wandered at random, which did not preserve itself and was devoted to all. Many needed Chiklin at that time, for shelter or peace in the midst of his certain warmth, but he wished to shelter too many for him to have anything himself to feel, and then the women and his comrades abandoned him out of jealousy, and Chiklin, languishing in the nights, went out to the market square and turned over trade stalls or even carried them off somewhere, for which he then languished in prison, whence he sang songs into the cherry red evenings of the summer.

By noon Voshchev's zeal yielded ever less and less earth, he had already begun to become irritated from digging and had fallen behind the artel; there was only one thin workman who worked more slowly than he did. This one who brought up the rear was grim, insignificant in his whole body, the sweat of weakness dropped into the clay from his blank, monotonous face which was grown over on its circumference with sparse hair; in raising up the earth to the edge of the foundation pit he coughed, forcing wetness out of himself, and then, when he had relaxed from it he shut his eyes just as if he desired sleep.

"Kozlov!" Safronov shouted at him. "Again you can't make it?"

"Again," replied Kozlov with his pale child's voice.

"You enjoy yourself too much," declared Safronov. "We are going to put you to sleep from now on on the table beneath the lamp so that you will lie there and be ashamed."

Kozlov looked on Safronov with red raw eyes and kept silence out of the indifference of exhaustion.

"Why is he after you?" asked Voshchev.

Kozlov took a speck of dust out of his bony nose and looked off to the side, just exactly as if he was longing for freedom, but in actual fact he was longing for nothing at all.

"They say," he replied with the weightfulness of offense, "that I have no woman, that I make love to myself at night underneath the blanket, and in the daytime because of emptiness of body am no good. Like they say, they really know everything!"

Voshchev once again began to dig the identical clay and saw that there was much clay and common earth left—it was necessary to have much more of a very long life in order to overcome with oblivion and labor this deposited world, hiding in its darkness the truth of all existence. Perhaps it would be easier to think up the meaning of life in one's head—after all one might quite

by chance guess it and touch upon it with sadly flowing feeling.

"Safronov," said Voshchev, weakening in patience, "it would be better for me to think without work, after all, no matter what, we are never going to dig to the bottom of the whole world."

"Don't go thinking something up, don't be distracted," reported Safronov. "You will have no memory and you will begin to think like an animal yourself, like Kozlov."

"Why are you groaning, orphan!" Chiklin chimed in from up ahead. "Look upon people and live now that you've been born."

Voshchev looked upon the people and decided to live somehow or other, considering that they suffered in patience and lived: he had taken place together with them and he would die in his own time inseparable from people.

"Kozlov, lie with your face downwards—take a breather!" said Chiklin. "He coughs, sighs, keeps silence, mourns—that's how graves get dug, not buildings."

But Kozlov did not respect another person's pity for him—unnoticeably he himself stroked his hollow-sounding decrepit chest beneath his shirt and continued to dig the solid earth. He still believed in the coming of life after the completion of big buildings, and he feared lest he not be accepted in that life if

he were to be presented there as a complaining non-working element. One sole feeling touched Kozlov mornings—his heart had difficulty in beating, but nonetheless he hoped to live in the future even if only with a tiny remnant of heart; however, because of the weakness of his chest he found it necessary during work time to stroke himself once in a while on top of his bones and to persuade himself in a whisper to endure.

Noon had already passed and the employment office had sent no diggers. The night time mower had had his sleep, cooked up some potatoes, poured eggs on top of

them, wet them with oil, added to them the kasha from yesterday, poured on top of them for embellishment some dill, and brought to them in a pot this mixture of food for the development of the declining strengths of the artel.

They ate in silence, not looking at each other and without greediness, not admitting that food had any value, as if the strength of a human being arose out of mere consciousness.

The engineer went around on his daily rounds to various indispensable institutions and put in his appearance at the foundation pit. He stood off to one side until the people had eaten everything in the pot, and then he said:

"On Monday there will be another forty people. And today is Saturday: it's already time for you to stop work."

"What do you mean stop work?" asked Chiklin. "We can still get out a cubic meter or a cubic meter and a half more and there's no point in stopping work earlier."

"But you must stop work," the work superintendent objected. "You have already been working more than six hours and the law is the law."

"That law is only for tired elements," interjected Chiklin, "and I have a bit of strength left before sleep. Who agrees with me?" he asked all of them.

"It's a long time till night," Safronov reported. "Why should we waste our lives. We would do better to do a job. After all we are not animals, we can live for the sake of enthusiasm."

"Perhaps nature will show us something down beneath," said Voshchev.

"What?" said the voice of an unidentified workman.

The engineer bowed his head, he was afraid of empty time at home, he did not know how to live all by himself.

"In that case I shall go and make some more drawings, and more calculations for the sockets for the

piling once again."

"Go right ahead—make your drawings and calculations!" agreed Chiklin. "The earth has been dug out in any event, and all about it's a bore—let's finish it up and then we can schedule life and rest."

The work supervisor went off slowly. He recollected his childhood when before holidays the servants washed the floors, his mother cleaned and picked up the rooms, and unpleasant water flowed along the street, and he, a boy, did not know where to go, and was melancholy and thoughtful. And now too the weather had turned bad, over the plain the slow dark clouds moved and in all of Russia now floors were being washed on the eve of the holiday of socialism—it was too early to start celebrating and there was no reason to do it anyway; it would be better to sit down, think things over, and make drawings, and draw designs for portions of the future building.

Kozlov felt gladness from satiation and his mind expanded:

"Masters of the whole world, as it is said, but they sure love to shovel the food in," reported Kozlov. "A real master would build himself a house in a hurry, but you are going to die on empty land."

"Kozlov, you are a dog!" Safronov proclaimed. "For what do you need the proletariat in the building when you only get joy from your body?"

"So be it!" replied Kozlov. "Is there anyone who has loved me even once? Just endure, they said, until old man capitalism dies—well now he has died, and I am living alone by myself under the blanket again, and after all, I'm sad."

Voshchev got concerned because of his friendship for Kozlov.

"Sadness is nothing, Comrade Kozlov," he said. "What it signifies is that our class has feeling for the whole world, and happiness in any case is a far distant thing... From happiness only shame will come."

After that Voshchev and the others with him again

stood up and set to work. The sun was still high and the birds sang complainingly in the bright air, without exulting, but seeking food out in space; the swallows dashed low above the bent-over, digging people, they flapped their wings silently out of fatigue, and beneath their down and feathers there was the sweat of their need—they had been flying from the very dawn, not ceasing for even a minute to torment themselves to keep their offspring and mates well fed. Once Voshchev had reached down and picked up a bird which had died instantly in the air and fallen to the ground; it was all in a sweat; and when Voshchev plucked it so as to see its body, in his hands was left merely a scanty sad being, which had perished from the exhaustion of its labor. And now Voshchev did not spare himself in the destruction of the compacted earth; here there would be a building, in it people would be preserved from adversity and would throw crumbs from the windows to the birds living outside.

Chiklin, seeing neither the birds nor the heavens, not feeling thought, lumberingly broke up the earth with his pick, and his flesh became exhausted down there in the clay pit he had dug, but he was not depressed by his fatigue, knowing that in sleep of the night his body would be replenished with strength.

The exhausted Kozlov sat down on the ground and cut exposed limestone with his axe; he worked with no recollection of time and place, releasing the remnants of his warm strength into the stone which he was cleaving—the stone grew warm and Kozlov gradually grew cold. He could have ceased to exist quite unnoticed just like this, and the destroyed stone would have been his poor heritage to the people who would grow and live in the future. Kozlov's trousers bared his legs as a result of the movement, through the skin crooked sharp shinbones peered jaggedly like sawtooth knives. Voshchev could feel melancholy nervousness from those defenseless bones, expecting that the bones would break through the weak

skin and emerge into the open; he ran his hand over his own legs in those very same bony places and said to the rest of the diggers there:

"It's time to knock off work! If you don't you'll become worn out and die and then who will be be people?"

Voshchev heard not a word in reply. The evening had already come; far off the dark blue night was rising, promising sleep and cool breathing, and, just like sadness, dead height hung there over the earth. Kozlov as before was engaged in destruction of the stone in the earth, not lifting his eyes from it come hell or high water, and, evidently his weakened heart was beating dully.

The work supervisor of the all-proletarian apartment house emerged from his designing office during the darkness of the night. The foundation pit was empty, the artel of workmen had gone off to sleep in the barracks in a crowded row of carcasses, and only the flame of the half-covered night light penetrated outwards from inside through the cracks in the board wall, retaining light in case of any untoward event or in case someone suddenly wanted a drink. Engineer Prushevsky approached the barracks and looked in through a knothole; near the wall slept Chiklin, his hand swollen with strength lay on his stomach, and all his body moaned in the nourishing work of sleep; barefoot Kozlov slept with an open mouth, his throat gurgled just as if the air of his breath was passing through heavy dark blood, and occasional tears emerged from the half-open pale eyes—as a result of dreams or an unknown longing.

Prushevsky raised his head up from the boards and thought for a time. From afar gleamed the electric lights of construction work on a factory, but Prushevsky knew that there was nothing there except dead construction material and tired, unthinking people. He was the one who had conceived the one and only all-proletarian home in place of the old city where even at the present

moment people lived in a fenced-off courtyard kind of a way; in a year's time all of the local proletariat would emerge from the city of petty private property and would occupy for life the monumental new house. In ten or twenty years' time another engineer would build a tower at the center of the world into which the workers of the whole world would move for eternal, joyous residence. Prushevsky could have already foreseen what a work of static mechanics, in the sense of art and purposefulness, could be placed at the center of the world, but

he could not perceive ahead of time the structure of soul of the residents-to-be in the all-proletarian home being built now in the midst of that plain and all the more therefore he could not imagine the inhabitants of the future tower in the midst of the universal earth. What kind of body would youth have then, and with what exciting strength would the heart begin to beat and the mind begin to think.

Prushevsky wanted to know all that right now so the walls of his architecture would not be erected to no purpose; the building had to be occupied by people and people were filled with the superfluous warmth of life which had once been given the name of soul. He was afraid of erecting empty structures—those in which people live only because of bad weather.

Prushevsky was chilled by the night and descended into the commenced foundation pit where there was a dead calm. For a certain length of time he sat there in the depths; beneath him was a stone, to the side rose the cross section of earth, and it could be seen how on the stratum of clay, but not originating out of it, lay the topsoil. Is there obligatorily a superstructure formed on every basis? Does every production of living material yield as a surplus product a soul within a human being? And if production is improved to the point of precise economy—then will there originate from out of it indirect, unexpected products?

Engineer Prushevsky as early as the age of twenty

had felt the constraint of his consciousness and an end to the further understanding of life, just as if a dark wall stood there point blank in front of his perceiving mind. And from that time on he had been in torment, stirring about in front of his wall, and he calmed down and relaxed with the conclusion that, in essence, the most average, true structure of the material out of which the earth and people have been assembled he had achieved— all of essential science was disposed in front of the wall of his consciousness, and behind the wall all there was to be found was a hollow place to which there was no need to strive. But nonetheless it was interesting to know whether someone perhaps had gotten through to the other side of the wall. Prushevsky once more went up to the wall of the barracks, bending over, looked through it to the nearest sleeper on the other side hoping to observe in him something unknown in life; but there was little which was visible there, because the kerosene in the night light had run out and all that could be heard was a slow, sinking breathing. Prushevsky left the barracks and went off to shave in the night shift barber shop; in periods of

melancholy he loved to have someone's hands touch him.

After midnight Prushevsky came to his own apartment—a flat in an orchard—opened the window into the darkness and sat down to relax. A weak local wind began at times to rustle the leaves, but soon once more silence fell. Behind the orchard someone was walking and singing his song; that, no doubt, was the bookkeeper returning from his night-school or else perhaps a person who had found it boring to sleep.

Far off, suspended and without apprehension, shone an unclear star, and it would never ever come closer. Prushevsky gazed at it through the murky air, time passed, and he fell into doubt:

"Maybe the thing for me to do is to die?"

Prushevsky could not see who needed him so much that he should unquestionably support himself till his

distant death. Instead of hope there was left to him only patience, and somewhere off behind a long series of nights, beyond the subsiding, flourishing, then once again perishing orchards, beyond people encountered and long gone there existed a term, a date, when he would come to lie down on a bed, turn his face to the wall, and die, without being able to weep. In the world only his sister would live on, but she would give birth to a child, and pity for it would become stronger than grief for her dead, demolished brother.

"I would do better to die," thought Prushevsky. "I am made use of, but no one gets joy from me. Tomorrow I will write my last letter to my sister, I have to buy a stamp in the morning."

And having decided to put an end to it, he lay down on his bed and went off to sleep in the happiness which results from indifference to life. Before he had managed to feel the entirety of happiness, however, he awakened at three o'clock in the morning, and lighting up his apartment, sat in the midst of the light and the quiet, surrounded by the nearby apple trees, till the very dawn, and then he opened the window so as to hear the birds and the steps of those walking by.

After the general awakening in the workmen's overnight barracks an outsider entered. Among all the workmen only Kozlov knew him thanks to his past

disputes. This was Comrade Pashkin, chairman of the district trade union council. He had a face prematurely aged and a bent-over body torso—not so much from the weight of years as from the burden of his public duties; and because of these facts he spoke in a fatherly way and knew or foresaw almost everything.

"Well, so what," he used to say in the midst of difficulties: "All the same happiness is going to dawn historically." And submissively would bend down his tired head which had nothing left with which to think.

Near the commenced foundation pit Pashkin stood facing the earth, as just another productive labor process.

"The tempo is slow," he said to the workmen. "Why are you so sparing about increasing productivity? Socialism can get along without you, but without socialism you will live to no end and die."

"We, Comrade Pashkin, as the expression goes, are trying," said Kozlov.

"What have you to show for trying?! All you have dug out is one pile of earth."

Embarrassed by Pashkin's reproach the workmen fell silent in response. They stood there and saw: the man was speaking the truth—the earth must be dug and the house built more swiftly, for otherwise you could die without having finished. So be it—life for the moment would depart, like the flow of breath, but at least by construction of the building life could be organized in reserve—for the fixed and immovable happiness-to-be-in-the-future and for childhood.

Pashkin looked off into the distance—to the plains and the ravines; somewhere there the winds are commencing, cold clouds are originating, all sorts of different gnat-like vermin and illnesses are breeding, the kulaks are deliberating, and rural backwardness is sleeping; and the proletariat lives all alone, in this wearisome emptiness, and is obligated to think up everything for everyone and to make by hand the substance of long life. And Pashkin felt sorry for all his trade unions, and he sensed within himself kindness and goodness towards the working people.

"Through trade union channels I am going to provide you with some privileges and benefits, comrades!" said Pashkin.

"And where are you going to get your privileges and benefits from?" asked Safronov. "We ought to make them ahead of time and hand them over to you, but you are proposing them to us."

Pashkin looked upon Safronov with his wearily-foreseeing eyes and went on off to the city to his work. Behind him followed Kozlov who said to him, as they

departed:

"Comrade Pashkin, Voshchev over there has joined up with us, but he has no documentation from the employment office. You ought, as the expression goes, to detach him back."

"I see no conflict there, there is a shortage of the proletariat right now," Pashkin gave his conclusion and left Kozlov without any reassurance. And Kozlov then and there began to fall in his proletarian faith and wanted to go off to the city—to write there excoriating declarations and set to rights various disputes, for the purpose of organizational achievements.

Right up until midday time went favorably: no one among the organizing or the technical personnel came to the foundation pit, yet the earth nonetheless was deepened beneath the spades, on the basis solely of the strength and endurance of the diggers. Voshchev sometimes bent down and picked up a pebble, or other sticky bit of trash, and put it for safekeeping into his trousers. He was gladdened and worried by the nearly eternal presence of pebbles in the midst of clay, in their abundant accumulation there; that meant that it was useful for him to be there, that there was all the more reason for a person to live.

After midday Kozlov could no longer inhale satisfactorily—he tried to breathe in heavily and deeply, and profoundly, but the air did not penetrate, as it formerly had, right on down to his stomach, and worked only superficially. Kozlov sat down on the bared earth and stretched his hands to his bony face.

"Are you out of sorts?" Safronov asked him. "For the sake of your durability you ought to sign up for physical training, but instead you hold dispute in esteem: your thinking is backwards."

Chiklin without let-up or intermission smashed with the crowbar at the slab of native stone, not halting either for thought or mood; he did not know for what

else he should live—one could otherwise either become a thief

or disturb the revolution.

"Kozlov has once again weakened!" Safronov said to Chiklin. "He isn't going to survive socialism—there is some function or other in him which is lacking."

At this point Chiklin right off began to think, because there was nowhere for his life to go, given the fact that its outlet into the earth had come to an end: he leaned with his moist back up against the vertical slope of the excavation, looked off into the distance and imagined recollections—more than this he could not think. In a ravine near the foundation pit at this moment a bit of grass was growing, and the insignificant sand lay there like dead; the constantly present sun unsparingly squandered its body on every petty bit of low-lying life, and by means of warm rains, it had also dug out in olden times the ravine, but there had not yet been located there any proletarian facility. Verifying his own thought, Chiklin went into the ravine and measured it off with his customary stride, breathing evenly to keep his count. The whole ravine was needed for the foundation pit and all that had to be done was to plane down the slopes and to cut down the depth to non-water-permeable strata.

"Kozlov can go on being ill for a time," said Chiklin, returning. "We are not going to try to dig further here, and we will move the building into the ravine, and from there we will lay it out upwards: Kozlov is going to be able to survive after all."

On hearing Chiklin many stopped digging and sat down to rest. But Kozlov had already retreated from his tiredness and wanted to go to Prushevsky in order to say that they were not digging any more and that it was necessary to undertake effective discipline. Gathering himself up to carry out such an organizational task, Kozlov was gladdened ahead of time and recovered his health. However, Safronov put him back in his place just as soon as he had made a move.

"What's all this, Kozlov—have you set your course towards the intelligentsia? But the intelligentsia itself is

descending into our masses."

Prushevsky came to the foundation pit at the head of some unfamiliar people. He had sent his letter off to his sister and was now desirous of acting firmly, of concerning himself with current subjects and building any building at all for the use of others, just so as not to arouse his consciousness in which he had established a special tender indifference, in harmony with death and the feeling of being orphaned from the rest of people. He had an attitude of special concern for those people whom previously for some reason he had not liked—and now he felt in them almost the main riddle of his life and he insistently looked into hostile and familiar stupid faces which were emotionally aroused and did not understand.

The unknown people turned out to be newcomers whom Pashkin had sent for the assurance of attainment of the state tempo. But the new arrivals were not real workers: Chiklin right off without even an intent gaze discovered in them instead reeducated urban employees, various steppe recluses, and people accustomed to walking with a quiet step behind a working horse; in their body there was not to be noted any proletarian talent for labor whatsoever, they were more capable of lying flat on their back or relaxing themselves in some other way.

Prushevsky appointed Chiklin to distribute the workers about the foundation pit and to give them training because one has to live and work with the people who are in the world.

"That's no problem for us," declared Safronov. "We are going to hammer their backwardness into ac-tiveness immediately."

"That's it, that's it," pronounced Prushevsky, trusting him, and he went off behind Chiklin to the ravine.

Chiklin said that the ravine was a more than half ready foundation pit already, and that by means of use of the ravine it was possible to preserve weak people for

the future. Prushevsky agreed with this because, no matter, he would die before the building was completed anyway.

"But in me scientific doubt has stirred," said Safronov, wrinkling his politely-politically-aware face. And all listened to hear what he had to say. And Safronov gazed upon those gathered about him with a smile of mysterious intelligence.

"From where has Comrade Chiklin gained his concept of the world?" Safronov enunciated slowly. "Maybe he got some sort of a special kiss in childhood which enabled him, better than a learned man, to prefer a ravine! From whence is it, Comrade Chiklin, that you go about thinking, while I go about with Comrade Prushevsky, like a grain of dust caught between social classes, and do not see for myself any improvement here!"

Chiklin was too gloomy for cleverness and answered approximately:

"There is nowhere for life to go, so then one thinks in one's head."

Prushevsky looked upon Chiklin as upon an aimless martyr, and then asked that there be carried out an exploratory drilling in the ravine and went off to his own office. There he began carefully to work at the parts of the all-proletarian house which he had conceived, so as to become aware of objects and to forget people in his recollections. Two hours later Voshchev brought him drill sections of earth from the exploratory drillings. "Evidently he knows the meaning of natural life," quietly thought Voshchev about Prushevsky, and, wearied by his own consistent sadness, he asked:

"Would you perhaps know—why the whole world was established?"

Prushevsky fixed his attention on Voshchev: could it possibly be that *they* were also intelligentsia, could it be that capitalism gave birth to *us* as twins. Good Lord, what a boring face he now has!

"I don't know," answered Prushevsky.

"You ought to have learned that, since they were trying to teach you."

"They taught each of us some particular dead portion: I know clay, the heaviness of weight, and the mechanics of resting bodies, but I know machines badly and I do not know why the heart beats in an animal. Everything as a whole or what is inside they never explained to us."

"They should have," Voshchev pointed out. "How is it that you have been alive so long? Clay is good for bricks, but for us it is too little!"

Prushevsky took into his hand a cross section of the ravine earth and concentrated upon it—he wished to be left all alone with this dark lump of earth. Voshchev retreated to the door and disappeared behind it, whispering his grief to himself.

The engineer examined the earth and for a long time, with the inertia of a self-propelling intelligence, freed of hope and the desire for satisfaction, he made calculations of compression and deformation. Previously, during the period of his sensitive life and apparent happiness, Prushevsky would have calculated the firmness of the soil less precisely; but now he wished to concern himself with objects and structures constantly so as to have them in his mind and his empty heart in place of friendship and attachment to people. His study of the technology of a body in a state of rest relating to the future building provided Prushevsky with an equanimity of clear thought close to physical enjoyment, and the details of the building aroused an interest, better and more firm than comradely excitement with those who shared his ideas. External substance, requiring neither movement nor life, nor disappearance, replaced for Prushevsky something forgotten and as essential as the person of a lost sweetheart.

Having completed the calculation of his magnitudes, Prushevsky guaranteed the indestructibility of the future all-proletarian dwelling and felt comforted by the

reliability of the material which had been foreordained to protect and preserve human beings living until now in the out-of-doors. And inside he felt good and inaudible, just as if he had been living not an indifferent life leading to death, but that very same life about which his mother had once whispered to him from her own lips, though he had lost her even in his memory.

Without violating his calm or his astonishment, Prushevsky left the excavation works office. In nature the ravaged summer day was retreating into night; everything near and far was gradually ending; the birds hid, people lay down to sleep, smoke quietly rose from the distant houses in the fields where an obscure tired human being sat at the pot waiting for his dinner, having decided to endure his life to the end. At the foundation pit it was deserted, the diggers had moved on over to work on the ravine, and it was there that their movement was taking place at the present time. Prushevsky all of a sudden had a desire to be in a distant central city where people spend a long time sleeping, thinking and arguing, where the food stores are open evenings, with the smell of wine and

confectionary goods arising from them, where one can meet a strange woman and converse with her the whole night long, experiencing the mysterious happiness of friendship, when one wishes to live forever in this state of excitement; and in the morning, saying farewells beneath the extinguished gas street lights, to part in the emptiness of the dawn without any promise of meeting again.

Prushevsky sat down on the bench by the office. Once upon a time he had used to sit just like this by his father's home—the summer evenings had not changed since—and he used to love to observe the passers-by then. Some of them he liked and he had regrets that people are not all acquainted with each other. One feeling he had which was alive and sad in him still to this very day; once on an evening just like this a girl walked past the home of his childhood, and he could not

recollect either her face or the year this event had taken place, but since that time he had looked into all women's faces and he had not recognized in any of them the one who, though she had disappeared, had nonetheless been his one and only sweetheart who had passed him by so closely yet without stopping.

During the period of the Revolution in all Russia the dogs had barked day and night, but now they had fallen silent; the order of the day was work, and the workers slept in quiet. The militia guarded from the outside the silence of the workers' houses, so that their sleep was deep and nourishing for the morning labor. The only ones not sleeping were the night shifts of builders and that legless cripple whom Voshchev had encountered on his entry into this city. Today he was riding in on his lowslung amputee's cart to Comrade Pashkin's so as to get from him his ration of life for which he went there once a week.

Pashkin lived in a solid house of brick so that it could not burn, and the open windows of his dwelling opened on a cultural park where even at night the flowers were illuminated. The crippled monstrosity rode past the window of the kitchen, where dinner was being cooked, as noisy as a boiler room, and he stopped opposite Pashkin's study. Pashkin was sitting motionlessly behind the desk, deeply pondering over something which was invisible to the cripple. On his desk were various liquids and jars for the strengthening of the health and the development of political activity. Pashkin had acquired much class consciousness for himself; he was in the ranks of the vanguard, he had already

accumulated a sufficient quantity of achievements and he therefore was scientifically preserving his body—not only for the sake of the personal gladness of existence but also for the working masses near and dear to his heart. The cripple bided his time until Pashkin, getting up out of his chair as a result of his occupation with thought, performed simultaneously with all his limbs running calisthenics, and, on

reaching the point of freshness, once again sat down. The cripple wished to enunciate his word through the window, but Pashkin took a vial and after three slow sighs drank from it a drop.

"Am I going to have to wait for you a long time?" asked the cripple, unaware of either the value of life or of health. "Once more, you are going to catch hell from me?"

Pashkin was desperately worried, but he relaxed by straining his mind—he never wished to spend the nervousness of his body.

"What are you up to, Comrade Zhachev; in what way are you not provided for, why are you excited?"

Zhachev responded to him directly on the basis of fact:

"What do you mean, you bourgeois, or maybe you have forgotten why I suffer you? Maybe you want to get a heavy one in the blind gut? Just keep one thing in mind—every criminal code is too weak for me!"

At this point the cripple tore out of the ground a whole row of roses which happened to be at hand, and, not using them, threw them away.

"Comrade Zhachev," replied Pashkin, "I don't understand you at all; after all you are getting a first category pension—now what about it? I have already met you half way in every way I could."

"You're lying, you class superfluity, it's I who landed halfway up your path, not you who came to meet me."

Pashkin's spouse entered his study, with red lips chewing on meat.

"Lyovochka, are you getting excited again!" she said. "I will take him a package right now; this is simply unbearable, with people like that you can ruin any nerves you have left."

She went out again, shuddering with her whole impossible body.

"Just look, how you've grabbed off a wife, you rat!" Zhachev declared from the garden. "In neutral he

got all the valves working—so you mean to say you can manage a bitch like that."

Pashkin was too experienced in leadership of backwards people to get irritated.

"You might very well maintain a girl friend for yourself; all the minimum needs are taken into account in pensions."

"Oho, what a tactful snake you are!" Zhachev remarked from the darkness. "My pension isn't even enough for cleaned millet, just uncleaned. And I want some fats and something of dairy products too. Tell your witch to pour some cream in a bottle, and make it thick cream too!"

Pashkin's wife entered her husband's room with a package.

"Olya, he demands some cream too," Pashkin said to her.

"Well what's next! Perhaps we'll have to buy him some crepe de Chine for trousers? What are you thinking up now!"

"What she wants is for me to slit down her skirt on the street," said Zhachev from the flower bed. "Or maybe she wants me to smash in the window of her bedroom right straight through to the powder table where she garnishes her mug—she is going to catch it from me yet!"

Pashkin's wife recollected how Zhachev had sent the Provincial Control Committee a declaration against her husband and how the investigation had gone on for a whole month. They had even objected to his name; why was he named "Lev Ilich?" That alone was something! Therefore she immediately took out to the cripple a bottle of cooperative cream, and Zhachev when he had received the

package and the bottle through the window started out the garden of the residence.

"I'll wait till I get home to check out the quality of the food," he shouted back, stopping his rig at the gate. "If I find one more spoiled piece of beef or just plain leftovers you can expect a brick in the belly; in terms of

humanity I am better than you—I need worthy food."

Remaining there with his wife, Pashkin right till midnight was unable to overcome inside himself the alarm aroused by the cripple. Pashkin's wife had the capability of thinking during boring moments, and here is what she thought up to say during the period of family silence:

"Do you know what, Lyovochka? What you should do is somehow to organize Zhachev, and then take him and advance him into some position—let him take over leadership at least of cripples! After all every person needs to have at least a small position of power, and then he is quiet and behaves decently... How trusting and absurd you are still, Lyovochka!"

Pashkin on hearing his wife felt love and calm—his basic life had once again returned to him.

"Olyusha, darling little frog, you really have a gigantic feeling for the masses! Let me, because of that, organize myself up close to you!"

He put his head on the body of his wife and fell quiet in the enjoyment of happiness and warmth. The night continued on in the park, and far off Zhachev's cart creaked—this squeaking sign told all the petty inhabitants of the city very clearly that there was no cream, for Zhachev oiled his wagon with cream which he got in packages from highly placed persons; he intentionally spoiled this product so there would not be any superfluity of strength in the bourgeois body; he himself did not wish to have nourishment from this rich substance. During the last two days Zhachev for some reason had felt the desire to see Nikita Chiklin and he directed the movement of his cart to the foundation pit.

"Nikit!" he called out at the overnight barracks. After this sound, the night, the silence and the general sadness of the weak life in darkness became even more noticeable. From the barracks resounded no reply to Zhachev and all that could

be heard was pitiful breathing.

"Without sleep the working man would long since

have kicked the bucket," thought Zhachev and rolled on further without making any noise. But two people emerged from the ravine with a lantern, and Zhachev became visible to them.

"Who are you? Why are you so short?" asked Safronov's voice.

"It's me," said Zhachev, "because capitalism cut half me off. And is there among the two of you at least one Nikita?"

"Why, it's not an animal but a human being!" reacted the same Safronov. "Tell him, Chiklin, your opinion of yourself."

Chiklin lit up with his lantern the face and the whole short body of Zhachev, and then in confusion removed the lantern to the dark side.

"Why did you come here, Zhachev?" Chiklin quietly enunciated. "You came here to eat kasha? Come along with you, we have some left. It will sour by tomorrow anyway, we will throw it out in any case."

Chiklin was afraid that Zhachev would be offended at receiving help but might eat the kasha anyway in the consciousness that it belonged to no one and that it would be thrown out in any case. Formerly, when Chiklin had worked at cleaning waterlogged stumps and snags out of the river, Zhachev had also paid visits to him, allegedly in order to get fed by the working class; but in the midst of the summer he had changed his direction and begun to get his nourishment from the maximal class, by which fact he counted on benefiting the whole propertyless movement in its future happiness.

"I have been missing you," reported Zhachev. "Finding a bastard torments me, and I want to ask you when you are going to get your nonsense built so that I can burn up the city!"

"Just try to squeeze grain out of a burdock like that!" said Safronov about the cripple. "We are all squeezing out our bodies for the common building, and here he presents a slogan that our heritage is nonsense,

and that nowhere at all is there the element of feeling of mind!"

Safronov knew that socialism is a scientific thing, and he enunciated the words logically and scientifically, giving them two meanings for durability—their basic meaning and one held in reserve, as with every material. All three of them had already gone to the barracks and entered it. Voshchev got from the corner a pan of kasha, wrapped in a padded jacket in order to keep it warm, and gave it to the arriva Is to eat. Chiklin and Safronov had become very chilled and were covered with clay and moisture; they had gone down into the foundation pit in order to dig out an underground spring, so as to stopper it up tightly with a plug of clay.

Zhachev did not open up his package, but instead ate the common kasha, making use of it both for the purpose of satiation and for affirmation of his equality with the two people eating. After the food Chiklin and Safronov went outside—to catch a breath of air before going to sleep and to look about. And so it was that they stood there for a time. The starry dark night did not correspond to the difficult earth of the ravine or to the rhythmic breathing of the sleeping diggers. If one looked only along the ground, at the dry details of the soil and into the grass, which lived thickly and in poverty, then in life there was no hope; the common general universal ugliness, and also the uncultured weariness of people puzzled Safronov and caused to totter within him the ideological arrangement. He was even beginning to have doubts in future happiness, which he pictured in the aspect of a dark blue summer, lit by a motionless sun—all around here, day and night, it was too depressing and useless.

"Chiklin, why is it that you live so silently? Why don't you say or do something to me for the sake of gladness?"

"What do you want me to do? Hug you or something?" answered Chiklin. "We are going to dig out the

foundation pit and that's enough... Your job is to persuade the people whom the employment office sent to us, for otherwise they are going to spare their bodies at the work, just as if they have something in them."

"I can," replied Safronov. "I can do it very boldly. I am going to transform those shepherds and clerks into the working class in a trice. They are going to start to

dig so swiftly that among them the mortal element will appear on their face... And why is it, Nikit, that the field lies there so bored? Can it really be that inside the whole world there is only longing, that only we alone possess a five year plan?"

Chiklin had a small stony head, thickly grown over with hair, and therefore all his life he had been either a blockhead or else dug with his spade, and he never ever managed to think and did not elucidate to Safronov his doubts.

They sighed in the midst of the stagnant silence and went off to sleep. Zhachev had already bent himself over in his cart, going off to sleep as best he could, and Vosh-chev lay flat on his back and eyes open stared with the patience of curiosity.

"You said that you knew everything in the world," said Voshchev, "and for a fact all you do is dig in the earth and sleep! I would do better to leave you—I will go and wander about the collective farms; for no matter what without the truth I am ashamed to live."

Safronov put a definite expression of superiority on his face, and walked on past the legs of the sleepers with the easy stride of a leader.

"Tell me please, comrade, in what form do you wish to receive the particular product—round or liquid?"

"Don't touch him," Chiklin ordered. "We are all living in an empty world—do you really have peace in your soul?"

Safronov, who loved the beauty of life and courtesy of mind, stood there with esteem for Voshchev's lot, even though at the same time he was deeply

disturbed; is not truth merely a class enemy? After all it could now appear even in the form of a dream or imagination.

"You, Comrade Chiklin, restrain yourself from your declarations for the time being," Safronov said to him with full self-importance. "The question has come in the form of a matter of principle, and it has to be put back in accordance with the whole theory of feelings and mass psychosis."

"As they say, Comrade Safronov, that's enough of your reducing my wages," said the awakened Kozlov. "Stop taking the floor while I am asleep, or else I am going to send in a complaint against you! Don't you disturb yourself—sleep is considered as being just the same as wages, and you'll find out that it is so, believe me.

Safronov pronounced some kind of moralizing sound in his mouth and said in his stronger voice:

"Be so good, Comrade Kozlov, as to sleep normally— what kind of a class of nervous intelligentsia is it that we have here, if one sound immediately grows to become bureaucracy? And Comrade Kozlov, if you have any mental stuffing in you and lie in the vanguard then get up on your elbow and inform us; why was it that the bourgeoisie did not leave Comrade Voshchev a register of the universal dead inventory and that he lives in a state of such loss and in such ridiculousness?"

But Kozlov was already asleep and felt only the depth of his own body. Voshchev lay face down and began to complain in a whisper to himself about the mysterious life in which he had pitilessly been born.

All of those who had been active last had lain down and relaxed; night was giving way to the dawn— and only one small animal was crying somewhere out on the brightening warm horizon, being sad or being glad.

Chiklin was sitting among the sleepers and silently reliving his life; he loved to sit in the silence sometimes

and observe everything he could see. He could think only with difficulty, and he was greatly grieved about that fact—willy-nilly it was his lot only to feel and silently to be troubled. And the more he sat, the more densely gloom accumulated within him because of immobility, so that he got up and leaned against the wall of the barracks with his arms just so as to bring pressure to bear and to move in some way. He did not want to sleep at all—on the contrary he would have gone out at the moment into the field and danced there with various girls and people beneath the branches, as he had used to do in the old time, when he had worked at the Dutch tile factory. There the daughter of the owner had once kissed him suddenly; he had been going down the stairs to the clay mixer in

the month of June, and she had been coming up the stairs towards him. And, rising up on her feet which were hidden beneath her dress, she took him by the shoulders and kissed him with her puffy and silent lips on the fuzz on his cheek. Now Chiklin no longer recollects either her face or her character, but at that time he did not like her—for it was precisely as if she were a disreputable being—and so it was that at that time he had gone on past her without stopping, while she, a noble being, had perhaps wept afterwards.

Pulling on his cotton-padded typhoid-yellow jacket which was the only one that Chiklin had owned since the defeat of the bourgeoisie, settling down for the night as if for the winter, he was about to go out for a walk along the road and, after having performed some deed, then go to sleep in the morning dew.

A person at first unfamiliar entered the overnight dwelling and stood in the darkness of the entry.

"You are still awake, Comrade Chiklin!" exclaimed Prushevsky. "I'm walking about too and simply can't get to sleep; it keeps seeming to me that I lost someone and I simply can't meet..."

Chiklin, who held the engineer's intellect in esteem,

was unable to reply to him with empathy, and in his embarrassment remained silent.

Prushevsky sat down on the bench and his head drooped; having made the decision to disappear from the world he was no longer ashamed to face people, and he himself came to them.

"I beg your pardon, Comrade Chiklin, but I am continually troubled when I am alone in my apartment. Would it be all right for me to sit here until morning?"

"Why shouldn't you?" said Chiklin. "Among us you will rest peacefully—lie down in my place and I'll find a place for myself somewhere else."

"No, it would be better for me to sit here just like this. At home things became sad and awful, and I don't know what to do. But, please, don't think the wrong thing about me."

Chiklin in fact didn't think anything.

"Don't leave here to go anywhere else," he enunciated. "We will not permit anyone to touch you, don't be afraid now."

Prushevsky kept sitting there in that very same mood of his; the lamp illuminated his serious face which was a stranger to feeling happy, but he no longer regretted that he had acted unconsciously in coming here; in any event he did not have very much time left to endure before death and the liquidation of everything.

Because of the buzz of the conversation Safronov half opened one eye and thought about the most correct line to adopt towards the sleeping representative of the intelligentsia. Figuring out the answer he said:

"You, Comrade Prushevsky, to the extent of my information, have been worrying yourself to no purpose in order to conceive of all-proletarian housing in accordance with all conditions. And now, I observe, you have put in an appearance at night among the proletarian mass, just as if some kind of fury is driving you; but considering that there is a Party line in the direction of the technical specialists, lie down opposite me, so that you will

constantly be able to see my face and will sleep boldly..."

Zhachev also awakened on his amputee's cart.

"Maybe he wants to eat?" he asked on behalf of Prushevsky. "If he does I have some bourgeois food."

"What constitutes bourgeois food and how much nourishment is there in it, comrade?" enunciated Safronov, astonished. "Where did any bourgeois personnel present themselves to you?"

"Shut up, you ignorant nothing!" replied Zhachev. "It's your business to remain whole in this life and mine to perish so as to clear out a place!"

"Don't be afraid," said Chiklin to Prushevsky. "Just lie down and shut your eyes. I won't be far away—when you get frightened just call out to me."

Prushevsky went over, hunched over so as not to make noise, to Chiklin's place and lay down there in his clothing.

Chiklin took his cotton padded jacket off and threw it on to Prushevsky's knees so he could cover himself with it.

"I have not paid my trade union dues for four months," said Prushevsky quietly, growing chilled immediately on his lower parts and covering himself. "I kept thinking I would get around to it."

"And now you are an automatically expelled person; it's a fact!" reported Safronov from his place.

"Sleep in silence!" said Chiklin to all and went outside so as to live for a bit all alone in the midst of the wearisome night.

In the morning Kozlov stood for a long time over the sleeping body of Prushevsky; it tormented him that this intelligent person from among the leadership was sleeping like an insignificant citizen among the masses lying there and that now he would lose his authority. Kozlov had to consider profoundly such a bewildering circumstance as this—he did not wish, nor did he have the capability to permit harm to the whole state as a result of an inappropriate line of conduct on the part of

the construction supervisor; he was even very worried and he washed himself hurriedly so as to be at the ready. In such moments of life, minutes of threatening danger, Kozlov felt hot social gladness inside himself; he wished to make use of this gladness in the achievement of a feat and to die with enthusiasm in order that the whole class should come to know of him and weep over him. Here Kozlov even shuddered with rapture, forgetting about summer time. With righteousness he went up to Prushevsky and awakened him from his sleep.

"Go back to your own apartment, comrade work supervisor," he said coldbloodedly. "Our workers have not yet caught up to the whole conception of things, and it will be bad for you to carry out the duties of this position."

"It's none of your business," replied Prushevsky.

"No, I beg your pardon," objected Kozlov. "Every citizen, as the expression

goes, is duty bound to carry out the directive issued to him, but you are trampling on yours and equating yourself with backwardness. This is no good at all for anything, I am going to appeal to higher authorities, you are spoiling our line, you are against tempo and leadership—what sort of thing is this anyway?"

Zhachev chewed on his gums and kept silence, preferring to wait to strike Kozlov in the stomach till later on—because he was a son-of-a-bitch who was shoving himself ahead. And Voshchev, hearing these words and declarations, lay there without a sound, just as before not comprehending life. "I would have been better off to have been born a mosquito, his fate is quick" he hypothesized.

Prushevsky, saying nothing to Kozlov, got up from his couch, looked upon Voshchev whom he knew, and concentrated further his gaze on the sleeping people; he wished to enunciate a word or request which was tormenting him, but the feeling of melancholy, like weariness, passed across Prushevsky's face, and he started to

leave. Chiklin, who approached from the direction of the dawn, told Prushevsky that if that evening once again things should seem frightening to him, in that case he should come here once again to spend the night, and if he wanted something then he would do better to speak out and ask for it.

But Prushevsky did not reply, and they silently continued, the two of them together, on their way. Wearily and hot began the long day; the sun, like blindness, hung there in place indifferently above the lowly palidness of the earth; but there was no other place allotted to life.

"Once a long time ago—almost back in childhood," said Prushevsky, "I noticed, Comrade Chiklin, a woman who passed me by, one just as young as I was then. It took place in June or July probably, and since that time I have felt longing and begun to remember and understand everything, but I have never seen her since and would like once more to look upon her. And more than that I no longer desire."

"In what locality was it that you noticed her?" asked Chiklin.

"In this very city."

"Well now, that must be the daughter of the Dutch tile manufacturer?" Chiklin

suggested.

"Why?" enunciated Prushevsky. "I don't understand."

"I too met her then in the month of June—and at that time refused to look upon her. And then, after a time, something warmed up towards her within my breast, just as with you. The person you seek and the person I seek are the very same."

Prushevsky smiled modestly.

"But why?"

"Because I am going to bring her to you, and you are going to see her; if only she is alive in the world at this moment."

Chiklin quite clearly imagined to himself Prushevsky's

grief, because he himself, though he was more forgetful, had mourned at one time with the same grief—for the thin, unfamiliar, ethereal stranger who had silently kissed him on the left side of his face. And here, as it had become apparent, the one and the same rare, wonderful object had had an impact from near and far on them both.

"Most likely she is middle-aged now," said Chiklin soon after. "No doubt she has had a hard life and her skin has become all brown or like that of a cook."

"Probably," agreed Prushevsky. "Much time has passed and if she is alive she has become all charred."

They came to a halt at the very edge of the ravine; the digging of the pit beneath the all-proletarian apartment house should have begun much earlier, for then the being whom Prushevsky sought would have resided here and remained whole.

"And most likely of all she is now a politically-aware person," said Chiklin, "and is acting for our common benefit; whoever in young years had an incalculable feeling will subsequently develop a mind."

Prushevsky looked over the empty district of nature nearby, and he felt sorry that his lost sweetheart and many needed people were obliged to live on this mortal

earth on which comfort had not yet been built, and he mentioned to Chiklin one disappointing consideration:

"But, after all, I do not know her face! What are we to do, Comrade Chiklin, when she comes?"

Chiklin replied to him:

"You will feel her and you will recognize her—are there not many forgotten people in the world! You will recollect her merely from your own sadness."

Prushevsky understood that this was true, and, afraid of somehow displeasing Chiklin, pulled out his watch to show his concern for the approaching daily labor.

Safronov, putting on an intelligent stride and a

thoughtful face, approached Chiklin.

"I have heard, comrades, that you have been throwing about your tendencies here, and so I beg of you to become more passive, for the time for work is at hand! And as for you, Comrade Chiklin, you better keep an eye on Kozlov—he is taking a line in the direction of sabotage."

At that moment Kozlov was eating breakfast in a state of melancholy; he considered his revolutionary services insufficient, and the public good he brought every day to be too little. Today he had awakened after midnight and right up till morning was attentively troubled by the fact that the principle organizational construction was taking place without his participation, and that he was operating only in the ravine, rather than on the scale of gigantic leadership.

By morning Kozlov had made his decision to go over onto an invalid's pension so as to be able truly to devote himself to the greatest public good—thus it was that his proletarian conscience within him spoke out with anguish.

Safronov, hearing this thought from Kozlov, considered him a parasite, and declared:

"You, Kozlov, have gained your principle, and you are abandoning the working masses, and you yourself are sticking your neck out a long way; and what that means is that you are an alien louse who always steers his course into the open."

"As they say, you'd do better to keep your mouth shut!" said Kozlov. "Otherwise you are going to get yourself an official rebuke very quickly! Do you recollect how during the very midst of the course towards collectivization you persuaded a certain poor peasant to kill his rooster and eat it! Do you remember that! We know that you wanted to weaken collectivization! We know how efficient a person you are!"

Safronov, in whom an idea was always surrounded by workaday passions, left the entire argument of Kozlov

without reply, and walked right away from him with his free-thinking stride. He had no great esteem for having charges filed against him.

Chiklin approached Kozlov and asked him about everything.

"I am going to go to social security today to get myself put on a pension," Kozlov reported. "I want to keep my eye on everything to protect against social harm and petit-bourgeois uprising."

"The working class is not the tsar," said Chiklin. "It is not afraid of uprisings."

"It doesn't need to fear them," agreed Kozlov. "But nonetheless it would be better, as the expression goes, to guard against them."

Zhachev was close by on his amputee's cart and, rolling back, he bent down and drove forward and struck Kozlov in the stomach with his silent head at full speed. Kozlov fell backwards out of fright, losing for the moment his desire for the greatest possible public good. Chiklin, bending down, lifted Zhachev along with his cart up into the air and hurled them both off into space together. Zhachev, establishing equilibrium in his line of flight managed to utter his words:

"What for, Nikit? I only wanted him to get the first category of invalid's pension?" And he broke up his amputee's cart between his body and the earth as a result of his fall.

"Be off with you, Kozlov!" said Chiklin to the person lying there. "We are all, no doubt, in turn going to have to leave for there. It's time for you to take a breather."

Kozlov, coming to, declared that he had seen in his dreams at night the chief of the Central Administration of Social Security, Comrade Romanov, and a varied society of people dressed in clean clothes, so he had been worried all week long.

Soon thereafter Kozlov put on a jacket, and Chiklin, together with others, cleaned off the earth and the trash

which had stuck to it from his clothing. Safronov managed to bring in Zhachev and, hurling his exhausted body into a corner of the barracks, said:

"Let that proletarian substance lie there—from out of him maybe some kind of principle will grow."

Kozlov offered his hand to all of them and went off to get on a pension.

"Farewell," said Safronov to him. "You are now like a vanguard angel from the working staff, in view of your ascension into government institutions..."

Kozlov himself was able to think thoughts and therefore silently departed into the supreme universally-useful life, taking in his hand his little personal-property suitcase.

At that minute from beyond the ravine, one man whom it was still impossible to discern and stop dashed across the field; his body was wasted away inside his clothing; and his trousers oscillated on him as if they were empty. The man ran up to the people there and sat down separately on a pile of earth, like someone alien to all. One eye he shut, and with his other he gazed upon all, expecting something bad, but not having any intention of complaining; he had the eyes of a peasant who possessed his own separate private farm, eyes which were yellow in color and which evaluated everything visible with the anguish of miserliness.

Soon after the human being sighed and lay down on his stomach to doze. No one objected to his being here, because there were a lot of people still living without participating in the construction—and the time for labor in the ravine had already struck.

Workers dream various dreams at night—some of them express fulfilled hope, others the presentiment of the dreamer's own coffin in a grave in clay; but the hours of day are spent in a uniform hunched-over way—with endurance and suffering of the body which is digging in the earth, so as to plant in a fresh abyss the eternal masonry root of an indestructible architecture.

The new diggers gradually began to feel at home and became accustomed to work. Each of them thought up his own idea of a future escape from this place—one desired to get increased seniority and to go off to study, a second awaited the moment for reclassification into a higher technical skill, a third preferred to go into the Party and hide in the ruling apparatus—and each of them zealously dug the earth while constantly keeping in mind his own idea of salvation.

Pashkin visited the foundation pit after a day's absence and just as before found the tempo too slow. Ordinarily he came mounted on horseback—since he had sold off his carriage during the epoch of the economy drive; and now he observed from his animal's back the great digging. However, Zhachev was present there too and managed, during the period of Pashkin's tours on foot into the bottom of the foundation pit, to get the horse to drink so excessively that Pashkin began to take care not to come on horseback and arrived in an automobile.

Voshchev just as before did not sense the truth of life, but he became resigned out of exhaustion from the heavy soil—and all he did was to collect all kinds of unhappy petty trash of nature on his rest days—as being documents of the unplanned creation of the world, and facts of the melancholy of every living breath.

And in the evenings, which were now darker, and longer, it became boring to live in the barracks. The peasant with the yellow eyes, who had fled from somewhere out of the farm country, likewise lived amidst the artel; he was there, silent, but he atoned for his existence by doing the housework in the common household, including the assiduous repair of worn clothing. Safronov was already mentally considering whether it was time to bring this peasant into the union, as a force performing useful services, but he did not know how many cattle the man had had on his farm and whether there was an absence of landless hired

laborers on it, and therefore he delayed his intentions.

Evenings Voshchev lay there with open eyes and longed for a future when everything would become universally known and a place would be found for it in the meager feeling of happiness. Zhachev tried to persuade Voshchev that his wish was insane, because a hostile propertied force was again taking place and walling off the light of life—and that the only thing to be done was to tend carefully the children as the tenderness of the revolution and to leave to them the mandate.

"What about it, comrades?" once said Safronov. "Ought we not install a radio in order to listen to achievements and directives! We have here backward masses for whom a cultural revolution and all kinds of musical sounds would be useful, so that they would not accumulate inside themselves gloomy moods."

"It would be better to bring a little orphan girl here by hand than to have your radio," Zhachev objected.

"And what merits or instruction would there be. Comrade Zhachev, in your little girl? How is she deprived for the sake of the raising of the whole construction?"

"She is not eating sugar right now for the sake of your construction, that is how she is serving it, get that unanimous soul of yours out of you!" replied Zhachev.

"Aha," Safronov delivered his opinion. "Then, Comrade Zhachev, bring this doleful little girl here on your own transportation facilities—from her melodic appearance we will begin to live in greater harmony."

And Safronov stood in front of them all there in the position of leader of the campaign for liquidation of illiteracy and of education and therefore paced a bit in front of them with a self-confident stride and made an activist's thinking face.

"Comrade, we require here, in the form of childhood, a leader of the future proletarian world; in this Comrade Zhachev has justified his situation of having his head whole but not his legs."

Zhachev wished to tell Safronov his answer, but he

preferred to drag up to himself by the britches that nearby peasant who had once

had his own individual farm and to give him with his developed hand two blows in the side, as to an available guilty bourgeois. The peasant's yellow eyes only squinted from pain, but he made no effort to defend himself and silently stood there on the earth.

"Just look what an iron piece of farm machinery-he stands there and is not afraid," Zhachev grew angry and once again struck the peasant from above with his long arm. "So there you are; what it means is that somewhere this venomous snake caught it more painfully, that here it's wonderful; listen here you, whose government is it, you cow's spouse!"

The peasant sat down to catch his breath. He had already gotten used to catching blows from Zhachev for his property in the village, and inaudibly mastered his pain.

"And it would also be a good thing for Comrade Voshchev too, to acquire from Zhachev a blow of retribution," said Safronov. "Otherwise he alone among the proletariat does not know what he should live for."

"For what, Comrade Safronov?" Voshchev listened attentively from a corner of the room. "I want to know the truth for the sake of labor productivity."

With his hand Safronov made a gesture of moral admonition, and on his face there showed a wrinkled thought of pity for a backward person.

"The proletariat lives for the sake of labor enthusiasm, Comrade Voshchev! It is long since time for you to receive this tendency! The body of every member of the union should burn from this slogan."

Chiklin was not there, he was walking about the locality around the Dutch tile factory. Everything there was just as it had been there formerly long ago, except that it had acquired the decrepitude of an obsolete world; the trees on the street had dried up out of old age and had stood there for a long time without leaves, but some

people still existed, hidden behind storm windows in little houses, living more firmly established than the trees. In Chiklin's youth there was a bakery smell in the air here, coalmen had ridden by, and milk was loudly advertised from village carts. Then the sun of childhood warmed the dust of the roadway, and his own

life was an eternity in the midst of the dark-blue, dim earth which Chiklin had only then begun to touch with his bare feet. And now the air of decrepitude and of memory bidding farewell hung over the snuffed out bakery and the ancient apple orchards.

Chiklin's constantly active sense of life had brought him to a state of sadness, all the more so in that he saw one fence by which he used to sit and be happy in his childhood, and now this fence had been overgrown with moss, it was leaning over, with the ancient nails sticking out of it, freed from the tightness of the wood by the force of time; it was sad and mysterious that Chiklin had grown up to become a man, had carelessly lost his feeling, had gone to distant parts and worked at a variety of jobs, and that the old man of a fence had stood there unmoving and, recollecting him, had nonetheless been waiting for the hour when Chiklin would go past and stroke the boards which had been forgotten by all with a hand which had grown unused to happiness.

The Dutch tile factory was in a grassy back street which no one used as a through way because it came up against the dead-end wall of a cemetery. The factory building had now become lower for it had gradually sunk into the ground, and its yard was deserted. But one unfamiliar old man was still there—he sat beneath a stock shed repairing his peasant bast sandals, evidently intending to travel on back to old times in them.

"What's this here?" Chiklin asked him.

"That, my dear man, is constervation, the Soviet government is strong, but the machine hereabouts is feeble - it doesn't oblige. Well anyway it's almost all the same to me now; I have only a little time to breathe left."

Chiklin said to him;

"From the whole world all you have is bast sandals! Wait for me right here, and I'll get you something in the way of clothing or food."

"Who are you anyway?" asked the old man, composing his reverent face into an attentive expression. "Are you a thief, is that it, or maybe just the owner—a bourgeois?"

"Of course not, I'm from the proletariat," Chiklin informed him reluctantly.

"Aha, so you are the present tsar, it seems; then I will wait for you."

With the strength of shame and melancholy, Chiklin entered the old factory building; soon he found the wooden staircase on which the owner's daughter once upon a time had kissed him—it had become so rickety that it collapsed beneath Chiklin's weight somewhere into the lower darkness, and in his last farewell to it he could only feel its exhausted wornout remains. Standing there Chiklin saw in the darkness an unmoving light, barely alive, and a door leading somewhere. Behind that door was a room which had been forgotten or which perhaps had not been put into the plan—without windows, and there on the floor burned a kerosene lamp.

What being could be hiding out of self-preservation in the unknown retreat Chiklin did not know, and he stood still in the middle of it.

Near the lamp lay a woman on the earth—the straw beneath her body had almost disintegrated and the woman herself had hardly any clothes covering her; her eyes were deeply shut as if she were pining away or asleep— and the little girl who was sitting by her head was also dozing, yet she kept caressing her mother's lips with a lemon peel, never forgetting to continue. Opening her eyes the girl observed that her mother had relaxed, because her lower jaw had fallen open out of weakness and exposed a dark and toothless mouth; the girl was frightened for her mother and, so as not to be afraid, tied the

mother's mouth shut with a string over the top of the head, so that the woman's lips once again touched each other. Thereupon the girl lay down by her mother's face, wishing to feel her and to sleep. But her mother momentarily awoke and said;

"Why are you sleeping? Rub my lips with lemon, you can see how hard it is for *me*'."

The girl once again began to rub her mother's lips with lemon peel. The woman fell deathly still again for the time being, savoring her nourishment from the remnant of the lemon.

"You aren't going to go to sleep or leave me, are you?" she asked her daughter.

"No, I don't feel like sleeping any more. I'm only going to close my eyes, but I'll

keep thinking all the time about you; after all you are my mama!"

The mother half opened her eyes, they were suspicious, prepared for any kind of a misfortune in life, and had whitened out of indifference—and she declared in her own defense:

"I don't feel sorry for you now and I don't need anyone—I have become like stone; please put out the lamp and turn me on my side, I want to die."

The girl kept a deliberate silence, and kept on as before wetting her mother's mouth with the lemon skin.

"Put out the light," said the old woman, "for otherwise I keep seeing you and keep on living. Just don't go anywhere; when I die then you'll go."

The girl blew into the lamp and extinguished the light. Chiklin sat down on the ground, fearing to make noise.

"Mama, are you still alive or not?" asked the girl.

"Just barely," answered the mother. "When you go away from me do not say that I am dead here. Do not tell anyone at all that I was your mother, for if you do they will mistreat you. Go far far away from here, and when you get there just forget about yourself, then you will stay alive.."

"Mama, what are you dying from, from being a bourgeois or from death?"

"I have become bored, I have become dead tired," said her mother.

"Because you were born a long long time ago, and I was not," said the girl.

"When you die I won't tell anyone, and no one will ever know whether you existed or not. Only I alone will live and I will remember you in my head. Do you know what," she fell silent for a moment, "I am going to go off to sleep right now just for one droplet, and you lie there and think so as not to die."

"Just take the string off me," said the mother. "It is stifling me."

But the girl was already sleeping noiselessly, and it became absolutely silent; Chiklin could not even hear their breathing. Evidently, not even one vermin lived

in this place, neither a rat, nor a worm, nor anything, and there was no noise at all. Just once there was an incomprehensible rumble—maybe an old brick falling in the neighboring forgotten retreat or perhaps it was the earth ceasing to suffer eternity and disintegrating into the debris of destruction.

"Come close to me someone!"

Chiklin listened to the air attentively and crawled cautiously into the darkness, trying not to crush the girl on his way. Chiklin had to move for a long time because he was hindered by some kind of material which got in his path. Feeling the girl's head, Chiklin then found the mother's face with his hand and bent down to her lips so as to find out if this was that former girl who had once kissed him in this very building or not. On kissing her he recognized by the dry taste of her lips and an insignificant remnant of tenderness in their caked wrinkles that it really was she.

"What do I need it for?" said the woman catching on quickly. "I shall be alone forever now," and turning away she died face down.

"I must light the lamp," loudly declared Chiklin,

and, working away in the darkness, illuminated the room. The little girl was sleeping with her head on her mother's stomach; she was hunched up because of the chilly underground air, warming herself with the closeness of her limbs. Chiklin, wanting the child to rest, began to wait for her awakening; and so that the girl should not spend her warmth on her mother who was growing cold, he took her in his arms and protected her thus until morning—as being the last pitiful remnant of the woman who had perished.

■ ■ ■

At the beginning of the autumn Voshchev felt the longness of time and sat there in the living quarters, surrounded by the darkness of tired evenings.

Other people were also lying or sitting there—the common lamp lit up their faces and they were all silent. Comrade Pashkin had vigilantly provided the diggers' dwelling with a radio loud speaker so that during their period of rest each could acquire the meaning of class life from out of its mouth.

"Comrades, we must mobilize the nettles on the front of socialist construction! Nettles are nothing less than an object needed abroad..."

"Comrades, we must," by the minute the loudspeaker made its demand, "cut off the tails and manes of horses! Every eighty thousand horses will give us 30 tractors!"

Saf ronov listened triumphantly, regretting only that he could not speak back into the loudspeaker, so that his feeling about being an activist, or about his readiness to trim horses, and about happiness, could be made audible. For no cause Zhachev, and along with him Voshchev, became ashamed of the long speeches on the radio; they did not have any feelings against the persons speaking and giving instructions on the radio, but they kept feeling more and more of a personal ignominy. Sometimes

Zhachev simply could not stand his oppressed desperation of soul, and he shouted in the midst of the noise of conscientiousness which kept pouring from the speaker:

"Stop that noise! Let me answer him."

Safronov immediately stepped up in front with his elegant little stride.

"You've already done enough of throwing about your expressions, I would suppose, Comrade Zhachev, and it's time wholly to submit to the production of the leadership."

"Leave the man in peace, Safronov," said Voshchev. "It's quite boring enough as it is to live."

But the socialist Safronov was afraid of forgetting the obligation of gladness answered all and for always with the supreme voice of power:

"Anyone who has a Party ticket in his britches must incessantly see to it that the enthusiasm of labor be in the body. I challenge you, Comrade Voshchev, to a competition for the highest happiness of mood!"

The loud speaker worked all the time, like a blizzard, and thereupon once more proclaimed that every worker must help with the accumulation of snow upon the

collective farm fields, and at this point the radio fell silent; in all likelihood the power of science, which had hitherto with equanimity, hurled the words needed by all through nature, had now collapsed.

Safronov, observing the passive silence, began to act in place of the radio:

"Let us put the question; where did the Russian people originate from? And let us reply: from out of bourgeois small fry! The Russian people might have been born from somewhere else, but there was no other place. And therefore we must hurl everyone into the brine of socialism so that the hide of capitalism will come off them easily and so their hearts will pay attention to the heat of life around the bonfire of the class struggle, and so enthusiasm should take place!.."

Having no other outlet for the strength of his mind.

Safronov put it into words and kept right on uttering the words for a long time. Supporting their heads on their hands some of the artel members listened to him in order to fill up the empty ache in their heads with these sounds, and others grieved monotonously—living within their own personal solitude and not hearing the words. Prushevsky sat on the very threshold of the barracks and looked out into the late twilight of the world. He saw dark trees and at times he heard a distant music which caused a flutter in the air. Prushevsky did not raise any objection in his feeling. Life seemed to him to be good when happiness was unattainable, when the tree leaves only rustled about it, and the band music sang in the trade union park.

Soon the whole artel, having settled down quietly with the general exhaustion, went off to sleep just as it lived: in daytime shirts and trousers so as not to labor over unbuttoning buttons, but to preserve strength for production.

Only Safronov remained without sleep. He looked upon the people lying there and declared with sadness:

"Oh, you, masses, masses! It is very hard to organize the skeleton of communism out of you. And so what do you want, you so and so's, anyway! You have put the whole vanguard through torment, you snake!"

And admitting precisely the poor backwardness of the masses, Safronov clung to some tired fellow and forgot himself in the depths of sleep.

And in the morning, without rising from his couch, he greeted the little girl who came with Chiklin as an element of the future and once again dozed off.

The little girl cautiously sat down on the bench, picked out the map of the USSR among the wall slogans and asked Chiklin about the meridian lines:

"Uncle, what are those, fences set up to keep out the bourgeois?"

"Fences, daughter, so they won't sneak in on us," Chiklin explained, desiring to endow her with a

revolutionary mind.

"But my mama didn't crawl through the fence, and she died just the same!"

"Well what about it," said Chiklin. "The bourgeois are all dying nowadays."

"Let them die," declared the girl. "For after all I remember her and I will see her in my dreams. Except that her stomach is not here any more, I have nothing to put my head on to sleep."

"That's all right; you can sleep on my stomach," Chiklin promised.

"What's better, the icebreaker Krasin or the Kremlin?"

"That's something I don't know, little one; I am nothing!" said Chiklin and thought about his head which alone in his whole body was unable to feel; and if it could have then he would have explained the whole world to the child so she could live securely.

The girl went all about the new place of her life and counted over and over all the objects there and all the people, desirous of classifying immediately whom she liked and whom she did not like, with whom she should associate and with whom she should not; after this activity she had already become accustomed to the wooden shed and she felt hungry.

"Give me something to eat! Hey there, Julia, I'll do you in!"

Chiklin brought her some kasha and covered the childish tummy with a clean

napkin."

"Why are you giving me cold kasha, hey you Julia!"

"What kind of a Julia am I to you?"

"And when my mama was called Julia, when she still used to see with her eyes and breathed all the time, she married Martynych because he was proletarian, and when Martynych used to come in that's what he said to mama: 'Hey, Julia, I'll do you in!' And mama used to keep quiet and she stayed with him anyway."

Prushevsky listened to and observed the small girl;

he had been awake for a long time already, aroused by the appearance of the child and at the same time depressed that this being, filled with fresh life, just as if with frost, was fated to be tormented in a more complex way and for a longer time than was he.

"I found your woman," said Chiklin to Prushevsky. "Let's go look at her. She is still intact."

Prushevsky arose and went along because it was all the same to him whether he lay there or moved forward.

In the courtyard of the Dutch tile factory the old man was completing the work on his bast sandals, but was afraid to go out into the world in such footwear.

"Would you perhaps know, comrades, whether they will arrest me because I wear bast sandals or whether they will leave me alone?" asked the old man.

"After all nowadays every last one goes about in leather boot tops; the women used to go about from childhood naked under their skirts, but now every one of them has some flowered pants beneath her skirt—how do you like that, how interesting everything has become!"

"Who needs you!" said Chiklin. "Step along and keep quiet!"

"I wouldn't say a word! Here's what I am afraid of: aha, they'll say, you are going about in bast sandals, that means you are a poor peasant! And if I am a poor peasant then why do I live alone and not pile up with other poor peasants!...

That's what I am afraid of. Else I'd have gone away from here long ago."

"Think, old man," advised Chiklin.

"But there's nothing to think with."

"You have lived a long time; you can work with your memory."

"But I've forgotten everything—I'd have to live it all over again from the start."

Descending into the woman's sanctuary, Chiklin bent down and kissed her again.

"But she's dead!" Prushevsky was astonished.

"Well and what of it!" said Chiklin. "Every person

is dead one time or another if he is worn down to nothing. After all you need her not for living, but just for recollecting."

Getting down on his knees, Prushevsky touched the dead, pained lips of the woman, and having felt them, he recognized neither the gladness nor the tenderness.

"She's not the one I saw in my youth," he declared. And rising over the deceased, he said in addition; "But maybe it is she—after intimate sensations I never could recognize those whom I loved, but I longed for them at a distance."

Chiklin was silent. In an unfamiliar and dead person he used to feel a certain residual warm and dear something—when he would kiss or even more profoundly somehow nestle up to that person.

Prushevsky could not go away from the deceased woman. Light and hot, she had once gone past him—he then wished death for himself, seeing her departing from his sight with her eyes dropped to the ground, and her hesitant, sad body. And then he had heard the wind in the weary world and pined for her. Fearing, however, that he would one day attain this woman, this happiness in his youth, he had perhaps left her defenseless throughout her whole life, and she, utterly exhausted by being tormented, had hidden here in order to perish from starvation and sadness. She lay there this moment face up—for Chiklin had turned her up

for his kiss. The string across her head and chin held her mouth shut, and her long bare legs were covered with a thick fuzz, almost a wool, which had grown as a result of illness and homelessness—some kind of primal life-giving force had transformed the dead woman, even while she was still alive, into an animal growing a pelt.

"Well, enough," said Chiklin. "Let the various dead objects here keep watch over her. After all there are many who are dead, just as there are many who are alive, and among each other it is not boring for them."

And Chiklin stroked the bricks of the wall, lifted

up an unknown ancient thing, placed it alongside the deceased, and both persons went on out. The woman remained to lie there in that eternal age at which she had died.

Passing through the yard, Chiklin returned and blocked the door leading to the deceased with broken up bricks, old stone boulders, and other heavy material. Prushevsky did not help him and asked him later:

"Why are you trying so hard?"

"What do you mean why?" Chiklin said astonished. "The dead are people too."

"But she needs nothing."

"It is true she needs nothing, but I need her. Let something be economized of a human being—when I see the grief of the dead or their bones the way I feel is, why should I live?"

The old man making the bast sandals had gone on out of the yard—and only old footwear was left in his place, the sole souvenir of a person gone forever.

The sun had already risen high in the heavens and the moment for labor had long since arrived. So Chiklin and Prushevsky hastened to the foundation pit along earthen, unpaved streets covered with leaves beneath which the seeds of the future summer were concealed and kept warm.

That evening the diggers did not plug in the loudspeaker and instead, after

eating, sat down to look at the little girl, whereby interrupting the trade union cultural work on the radio. Zhachev that morning had decided that as soon as that girl and other children like her became even a bit mature, he would put an end to all the adult inhabitants of his locality; only he knew that in the USSR there were many inveterate enemies of socialism, egoists, and venomous haters of the future world, and secretly he comforted himself with thinking sometime soon he would kill the entire mass of them, leaving alive only proletarian youth and the pure orphans.

"Just what are you, girl?" asked Safronov. "What

did your papa and mama do?"

"I am no one," said the girl.

"How can you be no one? Some kind of principle of the female sex obliged you by giving birth to you under Soviet rule."

"But I didn't want to be born myself, I was afraid that my mother would be a bourgeois."

"So how did you organize yourself then?"

The girl, discomfited and in fear, dropped her head and began to pull at her shirt; after all she knew that she was in the presence of the proletariat, and she kept a close guard over herself, just as her mother had told her to so often and for such a long time.

"I know who is the main one."

"Who is?" Safronov listened attentively.

"The main one is Lenin, and second is Budyonny. When they weren't there, and only the bourgeois people lived, then I was not born, because I didn't want to be. And when Lenin appeared then I came."

"Well now that's a real girlie for you." Safronov was able to declare. "Your mother was a politically conscious woman! And our Soviet rule is certainly profound if even children who do not remember their mother already sense

Comrade Lenin!"

■ ■ ■

The stranger peasant with yellow eyes kept whimpering about his own tragedy in the corner of the barracks, but he did not say what caused it, and he kept trying to win the good will of everyone with his efforts. His homesick mind would picture the village all in rye with a wind blowing over the fields quietly and turning the wooden windmill grinding the peaceful grain for the daily bread. He had been living like that just a short time before, with the feel of fullness in his stomach and family happiness in his soul; and no matter for how many years he had looked from out of the village into the distance and

the future, he had seen at the end of the plain only the merging of heaven and earth, and up above he had had sufficient sunlight and stars.

So as not to think further about it, the peasant lay down and sobbed out as quickly as possible urgent pouring tears.

"If you don't stop you will really have something to cry about, you petit bourgeois!" Safronov tried to stop him. "After all there is a child living here—or perhaps you don't know that grief is supposed to have been annulled in our country?"

The small girl left her place and leaned her head against the wooden wall. She had become lonesome for her mother, the new lonely night was terrifying to her, and then too she thought how sadly and how long her mother would lie there in the expectation of her little girl's becoming old and dying."

"Where's that stomach?" she asked, turning about to those watching her. "What am I to sleep on?"

Chiklin immediately lay down and got himself ready.

"What about food!" said the girl. "Everyone is sitting there, like Julias, and I have nothing to eat!"

Zhachev rolled up to her on his amputee's cart and offered her a fruit confection requisitioned that very morning from the manager of the food store.

"Go ahead and eat, you poor little thing! It's still unknown what will become of you, but it's already well known what will become of us."

The little girl ate and lay down with her face on Chiklin's stomach. She grew pale from weariness, and in a state of forgetfulness, she embraced Chiklin with her arm like her own accustomed mother.

Safronov, Voshchev and all the other diggers kept watch for a long while over the slumber of this tiny being who would be the master over their graves and live on a calmed earth packed full with their bones.

"Comrades!" Safronov began to define the general

feeling. "Before us lies unconscious a *de facto* inhabitant of socialism, and from the radio and other cultural materials we hear the line, and there is nothing at all to feel out. And right over there rests the substance of creation and the aim of the Party—a small human being destined to constitute the universal element! It is for the sake of that that we must complete as suddenly as possible the foundation pit, so the building may take place very soon, and so that the child personage will be shielded from the wind and from chill by a stone wall!

Voshchev felt the girl by the hand and looked her all over just as in childhood he had looked upon the angel up on the church wall; this weak body, left all atone, without kith and kin among people, would some day feel that warming flood of the meaning of life, and her mind would see a time which was like the first primeval day.

And then and there it was decided to begin tomorrow to dig the earth an hour ahead of time so as to bring closer the schedule for laying the foundation stone and the remaining architecture.

"As a monstrosity I can only hail your opinion, but I am unable to help!" said Zhachev. "You are all the same going to have to perish—you have nothing in your heart—and it would be better for you to love some small being and to deaden yourself with labor. So go on and exist for now!"

Because of the cold time Zhachev compelled the peasant to take off his homespun coat and put it over the child for the night; the peasant had saved up capitalism all his life—so he had plenty of time to warm up.

Prushevsky spent his rest days in observations, or writing letters to his sister. The moment when he stuck on a stamp and dropped the letter into the mail box always gave him calm happiness, just exactly as if he felt that someone needed him, summoning him to remain in life and to act industriously for the common good.

His sister wrote him nothing, she had many children and she was fagged out, and it was as if she had lost

her memory. Only once a year, at Easter, would she send her brother a postcard in which she informed him; "Christ has risen, my dear brother! We live just as we have been living for a long time, I cook, the children are growing up, my husband has been promoted one rank, now he brings home 48 rubles. Come be our guest. Your sister, Anya."

Prushevsky used to carry this postcard around with him for a long time in his pocket, and when he reread it, he sometimes wept.

On his walks he used to go far, all by himself. Once he stopped on a hill, off to the side from the city and highway. The day was cloudy, indeterminate, just as if the time would not continue much longer—on days like this plants and animals doze, and people recollect their parents. Prushevsky looked quietly upon the entire foggy old age of nature and saw at its end white peaceful buildings, shining more brightly than there was light in the air. He did not know the name of this completed construction nor its purpose, though one could understand that those distant buildings were built not merely for use, but also for gladness. Prushevsky, who had become accustomed, to his astonishment, to the sadness of man, observed the precise tenderness and the cool contained strength of the distant monuments. He had never yet seen such faith and freedom embodied in masonry and was unfamiliar with the law of incandescence of the gray color of his motherland. Like an island this white vision of buildings stood there in the midst of the rest of the newly building world gleaming peacefully. But not everything was white in those buildings—in other places they had dark blue, yellow and green color which gave them the intentional beauty of a child's portrayal. "When was this built?" Prushevsky asked with chagrin. For him it was more comfortable to feel grief on this earthly, extinguished star; alien and distant happiness aroused shame and alarm in him. He would have wished, without admitting it, for the eternally building and never ever completed

world to be like his own demolished life.

He looked fixedly upon this new city once more, wishing neither to forget it, nor to be mistaken, but the buildings stood there just as clear as before, just as if around them there had been not the foggiess of the native air but instead cool transparency.

On returning Prushevsky noticed many women on the city streets. The women were walking slowly, notwithstanding their youth—in all likelihood they were strolling in expectation of a starry night.

At dawn Chiklin came to the office with a stranger wearing only trousers.

"He has come to see you, Prushevsky," said Chiklin. "He is asking me to give their coffins back to their village."

"What coffins?"

The enormous naked man swollen from wind and from misfortune did not speak out immediately, at first he dropped his head and strained himself trying to think. It must have been he had constantly forgotten to remember about himself and about his own concerns; perhaps he was exhausted, or perhaps he was dying off by small parts in the course of life.

"Coffins!" he reported in a hot, wooly voice. "We stored up board coffins in the cave, and you are digging up the whole gully. Give us back our coffins!"

Chiklin said that yesterday evening one hundred empty coffins had really been discovered near the north picket; two of them he had appropriated for the little girl—in one he had made up her bed for the future when she would once again be left without his stomach and the other he had given her as a gift for her toys and all kinds of childs' things: let her have her own Red Reading Room.

"Give the rest of the coffins back to the peasant," replied Prushevsky.

"Give them all back," said the man. "We are lacking in dead inventory, the people are waiting for their

property. We got those coffins through self-taxation, don't take away from us what we have earned!"

"No," declared Chiklin. "Two coffins you must leave for our child, they are too small for you, anyway."

The stranger stood there, thought it over and refused to agree.

"It's impermissible! Where will we put our own children? We made the coffins in an assortment of sizes; they're marked—to show who is to go into which. Among us each person can go on living because he has his own coffin; perhaps, it is all we have now; they are all part of an inseparable whole for us now! We lay in those coffins to break them in before we put them in the cave."

The peasant with yellow eyes who had been living at the foundation pit for a long time entered, hastening to the office:

"Yelisei," he said to the half-naked chap, "I have strapped them into one load, let's go and drag them off while it's still dry ground!"

"You didn't get back two coffins," declared Yelisei. "What are you yourself going to lie in now?"

"I, Yelisei Savvich, will lie beneath a leafy maple in my own yard, beneath a mighty tree. I'll lie down. I've already gotten a pit ready beneath the roots—I'll die and my blood will flow like sap up the trunk and go high high up! Or, do you say my blood's gotten too thin, that it won't be tasty to the tree?"

The half-naked chap stood there without any impression and said nothing in reply. Paying no heed to the roadside stones and the chilling dawn wind, he went afoot with the peasant to take the coffins. Behind them went Chiklin, watching Yelisei's back, covered with a whole layer of dirt and already grown over with a protective wool. Yelisei stopped and stood in place at long intervals and looked about space with sleepy, emptied eyes, just as if recollecting something forgotten, or seeking a cozy nook for a gloomy final resting place. But the locality was strange to him, and he let fall to the ground

his fading eyes.

The coffins stood in a long row on a dry height over the edge of the foundation pit. The peasant, who had run first over to the barracks, was glad that the coffins had been found and that Yelisei had put in an appearance; he had already managed to drill holes into the heads and feet of the coffins and to tie them into one common line. Taking the end of the rope from the first coffin over his shoulder, Yelisei strained and hauled, like a Russian bargeman, to drag these board objects across the dry everyday sea. Chiklin and all of the rest of the artel stood there without hindering Yelisei, watching the trail the empty coffins traced out on the ground.

"Uncle, were those bourgeois?" the little girl asked out of curiosity, holding onto Chiklin.

"No, child," replied Chiklin. "They live in thatch huts, sow bread grains, and share half and half with us."

The girl looked up at all of the old faces of the people there.

"What do they need coffins for then? Only the bourgeois are supposed to die, not poor people."

The diggers kept their silence, still not absorbing this information or replying.

"And one was naked!" declared the girl. "When they take no pity on people, then they take away their clothes. My mother also lies naked."

"You are right, girl, the whole one hundred percent," decided Safronov. "Two kulaks just left here."

"Go kill them!" said the girl.

"It is not permitted, daughter; two individuals are not a class..."

"That's one and one more," counted the girl.

"But in total there were too few," Safronov regretted. "We, according to the plenum, have as our duty to liquidate them not less than as a class, so that the proletariat and the landless laboring class here should become orphaned from their enemies!"

"And with whom will you be left?"

"With tasks, with a firm line of further measures—do you understand that?"

"Yes," replied the girl. "That means that all bad people are to be killed for there are very few good ones."

"You are fully a class generation," Safronov was delighted. "You realize with clarity all the relationships, even though you yourself are still a juvenile. It was monarchists which had a demand for people without the least discrimination for war, but for us only one class is precious—and we will soon purge our class of the politically unconscientious element."

"Of scum," the girl guessed easily. "And then all that will be left will be the very very most chief people! My mama also called herself scum for having lived, and now she has died and become good—it's true isn't it?"

"True," said Chiklin.

The girl, recollecting that her mother was in darkness, went off silently, paying no attention to anyone, and sat down to play in the sand. But she didn't play, and merely touched something or other with an indifferent hand, and went on thinking.

The diggers came up near to her, and bending over asked:

"Who are you?"

"So," said the girl, paying no heed, "I have become bored with you, you don't love me—and when you go to sleep at night I am going to kill you."

The workmen looked at one another with pride and each of them had the desire to take up the child and to press her in their embraces, so as to feel that warm place from which emerged this intelligence and charm of a small life.

Only Voshchev stood there weak and cheerless among them, staring mechanically off into the distance; just as before he did not know where there was something really special in the common existence. And no one was able to read him any universal code of life, from memory—and as for events on the

earth's surface, they

did not entice him. Going off a ways by himself Voshchev, with slow steps, disappeared out in the open field and lay down there to lie for awhile, unseen by others, and content not to be a participant in insane circumstances any longer.

Later on he found the trail of the coffins which had been hauled by the two peasants over the horizons to their own country of crooked wattle fences overgrown with burdocks. Perhaps there existed there the quiet of warm farmyard places, or perhaps there was to be found there in the wind of the roads the collective farm orphanhood of the poor peasants with a pile of dead inventory in the middle. Voshchev proceeded on his way there at the pace of a person automatically detached, not recognizing that it was solely the fault of the weakness of cultural work at the foundation pit that compelled him to have no regrets about leaving the construction of the future building. Notwithstanding a sufficiently bright sun, somehow there was no gladness in his soul, all the more so that a turbid smokiness of breath and the odor of grass stretched across the fields. He looked about— everywhere over space hung the steam of living breathing, creating a sleepy, choking invisibility; endurance went wearily on and on in the world just as if everything living was somewhere between time and its own movement; its beginning had been forgotten by all and its end was unknown, the only thing remaining was direction. And Voshchev departed down the one open road.

Kozlov arrived at the foundation pit as a passenger in an automobile which Pashkin was driving himself. Kozlov was dressed in a light gray three-piece suit, had a face which had filled out with some kind of permanent gladness, and had begun to love the proletarian masses intensely. Every one of his replies to a working person he would begin with certain self-sufficing words; "Well good, well excellent," and then he would continue. To himself he loved to declare; "Where are you now, you insignificant little fascist!" And many other brief

slogan-songs.

That very morning Kozlov had liquidated as a feeling his love for a certain lady of middle years. In vain she wrote him letters expressing her adoration; and he, coping with his burden of public duties, kept silence, renouncing ahead of time the confiscation of her caresses, because he was seeking a woman of a more noble, politically-active type. Having read in the newspaper of the overloading of the mails and the imprecision in their operation, he decided to strengthen this sector of socialist construction by means of stopping the lady's letters to him. And he wrote the lady his last, summing-up postcard, divesting himself of the responsibility of love:

"Where once was a table of goodies. Nowadays a coffin stands!

Kozlov."

This verse he had only just before read and he made haste not to forget it. Each day on awakening he would generally read books in bed for a time and, having memorized the formulations, slogans, verses, precepts, all kinds of words of wisdom, the theses of various formal statements, resolutions, verses of songs et cetera he then made his rounds of organs and organizations where he was known and respected as a politically active social force—and there Kozlov used to frighten the already frightened employees with his scientificness, his breadth of outlook, and his well groundedness in politics. Supplementarily to his category No. 1 pension he had gotten himself provided with food in kind.

Dropping by the cooperative store one day, without moving an inch, he summoned to himself the manager and said to him:

"Well good, well excellent, but you have a cooperative here, as they say, of the Rochdale type, not of the Soviet type! So evidently you are not a milestone on the highroad to socialism!?"

"I do not recognize you, citizen," modestly replied the store manager.

"So once again we have here; 'Passively he asked not happiness from heaven / But daily bread, black bread, bread made with leaven.' Well good, well

excellent!" said Kozlov and stalked out deeply insulted, and just one ten-day period later he became the chairman of the trade union committee of this same cooperative store. He never did realize that he had been given this position on the petition of the manager himself who had made his reckoning not only with the outrage of the masses but also of the quality of those outraged.

Getting out of the automobile, Kozlov, looking wise, went to the arena of construction and stood on the edge of it, so as to have an overall view of the whole tempo of labor. As for the nearby diggers, he said to them:

"Do not be opportunists in practice!"

During the lunch break Comrade Pashkin informed the workmen that the poor-peasant stratum of the village had been sadly longing for the collective farm and that it was required that something special from the working class be dispatched there so as to begin the class struggle against the village stumps of capitalism."

"It is long since time to put an end to the prosperous parasites!" declared Safronov. "We no longer feel the heat from the bonfire of the class struggle, but there must be fire; where otherwise are our political-activist personnel to warm themselves?"

And thereupon the artel appointed Safronov and Kozlov to go to the nearby village so the poor peasants would not be abandoned to become under socialism total orphans or private swindlers in their hideouts.

Zhachev rolled up to Pashkin with the little girl on his amputee's cart and said to him:

"Have regard for this socialism in a barefoot body. You carrion crow, bend down to her bones from which you have eaten off the fat!"

"Fact!" declared the girl.

Here Safronov too defined his opinion:

"Fixate in your mind, Comrade Pashkin, Nastya as our future joyful object!"

Pashkin pulled out his notebook and put a dot in it; there were many such dots

depicted in Pashkin's notebook, and each dot marked some particular bit of attention to the masses.

That evening Nastya made a separate bed for Safronov and sat down to be with him. Safronov himself asked the girl to miss him for a bit because she was the only tender loving woman here. And Nastya spent the whole evening quietly with him, trying to think how Safronov would be going off where poor people were languishing in their huts, and how he would become louse-infected among strangers.

Later on Nastya lay down in Safronov's bed, warmed it up and then went off to sleep on Chiklin's stomach. She had long long since grown used to warming up her mother's bed before her stepfather went to bed in it.

The mother excavation for the apartment house of the future life was ready; and now foundation stone was to be laid in the foundation pit. But Pashkin kept constantly thinking bright thoughts, and he reported to the main person in the city that the scale of the house was too narrow, for socialist women would be replete with freshness and full-bloodedness, and the whole surface of the soil would be covered over with the sown seeds of childhood; would the children then really have to live out in the open air, in the midst of the unorganized weather?

"No," replied the chief, knocking a nourishing sandwich off the table with a sudden movement, "dig the main foundation pit excavation four times bigger."

Pashkin bent down and returned the sandwich from the ground to the table.

"It wasn't worth it to bend over," said the big man;

"For next year we have projected agricultural production in this district at half a billion."

So Pashkin put the sandwich in the wastepaper basket, fearing that he would be considered to be a person still living in the tempos of the epoch of the regime of economizing.

Prushevsky was waiting for Pashkin near the building for immediate communication of orders and instructions on the work. Pashkin, walking through

the vestibule, was weighing the idea of increasing the foundation pit not four times in size but six times, and thereby certainly gaining favor and forging ahead of the main Party line so as subsequently to greet it joyously on open ground—and then the Party line would see him and he would become impressed upon it in the form of an external dot.

"Six times larger," he instructed Prushevsky. "I said that the tempo was too slow!"

Prushevsky was overjoyed and smiled. Pashkin, observing the happiness of the engineer, also became satisfied, because he had correctly sensed the mood of the engineering-technician section of this union.

Prushevsky went up to Chiklin to mark out the expansion of the foundation pit. Even before he got there he saw a meeting of the diggers and a peasant cart among silent people. Chiklin carried an empty coffin from the barracks and put it on the cart; thereupon he brought out also a second coffin, and Nastya pursued him from behind, tearing her pictures off the coffin. So that the girl would not be angry, Chiklin picked her up beneath his arm and, pressing her to himself, carried the coffin with the other hand.

"They've died anyway, what do they need coffins for!" Nastya was indignant. "I won't have any place to put my things!"

"That's the way it has to be," replied Chiklin. "All of the dead, they're special people."

"Important indeed!" Nastya was astonished. "Why

does everybody go on living then? They'd be better off to die and become important!"

"They live so there won't be any bourgeois people," said Chiklin and put the last coffin on the cart. Two men were sitting on the cart—Voshchev and that semi-kulak peasant who had departed some time back with Yelisei.

"Who are you sending the coffins to?" asked Prush-evsky.

"Safronov and Kozlov died in a peasant hut, and they have been given my

coffins now; well, just what are you going to do?!" Nastya reported with details. And she leaned against the cart, concerned with what had been taken.

Voshchev, who had arrived on the cart from unknown places, started up the horse so as to ride back into that space in which he had been. Leaving Zhachev behind to look after the girl, Chiklin went along on foot behind the departing cart.

To the very depths of the moonlit night he walked into the distance. Occasionally, in the direction of the ravine off to the side, secluded lights of unknown dwellings shone, and dogs barked there dolefully—perhaps they were lonely, and perhaps they had noticed the people coming and were afraid of them. Ahead of Chiklin the cart with the coffins kept on going forward all the time, and he did not get separated from it.

Voshchev, leaning back against a coffin, looked up from the cart to the dead mass of the mist of the Milky Way. He was waiting for the day when up there a resolution would be promulgated on the cessation of the eternity of time, on atonement for the weariness of life. Not daring to hope, however, he dozed off and awakened when they came to a halt.

Chiklin got to the cart after several minutes and began to look about. Nearby was an old village; the universal decrepitude of poverty was all over it—and the ancient, enduring, wattle fences, and the roadside trees

which were bent over in the solitude had an identical appearance of sadness. In all the village cabins there was light, but there was no one outside them. Chiklin went up to the first hut and lit a match so as to read the white slip of paper on the door. On that slip it was written that this was socialized farmhouse no. 7 of the General Party Line Collective Farm and that here resided the activist for public works directed at the execution of state decrees and any campaigns whatsoever which were being carried out in the village.

"Let me in!" Chiklin knocked at the door.

The activist emerged and admitted him. Thereupon the activist made out a receipt for the coffins and instructed Voshchev to go to the village Soviet and stand there all night long as an honor guard at the two bodies of the fallen comrades.

"I will go myself," determined Chiklin.

"Go ahead," replied the activist. "Just give me the details about you and I will register you in the mobilized cadre."

The activist bent down over his papers, studying with his careful eyes all of the exact theses and tasks; with all the greed of possession, without a thought for his own personal domestic life and happiness, he was engaged in building the essential future and preparing an eternal place for himself within it—and that was why he had let himself go to seed right now, had grown swollen from his concerns, and become overgrown with sparse hairs. The lamp was burning beneath his suspicious gaze which was keeping a mental and factual watch on the kulak scum.

The whole night the activist kept sitting there under the unextinguished lamp, listening for a courier galloping in on the dark road from district headquarters so as to let drop a new directive on the village. Each new directive he read with the curiosity of one who counted on future enjoyment; like a child peering into the passionate secrets of adults he peered into the secrets of the central

authorities. Rarely did a night pass without the appearance of a new directive. And the activist would study it right until morning, building up within himself by dawn the enthusiasm of implacable action. And it was only rarely that it seemed as if for the moment he came to a standstill because of the weariness of life—and at such times he looked complainingly upon anyone who fell beneath his gaze; for then it was that he felt the recollection of being "a stupid bungler and a delinquent"—as he was sometimes called in documents coming from the regional office. At such moments he would decide to himself, "Perhaps I ought to descend into the masses and lose myself in the universal life being directed from above," but then swiftly he pulled himself together—because he did not wish to be a member of the universal orphanhood, and he feared the long languishing wait for socialism till the time came when each shepherd would exist in a state of gladness, for the fact was that right now, at this very moment, a man could be at the right hand of the vanguard and possess immediately all of the advantages of the future. The activist spent a particularly long time examining the signatures on the documents; these letters had been written there at headquarters by the hot hand of the district, and the hand is part of the whole body dwelling in the satiation of fame in the eyes of the devoted, convinced

masses. Tears even appeared in the eyes of the activist when he admired the clarity of the signatures and the depiction of the earthly spheres on the sealing stamps; after all, the whole earthly sphere, all its softness, would soon belong to those precise, iron hands—and how could it possibly be that then he himself would be left without influence on the worldwide body of the earth? And with the sparingness of assured happiness the activist caressed his chest, which was emaciated as a result of its heavy duties.

Why are you standing there motionless?" he asked Chiklin. "Go on over to guard the political corpses from being dishonored by the kulaks; you see how our heroic

brothers perish!"

Through the murk of the collective farm night Chiklin went to the empty hall of the village Soviet. There rested there his two comrades. The largest lamp, intended for lighting the meetings, was burning above the corpses. They lay there next to each other on the presidium table, covered up with a banner up to their chins so their fatal wounds would not be noticeable and so that the living would not therefore be afraid of perishing in the same manner.

Chiklin stood at the feet of the two deceased and calmly gazed into their silent faces. Safronov would have nothing more to say from out of his mind, and Kozlov would not be pained in his soul for all organizational construction, would not receive the pension due him.

Passing time flowed slowly in the midnight darkness of the collective farm; nothing violated the collectivized property and the quiet of the collective consciousness. Chiklin lit up a smoke, went up close to the faces of the dead men and touched them with his hand.

"What about it, Kozlov, are you bored?" Kozlov, being killed, went right on lying there in a silent way; Safronov was also calm, like a satisfied person, and his red mustaches, which hung over his weakened, half-opened mouth, even grew from his lips, because in life he had not been kissed. Around the eyes of Kozlov and Safronov could be seen the dried up salt of their former tears, so that Chiklin found it necessary to wipe it off and to ponder why Safronov and Kozlov had wept at the end of their lives.

"What about it, Safronov, have you laid down for good, or are you planning perhaps to rise again?"

Safronov was unable to reply because his heart lay in his destroyed breast and had no feeling.

Chiklin listened to the rain beginning in the courtyard, to its long and mournful sound, singing in the foliage, in the wattle fences, and on the peaceful roofing iron of the village; apathetically, as in an emptiness, the

fresh moisture poured down, and only the anguish of at least just one human being hearing the rain could have provided a reward for this attrition of nature. At long intervals the chickens screamed out in the fenced-off back country, but Chiklin heard them no more and had already lain down to sleep between Kozlov and Safronov beneath the common banner—because the dead are also human beings. The lamp burned unthriftilly over them till the morning when Yelisei appeared in the room and likewise did not put out the lamp; to him it was all the same whether it was light or dark. He stood there uselessly for a time, and then went on out just as he had entered.

Leaning his chest up against the flag staff, Yelisei stared into the murky dampness of the empty place. On that place the rooks had assembled in order to migrate to warm faraway lands, even though it was not yet the right time for their departure from the land hereabout. Even before the departure of the rooks Yelisei had seen the swallows too disappear, and at that time he had wanted to turn into the light, untroubled body of a bird, but now he no longer thought about becoming a rook, because he no longer could think. He lived and he gazed with his eyes only because he had the documents of a middle peasant, and his heart was permitted by the law to beat.

From the village Soviet sounds resounded and Yelisei went up to the window and put his face against the pane; he constantly listened to hear all kinds of sounds which were emitted from the masses or nature, because no one spoke words to him nor gave him any ideas or concepts, so that he had to feel even distant rumbles of sound.

Yelisei saw Chiklin sitting up between the two others there who were flat on their backs. Chiklin was smoking and confidently comforting the decedents with

his words.

"You've reached the end, Safronov! Well, what of

it? No matter, I remain here, and I'll be like you now; I'm going to become more intelligent, I'll begin to make statements from a point of view, I'll see all of your tendency, it's quite all right that you do not exist..."

Yelisei was unable to understand and could hear mere noises through the clean glass.

"And as for you, Kozlov, don't bother to live. I am going to forget myself, but I'll begin to possess you constantly. I'll conceal within myself all your ruined life, all your tasks, and I'll never abandon them, so just consider yourself alive. I'll be politically active day and night; I'll take under my observation the entirety of organizational life, and I'll go on a pension too—lie there peacefully, Comrade Kozlov!"

Yelisei breathed a film of breath on the pane and could see Chiklin only vaguely, but all the same he kept right on trying to see since there was nowhere else he could look. Chiklin fell silent and, feeling that Safronov and Kozlov were both happy now, he said to them:

"Let the entire class die—I alone will remain and I'll do its task in the world! I don't know how to live for myself anyway! Whose mug is that staring at us? Come in here stranger!"

Yelisei immediately entered the village Soviet and stood there without realizing his trousers had slipped down from his stomach even though the day before they had stayed up. Yelisei had no appetite for nourishment and therefore grew thinner every passing day.

"Was it you who killed them?" asked Chiklin.

Yelisei pulled up his trousers and did not let them drop any more and without answering anything, concentrated his pale, empty eyes on Chiklin.

"Well who then? Go and bring me someone who is killing our masses;"

The peasant set off and went right through that wet place where the last assemblage of the rooks was taking place; the rooks gave him room to pass and Yelisei saw that same peasant with the yellow eyes; the latter had set

a coffin up against the wattle fence and was writing his own last name on it in printed letters, fishing some gooey stuff out of the bottle with the finger with which he was writing,

"Well, Yelisei, have you found out what the orders are?"

"So, so," said Yelisei.

"Then it's all right," calmly declared the yellow-eyed peasant. "Have they washed the bodies of the dead men in the village Soviet yet? I'm afraid that government cripple will come here on his amputee's cart and hit me with his hand because I am alive and the two others died."

So the yellow-eyed peasant went off to wash the dead men, thereby to demonstrate his sympathy and desire to help. Yelisei trailed on behind, not knowing in any case where it was best to be.

Chiklin raised no obstacles while the peasant removed the clothes from the corpses and carried each, one after the other, to be dipped naked in the pond, and then, after wiping them down with sheeps' wool, once more dressed them and put both bodies back on the table.

"Well, very good," said Chiklin at this point. "So who killed them."

"We do not know, comrade Chiklin. We ourselves live unexpectedly."

"Unexpectedly!" declared Chiklin and he struck the yellow-eyed peasant a blow in the face to make him begin to live politically aware. The peasant would have fallen but he was afraid to deviate too far lest Chiklin think him to be a prosperous peasant, so he moved up even closer to Chiklin, desiring to be the more seriously maimed and subsequently to petition for himself by means of his torment the rights of the life of a poor peasant; Chiklin, seeing before him such a creature, mechanically hit him in the stomach, and the peasant fell down, shutting his yellow eyes.

Yelisei, who was standing quietly off to one side, said to Chiklin that the peasant was dead.

"Are you sorry for him?" asked Chiklin.

"No," replied Yelisei.

"Put him in the middle between my comrades."

Yelisei dragged the peasant to the table and using all his strength lifted him up and dropped him across the previous deceased, and only then did he fit him in properly, placing him tightly, closely alongside Saf ronov and Kozlov. When Yelisei moved away the peasant opened his yellow eyes, but he couldn't close them again, and thus they stayed open.

"Does he have a woman?" asked Chiklin of Yelisei.

"He was all alone," replied Yelisei.

"Why did he exist?"

"He was afraid not to exist."

Voshchev came in the door and told Chiklin to go along—he had been summoned by the committee of activists.

"Here is a ruble for you," Chiklin hurriedly gave Yelisei money. "Go over to the foundation pit and look to see whether the girl Nastya is still alive and buy her some candy. My heart just began to ache for her."

The activist was sitting with his three assistant activists, emaciated from incessant heroism and very poor people; yet their faces showed the same firm feeling—zealous devotion. The activist gave Chiklin and Voshchev to understand that in accordance with a directive of Comrade Pashkin they must join all their hidden forces in the service of the campaign for collectivization.

"And is the proletariat supposed to have the truth?" asked Voshchev.

"The proletariat is supposed to have movement," the activist informed him. "And whatever it happens along its path all belongs to it; be it truth, be it a plundered

kulak jacket—it all goes into the organizational pot, and you won't recognize a bit of it then."

Near the dead men in the village Soviet the activist

at first was saddened, but then, remembering the newly building future, he smiled enthusiastically, and gave orders to those surrounding him to mobilize the collective farm for a funeral procession so that all of them should feel the majesty of death during a time of the developing bright moment of socialization of private property.

Kozlov's left arm hung down, and all of his torso, which had perished, was hanging there askew from the table, just about ready to fall unconsciously. Chiklin reorganized Kozlov and noticed that it had gotten very crowded for the dead men lying there; there were already four instead of three. The fourth Chiklin did not remember and he turned to the activist for enlightenment on the misfortune, even though the fourth was not of the proletariat but was some uninteresting peasant lying askew on his side, with stopped breathing. The activist's story to Chiklin was that this farmyard element was the fatal wrecker of Safronov and Kozlov, but now he had realized his own grief as a result of the organizational movement against him and he himself had come here on his own and laid down on the table between the corpses and personally died.

"In any case I would have discovered him in another half hour," said the activist. "There is not one drop of unregulated elemental force in our village anymore, and there is nowhere to hide either! And who is this other extra one lying there?"

"That one I finished off," explained Chiklin. "I thought that the bastard had put in an appearance just begging to be struck a blow. I gave it to him and he weakened."

"Very correct too: in the district they would never believe that there was only one murderer; but two now, that's a complete kulak class and organization!"

After the funeral which was off at one side from the collective farm the sun set, and immediately it became desert-like and hostile on the earth; out from behind the morning edge of the district emerged a thick

underground cloud, and by midnight it was bound to arrive at the localities hereabouts and to pour out upon them its whole weight of cold water. Looking that way the collective farmers began to feel chilled, and the chickens had long since been cackling in their henhouses, sensing ahead of time the whole length of the autumn night. Soon afterwards complete darkness fell upon the earth, intensified by the blackness of the soil trampled by the wandering masses; but up above it was still light—in the midst of the dampness of the inaudible wind and heights there was a yellow gleam of the sun which reached up to there and was reflected on the last of the leaves in the orchards bent over in the silence. People did not wish to be inside the huts—for there thoughts and moods attacked them. They walked about all the open places of the village and tried to keep each other within view at all times; and in addition they listened carefully—to hear whether some sound or other would not resound from a great distance in the moist air, in order to find reassurance in such a difficult space. The activist had long since issued an oral directive on the observation of sanitation in the life of the people, for which people were required to be out on the street all the time, and not suffocating in their family huts. And as a result it was easier for the convened committee of activists to maintain observation over the masses through the window and to lead them perpetually further and further.

The activist also managed to note this yellow evening glow, similar to burial light, and he decided to designate on the morn of the next day a march in star-formation of collective farm foot marchers into those nearby villages which were clinging to individual farming, and thereupon to announce folk games.

The chairman of the village Soviet, an old chap from among the ranks of the middle peasants, was about to approach the activist for some orders and directions because he was afraid of being inactive, but the activist motioned him away with his hand, instructing the village

Soviet only to give support to and make secure the previous accomplishments of the committee of activists and to guard the ruling poor peasants from the kulak beasts of prey. The old man chairman gratefully relaxed and went off to make for himself a night watchman's rattle.

Voshchev feared the nights, he lay sleepless in them in a state of doubt; his basic feeling of life strove for something appropriate in the world, and secret hope of thought promised him a distant salvation from the oblivion of universal

existence. He went off to spend the night alongside Chiklin, and he was worried lest Chiklin should lie down and go off to sleep, while he would be there all alone staring with his eyes into the murk over the collective farm.

"Don't sleep today, Chiklin, because I'm afraid of something."

"Don't be afraid. Tell me who is frightening you. I'll kill him"

"I am frightened of perplexity of the heart, Comrade Chiklin. I myself do not know what. It keeps seeming to me as if far far away there is something special, or some luxurious unattainable object, and I meanwhile am living sadly."

"We will get it, Voshchev. As they say, don't you grieve!"

"When, Comrade Chiklin?"

"Just consider that we have already got it: you see how everything has now become nothing..."

At the edge of the collective farm stood the Organizational Yard—Org-Yard—in which the activist and other leading poor peasants conducted instruction of the masses; and here too it was that there lived the unproven kulaks and various penalized members of the collective—some of them had gotten there for falling into a petty mood of doubt, others because they had wept during a time of cheerfulness and kissed fenceposts in their own farmyards when they had departed for the collectivized yard, and still others for something else again, and then

last of all there was an old chap who had put in an appearance at the Org-Yard quiet haphazardly— this was the watchman from the Dutch tile factory: he had been walking on his way past and they had stopped him because he had an expression of alienation on his face.

Voshchev and Chiklin sat on a stone in the middle of the yard, expecting soon to go to sleep beneath the shed there. The old man from the Dutch tile factory recollected Chiklin and approached him—up to that point he had been sitting on the nearest grass and had been wiping the dirt off his body beneath his shirt without using water.

"Why are you here?" asked Chiklin.

"Well I was going past and they ordered me to stay here: perhaps, they say, you are living to no purpose, let's look and see. I tried to go past in silence but they curtailed me back: halt, they shouted, you kulak! Since then I have been living here on potato peels.

"It's all the same to you where you live," said Chiklin, "just so long as you don't die."

"You're telling the truth there! I can get used to anything at all, only at first I pine. Here they have already taught me the letters and they are compelling me to know the number too; you are going to be, they say, an appropriate class-conscious old chap. And in fact why not - I will be!"

The old man would have talked the whole night, but Yelisei returned from the foundation pit and brought Chiklin a letter from Prushevsky. Beneath the lantern which lit up the sign of the Org-Yard Chiklin read that Nastya was alive and that Zhachev had begun to take her each day to a nursery school where she had come to love the Soviet state and was collecting scrap and waste for it; Prushevsky was very strongly pained over the death of Kozlov and Safronov while Zhachev had wept enormous tears for them.

"It is rather difficult for me," wrote Comrade

Prushevsky, "and I am afraid that I will fall in love with some woman or other and get married since I do not possess any social significance. The foundation pit has been completed and in the spring we will lay the foundation stone. Nastya knows how, it seems, to write in printed letters and I am sending to you her paper."

Nastya wrote to Chiklin:

"Liquidate the kulak as a class. Hail Lenin, Kozlov, and Safronov!

"Greetings to the poor collective farm but not to the kulaks."

Chiklin kept whispering these written words and was very profoundly touched, unable to wrinkle up his face for sadness and weeping: then he went off to sleep.

In the big house of the Org-Yard there was one enormous room and everyone slept there on the floor, thanks to the cold. Forty or fifty human beings from among the people opened up their mouths and breathed upwards, and beneath the low ceiling hung a lamp in the fog of their breath, and it quietly swung from some kind of quaking of the earth. In the middle of the floor lay Yelisei too: his sleeping eyes were nearly completely open and looked without blinking at the burning lamp. Finding Voshchev, Chiklin lay down next to him and settled himself down to wait for a brighter morning.

In the morn the barefoot collective farm foot marchers formed up in a row in the Org-Yard. Each had a banner with a slogan in his hands and a pouch of food over his shoulder. They were awaiting the activist as the prime person in the collective farm in order to learn from him why they were to go to strange places.

The activist came to the Yard along with the leading personnel and, having arranged the foot marchers in the form of a five-sided star, he stood in the middle of them all and delivered his speech, directing the foot marchers to go out among the surrounding poor peasantry and demonstrate to them the characteristic of the collective farm by the method of summoning to socialist

law and order, because in any event what was about to happen would be bad. Yelisei held in his hand the longest banner of all and after hearing out obediently the activist he stepped out with his ordinary gait up in front, without knowing where he was expected to stop.

That morning there was dampness, and cold was blowing in from distant empty localities. This particular circumstance was likewise not missed by the committee of activists.

"Disorganization!" the activist said wearily of this chilling wind of nature.

The poor peasants and the middle peasants went on their way and disappeared into the distance, into space belonging to others. Chiklin gazed at the departing barefoot collective, not knowing what he ought to suppose beyond this, and Voshchev kept silence without thought. From the big cloud which had come to a halt over the distant God-forsaken fields of plowland, rain fell like a wall and covered those who had left in a surrounding of moisture.

"Where did they go?" said one prokulak, separated from the population at the

Org-Yard because of his harm-fulness. The activist had forbidden him to go outside beyond the wattle fence, and the prokulak had expressed himself across the fence. "One pair of shoes will last *us* for ten years, so where are *they* off to?"

"Hit him!" said Chiklin to Voshchev.

Voshchev went up to the prokulak and hit him hard in the face. The prokulak did not express himself further.

Voshchev approached Chiklin with his customary lack of comprehension of surrounding life.

"Just look, Chiklin, how the collective farm is going out into the world—bored and barefoot."

"That's why they are walking, because they are barefoot," said Chiklin. "They have nothing to be glad of—the collective farm after all is a run-of-the-mill everyday matter."

"Christ probably went about bored too, and in

nature then there was an insignificant rain."

"You do have a mind, poor fellow," replied Chiklin. "Christ went about all alone for some unknown reason, but in this case whole heaps are on the move for the sake of existence."

The activist was here at the Org-Yard; the previous night had passed to no purpose—no new directive had descended upon the collective farm, and he had let flow a river of thought within his own head; but the thought gave him fears of dereliction. He was fearful lest prosperousness might accumulate in the individually owned barnyards and that he would fail to take it into account. Simultaneously he was also fearful of overzealousness—and therefore he had collectivized only the horse population, tormenting himself over the isolated cows, sheep and poultry, because in the hands of the elemental private farmer even a goat was a lever of capitalism.

Restraining the strength of his initiative, the activist stood there immobile in the midst of the general silence of the collective farm, and his assistant comrades

gazed upon his silenced lips, not knowing which direction they should move in. Chiklin and Voshchev departed from the Org-Yard and went off to seek the dead inventory so as to see its state of usefulness.

After covering a certain distance they stopped along the way because from the right side of the street certain of the gates swung open without the work of human hands and calm horses began coming through them. At a steady gait, not dropping their heads to the fodder growing right there on the earth, the horses in a solid mass passed the street and descended into the ravine in which water was contained. After drinking up their quota, the horses went down into the water and stood in it for a certain length of time for the sake of their own cleanliness, and thereupon clambered up on to the dry land of the shore and went on back, not losing their formation nor their own solidarity among themselves. But upon

reaching the first barnyards the horses separated—one of them came to a halt at a thatch roof and began to jerk straw out of it, and another, bending down, picked up remnant bunches of spare hay in her mouth, while the more gloomy horses entered their farms residences and took there from their familiar, established places one sheaf, and then took it out to the street.

Each animal took a share of fodder which it could manage and thriftily carried it in the direction of the gates from which all the horses previously had emerged.

The horses which had arrived there first stopped at their common gates and waited there for all the rest of the mass of horses to come up, and only when all of them had gathered there together did the horse up in front push the gate wide open with his head and all of the horse formation enter the yard with fodder. In the yard the horses opened their mouths, the fodder fell from them into one center pile there, and at that point the collectivized horses stood in a circle and began slowly to eat, getting along with each other in an organized way without the meddling of a human being.

Voshchev gazed in fright through the chink in the gate at the animals there; he was astounded by the spiritual calm of the chewing horses, just as if all the horses had become convinced, with full exactitude, of the collective farm meaning of life, and as if he alone lived and was in a state of torment worse than any horse.

Beyond the horse yard someone's poor hut stood without any fence around it on a barren piece of land. Chiklin and Voshchev entered this hut and found a peasant lying face down on a bench. His woman was cleaning up the floor, and, upon seeing her guests, wiped her nose with the end of her kerchief, after which plain and ordinary tears began to flow:

"What's wrong with you?" Chiklin asked her.

", darlings!" the woman enunciated and wept even more profusely.

"Dry out right now and talk!" Chiklin tried to bring

her to her senses.

"My husband has been curled up and lying there for I don't know how many days now... Woman, he says, push some food into my insides, because I'm lying here all empty, and my soul has gone out of the whole flesh, and I'm afraid of floating away—he shouts at me to put some weight on his shirt. And when evening comes I tie the samovar to his stomach. When is there going to be something?"

Chiklin went up to the peasant there and turned him over on his back—he really was light and thin, and his pale, petrified eyes did not even express timidity. Chiklin bent down close to him.

"Are you breathing?"

"When I remember then I breathe," the man replied weakly.

"And if you forget to breathe?"

"Then I'll die."

"Perhaps you don't feel the meaning of life, and in that case just endure for a bit longer," said Voshchev to the man lying there.

The wife little by little but carefully and completely looked over the two new arrivals, and as a result of the causticity of her eyes her tears dried up unfeelingly.

"He had a presentiment for everything, comrades, he saw everything clearly in his soul! And when they took his horse into the organization then he just lay down there and just stopped everything. I at least weep, but he doesn't."

"It would be better for him to weep, it would be easier for him" advised Voshchev.

"That is exactly what I told him. Can you really just lie there in silence—the authorities will get frightened. After all, I'm of the people, that is the genuine real truth—you evidently are good folk—and when I go out on the street, I just overflow with tears. And the comrade activist sees me—after all he looks about everywhere and he has got all the chips counted up too—and

when he sees me he gives the order: weep, woman, weep harder, what you see is the sun of the new life which has risen, and the light is hurting your dark eyes. And he has an even voice and I see that nothing bad is going to happen to me, and so I weep with all my heart."

"It seems your husband has only existed for a short time without spiritual support?" Voshchev asked.

"Yes, just since he stopped recognizing me as his wife, consider it was from then."

"His soul is his horse," said Chiklin. "Let him live a time empty, without any load, and the wind will air him out."

The woman opened her mouth, but stood there without making a sound, because Voshchev and Chiklin had gone out the door.

Another hut stood on a large lot, fenced with wattle, and inside a peasant man lay there in an empty coffin, and whenever he heard any noise at all he shut his eyes like one dying. Above this half-sleeping man's head an ikon lamp had been burning several weeks, and the man himself would pour oil into it from time to time. Voshchev put his hand up to the forehead of the "deceased" and felt that the man was warm. The peasant heard him and totally ceased breathing, desirous of becoming colder on his outside. He clenched his teeth and did not permit air to enter his inside depths.

"Now he has grown cold," said Voshchev.

The peasant exerted all his dark forces to try to stop the inner beating of his life, but his life, because it had been driven forward for so many years, could not just stop within him. "Just see how strongly you revive me," the peasant lying there thought between efforts. "All the same I'm going to wear you down, you'd do better to end it yourself."

"It seems as if he has gotten warmer again," Voshchev discovered after an interval of time.

"So he still isn't frightened, the prokulak devil," declared Chiklin.

The peasant's heart moved up on its own into his soul, into the tightly packed throat space, and pressed itself tightly there, emitting the steam of dangerous life into the upper skin. The peasant moved his legs so as to help his heart shudder, but his heart was exhausted without air and was unable to work. The peasant opened up his mouth and cried out with grief and death, sorry that his intact bones would rot to dust, that his bloody strength of body would decay, that his eyes would shut out the white bright world, and that his farmyard was doomed to eternal orphanhood.

"Dead men make no noise," said Voshchev to the peasant.

"I'm not going to," agreed the man lying there, and he fell still, happy that he had pleased the authorities.

"He's growing cold," Voshchev felt the peasant's neck.

"Put out the ikon lamp," said Chiklin. "Over him the flame burns, and he has closed his eyes tightly—now that's where there is no stinginess to the revolution."

Emerging into the fresh air, Chiklin and Voshchev encountered the activist going to the library hut on affairs of the cultural revolution. Afterwards he had as his next duty to make the rounds, in addition, of all of the middle-peasant individual farmers left outside the collective farm, in order to convince them of the unreasonableness of fenced-off barnyard capitalism.

In the library hut stood previously organized collective farm women and girls.

"Good day, comrade activist!" they all said in chorus.

"Greetings to the cadres!" thoughtfully replied the activist and stood there in silent consideration. "And now we will repeat the letter 'a' —listen to my statements and write..."

The women lay down on the floor because the entire library hut was bare and they began to write with pieces of plaster on the floor planking. Chiklin and

Voshchev also sat down, desirous of strengthening their knowledge of the alphabet.

"What words begin with the letter 'a?' " asked the activist.

One fortunate girl rose to her knees and replied with all the swiftness and sprightliness of her intelligence.

"Avantgarde, activist, advance, archleftist, antifascist! All of them to be spelled with a hard sign, except for archleftist!"

"Correct, Makarovna," the activist remarked. "Write those words down systematically."

The women and girls assiduously lay on the floor and began to work hard at drawing the letters, making use of the scratchy pieces of plaster. During this period the activist gazed out the window, pondering some further path, or else, perhaps, wearied by his lonely political awareness.

"Why are they writing hard signs there? There aren't supposed to be any there!" said Voshchev.

The activist looked about.

"Because Party lines and slogans are designated by words, and because a hard sign is more useful than a soft sign. It is the soft sign which has to be abolished, and the sign is something inevitable; it makes for harshness, and clarity of formulations. Does everyone understand?"

"Everyone," replied all of them.

"Now write next concepts with a 'b,' Makarovna!"

Makarovna rose and trusting in science she said:

"Bolshevik. Bourgeois, the collective farm is the *benefit* of the poor peasant, bravo, bravo, Leninists! Hard signs are put on Bolshevik and also at the end of collective farm, but everywhere else there are soft signs."

"You forgot 'bureaucratism,' " the activist pointed out. Well go ahead and write. And you, Makarovna, run on over to the church and get me a light for my pipe."

"I'll go," said Chiklin. "Don't tear the people away from the mind."

The activist pressed burdock crumbs into his pipe

and Chiklin went over to get it lit from the flame. The church stood on the edge of the village, and behind it began the desertedness of autumn and the eternal conciliatoriness of nature. Chiklin looked upon this impoverished solitude, on the lone vines lying chilly in the clayey field, but for the time being he found no grounds for entering an objection.

Near the church grew old forgotten grass, and there were no pathways or other marks of human passing—which meant that people had long since avoided worshipping in the church. Chiklin went to the church through a thicket of burdocks and goosefoot and then stepped up on the church porch. There was no one in the cold vestibule except for a sparrow who lived, all hunched up, in a corner; but even he was not frightened by Chiklin, and merely looked in silence at the human being, intending, evidently, to die soon in the darkness of the autumn.

In the church burned many candles; the light of the silent, sad wax illuminated the entire interior of the building right up to the cupola above the hiding place of the sacred relics, and the cleanwashed faces of the saints stared out into the dead air with an expression of equanimity, like inhabitants of that other peaceful world—but the church was empty.

Chiklin lit up the pipe from the nearest candle and saw that up in front on the

pulpit someone else was smoking. Chiklin went on up to him.

"Did you come from the comrade activist?" asked the smoker.

"What's it to you?"

"I see by the pipe in any case."

"And who are you?"

"I used to be the priest, and now I have disassociated myself from my soul, and have had my hair cut in the style of the foxtrot. Just look at it!"

The priest took off his cap and showed Chiklin his hair, bobbed like that of a girl.

"Not so bad, right! But they don't believe me

anyway. They say I am a secret believer and an obvious parasite on the impoverished. And I am now going to have to earn my seniority, so they will accept me as a member of the atheists' circle.

"How are you earning it, vile being?" asked Chiklin.

The priest put his bitterness away in his heart and replied willingly:

"Oh, I sell candles to the people—you see how the whole church is lit up! The money received is saved up in the atheists' circle and will go to the activist for a tractor."

"Don't tell lies: where are the worshipping people?"

"There cannot be any people here," reported the priest. "The people only buy a candle and put it here for God, like an orphan, in place of their prayers, and meanwhile they hide."

Chiklin sighed wrathfully and asked further:

"And why is it that the people do not come here to cross themselves, you rat you?"

The priest, to show respect, rose to his feet in front of him, preparing to report to him in full.

"Crossing oneself, comrade, is not permitted: whoever does so I write their names down in stenography in the memorial register."

"Talk faster and further," directed Chiklin.

"I am not ceasing my words, comrade brigadier, it is just that I am weak in my tempos but please suffer me out anyway... And the register sheets with the designated persons who have made the sign of a cross, or who have bowed down before the heavenly powers, or who have carried out any other act of reverence to the prokulak high priests—those sheets I personally accompany each midnight to the comrade activist."

"Come up close to me," said Chiklin.

The priest readily descended the pulpit steps.

"Close your eyes tight, scoundrel!"

The priest shut his eyes and expressed touching kindness on his face. Chiklin, without a quaver of his

torso gave the priest a conscientious blow on his cheek bone. The priest opened his eyes and once again shut them tightly, but he could not permit himself to fall down—so as not to give Chiklin a concept of his disobedience.

"You want to live?" asked Chiklin.

"For me, comrade, it is useless to live," the priest replied wisely. "I do not feel the loveliness of creation any longer—and I am left without God, and God without man."

Having uttered these last words the priest bent down to the ground and began to pray to his protecting angel, touching the floor with his foxtrot-bobbed head.

A long whistle resounded in the village and in its wake the horses began to neigh.

The priest halted his praying hand and realized the significance of the signal.

"A gathering of the founders," said he with humility.

Chiklin went on out the church into the grass. Through the grass a woman was going to the church, straightening up the ruffled goosefoot in her tracks, but, when she saw Chiklin, she froze and out of fright she handed him a five-kopek piece for a candle.

■ ■ ■

The Org-Yard was filled with a mass of people; present were organized members and unorganized peasants who still had individual farms, those who were still weak in their political consciousness, or those who had a prokulak portion of life and had not yet entered the collective farm.

The activist was up on a high porch and he observed with sitent grief the movement of the vital mass beneath him on the raw, wet, evening earth; he silently loved the poor peasantry who, eating their simple bread, were rushing eagerly ahead into the bright future, for all the same the land for them was empty and alarming; secretly he

gave city candies to the children of the deprived and with the advance of communism into agriculture he decided to set his sights on marriage, all the more because then women would show their real mettle better. Right now someone's little child was standing near the activist and staring into his face.

"What is your mouth watering about?" asked the activist. "Here's a candy for you."

The boy took the candy, but mere food was too little for him.

"Uncle, why are you the smartest but you still don't have a visored cap?"

The activist stroked the boy's head without a reply; the child gnawed with astonishment on the candy which was stony all the way through—it was shiny like cloven ice and inside it there was nothing except hardness. The boy gave half the candy back to the activist.

"Eat it up yourself, there's no jam in the middle; little joy for us."

The activist smiled with a penetrating consciousness and had the presentiment that this child in the maturity of his life would recollect him in the midst of the burning light of socialism which had been wrought out of wattle-fenced village barnyards by the concentrated strength of the committee of the activists.

Voshchev and three other already convinced peasants were carrying beams to the gates of the Org-Yard and arranging them in a pile—the activist had given them previous instructions for this work.

Chiklin too walked behind the workers and, taking up a beam near the ravine, he carried it to the Org-Yard: let there be more benefit in the common pot, let it not be so sad all about.

"Well, how will it be, citizens?" declared the activist to the substance of the people located in front of him. "Just what are you up to, do you want to sow capitalism once again, or have you come to your senses?.."

The organized peasants sat on the earth and smoked

with a satisfied feeling, stroking their beards which during the last half year had for some reason begun to grow more sparsely; the non-organized peasants stood there on their feet, overcoming their useless souls, but one of the appointees of the committee of activists had taught them they possessed no souls but instead had only a private property attitude, and now they did not at all know what would become of them, given the fact they would have no more private property. Others, bending over, beat themselves in the breast and listened to hear their own thoughts emerging from there, but their hearts beat lightly and sadly as if they were empty and there was no response. The people standing there did not let the activist out of their sight for a moment, and those nearer to the porch stared at the leader with full desire in their unblinking eyes so that he should see their ready mood.

By this time Chiklin and Voshchev had already completed delivering the beams and begun to rough-hew them with joints on all ends, attempting to build some large object. There was no sun in nature either yesterday or now, and the weary night had fallen early on the raw, damp fields; quietude had now extended itself over all the visible world, and only Chiklin's axe resounded in its midst and

echoed with a decrepit creak on the nearby mill and in the wattle fences.

"Well, what about it!" patiently said the activist from his lofty perch up above. "Or are you going to keep standing there between capitalism and communism: after all it's already time to get moving—in our district the fourteenth plenum is under way!"

"Comrade active, let us middle peasants stay standing there awhile yet," the peasants from behind requested him. "Maybe we will get used to it: the main thing for us is custom, habit, otherwise we will endure everything."

"Well, go on standing there, while the poor peasants sit," the activist gave his permission. "Comrade Chiklin hasn't joined the beams together in one block yet anyway."

"And what are those beams being joined for, comrade active?" asked a middle peasant from the rear.

"It's for the liquidation of classes that a raft is being organized, so that tomorrow the kulak sector should be floated on down the river into the sea and further..."

Pulling out his notation sheets and his class-stratification register, the activist began to make marks on the paper; his pencil was two-colored, and sometimes he would use the dark blue, sometimes the red, and sometimes he merely sighed and thought, making no marks until he had reached a decision. The standing peasants opened their mouths and looked at the pencil with anguish in their weak souls which had arisen in them because of the last remnants of their private property, because their souls had begun to feel torment. Chiklin and Voshchev were hewing away with two axes at the same time and their beams were fitting right up to each other, forming a large area up on top of them.

The nearest middle peasant leaned his head up against the porch and stood there in this state of rest for a time.

"Comrade activist, comrade!"

"Speak out clearly," the activist told the middle peasant while continuing his activity.

"Just let us grieve out grief the rest of the night and then we will share in gladness with you forever."

The activist considered this briefly:

"The night is long. All about us the tempos in the whole district are marching along—but go ahead and grieve until the raft is ready."

"Well even till just the raft, that's a gladness too," said the middle peasant and began to weep, so as not to lose time from his last grieving. The women standing outside the wattle fences of the Org-Yard immediately began to wail at the top of their choked voices, so Chiklin and Voshchev stopped hewing the wood with their axes. The organized membership of the poor peasantry

rose from the earth, satisfied not to have to grieve, and they went out to look over their vital common village property.

"Turn away from us for a little while," the activist asked two of the middle peasants: "So we don't have to look at you."

The activist departed from the porch and went into the house where he greedily began to write out a report on the exact fulfillment of the measure for total collectivization and on the liquidation by means of a raft, of the kulaks as a class; but while doing this the activist was unable to put a comma after the word "kulak," since there was none in the directive. Further he requested the district for a new battle campaign for himself, so the local activists could be kept at uninterrupted work and clearly outline the dear general line forward. The activist would also have liked for the district to proclaim him in its decree the most ideological person in the entire district superstructure, but this desire subsided in him without any consequences, because he recollected how after the bread grain procurements for the state he had had occasion to proclaim himself to be the most intelligent man in the given stage, and how, on hearing this, a certain peasant had declared himself to be a woman.

The house door opened and through it resounded the sound of torment from the village; the person entering wiped the wetness from his clothing and then said:

"Comrade active, snow has started out there, and the cold wind is blowing."

"Let it snow and blow, what's it to us?"

"For us it's nothing, we can get along in anything, we will manage," the middle-aged poor peasant who had just put in an appearance completely agreed. He was permanently astonished that he was still alive in the world, because he had nothing except vegetables and his poor peasant's special benefits, and was unable to achieve a higher, satisfying life.

"Comrade chief, just tell me for my consolation:

should I join up with the collective farm to die, or just wait?"

"Sign up, of course, otherwise I'll send you to the ocean."

"There is no place at all that is frightening to a poor peasant; I would have signed up a long time ago but I will not sow Zoya."

"What Zoya? If you mean soy, that's after all an official grain."

"She's the one, that bitch!"

"Well don't sow it—I will take your psychology into consideration."

"Take it into consideration, please!"

Enrolling the poor peasant in the collective farm, the activist had to give him a receipt for his membership, which also attested to the fact that there would be no Zoya in the collective farm, and he also had to think up an appropriate form for this receipt since there was no way the poor peasant would leave without it.

Outdoors at this same time the cold snow kept falling ever more densely; the earth itself became the more relaxed as a result of the snow, but the sounds of the middle peasants' mood hindered the coming of total quietude. The old plowman Ivan Semyonovich Krest-yanin—his last name meaning in Russian "peasant"—kissed the young trees in his orchard and then he broke them off right at the roots, and his wife lamented over the bare branches.

"Don't weep, old woman," said Krestyanin: "In the collective farm you will at least become a servant for the men. And these trees, they are my flesh, so let it

now be tormented, for it will be depressing for it to be collectivized into captivity."

The woman, on hearing the words of her husband, virtually rolled along the ground: and another woman, something like an old maid or a widow, first ran along the street and wailed in such an agitating nun's voice that Chiklin had a strong desire to shoot at her; but then

she saw how the Krestyanin woman was rolling on the ground, and she too threw herself down flat and kicked out with her legs in their woolen stockings.

The night covered over the whole village scale of things, and the snow made the air impenetrable and crowded and in it the chest choked; but nonetheless the women kept on shrieking everywhere, and getting used to this lament, kept up a constant howl. The dogs and other small nervous animals also supported these anguished sounds, and in the collective farm it was noisy and uneasy, just as in the vestibule to a bath house; the middle and the higher peasants silently worked in their yards and sheds, protected by their women's weeping at their wide-open gates. The remaining, uncollectivized horses slept sadly in their stalls, tied into them so tightly that they could never fall, because other horses already stood there dead; in the anticipation of the coming of the collective farm the less unprosperous peasants kept their horses without food, so as to be collectivized in on their body alone, and so as not to take the animals with them into their own sorrow.

"Are you alive, breadwinner?"

The horse dozed there in the stall, with sensitive head dropping down forever, one eye weakly closed and no strength left for the other—so that it kept right on staring into the darkness. The shed grew chilly without the breath of the horses, and the snow fell into it, and lay there on the head of the mare and did not melt. And the master put out the candle, embraced the horse's neck and stood there in his orphanhood, in memory smelling the mare's sweat, just as our plowing.

"So you've died? Well that's all right. I will die out soon too and things will be quiet for both of us."

A dog, not seeing the human being there, entered the shed and smelled the rear foot of the horse. The dog began to growl, bit into the meat there, and tore some

off for itself. Both eyes of the horse whitened in the darkness, and she stared with both and stepped forward

on her feet a bit, the feeling of pain showing she had not forgotten how to live.

"Maybe you'll go to the collective farm. Go then, but I'll wait a while," said the farmer.

He took a bunch of hay from the corner and held it up to the horse's mouth. The mare's eye sockets went dark; she already had closed off the last of vision and did not sense the smell of the grass because her nostrils did not twitch from the hay, and now two new dogs behind were indifferently eating at her rear legs—but the horse's life was still intact. It had only sunk deeper into poverty, was being divided into ever tinier parts, and could not be completely exhausted.

The snow was falling upon the cold ground, ready to stay there the whole winter; the peaceful covering was bedding down for sleep the entire visible earth; it was only around the stables that the snow had melted and that the earth was black, because warm blood of cows and sheep emerged from beneath the walls to the outside, and the summer places grew bare. Having liquidated all of their last smoking livestock, the peasants began to eat meat and ordered all their family members to eat it as well; meat they ate at that short time like a eucharist—no one wished to eat it but they had to hide the flesh of their own home slaughter within their bodies and preserve it there from collectivization. Other calculating peasants had long since become swollen from eating meat and went about heavily like moving barns; others vomited incessantly, but they could not say farewell to their cattle and destroyed what they had to the very bones, not expecting any use to the stomach. Whoever managed to eat up his livestock ahead of the others and whoever put his into the imprisonment of the collective farm just lay there then in an empty coffin and lived in it, just as in a crowded yard, feeling there a fenced-off peace.

Chiklin left off making the raft. Without ideology Voshchev also had weakened to such a degree that he

could not lift his axe, and he lay there in the snow; no matter what, there was no truth in the world, or, perhaps, it had existed within some plant or in some heroic

tiny vermin, but some travelling beggar had come by and eaten up the plant or trampled on the vermin below, and had then died himself in an autumn ravine, and his body had been blown into nothingness by the wind.

The activist could see from the Org-Yard that the raft was not ready; however, the next morning he was duty bound to send off to district headquarters an official report with summary totals, and this was why he had given forth with the urgent whistle summoning all to the general organizational assemblage. The people had emerged from their farmyards in response to this sound and had appeared in their still nonorganized state on the square of the Org-Yard. The women were no longer weeping; they had dried their faces, and the men too bore themselves self-sacrificingly, ready to be organized once and for all. Pressing up against each other, the people stood there without uttering a word in all their middle peasant mass and kept their eyes fixed on the porch on which the activist stood with a lantern in his hand—from this light of his own he failed to see various petty details on the faces of the people there, but on the other hand he himself was observed clearly by all.

"Well, are you ready?" asked the activist.

"Wait a bit," said Chiklin to the activist. "Let them say their farewells before the future life."

The peasants were ready for something, but one of them said in the darkness:

"Give us a moment of time more."

And having said his last words the peasant embraced his neighbor, kissed him three times, and said his farewell to him:

"I beg your forgiveness, Yegor Semyonich!"

"There's nothing to forgive, Nikanor Petrovich: forgive me too."

Each one began to kiss in turn all of the people

there, embracing bodies hitherto those of strangers, and all of their lips kissed each sadly and with friendship.

"Forgive me, Aunt Darya, don't hold a grudge against me for having burned down your threshing barn."

"God will forgive, Alyosha, now the threshing barn isn't mine anyway."

Many, touching each other's lips, stood there immersed in that feeling for a while, so as to recall forever their new kin, because until this time they had lived without thought of each other and without pity.

"Come on, Stepan, let's be brothers."

"Forgive me, Yegor, we lived stormily, but we are coming to our ends with clean consciences."

After the kissing the people bowed down to the ground—each to all—and then rose to their feet, free and empty hearted.

"Now, comrade activist, we are ready, write us all down in one column and we will point out the kulaks to you ourselves."

But the activist had already previously listed all of the inhabitants—those to be in the collective farm and those to go on the raft.

"Aha, so political awareness has at last had its say with you?" he said. "So the mass work of the activists has born fruit! There it is—a precise line and your future world!"

Chiklin went out to the high porch and put out the activist's lantern—the night was quite light from the fresh snow without kerosene.

"Do you feel good now, comrades?" asked Chiklin.

"Good," they replied from the whole Org-Yard. "We no longer sense anything, the only thing left within us is ash."

Voshchev lay off to one side and could not manage to go to sleep without the peace of truth within his life— so he arose from the snow and went into the midst of

the people.

"Hail and hello!" he said to the collective farm, gladdened. "You have become like me now—I too am nothing."

"Hello!" the entire collective farm was like one person gladdened.

Chiklin too could not stand being isolated on the porch when people were standing together down below; he descended to the ground, lit up a bonfire from fencing material, and all of them began to warm themselves at the fire.

The night hung dimly over the people, and no one spoke a word, and all that could be heard was, just as from time immemorial, a dog barking in a neighbor village just as if it existed in continuing eternity.

■ ■ ■

After the night had passed Chiklin came to himself first, because he recollected something important, but on opening his eyes he forgot it all. Before him stood Yelisei, holding Nastya in his arms. He had already held the girl for two hours, afraid to awaken Chiklin, and the girl had been sleeping calmly, warming herself on his warm, hearty chest.

"You didn't torment the girl?" asked Chiklin.

"I would not dare to," said Yelisei.

Nastya opened up her eyes looking at Chiklin and wept for him; she had thought that in the world everything was in actual truth final and forever, that if Chiklin departed then she would never ever find him anywhere in the world. In the barracks Nastya often saw Chiklin in her sleep and was even reluctant to sleep, so as not to be in anguish in the morning when she would awaken to find him not there.

Chiklin took the girl into his arms.

"Was everything all right with you?"

"All right," said Nastya. "And here you have made

a collective farm? Show me the collective farm."

Rising from the ground Chiklin put Nastya's hand up to his neck and went off to liquidate the kulaks.

"Zhachev didn't harm you?"

"Just how could he do harm to me when I will remain in socialism, while he will die soon!"

"Yes, I suppose he would not harm you!" said Chiklin and directed his attention at the multiplicity of people present. Outsiders, strangers were arrayed in groups and in whole masses throughout the Org-Yard, while the collective farm was still sleeping in its common mass near the night time bonfire which by now was going out. Along the collective farm street there were also people from the outside; they stood silently in expectation of that gladness for which Yelisei and other collective farm foot travelers had brought them there. Certain of the wanderers clustered about Yelisei and asked him:

"Where is all the collective farm wealth—or have we come here for nothing? Do we have to keep wandering about for a long time without shelter?"

"If they brought us here then the committee of activists knows about it," replied Yelisei.

"But your committee of activists is sleeping, it seems."

"The activists are not permitted to sleep," said Yelisei.

The chief activist emerged onto the porch with his aides, and along with them was Prushevsky; and Zhachev crawled along behind them all. Comrade Pashkin had sent Prushevsky to the collective farm because even though Yelisei had passed by the foundation pit the day before and eaten kasha with Zhachev, because of the absence of his mind he was unable to say even one word. Learning of this, Pashkin decided to send Prushevsky to the collective farm at full tempo, as a member of the cadre group of the cultural revolution, for organized people must not live without mind; and Zhachev meanwhile had gone along too at the same time out of his

own desire, as a monstrosity—and therefore they had arrived, the three of them, with Nastya in their arms, not counting those passing peasants whom Yelisei had ordered to come too, following behind him, so as to celebrate the coming of the collective farm.

"Go along and finish up the raft as soon as possible," said Chiklin to Prushevsky. "And I'll manage to get back to you soon."

Yelisei went along with Chiklin because he was to show him the most oppressed landless hired laborer, who, nearly from the beginning of time, had worked for nothing for prosperous farms, and who was now working as a blacksmith's striker in the collective farm smithy and was receiving food and victuals for this as a smith's assistant; however, this smith's helper was not enrolled as a member of the collective farm, but was considered instead as a hired person, and the trade union line of command on receiving a report on this official landless hired laborer, the only one in the whole district, was very profoundly disturbed. Pashkin in general was grieving over this unknown proletariat of the district and wished to deliver him from oppression as swiftly as possible.

Near the smithy stood an automobile with motor running and burning gasoline on one spot. Pashkin, who had arrived along with his wife, had just gotten out of it, so as to discover here, with an activist's greediness, this one remaining landless laborer and, upon providing him with a better share of life, thereupon to go back and fire the district committee of the trade unions for carelessness in serving their member masses. But no more had Chiklin and Yelisei approached the smithy than Comrade Pashkin hurriedly emerged from the building and departed in his automobile, hanging his head in the car as if he did not know what would become of him. Comrade Pashkin's spouse had not gotten out of the car at all: she was only there to protect her beloved husband from encounters with women who wor-

shipped the power of her husband and who mistook the firmness of his leadership for the power of the love which he could give them.

Chiklin, with Nastya in his arms, entered the smithy; Yelisei remained standing outside. The smith was pumping air into the furnace, with the bellows and meanwhile a bear was beating with a hammer on a white hot iron strip on the anvil.

"Faster, Mish, because, after all, you and I are a shock brigade!" said the smith.

But even without urging the bear was working so zealously that all about there was an odor of burned fur scorched by the sparks from the metal, but the bear did not feel it.

"Well, no, enough!" said the smith.

The bear ceased hammering and, stepping back, thirstily drank half a pail of water. Then, wiping his fatigued proletarian face, the bear spit into his paw and once again set to work hammering. This time the smith put him at hammering out a horseshoe for a certain individual farmer from the outskirts of the collective farm.

"Mish, you are going to have to finish that faster; in the evening the boss will come and there will be liquid refreshments!" And the smith indicated his neck as a pipe for vodka. The bear, understanding this future enjoyment, began to make the shoe with great energy.

"And why did you come here, person?" the smith asked Chiklin.

"Let your helper go so he can point the kulaks out to us; they say he has long years of experience."

The smith considered a bit and then said:

"Have you got the activists' consent? After all the smithy has its production and financial plan, and you are going to spoil its fulfillment."

"I have got full consent," answered Chiklin. "And if your plan is not fulfilled then I will come here myself to complete it... Have you heard of Mount Ararat—well I would no doubt have piled it all up myself if I had put

the earth from my spade in one pile!"

"All right he can go then," said the smith of the bear. "Get on over to the Org-Yard and ring the bell so he will hear the signal for lunch time for otherwise he won't budge—he worships our discipline."

While Yelisei walked indifferently about the Org-Yard, the bear made four horseshoes and asked for more work. But the smith sent him out for firewood to be made into charcoal, and the bear brought back a whole suitable fence. Nastya, looking at the sooty, singed bear, was gladdened that he was for us and not for the bourgeois.

"He is tormented too, and that means he is on our side, right?" said Nastya.

"Of course!" answered Chiklin.

The bell rang and the bear momentarily stopped his work. Up to that point he had been breaking the fence up into tiny bits, but now he straightened up and sighed dependably; enough of that, so to say. Putting his paws into the pail of water so as to wash them off to make them clean, he then went out to get his food. The smith pointed Chiklin out to him and the bear went calmly behind the human being, bearing himself, as if accustomed to it, erectly, walking on his back paws only. Nastya touched the bear on the shoulder, and he also brushed her lightly with his paw and yawned with his whole mouth, from which the odor of past food was emitted.

"Look, Chiklin, he is all gray!"

"He has lived with human beings, so he got gray with grief."

The bear waited for the girl to look at him once again, and when she did he winked at her with one eye; Nastya laughed and the blacksmith striker-bear hit himself in the stomach so that something down there rumbled—which made Nastya laugh even more. But the bear paid the child no heed.

Near some of the farmyards it was as cold as out in

the open fields, but near others of them warmth could be felt. The cows and the horses lay on the lots with yawning rotting carcasses—the heat of life which over a period of many long years had been accumulated beneath the sun was still escaping from them into the open air, into the wide open spaces of winter. Chiklin and the blacksmith striker-bear had already passed many farmyards and for some reason nowhere had the kulaks been liquidated.

The snow, till then sparsely falling from the higher reaches, now was falling

harder and faster—some kind of roaming wind began to build up into the blizzard which can happen once winter sets in. But Chiklin and the bear went on through the snow, cutting straight through its rhythmically falling sheets because Chiklin found it impossible to take into consideration the mood of nature: but Chiklin hid Nastya from the cold under his blouse, leaving only her head exposed, so that she would not be bored in the dark warmth. The little girl kept watching the bear all the time—she was pleased the bear was also of the working class—and meanwhile the blacksmith striker-bear looked at her as if she were a forgotten sister with whom he had been nursed at his mother's stomach in the summer forest of his childhood. Wishing to please Nastya the bear looked about to see what he could grab and break off for her as a gift. But nearby there wasn't any pleasing object whatsoever other than the clay-and-thatch huts and wattle fences. So the striker-bear looked up into the snowy wind and swiftly grabbed something tiny from it, and then he reached out his clenched paw to Nastya's face. Nastya took from it a fly, though she knew there were no flies now—they had died at the end of summer. The bear commenced to dash about after flies along the entire street—and the flies flew in whole big clouds, mingling with the driving snow.

"Why are there flies in winter?" asked Nastya.

"From the kulaks, daughter!" said Chiklin.

Nastya crushed within her hand the fat kulak fly, given her by the bear, and she said:

"Kill them as a class! Otherwise the flies will be here in winter and not in summer; the birds will have nothing to eat."

The bear suddenly growled near a strongly built clean hut and did not wish to go on further, forgetting all about flies and the girl. There was a woman's face staring through the windowpane, and down the glass flowed the liquid of her tears, just as if the woman had been keeping them on the ready all along. The bear opened his snout at the visible woman and roared in rage so that the woman jumped back into the house.

"Kulaks!" said Chiklin and, entering the farmyard, opened the gates from the inside. The bear also crossed the property line onto the lot.

Chiklin and the bear began by inspecting the nooks and hiding places of the farmstead. In the shed, covered with chaff, lay four or five large dead sheep. When the bear touched one of them with his foot, flies rose from it; they were having themselves a fat life in the hot meaty crannies of the sheep's body and, feeding energetically, they flew fat and heavy in the midst of the snow, not at all chilled by it.

From the shed emerged a breath of warmth—and in the carcass wells of the slaughter shed it was in all likelihood as hot as in summer in rotting peaty soil, and the flies lived in there just as if it were not winter at all. Chiklin felt ill in the big shed; it seemed to him as if bath ovens were being heated up in here, and Nastya shut her eyes tight because of the stink and wondered to herself why it was warm in the collective farm in the winter and why there were no four seasons of the year, about which Prushevsky had told her at the foundation pit when on empty autumn fields the singing of the birds had ceased.

The blacksmith striker-bear went from the shed into the hut and, roaring in the passageway with a hostile

voice, he hurled across the porch an enormous ancient trunk from which spools of thread spilled.

In the hut Chiklin found one woman and a small boy; the boy was sulking on a night pot, and his mother, seating herself, settled down into the room just as if all the substance had sunk downwards in her; she did not cry out, but only opened her mouth and tried to breath.

"Husband, husband!" she began to call, not moving because of the impotence of grief.

"What?" responded a voice from the stove; and then came the creak of a dried-out coffin, and the master of the house climbed out.

"They have come," said the woman slowly. "Go and meet them, my bitter darling!"

"Get out!" Chiklin ordered the entire family.

The blacksmith striker-bear tried to take the boy by the ear and the boy leapt

from the night pot, and the bear not knowing what it was sat down on the low utensil himself in order to try it out.

The boy stood there in just his shirt and, realizing what was going on, stared at the seated bear:

"Come on uncle, do caca!" he asked; but the bear quietly growled at him, exerting himself in his uncomfortable position.

"Get out!" declared Chiklin to the kulak population.

The bear, not moving from the night pot, gave forth with a noise from his jaws—and the prosperous peasant answered:

"Don't be noisy, sirs, we will go away ourselves."

The blacksmith striker-bear recollected how in the old times he had used to pull out stumps on the back-lands of this peasant and ate grass out of silent starvation because the peasant gave him food only in the evening— what the pigs had left; and for that matter the pigs used to lie down there in their trough and eat a portion in their sleep. Remembering this the bear got up from the night pot, embraced easily the peasant's body, and hugged him

with such force that all the accumulated fat was squeezed out of the man as well as his sweat, and the bear shouted right into his head in different voices—for out of anger and because of being accustomed to hearing people the blacksmith striker-bear was almost able to converse.

The prosperous peasant, waiting a while, till the bear released him and stepped back, went on outside just as he was, and went on past the window on foot, and only then did the woman dash out after him, and the boy remained in the hut without his parents. Standing there in dull bewilderment, he grabbed up the night pot from the floor and ran after his father and mother with it.

"He is very sly," said Nastya of this boy who had taken his night pot with him.

Further on they encountered more kulaks. Three farmyards down the street the bear roared once again, announcing the presence here of his class enemy. Chiklin gave Nastya over to the blacksmith striker-bear and went on into the hut all

alone.

"Why have you come here, dear sir?" asked an amiable, quiet peasant.

"Get out!" replied Chiklin.

"Why, have I done something which displeased you?"

"We need a collective farm, don't try to prevent it!"

The peasant, unhurried, thought a bit, just as if he was having a heart to heart conversation.

"The collective farm is no good for you..."

"Get out rat!"

"Well so you are going to make the whole republic into a collective farm and the whole republic will then be one single private farm.

Chiklin gasped, and he rushed to the door and opened it so that he could see freedom in front of him—he had once before hurled himself at the locked door of a prison, not comprehending captivity, and had cried out from the gnashing strength of his heart. He turned

away from the reasoning peasant—so the latter would participate in his overwhelming grief which concerned only the working class alone.

"It's none of your business, carrion crow! We can appoint a tsar if it is useful for us to do it, and we can overthrow him with one fell swoop... And as for you—disappear!"

At this point Chiklin grabbed the peasant cross-ways and carried him outside where he threw him into the snow; the peasant was unmarried out of his greed, expending all his flesh in the accumulation of property, in the happiness of a secure existence, and now he did not know what he ought to feel.

"Liquidated?" he said from the snow. "Just look, today I am not here, and tomorrow you will be gone yourself. That's what is going to come of it—the

only one who will get to socialism will be your chief person!"

Four farmyards further the blacksmith striker-bear once again roared hatefully. Out of the house leapt a poor inhabitant with a pancake in his hands. But the bear knew that this master had beat him with a tree root when out of fatigue he had stopped turning a millstone by means of a beam. This peasant had compelled the bear to work in his mill in place of the wind so as not to pay a tax, and he himself had always whimpered about like a landless hired laborer and had eaten only when hidden beneath the bed covers with his wife. When his wife became pregnant then the miller had caused her to have a miscarriage with his own hands, because he loved only his big son whom he had long since gotten fixed up with a post among the city communists.

"Eat, Misha!" the peasant gave the pancake to the blacksmith striker-bear.

The bear turned the pancake over on his paw, and with it in his paw he slapped the kulak on the ear so the peasant squealed and fell down.

"Go out of the property which belongs to the landless laborers!" said Chiklin to the man lying there. "Get

out of the collective farm and don't dare to live in the world any longer!"

The well-to-do peasant lay for a time and then came to his senses:

"Show me your paper that you are a real person!"

"What kind of a person am I to you?" said Chiklin. "I am nobody: we have a Party—that's your person!"

"Show me then the Party at least, I want to look at it."

Chiklin smiled meagrely.

"You wouldn't recognize it by face. I myself barely feel it. Go put in your appearance at the raft, you capitalist bastard!"

"Let him ride the seas: here today and there tomorrow—it's the truth, isn't it?" said Nastya. "It would be a bore for us with the bastard!"

Further Chiklin and the blacksmith striker-bear liberated another six huts squeezed from the sweat of landless hired laborers, and then they returned to the Org-Yard where the masses purged of the kulaks stood in expectation of something.

Checking the arriving kulak class against his registration list, the activist found complete exactitude and was delighted by the actions of Chiklin and of the blacksmith striker-bear. Chiklin likewise gave his approval to the activist:

"You are a politically aware guy," he said, "and you have a nose for class as good as that of an animal."

The bear was unable to express himself and, standing off separately, he went back to the smithy through the falling snow in which the flies were buzzing; only Nastya followed him with her eyes and felt sorry for this old creature who was just as singed as a human being.

Prushevsky had already accomplished the completion of the raft made from the beams and was now looking in readiness at all who were there.

"You are repulsive!" Zhachev said to him: "What are you staring for, like one who has lost touch? Live

more boldly—'Squeeze each other up: Put the money in a cup!' You think it is people who are existing? Don't make me laugh! All there is is superficial skin, we have a long way yet to go before we get to people, that's what I regret."

On command of the activist the kulaks bent down and began to move the raft straight down to the river valley. Zhachev crawled along behind the kulaks, so as to assure them a safe float down to the sea down-river, and so as to be the more intensely certain that socialism would come into being, that Nastya would receive it as her maiden's dowry, and that he, Zhachev, would die the sooner, as outworn prejudice.

■ ■ ■

Having liquidated the kulaks at a distance, Zhachev did not relax, it became even more difficult for him, though it was not clear why. For a long time he watched the raft systematically float down the gently flowing river, the evening wind

rustle the warm, dead water which was pouring through cold lands into its distant abyss: and he became depressed, sad within his breast. After all, the social category of sad monstrosities was not needed in socialism and they would soon liquidate him too in distant silence.

The kulaks looked from the raft in only one direction—at Zhachev; the people there wished for a last time to look upon their home and the last, happy human being on it.

Already the kulak river transport had begun to disappear behind the bushes on the shore at the bend, and Zhachev had begun to lose visibility of the class enemy.

"Hey there parasites, farewell!" shouted Zhachev down the river.

"Farewelllll!" responded the kulaks floating down to the sea.

From the Org-Yard resounded music which made

one want to march forward; Zhachev hurriedly crawled up the clayey bluff to the celebration of the collective farm, even though he knew that only former participants in imperialism were celebrating, provided one did not count Nastya and other childhood.

The activist had put out on the Org-Yard porch a radio loud speaker from which the march of the great onward drive was broadcast, and the whole collective farm, together with the foot traveller guests from the surrounding area, was joyfully stamping up and down in place. The collective farm peasants were radiant of face, as if freshly washed, and now they no longer felt regrets, and there was oblivion and a chill in their emptiness of soul. When the music changed, Yelisei went out to the central spot, struck the ground with the sole of his shoe and began to dance, not bending over in the least, nor blinking with his white eyes; he went about straight and upright like a rod—he alone among those standing there—moving his bones and his torso in time. Gradually the other men puffed themselves up and began to egg one another on, and the women merrily raised up their arms and went about moving their legs beneath their skirts. The guests tossed aside their handbags and pouches, called the local girls to join them, and began to move swiftly in their lower parts, shuffling energetically; and for their enjoyment they kissed the collective farm girls. The radio music made

life still more exciting; passive peasants cried out with shouts of satisfaction, while the more politically advanced of them gave a many-sided development to the further tempo of the holiday, and even the collectivized horses, on hearing the roar of human happiness, came one at a time to the Org-Yard and began to neigh.

The snowy wind fell quiet; the dim moon appeared on the distant sky, made empty by the stormwind and the clouds—on a sky which was so deserted it could envision eternal freedom and which at the same time was so terrible that for freedom friendship was necessary.

Beneath this sky, on the clean snow, already specked in places by flies, the whole people triumphantly celebrated. People who had been living in the world for a long time—these too danced and stamped in total abandon.

"Oh you, USSR, our mother!" one prankster peasant cried out in joy, showing his stuff and clapping himself on the tummy, cheeks and mouth. "Pay court to our government and kingdom, boys! She's not married."

"Is she a gal or a widow?" a guest from across the way asked while still dancing.

"A gal!" explained the peasant who was also in motion. "Or don't you see how smart she is?"

"Let her be smart!" the guest from outside agreed. "Let her celebrate! Later on we'll make a quiet woman of her: she'll be good!"

Nastya got down from Chiklin's arms and also stamped along next to the dashing peasants because she felt like it. Zhachev crawled between all of them, tripping those in his way, and when he got to that peasant from the outside who had wanted to marry off the girl-USSR to a peasant, Zhachev gave him a poke in the side so he would forget about it.

"Don't you dare to think whatever comes into your mind! Maybe you want to earn yourself a trip floating down the river? You'll get on a raft all right!"

The guest got frightened at having come here.

"I'll not think anything any more, comrade cripple, I'll only whisper from now

on."

Chiklin looked long upon the celebrating mass of people and felt peace of mind arising out of good in his breast; from the height of the porch he saw the lunar purity of distant scale, the sadness of the settled snow, and the obedient sleep of the whole world into whose construction so much labor and anguish had gone, all of which had been forgotten by everyone—so they would not have to know the fear of living on.

"Nastya, don't get so cold, come to me," Chiklin

called her.

"I'm not chilled in the least, after all people are breathing here," said Nastya, running away from the lovingly roaring Zhachev.

"Rub your hands together, otherwise you are going to get stiff with cold: the air is big and you are little!"

"I have already rubbed them together: sit there and be quiet!"

The radio suddenly stopped playing in the middle of a tune. But the people themselves could not stop until the activist said: "Stand still until the next sound!"

Prushevsky managed to fix the radio in very short order, but it emitted not music but only a human voice:

"Listen to our reports: the state summons you to gather willow bark!"

And at this point the radio once again shut down. The activist, on hearing the report, thought about it so as to remember it, so as not to forget about the willow bark drive and thereby not to become notorious in the entire district as a "delinquent" as had happened with him the last time when he had forgotten about organization of a "bush day," as a result of which the whole collective farm now had no willow withes. Prushevsky once more began to fix the radio—and time passed while the engineer, with hands growing colder, kept attempting to repair the mechanism: but he was not succeeding because he was not convinced the radio would provide the poor peasants with reassurance or that a

loving voice might speak to him from somewhere.

It was evidently nearly midnight; the moon was high over the wattle fences and the peaceful aged village, and the dead burdocks gleamed, covered with fine, fused snow. One lost fly tried to land on an icy burdock, but immediately slipped off and flew away, buzzing in the heights of the moonlight like a lark beneath the sun.

The collective farm, without ceasing the stomping, heavy dancing, also gradually began to sing in a weak voice. The words in this song could not be understood

at all, yet nonetheless they echoed with plaintive happiness and the melody of man dragging himself along.

"Zhachev!" said Chiklin. "Go on over and stop the movement—have they died out of joy, is that it: they keep dancing and dancing."

Zhachev crawled away with Nastya into the Organizing House—the Org-House—and once he had made a place for her to sleep there, he crawled back out.

"Hey, you organized people out there, that's enough dancing: you bastards have had your fun!"

But the collective farm, carried away, did not listen to Zhachev's words and kept right on, heavily stamping, covering themselves with song.

"Do you want to catch it from me? You'll get what for—right now too!"

Zhachev climbed down from the porch, mingled among the moving legs, and without warning began taking people by their lower ends and throwing them down flat on the ground. And the people toppled like empty pants. Zhachev even regretted that in all likelihood they could not even feel his hands—they fell quietly just like that!

"Where is Voshchev?" Chiklin was worried. "What's he looking for off in the distance, some petty proletariat?"

Without waiting for Voshchev, Chiklin went off after midnight to look for him.

He went down the whole deserted village street to its end, and nowhere was there to be seen a human being; only the bear was snoring away in the smithy in the entire moonlit vicinity, and the smith himself would occasionally cough.

All about it was still and beautiful. Chiklin halted in puzzled thought. Just as before, the bear went on snoring obediently, gathering strength for the next day's work and a new feeling of life. He would never again see the kulaks who had tormented him, and now he would be glad of his existence. Now, no doubt, the blacksmith striker-bear would hammer away at horseshoes and tire

irons with even greater heartfelt zeal, given the fact that there was a mysterious force in the world which left in the village only those middle people whom he liked, who silently went about making useful substance and feeling participatory happiness; all the precise meaning of life and universal happiness were forced to languish in the breasts of those who were digging the earth of proletarian happiness—so that the hearts of the bear and of Chiklin should just hope and breathe, so that their working hand would be true and enduring.

Chiklin in his concern closed someone's open gates and then looked about to see whether things were in order in the street—whether everything was intact—and noticing a peasant's cloth coat lying there in the road he picked it up and took it into the passageway of the nearby hut: let it be preserved for the benefit of labor.

Bending down his body out of trusting hope, Chiklin went—through the backs of the farmyards—looking further for Voshchev. He climbed over wattle fences, went past clay walls of dwellings, straightened up bent over pickets, and constantly saw how beginning right at the thin fences, endless empty winter commenced immediately, Nastya could very easily get chilled in such an alien world because the earth does not exist for freezing childhood—only those like the blacksmith striker-bear could manage to endure their life here, and even they would grow gray from it.

"I had not yet been born when you already lay there, poor, unmoving, my darling!" the voice of Voshchev, of a human being, spoke nearby. "So you have been enduring for a long time: come and get warm."

Chiklin turned his head obliquely and observed that Voshchev had bent down behind a tree and was putting something in a bag which was already full.

"What are you up to, Voshchev?"

"Just so," said Voshchev and, tying up the neck of his bag, put this weight over his shoulder.

They went, the two of them, to spend the night at

the Org-Yard. The moon had already sunk lower, the tree stood in black shadows, everything had fallen into deep silence, and only the river which was growing more dense as a result of the cold rustled in its accustomed rural banks.

The collective farm slept imperturbably in the Org-Yard. In the Org-House the security lamp burned—one lamp for the whole snuffed out village; by the lamp sat the activist at his mental labor—he was drawing up the graph for the official report in which he wished to put down all of the statistics on organization of public services and amenities for the poor and middle peasants so that there might already be in existence an eternal formal picture and experience, as a foundation.

"Write down my things in it too!" asked Voshchev, opening his bag.

From around the village he had gathered into it all of the pauper and rejected objects, all the petty oblivion, and all kinds of unconsciousness—for the sake of socialist retribution. This worn down and long-suffering trash had once upon a time touched the flesh and blood of hired landless laborers; in these things the burden of their stooped-over life was imprinted for eternity, life spent without conscious meaning, life which had perished in-gloriously and lay somewhere beneath the rye straw of the earth. Voshchev, without completely understanding, had thriftily accumulated in his bag the material remains of lost people, who like him had lived without truth and who had come to their end before the victorious finish. So now he presented these liquidated toilers to the face of the authorities and of the future, in order, by means of organization of the eternal meaning of people, to obtain retribution—for those who lay quietly in the depths of the earth.

The activist began to inventory the things which had come with Voshchev, setting up for this purpose a special column off to one side under the title of "a list of kulaks fatally liquidated as a class by the proletariat,

in accordance with escheated remnants." Instead of people, the activist listed the marks of existence: a bark sandal from the last century, a tin earring from a shepherd's ear, a pantleg of canvas, and various other equipment of the working, yet propertyless, body.

By this time Zhachev, who was sleeping with Nastya on the floor, managed to awaken the girl accidentally.

"Turn your mouth away: you don't clean your teeth, you fool," said Nastya to the cripple who was protecting her from the cold from the door; "The bourgeois cut your legs off just like that, and now you want your teeth to be gone too?"

Zhachev shut his mouth out of fright and began to breathe through his nose. The girl stretched out, adjusted the warm kerchief which she wore to bed on her head, but was unable to go to sleep, because she had been awakened.

"What's that they brought—waste and scrap for the scrap and waste drive?" she asked about Voshchev's sack.

"No," said Chiklin, "those are toys collected for you. Go pick out the ones you want."

Nastya stood to her full height, stamped a bit to get her blood going, and, getting down on the floor, surrounded the inventoried pile of objects with her outstretched legs. Chiklin put the table lamp on the floor so the girl could see better what she liked—the activist, after all, could write in the darkness without making a mistake.

After a time the activist dropped the official register on the floor so the child would note that he had received in full all of the accumulated property of the landless hired laborers who had died without kith and kin and that he would make good use of it. Nastya slowly drew a hammer and sickle on the paper and handed it back.

Chiklin took off his quilted cotton padded jacket, and his footwear, and he went about the floor in stockings, satisfied and at peace, because now there was no

one to take Nastya's share of life in the world away from her, since rivers flow

only down to ocean deeps, and since those floating off on the raft would never return to torment the blacksmith's striker, Mikhail, the bear; those very same nameless people of whom there remained only bark sandals and tin earrings need not then lie in anguish for all eternity underground, but they could not arise either.

"Prushevsky," Chiklin called.

"Here I am," replied the engineer; he was sitting in a corner, leaning back against the wall, and dozing inattentively. His sister had not written him a thing for a long time now—and if it turned out she had died then he had decided he would go there to cook for her children in order to exhaust himself to the point of loss of his soul, someday to come to his end as an old person grown used to living without sensitivity. This would be exactly the same as dying now, but even sadder. He could, if he went there, live for his sister, and recollect longer and more sadly that girl who had passed by in his youth, who probably did not exist any longer. Prushevsky wished that the excited young woman, forgotten by all if she had perished and who was cooking cabbage soup for her children if she were still alive should remain in the world a little while longer even if only in his own secret feelings.

"Prushevsky! Are the successes of higher science able to resurrect people who have decomposed or not?"

"No," said Prushevsky.

"You're lying," accused Zhachev without opening his eyes. "Marxism can do anything. Why is it then that Lenin lies intact in Moscow? He is waiting for science—he wants to be resurrected. And I would find work for Lenin too," reported Zhachev. "I would tell him who should be getting handed out something additional! For some reason I can see through any son-of-a-bitch right off!"

"You are a fool," explained Nastya, digging about

in Voshchev's remnants of landless hired laborers. "All you can do is to see, and what's needed is to work. That's true isn't it. Uncle Voshchev?"

Voshchev had already covered himself up with the empty sack and was lying there listening to the beating of his muddled heart which kept dragging his whole

body into some undesirable, far-off remoteness of life.

"It's not known," Voshchev replied to Nastya. "Go on working and working and working and when you have worked your way all the way to the very end, when you learn everything, then you'll be all fagged out and die. Don't grow up, little girl—you'll just begin to pine!"

Nastya was left dissatisfied.

"The only ones who have to die are kulaks—and you are a fool. Zhachev, look after me, I want to go to sleep again."

"Go ahead, girl," responded Zhachev. "Come to me—away from that prokulak. He wants to catch it from me—and tomorrow he'll get it but good!"

All fell silent, patiently enduring the night. Only the activist continued to write noisily, and achievements spread out ever more broadly before his politically aware mind, so that he already thought to himself: "You are bringing damage to the Soviet Union, you passive devil—you could have sent the whole district into collectivization, and here you are suffering away in one collective farm; it's long since time to send off the population in whole trainloads into socialism, and here you keep trying on a small scale. What a shame!"

Out of the pure lunar quiet someone knocked at the door softly and in the sounds of that hand could be heard fear as a vestige of the former order.

"Come in, there is no meeting going on," said the activist.

"Well," replied the person outside without entering, "I just thought you were thinking."

"Come in, don't irritate me!"

Yelisei entered; he had already had his sleep out on

the ground, because his eyes had darkened from internal blood, and he had grown stronger from the habit of being organized.

"There's a bear who is hammering over in the smithy and roaring a song—the

whole collective farm has opened its eyes, and without you we are frightened."

"I must go and see what's up!" decided the activist.

"I'll go there myself," decided Chiklin. "Sit right there and just keep on writing—that will be better; reports are your business."

"He's still a fool!" Zhachev warned the activist. "But soon we are all going to become activists: just let the masses endure enough torment, let the children grow up!"

Chiklin went to the smithy. Great and chill was the night up above him, the stars shone down unselfishly upon the snowy cleanliness of the earth, and the striker-bear's blows resounded widely, just as if he were ashamed of sleeping beneath these expectant stars, and was replying to them the only way he could.

"The bear is a straightforward old proletarian," Chiklin expressed his esteem for him in his thoughts. And then the bear began to roar long roars of satisfaction, communicating aloud some kind of happy song.

In the moonlit night the smithy opened out upon the whole brightly lit surface of the earth, in the furnace burned a blast flame fanned by the smith himself, lying on the ground, pulling on the bellows' ropes. And the striker-bear, totally satisfied, was forging a white hot tire iron and singing a song.

"He just won't let me sleep," complained the smith. "He got up, roared, I lit up the furnace for him, and he went off to kick up a row... He always used to be quiet, and now it's just as if he had gone off his crock!"

"Why is it?" Chiklin asked.

"Who can say! Yesterday he returned from the liquidation of the kulaks and just kept stamping about and muttering in a pleased tone. It would seem he felt he

had been done a favor. And then a proactivist came in and pinned up that material over there on the fence. And Mikhail keeps looking all the time at it and imagining something. No more kulaks, so to speak, and a red slogan hanging over there. I see that something keeps entering his mind and stopping there."

"All right, you sleep, and I will work the bellows," said Chiklin. Taking the rope he began to pump air into the furnace so the Bear would make tire irons for wheels for collective farm carts.

Closer to dawn the peasants who had been there as guests began to disperse to the surrounding areas. The collective farm itself however had nowhere else to go, and after arising in the Org-Yard, began to move on towards the smithy where the hammering of the striker-bear resounded. Prushevsky likewise put in an appearance with them all and watched Chiklin helping the Bear. Next to the smithy hung a slogan on a banner: "For the Party, for loyalty to it, for shock labor which is breaking open the door into the future for the proletariat."

Growing tired, the bear went outside and ate snow to cool off, and then once again the hammer beat into the flesh of the iron with the frequency of the blows ever increasing; by now the striker-bear had stopped singing—he was expending all his fierce, silent joy in the zeal of his labor, and the collective farm peasants gradually began to feel for him and collectively grunted in time with the clang of the anvil in order that the tire irons would be stronger and more reliable. After watching for a time Yelisei gave the striker-bear advice:

"Listen, Mish, strike with a greater interval between blows, because then the tire iron will be less brittle and won't break. You keep hitting at the iron as if you were beating up some bitch of a whore—but it's good material! That's no way!"

But the bear merely bared his teeth at Yelisei who retreated quickly, still sorry for the iron. However,

other peasants too couldn't stand seeing good iron spoiled:

"Don't hit so hard, you devil!" they began to hoot. "Don't spoil what belongs to all; nowadays property is an orphan—there's no one to care for it. Come on there, you hobgoblin, go easy!"

"Why are you being so hard on the iron? What do you think—that it's still private property?"

"Get out and cool down, you devil! Lay off, you fur-covered demon!"

"He should be kicked out of the collective farm— and that will be that! We aren't

going to stand for any losses; not on your life!"

But Chiklin kept on fanning the blast with the bellows and the striker-bear tried to keep up with the blast and crushed the iron as if it were his blood enemy, if there were no more kulaks the bear was alone in the world.

"How terrible!" sighed the collective farm members.

"That's a mistake for you; it's all going to break! All the iron will be in blisters!"

"What a plague—and he can't even be touched. They'll say he's a poor peasant, proletariat, industrialization!"

"That is just the beginning. If the Party cadres pass on the word then we'll all catch it because of him!"

"The cadres aren't the half of it. If the Party instructor comes or comrade Pashkin himself then they'll really have us on fire!"

"But maybe nothing will happen—maybe we should just beat him up!"

"What's wrong with you, have you gone mad? Just the other day comrade Pashkin came here especially to see him—after all, he finds it boring that there are no landless hired laborers about."

Yelisei in the meanwhile spoke less but was more concerned about it than nearly anyone else there. When he used to have his own farm he couldn't sleep nights—

he kept watch to see that nothing perished, that the horse should not overeat or overdrink, that the cow should be in a good mood, and now when the whole collective farm, the entire local world about him, had become his concern, because he was fearful of relying on others, his stomach ached ahead of time out of fear for such property as this.

"We'll dry up into nothing!" quietly declared a middle peasant who had lived through the whole revolution. "Used to be I had to worry only about my own family, but now they say we have to worry about ail-that kind of dependency is going to be the total torment of all of us."

Voshchev felt sad that the bear was working as if he could sense the meaning of life nearby, while meantime he himself, Voshchev, stood there at ease without trying to open the door into the future; and perhaps there really was something inside it. Chiklin by this time had already stopped forcing the blast with the bellows and had undertaken with the bear to make some narrow teeth. Paying no heed to the people observing them or to the entire scene, the two workmen worked incessantly out of a sense of conscience, which was the way it was supposed to be. The bear forged the teeth and Chiklin tempered them, even though he did not know the precise length of time they were supposed to be held in the water so as not to become overtempered.

"But what if a tooth runs into a stone?" moaned Yelisei. "What if it hits something hard—it will break right in two!"

"Pull the iron out of the liquid, you devil you!" the collective farm members exclaimed. "Don't torture material!"

Chiklin was going to pull the overfatigued metal from the water, but Yelisei had already come on into the smithy, taken away the tongs from Chiklin and begun to temper the teeth with his own two hands. Other collective farm men also thrust themselves into the smithy

and, to ease their hearts, began to work on iron objects— with that exhausting zeal typical when benefit is more needed than loss. "We must remember to whitewash this smithy," Yelisei thought calmly at his work. "Or it'll get all black. Can one call this a businesslike institution?"

"Well, pull on the rope!" agreed Yelisei. "But not too hard—rope is precious now. And no one's going to be getting any new bellows out of collective farm earnings either."

"I'll take it easy," said Voshchev, and he began to pull and then let out the rope, forgetting himself in the endurance of labor.

The morning of the winter day arrived, and the customary light spread all over the whole district. The lamp was still burning in the Org-Yard, until Yelisei noticed this superfluous flame. When he had noticed he went there and put out the lamp so the kerosene would remain intact.

The girls and youths who previously used to sleep in huts had already awakened; as a rule they seemed to be indifferent to the alarmed concern of their fathers; the torments of the latter were of no interest to them, and they endured, without paying any attention, their poverty in domestic amenities, living off their feeling of a happiness which, [though it](#) was still unresponsive, was all the same bound to come. Almost all the girls and the still growing generation went off in the morning to the library hut and stayed there, eating nothing the whole day, learning reading, writing, arithmetic, growing accustomed to friendship, and imagining something or other in a state of expectation. Prushevsky alone had stayed off to one side when the collective farm had taken over the smithy and remained unmoving for the whole time beside a wattle fence. He did not know why they had sent him to this village, nor how he could live forgotten in the midst of the masses, and he decided to set an exact date for the end of his stay on earth; pulling out his notebook, he jotted down in it a late night hour

of the dull winter day: let them all lie down to sleep, the frozen earth would fall silent of the sound of all kinds of construction, and he, no matter where he was to be, would lie down with his face upwards and cease to breathe. After all, there was no construction project or installation, no satisfaction, no dear friend, no conquest of the stars which could overcome his impoverishment of soul; and no matter what might happen he would recognize the vanity of any friendship not founded on superiority or on corporeal love, and the tedium of even the most distant stars from whose inner depths those very same copper ores would be required by that very same Supreme Council of the National Economy. It seemed to Prushevsky that all his feelings, all his enthusiasms and his ancient longing had met in judgement and had acknowledged themselves right to the very source of origin, to the fatal destruction of the innocence of every kind of hope. But the origin of feelings remained an exciting area of life; on dying, one could lose forever this one and only happy and true area of existence without entering into it. What was to be done, good Lord! If there were none of those self-oblivious impressions, which arouse life and which, when they appear, reach out their arms toward what they hope for?

Prushevsky covered his face over with his hands. Let reason be the synthesis of all feelings—where all the currents of alarmed impulses become reconciled with each other and fall quiet, but where then does this alarm and the impulse come from? He did not know; he only knew that the old age of judgement constituted an inclination towards death, this was his sole feeling; and then, perhaps, he

would close the circle—he would return to the origin of feelings, to the evening of that summer day of his unique encounter.

"Comrade! Were you the one who came to us for cultural revolution?"

Prushevsky dropped his hands from his eyes. Off to one side the young men and women were streaming

into the library hut. One of the girls stood there in front of him—dressed in felt boots and with a poor peasant kerchief on her trusting head; her eyes gazed on the engineer with astonished love because the power of knowledge concealed within this human being was incomprehensible to her; she would have agreed then and there to love him devotedly and eternally, gray though he was and a stranger, she would have agreed to have his child, to torment her body every living day for him, if only he would teach her to know the whole world and to participate in it. Her youth was nothing to her nor her happiness either. She felt a hurtling hot drive nearby, her heart rose upwards from the wind of the universal, onward-rushing life; but she was unable to express in words her joy, and so now she stood there and begged to be taught these words in which to express herself, to be taught this capability of feeling within her own head the whole world, so as to help it shine forth. The girl did not yet know whether this educated person would take her, and she looked hesitatingly, ready to learn once more from the activist.

"I will come with you right now," said Prushevsky.

The girl wished to be glad and to shout out but she did not—so Prushevsky would not be offended.

"Let us go," declared Prushevsky.

The girl went on ahead, pointing out to the engineer the way, even though it was quite impossible to lose one's way there; she wished to show appreciation, but had nothing to offer as a gift to the man following in her wake.

■ ■ ■

The collective farm members burned up all the charcoal in the smithy, used up all the iron which was to be found there on useful things, repaired all of the

stock, and with anguish that their labor had come to an end, and not knowing how to prevent the collective

farm from going into the red at this point, left the smithy. The striker-bear had gotten exhausted even earlier—he had gone on out to eat snow previously because of his thirst and while the snow was melting in his mouth he had dozed and fallen flat on his whole carcass to rest.

Emerging, the collective farm sat at the wattle fence and kept on sitting there while the snow melted underneath the motionless peasants. Halting work, Voshchev once again began to think, standing still in one spot.

"Come to!" Chiklin said to him. "Lie down with the bear and forget about everything."

"The truth, comrade Chiklin, cannot forget about everything..."

Chiklin picked Voshchev up crossways and laid him down by the sleeping striker-bear.

"Lie there and be quiet," he said from above. "The bear is breathing, and you cannot! The proletariat endures, and you are afraid! What a bastard you are anyway!"

Voshchev squeezed up to the bear, got warm, and went to sleep.

Along the street galloped a rider from the district headquarters on a foaming steed.

"Where are the activists?" he shouted at the seated collective farm without slowing down.

"Gallop on, straight ahead!" the collective farm informed him of the route. "Just don't turn to the right or the left!"

"I won't!" cried the rider, already in the distance, while the pouch with the directives beat against his hip.

In a few minutes time that very same rider hurtled back in the same direction

from which he had come, waving in the air his record book so that the wind would dry the ink of the activist's signature. The fat horse, splashing the snow and the mud as he galloped, urgently disappeared in the distance.

"Spoiling a horse like that, the bureaucrat!" thought the collective farm.
"Depressing to see it!"

Chiklin took an iron rod from the smithy and went to take it to Nastya as a toy. He loved quietly to bring her various objects—so that without saying anything the girl would understand his joy in her.

Zhachev had long since already awakened. Nastya, opening her fatigued mouth, involuntarily and sadly continued to sleep.

Chiklin looked at the girl attentively—to see if somehow she had been harmed since the day before, whether her body was wholly intact; but the child was quite intact and in running order; only her face burned with the inner power of youth. The activist's tears meanwhile dripped onto the new directive—Chiklin immediately noticed this. Just as yesterday evening this leader sat there unmoving behind the table. He had sent off, with great satisfaction, with the district headquarter's courier, the completed register of liquidation of the class enemy, and had reported all the successes of his activity in it; but then and there another fresh directive had descended on him signed for some reason by provincial headquarters, sent thus over the heads of the two intermediate instances, the district and the region. In this new directive were singled out some undesirable cases of extremism, of overshooting, overzealousness, and all sorts of sliding onto the right and left away from the precise sharpness of the well-defined Party line; and in addition the directive ordered the manifestation of an increased vigilance of activists towards middle peasants; did not their rushing into the collective farms mean this was a general fact of secret evil intention, carried out on the initiative of the masses of the prokulaks: so to say, let us enter the collective farms in all of our existing ocean deeps and wash away the shores of the leadership—then the government will not be strong enough, to cope with us, it will wear itself out.

"According to the latest materials in the hands of

the provincial Party Committee," it was stated at the conclusion of the directive, "it is clear, for example, that the activists' committee of the General Party Line Collective Farm has already put the cart ahead of the horse and fallen into the leftist swamp of rightist opportunism. The Party organizer of the local collective farm inquires of his immediately superior organization: is there something beyond the collective farm and the commune which is superior and brighter, so as no doubt immediately to push thither the local poor and middle peasant masses which are irrepressibly driving forward into the far distance of history, to the peak of universal unheard-of times. This comrade asks to be sent an exemplary statute of such an organization, and at the same time blank forms, a penholder and a pen, and two quarts of ink. He has no comprehension of the extent to which he is gambling on the sincere, for the most part healthy, middle peasantry's feeling of attraction to the collective farms. One cannot but agree that such a comrade as this is a wrecker of the Party, an objective enemy of the proletariat, and must immediately be removed once and for all from a position of leadership."

At this point the weakening heart of the activist shuddered and his tears fell on the document from provincial headquarters.

"What's with you, vulture?" Zhachev asked him.

But the activist did not answer. Had he really seen any gladness lately, had he really eaten or slept enough, or had he possessed the love of even one of the poor peasant maidens? He had felt as if he were in a delirium, his heart had barely beat from the load it bore, and it was only externally—away from himself—that he had tried to organize happiness and, even though only in the long term, to deserve, to earn, a position in the district headquarters.

"Answer, you parasite, or I'll give you what for!" once again Zhachev burst out. "You reptile, no doubt you have spoiled our republic!"

Jerking the directive from off the table, Zhachev began to study it on the floor himself.

"I want to go to my mama!" said Nastya, awakening.

Chiklin bent down over the unhappy child.

"Your mama died, little girl. I'm what's left."

"So why do you take me where there are four seasons of the year? Just feel what an awful fever I have under the skin! Take off my shirt, otherwise it will burn up—and when I get well there will be nothing for me to wear."

Chiklin felt Nastya; she was hot, moist, and her bones protruded aching from inside; how tender and quiet the surrounding world had to be for her to live.

"Cover me up, I want to sleep. I'll remember nothing, for it's sad to be ill, isn't it true?"

Chiklin took off all his outer clothing and in addition he took from Zhachev and the activist their padded jackets and wrapped Nastya up with all this warm material. She shut her eyes and in warmth and in heat she felt lighter, as if she were flying through cool air. During the recent period Nastya had grown a bit and looked more and more like her mother.

"I knew he was a bastard," Zhachev judged the activist. "Well what are you going to do with that member?"

"What's reported in there?" asked Chiklin.

"They write in there that it is impermissible not to agree with them!"

"Just try and not agree with them," the activist person declared, in tears.

"Oh, what grief I've had with the revolution," Zhachev became seriously sad. "Where are you now, you worst bitch of all? Come here to me, my darling, and come and get it from a maimed warrior!"

Feeling thought in loneliness, not wishing to spend unrecompensed funds on the state and the future generation, the activist took his jacket off Nastya: if they were showing him the door then let the masses warm

themselves without his help. And jacket in hand he stood there in the middle of the Org-House—without further desire for life, shedding great tears, and thinking in his heart that perhaps capitalism, if you please, might yet put in an appearance.

"Why did you uncover the child?" asked Chiklin. "You want her to be chilled?"

"Phooey on your child!" said the activist.

Zhachev looked at Chiklin and advised him:

"Take that iron rod you brought from the smithy."

"Of course not!" answered Chiklin. "I have never yet in my life touched a man with a dead weapon: how then could I feel justice?"

Thereupon Chiklin calmly gave the activist a blow with his fist in the chest, so that children might still have hope and not just shiver from cold. Inside the activist a weak crack of bones resounded and the entire human being collapsed to the floor. Chiklin looked upon him with satisfaction, as if he had just carried out a necessary and useful deed. The activist's jacket had been torn from his hands and lay separately, not covering anyone.

"Cover him up!" said Chiklin to Zhachev. "Let him warm up."

Zhachev immediately dressed the activist in his own jacket and simultaneously pinched him to see to what extent he was still intact.

"Is he alive?" asked Chiklin.

"Maybe yes, maybe no, on the whole in between," replied Zhachev rejoicing. "It's all the same, comrade Chiklin: your hand works like an anvil, it has nothing to do with you."

"He shouldn't have taken covers off a hot child!" said Chiklin, still angry. "He could've boiled up some tea and made himself warm."

In the village a snow storm rose, though no storm wind could be heard. Opening the window to check up, Zhachev saw that what was happening was that the

collective farm was sweeping up snow for the sake of hygiene: the peasants did not like it that the snow was all covered over with flies now, they wanted a cleaner winter.

On finishing up with the Org-Yard the collective farm members ceased their work and got under a shed roof where they waited in puzzlement over their further life. In spite of the fact that the people had already gone a long time without eating, even now they were not hungry because their stomachs were still piled full of the surplus of meat from recent days. Making use of the peaceful grief of the collective farm, and also of the invisibility of the activists' committee, the old man from the Dutch tile factory and other unclear elements who up to then had been imprisoned in the Org-Yard emerged from the rear storerooms and various concealed obstacles to life and went off into the distance on their urgent affairs.

Chiklin and Zhachev leaned up against Nastya from both sides, the better to care for her. Because of her confined warmth the girl became all swarthy and submissive, except that her mind sadly thought:

"I want to go to my mama again!" she said, without opening her eyes.

"Your mother does not exist," said Zhachev without gladness. "All die of life—only the bones are left."

"I want her bones!" Nastya begged. "Who is that crying there in the collective farm?"

Chiklin readily listened; yet everything was quiet all around—no one was crying, there was nothing to cry about. The day had already arrived at its middle point, the pale sun shone high over the region, some distant masses moved along the horizon to some unknown intervillage assemblage—nothing could make noise. Chiklin went out on the porch. A quiet unconscious moaning wafted to the silent collective farm and then was repeated. The sound commenced somewhere off to the side, directing itself towards a remote place, and was

not calculated to be a complaint.

"Who's that?" cried Chiklin from the height of the porch across the entire village so that that dissatisfied person would hear him.

"It's the bear who is whining," answered the collective farm lying there beneath the shed roof. "And last night he was growling out songs."

And in reality, other than the bear, there was no one else left to cry. No doubt he had stuck his snout in the earth and was groaning away sadly into the depths of the soil, without understanding his grief.

"The bear is pining for something," said Chiklin to Nastya, returning to the room.

"Summon him to me. I am also pining," asked Nastya. "Carry me to my mama, I am very hot here!"

"Right away, Nastya. Zhachev go crawl off to the bear. In any case there's no reason for him to work here. There isn't any material."

But Zhachev who had just disappeared had already returned: the bear himself was coming to the Org-Yard along with Voshchev; and Voshchev was holding him, as if he were weak, by the paw, and the bear was moving alongside him with sad step.

Entering the Org-House the bear smelled the activist lying there and stood indifferently in the corner.

"I took him as a witness that there is no truth," Voshchev declared. "After all the only thing he can do is work, and just as soon as he starts resting he begins to pine. Let him exist now as an object—for eternal memory—I will be host to all!"

"Be host to the imminent bastard," agreed Zhachev. "Save for him the pitiful product."

Bending down, Voshchev commenced to gather up into his sack the decrepit old things, taken out by Nastya, which were requisite for the coming retribution. Chiklin picked up Nastya in his arms and she opened her fallen, silent eyes dried out like leaves. Through the window the little girl looked upon the collective farm peasants

pushed up close to one another, lying beneath the shed roof in patient oblivion.

"Voshchev, are you going to take the bear for your trash and scrap drive too?" Nastya worried.

"But of course. I even save remains and ash, and this is a poor being!"

"And what about them then?" Nastya stretched out her little emaciated hand, as thin as a lamb's leg, pointing to the collective farm lying out in the Org-Yard.

Voshchev looked over the courtyard with a managerial eye and, turning away, let droop even further his head which was pining away for truth.

The activist lay there, just as before, silent on the floor, until thoughtful Voshchev bent down over him and moved him a bit, out of a feeling of curiosity towards all loss of life. But the activist, whether feigning or dead, did not respond to Voshchev. Then Voshchev sat down close to the man and looked long into his blind, open face, which was borne deeply into his sad consciousness.

The bear was quiet for a moment and then began to whine once more, and on hearing his voice the whole collective farm came from the Org-Yard into the house.

"Comrades of the activists' committee, just how are we to go about living from now on?" the collective farm asked. "Grieve over us because we have no endurance left! Our implements are in working order, our seed is clean, it's now a matter of winter work—there's nothing to be felt in it. You must try!"

"There is no one to grieve," said Chiklin. "There lies your chief griever."

The collective farm calmly studied the toppled activist, having no pity for him, yet not feeling gladness either, because the activist had always spoken precisely and correctly, fully in accordance with the gospel, except that he was personally so repulsive that when all local society had planned to get him married off on one occasion so as to lessen his activity, even the least

comely women and wenches had wept from sadness.

"He died," Voshchev reported to them all, rising from below. "He knew everything, yet he too came to an end."

"But maybe he is still breathing?" Zhachev expressed skepticism. "Touch him and try him, please, because he hadn't yet got what was coming to him from me: Then I'll give him some more, right now!"

Voshchev lay down once more by the body of the activist who had once carried on with such predatory significance that all the universal truth, all of the meaning of life, was located solely within him, and existed nowhere else, while Voshchev got nothing out of it except torment of mind, unconsciousness in the onward driving torrent of existence and the submissiveness of blind material.

"Aha, you viper!" whispered Voshchev over this silent carcass. "So *that's* the reason I did not know meaning! It would seem that you, you dry soul, had sucked the blood not only from me but from the entire class as well, leaving us to wander about like quiet dregs, knowing nothing."

And Voshchev punched the activist on the forehead—for the sake of the durability of his death and for the sake of his own politically conscious happiness.

Feeling now a full mind, though still unable to pronounce or to bring into action his original strength, Voshchev rose to his feet and said to the collective farm:

"Now I will grieve for you!"

"We beg you!!" the collective farm cried unanimously.

Voshchev opened wide the Org-House door and recognized the desire to live away out in that unfenced-in distance, where the heart could beat not only from the cold air but also from the honest gladness of overcoming the whole dull substance of the soil.

"Carry the dead body away!" directed Voshchev.

"Where to?" asked the collective farm. "After all he certainly cannot be buried without music! At least turn on the radio!"

"You can dekulakize him—down the river and into the sea!" Zhachev suggested.

"That can be done too," agreed the collective farm. "The water is still running."

So several men lifted the activist's body high up and took it to the river bank. All this time Chiklin held Nastya close to him, intending to go to the foundation pit with her, but was detained by the occurring conditions.

"The juice has left me, from everywhere in me," said Nastya. "Take me to my mama quickly, you old fool! I am bored!"

"We'll get going right now, little girl. I will carry you on the run. Yelisei, be off with you, summon Prushevsky—tell him we're leaving and that Voshchev is being left here on behalf of all of us because the child has fallen ill."

Yelisei went off and returned by himself: Prushevsky did not wish to go, saying that he had to finish the teaching of all the youths here first, because otherwise they might perish in the future and he felt sorry for them.

"All right, let him stay," Chiklin consented. "Just so he himself remains intact."

Zhachev, because he was a monstrosity, was unable to move by himself swiftly and could only crawl: therefore Chiklin organized things thus: he commanded Yelisei to carry Nastya, and he himself carried Zhachev. And thus, making haste on their way, they went off to the foundation pit along the winter road.

"Take good care of Mishka the Bear!" Nastya ordered, turning back. "I will come to visit him soon."

"Don't worry, miss!" promised the collective farm.

By evening time the foot travellers could see the electric illumination of the city in the distance. Zhachev

had long since grown tired of sitting in Chiklin's arms and said they should have taken a horse from the collective farm.

"Afoot we will get there more swiftly," replied Yelisei. "Our horses have grown unused to being ridden: they have been just standing still for so long! Their legs have even become swollen, for after all, the only walking they get is in stealing fodder."

When the travelers arrived at their destination they saw that the entire foundation pit was covered with snow, and in the barracks it was empty and dark. Chiklin, placing Zhachev down on the ground, set to lighting a bonfire to get Nastya warm, but she said to him:

"Bring me mama's bones, I want them!"

Chiklin sat down opposite the little girl and kept trying to get the fire going for light and heat, and Zhachev meanwhile had been sent out to get some milk from someone. Yelisei sat for a long time on the threshold, observing the nearby bright city where something was constantly making a clamour and rising and falling rhythmically in the universal disturbance, and then he fell down upon his side and went off to sleep without eating anything.

People went past the barracks, but no one came to call on the ailing Nastya, because each had his head bent down and was thinking incessantly about total collectivization.

Sometimes all of a sudden quiet fell, and then once again the train whistles blew from far away, the piledrivers released lengthy gusts of steam, and voices shouted from the shock brigades which had come up against something heavy—all around everything was supercharged with the public good.

"Chiklin, why is it that I always feel mind and cannot forget it?" Nastya expressed surprise.

"I don't know, little girl. Probably because you have never seen anything good."

"And why is it that in the city they work at night

and do not sleep?"

"They are doing it for you."

"And I am lying here so sick... Chiklin, give me mama's bones, I will embrace them and go to sleep. I have gotten so depressed now!"

"Go to sleep, maybe you'll forget your mind."

The weakened Nastya suddenly half rose and kissed the bent-over Chiklin on the moustache—like her mother she had the capability of kissing people without warning them.

Chiklin froze from this repetition of the happiness of his life and breathed

silently above the child's body until once again he felt concern for this small, hot torso.

To preserve Nastya from the wind and for her general warmth Chiklin got Yelisei up from the threshold and put him beside the child.

"Liethere," said Chiklin to Yelisei who had become frightened in his sleep. "Hug the girl with your arm and breathe on her more often."

Yelisei did just this, and Chiklin himself lay down off to one side of his elbow and listened sensitively With his dozing head to the aroused clamor from the city's installations.

Zhachev returned about midnight: he brought with him a bottle of cream and two pastries. He was unable to obtain anything else since all the newly-activated employees were absent from their apartments and were showing themselves off somewhere away from home. All in a sweat from hustling about, Zhachev decided in the end to penalize Comrade Pashkin as his most reliable reserve. But Pashkin was not at home either. It turned out, he was attending the theater with his wife. Therefore Zhachev had to put in an appearance at the performance in the midst of the darkness and the attention being paid to some elements dashing about the stage, and he had loudly demanded Pashkin's presence in the buffet, thereby bringing the theatrical activity to a halt. Pashkin immediately emerged, silently purchased the foodstuffs

at the buffet for Zhachev, and hurriedly disappeared back into the hall so he could have his emotions stirred again.

"Tomorrow I must go to Pashkin again," said Zhachev, relaxing in the far corner of the barracks. "Let him install a stove in here, for otherwise in this wooden wagon no one is ever going to get to socialism!"

Early in the morning Chiklin awakened. He had grown chilled, and he listened closely to Nastya. It was just barely light and quiet, except that Zhachev kept mumbling his complaints in his sleep.

"You're breathing there, you middle peasant devil!" Chiklin said to Yelisei.

"I'm breathing, Comrade Chiklin, what else can I do? I've been giving away my

warmth to the child all night!"

"So what?"

"The girl isn't breathing: she has grown cold for some reason."

Chiklin slowly got up from the ground and stood there in place. After having stood a time he went to where Zhachev was lying and looked to see whether the cripple had perhaps annihilated the cream and the pastries, and then he found a broom and cleaned out the whole barracks of various trash accumulated there since the time it had been inhabited.

After putting the broom back in place Chiklin wanted to dig in the earth; he broke the lock on the forgotten stockroom where the spare implements were stored and, bringing himself out a spade, he went on over to the foundation pit unhurriedly. He began to dig in the ground, but the ground had already frozen, and Chiklin had to cut the earth into chunks and to pry it out in whole dead pieces. Deeper down things were softer and warmer; Chiklin drove into it with cutting blows of his iron spade and soon was concealed beneath the silence of the earth's interior, nearly to the extent of his whole height; but even that far in he was unable to become

fatigued, and he began to smash the earth sideways, opening wide the earth's inner tightness. Striking a wedge of virgin stone, the spade bent from the power of the blow—and then Chiklin hurled it along with its handle up onto the outer surface and bent down his head to the exposed clay.

In these actions he wanted to forget his mind, but his mind kept right on unmovingly thinking that Nastya had died.

"I'll go get another spade!" said Chiklin and climbed out of the hole.

In the barracks, so as not to believe his mind, he went up to Nastya and touched her head; then he put his hand against Yelisei's forehead, verifying his life by the warmth.

"Why is she cold while you are hot?" asked Chiklin and did not hear the answer because his mind had now forgotten itself by itself.

Thereupon Chiklin kept sitting on the earthen floor the whole time, and Zhachev who had awakened from sleep was also there with him, preserving unmovingly in his hands the bottle of cream and the two pastries. And Yelisei, who had breathed on the girl the whole night long without sleep, was now exhausted and had gone to sleep alongside her, and slept until he heard the neighing voices of the socialized horses of his native village.

Into the barracks came Voshchev and following him came the bear and the whole collective farm; the horses were left waiting outside.

"What are you doing here?" Zhachev saw Voshchev. "Why did you leave the collective farm, or maybe you want all our land to die? Or maybe you want to catch it from the whole proletariat? So come over here to me, and I'll give you as a class what for!"

But Voshchev had already gone out to his horse and had not heard Zhachev out. As a gift he had brought to Nastya the bag of specially collected trash and scrap, as

rare, unpurchasable toys, each of which was an eternal memento of a forgotten human being. Nastya, even though she was looking at Voshchev, was not gladdened, and Voshchev touched her. Observing her open, silenced mouth, and her indifferent, tired body, Voshchev stood there in bewilderment over this silenced child—now he no longer knew where there would be communism in the world, if it did not exist as a beginning in the feelings of a child and in the impression of conviction? Why did he need the meaning of life and the truth of universal origin now if the small, loyal and true human being within whom truth would have become joy and motion no longer existed?

Voshchev would have reconciled himself to not knowing anything again and to living without hope in the dim passionate longing of futile mind, if only the girl were again whole, intact, ready for life, even if she were to endure torment with the passing of time. Voshchev lifted up Nastya into his arms, kissed her on her open lips, and with the passion of happiness pressed her to himself, finding more than he had sought.

"Why did you bring the collective farm? I am asking you for the second time!" Zhachev addressed him, not letting either the cream or the pastries out of his

hands.

"The peasants wish to enroll in the proletariat," answered Voshchev.

"Let them," declared Chiklin from inside the earth. "Now we have to dig the foundation pit even wider and deeper. Let every person who now lives in barracks or a clay hut move into our building. Summon here all the authorities and Prushevsky while I go out to dig."

Chiklin took a crowbar and a new spade and slowly went out to the far edge of the foundation pit. There he once again began to open up the unmoving earth, because he was unable to weep; and he dug till night, incapable of tiring, and then the whole night through

until he heard his bones cracking in his laboring torso. So then he called a halt and looked about himself. The collective farm had come out behind him, and unceasingly was digging the ground; all the poor and middle peasants were working with such zeal for life, that it was as if they wished to save themselves forever in the abyss of the foundation pit.

The horses were not standing still either—the collective farm members mounted on their backs were carrying foundation stone in their hands, and the bear was hauling this stone afoot with his mouth wide open from the strain of the work.

Only Zhachev alone was not participating in anything and looked upon the whole labor of digging with a regretful gaze.

"What are you sitting there for, like some white-collar employee?" Chiklin asked him as he returned to the barracks. "You might at least set to sharpening the spades."

"I am unable to, Nikit, I don't believe in anything any longer!" replied Zhachev on that morning of the second day.

"Why, you rat?"

"You can see that I am a monstrosity of imperialism; and communism is a thing for children, and for that I loved Nastya... I am going over right now to kill Comrade Pashkin in farewell."

And Zhachev crawled off to the city and never more returned to the foundation pit.

■ ■ ■

At noon Chiklin began to dig a special grave for Nastya. He dug it fifteen hours in a row so it would be deep and so that neither worms, nor tree roots, nor warmth, nor cold would be able to penetrate it, so the child would never ever be troubled by the clamor of life on the earth's surface. Chiklin carved out the tomb from

eternal stone and also made ready a special separate granite slab as a top to it, so the enormous weight of the grave earth might not lie upon the small girl.

After he had rested, Chiklin took Nastya in his arms and carefully carried her and put her within the stone and covered over her grave. It was night, the whole collective farm was sleeping in the barracks, and only the striker-bear, sensing movement, had awakened, and Chiklin allowed him to touch Nastya in farewell.

THE BARREL ORGAN

A Play in Three Acts, Six Scenes

CAST OF RA CTERS

SHOEV — Manager of a Cooperative System in a remote region.

EVSEI - His Assistant.

OPORNYKH and KLOKOTOV - Coop Supply Agents.

GODOVALOV — Shareholders' Chairman, Representative of the Coop Store.

EVDOKIA — a worker promoted to an office job.

FIRST OFFICE EMPLOYEE

SECOND OFFICE EMPLOYEE

Several other office employees—men and women. People from the cooperativized population. People in line at the Park of Culture and Rest.

ALYOSHA — a wandering culture-worker, music division.

MYUD — an adolescent girl, Alyosha's friend in common labor.

KUZMA — an iron person, the Alyosha-Myud group's attraction.

EDUARD-VALKYRIA-HANSEN STERVETSEN- a Danish professor, a food-industry specialist who has come with the goal of acquiring a "USSR shockworker soul" for Western Europe.

SERENA — his daughter, a young girl.

THE MICROPHONE - on Shoen's desk.

AGENT — from the State Collective Farm.

Two or three passing construction workers. Workers in the shop at the coop's doors.

AN OUTSIDER.

GIRLS — from Osoaviakhim.

A FIREMAN.

A POLICEMAN.

CIRCUIT POSTMAN.

CHILDREN'S faces looking through the establishment window.

TWO WORKERS - who demolish the building.

ACT I

SCENE ONE

, A provincial region. A road into the country distance. The trees alongside the road shiver in an occasional wind. To the left—a structure on the empty horizon; to the right—a small town is visible, the regional center. Over the town wave flags. A small barn-shaped building stands at the edge of town; there is a flag over it, and on the flag is a design which can be understood from afar—a cooperative handshake.

Wind. Desolation. The distant flags tremble. The sun and a vast summer day are over the earth.

In the beginning, except for the wind, everything is quiet. Then the sound of moving iron can be heard. Judging by the noises this unknown, heavy iron is moving slowly, just barely. A girl's voice wearisomely sings a song, not too loud. The song approaches along with the iron.

On stage a mechanical personage appears—a cast-iron man, hereafter called

Kuzma. Kuzma is a metallic structure in the shape of a short, fat man, solemnly stepping forward, flapping his mouth continuously, as if accomplishing the act of breathing. A young man in a straw hat, with the face of a traveler, Alyosha, is leading Kuzma by the arm, turning the arm on its axis like a steering wheel or control. With him appears Myud—an adolescent girl. She carries herself and speaks trustingly and clearly: she has not known oppression. Slung over Alyosha's shoulder is a barrel organ. The whole group gives the impression that they are street musicians, and Kuzma is their attraction. Kuzma suddenly stops and drops his lower jaw, as if he wants to drink. The group stands amid the empty, daylight world.

MYUD. Alyosha, living in the world has made me feel so dreary.

ALYOSHA. It's all right, Myud, soon there will be socialism-then everyone will be happy.

MYUD. Me too?

ALYOSHA. You too.

MYUD. And what if my heart feels sick for some reason?

ALYOSHA. Well, so what? It will be cut out, so that it doesn't bother you.

A pause. Myud hums without words. Alyosha stares into the distance.

MYUD (*shifts from humming to singing*): Along a hard and happy road We go, barefoot, on foot— We don't have far to go now: Our happy home has been put up... MYUD. Alyosha, I've been thinking—and here's what I thought: my heart has gotten sick because I am cut off from the masses...

ALYOSHA. You live unscientifically. That's why your some-thing-or-other is always aching inside. When socialism comes I'll invent you all over again from the beginning, and you will be the child of the whole international proletariat.

MYUD. All right. After all, I was born under capitalism. Two years I suffered under it... (*She turns to Kuzma, touches his hands. —Myud is always touching the hands of the people and objects which she enters into relations with.*) Kuzma, tell me something intelligent, so very intelligent!

Kuzma champs his inhuman jaw. Alyosha switches some sort of mechanism on Kuzma's cuffs and holds him by the arm.

MYUD. Come on, Kuzma!

KUZMA (*in a wooden, indifferent voice, in which one can always hear gnashing gears moving inside*). Opportunist female...

MYUD (*listens closely*). And what else?

KUZMA. Grabber.., Un-prin-ci-pledness... Right-left element... Backwardness... You have to be directed!

MYUD. And what else am I?

Alyosha performs some manipulation on Kuzma's arm.

KUZMA. You are a class charm... You are very much a sprout. You are a shockworker of poorfolk joy... We already...

MYUD (*quickly*). I know, I know: we have already set foot on the foundation, we have already got both feet on it. (*She moves and dances.*) We have, totally and wholly. We are really something special!

KUZMA. ...We are a mass surging upward and onward!..

The noises emitted by Kuzma after this are neutral and indecipherable.

MYUD (*to Kuzma*). I love you, Kuzee-after all, you're poor iron! You're so solid looking, and yet you have a busted heart, and Alyosha invented you! After all, you cannot really *be*, you-you're just so-so!..

Kuzma is silent and does not clank his mouth. A locomotive whistle in the distance.

ALYOSHA. Let's go, Myud. It'll soon be evening. Dreariness will descend on the earth, and we have to eat and find shelter for the night.

MYUD. Alyosha, all of my ideas hurt from hunger! (*She touches her breast.*)

ALYOSHA (*touches Myud*). Where?

MYUD. Here, Alyosha, where it sometimes feels good and sometimes doesn't.

ALYOSHA. That's Nature's wrecker-tactic, Myud.

MYUD. Is Mother Nature a Fascist?

ALYOSHA. And who did you think she was?

MYUD. I thought she was a Fascist too. The sun disappears so all of a sudden! Or the rain—first it drips, then it doesn't! It's true, isn't it: what we need is Bolshevik Nature—the way spring was, right? And what's this? (*She points to the surrounding areas.*) -This is kulakism and nothing but. There's not even a beginning of a plan to it all.

Kuzma rumbles inaudibly. The locomotive gives a short whistle nearby. Alyosha regulates Kuzma and he falls silent.

ALYOSHA. Let it keep on shining a while longer (*he looks at the surrounding area*). We will soon liquidate it too, as a hangover production. After all, we didn't make it—so why should it exist?!

MYUD. Hurry, Alyosha, or it'll get dreary waiting.

People's footsteps are heard.

KUZMA (*mutters*). ...Lack of reaction to activity... MYUD. What's wrong with him?

ALYOSHA. His other words got stuck. (*He regulates Kuzma on the back of the head.*)

Two or three construction workers walk by with cases, saws, a flag in the hands of the one in front.

MYUD. Who are you? Shockworkers or not?

ONE OF THE WORKERS. That's us, miss.

MYUD. And we're culture-workers. The collective farm hut-reading room sent us...

ONE OF THE WORKERS. What are you, beggars or what?

MYUD. Alyosha, they're the idiocy of country life!..

KUZMA (*rumbles something, after*). Life pacifically...sow kenafcastoroilplants... (*hums on and then goes silent: one can hear the friction inside the mechanism*).

ONE OF THE WORKERS. Play us something for our rapture, fellow...

ALYOSHA. Coming up. (*Starts Kuzma from the back.*)

MYUD. Put a nickel in Kuzma (*she shows them where to put it: in the mouth*). That's for culture-work with one-family houses. You like them, don't you?

One of the Workers puts a nickel in Kuzma's mouth. Kuzma champs his jaws.

Alyosha takes Kuzma by the arm and puts the barrel organ on play.

Kuzma gnashes something incomprehensibly.

Alyosha starts playing an ancient tune on the barrel organ.

Kuzma starts singing more comprehensibly.

Myud sings along with Kuzma.

Glory

To the u-ni-ver-sal pro-le-tar-i-at,

The power that's in power!

Eternal dis-grace

To Ku-la-kism, ex-cess-es, halle-

luia-niks, hypocrisy, lack of principles.

To right and left and

Ev-e-ry dark force!..

KUZMA (*after the singing, alone*). ...But it's warmer to live in a hut than in socialism...

ONE OF THE WORKERS (*having listened to all this*). Sell us this cast-iron opportunist!

MYUD. Kuzee?! What's wrong with you—he's very dear to us. And what for?

OTHER WORKER. Just for fun. Take God, for example—He got Himself a devil when He existed. We'll do the same—we'll keep us an opportunist!

THE FIRST WORKER (*to Alyosha*). There, buddy, there's a ruble for your invention. You get something to eat, or your head'll get weak.

ALYOSHA. No need of that. You'd better put down your payment on a construction, but I'll get your ruble everywhere.

MYUD. We don't take money for ourselves—we have too much love for Soviet cash.

KUZMA. Shhnakes—heeroes... Live quietly...

ALYOSHA (*regulates Kuzma, and he shuts up*). Some sort of counter-slogans are always storming in him. He's either sick or broken.

MYUD (*to the workers*). Well, you get along, go on. There's no reason to stand around when the Five-Year Plan is underway!

FIRST WORKER. Some girl! Wonder who her mother was!

OTHER WORKER (*sensibly*). Social material!

The construction workers go away. Off-stage indefinite foreign sounds can be heard softly.

MYUD. Let's go, Alyosha. I want something filling.

ALYOSHA (*fixes Kuzma*). We'll go in a second... What's wrong with you, my little toad, are you still suffering? You'll get used to it!

MYUD. All right, after all, I do like to get used to things, Alyosha.

Stervetsen and his daughter Serena appear—a European girl with a rather Mongol face. At her waist is an elegant revolver; both are carrying suitcases, wearing traveling cloaks. They bow and say hello to Alyosha and Myud and also to Kuzma. Kuzma slowly holds out his hand in response to Serena and Stervetsen. The foreigners speak Russian. But the degree to

which it is broken must be fixed by the actors themselves.

STERVETSEN. Hello, comrades, activists...

SERENA. We want to be with you... We love your whole bitter lot!

MYUD. You're lying, we don't even have a lot now. Now we have summer, the birds are singing, and something is being built here!.. (*To Alyosha, in a different, more peaceful, tone.*) Alyosha, what is she?

ALYOSHA. Must be a moneybags.

KUZMA. ...Shhnakes...

STERVETSEN. We... are now the have-not spirit which has been dekulakized.

SERENA. We were reading and were manufactured... Papa, how do you say "information?"

STERVETSEN. Precise conversation, Serena.

SERENA. Conversation, when they said: you took the bourgeoisie and again the demi-class and also the big class and sended them straightly to hell!

MYUD. She's good, Alyosha. We sent them to hell, and she's from Helsinki, and she herself speaks clearly...

STERVETSEN. I was young and came a long time ago to Russian to exist here. I

lived here in the nineteenth century at a factory that made coarse rolls. Now I see—the town's there, but then there was here rare particle people and I cried on foot among them... Yes, Seren!

SERENA. What, Papa? Who are these people—the hired hands of the avant-garde?

MYUD. You're a fool of a bourgeoisie: we're *the* generation, that's who!

STERVETSEN. They're a good undertaking, Seren!

ALYOSHA. And what do you need here among our class?

STERVETSEN. We need the heavenly joy you feel in earthly labor.

ALYOSHA. What joy?

STERVETSEN. You have the psyche of shockworkerism. On all citizen faces there is enthusiasm...

MYUD. And what business is it of yours?.. If we're joyous?..

STERVETSEN. In your land state silence has been organized and above it all stands...the tower of the needed soul...

MYUD. You mean the superstructure! You don't know what

it's called—we have really passed you by!

STERVETSEN. The superstructure! That's the spirit of movement in the heart-of-hearts of the citizens, warmth over the icy landscape of your poverty. The superstructure! We want to buy it in your kingdom, or exchange it for our sad, precise science. In Europe we have a lot of lower matter, but the flame has gone out in the tower. The wind blows directly into our bored hearts—and over it there is no superstructure of animating inspiration... With us the heart is not a shockworker, it... How do you call it... it...is a quiet vagrant...

SERENA. Papa, you tell them that I...

KUZMA. Wrecker! Power of an element...

SERENA (*to Kuzma*). He knows everything like a patron...

MYUD. Kuzee? Why he's our underling element!

STERVETSEN. Where can one buy the superstructure here. (*He points to town.*) There?.. We'll pay a pile of cash! We'll give, maybe to you, a diamond loan, ships of Canadian grain, our Danish cream, two aircraft carriers, women of mature Mongol beauty—we agree to open our eternal safes to you.... And you give us just one superstructure! What is it to you? You have the base, so live on the foundation for a while...

KUZMA (*roars threateningly*). Cunning of the class enemy... The Roman Pope...

ALYOSHA (*calming Kuzma down*). Aha! You want to close up our ashpit and siphon?! So that we'll go cold immediately!

MYUD (*in a whisper to Alyosha*). Fascists! Don't sell the superstructure. We'll climb up on it ourselves!

ALYOSHA. I won't.

SERENA. Papa. They've given us a comprehension of the problem—they have Party lines lying around. So buy Europe a line. Obviously they'll complain about giving away a superstructure.

STERVETSEN. Sell us a line—I'll give you dollars!

MYUD. Well, we have only one directive, and it's a little one.

SERENA. Buy it, Papa, buy the directive. You can buy the superstructure of extremism later, far from here.

ALYOSHA. We don't sell directives for Fascist money.

MYUD (*touching the revolver on Serena's waist*). Give this to me. We have a cultural revolution, and you're walking around with a pistol. Aren't you ashamed?

SERENA (*perplexed*). Do you need it badly?

MYUD. Well, of course, you don't have any cultural revolution

after all. You're an ignorant and evil people, and we're supposed to get Nagan revolvers from you...

SERENA. Take it!.. (*She surrenders the revolver.*)

MYUD. Thanks, girl (*immediately kisses Serena on the cheek*). We forgive anyone anything if he surrenders to us.

SERENA. Papa, the Soviet Union is very nice! (*To Alyosha.*) Play a fox-trot!

ALYOSHA. A Soviet machine does not dare to do that.

Stervetsen and Serena bow and go off.

MYUD. Alyosha, but how can they buy an idea when it's inside the whole body?! After all, it'll be painful for us to take it out!

ALYOSHA. Never mind, Myud. I'll sell them... Kuzma. He's an idea too, after all. And the bourgeoisie will die from him.

MYUD. Alyosha, I'd feel sorry for Kuzma...

KUZMA. ...backwardness... fear capitalism...

ALYOSHA. Don't miss him, Myud. We'll order ourselves a new one. Kuzma is already lagging behind the masses anyway.

He starts up Kuzma. Kuzma begins to step with internal grinding, muttering incomprehensibly with his metal lips. All three go off. Off-stage, no longer in sight, they sing a song several words long. Alyosha and Myud stop singing, but Kuzma, going into the distance, keeps on drawling alone in his cast-iron voice: eh-eh-eh-eh.

End of Act I, Scene 1

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

An establishment which looks like a cross between a bathhouse, a beer bar, and a barracks. A crush of people working; smoke and noise. Two toilets, two doors into them; the toilet doors keep opening and closing: workers of both sexes use them. Shoev is seated at a huge table. On the table is a loudspeaker which he uses for talks to the whole town and the coops: the town isn't large, and the loudspeaker can be heard everywhere in the area.

SHOEV (*to the whole establishment as it storms along in production*). Let me think. Stop the odors of those stomachs—I can smell them over here.

The doors to the toilets stop. General silence ensues. Shoev thinks. His stomach begins to rumble: the rumbling intensifies.

SHOEV (*softly*). My body aches from lack of groceries. (*He rubs his belly.*) When I start thinking, my belly growls. That means all my natural elements are lonely... (*To the mass of workers.*) Evsei!

EVSEI (*it isn't clear where he is*). Right away, Ignat Nikanorovich. I'll sum up some cabbage and cukes right away and appear before you.

SHOEV. Sum them up quick, without leaving your spot! Then I'll iron over your figures for you myself. Tell me in detail, what are we handing out to the non-shareholders today?

EVSEI (*invisible*). Glue!

SHOEV. That's enough. And tomorrow?

EVSEI. A book for reading. After the alphabet book, Ignat Nikanorovich.

SHOEV. And yesterday?

EVSEI. Zverev brand fly-killing powder, half a packet apiece.

SHOEV. Does it make sense to kill flies with powder, Evsei?

EVSEI. Well why not, Ignat Nikanorovich? We don't have any orders for flies yet. The junkyard still refuses to accept flies too.

SHOEV. That's not what I meant—don't interrupt my thoughts... I'm asking you what pigeon-birds and sundry flying

things, what are they going to eat if you kill off all the flies. Flying things are food products too, you know.

EVSEI. But no flying things are expected this year, Ignat Nikanorovich. The southern region coops have grabbed them all up and stockpiled them ahead of us. This spring, Ignat Nikanorovich, we expect an empty sky. Now the flies'll start going crazy without the birds.

SHOEV. Aha, well, so be it. Let the flying things eat. Check me out through District with the telegraph—see if directives are being stolen in this region—it's been ten days since we had any circulars containing directives. It's absolutely terrible! I can't see any line to follow!

A barrel organ plays an old waltz outside in the yard of the establishment. The establishment harkens. Shoen too.

EVSEI (*still invisible*). Should I give the musician a coin, Ignat Nikanorovich? He is a cultural-worker person, after all.

SHOEV. I'll give you a coin! What a wastrel! Our fiscal plan isn't being fulfilled, and he's throwing our means around! You go and get him to make a contribution to a dirigible, that's what you can do!

Evsei appears, standing up out of the mass of workers, and he goes out. The barrel organ goes on playing without interruption. The loudspeaker on Shoen's table starts to hum. The barrel organ falls quiet.

SHOEV (*into the microphone*). Hello!.. Who's this? Speak up, it's me, ain't no one else!

These words, uttered into the microphone, are then repeated, doubly loud, somewhere beyond the wall of the establishment, and the echo from them resounds in the surrounding spaces, the emptiness of which is felt in the length

and monotony of the repeatedly echoing sounds. Any talking on the microphone has to echo like this every time—without special stage directions to that effect each time.

A DISTANT VOICE (*from outside the establishment*). Ignat Nikanorovich, the mushrooms are starting to get wormy. Should we

cut them up for the shop workers or give them to the masses?

The microphone on the table repeats these words in a second or two in a completely different voice—deeper, with a different expression, and even with a different meaning.

SHOEV (*into the microphone*). What mushrooms?

DISTANT VOICE OFFSTAGE. The annuals, salted ones, pickled ones and dried ones...

SHOEV (*not into the microphone*). Evsei!

WORKERS. Ignat Nikanorovich, Evsei went out to conduct your campaign.

SHOEV. Work in silence you. I remember that myself.

The barrel organ plays a new tune. Evsei enters with someone else's straw hat in his hands, filled with copper coins. He pours money out on Shoen's table. The barrel organ goes silent.

EVSEI. He gave us twenty rubles. He says he'll bring more. He said he was happy about the dirigible: too bad he hadn't heard about it before, he said, or he would have invented a Soviet airship himself.

SHOEV. What is he anyway, a building enthusiast—hot for anything at all?

EVSEI. Yes, apparently, Ignat Nikanorovich.

SHOEV. Is he a member of anything or not?

EVSEI. Says he's not a member of anything.

SHOEV. How can that be? Very strange...

A pause. The barrel organ plays in the distance, just audibly.

SHOEV. Haven't ever seen an enthusiast! Ten thousand shareholders I've united, but they're all like animals—all they want to do is eat, all day and all night. Go on—bring him here for my observation.

The microphone blares something on the table.

SHOEV (*looks at the microphone, then at Evsei*). Are you the one who's been torturing those mushrooms for two years?

EVSEI. Those aren't mushrooms, Ignat Nikanorovich, it's soy that looks like mushrooms, and I ordered it marinated... Why hurry.

Ignat Nikanorovich, after all, people can eat anything, and what's the point! Let there be a little more materialism, and there are enough people as it is.

SHOEV (*pensively*). You're right, all 100-plus percent. (*Into the mike.*) Don't touch those mushrooms, you devil's plague: let them lie there as a reserve!

The barrel organ plays further and further off.

SHOEV (*to Evsei*). Call the musician here: I want a mood.

Evsei exits.

SHOEV (*to the workers*). Give me some papers to sign. Somehow the world is dreary now!

FIRST WORKER brings a file of papers to Shoen's table.

SHOEV (*takes a stamp out of his trousers, gives the stamp to the First Worker*). Pound away!

First Worker blows on the stamp and starts stamping papers.

SHOEV (*sitting idly*). We ought to let fly a directive of some sort to the shop periphery.

FIRST WORKER. I'll let one fly, Ignat Nikanorovich! SHOEV. Let fly, please.

Evsei enters. Behind him Alyosha carrying the barrel organ. Myud attempts to lead Kuzma by the hand, but his torso does not fit through the narrow entrance.

ALYOSHA. Let him stay outside.

KUZMA (*through the door*). ...don't touch capitalism—old man. Shhnakes... (*He stays outside the establishment.*)

SHOEV. Who are you?

ALYOSHA. We're Bolsheviks on foot.

SHOEV. Where are you headed right now?

ALYOSHA (*with profound sincerity*). We are going around from collective farm to collective farm and building site to building site—on the way to socialism!

SHOEV. Where?

MYUD (*with childish enthusiasm*). To socialism!

SHOEV (*pensively*). A fine but distant realm.

MYUD. Yes, far it is. But we're headed there anyway.

SHOEV. Evsei, give this girl some candy.-

ALYOSHA (*embracing Myud*). No need to-she's not used to having sweets.

MYUD. Suck on the candy yourself, you sweet-eating egotist!

SHOEV (*comes out from behind the table to the people*). Dear comrades, laborers, consumers, members on foot, and fans, I love you all remarkably much!..

EVSEI (*to Myud*). Lady, what kind of filling do you want in the candy I bring—jam or cherry juice?

MYUD. Let the proletariat feed me—not you. You've got a non-class face.

SHOEV. Evsei, I love this new generation! How about you?

EVSEI. Yes, I've got to love it, Ignat Nikanorovich!

ALYOSHA (*not understanding the surroundings*). And are you building socialism here?

SHOEV. Are we ever!

EVSEI. In totality!

ALYOSHA. Well, maybe we should build too?.. Playing music all the time makes one's heart ache.

MYUD (*touching Alyosha*). And it's become dreary for me to live in the world on foot.

SHOEV. But why should you build? You are the springtime of our class, and the springtime should flower. Play the music! What do you say, Evsei?

EVSEI. Yes, I imagine we can get along without minors, Ignat Nikanorovich! Have them come and feast when everything is ready instead!

MYUD. But we want to!

SHOEV. But do you know how to organize the masses?

Alyosha and Myud are silent for a moment. ALYOSHA. All I can do is invent a dirigible.

A pause. SHOEV. Well, there you are. But you say you want to. It

would be better if you remained in our multi-shop system as musical forces. You'll comfort the leadership... Evsei, are we supposed to have comforters on our staff, according to the rules?

EVSEI. Ignat Nikanorovich, I don't imagine any objections are likely to arise. Let them comfort us...

SHOEV (*pondering profoundly*). Excellent. Then we'll take in these wanderers, Evsei, and let them stay. (*To Alyosha.*) Play me something tender.

Alyosha takes the barrel organ and plays a sad folk song. Shoev, Evsei, the whole establishment are in a deep pause. The establishment is idle. All grow thoughtful. Alyosha changes the key, plans another song.

MYUD (*gradually, unnoticeably, gets into the tune and starts to sing softly*).

To a distant land Wanderers intended to go. They left their Motherland For an unknown liberty; Alien to all-Comrades only to the wind... In their breasts beat hearts Which find no response...

Alyosha plays a while longer, even after Myud falls silent. As the music and songs continue Shoev bends over the table, starts to weep softly from sadness. Evsei, looking at Shoev, distorts his face in the same kind of suffering, but he is unable to produce any tears. The establishment weeps silently. A pause.

SHOEV. It's mournful somehow, the devil take it!.. Evsei, come on, let's organize some masses!

EVSEI. There won't be enough vegetables for them then, Ignat Nikanorovich!

SHOEV. Oh Evsei, come on, believe in something!.. (*He wipes away his tears and says to Alyosha.*) Instead of dirigibles, you'd do better to invent a way to dry up the tears which people cry!

ALYOSHA. I can.

SHOEV. Evsei, sign him up as staff comforter of the masses. Straighten this out using a troika of leaders—we have to prepare the masses for the administrative apparatus.

EVSEI. Is that really necessary, Ignat Nikanorovich? As it is we've already unloaded one peasant turned office worker—Evdokia— already!

Alyosha softly plays the barrel organ, a dance tune. Myud slightly moves In a dance.

SHOEV. But what's she doing now?

EVSEI. Nothing, Ignat Nikanorovich—she's a woman!

SHOEV. So what if she's a woman—there's something mysterious in her too!

EVSEI. There's milk in her, Ignat Nikanorovich!

SHOEV. Aha, then let her play a leading role in our apparatus in the milk and butter sectors.

EVSEI. Let her, Ignat Nikanorovich!

Alyosha plays the same dance a bit louder. Without rising from their places, the workers in the establishment, sitting, move their bodies in time to the music. The microphone on Shoen's table rumbles.

SHOEV (*into the microphone*). Hello! It's me! MICROPHONE. Birds are flying over the region, Ignat Nikanorovich!

SHOEV (*into the microphone*). Where from? MICROPHONE. Unknown. From foreign states. SHOEV. How many of them are there? MICROPHONE-Three. SHOEV. Catch them! MICROPHONE. Right away.

The noise of the wind over the establishment, bird calls.

SHOEV. Evsei, what's going on?

EVSEI. Ignat Nikanorovich, it's the new quarter setting in, or to use the old-fashioned term, spring!

SHOEV (*pensively*). Spring... A good Bolshevik time of year! EVSEI. Bearable, Ignat Nikanorovich.

SHOEV. Evsei, sign him up as staff comforter of the masses. Straighten this out using a troika of leaders—we have to prepare the masses for the administrative apparatus.

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EVSEI. Ignat Nikanorovich, it's the new quarter setting in, or to use the old-fashioned term, spring!

SHOEV (*pensively*). Spring... A good Bolshevik time of year! EVSEI. Bearable, Ignat Nikanorovich.

MYUD. There is no spring any more, it passed long ago. Now summer has set in

—the construction season!

SHOEV. What do you mean "summer?!"

EVSEI. Well, it's all the same, Ignat Nikanorovich. The only thing that changes is the weather—time remains the same.

SHOEV. You're right, Evsei.

PYOTR OPORNYKH (*enters, carrying a chicken and two doves*). 'Dis here's... whacha call it? Looks like I's caught you a bird, Ignat Nikanorovich: one poor-class chicken, and two doves to boot!

MYUD. Only outsider birds come in the spring—not chickens. All chickens are collective farm ones.

ALYOSHA (*studies the birds Opornykh is carrying—there is a little label on the chicken's foot, and a rolled-up note on the dove's. Alyosha reads these*).

"Chicken declares a curse on waste! It is given an unnecessary mass of grain, as a result of which the grain is wasted or destroyed by birds of prey. And they don't give it a drop to drink. The chicken declares its indignance at this shortsightedness. The 'Little Giant' State Farm Pioneer Troop."

SHOEV. We can't stockpile any like this—we've got no directive. Toss it out, Pyotr.

OPORNYKH (*takes the chicken by the head and throws it out the door. The chicken's head remains in his hand, but the body disappears*).

EVSEI (*looking at the chicken's head and its blinking eyes*). That chicken's a goner now—won't fly any further.

SHOEV (*to Alyosha*). And what does the Egyptian dove tell us?

ALYOSHA (*reads*). It's written in some capitalist language. It's not particularly clear to us.

SHOEV. Then pound that Kulak propaganda into the ground!

MYUD. Better yet, give it to me—I'll eat it and the paper.

SHOEV. My girl, you will eat it, and no leftovers!

EVSEI (*to Myud*). I'll eat it for you! Why, maybe it's a message to us from Egypt's proletarians—news of their accomplishments...

SHOEV (*pensively*). ...a distant, exhausted class... Opornykh, takes care of the doves the way you take care of the union book!..

A distant noise. Everyone listens. The noises increase, turning into a roar.

SHOEV. Opornykh, check that out! Who's disturbing the...

The noise increases and simultaneously starts to differentiate— one can hear something like separate voices. The microphone on Shoen's table buzzes.

OPORNYKH. What the hell's goin' on here!! (*He exits.*)

A short, fearful pause.

EVSEI (*shouts with all his might*). Ignat Nikanorovich, it's the interventionists!!!

The work of the establishment comes to a halt all at once. Myud takes the revolver out of her purse. Alyosha takes the rumbling microphone from Shoen's table. The microphone tears loose from the equipment and continues rumbling in the hands of the man. Both of them run to the exit with these objects and disappear. The strange noise increases, but becomes as if broader and softer, like a stream of water.

EVSEI (*in horror*). Ignat Nikanorovich, I told you, that old mother bourgeoisie was tough...

SHOEV. Never mind, Evsei, maybe it's just petty bourgeoisie. And where are my masses?!

Shoen looks around the establishment: it is deserted. A bit earlier all of the workers have silently hidden somewhere. Kuzma smashes down the door and moves into the room. He sits down among the empty tables and takes a pen. Shoen and Evsei watch him in terror. Myud enters, revolver in hand.

MYUD. It's the geese-swans flying. The fools!

The noise turns into the cries of thousands of birds. One can hear bird claws raking the iron roof of the building: the birds are roosting, calling back and forth.

SHOEV. Evsei! Get me the service masses. Where've they hidden? We've got to fix something!

Kuzma stands up and goes into the toilet, sharply slamming the door behind him.

ACT ONE SCENE THREE

The same establishment as in Scene 2. There is no microphone on Shoev's table now. It's empty. Shoev alone. The plaintive cries of birds outside the building as they are bludgeoned and killed with whatever weapons are at hand.

SHOEV (*chewing some food*). The people have gotten gluttonous now. They're building some-brick buildings, fences, towers, and they want to have dinner three times a day. And I have to sit here and provide for all of them! It really is difficult to be head of a coop system! It would be better if I were some object, or simply a consumer... Somehow we haven't got enough ideological superstructure: could it be that we've already invented everything there is to invent? I keep feeling this desire to have some kind of pleasure!.. (*He picks up some crumbs and pours them into his mouth.*) Evsei!

EVSEI (*somewhere behind the establishment*). Coming, Ignat Nikanorovich.

SHOEV. These goddamn birds keep coming from somewhere! Before, it was peaceful, and everything was according to plan. The entire apparatus took its directive for the organization of crayfish holes. But now these birds are flopping all around. Just try to stock them. O, you, the populace! O, populace—you're a pain to the coop-system!.. Klokotov!!!

KLOKOTOV (*behind the establishment walls*). I'm coming, Ignat Nikanorovich.

Klokotov enters—all covered with bird feathers.

SHOEV. Well, how's it going there?

KLOKOTOV. Well, Ignat Nikanorovich, it's no decent business, that's for sure!

SHOEV. Just what's going on then?

KLOKOTOV. The whole plan is falling apart, Ignat Nikanoro-vich. we accepted the directive to organize the crayfish holes, and that's what we should've stuck to. The body of a crayfish, Ignat Nikanorovich, is better than any beef. But yesterday it was crayfish, today the birds are flying, tomorrow some animal will come running out of the woods—and then I bet we'll have to wreck the system because of that natural element?!

Shoev is pensively silent.

KLOKOTOV. It's no good, Ignat Nikanorovich! And the populace is getting spoiled! Once we've got them used to one kind of food—that's what they like! But what is this anyway—any living stuff from the bourgeois kingdoms can invade our republic now: after all, there's a crisis abroad—how can everything there be eaten? But we won't have enough eaters here!

SHOEV. Well, how are your crayfish in our watery depths?

KLOKOTOV. The crayfish are silent, Ignat Nikanorovich, still too early.

EVSEI (*enters, covered with bird feathers*). Ignat Nikanorovich, a bird carrying documents has arrived. You look! (*Takes several cardboard rolls from his pocket*). A number on each one, and a stamp on each one! She's organized, Ignat Nikanorovich! I'm afraid of her!

SHOEV (*pensively and slowly*). Organized birds... The air over our land is precise!

OPORNYKH (*entering, all wet, wearing high boots*). The fish is comin', Ignat Nikanorovich!..

KLOKOTOV. I knew it!

OPORNYKH. The fish is comin' to the top, and the birds is flyin' down and eatin' 'em...

EVSEI. It's a break-through of fishing-season, Ignat Nikanorovich!

SHOEV. But there's no one there... no big animals that could eat up the birds? Isn't that right?

KLOKOTOV (*satisfactorily*). Of course, Ignat Nikanorovich! We don't need anything. We'll get along on crayfish instead of meat, on nut oil instead of real butter, and in place of milk we'll mix wild honey with formic acid, and that's that. Science has reached this point now, they say.

EVSEI. Ignat Nikanorovich, we'll supply this to everyone on the sly. Everyone'll have a full appetite.

OPORNYKH. So what now... eh... tell me? Shoot the birds or catch the fish?

A growing noise off-stage, as in Scene 1.

SHOEV. Go out and take a look, Evsei!

Evsei disappears.

SHOEV. Why are the birds flying to us from the bourgeoisie?

OPORNYKH. Because our country is awfully lush, Ignat Nikanorovich. All kinds of stuff springs right up from the earth—and it lives!

SHOEV. Don't lie. If that were so, everything would crawl into the storage barrels by itself.

OPORNYKH. But in our country a man is a fool, Ignat Nikanorovich. We don't even have any barrels!

SHOEV. Man?.. / am man...

The noise increases. Evsei runs in.

EVSEI. A whole mess more are coming!..

SHOEV. Mess of what?

EVSEI. Geese, sparrows, cranes, and lower down—roosters... Some kind of gulls too!

SHOEV. My God, my God!.. Why have you left me in this post?! It would've been better if I'd been an extremist—now I'd be living in peace!

OPORNYKH. Now all the fish'll be snapped up!.. So what'll we do, eh, leaders?! Make Lenten fare from the water, or leave that to the priests?

EVSEI (*to Opornykh*). Petya, don't be an activist until you're asked.

SHOEV. Evsei! Think of something concrete to do, for God's sake! You can see that my heart is aching.

EVSEI. But I've already thought of everything, Ignat Nikanorovich.

SHOEV. So, report to me then, take aim and do it.

EVSEI. There's an artillery group in Osoaviakhim, Ignat Nika-

norovich, and there's a cannon in that group-allow them to blast the flock of birds!

SHOEV. Get moving, blast them!

All exit, except Opornykh. The noise off-stage continues and turns into bird cries.

OPORNYKH. Ignat Nikanorovich! Why drive the birds away, that's missin' the point? We oughta go snare the birds and drag the fish out. Are the people here, uh, eager to work?

SHOEV. What does that matter? Let them fly off to some other regions—the people there can eat them just as well!!! Why are you such an egotist—I'm simply amazed at you?

Opornykh mutters something to himself.

SHOEV. Well, what else've you got to say! You've forgotten my one-man

management—you're unprincipled, you devil!.. Go on, Petya, get to your fishing.

OPORNYKH (*exiting*). What a... what... what a shit that guy is.

SHOEV. I'm somehow tired...it's hard for me to feed such a difficult populace all the way to the grave!..

The noise off-stage somewhat dies down and is audible softly. Myud and Alyosha enter. Both are covered with feathers. Myud even has feathers in her hair.

MYUD (*to Shoevj*). Why are you so important?

SHOEV. I'm not important—I'm responsible. Why've you come back? Can't you see that animals have attacked the coop?

ALYOSHA. That's nothing. Comrade Shoev. Food is always needed by the proletariat. The three of us stockpiled a thousand of them. We...

SHOEV. Enough of your we-ing: we-we-we!.. What would you be good for if I were not at your head, in charge?!

MYUD. Alyosha, where is the Party and where are the shock-workers here? I'm getting very bored here!

SHOEV (*somewhat pensively*). Boredom... A tender and decent feeling—in youth it sometimes stunts your growth...

Off-stage something hisses, as if a huge fire is being started.

ALYOSHA (*to Shoev*). Old man, let's think up a rational method, otherwise everything you've got here seems so unscientific.

The noise off-stage turns into a howl and suddenly dies away.

SHOEV (*pensively*). Rational method... (*He touches Alyosha*). Maybe you're a genius of the masses, buddy, but I am a thinking man too... (*Deeply*). Let science do the work now, and man will just sit around as if at a resort. A tolerable thing!.. We'll at least rest our bodies... If only...

Off-stage a continuously intensifying roar, as if from a growing conflagration. A short pause. The muffled roar of a cannon. The back (from the audience) wall of the building slowly collapses, wind gushes into the establishment, thousands of birds fly up from the roof of the establishment. The region landscape opens up: two cooperative shops with their salesmen, outside—gates with the inscription: "Park of Culture and Rest," by these gates—a line of people. Kuzma is first in line. At first this whole spectacle is veiled in smoke. The smoke disperses. Four large Osoaviakhim girls carry two stretchers into the establishment, passing through the ruined wall. Evsei and Klokotov are on the stretchers. The stretchers are put on the floor in front of Shoev. Evsei and Klokotov get up and sit on the stretchers.

EVSEI. The cannon, Ignat Nikanorovich!..

SHOEV. What about the cannon? What about it?

EVSEI. The cannon, Ignat Nikanorovich, it simmered for a whole hour, and then it let loose...

SHOEV. It's good that it did let loose.

KLOKOTOV. It let loose at us!

EVSEI. It fires low, Ignat Nikanorovich. It's got a slogan hanging from its barrel...

SHOEV. And what about you, are you dead or not?

EVSEI. No, no, Ignat Nikanorovich, we'll have to live some more yet! What's to be done?

SHOEV (*to the nurses*). And who're these girls?

EVSEI. This is social work for them, Ignat Nikanorovich. They're happy to carry people around.

CIRCUIT POSTMAN (*runs up with his bag to the line of*

people by the Park of Culture and Rest, and says). Citizens, give this package to

the coop—after all, for me every step is dear, but you're on your feet anyhow.

The people point to Kuzma. The postman shoves the package at Kuzma, into some hole in him, and runs off at express speed. Kuzma starts striding towards the coop. Without changing the order of the line, the people move toward the coop too, led by Kuzma.

SHOEV (*to the Osoaviakhim girls*). Listen to me, girls! If you love weights, raise the wall of this building for me—otherwise I keep seeing various masses all the time, and I get distracted...

ONE OF THE GIRLS. We can do that, Citizen. You are the boss because nobody sees you... You think we're idiots, eh?

The four of them easily lift the log wall and put it back in place, cutting off the establishment from the region world. The girls themselves remain outside the building now.

MYUD. Alyosha, what is this here anyway—capitalism, or a second something else?

SHOEV. Evsei! Please organize that girl. I'm starting to get heart-burn from her.

EVSEI. I'll put her on the reprimand list, Ignat Nikanorovich.

SHOEV. And where are my employees?

EVSEI. It's their day off, Ignat Nikanorovich!

SHOEV (*pensively*). Day off... It'd be good if it didn't happen again. Then I'd take it from supply right at once, and fulfill the plan. Evsei, let's set a course for getting rid of all the people!

EVSEI. Let's, Ignat Nikanorovich! But how?

SHOEV. How should I know? Let's just set a course, that's all.

ALYOSHA. You could invent machines, Comrade Cooperative. Machines can serve you too.

SHOEV. Machines... Well, that's fine: some scientific creature sits there turning, and I am in charge of it. That pleases me. I would switch the entire republic over to machines. What do you think, Evsei?

EVSEI. It would make things easier for us, Ignat Nikanorovich.

KLOKOTOV. The tempo of work would get more normal!

MYUD. The birds are flying, the fish are swimming, the people want to eat something—but they're fantasizing... Alyosha, I don't understand what's going on here!

SHOEV. Well, let me be at your head, then you'll understand!

OPORNYKH (*enters all wet*). Well, what should I do... Catch the fish or let 'em live?..

SHOEV. Get them, of course.

OPORNYKH. Ain't no traps, Ignat Nikanorovich... And the coopers say, eh, you didn't give them any salt last month. Give us some salt, they say, or our daily bread isn't salted!

SHOEV. And you, Petya, you go tell them they're opportunists.

OPORNYKH. Well, they told me that you're an opportunist! So what am I supposed to do?

MYUD (*to everyone*). Who are they? Fascists?

OPORNYKH. Some girls I met told me about the berries. They say, Ignat Nikanorovich, that the berries are off in the woods... Somehow all this, as you say, flies, creeps, swims and grows, but we don't have no barrels and I walk around in a hell of a state.

A noise off-stage.

SHOEV (*to Alyosha*). Where's your music, musicians! Again I feel somehow sad from dreams and opinions... Evsei, see who's making the noise and disturbing

the peace out there.

Evsei exits. Alyosha and Myud disappear outside with him. The noise of people off-stage increases.

OPORNYKH. Also, Ignat Nikanorovich, the flock of birds has let loose a lot of birdshit. Whole mounds of it are lyin' 'round, and they say it's a real goldmine. What should I do, store it, or let it go?

The noise off-stage abates.

SHOEV. What does birdshit mean to you? Why you're the most retrograde person in your class! Foreign chemists know how to make iron and cream out of birdshit. And you call it shit! What do you know?

Evsei enters.

KLOKOTOV. Let's requisition a foreign scientist, Ignat Nikanorovich—we have a mass of mysterious questions facing us.

EVSEI. Of course, we've got to requisition one. Foreigners are given special rations, and they bring suitcases full of clothing.

SHOEV. Right, Evsei... Who was making the noise outside?

EVSEI. A mass of shareholders have come over here, but I cut down on them.

SHOEV. In vain, Evsei, you should have chosen a representative from among them, so that he'd eternally be one for all.

EVSEI. Oh, I already chose one, Ignat Nikanorovich, and I gave him his job—now he'll calm down.

SHOEV. You're right, Evsei. For some reason you and I are always right!

Someone knocks softly at the door.

SHOEV. Yes, please, be so kind as to come in.

Enter Danish Professor Edward Valkyria-Hansen Stervetsen and his daughter

Serena.

STERVETSEN. Hello, Russian maximal people!

SERENA. We are science. We know food. Hello!

SHOEV. Hello, Mr. and Miss Bouregois Scientists. We are sitting here, always glad to see science.

EVSEI. We store up science too...

STERVETSEN. Since childhood we have loved cooperative-ness maximally. In the Sovietical Russian Union your cooperative-ness is lovely—we want to study everything related to food and goods too... And I have a sad difficulty to say it—but also your drifting!

SHOEV. Aha, you've come. Now when we've caught up with and passed everyone else, our cooperativeness has become lovely! Evsei, respect these devils!

SERENA (*to her father*). He says "devil."

STERVETSEN. Seren, that's because they don't have God, all that's left for them is his comrade—the devil.

SHOEV (*solemnly*). Comrades Bourgeoisies. You've happened along at the very flowering of the reorganization of our apparatus. So first of all you go on, take a rest, collect yourselves, and in ten days, in the second place, you come to our cooperativeness—then

we'll show you!!! But leave your suitcase here—our land can bear any weight.

STERVETSEN. Marvelous. (*He bows.*) Let's go, Seren, we have to collect ourselves as soon as possible.

SERENA. Papa, for some reason I'm happy...

They exit, leaving the suitcase in the establishment.

SHOEV. Evsei! Organize me a ball! Arrange a great rational plan for it. Prepare mighty food!

ÈVSEI. I'll do the rationalization, Ignat Nikanorovich, there's a lot of intelligence among the masses. Only I'm afraid there's not enough food...

SHOEV (*falling thoughtful*). You say there's no food... Well, so what? We'll organize an evening to test new forms of food. We'll collect any grasses around, we'll make flour from fish, we'll drag crayfish out of the water, we'll turn birdshit into chemistry, we'll make soup from the suet of dead bones, and boil kvass out of the wild honey, half and half with formic acid... On top of that, we'll use burdocks to cook up pancakes so good you'll eat them with enthusiasm, we'll put all nature into the victuals, we'll feed everyone with cheap and eternal materials... O, Evsei, Evsei: food is nothing but a social convention, nothing more at all!...

The crackle of a motorcycle outside the building. A man enters: an Agent from the State Collective Farm.

AGENT. I'm from the "Little Giant" Collective Farm of Small Flying and Aquatic Animals. Our birds broke loose from the aviary and got away. The water in our dam overflowed—and the fish got into the overflow. Have you observed any of these creatures in your region?

EVSEI. No, Comrade. We stockpile non-domestic animals. We like to do things the hard way.

AGENT. But I just saw some of your people covered with feathers!

SHOEV. People covered with feathers? They're lying. That's not so, Comrade!

AGENT. Huh?!

End of Act I, Scene 3

ACT TWO SCENE ONE

The same establishment, but somewhat changed. It is equipped with various machines. As they are started up, the viewer understands their function. At the

back wall lies the foreign suitcase. It's clean. One long table. A rostrum by the table. Nothing on the table. In one corner there is a piano. On another side the barrel organ: in place of a handle it has a pulley, with a belt drive running upward from the pulley. It is quiet and deserted. In a second, adjoining part, of the establishment—the noise of cooking. Evsei and Alyosha enter.

EVSEI. Well, how do you like it here, everything all right?

ALYOSHA. It's fixed up right.

EVSEI (*examining Alyosha*). You seem to have gotten thinner.

ALYOSHA. I've released many thoughts from my body, and I feel dreary here in your region... Evsei, when are the future people going to come—I'm bored with the ones who live here now. You're a shit yourself, Evsei!

EVSEI. Me? Me—a shit? That's why I'm in one piece. Otherwise I would have perished long ago, maybe I wouldn't even have been born. What did you think anyway?

ALYOSHA. But how can I be alive then?

EVSEI. Primordially... And are you really alive? You move, but you don't exist. Why did you become a barrel organ player, you hopscotching devil?

ALYOSHA. I want to achieve socialism as fast as possible. All the time I keep feeling this impulse pulling me into the distance.

EVSEI. Socialism will come for sensible elements, but you'll be done for. After all, you're—you're a nothing, you need someone at your head, in charge of you.

ALYOSHA. All right, I don't count myself anyway. But why are you an absolute snake, but still more important than me?

EVSEI. Me? Why it's the masses that've made a snake of me: one has to rule somehow, you know.

ALYOSHA (*deeply*). Soon there will be communism—and you won't be in the world any longer.

EVSEI. Me? What's wrong with you? I'm afraid the world won't exist without me, no sir!

The noise of food being prepared gets louder. Shoev enters. Alyosha busies himself setting up the machines.

SHOEV. Report, Evsei!

EVSEI. All's normal, Ignat Nikanorovich! The thistle soup is ready, the cabbage soup made from bushes and oak sap is on to boil, the mechanical sandwiches are lying at their posts, the compote out of administrative juice is cooling on the roof, the black earth cutlets are being broiled. And as for the locust kasha and the ant eggs, they're on too, Ignat Nikanorovich! All the rest is also mobilized on the stove, and the first thing done was the dessert made from glue and kvass!

SHOEV. And the sauce, what kind of sauce are you having?

EVSEI. Ignat Nikanorovich, a sauce is a complex thing. We're serving a thin additive made from birch sap!

SHOEV. Well uh... Will there be anything to clear up perspective?

EVSEI. Vinegar, Ignat Nikanorovich, vinegar with makhorka tobacco sprinklings and lilac leaves!

SHOEV. Marvellous, Evsei! Now tell me how things stand with implements.

EVSEI. Well, I carved all of the dishes out of wood for you. You didn't have any spoons or cups anywhere—you didn't even stop to think that you had a forest all around, and there are collective farms with working hands in that forest. You could have an entire wood age here!

SHOEV. A wood age... Well, so what, that was a pretty good transition epoch too!

The noise of people behind the door.

EVSEI. A guest mass is coming, Ignat Nikanorovich. SHOEV. Don't let them in. Let me think.

Evsei locks the door with a latch.

SHOEV. Now... What are you going to feed the scientific bourgeois and his daughter with?

EVSEI. The same things, Ignat Nikanorovich. He told me himself that he is a sympathizer with the great food of the future, and he's prepared to suffer for the brilliant new kind of food.

SHOEV. And what am I going to eat?

EVSEI. Ignat Nikanorovich, you'll eat with me. You and I will try the rations the foreign scientists were given. I took all of their food to use for this experiment.

SHOEV. You're smart, Evsei!

EVSEI. Well, I should think so! One has to be manysided...

The guests storm at the locked door.

SHOEV. Let the eaters in, Evsei. Alyosha, strike up the music!

Alyosha starts the barrel organ: pulls the lever—and the drive belt, slapping against the pulley all the while the playing continues, begins to turn the barrel organ drive shaft. Softly, melodically, the barrel organ plays a waltz—"On the Hills of Manchzhuria. "

Evsei opens the door.

Enter: Stervetsen with his daughter on his arm and a box in the other hand, Klokov, Evdokia, five girl office workers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th), Pyotr Opornykh with his little wife on his arm, three men office workers with their wives (1st, 2nd, 3rd), and the representative of the coop populace—Godova/ov. Then a fireman in full working uniform and hat, which is put at the door, and, finally, a policeman.

The barrel organ stops playing. Stervetsen hands Evsei a box full of food-stuffs.

EVSEI. Listen, Comrade Guests! Allow me to welcome you!

Let us all rejoice today...

SHOEV. Stop it, Evsei, stop your speech! I haven't said my piece yet...

EVSEI. Yes, Ignat Nikanorovich, as they say, I...

SHOEV. You'd better always act not as they say, but as one is supposed to... Listen to me, Comrade Guests!

The guests were about to sit down, but now everyone except Stervetsen and his daughter stands up, and listens standing.

SHOEV. Local and foreign comrades! I want to tell you something special, but I am no longer used to a mood of happiness. I am tormented by anxiety that the masses be full... Perplexity reigns

melancholy in me... In view of the intensifying tempo of the masses' appetite, one manifest necessity arose before our coop-system, to wit—to overcome a certain manifest underevaluation of a certain something... To do this one has only to swallow food, but when it drops into your stomach—let it manage for itself then, let it either be bored or rejoice. Today in the depths of your bodies we must test the strength of the new food which we have prepared using random natural materials. Long live the Five-Year-Plan in four years!

Applause. A general hurrah. The people stop applauding; they drop their hands, but rather than ceasing, the applause intensifies, turning into an ovation. Even more booming applause is repeated, and a shout of hurrah, with a metallic tone. All of the guests are frightened. Alyosha pulls the handle of one crude wooden mechanism (it is partially visible to the audience), the drive belt turns the mechanism from above—it applauds and shouts hurrah. Alyosha pushes the handle—the belt stops, the mechanism goes quiet.

SHOEV. Evsei! EVSEI. Alyosha! ALYOSHA. I serve the food.

He shifts a lever. The rumbling of an unseen machine. Then-quiet. Across the table, on a conveyer, a huge wooden bowl comes up slowly; there is steam over

the bowl and solid wooden spoons are propped up around it. The guests take the spoons.

SHOEV. Upbeat music, Alyosha!

ALYOSHA. All right. What should I play?

SHOEV. Please, do me a favor, start something intimate.

The barrel organ starts to play something intimate. The guests eat. Shoev and Evsei sit on the rostrum. Evsei takes food out of the box presented by Stervetsen—separate, real food: sausage, cheese, etc. And along with Shoev he eats it on the rostrum.

OPORNYKH. Eh... this... Ignat Nikanorovich! What's this, have

you made this kind of soup for from now on? Or is it just a single campaign?

SHOEV. Eat, Petya, don't be an opportunist!

OPORNYKH. What's it to me? I'm just sayin'... what's this... we do have beef and cabbage in the republic. Maybe it'd be better to eat normal soup. This way the belly may go on a rampage!

EVSEI. Petya! Eat in silence, try it.

OPORNYKH. Well I am silent. Now I'm going to think about a try...

The barrel organ goes silent.

SHOEV. Alyosha! Treat us to a second dish. Let's try the kasha!

Alyosha shifts the lever. Rumbling. The bowl with "cabbage" soup goes away. The rumbling ceases. A bowl of kasha comes out.

GODOVALOV (*stands*). From all participating members who have authorized me to think for them and also...

EVSEI. To suffer for their souls, Comrade Godovalov...

GODOVALOV. And also to suffer for their souls—I express the all-round gigantic feeling of joy, and enthusiasm too...

Alyosha turns on his machine. Thunderous applause rings out. Everyone eats kasha. Godovalov sits down.

SHOEV. Well, how is it, comrades?

SERENA. Papa! Are those locusts?! They're eating the little wreckers.

EVSEI. Right, Miss. We're hiding the wreckers inside ourselves.

SERENA. Then you will be wreckers too...

GODOVALOV. The kasha's not bad, Ignat Nikanorovich.

1st OFFICE WORKER (male). These experiments have immense educational significance. Comrade Shoev. They should be arranged every decade.

1st OFFICE WORKER (female). Oh, how nice it is here. It's the first time I've seen intervention.

SHOEV. Hey, you idiot... Shut up if you don't know the right word. Sit and feel something mutely.

1st OFFICE WORKER (female). But I *want* something, Ignat Nikanorovich. I'm excited all over!..

EVSEI. Polya!!! You can tell your mama everything later, in a whisper, but you're here for the experiment right now...

1st OFFICE WORKER (female). Oh, Evsei Ivanovich, I so like our establishment... There's a certain something that I'm feeling...

STERVETSEN. Nothing should go untested. The whole world is nothing but an experiment.

SHOEV. Quiet there, swallow away! Let us hear science at work!

STERVETSEN. I say: the whole world is nothing but an experiment of Godly

powers. Do you agree, Seren?

SERENA. Papa, do you mean God is a professor too? But why you then?

EVSEI (*softly to Shoev*). Ignat Nikanorovich, that's religious propaganda!

SHOEV. Let it be, Evsei. They're allowed—they're crazy... Alyosha! Let's have all the food out to choose from!

Alyosha shifts the lever. Grinding. Kasha flows out on the conveyor belt. The grinding stops. The conveyor offers a series of varied things to eat one by one.

SHOEV. Eat up, comrades, these délectables should have no left-overs. We've got a lot all together—we've got a whole sixth of the earth's globe... Alyosha! Organize the sandwiches!..

Alyosha turns on some sort of wooden device, a device earlier loaded with a loaf of bread. The device cuts the bread into thin slices, and these slices are automatically spread with some sort of white substance; then the readied sandwiches are tossed out into wooden bowls by an arm from the device. The wooden bowls are borne along the conveyor.

STERVETSEN (*examining the device's workings*). It's astounding, Seren! That's hygiene for you!

SERENA. Papa, I like Alyosha.

SHOEV. Alyosha, do something nice for the foreign miss, she likes you!

Alyosha walks up to Serena and kisses her, lifting her whole

body off the floor.

STERVETSEN. That's bizarre, Seren!

SERENA (*straightening her dress*). It's all right, Papa, it didn't hurt. And after all, I do have to feel the Union Russian Soviet.

SHOEV (*sternly*). Alexei, don't be unprincipled.

SERENA (*to Alyosha*). Do you love anything in this world besides communism?

ALYOSHA. I love dirigibles more than anything. I keep thinking of how one will rise up over the entire earth, how all the collective farmers will begin to weep, their faces uplifted, and I pour on the roaring power to the motors, overcome with tears of class joy... We will fly against the wind over all the oceans, and world capital will mourn deeply under the flying masses, under the huge body of science and technology!..

SERENA. I hear your words... But I was told in Moscow by your solitary member that you love shock workers and those who labor in order to overtake and pass.

EVSEI. He's a flyer—all he wants to do is rush off somewhere while our dear masses have to go on living on foot.

ALYOSHA (*answering Serena*). You don't understand, but he (*pointing to Evsei*), he's like your people. He's not for the class, he's a compromiser.

SERENA. But there are dirigibles in Europe too.

ALYOSHA. Well, so what?

SHOEV. The dirigibles there are the businessmen's!

ALYOSHA (*to Serena*). You don't understand because you're bourgeois. You're an individualist!.. You think you have a soul...

SERENA. Yes...

ALYOSHA. No, you don't. But we're going to have a dirigible. It will go over the whole have-not earth, over the Third International, it will come down and be touched by the hands of the universal proletariat...

SHOEV (*to Evsei*). And I thought he was a fool.

EVSEI. After all, our fools have always been upright ones, solid fools, Ignat Nikanorovich. But he's a different kind of fool.

SERENA (*to Alyosha*). The effect you have on me is like a landscape—I

experience melancholy, how do you say it, here, here in my...skirt.

Stervetsen takes out some Troika cigarettes and lights up.

SERENA. Papa, why are you and I individualists?

STERVETSEN. Seren, you shock me!

OPORNYKH (*drinking a cup of vinegar*). I drink for all nations where... eh.. the proletariat will raise its head on seein' our, whadyacallit—dirigible!

SHOEV (*standing, triumphantly*). To the dirigible of the Revolution, to all ration-holders everywhere and... to all the slogans published in the local press—hurrah!

ALL. Hur-rah!

After these shouts, silence falls suddenly. But the 2nd Office Worker (male) shouts hurrah by himself, not noticing the silence.

SHOEV (*to the shouter*). Vaska, knock it off!

The 2nd Office Worker quiets down. Noise behind the establishment wall.

SHOEV. Alyosha! Start the ball!

GODOVALOV. At least let me finish the fruit juice...

He drinks juice from the clay pot.

OPORNYKH (*to Stervetsen*). Would you let me try some of that whadyacallit... Your dumping...

Stervetsen gives him a pack of Troikas. Opornykh takes three cigarettes, gives two to his neighbors. The guests hurriedly finish eating the food, except for Serena, who chats with Alyosha.

SHOEV (*pensively*). A ball... I love this gay intermingling of humanity!..

One of the guest office workers goes to the window and opens it. The noise of the

region penetrates the room, and then gradually dies down. Three semi-childish faces appear at the window and peer into the room. An office worker guest callously puffs smoke into their faces, smoke which goes out into the darkness of the regional night.

EVSEI (*to Stervetsen*). Mr. Bourgeois Scientist, perhaps you have formed an opinion of our food samples, or haven't you?

STERVETSEN. I can say this much: it is being formed. Does this sound like aimless drifting to you, or do I note an underestimation? Without a concept I feel only some dull ache.

EVSEI. Well, don't worry, after all, you're not a Marxist, we'll teach you. Can I look at your automatic pen? Is it an import or what?

STERVETSEN (*hands Evsei the automatic pen*). I recommend it—it's a decent automatic.

EVSEI. Does it write by itself?

STERVETSEN. No, it has no motor. Do you have to think what to call it? — Sole power...

EVSEI. OK, but I supposed it could think by itself. But it's just an opportunist. Leave it as a sample, Alyoshka will make a more advanced model.

GIRL FROM THE WINDOW. Hey unc, give me a piece!

SERENA (*to Alyosha*). Why is there home-sickness on your face?

ALYOSHA. It's home-sickness for socialism, as usual...

SERENA. And is that so charming?

ALYOSHA. I could kill you for a question like that! Or don't you see?

SERENA. No, I have eyes only for you.

GIRL FROM THE WINDOW. Hey, unc, give me a piece!

ANOTHER CREATURE FROM THE POPULACE OUTSIDE. Just a little bit, please!

Myud's face appears behind everyone else outside the window.

SHOEV. Alyosha! Give us the unofficial part!...

Alyosha moves one of the levers and the table creeps off, with the leftover foodstuffs, into an opening in one side of the establishment. The guests stand up.

VOICE OUTSIDE THE WINDOW. Even something that tastes bad... Even if it's rotten...

AN OUTSIDER'S RUBBISHY VOICE, GROWN UP, OUTSIDE THE WINDOW. Let us chaw on the broth! I was a member too!

Alyosha moves the starting belt on his barrel organ, slapping the belt against the pulley, it turns the organ. And it plays tender music, a waltz. The guests begin to move in time to the music.

EVSEI (*out the window*). What are you hanging around for?

GIRL'S VOICE OUTSIDE. We want something good to eat!

OUTSIDER'S VOICE. Come on, give me something to swallow!

EVSEI. Here, drink for God's sake. (*Gives him a cup of vinegar left on the rostrum*). After all, there's an evening of science going on here, people are slaving away for you, brother.

The Outsider drinks the vinegar outside the window and hands the cup back.

OUTSIDER. I love anything liquid.

The guests dance: Alyosha with Serena, Opornykh (a tall man) with his little wife, Stervetsen with Evdokia, etc. —Only Shoev sits pensively on the highest place.

SHOEV. I respect this pleasure of the masses...

EVSEI (*coming up to Shoev*). I don't know what it is, Ignat Nikanorovich, I've fallen in love with all the citizens now!

SHOEV. Evsei, all animals love each other. Love isn't what is needed, a directive line is what's needed... (*More pensively.*) A directive line... without one everyone would be lying face down by now.

The waltz goes on. Claspng his wife to himself, Opornykh spits over her head into the corner wastebasket without missing a step in his courtly, spousely dance; his wife does not notice what he did.

MYUD (*outside the window*). Alyosha, take us there!

Alyosha is dancing with Serena and doesn't hear. Serena's face has gone totally white, and she is closer to dying than dancing. Stervetsen suddenly falls on the piano, turning white. Evsei grabs the wastebasket and holds it politely in front of Stervetsen's mouth. Myud stands outside the window and beside her appear's Kuzma's face, beard on the windowsill. There are no

other people; the regional night is clearly visible.

STERVETSEN. I thank you. But the food didn't come up; it was assimilated in the depths.

EVSEI. Even if you didn't throw up, our populace will never get sick, not ever...

The 1st Office Worker's body begins to wobble in the middle of the dance, her throat and jaw shudder and tremble; she is wracked by nausea—she moves virtually in a fit, shaking all over from stomach pains. The same thing happens to her partner, an office worker.

1st OFFICE WORKER. Oh, in general, on the whole, I'm so happy—but I can't stand any more of this... I haven't the strength... My whole soul is coming out of me...

STERVETSEN. Sell it to me, mademoiselle.

The nauseating convulsions overcome all the other dancers too, but the dance goes on anyway; the bewildered bodies embrace each other in pain, but the

pressure of the stomach material pushes into their throats, and the dancers hurl themselves away from each other. The music dies down.

KUZMA (*sings outside the window*). High up in the sky...

MYUD (*continues the song outside the window in a mournful voice*). A crimson stalk waves in the wind...

SERENA (*barely moving in the dance with her exhausted body, dolefully says to Alyosha*). Oh, my stomach feels so dismal!

ALYOSHA. What is it—is your soul parting from your body?

SERENA (*bends over convulsively and vomits into her scarf*). They've already parted!

The music stops completely. The guests take seats along the sides and double over on their chairs from the feelings in their stomachs. Serena, immediately after vomiting into her scarf, changes—gets more cheerful and dances by herself.

SERENA (*to her father*). Papa, I want to do a fox-trot now! STERVETSEN (*sits down at the piano and starts playing a slow, pessimistic fox-trot*).

SERENA (*moves and sings*).

My poor young man, A sailor who perished far away. Came back again to say goodbye. You hear—

our fox-trot is weeping.

(*sadly, to Alyosha*). Where is your Bolshevik soul?.. Without it, all Europe is full of tears and gloom.

ALYOSHA. The bourgeoisie must shed tears non-stop. It's good for them to cry some now.

SERENA. Oh, Alyosha, Bolshevism is so nice, everything is so cheerful and so hard here! Hug me with Bolshevik masculinity I..

ALYOSHA (*pushing Serena away*). Not interesting. You're bourgeois, girl.

OPORNYKH. Eh... Can I whadyamacall-it, Ignat Nikanoro-vich—can I barf. I've still got some left in me...

GODOVALOV (*imploringly*). Ignat Nikanorovich, I'll only chuck a little of the excess out of my mouth—I just took too much of the food...

FIRST OFFICE WORKER. Comrade Shoev, allow me to take me day off now. I have already been happy enough for one evening!

SHOEV. Shut up! Get yourselves used to holding it in—you will open up a new epoch of brilliant food. The entire world is developing thanks to your torment and stick-to-it-iveness. (*Pensively.*) Patience. That's the reason that time moves on.

EVSEI (*to the guests*). Enough of this pretending!..

Kuzma (outside the window, weeps, liquid drips down his iron face).

MYUD (*outside the window*). Alyosha, take us in. We feel dismal. Nature is Fascist out here. The wind's blowing on me and Kuzma is crying.

ALYOSHA (*coming to his senses*). Myud! (*He drags her in through the window. Then Kuzma. Kuzma rumbles.*)

The guests all turn around, faces to the walls, wracked by the nausea. Kuzma eats the leftovers of the food from the leaders'

stock. The clock chimes.

STERVETSEN (*to Shoev*). Mr. Chief! We would like very much for you to make all Pan-Europe rejoice, if only you will release the hot spirit of your state superstructure to us.

Kuzmagoes off into the toilet.

SERENA. Or at least sell us a line... Papa, that would be cheaper, just a line!

SHOEV (*pensively*). You want to take over our spirit of enthusiasm?!

EVSEI (*to Shoen*). Let us go, Ignat Nikanorovich, without any limits. We need barrels, not spirit.

SHOEV. What! We've got many, many directives for enthusiasm, almost an overstock.

The sounds of Kuzma throwing up in the toilet with iron noises—and the guests, after Kuzma, simultaneously do the same thing.

SHOEV (*turning his attention to the guests*). Go on and go to bed. Tomorrow is a working day. (*The guests disappear. Remaining are Shoen, Evsei, Stervetsen, Serena, Myud, Alyosha, the fireman and the policeman.*) Well, we can unload a few ideological lines to you, but only for hard currency!

An explosion of collective nausea off-stage.

EVSEI. They busted, the suckers. They lie—they'll get used to it.

POLICEMAN and FIREMAN (*smiling*). They don't have any stick-to-it-iveness.

End of Act II, Scene 1

ACT TWO SCENE TWO

The stage is set up with its former set. Myud is sleeping on the counter, hugging Kuzma. Evsei is dozing in a chair. Serena is sleeping on a desk. Shoen, Alyosha and Stervetsen are sitting up at the table. Through the windows one can see the stars over the region.

SHOEV. You pay cheap, Mr. Bourgeois Scientist. If it were not a very perishable product, or if the storage price were better, but no!.. Do you know where we have to keep these directive lines?

STERVETSEN. I do not have that fact at my disposal. Comrade Chief.

SHOEV. If you don't have any idea, don't bargain... What do you think anyway—that we keep our superstructure in a barn or in bales? What do you think this is

—like hiring a guard at the lowest price, paying him 24, buying him galoshes for the winter and that's all there is to it? Oh, you devil of an interventionist!

KUZMA (*sleeping*). The Roman Pope... Shhnakes...

SHOEV. You're right, Kuzma, 100% right... You, Mr. Agent of the Bourgeoisie...

STERVETSEN. I'm not an agent, I am a cultural figure in Europe.

SHOEV. It makes no difference—you're no figure at all once you've come into our periphery. Now I'm the figure... And you just go and calculate how much the storage fees are for every idea! Calculate that: we store it in millions of tempered personalities, every figure, every personality must be preserved, protected from decay, worked over so that the air doesn't spoil in it, and the directive therefore get infected—all this not to mention having to feed them all! It's the most fragile of goods, Mr. Scientist, not just a mushroom!

EVSEI (*asleep*). With mushrooms, Ignat Nikanorovich, or will there be too little trouble?

SHOEV. Moreover, calculate the structure of every line!..

STERVETSEN. Do you mean to say that your soul is made like some industrial product?

SHOEV. The superstructure *is* the soul, you fool! The superstructure over the relation of material!!! Of course we make it here!

In our REGIONCONSUMUNION it took three years to produce a single ideological resolution: 40,000 share-holders were put to work on their feet so that the principal directive could be carried out. Fourteen mass companies were shifted to the work! Thirty-seven senior instructors were thrown over into the depth of membership for a year and a half! Two hundred fourteen sessions with a mean number of 7,000 eater-souls present were held. And besides that, there were general open meetings where a total of millions piled up! That's what the construction of just a single line costs us! And you want to purchase an entire superstructure! You haven't got a banner big enough in all of Europe for it! And how are you going to pack it? You just aren't a suitable international figure...

KUZMA. ...Pope of Rome...

SHOEV. He's no good, Kuzma. He's a pitiful opportunist-schematic. (*Pensively.*) Schematic! A rotten simplifier of Jesus Christ's line, that's all.

ALYOSHA. Comrade Shoev. Let me take it to them. So much revolutionary spirit lies inside of me! I keep feeling the future ahead. I'm wracked by pains from the dreariness of foreign capitalism!

STERVETSEN. I don't understand... I eat food, but my soul is what's alive. In the West our hearts are all quiet inside—but here, in your country, the soul in your chest is a shockworker, out of sheer joy. The poor intelligentsia wants your souls. We're asking for a cheaper price, we're having a depression, and it's so sad in our heads...

SHOEV. I sympathize. But what can be done with you if you're a beggar?! Here we have to control the ruble, brother of mine.

KUZMA. ...Agreement with capitalism is necessary.

ALYOSHA. Lie down, Kuzma, better be quiet. I made you after all.

MYUD (*sleeping*). Don't wake me up, Kuzma. I'm having a dream.

SHOEV. Kuzma, I know what's got to be done. I don't want to, but we have to. This interventionist devil simply won't understand that what's going on here is the construction of conscious giants—resolutions. And he wants to buy them for peanuts. Our entire Kuzbas complex would be cheaper and more expendable than the refinement of our coop charter!.. Evsei!

EVSEI (*asleep*). Eh?

SHOEV. How much did the construction of the charter for the region cost us?

EVSEI. Just a moment, Ignat Nikanorovich. Eh, eh... according to Document No. 48/11, 40,000 and some kopeks, not counting the expenses for the per diem living of the meetings...

SHOEV (*to Stervetsen*). There, you see! And you want to buy a line! Better to

buy a simple directive—that I'll let go cheap...

STERVETSEN. Can you? Is your enthusiasm in that too?

SHOEV. We don't sell rejects! Your merchandising bourgeoisie doesn't complain about us.

STERVETSEN. And how much wherewithal do you need for one?

SHOEV. Evsei!

EVSEI (*dozing*). Eh!

SHOEV. How much can we let a simple directive go for— counting all our expenses?

EVSEI. For 37 rubles apiece, Ignat Nikanorovich! The cost of a suit of average administrative cut...

STERVETSEN. I do have some suits!..

EVSEI. Let's see them !

ALYOSHA (*to Evsei*). Don't take it from him. It would be better if I gave you my pants and shirt!

EVSEI. Sit on your duds. Your fabric isn't hard-cash stuff.

ALYOSHA. I'll beat you with my bare hands, you devils!.. A comrade wants to wrap himself up in our idea, and you...

EVSEI. And we undress him, so that he will wrap himself in it and be cleansed!

SHOEV. Alyosha, calm down your psychology, this is not a privately-owned institution.

STERVETSEN. Serena!

SERENA. Ya?

STERVETSEN. Where's our wardrobe?

SERENA. Just a moment. Papa. *(Gets up and goes to the corner where there are two suitcases. Evsei operates on these suitcases with her.)*

ALYOSHA *(to Shoev)*. You're not selling an idea, you're selling bureaucracy for money—I'll go and tell the Party!

SHOEV. You're 100% right. Let bureaucracy go to the bourgeoisie—let them have to itch themselves for a while. *(Pensively.)* Bureaucracy... We'll foist it off on capitalism, and that'll be the end of Fascism. Otherwise, they'll be afraid of our wood forests, the

simpleton devils! Let them be glad we're letting them have living wood stuff, otherwise we'd make paper out of the wood, and we know how to make a soul out of that paper, and would let that soul loose on them - then they'd cry...

Meanwhile Evsei has thrown off his pants and quilt jacket and dressed up in the foreign suit.

EVSEI *(takes a folder of papers, gives one paper to Stervet-sen, opens a place in the folder)*. Sign a receipt.

STERVETSEN *(signs the receipt and takes the paper, then reads)*. "Circular. On the principles of achieving enthusiasm through self-stimulation." I love this. Let us have your mood too!

EVSEI. That's possible. Ignat Nikanorovich, there's a blouse there for your old lady...

SHOEV. Take it easy, Evsei. My old lady's a living creature too.

Evsei takes a colored blouse out of the suitcase and throws it on Shoev's table.

STERVETSEN *(again signs a receipt, reads)*. "Specific notes on the charter on cultural work." I'm very happy!..

SHOEV. Well there, you see? Study, feel, and you'll become a decent class person.

STERVETSEN. Thanks!

KUZMA (*getting up part way, ejects a paper from his innards, the one the circuit postman gave him, and he hands it to Stervetsen*). There!

STERVETSEN (*taking the document*). I thank you...

KUZMA. Give, shhnake...

STERVETSEN. Please do, here. (*He takes the little opened suitcase up to Kuzma.*)

Kuzma takes a colored vest, pants, and calms down.

ALYOSHA (*to Shoev*). Why is it, Comrade Shoev, I look at you, at almost everyone—and my heart aches? SHOEV. It's not tempered yet, so it aches.

KUZMA. ...there's no peace... eclectics... SHOEV. Precisely, Kuzma, there is no peace. I don't sleep

nights, and they tell me I have too little tempo... I want to extract tenderness from the superstructure, but they inform me: rejoice in your own self... I feel so dreary, Kuzma!

KUZMA. ...Hurtling toward the future... Shhnakes...

Myud stirs and opens her eyes.

SHOEV. Hurtling, Kuzma!.. Lord, Lord, if only, if only You existed!..

EVSEI (*rummaging through the suitcases*). There's other good stuff left here, Ignat Nikanorovich! Maybe we can sell a smallish line for hard-currency goods?..

SHOEV. We can, Evsei... After all, we can stand without a line. And if we do fall down, we'll just go on living while lying down. O, it would be good to live lying down now!

ALYOSHA. Why not sell them the whole superstructure at once! We can spare it—our soul will grow out of the leftovers!

SHOEV. You're right, Alyosha, and where are we to get it, the superstructure, so

we can have one package for one invoice?

ALYOSHA. It is all inside you, in its entirety, Comrade Shoev! You are the most precise man in the entire region!.. But we have no superstructure—we are the lower mass. You say that yourself.

SHOEV. Well, maybe so... I *do* feel something really great in me all the time—only I don't say the right thing.

STERVETSEN. We need your *feeling* too!

MYUD. Alyosha, sell Shoev—he's a bastard of socialism.

ALYOSHA (*softly*). I've realized that all along, Myud. Meantime, you keep lying there asleep.

SHOEV. That's true too, Evsei. Sell my soul for the USSR! 0, I'd kill myself for socialism. Let him be satisfied—let the children remember me!.. 0, Evsei, I've a desire to be doomed—then the whole international proletariat will weep for me!.. The melancholy music will resound all across Europe and the miscellaneous world too... For the sonofabitch bourgeoisie will devour the soul of the proletariat for hard currency!

EVSEI. They'll devour it, Ignat Nikanorovich, and steal our enthusiasm. And without you the entire USSR will be left an utter orphan, and what will we do then? Who will be our chief without you?.. (*He twists his face to cry, but he cannot produce any tears, and in his sadness he puts on the pince-nez from the pocket of the foreign suit which he has already put on from Stervetsen's suitcase.*)

SHOEV. Yes, maybe you're right, Evsei!.. Think all this through and report on it later...

ALYOSHA. There's nothing to think through. Jack up the price some more for the bourgeoisie to buy your whole body, in which your ideological soul pulsates!.. Or have you fallen out of love with our republic, you bastard?

STERVETSEN (*to Shoev*). Well, please, I beg you... If the superstructure is... the psyche of joy... for you... I ask you to invigorate Europe with the whole heart of

your culture. Come over to our world!

SHOEV. To be your chief, or what?

STERVETSEN. You inform correctly. We need your complete undertaking of culture.

Serena, frightened, mutters something incomprehensible in French as she sleeps.

SHOEV. The young lady's afraid of something.

EVSEI. There's no line, that's why she's afraid. Class consciousness is decaying...

ALYOSHA. Go on. Comrade Shoev! Ask for a million!

SHOEV. I'm a bit more expensive than that sum. What do you think, Evsei?

EVSEI. I have posed the problem and thought it over: Ignat Nikanorovich, as our superstructure-in-chief, you must remain in the USSR, because the USSR is more valuable than all the rest of the rotten earth...

SHOEV. You're right, Evsei!

ALYOSHA. Both of you should go to some other world— you're cheaper than anyone else here as far as we're concerned...

EVSEI. Hold on, Alyosha, before you go too far... I suspect that we can quickly find a suitable ideological figure among our shareholders. We'll let the person chosen go to Fascism and give it the required mood. It's a trivial matter for us—all they want is spirit, and spirit is nothing. We've got nowhere to put spirit—all we need is materialism!

SHOEV. Opornykh? Maybe he should go?

EVSEI. Maybe Petka? He's a fool, so he's dear to us...

SHOEV. Then Godovalov.

EVSEI. An untempered figure. He's always happy about something.

SHOEV. Maybe a female?

EVSEI. They'll lower the price then, Ignat Nikanorovich, it's not worth it.

SERENA (*in her sleep*). Oh, Papa, Papa, I love Soviet Alyosha so much. I can't wake up from our sadness...

STERVETSEN. Sleep, little girl!

SERENA. But Papa, that is as rare as life—it happens only once..

EVSEI. Well, the fool found herself a line!

SHOEV. Well, who shall we send with this spiritual load?

KUZMA. A quiet, sensible element...

SHOEV (*to Kuzma*). He thinks almost the way I do. Let's send a quiet, sensible element.

EVSEI. Meantime, lie down and take a rest, Ignat Nikanorovich. And tomorrow we'll gather the shareholders and set up an auction for the best ideology. And we'll send somebody, some element or other!

SHOEV. You're really smart, Evsei! Goodbye, Mr. Bourgeois Scientist. Goodbye, Kuzma!

KUZMA. ...Sleep... Activist!..

SHOEV. Kuzma, are you alive, or what?

KUZMA. Yes, almost... Like you...

MYUD. Alyosha, in my dream I see only the bourgeoisie and kulaks. You and I are the only ones not there!

ALYOSHA. Strike them down, Myud, in your dream too... Where are they?

EVSEI. Citizens, please be quiet. Socialist construction is in progress here. Give me a chance to sell the professor our line!..

MYUD (*bumping into Kuzma on the floor*). Away from me, you opportunist!
You stand for them!

Kuzma clanks onto the floor. The region clock strikes. End of Act II, Scene 2

ACT THREE

The same establishment, but deserted, stripped of mechanical apparatus. A shareholders' meeting is in progress. All of the people who were at the tasting ball, plus ten other sundry persons are present. A rostrum. At the rostrum are Shoev and Evsei. The two of them, as well as Opornykh, Godovalov, Klokotov, are wearing foreign suits. Moreover, Shoev has on horn-rimmed glasses. Evsei has on the pince-nez. Kuzma is wearing the foreign vest and pants—and looks quite human. On the other hand, Stervetsen and Serena are now dressed very badly: the professor in a typhus-yellow work-jacket, quilted pants of a paramilitary type, and a Soviet cap; his daughter wears a calico cook's housecoat, and on her head a provincial shawl. At the moment when the act begins, the meeting has already been going on for a long time. Noise.

SHOEV (*smoking a cigar, pensively, in suddenly fallen silence*). There's no one. All are tempered, in every one of them there is a storm of something radiant, and still—they're obviously inadequate. Petya, how are things in your soul?

OPORNYKH. Why things is OK in it, Ignat Nikanorovich. And besides...eh... I feel things is good.

SHOEV. And what do you think, Godovalov?

GODOVALOV. I'm already happy, Ignat Nikanorovich, I don't think.

EVSEI. Maybe we should send the girl Myud?

SHOEV. Even that, Evsei. Girl!!! What's your mood?

MYUD. I'm definitely against!

SHOEV. Against what?

MYUD. Against you. You. Because you're a bastard, a halle-luia-nik, a right-left

element, you've tormented the whole local mass, you don't have any barrels, you're a snake in the grass of the lower class—that's what you are!.. Alyosha, I feel so dreary here, I keep crying... Let's get out of here and go to socialism!

ALYOSHA. Wait, Myud. I'll manage to kindle some enthusiasm in them yet! Or else I'll extinguish them for all time!

MYUD. Better extinguish them for all time... Because at night I keep hearing hammers and wheels thundering in the distance, and nails too!.. I want shock-workism, Alyosha, and for things to be wearisome from difficulty!..

KUZMA. Vote unanimously... Instill!..

SHOEV. Never mind that, Kuzma. We haven't formed an opinion yet...

GODOVALOV. Ignat Nikanorovich, why not sell Evsei Ivanovich to the bourgeoisie—he's a really expensive man!

EVSEI. Vasya! Shut up before I reelect you!

FIRST OFFICE WORKER. Ignat Nikanorovich! Tell me to and I will! I haven't said anything about it, but I've been in a cultural relay-race, and the opulent charm of spirit is something I've been concealing. I am madly in love with competition with Europe!..

SHOEV (*pensively*). Oh, women, women—why are you fat from the bottom up and not from the top down?! Evsei, think of something, for God's sake, you can see that I've had it.

EVSEI. I've already done so, Ignat Nikanorovich! We'll send Kuzma!

SHOEV. What do you mean, Evsei? He's just an idea!

EVSEI. That's exactly what we're selling, Ignat Nikanorovich, an idea! A superstructure! A trifle over the base! And Kuzma is a hard man, a tempered man, almost a man of reason.

MYUD. Alyosha, let them sell him. I don't feel sorry for Kuzee. I'm sorry for the Five-Year-Plan in four years.

SERENA. Papa, have them give us Alyosha! He is a superstructure!

MYUD (*throws herself on Serena*). You idiot of capitalism! Alyosha would upset all of Europe!

SERENA. O, I'm already upset...

SHOEV. Kuzma! We'll send you to the bourgeoisie, as freight, and you will be there as the ideology of their culture!.. Can you be alive?

KUZMA. ...I cannot live!.. Shhnakes...

SHOEV. What's wrong?

KUZMA. I don't want to live. I'll make a mistake alive... I want to remain iron...

SHOEV. Pitiful element!

EVSEI. He's afraid of losing his hardness, Ignat Nikanorovich. Afraid of falling into groundless optimism and rolling off into a deviation with all his convictions. He really is a man of reason!

SERENA (*pointing to Kuzma*). Who is that, Alyosha?

ALYOSHA. He has become a bourgeois toy.

SERENA. A shock-worker?

ALYOSHA. He shocks us now. We purposely invented him to carry out educational work...

MYUD. Kuzee is a bastard... An opportunist.

OPORNYKH. Eh... Who is she, anyways?

ONE OF THE SHAREHOLDERS. Ignat Nikanorovich, allow me to go and make Europe decay!

OPORNYKH. Eh... maybe, Ignat Nikanorovich, maybe it's only here that we're poor at ideologicalness, and maybe there we'd straighten out?

STERVETSEN. I excuse myself and greet you... But if this sale causes you nothing but a deficit...

EVSEI. That's true. Scientist. Your price is red ink for us. Add something on!

STERVETSEN. We had virtually agreed...

SHOEV. You figured right, Evsei. Let the additional price be this man himself. Harness him until the end of the Five-Year-Plan, as a scientific cadre.

EVSEI. He'll fly away, Ignat Nikanorovich!

SHOEV. And we'll... here's what we'll do for him... We'll make him sign...

GODOVALOV. Marry him off, that's all you have to do. Our Evdokia is walking around loose. Have him fall in love with Evdokia.

SHOEV. Evdokia!

Evdokia emerges from the mass.

SHOEV (*pointing to Stervetsen*). Can you love a foreigner?

EVDOKIA. Sure, why not?

SHOEV (*to Stervetsen*). There's a creature for you—get along for a couple of years with her, then I'll divorce you. Now kiss each other!

Evdokia grabs Stervetsen first and kisses him.

EVSEI. And what about the daughter, Ignat Nikanorovich? After all, she'll get lonely!

SHOEV. Just a moment... Alyosha, hug this bourgeois baby. Love her for the common good.

Serena wants to come up to Alyosha.

ALYOSHA (*jumps up on the rostrum*). I'll go to the bourgeoisie myself. An ideological soul is surging within me constantly...

(To Stervetsen.) What will you give the USSR for our superstructure?

EVSEI. How much will you pay us, cash, for accomplishing a revolution?

SERENA. The dirigible, Alyosha!

ALYOSHA (*happy*). The dirigible!!! In it the proletariat can rise high above the whole indigent earth!.. To get a machine like that I'll agree to burn in Europe!

STERVETSEN. I don't understand...

SERENA. Papa, Alyosha loves me...

OPORNYKH. Why her? We need a dirgble shaped like a barrel. We don't got no barrels now!

GODOVALOV. I'd get an opinion to buy transport for it.

ONE OF THE SHAREHOLDERS. What do we need an idea for? We already understand everything, we've become aware of everything a long time ago. Universal questions are trifles.

MYUD. And me, Alyosha, who does that leave me with? I will die from opportunism...

ALYOSHA. Never mind, Myud. I'll liquidate it right now. Kuzma?

KUZMA (*from the middle of the gathering*). Eh?

ALYOSHA. Do you want to end for all time?

KUZMA. I want peace. Dead men please everyone.

Alyosha brings Kuzma to the front of the meeting. He takes a crescent wrench out of his pocket, a screwdriver and other tools. He unscrews Kuzma's head and throws it away.

OPORNYKH. Eh...eh... I'll take that head. I can make a tea cup out of it... (*Takes Kuzma's head for himself.*)

Alyosha extracts a primus from Kuzma's chest, a radio apparatus, etc., simple

objects. Then he cuts up the whole body into several parts—the elements of Kuzma fall onto the ground with clanks and nickels pour out; from the depths of the murdered iron body a cloud of yellow smoke appears and floats upward. The pieces of scrap iron are left on the floor. Everyone watches the cloud of dissipating yellow smoke.

MYUD (*looking at the smoke*). Alyosha, what's that? ALYOSHA. Used gas. Opportunism.

MYUD (*melancholically*). Let it go. One can't breathe it anyhow.

STERVETSEN. I'm sorry about the demise of citizen Kuzma. In Europe we need an iron spirit.

Klokotov comes out with a bag and puts the remains of Kuzma in it.

ALYOSHA. Don't feel man, scientific man. I can make iron out of you too.

STERVETSEN. I'm far from objecting.

SHOEV. Opomykh, Petya!

OPORNYKH. Here, Ignat Nikanorovich!

SHOEV. Take Kuzma and put him in the region recycling yard, counting him in our plan.

OPORNYKH. Right away, Ignat Nikanorovich. (*Hurries to do his job.*)

SHOEV (*to Alyosha*). And what is this anyway? —You think up opportunists, dear comrade? You want to ruin the masses?

ALYOSHA. Yes, Comrade Shoen... I accidentally... I wanted to make a hero, but he was broken...

SHOEV. Broken?! Lots of things break! Now you just turn in a declaration that you have admitted your mistake. But you consider your declaration obviously insufficient, and admit that you are a class enemy.

EVSEI. Yes, yes... Why you! The hero was broken! You mean to tell us heroes

can be broken?

Alyosha bows his head sorrowfully.

MYUD. Don't cry, Alyosha. You close your eyes, and I'll lead you to socialism as a blind man. And we'll be alone again together to sing in the collective farms about the Five-Year-Plan, about shock-workers, about everything that is in our hearts.

ALYOSHA. No... I made an opportunist. Now my soul aches sadly.

EVSEI. Turn in the declaration. Write that you feel mute anguish.

SHOEV. Confess—it lightens the burden.

ONE OF THE SHAREHOLDERS. Death to the traitor of the interests of our social layer!

FIRST OFFICE WORKER. Oh, this is terrible!.. That unofficial musician turned out to be a compromiser, he oversimplified our

VOICES FROM THE MEETING:

—A nightmare! I said there would be intervention...

—His papers! Check his papers!.. Grab him by the papers!

—Surround them with the impenetrable unity of our ranks!

—That is a formal error—he has to recant his ugliness!..

—Give him a whack, you who are closest to him!

—He's a wrecker, he wants to break the class apparatus!

—Fascist! Let me get at him! Give me the face of that class enemy!

—O, the highest hate is storming within us! And the main thing is—it is hate in a common breast!

—What fun, you mothers!

—It's interesting to live in an establishment like this now! You fairly tremble with feelings!

—Members of the actors circle, come over here!

—Seren, what is this? I am puzzled again...

—Ah, Papa, this is drifting intrigue!..

—Eh... Whatsyername... Alyoshka— you're a shit!

—But you know, all the time, just all the time, even when they were performing the abortion on me, I kept feeling that our work here was somehow unsuccessful... I even said that to the doctor during the operation. I'm amazed myself!

—Ooh, I love these dangers!

—You're a very nice man. It's only in relation to women that you're capable of baseness.

—Of course, not in relation to the state!

—Establish a punitive undertaking for the traitors!

—Ah, ah-ah, come one, come on, come on, give it to him hotter!.. Good fun, you sons of bitches!

—Now, comrades, we have to close ranks!

—Keep on eye on each other!

—Don't trust anyone!

—For the good of your work—consider yourself a wrecker!

—Punish yourselves, even on your days off I

—More torments, more pangs of conscience, more sorrow for your class,

comrades!

—The highest degree!

—Hurrah!

SHOEV. Silence, raw element!..

Alyosha stands there surrounded by universal hostility; he feels lost and in pain. He does not know how he can go on living.

SHOEV (*cold-bloodedly*). It's sufficient if a person repents in writing his honest mistake.

EVSEI. What's important for us is to receive a document in the proper form, nothing else. According to the document—he will correct himself mechanically!

SHOEV. You're right, Evsei! (*Pensively.*) A document!.. How much pensiveness there is in that word! Eternal memory to the thoughts of humanity!

ALYOSHA. I was an individualistic talent...

EVSEI. You're a gift from God, but there is no God...

ALYOSHA. Why couldn't I have become iron! I would have been faithful to you forever!

EVSEI. You had no hardness; tenderness did you in.

ALYOSHA. You're right all around! But I am a nothing, I no longer exist in this organized world.

EVSEI. You didn't have enough discipline, your little line was crumbled.

ALYOSHA. I thought randomly. I am uncultured, my feelings were unchannelled, and I often cried from nothing more than sad music...

SHOEV. You invented without guidance, and your inventions worked backwards. Where were you before—if I had been your chief!..

ALYOSHA. I confess I am in error, a two-faced hypocrite, a compromiser, and a mechanist to boot. But don't believe me... Maybe I am the mask of the class enemy! But you think rarely and precisely, you are the most intelligent members! And I imagined that you were somehow tedious, that you were moving along in a wave of self-generated motion, that you were bureaucratic bastards, kulak agents, Fascism. Now I see that I was an opportunist, and melancholy overtakes my mind...

MYUD. Alyosha! Now I'm all alone! *(She turns away from all and covers her face with her hands.)*

SHOEV. It's all right, Alexei, we'll work you into shape.

SERENA. Papa, what is this? Alyosha, don't be afraid!

STERVETSEN *(to Shoev and Evsei)*. I reject a deal for this *(points to Alyosha)* psychology. It would be a reject, not the needed

superstructure. Only hot and selfless heroes are useful to us! I make a note of this reject.

EVSEI. You've caused us red ink, Alyosha!

ALYOSHA. I am a pitiful blunderer, but you—you are leaders.

SHOEV. We're quite aware of that. We guide and we make the final accounting.

MYUD. Why are you this way, Alyosha?

ALYOSHA. I'm reconciled to the facts, Myud.

MYUD. Why are you afraid of this rotten layer? I'll be an orphan without you. I can't pick up a barrel organ by myself or get to socialism in such a fever alone!.. Alyosha, Comrade Alyosha!..

Alyosha weeps, all are silent.

SHOEV. The tenderness in him is creeping outside too. The son of a bitch couldn't save it for the future.

Myud takes the revolver out of her blouse. She aims the muzzle at Shoev and Evsei.

MYUD. You're done for!

Evsei immediately, silently, and abundantly cries; his entire face is covered with flowing tears. Shoev looks at Evsei and Myud in disbelief.

OPORNYKH. Th-th.. Evsei Ivanovich... You mean you do have tears after all? You ain't never cried in all your born days!

MYUD. You're done for! You are going to ruin socialism!.. Better if I ruin you permanently!

SHOEV. Right now, Comrade Woman. I'll give you a piece of paper, I'll write a declaration that I renounce my mistakes...

EVSEI (*in a tiny, childish voice*). We have no ink, Ignat Nikanorovich. Ask the Comrade Girl to wait a while. We'll give her a receipt that we're agreed to be done for...

SHOEV. I want something sad - Alyosha, play us a march...

MYUD. Hurry it up, my arm is getting tired.

SHOEV. Evsei, hold up the citizeness's arm.

Evsei rushes over to Myud. Myud shoots at him. Evsei falls and lies there motionlessly. Myud aims the revolver at Shoev.

The meeting instinctively takes a step toward Myud. MYUD. Easy there! We haven't time to dig graves! *The meeting comes to a halt.*

SHOEV. In the name of the shareholders, I express gratitude to the Comrade Woman for the death of this (*points to Evsei*) secret snake...

MYUD (*to Shoev*). I didn't give you the floor.

SHOEV. Excuse me. But then allow me to be sad... Alyosha, rip me off

something from the musical tunes!

OPORNYKH. Right now, Ignat Nikanorovich! Where's that whadyamacallit? *(He disappears, reappears with the barrel organ, hands it to Alyosha.)* Please, for God's sake!

EVSEI *(lying there)*. Something's wrong, Ignat Nikanorovich, I simply can't get done for.

SHOEV. Well, Evsei, just do it little by little. Don't hurry, you'll manage somehow. What's wrong—reluctant to die?

EVSEI. Well, since I'm a snake, as you said, I'll just have to, Ignat Nikanorovich. Only see that you don't get lonely without me.

SHOEV. We won't, Evsei. Alyosha, give us something with melody.

Alyosha starts turning the music out softly. Plays a mournful song, then quiets down a bit and plays just audibly.

SHOEV. Somehow I feel sorry again! Citizeness, at least let me write a declaration that I sympathize with everyone.

Evsei-sighs noisily from the floor.

FIRST OFFICE WORKER. Evsei Ivanovich is sighing. EVSEI. I forewarn you—without me there's going to be a gap in construction...

OPORNYKH. What's his trouble? He's killed, but he sympathizes.

MYUD. My arm is dying. I'll have to shoot now. ALYOSHA *(starts singing in tune with the music)*. Along a hard and happy road We march, barefoot...

MYUD. Something else, Alyosha, something else, the snake! It's not painful or fun for you now. Do this one!.. *(The music stops: Myud drops her arm and sings in utter silence.)*

Who will open the doors for me?

Alien birds and beasts?

And where are you, my comrade?

Alas, I do not know! EVSEI (*from the floor*). Maybe I could be your comrade? I'll become a shockworker, I'll sign up as an enthusiast, I'll have permanent zeal!.. I'll organize some barrels!

The meeting picks up the song and sings to the barrel organ:

And where are you, my comrade? Alas, I do not know!

SHOEV (*cries through horn-rimmed glasses*). I want to die!!!

The noise of birds, the noise of waterfalls—in the distance, outside the establishment. The crackling roar of a motorcycle. The agent from the State Collective Farm runs in.

AGENT. Mobilize the masses for me at once! I'm driving the birds and fish back into the economy!.. What are you doing?

SHOEV. Don't be afraid of difficulties, comrade, drive them by yourself.

AGENT. What?

EVSEI. Maybe I can drive them? Animals are afraid of me.

MYUD. Get moving...

Evsei, jumping up vivaciously, runs out. The agent also disappears after him.

OPORNYKH. Dead people try harder. All this is you know what—havin' a line!

STERVETSEN. Citizens of the Region, I am stunned by the presence of your spirit!.. I have a high opinion of your wandering girl, Myud!

SHOEV. Why don't you kill me, girl! Creature of little might! Are you afraid of bravery? (*Pensively.*) Bravery!.. It is a quality which makes me love my character!.. Fire, you murderer!

MYUD. I've already changed my mind. I'm afraid of falling into extremism.

SERENA. Papa, aren't you going to buy Alyosha now? STERVETSEN. No, he's fallen apart, Seren...

The meeting gradually settles down to go to sleep on the floor and the office equipment. Myud takes the barrel organ from Alyosha, gets it to the door on her back with some difficulty, at the door stops and looks around at the establishment. All of the people look at her vigilantly.

ALYOSHA. Goodbye, Myud! MYUD. Farewell, compromising snake!

The meeting members, still lying down, raise their arms in greeting to the girl who is leaving. Myud makes a fist at them and smiles.

MYUD. O you low-down slime!..

She opens the door.

STERVETSEN (*gets up from the floor and rushes to Myud*). Listen to me, little miss... Allow me to acquire you for Europe. *You are* the superstructure!

Myud laughs.

STERVETSEN. But I beg you. You are the mind and heart of all the regions of our land. The West will fall in love with you...

MYUD (*seriously*). No. I don't need love. I love myself.

STERVETSEN. Allow me to inquire—who is in your heart?

MYUD. Comrade Lenin.

THE MEETING (*almost in a chorus*). We hail you!

STERVETSEN. But your state has to have dirigibles, and we can provide an entire squadron of flying ships...

OPORNYKH. Take 'em, girl!

MYUD. Somehow I don't want to. For now we can live on foot.

STERVETSEN (*bowing*). I'm exceedingly sorry.

MYUD. Ask the proletariat of your own region.

STERVETSEN. I thank you.

Myud leaves. Silence.

SHOEV (*sighs*). How long, Lord!

OPORNYKH (*lying down among the members*). Eh, what's wrong, Ignat Nikanorovich? Ignat Nikanorovich, who will console us now?

SHOEV. Oh Petya, Petya-now I want sad things... Everything has been clear to me for a long time, and now I feel drawn to something which is somehow indefinite...

KLOKOTOV. Comrade Shoev, give us the current jobs please. The members are getting tired too. We have to get up early tomorrow and fulfill the plan.

FIRST OFFICE WORKER. No, no, what are you saying. All this is too interesting. We love creating difficulties.

STERVETSEN (*his face turning purple with rage*). Deceivers, grabbers, cheerleaders, aimless drifters... You don't have any line—just circulars. You don't have any superstructure—you're opportunists!.. Take your instructions (*he takes the papers out of his pockets and throws them into the air*), take your points and paragraphs—and give me back my suits, my slips, my glasses and other belongings!..

SERENA. Blouses, brassieres, stockings, overalls!..

Stervetsen and Serena jump on Shoev, Klokotov and tear their clothing off.

GODOVALOV (*to the First Office Worker*). Listen, didn't you exchange a copy of the upcoming plan for a foreign girdle?

FIRST OFFICE WORKER. I... But you took it away from me and gave it to your wife, and you said that she was born forty years ago to the day that day.

Remember?

KLOKOTOV. I forgot.

Shoev now without a jacket, vest and eyeglasses. Serena has managed to get everything off him. Meantime Stervetsen has stripped Klokotov virtually naked. When he is being stripped, Shoev reads one of the papers Stervetsen threw away, in an indifferent tone.

SHOEV. Citizens! Stop! It seems we no longer exist. *General attention. All of the people lying down get up.*

SHOEV (*reads*). "In the month of April this year your Sandy-Ravine Coop-System is being liquidated. The supply of produce and grain products is ceasing. Basis for this action: the specified population point is being removed so that we can exploit for industrial purposes the sub-surface of the land, in which there is natural gas." (*To the meeting.*) I don't understand. How can we have *been* when we've long since ceased to *be*?..

KLOKOTOV. So it must be we're breathing natural gas fumes, Ignat Nikanorovich! How are we to understand this: do you exist consciously, or from the fumes!

SHOEV (*pensively*). Natural gas fumes!.. There it is, the objective reason for the unconsciousness of this region's masses.

GODOVALOV. But what are we supposed to do now, Ignat Nikanorovich? After all, there are no objective reasons, people say, but there are only subjects?...

SHOEV. You say there are no objects?.. Then organize some self-criticism, if you are a subject...

GODOVALOV. Right away, Ignat Nikanorovich! (*Starts bustling around.*)

A pounding of axes. Several logs fall off the back (away from the audience) wall of the building. Two workers are seen working in the hole. Another part of the wall falls apart. The meeting lies down again, except for Stervetsen and Serena, who stand with the bunches of clothing they have taken away in their hands.

One of the workers puts some crane claws under the roof of the building and yells, "Hit the crane" (To the meeting.) "And they told us there was a clear space here, and there hadn't been anyone here for a long time. You've gotten in the way of our whole road. "

The upper part of the building is taken off into the sky, the remaining parts then collapse. The emptiness of the world is visible now—the infinite regional landscape. A pause. Then from the distance one can hear the barrel organ: somewhere the invisible, departing Myud is playing. The music is solemn. It touches men's feeling of dreariness. Myud sings far away:

To a distant land Wanderers intended to go. They left their Motherland For an unknown liberty; Alien to all-Comrades only to the wind... In their breasts beat hearts Which find no response...

A rumbling starts in Shoev's stomach, and he rubs his belly in hopes of quieting the noises. The members of the meeting lie there face down in silence. Stervetsen and Serena stand alone amid the liquidated and wrecked establishment.

SERENA. Papa, what is this anyway?

STERVETSEN. This is the superstructure of the soul, Seren.

SERENA. Over weeping Europe.

THE END (1932-35)
Proffer

Translated by Carl R.

STORIES

THE EPIFAN LOCKS

1

"My dear brother Bertrand,

The miracles of nature here are so ingenious, the untrodden stretches of country so vast, that they are unencompassable even by the most powerful intelligence, incomprehensible even to the most delicate sensibility. Can you visualize in your mind's eye the place where your brother is living, in the heart of this asiatic continent? I know that you cannot really imagine it. I know that your eyes are bewitched by the bustle of Europe, and by my native and populous Newcastle where there is always a fair number of ocean-going vessels around and where there is always something on which to rest your civilized gaze. The more homesick I grow for my own country, the greater my despair at this life in the wilds.

The Russians are gentle by nature, obedient and enduring in their heavy and lengthy labors, but they are gloomy and savage in their ignorance. My moustache is grown long from lack of civilized speech. I do nothing but give conventional signals to the foremen on the site and they pass on the orders in words to the workmen. The banks of every river are pleasantly overgrown with shipbuilding timber, and the plains are practically covered too. Wild beasts live here on equal terms with men and the peasants are very much afraid of them.

But then there is grain and beef here in plenty, and I have been consoled by the abundance of food, despite my homesickness for Newcastle.

This letter is not as long as my last one. The merchants bound for Azov, Kafu and Constantinople have already got their boats in order and are getting ready to sail. I shall send these lines with them so that they will get to Newcastle as quickly as possible. But the merchants are in a hurry to be off since the level of the Don may fall and then it will not be navigable to merchant ships. Besides, the request I have to make is small, and then the matter will be in your hands.

Tsar Peter is a very powerful man, for all his empty shouting and undisciplined behavior. His nature is like his country, su-

perficially as undisciplined as a creature of the wild, but underneath all this abundantly capable.

However, he is thoroughly well-disposed towards foreign marine engineers and incredibly generous to them.

I have constructed a two chamber lock with a coffer-dam at the mouth of the River Voronezh, which means that ships can be repaired on dry land without too much damage being done. I have also built a substantial coffer-dam and a gated lock large enough to release the water. Then another lock with two large gates big enough for large ships to go through, so that they can be shut in at any time in the space bounded by the coffer-dam, and the water can be let out when the ships are inside.

All that took sixteen months. And then another job turned up. Tsar Peter was pleased with my work and ordered another lock to be built further up stream so as to allow ships with up to 80 cannon to go up the Voronezh as far as the town. And I have worked at that for ten months and never once left the site while there was light enough to see, although the bottom was weak where the dam was to be and there were powerful springs around. These springs were too powerful for our German pumps and we could not make any progress for six weeks because of them. Then we made an engine which would clear out twelve barrels of water a minute. That was in continuous use for eight months, and at last we got down dry to the bottom of the foundation pit.

After all this exhausting work the tsar kissed me and gave me a thousand silver rubles, which is money worth having. And then he told me that Leonardo da Vinci, the inventor of locks, could not have done better.

But what I am really coming to, my dear brother Bertrand, is that I want you to come to Russia. They are very generous to engineers here, and Peter is always thinking of some engineering scheme. I have heard from him personally that he needs to construct a canal to join the Don and the Oka, two powerful rivers in this country.

The tsar wants to make a continuous waterway between the Baltic and Caspian seas, so as to control the great stretches of the continent as far as India, the Mediterranean lands and Europe. The tsar has given the most careful

consideration to the whole affair. But it is the nature of trade here which would really make sense of the project, since more or less all the merchants, you should realize, operate in Moscow or in the towns around Mos-

cow; yet the wealth of the country is disposed chiefly right in the heart of the continent, and there is no way out for it, except to join the great rivers by canals and to sail along them right from the Persians to St. Petersburg, and from Athens to Moscow, and up the Urals, to Lake Ladoga, to the Kalmyk Steppes and beyond.

But the tsar desperately needs engineers for such work. The canal between the Don and the Oka, for example, is no small matter — it will take a great deal of hard work and even more skill. So I have promised Tsar Peter that I would ask my brother Bertrand to come from Newcastle. As for me, I am tired out, and I love my sweetheart and miss her greatly. I have lived among savages for four years — and my heart is dried up and my reason dimmed.

When you get this letter send me your decision in the matter, but my advice is that you should come. You will find it hard, but you will go back to Newcastle with money to spare and you can live out your life in peace and plenty. And that is worth suffering for.

Tell my sweetheart Anna that I love her and long for her, and that I shall soon be home. Tell her my heart beats only for her and ask her to wait for me. And then farewell. Look affectionately on the gentle sea, on happy Newcastle, and on all our native England.

Your brother and fellow engineer, William Perry

8th August, 1708. "

2

Bertrand Perry arrived in St. Petersburg in the spring of 1709 with the first ships of the year.

He had made the voyage from Newcastle on the old ship "Mary," which had many times seen the ports of Australia and southern Africa.

Captain Sutherland shook Perry's hand and wished him good luck on his travels in that terrible land, and a speedy return to his native hearth. Bertrand thanked him and went ashore, to a strange town, to a vast land where there awaited him only hard work, loneliness, and, perhaps, an early death.

Bertrand was 33 but his gloomy, careworn face and gray temples made him look 45. He was met at the port by an envoy from the Russian emperor and by the English consul.

They parted after a few desultory words: the tsar's envoy went home to eat buckwheat porridge, the English consul went back to his office, and Bertrand went to the lodging appointed for him near the dock warehouses.

The lodging was clean, roomy and comfortable but so quiet and secluded as to be depressing. The unbroken sea wind beat against the Venetian window and the cold air from the window spoke to Bertrand even more depressingly of loneliness.

There was a sealed packet on the sturdy low table.

Bertrand opened it and read:

"By the command of the Tsar and Autocrat of All the Russias, the College of Sciences humbly begs the English marine engineer Bertrand Perry to visit the College of Sciences, whose premises are on Canal Prospect.

The tsar has personal surveillance over the progress of the scheme to join the rivers Don and Oka, via Lake Ivan, the River Shat and the River Upa, and it is therefore necessary to hurry the project along.

It is thus also important for you to appear at the College of Sciences as soon as possible, though of course allowing yourself time to rest after your journey so that you may be mentally and physically restored.

By command of the president, Chief Legal Secretary,

Henry Vortman"

Bertrand lay down on the wide German couch with the letter in his hand and

dropped off to sleep.

He was awakened by a storm blowing threateningly against the window. Damp thick snow was falling outside in the deserted gloom. Bertrand lit the lamp and sat at the table opposite the narrow window. But he had nothing to do and he fell to thinking.

He sat for a long time until the earth had long been overtaken by the slow night. From time to time Bertrand forgot where he was and turned round sharply, expecting to see his own room in Newcastle, or to see outside the warm and busy harbor

and the misty outline of Europe on the horizon. But the wind and the night and the snow outside, and the silence and the cold in his rooms, reminded Bertrand of the different latitudes of his present dwelling.

And the fact that he had been refusing to acknowledge for some time suddenly broke in upon his fantasy.

His twenty-year-old sweetheart, Mary, was now, no doubt, walking along the green ways of Newcastle with a sprig of lilac on her blouse. Perhaps another man was taking her by the hand and making her false but persuasive professions of love. If so it would remain forever unknown to Bertrand. It had taken him two weeks to get here and what might not have happened in Mary's fantastical and foolish heart in that time?

Anyway, could a woman really wait five or ten years for a husband, nourishing in her heart a love for an unseen figure? That could scarcely be.

If that could have been there would long ago have been nothing but nobility in the world.

Indeed, if one could have left such a trustworthy love behind, every man would have been willing to walk off, even to the moon.

Bertrand filled his pipe with Indian tobacco.

"However, Mary was right. What use would a merchant or a simple sailor be to her as a husband? She is very dear to me, and she is clever..."

Bertrand's thoughts rushed on, but they were quite orderly and coherent.

"You are incontrovertibly right, Mary dear... I remember the scent of grass around you. I remember your saying: I need a husband like the wandering Lysander, like the headstrong Tamburlaine or the indomitable Attila. And if he is to be a sailor, then let him be like Amerigo Vespucci... You are absolutely right: if a husband is to be dearer to you than life, then let him be more interesting and more unusual than life. With any other you would pine, and die of misery."

Bertrand spat out his wad of tobacco violently and said:

"Yes, Mary, you are too sharp for me. And I am certainly not worthy of such a wife. But how I love to stroke that lively little head! It is a joy to me that there should be such a keen mind under a woman's plait of hair. But we shall see! Why have I come to this miserable Palmyra. William's letter was not really the rea-

son, though it helped me to make up my mind..."

Bertrand felt cold and began to get ready for bed. Whilst he had been thinking of Mary, and carrying on an imaginary conversation with her, the blizzard raging over St. Petersburg had become even more ferocious, and brought up short against the buildings, had chilled Bertrand's rooms.

Bertrand dozed, wrapped in his blanket and with his heavy sea coat over that, and a vivid and penetrating grief, ceaseless and beyond all reasoning away, spread through his dry, powerful frame.

There was a sharp cry outside, as if some ship, struck by the ice, had cracked right across the planking. Bertrand opened his eyes and listened for a moment, but his mind had been distracted from grief and he fell fast asleep.

3

Next day at the College of Sciences Bertrand was given an outline of the tsar's scheme. The project had been barely started.

The tsar's assignment was, in effect, to create a continuous waterway between the Oka and the Don and by this means to link the whole Don region with Moscow and the Volga provinces. This required large lock and canal works and

it was for this part of the scheme that Bertrand had been summoned from Britain.

Bertrand spent the following week familiarizing himself with the exploratory data with whose aid the project was to be drafted. The documents turned out to be in good order, and had been compiled by experienced people: a French engineer, Major-General Truzson, and a Polish technical engineer. Captain Tsitsevsky.

Bertrand was pleased, because good exploratory data would make possible an early start on the actual work of construction. All the while he kept to himself the knowledge that he had been fascinated by Peter, even while he was still in Newcastle, and had wished to work with him in bringing civilization to this wild and secretive land. And after that Mary would surely wish to have him as a husband.

Lysander had fought, Vespucci had made voyages of discovery, but now there had come the age of construction — the skillful engineer had replaced the bloody warrior, and the weary traveler.

Bertrand worked incredibly hard, but happily — his grief at the parting from his sweetheart was dulled by work.

He continued to live in the same rooms, he did not attend either admiralty or state assemblies, he shunned the society of ladies and their husbands, although various society women tried to seek out the acquaintance of this lonely Englishman. Bertrand directed the work as he would have steered a ship — carefully, practically, and quickly, avoiding all theoretical shoals and sandbanks in his planning.

A draft scheme was completed early in July and the plans were copied up neatly. All the documents were conveyed to the tsar, who approved them, and ordered that Bertrand should be given a payment of 1,500 silver rubles, and appointed that he should henceforth be given a salary of 1,000 silver roubles a month, and that he should be put in charge of the construction of all locks and dams necessary to link the Don with the Oka.

At the same time Peter commanded that all the deputies and governors of the provinces in which dams and canals were to be built should provide any

facilities for Bertrand that he might require. Bertrand was also given the rank of General, and was answerable only to the Tsar and to the Commander-in-Chief of the army.

After the official business was over Peter stood and addressed Bertrand.

"Master Perry, I know your brother William, he is a hydro-engineer of incomparable skill who can devise wonderful systems to make good use of water power. But to you there is entrusted, as there was not to him, this most complex task by means of which we mean to link in perpetuity these most mighty rivers of our empire into one continuous waterway, which process will be of the greatest benefit both to peaceful trade and to military power. We are firmly resolved that by means of these constructions we shall enter into relations with the ancient kingdoms beyond the Volga and the Caspian, and we shall link our whole territory with the civilization of Europe. And we shall profit by this worldwide trade and our people will master foreign skills.

"I therefore charge you to set out upon this work at once — let there be a waterway!

"And whatever opposition you shall meet, send messengers at once to let me know - so that matters may be swiftly set to

rights. Here is my hand - your pledge. Hold firmly to your purpose, deal wisely with the task, and I know how to show my gratitude, but I know too how to flog those who neglect the good of the state or oppose the will of the tsar."

Here Peter went up to Bertrand with a speed unusual for one of his massive size and shook his hand.

Then Peter turned and went back to his own chambers, coughing and breathing heavily as he went.

The tsar's speech was translated to Bertrand and he was pleased by it.

Bertrand Perry's plan of attack was as follows: to build 33 dams of unworked limestone; to excavate a canal 15 miles long linking the River Shat at the village of Lyubovka to the Don at the village of Bobrikov; to dredge out and deepen the Don to navigable depths for a stretch of 75 miles from Bobrikov to the village of

Gai; and then to surround and protect both Lake Ivan out of which the Don flows and the whole canal with a rampart and earth dikes.

It was necessary, therefore, to construct in all 250 miles of waterway, one end of which would be in the Oka, and the other end of which would start with a 75 mile canal into the Don. The canal was to be 85 feet wide and 5 feet deep.

Bertrand was to supervise the work of construction from the town of Epifan in the province of Tula, because this town would be the central point for the work.

Five German engineers were also to go along with Bertrand, and ten clerks from the Department of Administration.

They were to set off on July 18th. The coaches for this wearisome and demanding journey were to appear at Bertrand's lodging at 10 o'clock, ready to follow the highroad to the insignificant town of Epifan.

4

The five Germans and Perry assembled for a large meal hoping to down enough food to last them for twenty-four hours. And they really did stuff their bellies full, in preparation for their long contemplation of the weary expanses of Russia which awaited them.

Perry was already putting a packet of tobacco into his travel

bag — always the last thing he did before any journey. The Germans were already finishing off their letters home, and the youngest of them, Karl Bergen, was breaking into a sob at the unbearable longing of his grief-stricken heart for the young wife whom he still loved.

But suddenly the door shook with a sharp knocking from some official hand — such a knocking as might come from a messenger sent either to make an arrest, or to announce some gracious act of the mighty tsar.

But this was a messenger from the State Post Office.

He asked for the English engineer, Bertrand Perry. And five freckled German hands pointed to the Englishman.

The messenger thrust his leg forward in an absurd pose and respectfully handed Perry a package with five seals.

"Sire, be so good as to accept this missive from the British State."

Perry went across to the window, away from the Germans, and opened the package:

"Newcastle 28th June

My dearest Bertrand,

You will not be expecting this news. I find it difficult to cause you any distress. Perhaps I still love you a little. But already there is a new love in my heart. And my wretched imagination strains to recapture your dear image which so possessed my heart before.

But you are both over-simple and cruel — you have sailed away to a distant land in order to gain gold; you have sacrificed my love and my youth, which expected only tenderness, in order to gain fame. I am a woman; without you I yield as easily as a twig, and I have given my life to another.

You remember Thomas Rice, my dearest Bertrand? He is now my husband. You will be angry, of course, but you must admit that he is a fine man, and he is very devoted to me. I refused him before and chose you. But you went away, and he consoled me in my unhappiness and my grief for you.

Don't be upset, Bertrand dear. You have all my sympathy. Did you really think that I needed an Alexander the Great for a husband? No, what I really need is someone who loves me and

whom I love, and then I don't mind if he does nothing but load coal at the docks, or work as a simple sailor, provided he sings songs about me across the oceans of the world. That, my foolish Bertrand, is what a woman needs.

I have already been married to Thomas for two weeks. He is completely happy and so am I. I think perhaps I am already with child. You see how quick this is. That is because Thomas and I love each other and he will not leave me, whereas you went off to seek a colony. You may keep your colony, for I have taken

Thomas.

Farewell. Do not grieve. And if you come back to Newcastle come and visit us, we shall be glad to see you. And if you should die, Thomas and I will grieve together.

Mary Carborund-Rice"

Perry read the letter through three times, unable to take it in. Then his eye lighted on the huge window — but it would be a pity to smash it, the glass had been bought for gold from Germany. Perhaps he should smash up the table — but there was no heavy instrument to do it with. Should he hit one of the Germans in the face — but they were so defenseless, and one of them had wept so bitterly. But even while Perry's fury raged, and he hesitated with his arithmetical calculations, his desire to commit some violent act passed.

"Herr Perry, there is something wrong with your mouth," the Germans told him.

"What's that?" Perry asked, his rage already passed, and feeling only grief.

"Wipe your mouth, Herr Perry."

Perry took his pipe out of his mouth with some difficulty, for he had bitten into the stem, and in gripping the pipe so tightly in his teeth had torn his gums so that they bled.

"What is wrong, sir? Bad news from home?"

"No, it is all over my friends..."

"What is all over, sir? Do tell us, please."

"It has stopped bleeding, and the gums will soon heal. Let us be on our way to Epifan."

The travelers made their way along the State Highway that goes through Moscow to Kazan, the Tatar route into old Russia along the right bank of the

Don. The travelers had to turn off the main highway to get to Epifan, their eventual stopping place, via the roads through Idov and Ordobazar.

The head winds and the fresh air blew the grief from Perry's heart.

He looked with awe on the countryside, which was so rich and at the same time so restrained, even miserly. They came through territory with fertile land all around, yet there was only spare vegetation there: slim, elegant birch and mournful, melodious aspen.

Even in summer the huge expanses were so empty that the place seemed not like some living creation but like a disembodied spirit. Occasionally the forest disclosed a modest little wooden church vaguely Byzantine in style. Perry even noticed near Tver signs of the Gothic style in one wooden chapel with its Protestant lenten poverty. And the warmth of his own country breathed for a moment upon Perry, the close, practical common sense of the faith of his fathers, which held all unearthly things vain.

The huge peat bogs on the edge of the forest held a great charm for Perry, and he could taste on his lips the incredible richness hidden in the dark earth.

Karl Bergen, the German who had wept over his letter in St. Petersburg, felt the same. In the open air he felt more alive, more excited, forgot about his young wife for a time, and explained to Perry, swallowing as he did so:

"England mines coal. But Russia digs peat. Isn't that so, Herr Perry?"

"That's right," said Perry turning away, and noting the terrific height of the sky over the continent, a height which was scarcely possible over the sea, or over the narrow island of Britain.

The travelers ate occasionally but well in the settlements along the way. Perry drank wooden-hooped jugs of kvass, which he enjoyed, and which helped to settle his digestion.

They passed through Moscow and the engineers long remembered the music of its bells and the silence of the empty towers at the corners of the Kremlin. Perry had particularly liked St. Basil's Cathedral, that strange striving of the spirit of the crude artist to

realize the subtlety and, at the same time, the rounded magnificence of the world which was given to man as a gift.

Sometimes great expanses of steppe and wastes of feather grass spread before them, with not a trace of a road.

"Where is the State Highway?" the Germans would ask the coach drivers.

"There it is," the drivers would say, indicating the empty space.

"But there isn't a thing to be seen," the Germans would exclaim, looking down at the bare earth.

"Well there's only one way for the road to go, so there's no need to tramp the earth down hard. It's just like this all the way to Kazan," the drivers would explain as well as they could to the foreigners.

"Well, that's marvelous," laughed the Germans.

"So it is," the drivers would agree in all seriousness. "It's easier to pick out that way, and it's wider. With the steppe before his eyes, a man is good and wise."

"Quite remarkable," said the Germans in astonishment.

"So it is," agreed the drivers, and laughed into their beards so that no one should feel hurt.

Very few people lived beyond Ryazan, a wretched, lowly and inhospitable town. Life there was cautious and withdrawn. Ever since the time of the Tatar raids the people have kept their fearfulness, their frightened eyes, their secrecy of character, and their little hidden cellars where they stored their modest possessions for future use.

Bertrand Perry looked in astonishment at the fortifications with little temples inside. The local people lived around these homemade forts in huddles of little huts. And it was clear that these were new settlers. In earlier times the people had taken refuge in the shelter of earth ramparts and wooden walls when the Tatars used to pass through these regions in their random sacking of the steppes. And there had lived here also an even more bureaucratic group, sent by the lords of the region, who were by no means useful tillers of the soil. But now

settlements were growing up and there were fairs in the autumn, despite the fact that the tsar kept fighting with the Swedes or the Turks and that the country was in a decline because of this.

Soon the travelers were to turn off to Kalmyuskaya Sakma, the Tatar route along the Don into ancient Russia.

However, at midday one of the drivers signaled with his whip for no apparent reason and gave a wild whistle. The horses stopped.

"It's the Don," shouted Karl Bergen leaning out of the carriage.

Perry stopped the carriage and got out. A clear bright strip glowed like a silver mirage on the distant horizon, almost in the sky, like snow on a mountain.

"So that's the Don," thought Perry and so huge was the land, so unencompassable the region across which the shipping route was to be built, that he felt aghast at Peter's scheme. It had all looked quite clear on the drawing-boards in St. Petersburg, but here, looking across to the Don in the full light of day, it seemed sly, arduous and arrogant.

Perry had seen oceans, but these dry inert lands seemed to him just as mysterious, as magnificent, and as grandiose.

"To Sakma," called the leading driver. "Let's get going, so as to be on the Idov highroad by night."

The mules pulled and tugged with all their might in sympathy with the impatience of the human beings.

"Stop," shouted the leading driver suddenly, and raised his whip as a signal to those behind.

"What's wrong?" the Germans asked with surprise.

"We've forgotten to bring the guard," said the driver.

"How?" asked the Germans, no longer worried.

"He had to jump down for a moment at the posting station, and when I looked round now I saw he wasn't on the back."

"Oh, you bearded fool," said the second driver reasonably.

"But there he is thrashing his way across the steppe, the bald-headed nit, holding his trousers up," said the driver, whose fault it was, consoling himself.

And the trek went on heading straight for the Idov and Ordobazar highroads, and thence — for lower Epifan.

6

They set to work immediately in Epifan.

Perry was isolated in a dark hold of loneliness by his lack of knowledge of the language, by the foreignness of the people around him and by the despair in his heart.

And so there was only work upon which he could expend his energy. Sometimes he raged for no reason, and his men said that he drove them like forced laborers.

The military governor of Epifan provided Perry with all the men under his command: some broke stones and took them to the locks, some dug out the canal, some worked up to their bellies in water to dredge out the River Shat.

"Oh, Mary," Perry would mutter to himself as he paced up and down his lodging in Epifan by night.

"I must not be overcome by my grief. I must find some refuge where the grief in my heart will be assuaged. I will build the canal. The tsar will give me money and I'll go off to... to India... Oh, Mary, how dejected I am!"

And, confused by his suffering, by his cares, by an excess of strength, Perry would fall heavily, almost senselessly, asleep, and yet he would pine and call out in his sleep like a child.

The tsar came to visit Epifan in the autumn. He was not pleased with the work.

"You are nursing your grief and making little attempt to push on a work which could be of such value to the fatherland," the tsar declared.

And indeed, progress was slow, however hard a task-master Perry might be. The peasants hid to try to avoid labor conscription, and the braver spirits ran off into the blue.

Those of the local people who dared sent petitions to Peter in which they complained of the wrong-doing of the authorities. Peter ordered an investigation and found that the governor, Pro-tasev, had released the free peasants of the settlements from labor conscription in return for large requisitions from them, and had furthermore pocketed a million roubles by means of various deficiencies in the accounts and lists from the treasury.

Peter ordered Protasev to be beaten and then sent him to Moscow for further questioning, but he died as soon as he got there, out of grief and shame.

Hard upon Peter's departure, while the disgrace was still fresh in their minds, yet another misfortune befell the work at Epifan.

Karl Bergen was in charge of the work at Lake Ivan: he was building an earth wall around the lake so as to raise the water in it to a navigable depth.

In September Perry receive a report from him:

"The people who were sent here, especially the officials from Moscow and the master-craftsmen from the Baltic states are, by God's will, practically all ill. They go into a decline, and then sicken and swell up and die, mostly of fever. The ordinary, local people are all right, but the work in the water of the marsh is so hard, and we push them along so, and it is so cold as autumn approaches, that they are ready to mutiny. I can only say finally that if things go on as they are we shall find ourselves without supervisors and without craftsmen. I, therefore, await speedy orders from the chief construction engineer. "

Perry knew already that the craftsmen from the Baltic states and the German technicians were not only sickening and dying in the swamps of the River Shat and the River Upa, but also that they were running off home secretly, taking with them large sums of money.

Perry was apprehensive about the spring floods which threatened to destroy the started but still defenseless works. He wanted to advance the construction to a state where even these floods would not cause any real damage.

However, it would be difficult to do that. The technical staff were either dying or running away, and the peasants were even worse—they mutinied and whole settlements refused to go out to work. However, it was not Bergen alone who could not deal with such villains nor cure the marsh sickness.

Then, in order to eliminate at least one of the difficulties. Perry sent out an order to all the Work sites and to all the local governors that, upon pain of death, no foreigners, no craftsmen from the canal or the locks, should be allowed to pass, and that no one should provide these people with carts, nor sell them horses, nor make them loans.

And Perry added Peter's signature to the order to make it more frightening and compelling: let the tsar be as angry as he wishes, one could scarcely waste two months going to find him in Voronezh, where he was fitting out a fleet for the Sea of Azov, in order to get his signature.

But the craftsmen were not to be forestalled even by these measures.

Then Perry realized that there had been no point in rushing headlong at the work and dragging so many laborers, officials and

craftsmen into it: it would have been better to begin gradually, to give both the local people and the craftsmen time to get used to it and to know what they were doing.

The work came to a stop finally in October. The German engineers had done their best to protect the construction work and the prepared materials with the help of the local people, but they had not succeeded. Whilst this was going on whenever the opportunity arose the Germans sent reports to Perry asking to be released from the task since the tsar might have them beaten when he came, and it was not their fault.

However, the Governor of Epifan came to see Perry one Sunday.

"Bertrand Ramseyich, look what I've got here. It's impossible impudence."

"What is it?" asked Perry.

"Just you look at this, Bertrand Ramseyich. You just look over this document quietly and I'll sit and... You haven't got many home comforts here, Bertrand Ramseyich. But then, we haven't any wives here for you. I can see that, and sympathize."

Bertrand opened the document:

"To Peter Alekseich the First.

Russian Autocrat and Sovereign

We, your serfs and wretched peasants, are forced this year, your majesty, to stay at work on your canals and locks without so much as a break, we were not even allowed back to our wretched homes for ploughing, or harvest, or hay-making and now, because of your work, we haven't got in the winter corn, we haven't sown the spring crop and there is no one to sow it, and nothing to sow it with, and no horses to travel with, and the supply of milk — and nonmilk — bread that our wretched brother-peasants did have your workmen, your majesty, on their way to do your work in Epifan have taken most of it, and not paid for it, and the rest, by God's will, the mice have eaten and not left a scrap, and these workmen of yours continually insult us and our brother-peasants, and behave outrageously and fatten our daughters up out of season. "

"Do you get that, Bertrand Ramseyich?" asked the military

governor.

"How do you come by this?" Perry asked in amazement.

"Oh, just a lucky chance: for two weeks on end the peasants came crawling to one of my clerks offering him an end of ham to give them some ink, or to tell them how to make it. But this clerk of mine is a wily old fox himself — he gave them some ink but then followed them, and found out about the letter. After all, there isn't any ink in Epifan except in the governor's office, and no one knows how to make it."

"Have we really caused all this trouble to the peasants?" asked Perry.

"Come, Bertrand Ramseyich. The peasants here are so uppish and disobedient — they are always writing petitions and laying complaints, in spite of the fact that they can't really write and don't know how to make ink... But just you wait, I'll make them suffer for it. I'll teach them to set themselves up in this way and to keep writing to the tsar. It's a punishment from above. And why have we taught them to speak? Once upon a time they couldn't read and write, and it's time they unlearnt how to speak."

"And have you had any reports from Lake Ivan, governor? There were whole columns of workmen on foot and carts there that you took from Epifan under guard."

"What columns? The ones I sent earlier. What are you saying, Bertrand Ramseyich! There was one guard who came galloping back to say that the men on foot had all run off to the Yaik and Khoper, and their families are, I confess, starving in Epifan. I never get a minute's peace from the women and then wretches of every kind try to give information against me. I am afraid of the tsar, Bertrand Ramseyich. He'll arrive unexpectedly, and without so much as a second glance have you flogged. I expect you to speak up for me, Bertrand Ramseyich, I pray you in the name of your English god."

"All right, I will," said Perry. "Well, are the peasants with horses and carts still working at Lake Ivan?"

"Of course not, Bertrand Ramseyich! The horses overtook the men on foot: they ran off and hid among the little farmsteads all over the steppe. And is there any hope of finding them? And besides it wouldn't do any good if you could — the horses just dragged around at work — they weren't even any good for ploughing — and a lot of them just died on the steppe... And so..."

"What!" shouted Perry holding his firm thin head, in which

there was no longer any hope, in his hands. "So what are you going to do, governor? I must have workmen as you know. Do as you wish, but let me have both men on foot and with horses or the locks will be swept away in the spring and the tsar will make me pay for it."

"As you wish, Bertrand Ramseyich. But even if you were to take my head, there is nothing but women left in Epifan and the rest of the province is overrun by

brigands. I daren't even show my face in my own province, how am I to go and look for laborers there? There is no way out for me — if I save my head from the peasants, then the tsar will have it off."

"Well, that's not my business. These are your orders for the next week: you must provide 500 ordinary workers and 100 workers with horses for Lake Ivan; 1,500 ordinary workers and 400 with horses for the lock at Storezhevaya Dubrovka; 2,000 ordinary workers and 500 with horses for the lock at Nyukhov; 4,000 ordinary and 1,500 with horses for the Lyubov canal from the Shat to the Don; and 600 ordinary workers and 100 with horses for the Gai lock. That's your orders, governor — that a work force of this size be provided within the week. And if it's not done I shall send in a report to the tsar."

"But listen, Bertrand Ramseyich..."

Perry interrupted him. "I don't intend to listen to anything else. There's no point in my listening to ballads about your suffering — I'm not a young bride. You provide me with workmen, I don't wish to listen to your sob-stories. Off you go to your province and find me some live workers."

"But listen, Bertrand Ramseyich, listen, sir. You won't get a thing out of this, even your late mother..."

"Off to your province," said Perry, now really roused.

"Bertrand Ramseyich, at least don't have us cart any more undressed stone until the spring. It scares the hide off the peasants it's so heavy, and it's not possible to go on quarrying at Lyutorets anyway..."

Perry accepte'd this, thinking that this was not the time for starting new work, but rather for protecting from the floods what had already been done.

"But just you get on with it, governor. You're very plausible in words, but when it comes down to actual work, you're sly."

"Thank you about the stone anyway. Goodbye, Bertrand Ramseyich."

The governor muttered something else and then took himself off.

His last few words had been, in fact, in the local Epifan dialect and so Perry had not understood them. And if he had understood them he would have found no comfort there.

7

All five German engineers also came to Epifan for the winter. They had aged over the past six months, their beards had grown long and they were quite unused to company. Karl Bergen was still obsessed by grief for his German wife but he had agreed with the tsar to stay for a year and could not leave before the year was up: the Russians were dealing quite ruthlessly with any offender at that time. So the young German was in a state of nervous exhaustion from this combination of fear and longing for his family, and was quite unable to get any work done.

The other Germans also felt that they had made a mistake and regretted coming to Russia in the hope of making money.

Perry alone had not given in — his grief for Mary found an outlet in his fiercely energetic attack upon his work.

He made clear in the course of a technical conference with the Germans that the position with regard to the half-finished constructions was perilous. The spring floods might well sweep away all that had been started, especially the locks at Lyutorets and Murovlyan, since the workmen had run off from these as long ago as August.

The governor of Epifan had made none of the provisions demanded in Perry's last orders, whether from deliberate malice or because it really was impossible to compel the men to go there.

The engineers discussed the works but could not think of any way to save them from the spring waters. Perry knew that Peter had the engineers who built ships in St. Petersburg put on black funeral gowns. If the launch and the trial run of the ship went well then the tsar would give the ship-building engineers a hundred roubles or more and take off the black gown with his own hands. If, however, the ship sprang a leak, or heeled over for no reason, or, even worse, if it sank by the shore then the tsar had the engineers summarily punished — they were beheaded.

Perry did not fear the loss of his own head, on the contrary

he was quite prepared to accept it, but he said nothing to the Germans.

The long Russian winter dragged on. Epifan was snowed under, and the surrounding area lay silent. It seemed that the people here led a sad, apathetic life. But it was not so bad really. They visited one another on the frequent feast days, drank home-made wine, ate sauerkraut and pickled apples, and got married from time to time.

One of the Germans, Peter Forkh, was so lonely and homesick that at Christmas time he married a young lady from Epifan, Kseniya Rodionova, the daughter of a rich salt merchant. Her father had his own string of 40 carts which traveled between Astrakhan and Moscow with twenty drivers supplying salt to the remote provinces. Taras Rodionov had been a driver himself in his younger days. Peter Forkh went off to live in his father-in-law's house and soon put on weight with the peaceful life and the food provided with such care.

All the engineers under Perry's guidance worked hard until the beginning of the Western new year setting up plans and estimates of the materials and the manpower which had been used, and also drew up plans for all possible ways of allowing the spring floods to pass without damage.

Perry sent a report to the tsar in which he made quite clear all that had taken place, he pointed out the fatal lack of labor and expressed his doubts about a successful outcome. He also sent a copy of his report to the British consul in St. Petersburg — just in case.

A court messenger arrived in Epifan in February with a package from the tsar.

"Bertrand Perry Chief Engineer of the Epifan Locks and the Canals between the Rivers Oka and Don.

The news of your lack of progress has reached me in your petition. I can tell from your lack of success that the people of Epifan are worthless knaves who give you no help, but the most important thing is that it behooves you to pursue my will more firmly and to keep a tight hold upon the workmen so that no one may presume to disobey, be he a foreign expert or the lowliest

manual worker.

Having considered all aspects of the question of the locks at Epifan I have decided to take the following fundamental steps for the coming summer.

I have dismissed your military governor, and have appointed him this penance — to drag fireships over the great sandbanks from the Sea of Azov to Voronezh. And I am sending you a new governor, Grishka Saltykov, a man who is both strict and efficient, a man known to me and swift to punish any offense.

Furthermore I declare that the whole province of Epifan is now under military rule and the whole of the peasantry are to be counted soldiers. Further to this, I am sending you an excellent selection of lieutenants and captains who will arrive at the works with recruits and militia from the Epifan region. You yourself will have the rank of full general and you must give appropriate ranks to your assistants and your master craftsmen.

I have also declared a state of military rule in the neighboring provinces into which your work extends.

If you are guilty of further miscalculations with regard to the locks and canals during the coming summer then beware. The fact that you are a British citizen will be no comfort to you. "

Perry was delighted at this reply. With reforms of this kind in Epifan success could be relied upon. Now he had only to hope that the spring would not do too much damage so that last year's work would not be entirely wasted.

In March Perry got a letter from Newcastle. He read it like news from some other world, his heart no longer responsive to his former fate:

"Bertrand,

My son, my first-born son, died on New Year's Day. My body aches at the memory of it. You must forgive my writing to you, who are now a stranger to me, but you always believed in my sincerity. You remember how I used to say that a woman remembers all her life the man to whom she gives her first kiss. And I remember you, and so I am writing to tell you of the loss of my little son. I loved him more than I love my husband, more than I love the memory of you, more than I love myself. I loved him incalculably more than all else that is dear to me.

But I must not write of this to you, or I shall start to cry and not finish my second

letter. I sent you a first letter a month ago.

My husband has become no more than a stranger to me. He works long hours, and then goes off to the Sailors Club in the evening, and I am alone and wretched. My only consolation is in reading books and writing to you, which I shall do often if it does not offend you.

Goodbye my dear Bertrand, I love you as a friend or a distant relative, I remember you with great tenderness. Write to me, I should be delighted to have your letters. I am kept alive only by my love for my husband and my memories of you. But my dead child calls me in my dreams to share his suffering and his death.

Yet I am still alive, shameless and cowardly mother that I am.

Mary

P.S. The spring is hot in Newcastle. On clear days one can see the coastline of Europe across the straits as one always could. This coastline always reminds me of you and makes me more miserable.

Do you remember the lines which you once wrote to me in a letter.

'The possibility of a bitter and wearing grief, Is the pledge of a heart that is loved by a god...' Who wrote the lines? Do you remember your first letter to me where you declared your love, because you were too shy to say the fateful words to my face? It was then that I understood the manliness and the modesty of your nature, and came to like you. "

As Perry read the letter he was filled with a sense of human sympathy and tenderness: perhaps he was content that Mary should be unhappy — now their fates were equal.

Since he had no close friends in Epifan he began to visit Peter Forkh; he would drink tea with cherry jam and chat with Forkh's wife, Kseniya, of far-off Newcastle, of the warm straits, and of the coastline of Europe which could be seen on clear days. But Bertrand never spoke to anyone of Mary, he kept her

image secret as a source of humanity and friendship.

It was March. The inhabitants of Epifan were keeping Lent, there was a mournful ringing of bells in the Orthodox churches,

and the fields at the watersheds already looked darker.

But Perry was still in a pleasantly peaceful state of mind. He did not answer Mary's letter, her husband would scarcely have liked her to get letters from him; and besides he did not feel like writing polite commonplaces.

Perry disposed the German engineers around the various locks where there was most danger, so that they might supervise the work necessary to let through the spring floods.

The peasants were now all part of the militia. And the new military governor, Saltykov, raged around the province quite ruthlessly; the prisons were packed to the gates with insubordinate peasants, and that form of punishment in which the province specialized, that is to say the house of correction, was in daily use, the lash beating sense into the backsides of the peasants.

There were now enough men, both on foot and with carts, but Perry knew how unreliable it all was; there might be a mutiny at any moment and not only would the men all run off but they would destroy maliciously at one blow the work already done.

But spring was not particularly warm: the water flowed in dribs and drabs in the day and stopped again at night. The water ran through the locks as though through a narrow bucket and so the German engineers and the workmen on duty were able to stop up the gaps in the flood gates with thawed earth and no great damage was done.

Perry was pleased and often dropped in to see Forkh's wife, who was now lonely, and to chat with her father about salt-cart drivers, and journeys into Tartary and the sweet feather grass of the old steppes.

The real provincial spring, as hot as summer, came at last and the countryside was no longer so youthful. Then came the ripeness and the spiteful heat of summer and everything on earth trembled into life.

Perry determined to finish all the locks and canals by autumn. He was homesick for the sea, for his own country, for his old father who lived in London.

The father's grief for his son could be measured by the amount of ash from his pipe. When he was missing his son he smoked continuously. When Bertrand had been about to leave he had said:

"Bertrand, how much tobacco shall I have to burn before I see you again..."

"A lot, father, a lot," said Bertrand.

"Well, let's hope it doesn't do me any harm, son. I shall probably have to start chewing tobacco soon..."

Things went well at the beginning of summer. The peasants, now really frightened by the tsar, worked hard. However, some underground workers ran off and took refuge in remote monasteries. And certain indefatigable characters conspired together and took off whole companies of men to the Urals or the Kalmyk steppes. They were pursued but without success.

Perry made a tour of all the works in June and he was satisfied with the rate of progress.

And Karl Bergen really cheered him up. He had found a bottomless well-opening right on the bed of Lake Ivan. There was enough spring water running from there into the lake to provide a supplementary supply for the canals in dry years when the level would otherwise be low. They needed only to raise the earth wall which they had put up the previous year by a further seven feet in order to collect more water from the well in the lakes and then they would be able to let out the water through specially constructed gates whenever the necessity arose.

Perry expressed his approval of Bergen's discovery and gave orders that the well should be dredged out with a cylindrical pump and that then an iron pipe with a grid should be inserted into it so that it would not get silted up again. Even more water would then flow into the lake and the waterway would not become too shallow in times of drought.

Perry's pride was offset by fear and doubt on the way back to Epifan. The plans made in St. Petersburg had taken no account of local circumstances, in particular

they had taken no account of droughts which were by no means infrequent there. And it seemed to be turning out that in a dry summer there would not be enough water for the canals and the waterway would become a dry sandy track.

When Perry got to Epifan he began to recalculate the technical data. Things were worse than he had thought: the scheme had been based on the data for 1682, a year with particularly heavy precipitation.

Perry talked with the local people and with Forkh's father-in-law and reached the conclusion that in years with average snow and rainfall the canals would be so shallow that they would not be navigable. And what was going to happen in a dry summer one

dare hardly contemplate — there would just be dry sand along the canal bed.

"In that case I shall never see my father again," thought Perry. "I shall never get back to Newcastle and look across to the coastline of Europe..."

The only hope was the spring at the bottom of Lake Ivan. If it provided enough water then it would be able to supply the canals in dry years.

But this discovery of Bergen's did not restore to Bertrand's heart the gentle peace which he had felt after receiving Mary's letter. He did not believe in his heart of hearts that the well in Lake Ivan would provide a sufficient supply of water but he hid his despair behind this minor hope.

They were building a special raft at Lake Ivan at this time from which to deepen the well and to insert into it a wide cast-iron pipe.

8

Perry got a progress report from Karl Bergen early in August. It was brought by the governor Saltykov.

"Look, your excellency, a note for you. My lads say that the whole brood of peasants have run off without a word from the lock at Tatinka. But you can console yourself with this thought: tomorrow I shall drive off to Tatinka the women whose husbands have fled, and I'll catch the fugitives and hand them over to a military court. I'll have their heads off — that'll teach them a bit of

sense. You'll see."

"That's the right thing to do, Saltykov," said Perry who was too harassed to feel anything.

"So, your excellency, you'll sign their death warrants? I'm warning you, it's your own head now that'll answer..."

"All right, I'll sign then," said Perry.

"And by the way, general, tomorrow is my daughter's bride show. A young suitor from Moscow, a merchant's son, is taking her into his home as his wife, will you come to the celebrations?"

"Thank you. I'll drop in if I can, governor."

Saltykov went and Perry opened the package from Bergen.

"Confidential

Colleague Perry,

Drilling went on at the underwater bore hole at Lake Ivan from July 20th to 25th, to deepen and widen it and to clean it out. Your directions were to provide a powerful flow of underground water into Lake Ivan.

The drilling stopped at a depth of 70 feet for the reasons given below.

On July 25th at 8 p.m. the pump ceased bringing up mud and clay and started to bring up fine dry sand. I was present throughout the relevant time.

Leaving the boring-raft to go ashore for some reason I noticed grass sticking up at a water-level at which I had not previously seen it. As I stepped ashore I heard the howling of a dog, Ilyushka, which lives with the soldiers. I was troubled by this despite my belief in God.

The soldier working there convinced me that from midday onwards the level of the water in the lake had been falling. Underwater grass had been revealed and two small islands had appeared in the middle of the lake.

The soldiers were terrified and claimed that we had gone through the bottom of the lake with our pipe and that the lake would now perish.

And one could in fact see the marks of yesterday's water level on the lake shore and of today's and today's was a good three feet lower.

I went back on board the raft and gave orders for the drilling to cease and the bore hole to be filled in immediately. In order to do this we lowered a cast-iron trap two feet across into the well, but it was immediately sucked into the depths and vanished without trace. Then we started trying to block up the bore hole with a pipe filled with clay. But that was also sucked into the bore hole and dragged away. And so the suction is still going on and water is running out of the lake irretrievably.

The reason is easy to see. The man in charge of the bore pump went right through the layer of impermeable clay which kept the water in the lake.

And there were dry sands under this clay which now draw the water from the lake and also drag down our iron devices.

I don't know what to do now and await your instructions. "

Perry had not been frightened before but now his heart failed for he was only human. Bertrand could not endure so great a grief. He put his head on the table and cried.

Fate had driven him where it would: first he had lost his homeland, then Mary, now his work had failed: he knew that he would not come out alive from these arid wastes, that he would never again see Newcastle, never again see the coastline of Europe, never again see his father with his pipe, never take a last look at Mary. Perry sat in the empty low room and ground his teeth and wept. He pushed over the table and blundered about in the darkness, beside himself with sobbing. He was rocked by a violent and involuntary grief quite beyond the control of reason.

But at length he grew reconciled and then smiled to himself and was ashamed of his shameless despair. Then he took a little book from his trunk and began to read:

"Arthur Chemsfield

The Love of Lady Betty Hugh

A novel in 3 volumes and 40 chapters

...My lady. My heart overflows with love. It calls out to you in its torment with a holy prayer: choose me above all other men or take the heart from my breast and devour it like an egg. A wind of foreboding blows through my vaulted skull, and my blood boils like hot pitch. Could you refuse me comfort. Lady Betty? Would you not fear the grief you must feel at the death of one who though strange to you is yet devoted to the death?

Mistress Betty, I know that your husband will shoot me with his old gun and his stale gunpowder if I approach your home. Let that be. Let that be my fate.

I am a destroyer of home and hearth. But my heart looks for kindness in the heart of my beloved as it beats within her childlike breast.

I am a homeless wanderer. But I beg the favor of your respectable husband.

I have had enough of devotion to horses and other such creatures and I now seek a more suitable love, the love of a woman... "

Quite without warning Perry fell into a deep, refreshing sleep and the book fell from his hand, never to be finished and

yet interesting.

Night came; the room grew cold and dark, and was suffused with a plaintive light from the remote and secretive sky.

9

A whole year went by — a long autumn, an even longer winter and a fragile, timid spring.

At length the lilac suddenly bloomed, the rose of provincial Russia, the gift of the modest hedges, and the symbol of the inevitable rural dream.

The whole complex of construction work known under the title of the Don-Oka State Waterway was completed.

It was envisaged that for many years to come ships of all sizes, so becoming to an inland country, would sail the waterway.

By the end of May the fierce heat of summer was already established. At first the countryside was heavy with the scent of June flowers, but then there was no rain in June and the air grew sour with the smell of dry leaves and flowers festering in the steaming plague.

The tsar sent a French engineer, General Truzson, and a special commission consisting of three admirals and an Italian engineer to inspect the locks and canals.

"Engineer Perry," Truzson announced, "I order you in the name of our sovereign and emperor to have the whole route from the Don to the Oka navigable in one week. I am empowered by his majesty to inspect all waterworks in order to ascertain their quality and their suitability to the tsar's purposes."

"Certainly," replied Perry. "The waterway will be ready in four days."

"Excellent," pronounced Truzson with a good deal of satisfaction. "Do that, engineer, and do not prolong our absence from St. Petersburg."

Four days later the watergates were opened and the water began to collect in the lock basins. However, the supply was so small that even at the best it did not reach a depth of more than two feet. Furthermore when the water rose in the rivers where it had been held back by the locks the underground springs were stopped up by the heavy weight of water and ceased to function.

By the fifth day the water in the reaches between the locks

no longer rose. Moreover, it was a time of fierce heat and no rain, and even the gullies were quite dry. A small boat loaded with wood, drawing only 3 feet of water was launched on the River Shat from the lock at Murovlyan. It went for five hundred yards and then got caught on a shoal right in the middle of the channel.

Truzson and his investigating committee traveled in troikas alongside the waterway.

None of the peasants, except for a few essential workmen, were present at the opening of the waterway. They had put no trust in the scheme when it threatened Epifan, they did not in any case want to go on the water; perhaps a drunk would occasionally try to ford the stream but that was only rarely: in those days godparents lived hundreds of miles away from their godchildren because neighbors never chose each other as godparents, the women did not get on together well enough for that.

Truzson expressed his anger in French and in English, but that had scarcely any effect. Yet he could not express his anger in Russian. For this reason even the workmen at the locks were not afraid of the general, they did not understand what this Russian general, who was really a foreigner, was shouting and screaming about.

And as for the fact that there was hardly any water and that the waterway would not be navigable, why every old peasant woman in Epifan had known that for a least a year. And so all the local people had looked on the work as some sport of the tsar's, some complicated foreign scheme, but they had not dared to ask why the people were being made to suffer.

Only the peasant women felt sorry for poor Perry:

"He's a good worker, well-made, not badly behaved, not too old, and he doesn't waste his time hanging around the womenfolk. But there's some grief eating him up, or his woman has died — who knows? He never says — but he certainly looks grief-stricken, horribly..."

Next day a hundred peasants were given measuring rods. The peasants went straight into the water on foot. There were just a few spots right in the middle of the lock basins where they had to swim, otherwise the whole stretch of water could be forded. They carried the rods in their hands and the foremen marked the depth on them, but mostly they measured the water up their shins rather than with the rods and then they marked them off in small units, and with some of them these small units added up to as much as half a yard.

In a week the level had been tested throughout the waterway, and Truzson

reckoned that a boat could certainly not go the whole way, and that there were places which could not even support a raft.

And the tsar's orders had been that it should be of a depth to allow the passage of ten-gun ships.

Truzson's commission made out their test report and read it to Perry and the German specialists.

The report said that neither the canals nor the locking stretches were fit for sailing or navigation because of the lack of water. The expense and the work must be counted a complete loss, they would be of no use to anyone. They awaited further instructions from the tsar.

"Yes," said one of Truzson's henchmen, a certain admiral, "a fine waterway they've made! They've made a laughing-stock, they've wasted the labor of the people. They've made a mockery of the tsar, brought nothing but shame upon him. My heart burns at the thought of such goings on. But you watch out now, you Germans. And you, English magician, you can now expect the lash - and even that would be lenient. It is a terrible thing to have to convey such a report to the tsar — he'll certainly have you beaten about the head."

Perry said nothing. He knew that the whole scheme had been based on preliminary investigations made by Truzson, but he knew that this did not mean that there was any hope of saving himself.

Truzson and his men left at sunrise next day.

Perry did not know how to use up the energy he customarily spent on work, so for whole days on end he walked in the forest, and in the evenings he read English novels — but not "The Love of Betty Hugh" this time.

Ten days after Truzson left the Germans ran off. Saltykov sent men after them but the pursuers had still not come back.

Forkh alone of the Germans remained in Epifan since he had married there and loved his wife.

The governor, Saltykov, had Perry and Forkh watched secretly, but Perry and Forkh realized what was going on. Saltykov was waiting for orders from

Petersburg and never went to see Perry.

Perry's feelings were disorganized and he quite ceased to think. He was not able to do anything serious. He knew that the

summary justice of the tsar awaited him. However, he did write briefly to the British Consul in Petersburg asking him to help a British citizen who was in trouble. But Perry felt that the governor would not send his letter at the first opportunity, or that he would send it with the state mail to the Secret Service Office in St. Petersburg.

Two months later Peter sent a special messenger with a secret package. This messenger arrived by carriage and the little boys ran behind the carriage and dust was sprayed up behind it like a rainbow in the evening sun.

Perry was standing by his window at the time and witnessed the rapid approach of his own fate. He guessed immediately why the messenger had come and went to bed so as to cut short all unnecessary time.

They knocked for Perry at sunrise next day.

The military governor, Saltykov, came into the room.

"Bertrand Ramseyich Perry, British citizen, I have to announce to you the will of his imperial majesty: from this moment you are no longer a general but an ordinary citizen and a criminal to boot. You are to go to Moscow on foot and under guard to receive the justice of the tsar. Prepare yourself, Bertrand Ramseyich, for the place of punishment."

10

As Perry made his way on foot across the Central Russian plain at noon he contemplated the blades of grass before him. He had a pack on his back and there were guards alongside him.

The road would be long, and the guards made themselves pleasant so as not to waste their spirits in unnecessary ill-feeling.

The two guards were natives of Epifan. They told Perry that next day they were

to begin beating the one remaining German, Forkh, in the house of correction. It seemed that that was the only punishment that the tsar had appointed him, that he was to be given a good beating and then sent out to Nemetchina.

The road to Moscow was so long that Perry forgot where they were taking him, and he was so weary that he wanted them to get him there as quickly as possible and get him killed.

In Ryazan the two guards from Epifan were replaced. The new guards told Perry that there might well be a war with Eng-

land.

"How is that?" asked Perry.

"Well they say that Sire Peter caught a lover right in bed with the tsarina, and he turned out to be an English envoy! Tsar Peter chopped his head off and sent it to the tsarina in a silken bag!"

"He couldn't possibly have done such a thing."

"You think not?" asked the guard. "Have you seen our tsar? He's a huge fellow. They do say he tore off the envoy's head with his own hands, like a chicken's. Do you think that's a laughing matter? However, I did hear that the tsar won't take the country to war on account of a woman."

Towards the end of the journey Perry could scarcely feel his feet. They were so swollen up it felt as though he were walking in felt boots.

When they made their last night's stop one of the guards, an old man, said to Perry for no apparent reason:

"Where are we taking you then? Probably to your death! This tsar of ours is all too eager to dole out violence. I'd have run off from under our noses if I'd been you. But you just walk along as meek as a chicken. There's no fire in your blood, my lad. I should have run amok, I certainly wouldn't have given myself up to a beating, let alone to death."

They took Perry to the Kremlin and imprisoned him in one of the towers, and he stopped worrying about his fate.

All night long he looked out through the narrow window at the splendors of nature, at the stars, and marveled at these vital fires in the sky, which shone in that lofty world above the reach of law.

Perry was cheered up by their mystery, and he stood on the lowly ground and laughed as though he had not a care in the world at the high heavens which ruled so merrily over this breathtaking expanse of space.

Perry woke up suddenly, not knowing how he had come to fall asleep. But he had not woken of his own accord, he had been awakened by people who now stood before him, talking in low voices so as not to wake the prisoner. But he had felt their pres-

ence and awoken.

"Bertrand Ramseyich Perry," said an official, taking out a paper and reading off the name, "by order of his majesty, the king and emperor, you are condemned to be beheaded. I have no further information. Farewell. May God have mercy on you! You are, after all, still a member of the human race."

The official went out and closed the door noisily from outside, fumbling somewhat with the key.

The other man stayed behind — he was a huge lout in nothing but trousers, buttoned at the waist, no shirt.

"Pants off!"

Perry started to take off his shirt.

"I'm telling you, pants off, you thief."

The executioner's normally blue but now almost black eyes sparkled with a wild, somehow turbulent happiness.

"Where is your ax?" asked Perry, feeling nothing now but a slightly unpleasant

sensation as though he were about to be thrown into cold water by this man.

"Ax!" the executioner said. "I can deal with you all right without an ax."

Suddenly a strange and terrible conjecture stabbed into Perry's brain like a sharp slashing blade, like a bullet into his beating heart.

And this conjecture replaced in Perry's mind the feel of the ax on his neck: for a moment he saw the blood in his own astonished and darkening eyes, and then he collapsed in the arms of the howling executioner.

An hour later the official's key grated in the lock.

"Are you ready, Ignaty?" he shouted through the door crouching down and listening.

"Wait a bit, don't come crawling in here, you louse," the executioner shouted from inside, grinding his teeth and puffing.

"He's a real devil," the official muttered. "I've never seen anyone like him in my life: it would be death for me to go in there before his fury is exhausted."

There was a ringing of bells — early mass was coming out.

The official went into the church, took a piece of communion bread — for breakfast — and provided himself with a small candle — for his evening reading.

In August Saltykov, the military governor in Epifan, received

a sweet-smelling package with foreign stamps on it. The writing was not in Cyrillic characters except for three words:

Bertrand Perry Engineer

Saltykov, terrified, did not know what to do with this package in the name of the dead man.

Then he put it out of harm's way behind the icon-case.

(1927)

Translated by Marion Jordan

THE POTUDAN RIVER

Once more grass was growing along the hardened dirt roads of the civil war, now that the war had ended. In the world, throughout the provinces, it once again became quiet and unfrequented: some people had died in action, many were being treated for their wounds and resting with relatives, forgetting the hard work of the war in their long sleep, but some of the demobilized had not yet succeeded in reaching home, and were now walking in old military overcoats with field bags, in soft helmets or sheepskin caps — walking through the dense, unfamiliar grass, which earlier there had been no time to see, but, perhaps it was simply trampled down by the marching and did not grow then. They walked with faint, surprised heart, recognized the fields and villages again, spread out along their journey; their heart had already changed in the torment of the war, in the sickness and in the happiness of victory, — now they were walking to live as if for the first time, vaguely remembering themselves, what they were three

— four years ago, because they had changed into different people

— they had grown because of age and had become wiser, they became more patient and felt within themselves great worldwide hope, which now became the idea of their present small life, which had no clear goal or purpose before the civil war.

During the late summer the last of the demobilized Red Army men returned home. They had lingered in the army performing civil services, where they were occupied with various unfamiliar chores and grieved, and only now were they ordered to go home to their own and communal life.

Along the hills which stretched far away above the Potudan River, a former Red Army man, Nikita Fearsov, had now been walking home for two days, to a little-known provincial town. This was a man of about twenty-five years old, with a humble face, as if constantly saddened, — but perhaps this expression of his face resulted not from sadness, but from a reserved goodness of character, or from the typical concentration of youth. The light hair — uncut for a long time — fell from under the hat onto his ears, his big gray eyes gazed with sullen tension at

the peaceful, languorous nature of the monotonous countryside, as though the traveler were not of these parts.

At noon Nikita Fearsov lay down near a small stream which flowed from a spring in the bottom of a gully into the Potudan. And he dozed off on the ground beneath the sun, in the September grass, which was already tired from growing here since the long-past spring. The warmth of life inside of him seemed to darken and Fearsov fell asleep in the silence of this remote place. Insects flew over him, a spider's web floated, some kind of wandering-human being stepped over him and, not touching the sleeper, not being interested in him walked on, about his business. The dust of the summer and the long drought stood high in the air, creating a hazier and ethereal celestial light, but all the same, the time of peace, as usual, followed the sun at a distance... Suddenly Fearsov raised himself and sat up, breathing heavily in fright, as if he had set himself on fire in invisible running and wrestling. He had dreamed a terrible dream, that a small, well-fed animal — like a beast of the field fattened by pure wheat — was smothering him with its hot fur. This animal, soaked with sweat from exertion and greediness, climbed into the mouth of the sleeper, into his throat, trying to make its way with clinging little paws into the very middle of his soul, in order to burn out his breath. Choking in his sleep, Fearsov wanted to scream, to start running, but the animal independently tore itself from him, blind, pitiful, itself frightened and trembling, and disappeared in the darkness of its night.

Fearsov washed himself in the stream and rinsed his mouth, then quickly went further on; his father's home was already nearby, and by evening he could succeed in reaching it.

As soon as it had become dark, Fearsov saw his native land in the dim, beginning night. It was a sloping, gradual elevation, rising from the shores of the Potudan to the high rye fields. On this elevation, the small town was settled, almost invisible now due to the darkness. Not a single light burned there.

Nikita Fearsov's father was sleeping now: he lay down as soon as he returned from work, before the sun had set. He lived alone, his wife had died long ago, his two sons had been lost in the imperialist war, and his last son, Nikita, was in the civil war: perhaps he would still return, the father thought about his last son, the civil war took place close to homes and yards, and there was less gunfire than in the imperialist war. The father slept a great deal — from evening sunset

to daybreak — otherwise, if he did not sleep, he began to reminisce, and to recall forgotten mem-

ories and his heart was tormented with anguish for his lost sons, in sadness for his monotonously lived past life. In the morning he would leave immediately for the peasant furniture workshop, it was more bearable for him, he would forget himself. But toward evening his heart would begin to sink again, and returning to the one-room apartment he quickly, almost in fright, fell asleep until the next morning; he didn't even need kerosene. And at dawn, the flies began to bite him on his bald spot, the old man woke up and at length, little by little, carefully got dressed, put on his shoes, washed himself, sighed, shuffled, cleaned the room, muttered to himself, walked out, looked there at the weather and returned, if only to waste spare time which remained until the beginning of work in the peasant furniture workshop.

This night, Nikita Fearsov's father slept, as usual, from necessity and from fatigue. A cricket was chirping, no one knows how many years it had lived in a small mound of earth along the outer walls of the peasant's house and sang from there during the evening hours — either this was the same cricket from the summer before last, or a grandson of his. Nikita approached this mound and knocked on his father's casement window; the cricket fell silent for a while as if he was listening — who was it that had arrived — a stranger, a keeper of late hours. The father climbed out of the old wooden bed, on which he had slept with the deceased mother of all his sons; Nikita himself was born some time ago on this very same bed. The old, thin man was now in long-johns; they had shrunk and grown narrow from long wearing and washing, therefore they came only to his knees. The father leaned close to the windowpane and looked at his son from there. He already saw, recognized his son, but still looked and looked at him, wishing to see more of him. Then he ran, small and skinny as a boy, round through the passage and courtyard — to open the gate which was locked for the night.

Nikita entered the old room, with a stove that could be slept on, low ceiling, with one small window to the street. He smelled the same scent as both in his childhood days and three years ago, when he had left for the war; even the scent of his mother's skirt could still be felt here — in the only place in the whole world. Nikita took off his pack and hat, slowly undressed and sat on the bed. His father stood in front of him the whole time, barefooted and in his long-johns, not

yet daring to either greet him as one should, or to speak.

"Well, how are the bourgeois and the Cadets?" he asked a little later. "Did you sweep all of them away, or do a few of them still remain?"

"Oh, well, almost all of them," said the son.

The father momentarily, but seriously fell to thinking: nevertheless they destroyed the whole class, that was a big job.

"Well, they are weaklings!" asserted the old man about the bourgeois. "What use are they, they're only used to living in vain..."

Nikita stood in front of his father, he was now taller than he by a head and a half. The old man was quiet next to his son in modest perplexity of his love for him. Nikita placed his hand on his father's head and drew it to his chest. The old man leaned on his son and began to breathe rapidly and deeply, as if he had arrived at his rest.

On one street of this same town, heading straight towards a field, stood a wooden house with green shutters. At one time an old widow had lived in this house, a teacher in the city school; her children lived with her — her son, a boy about ten years old, and her daughter, a blonde girl, Lyuba, fifteen years old.

Several years before Nikita Fearsov's father wanted to marry the widow teacher, but soon after he abandoned his idea.. Twice, he took Nikita, then still a little boy, with him to visit the teacher and Nikita saw the pensive girl there, Lyuba, who sat and read books, paying no attention to the unfamiliar guests.

The old teacher treated the carpenter to tea with crackers and talked something about the enlightenment of the people's minds and about repairing the school stoves. The whole time Ni-kita's father sat in silence; he felt shy, grunted, coughed and smoked home-made cigars, and then gingerly drank the tea from the saucer, not touching the crackers, because, so to say, he was already full.

Chairs stood in the teacher's apartment, in both of her two rooms and in the kitchen, curtains hung at the windows, in the first room a piano and a wardrobe could be found, and in the other, farther room were beds, two soft, red velvet armchairs and on the wall-shelves there were many books — probably a whole

collection of works. The setting appeared too luxurious to the father and son, and having visited the widow twice, the father stopped going to see her. He didn't even get around to telling her that he wanted to marry her. But Nikita was interested in seeing the

piano and the reading, pensive girl once again, therefore he asked his father to marry the old woman, so that he could visit her.

"No, Nikita!" the father said then. "I have little education, what will I talk to her about? And to invite them over to our place — shameful: we have no dishes, and our provisions are no good. Did you see what kind of armchairs they have? Antique, from Moscow! And the cupboard? On all the legs are carvings and what a selection of fretwork: I understand!... And the daughter! She'll probably be going to the university."

And the father had not seen his old love for several years now, only occasionally, perhaps, he missed her or merely thought about her.

The next day, after his return from the civil war, Nikita went to the military commissariat to register in the reserves. Then Nikita walked all around his familiar, native town, and his heart ached from the sight of the rundown, small houses, decayed fences and wattle-fences and sparsely-growing apple trees in the courtyards, many of which had already died, withered forever. In his childhood these apple trees had still been green, and the one-floor houses seemed big and rich, inhabited by mysterious, intelligent people, and the streets then were long, the burdocks were high, and the weeds in the vacant lots, in the deserted kitchen gardens, seemed at that bygone time terrible, overgrown thickets. And now Nikita saw that the small houses of the residents were pitiful, squatty, they were in need of paint and repair, the weeds on the bare spots were meager, they did not grow formidably, but dismally, inhabited only by old, patient ants, and all the streets soon came to an end, overwhelmed by the strong-willed earth, by the light, celestial space, — the town had become small. Nikita thought that this meant he had already lived through much of his life, since the larger, mysterious objects had turned into small and boring ones.

He walked slowly past the house with the green shutters where, in the old days, he had gone to visit with his father. He knew the green paint on the shutters only from memory, now only faint signs of it remained, — it had faded from the sun,

was washed away by heavy showers and rain, faded down into the wood; and the tin roof on the house was badly rusted, now the rain probably penetrates the roof and soaks the ceiling above the piano in the apartment. Nikita looked attentively through a window of this house; the curtains were no longer at the windows, a

strange darkness could be seen on the other side of the glass. Nikita sat on a bench near the wicket gate of the dilapidated, yet still familiar house. He thought that maybe someone would begin to play the piano inside the house, then he would listen to the music. But in the house it was quiet, telling him nothing. Waiting awhile, Nikita looked through an opening in the fence into the courtyard; an old nettle grew there, an empty path led through its undergrowth to the shed and three wooden steps led into the passage. It must be that both the old woman teacher and her daughter, Lyuba, had died long ago, and the little boy had volunteered for the war...

Nikita made his way home. The day turned to evening, — soon the father would come back for the night, it would be necessary to think over with him about how to go on living, and where to go to work.

On the main street of the town there was some festivity, because the people had begun to come to life after the war. Now there were wage-earners, students, demobilized soldiers recovering from their wounds, teenagers, people who occupied themselves with housework and gardening work, and others walking along the street; but the working man would come out here for a walk later, when it had grown quite dark. The people were dressed poorly in old clothes or in threadbare military uniforms from the time of imperialism.

Almost all the passersby, even those who walked arm-in-arm, future newlyweds, had something with them for the household. The women carried potatoes in their shopping bags, and sometimes fish, the men held bread rations or half a cow's head under their arms, or stingily held the tripe in their hands for a solid meal. But seldom did anyone walk in despondency, with the exception of quite an elderly, exhausted man. The younger ones usually laughed and looked closely into each other's faces, enthusiastic and trusting, as if they were on the eve of eternal happiness.

"Hello!" a woman said timidly to Nikita Fearsov from one side.

And the voice immediately touched and warmed him, as if someone dear and lost had responded to his call for help. However it seemed to Nikita that it was an error and they were not greeting him. Afraid to make a mistake, he slowly looked at the neighboring passersby. But at this moment there were only two of them, and they had already passed him. Nikita turned around

- a big, grown-up Lyuba stopped and looked in his direction. She smiled at him sadly and with embarrassment.

Nikita approached her and cautiously looked at her — as if to see if she remained intact, for even in his memory she was precious to him. Her Austrian boots, laced up with string, were very worn out, a pale muslin dress came only to her knees, probably there was no more material — and that dress caused Nikita to immediately have pity on Lyuba, he had seen such dresses on women in coffins, yet here the muslin covered a live, grown-up, though impoverished, body. She wore an old lady's jacket over the dress

— probably Lyuba's mother had worn it in her maiden days, and there was nothing on Lyuba's head, just plain hair, twisted below her neck into a light, solid braid.

"You don't remember me?" asked Lyuba.

"No, I haven't forgotten you," answered Nikita.

"One should never forget," smiled Lyuba.

Her clear eyes, filled with a secret warmth, looked at Nikita tenderly, as if they adored him. Nikita looked at her face also, and his heart rejoiced and pained just from the sight of her eyes, deeply sunken from daily hardships but lighted with a trusting hope.

Nikita walked along with Lyuba to her home — she still lived there. Her mother had died only recently, and her little brother survived during the famine near the Red Army field kitchen, then he grew used to being there and went with the Red Army men to the south against the enemy.

"He became used to eating porridge there, and there wasn't any at home," Lyuba was saying about her brother.

Lyuba lived only in one room now — she needed no more. With a sinking feeling Nikita looked around this room, where he had seen Lyuba for the first time, the piano, the expensive furniture. Now neither the piano, nor the cupboard with the fretwork on all the legs, was here, there remained only two soft armchairs, a table and a bed, and now the room itself had stopped being so interesting and mysterious, as then in his early youth — the wall paper was faded and torn, the floor was worn out, there was a small iron stove next to the tile stove, which one could heat with a handful of chips, to warm oneself a bit near it.

Lyuba pulled an ordinary notebook out from the top of her blouse, then took off her boots and remained barefoot. She was now studying in the district Academy of Medical Science: during

these years there were universities and academies in all the districts, because the people wanted to gain higher knowledge more quickly; the senselessness of life, in the same way as hunger and want, had tormented the human heart too much, and it was necessary to discover what the existence of man is all about, is it serious or for some specific purpose.

"They are rubbing my feet," said Lyuba about her boots. "You stay awhile, and I'll go to sleep, because I want very much to eat, and I don't want to think about this..."

Lyuba, without undressing, climbed under the blanket on the bed and laid the braid over her eyes.

Nikita sat silently for about two or three hours, until Lyuba woke up. By then night had already fallen, and Lyuba stood up in the darkness.

"My girl friend probably won't come today," said Lyuba sadly.

"Why, do you need her?" asked Nikita.

"Very much, indeed," said Lyuba. "They have a big family and the father is in the military, she brings me supper if anything is left over... I eat and then we begin studying together..."

"But do you have kerosene?" asked Nikita.

"No, they have given me firewood... We light the stove — we sit on the floor and see from the fire."

Lyuba helplessly, bashfully smiled, as if a cruel and sad thought had entered her mind.

"Probably her older brother, a young fellow, has not fallen asleep," she said. "He doesn't permit his sister to feed me, he's stingy... And it's not my fault! I don't like eating as it is: that isn't me — my head itself begins to ache, it thinks about bread and prevents me from living and thinking about other things..."

"Lyuba!" called a young voice near the window.

"Zhenya!" answered Lyuba through the window.

Lyuba's girl friend came in. She took four big baked potatoes out of the pocket of her jacket and placed them on the iron stove.

"And did you get the histology book?" asked Lyuba.

"And who can I get it from?" answered Zhenya. "They have put me on a waiting list in the library..."

"That's all right, we'll manage," announced Lyuba. "At the department I've memorized the first two chapters. I'll talk, and you take notes. Will it work?"

"Oh, remember the past?" Zhenya began laughing.

Nikita lit the stove in order to be able to see the notebook by the light of the fire and got ready to go to his father's for the night.

"You won't forget me now?" Lyuba said goodbye to him.

"No," said Nikita. "I have no one else to remember."

Fearsov spent two day lying around the house after the war and then went to work in the peasant furniture workshop where his father worked. They enrolled him as a carpenter for the preparation of materials, and his pay was lower than his father's — almost twice as low. But Nikita knew that this was temporary,

until he became used to the trade, and then they would promote him to a cabinet maker and his earnings would be better.

Nikita had never fallen out of the habit of working. In the Red Army people were also busy not only with war — during the long stops: while billeted in civilian houses, and in the reserves — the Red Army men dug wells, repaired the cottages of poor peasants in the villages, and planted shrubs at the tops of active ravines so that the earth would not wash away further. The war would pass, but life would remain, and it was necessary to plan for it beforehand.

In a week Nikita went to visit Lyuba again; he took her a gift of boiled fish and bread — his second course from dinner in the worker's dining room.

Lyuba hurried to read a book by the window, taking advantage of that sunlight which had not yet vanished; therefore, Nikita sat quietly for some time in the room with Lyuba, waiting for the night darkness. And soon the dusk became equal to the quiet on the district street, and Lyuba rubbed her eyes and closed the textbook.

"How are you?" asked Lyuba softly.

"I'm living with my father, we — nothing," said Nikita. "I brought you some food, please eat it," he asked.

"I'll eat it, thank you," said Lyuba.

"And you won't go to sleep?" asked Nikita.

"I won't," answered Lyuba. "I'll eat now, I will be full!"

Nikita brought a couple of small pieces of firewood from the passageway and lit the iron stove, so that there would be light to study by. He sat on the floor, opened the stove door and put chips and thin, short branches into the fire, trying to make less heat and more light. After eating the fish with the bread, Lyuba

also sat on the floor, opposite Nikita and near the light from the stove, and began to study medicine from her book.

She read silently, however now and then she whispered something, smiled, and

wrote down several words in the notebook with short, quick strokes — probably the most important points. And Nikita just watched for the fire to burn correctly, and only from time to time — not often — looked into Lyuba's face, but then he again stared at the fire at length, because he was afraid to annoy Lyuba with his gaze. So the time passed, and Nikita thought sadly that it would soon pass completely and it would be time for him to go home.

At midnight, when the clock on the bell tower struck, Nikita asked Lyuba why her girl friend, Zhenya, had not come by.

"She has typhus again, she'll probably die—" answered Lyuba and again began to read her medicine.

"That's really a shame!" said Nikita, but Lyuba did not answer him.

Nikita envisioned the sick, feverish Zhenya, and as a matter of fact he could fall sincerely in love with her also, if he had known her earlier and she had been a little kind to him. It seemed she was also beautiful: why hadn't he looked more closely at her that time in the dark, and remembered her more clearly.

"I already want to go to sleep," whispered Lyuba, sighing.

"And did you understand everything you read?" asked Nikita.

"Everything clearly! Do you want me to tell you?" proposed Lyuba.

"That's not necessary," Nikita refused, "you keep it to yourself, for I'd forget it anyway."

He swept up the litter around the stove with a wisk-broom and left for his father's.

Ever since that time, he visited Lyuba almost every day, only sometimes he let a day or two pass so that Lyuba would miss him. Whether she missed him or not is not known, but during these empty nights Nikita had to walk for ten, for fifteen miles, several times around the whole town, wishing to remain in solitude, enduring in discomfort his yearning for Lyuba and not going to her.

When he visited her, he usually busied himself with heating the stove and waited for her to tell him something during an interval when she paused in her study of

the book. Each time Nikita

brought Lyuba some food for supper from the dining room at the peasant furniture workshop. She ate at her academy but they served too little to eat there, and Lyuba thought a lot, studied, and in addition, was still growing, and she did not receive enough nourishment. With his first pay, Nikita bought cowfeet in a neighboring village and then cooked the jelly on the iron stove all night, and Lyuba was preoccupied until midnight with her books and notebooks, then she repaired her clothes, darned her stockings, washed the floors at dawn and then bathed outdoors in a tub of rainwater before the neighbors even woke up.

It was boring for Nikita's father to be alone every evening, without his son, and Nikita never said where he was going. "He's a man now," thought the old man. "He could have been killed or wounded in the war, but since he's alive — let him go!"

Once the old man noticed that his son brought two rolls of white bread from somewhere. But he immediately wrapped them up in separate paper and did not offer him any. Then Nikita, as usual, put on his cap and went off until midnight, taking both rolls with him.

"Nikita, take me with you!" pleaded the father. "I won't say anything there, I'll only take a look... it is interesting there, — it must be something remarkable!"

"Another time, father," Nikita said, feeling embarrassed. "Anyway now it's time for you to sleep, tomorrow you have to go to work..."

That evening Nikita did not find Lyuba, she wasn't home. So he sat on the bench by the gate and began waiting for the hostess. He put the white rolls inside his shirt and warmed them there, so that they would not cool before Lyuba's arrival. He waited patiently until late at night, watching the stars in the sky and the occasional passersby, hurrying home to their children, listened to the sound of the town clock on the bell tower, the barking of dogs in the yards and several soft, unclear sounds, which do not exist during the day. He probably could live here waiting, until his very death.

Lyuba appeared silently, out of the darkness in front of Nikita. He stood up before her, but she told him: "It would be better if you went home," and she began to cry. She walked into her apartment, and Nikita still waited awhile

outside in bewilderment and then followed Lyuba.

"Zhenya died," Lyuba told him in the room. "What am I

to do now...?"

Nikita was silent. The warm rolls were inside his shirt — either it is necessary to take them out right away, or else there is nothing now that had to be done. Lyuba lay on the bed in her clothes, turned her face to the wall and cried there to herself, inaudibly and scarcely moving.

Nikita stood alone for a long time in the night-darkened room, ashamed to disturb another's deep grief. Lyuba paid no attention to him, because the sadness from one's own grief makes people indifferent to all others who suffer. Nikita deliberately sat on the bed at Lyuba's feet and took the rolls from under his shirt, so that he could put them somewhere, but at the moment he could not find a place for them.

"Let me be with you now!" said Nikita.

"And what will you do?" asked Lyuba tearfully.

Nikita thought a bit, afraid of making a blunder or inadvertently hurting Lyuba.

"I won't do anything," he answered. "We'll start living as usual, so that you won't be so tormented.

"Let's wait, there is no need for us to hurry," Lyuba said pensively and prudently. "We have to decide what to bury Zhenya in, — they don't have a coffin..."

"I'll bring one tomorrow," promised Nikita and put the rolls on the bed.

The next day, Nikita asked the foreman's permission and began to make a casket; they always allowed building of coffins freely and did not deduct from their pay for the use of the material. Because of lack of know-how, it took him a long time, but to make up for this, he finished the inside resting place for the dead girl carefully and especially neatly; from his remembrance of the dead Zhenya, Nikita himself felt upset and a few tears fell on the shavings. The father, passing by the yard, approached Nikita and noticed his distress.

"What are you upset about: did your betrothed die?" asked the father.

"No, her girl friend did," he answered.

"Her girl friend?" said the father. "The Devil take her. Let me even the side of the coffin for you, it didn't come out right for you, one can't see the workmanship."

After work Nikita took the coffin to Lyuba; he didn't know where her dead friend was lying.

That year's autumn remained warm for a long time, and the people were glad. "There was a poor harvest, so we'll save on the firewood," the economy-minded people were saying. Nikita Fear-sov ordered in advance his Red Army overcoat to be made into a woman's coat for Lyuba, and the coat was already prepared, yet now with the overcoat ready there was no need for it because of the warm weather. As previously, Nikita continued to go to Lyuba's apartment, to help her get along and to receive nourishment himself for the delight of his own heart.

He asked her once how they would go on living — together or separately. And she answered that until spring, she would not be able to feel happiness, because she had to hurry to finish the medical academy, and then they could see about it. Nikita listened to this distant promise, he did not demand greater happiness than that which he already had because of Lyuba, and he did not know whether or not there was any still better, but his heart froze from long patience and uncertainty — did Lyuba need him as he was: as a poor, uneducated, demobilized man. With a smile, Lyuba sometimes looked at him with her light eyes, in which were found big, black incomprehensible dots, and her face, around her eyes, was filled with kindness.

Once Nikita began to cry, covering Lyuba for the night with a blanket before he left for home, but Lyuba only stroked his head and said: "Well, come on, you can't worry like this as long as I'm still alive."

Nikita hurriedly left for his father's, to seek shelter there, collect himself, and not go to Lyuba for several days in succession. "I'll read," he decided. "I'll start to live the way I should, and forget Lyuba, I will not start to think of her and I will forget that I even know her. What's so special about her — great millions live in this world, there are better ones than she! She is plain!"

The next morning he did not get up from the bedding on the floor where he slept. His father, leaving for work, felt his head and said: "You're hot: lie on the bed! Go and be ill for awhile, then you'll recover... have you been wounded anywhere in the war?"

"Nowhere," answered Nikita.

Towards evening he lost consciousness: in the beginning he constantly saw the ceiling and two late-dying flies on it, sheltering themselves to warm themselves for the continuation of life, and then these two subjects began to arouse anguish and disgust in

him — the ceiling and the flies seemed to penetrate to the inside of his brain, it was impossible to drive them away from there and stop thinking about them, with the continuously enlarging thought, already eating up his head bones. Nikita closed his eyes, but the flies were seething in his brain, he jumped out of bed, to chase the flies from the ceiling, but fell again on the pillow: it seemed to him that his mother's breath still issued from the pillow — his mother had slept right there next to his father — Nikita remembered her and forgot himself.

After four days Lyuba found Nikita Fearsov's cottage and for the first time came to him herself. It was only mid-day; all the houses where the workers lived were uninhabited — the women had gone to get food and the pre-school children were scattered throughout the yards and meadows. Lyuba sat on the bed next to Nikita, stroked his forehead, wiped his eyes with the edge of her handkerchief and asked:

"Well, where are you hurting?"

"Nowhere," said Nikita.

The strong fever carried him away in its current, far from all the people and objects nearby, and he now had difficulty seeing and recognizing Lyuba; afraid to lose her in the darkness of indifferent reason, he touched the pocket of her coat, sewn from the Red Army overcoat, and held on to it as a tired swimmer would clutch a very steep embankment, sometimes sinking, sometimes rescuing himself. The illness continuously tried to carry him away to the shining, empty horizon — to the open sea, so that he could rest there on the slow, heavy waves.

"You probably have the grippe, I'll cure you," said Lyuba. "Or, perhaps, typhus!.. But it's all right — there's nothing to be afraid of!"

She raised Nikita by the shoulders and seated him with his back against the wall. Then Lyuba quickly and firmly changed Nikita into her coat, found his father's scarf and tied it around the patient's head, and put his feet into felt boots, lying under the bed until winter. With her arms around Nikita, Lyuba ordered him to move his feet and led him, shivering, to the street. A coachman was standing there. Lyuba helped her patient into the cab, and they drove off.

"People nowadays certainly can't settle down!" said the coachman, turning to the horse and continuously urging her on with his reigns into a departing slow trot.

In her room Lyuba undressed Nikita, put him into the bed and covered him with the blanket, with an old strip of carpet, with her mother's dilapidated shawl — with all the belongings she had that could keep one warm.

"Why should you lie at home?" said Lyuba with satisfaction, tucking the blanket under Nikita's hot body. "Well, why! Your father's at work, you're lying all day by yourself. You don't receive any care and you are pining for me."

For a long time Nikita tried to figure out and wondered where Lyuba had gotten the money to pay the coachman. Perhaps she had sold her Austrian boots or her textbook (first she had learned it by heart, so that she wouldn't need it), or she had paid the coachman her entire monthly stipend...

During the night Nikita lay in dim consciousness: at times he realized where he now was, and he saw Lyuba, who heated the stove, and cooked the food on it, and then Nikita observed the unfamiliar shadows of his mind, acting independently of his will in the compressed, burning congestion of his head.

His chill steadily intensified. From time to time Lyuba felt Nikita's forehead with her palm and counted the pulse in his wrist. Late at night she gave him boiled, warm water to drink, and, taking off her street clothes, lay under the blanket next to the patient, because Nikita shivered from the fever and it was necessary to warm him. Lyuba embraced Nikita and pulled him to herself, but he rolled himself up in a ball from the chill and pressed his head to her breast, in order to feel more intimately another's higher, better life, and forget his torment, his own shivering, empty body. But now Nikita didn't want to die — not for his sake, but

in order to be in contact with Lyuba, with another life—therefore, he asked Lyuba in a whisper if he would get well or would he die: she was studying, and should know the answer.

Lyuba held Nikita's head in her hands and answered him: "You'll soon recover... People die because they are sick alone, and there is no one to love them, but you are with me now..."

Nikita warmed up and fell asleep.

In about three weeks Nikita recovered. Outside, snow had already fallen, it suddenly grew quiet everywhere and Nikita went to spend the winter with his father. He didn't want to disturb Lyuba until she finished her studies at the academy; let her mind develop to its full capacity, she was also one of the poor people.

The father was happy with his son's return, even though he had visited him at Lyuba's two out of three days, each time bringing food for his son and some kind of sweets for Lyuba.

During the day, Nikita began to work again in the workshop, and in the evenings he visited Lyuba and spent the winter peacefully: he knew that with the spring she would be his wife and at that time a happy, long life would begin. From time to time Lyuba touched him, pushed at him, ran from him around the room, and then — after the game — Nikita kissed her carefully on the cheek. Usually Lyuba, however, did not let him touch her without a reason.

"Otherwise you'll get bored with me and we still have a whole life to live!" she would say. "I'm not really that sweet: it only seems that way to you!..."

During their days off, Lyuba and Nikita went for walks along the winter roads beyond the town or walked half-embracing on the ice of the sleeping Potudan River— far in the direction of the summer flow of the river. Nikita would lie on his stomach and look down under the ice, where one could see how the water quietly flowed. Lyuba too settled next to him and, touching each other, they watched the secluded stream of water and said how happy the Potudan River was, because it ran out to the sea, and that the water under the ice would flow past the shores of far-off lands, where flowers were now growing and birds were singing. Thinking about this a little, Lyuba ordered Nikita to get up from the ice

immediately; Nikita wore his father's old quilted jacket, it was too short for him, didn't keep him very warm, and Nikita could catch a cold.

And so together they were patiently friends with each other almost all winter long, tormented by the anticipation of their impending future happiness. All winter the Potudan River, also, hid itself under the ice, and the winter crops of grain dozed under the snow — these phenomena of nature calmed and even comforted Nikita Fearsov: it is not only his heart that lies buried before spring. In February, waking in the morning, he listened — were the new flies buzzing yet or not, — and outside he looked at the sky and at the trees of the neighboring garden: perhaps the first birds were already flying in from the distant countries. But the trees, the grass and the embryos of the flies still slept in the depths of their strength and conception.

In the middle of February, Lyuba told Nikita that their

finals would begin on the twentieth, because doctors were very much in need and the people had no time to wait long for them. And towards March the exams would already be over, therefore let the snow lie and the river flow under the ice even until the month of July! The joy of their hearts would come earlier than the warmth of nature.

For this time, — until March — Nikita wanted to leave the town, to pass the time more quickly until his joint life with Lyuba. He volunteered in the peasant furniture workshop to go with a brigade of carpenters to repair furniture in villages and in country schools.

The father meanwhile — towards the month of March — took his time in making a present for the newlyweds — a big cupboard like the one which stood in Lyuba's apartment when her mother was a similar bride-to-be for Nikita's father. In the eyes of the old carpenter life now repeated itself for the second or third cycle. One could understand this, but to change it was perhaps impossible, and sighing, Nikita's father placed the cupboard on the sledge and pulled it to the apartment of his son's fiancée. The snow grew warm and melted under the sun, but the old man was still strong and dragged the sledge, even directly over the black body of bare earth. He secretly thought that he himself could certainly have married this girl, Lyuba, since he had been too shy to marry her mother, but somehow it's too embarrassing, and in his home there isn't enough in order to

treat, attract a young girl like Lyuba to himself. And Nikita's father reckoned from this that life was far from normal. His son had just returned from the war and again he was leaving home, this time once and for all. Evidently the old man would have to take a beggar from the street — not for the sake of family life, but so that there would be a second being in the cottage, as a domesticated hedgehog or rabbit; let it hamper life, and bring in dirtiness, but without it one would stop being a man.

Having completed the cupboard for Lyuba, Nikita's father asked her when he would have to come to the wedding.

"When Nikita comes back: I'm ready!" said Lyuba.

At night the father went to the village thirteen miles away, where Nikita worked on making school desks. Nikita was sleeping on the floor in an empty classroom, but the father woke him up and told him that it was time to go back to the town — he could get married.

"You be off, and I'll finish the desks for you!" said the father.

Nikita put on his cap and immediately, not waiting for dawn, set off on foot for the town. He walked alone through empty places all of the second half of the night; the field wind wandered without order near him, sometimes touching his face, sometimes blowing into his back, but sometimes completely retiring in the quiet of the roadside ravine. The earth lay dark along the slopes and on the high field land, the snow left it for the lower strata, there was a smell of young water and old grass, fallen since the autumn. But the autumn was already a forgotten, distant time — the earth was now poor and free, she would give birth to everything once again, and only to those beings who had never lived before. Nikita didn't even hurry to go to Lyuba; he liked being in the gloomy light of the night on this unforgettable, early earth which had forgotten all that which had died on it and didn't know that it was giving birth in the warmth of the new summer.

Toward morning Nikita reached Lyuba's house. A light hoarfrost lay on the familiar roof and on the brick foundation — Lyuba was probably sleeping well in the warm bed now, and Nikita passed her house so that he would not wake up his betrothed, not to cool her body because of his own interest.

Toward evening of that day Nikita Fearsov and Lyuba Kuz-netsova registered themselves as married in the district soviet, then they went back to Lyuba's room, and didn't know what to occupy themselves with. Nikita now became ashamed that complete happiness had come to him, that the human being most needed by him in this world wished to live as one with him, as if a great precious goodness was hidden in him. He took Lyuba's hand to him and held it for a long time; he took delight in the warmth of the palm of this hand, through it he felt the distant throbbing of a heart that loved him and thought about the incomprehensible mystery: why Lyuba smiles at him and he does not know for what unknown reason she loves him. For himself, he felt precisely why Lyuba was dear to him.

"First, let's eat!" said Lyuba and took her hand away from Nikita.

She had prepared something today: for completion of the academy she had been given a double allowance in the form of food and money.

With constraint Nikita began to eat his wife's delicious, varied

food. He did not remember ever having been treated almost free of charge, he did not have occasions to visit people for his own pleasure and eat his fill there as well.

Having eaten, Lyuba stood up from the table first. She opened her arms to Nikita and said to him:

"Well!"

Nikita stood up and shyly embraced her, afraid of hurting something in this special, delicate body. Lyuba herself pressed him to herself to help him, but Nikita asked, "Wait, my heart begins to ache very much," and Lyuba let her husband go.

Outside twilight was falling, and Nikita wanted to light up the stove but Lyuba said, "It isn't necessary, I've already finished studying, and this is our wedding day." Then Nikita arranged the bed and meanwhile Lyuba undressed in his presence, not feeling any shame before her husband. Nikita, however, walked behind his father's cupboard and quickly took off his clothes there, and then lay next to Lyuba for the night.

The next morning Nikita got up very early. He swept the room, lit the oven to boil tea, brought water in a bucket from the passage for washing and towards the end did not know what else to do while Lyuba was sleeping. He sat on a chair and grew sad: now Lyuba would probably order him to go back to his father forever, because it turns out that one must know how to take pleasure, but Nikita cannot torment Lyuba for the sake of his own happiness and all his strength was throbbing inside his heart, flowing up to his throat, with none remaining anywhere else.

Lyuba woke up and looked at her husband.

"Don't be dejected, it's not worth it," she said, smiling. "Everything will work out between you and me."

"Let me wash the floor," asked Nikita. "It's dirty here."

"Well, wash it," agreed Lyuba.

"How pitiful and weak he is from his love for me," thought Lyuba in bed. "How beloved and dear he is to me; let it be that I remain an eternal girl with him!.. I'll bear it through. And perhaps sometime he will start to love me less and then he will be a strong man."

Nikita moved restlessly along the floor with a wet rag, washing the dirt from the floor boards, and Lyuba laughed at him from the bed.

"Here I am married," she was happy for herself and climbed out from under the blanket in her nightgown.

Tidying up the room, Nikita at the same time wiped all the furniture with a damp rag, then diluted the cold water in the bucket with hot water and took a washbasin from under the bed, so that Lyuba could wash herself over it.

After tea, Lyuba kissed her husband on the forehead and went to work at the hospital, saying that she would return at around three o'clock. Nikita felt the place of his wife's kiss on his forehead and remained alone. He did not know himself why he didn't go to work today — it seemed to him that it was now shameful for him to be alive, and perhaps altogether unnecessary: why then earn money for bread? He decided somehow to spend the rest of his life until he was

worn to a shadow from shame and anguish.

Inspecting the general family belongings in the apartment, Nikita found the food and prepared a lunch consisting of one dish — a thin millet porridge with beef. And after such work, he lay face downwards on the bed and began to calculate how much time was left until the opening of the river, in order that he could drown himself in the Potudan.

"I'll wait for the ice to begin to flow downstream: it won't be long!" he said aloud to himself, to soothe himself, and he dozed off.

Lyuba brought a gift from work — two saucers of winter flowers: the doctors and nurses there had congratulated her on her marriage. And she conducted herself with them grandly and mysteriously, as a true woman. Young girls, the nurses and special-duty nurses envied her, one straightforward worker of the hospital pharmacy asked Lyuba trustingly — was it true or not, that love is something fascinating; and marriage for love — an entrancing happiness? Lyuba answered her that all this was the honest truth, because of which people of the world continue living.

In the evening the husband and wife talked with each other. Lyuba said that they might have children and they should think about this beforehand. Nikita promised to begin to make children's furniture overtime in the workshop: a table, a chair and a rockingbed.

"Revolution is here forever, now it is good to give birth," Nikita was saying. "The children now will never be unhappy."

"It's O.K. for you to talk, but I'm the one who will have to give birth," Lyuba felt hurt.

"Will it hurt?" asked Nikita. "Better not have children then."

not to torment yourself..."

"No, I'll bear it, I think!" agreed Lyuba.

At dusk she made the bed, and in order that it would not be crowded to sleep, she moved two chairs for their feet up to the bed, and she told him to lie down

diagonally across the bed. Niki-ta lay down at the indicated place, fell silent and late at night he cried in his sleep. But Lyuba did not fall asleep for a long time, she heard his tears and carefully wiped Nikita's sleeping face with the edge of the sheet, and in the morning, waking up, he did not remember his grief in the night.

Thus, their conjugal life went its own way. Lyuba treated people in the hospital, and Nikita made peasant's furniture. In his free time and on Sundays he worked in the courtyard and in the house, even though Lyuba didn't ask him to do it, — as if she herself now didn't know whose house this was. Earlier it belonged to her mother, then it was taken as government property, but the government forgot about the house — no one ever came to inquire whether the house was still intact and nobody collected money for the apartment. Nikita did not care about this. Through his father's acquaintances he got green paint — verdigris, and painted the roof and shutters all over again, as soon as spring weather set in. With this same diligence he gradually repaired the dilapidated shed outdoors, fixed the gates and the fence and was preparing to dig a new cellar, because the old one caved in.

The Potudan River had now begun to flow. Nikita went to the shore twice, looked at the flowing water, and decided not to die as long as Lyuba still tolerated him, and when she stopped enduring him, then there would be time to succumb — the river would not freeze over for a long while. Nikita usually did the work in the courtyard slowly, in order to avoid sitting in the room and pestering Lyuba needlessly. And when he finished the work completely, he gathered clay from the old cellar in the hem of his shirt, and went with it into the apartment. There he sat on the floor and modeled figures from the clay of people and other objects, having no meaning or resemblance to anything — simply dead inventions in the shape of a mountain with the head of an animal or the roots of a tree in which the root seemed ordinary, but so intricate, impassible, pierced from one of its shoots to another, gnawing and tormenting itself, that from a long study of this root one wanted to sleep. Nikita inadvertently, blissfully smiled during his clay work, and Lyuba sat right there on the floor

next to him, mended the underwear, sang songs which she had heard at some time, and at odd moments caressed Nikita with one hand, sometimes she stroked him on the head, sometimes she tickled him under his arm. Nikita lived during these hours with a strained, timid heart, and did not know whether he needed

something else higher and more powerful, or whether life in reality was insignificant — such as he already had now. But Lyuba looked at him with tired eyes full of patient goodness, as if goodness and happiness became a great effort for her. Then Nikita kneaded his toys, converting them again into clay, and asked his wife whether he should light the stove to heat water for tea, or go somewhere on an errand...

"You don't have to," smiled Lyuba. "I'll do everything myself..."

And Nikita understood that life was great, and perhaps beyond his strength; that it was not all concentrated in his beating heart — it was still more interesting, stronger and dearer in another person, inaccessible to him. He took the bucket and went for water at the town well, where the water was cleaner than in the street reservoirs. Nikita could not exhaust his grief with any kind of work, with anything, and he was afraid of the approaching night as in his childhood. Gathering the water, Nikita stopped in at his father's with the full pail and sat visiting with him a while...

"Why haven't you celebrated your wedding?" asked the father. "Secretly, in Soviet-fashion, did you manage it?..."

"We'll still celebrate it," promised his son. "Let's you and I make a little table with a chair and a rocking-bed, — you have a talk with the foreman tomorrow, so that we'll get the material... You know, we'll probably be having children soon!"

"Well, it can be done," agreed the father. "You should not have children for a while: it's not yet time..."

In a week Nikita had made for himself all the necessary children's furniture; he stayed overtime every evening and worked carefully. And his father put the final touches on each article and painted it.

Lyuba placed the children's items in a special corner, decorated the future child's table with two pots of flowers and placed a new embroidered towel on the back of the chair. In thanks for his faithfulness to her and to her unknown children Lyuba embraced Nikita, she kissed him on the throat, clung to his chest, and for a long time warmed herself near her beloved man, knowing that it

was impossible to do anything else. But Nikita, lowering his hands, hiding his heart, stood silently before her, because he did not want to appear strong, being helpless.

That night Nikita, having enough sleep, woke up a little after midnight. He lay a long time in the quiet and heard the peal of the clock in the town — half-past twelve, one, half-past one: one stroke for the three times. In the sky outside of the window, a vague aimless life began — it was not yet dawn, but only the movement of the darkness, the slow uncovering of the empty space, and all the things in the room and the new children's furniture, too, became visible, but after the dark night they had spent they seemed pitiful and tired, as if calling for help. Lyuba moved a bit under the blanket and sighed; perhaps she also was not sleeping. Just in case, Nikita grew still and began to listen. However, Lyuba no longer moved, she breathed evenly again and Nikita was pleased that Lyuba was lying near him, alive, essential for his soul, and not realizing in her sleep that he, her husband, existed. If only she was safe and happy, the mere consciousness of her was sufficient to Nikita for life. He dozed off in peace, being consoled with the sleep of someone close and dear to him, and then opened his eyes again.

Lyuba cried, cautiously, almost inaudibly. She covered her head and tormented herself there alone, squeezing her grief in order that it would die silently. Nikita turned his face to Lyuba and saw how mournfully she curled up under the blanket, breathing quickly and suppressing herself. Nikita was silent. One is not able to comfort every grief; there is grief which ends only after the exhaustion of the heart, in a long oblivion or the distractions of current everyday cares.

At dawn, Lyuba quieted down. Nikita waited for a while, then lifted the edge of the blanket, and looked into his wife's face. She slept peacefully, warm, quiet, with dried tears...

Nikita got up, got dressed soundlessly and went outside. A faint morning was beginning in the world, a passing beggar walked in the middle of the street with a full bag. Nikita set out after this man, in order to have a reason for going somewhere. The beggar walked out of the town and made his way along the high road to the village of Kantemirovka where from time immemorial there were big markets and prosperous people living; true, they always gave little away to the poor, and to feed oneself one had to look in the distant villages of the poor; but then to make up for this it

was festive, interesting, in Kantemirovka, one could live in the market by the mere observation of the great number of people, in order to entertain one's soul for a while.

Towards noon the beggar and Nikita reached Kantemirovka. On the outskirts of the village the beggar sat in a ditch, opened the bag and together with Nikita began to treat himself from it; and then in the village they broke off in different directions, because the beggar had his own plans and Nikita had none. Nikita arrived at the market, sat in the shade behind a large covered commercial stand and stopped thinking about Lyuba, about the cares of life and about himself.

The market guard had already lived in the market for twenty-five years, and all those years he had lived richly with his fat, childless old woman. The merchants and the cooperative shops always gave him meat, remains and scraps of food rations, supplied sewing materials at cost, and also household objects such as thread, soap and so forth. For a long time, he himself had traded worthless and damaged wrapping materials a little at a time, and increased his money in a savings account. His duty was to sweep up the rubbish from the whole market, wash the blood from the shelves in the meat row, clean the public latrines and at night, guard the trade sheds and premises. But at night he only strolled through the market in a warm sheepskin coat, and he assigned the unskilled labor to the vagabonds and beggars, who spent the night at the market; his wife almost always emptied the scraps from yesterday's meat soup into the garbage pail, so that the guard could always feed some kind of poor man for cleaning up the latrine.

The wife constantly ordered him not to occupy himself with the unskilled work, he already grew such a gray beard — he was not a guard any longer, but an overseer. But can one instruct a tramp or a beggar to work forever on such grub: he works once, eats what they give him, asks for more, and then he vanishes back to the district.

Recently, several nights in succession already, the guard had chased the same man from the market. When the guard pushed him as he slept, the latter got up and left, answering nothing, and then again lay down or sat somewhere behind a large stand farther away. Once the guard chased after this homeless man all night, his blood even began to boil from the passion of tormenting, conquering this strange, exhausted being... A couple of times the guard threw a stick at him, hitting him on the head, but at dawn

the tramp was still hiding from him — he had probably left the market square altogether. But in the morning the guard found him again — he was sleeping on the roof of the cesspool behind the latrine, right outdoors. The guard called out to the sleeping man; the latter opened his eyes, but didn't answer, looked, and then again dozed off indifferently. The guard thought that he was a mute. He poked the tip of his stick into the dozing man's stomach and motioned with his hand that he should follow him.

In his neat state-issued apartment, which consisted of a kitchen and one room — the guard gave the mute a drink of cold cabbage soup with pieces of fat from the pot, and after the food ordered him to take a broom, spade, scraper, bucket of lime from the shed and clean up the public latrine thoroughly. The mute looked at the guard with clouded eyes: probably he was also deaf... But not really, — the mute took the necessary utensils and materials from the shed, as the guard had told him, hence — he could hear.

Nikita completed his work neatly, and then the guard appeared to check on how it had turned out; for a start, it turned out tolerably, so the guard led Nikita to the rail and entrusted him to pick up manure and carry it away in a wheelbarrow.

At home the guard-overseer ordered his wife not to spill out the leftovers from supper and dinner in the garbage heap, but to pour them into a separate crock: let the dumb man finish it off.

"Maybe you'll order me to put him to sleep in the room?" asked the wife.

"That won't be necessary," determined the master. "He will spend the nights outside: he isn't deaf, let him lie and listen for thieves; if he hears them he'll run and tell me... Give him a sackcloth; he'll find himself a place and make a bed..."

Nikita spent a long time at the village market. Having grown out of the habit of talking, he started to think, remember and torment himself less. Only seldom did despair enter his heart, but he endured it without reflection, and the feeling of grief tired itself in him little by little and faded away. He had already grown used to living in the market, and the crowds of people, the noise of voices, the daily events, distracted him from the memory of himself and his own interests — food, rest, desire to see his father. Nikita worked constantly; even at night, when Nikita went to sleep in an empty box in the middle of the silent market, the

guard-overseer visited him and ordered him to doze and listen.

and not sleep like a dead man. "Anything can happen," the guard said. "The other day the rogues tore away two boards from the stand over there, ate thirty-six pounds of honey without any bread..." And by dawn Nikita was already working, he hurried to clean up the market before the people came; during the day it was impossible to eat: sometimes it was necessary to put manure from the heap into the communal cart, sometimes to dig a hole for slops and sewage, or to dismantle old boxes which the guard took for free from the merchants and then sold in the village as separate boards, — or still more work was found.

In the middle of summer Nikita was taken to jail on suspicion of stealing used merchandise from a market branch of the village general store, but the investigation acquitted him because the mute, a greatly exhausted man, was too indifferent to the accusation. The investigator did not find in Nikita's character or in his modest work at the market, as the guard's helper, any signs of greediness toward life or any inclination for pleasure or enjoyment, — in prison he didn't even eat all the food. The investigator understood that this man didn't know the value of personal and public property, and the status of his case did not contain any circumstantial evidence. "There is no need to dirty the prison with such a man!" decided the investigator.

Nikita sat in the prison only five days, and from there he again appeared at the market. The guard-overseer had grown tired working without him; therefore, he was glad when the mute showed up again at the market stands. The old man called Nikita into the apartment and gave him fresh hot cabbage soup to eat, breaking the order and thriftiness in his household. "For once he will eat — it won't break us!" the old guard-overseer was reassuring himself. "And then we'll switch him again to yesterday's cold food, when something is left over."

"Go rake away the debris in the grocer's aisle," — the guard ordered Nikita, after the latter had eaten the overseer's cabbage soup.

Nikita set about his usual work. He was now only faintly aware of himself and didn't think much, only that which randomly appeared in his mind. By autumn he would very likely forget himself entirely, what he is, and seeing the activity of the world around, would no longer continue to have ideas about it; let it seem to all the people that this man lives in the world, but actually he would be found

here and exist only in unconsciousness, in

the poverty of his mind, in heartlessness, as in the warmth of a house, in shelter from mortal grief...

Soon after jail, already at the passing of summer, — when the nights grew longer, — Nikita, as was necessary according to the rule, wanted to lock the door in the latrine at night, but a voice was heard from within:

"Wait, don't lock up, fellow!.. Or do they also steal things from here?"

Nikita waited for the man. His father walked out from the place with an empty bag under his arm.

"Hello, Nikita!" said the father and suddenly began to cry mournfully, ashamed of his tears and not wiping them away with anything, so as not to consider them as existing. "We thought that you had died long ago... Therefore, you're alive?"

Nikita embraced his father, who was stooped and had lost much weight, — his heart throbbed, having fallen out of the habit of feeling.

Then they walked to the empty market and took shelter in a passage between two stands.

"And I came here after groats, they are cheaper here," explained the father. "So you see, I was late, the market had already broken up... Well, now I will spend the night, and tomorrow I'll buy them and start off... And you, what are you doing here?"

Nikita wanted to answer his father, however his throat had dried up and he forgot how to speak. Then he began to cough and whispered:

"I'm all right. Is Lyuba alive?"

"She tried to drown herself in the river," said the father. "But the fishermen saw her immediately and dragged her out, began to care for her — she was even in the hospital: she got better."

"And she is alive now?" asked Nikita quietly.

"She hasn't died yet," said the father. "She often bleeds from her mouth: she probably caught cold when she was drowning. She chose a bad time, — the weather had worsened somewhat, the water was cold..."

The father took some bread out of his pocket, gave half to his son, and they chewed a bit for their supper. Nikita was quiet, and his father placed the sack on the ground and was getting ready to rest.

"And do you have room?" asked the father. "Then lie on

the bag, and I'll lie on the ground, I won't catch cold, I am old..."

"And why did Lyuba drown herself?" whispered Nikita.

"Does your throat hurt?" asked the father. "It will pass. She missed you greatly and wasted away with grief over you, that's why... For a whole month she walked along the Potudan River, along the shore, back and forth she walked for over sixty miles. She thought you had drowned and you would surface, and she wanted to see you. And you, it turns out, are living here. That's bad..."

Nikita thought of Lyuba, and again his heart filled with grief and power.

"You sleep, Father, alone," said Nikita. "I will go to see Lyuba."

"Go," agreed the father. "Now is a good time to go, it's cool. I'll come back tomorrow, then we'll talk..."

Leaving the village, Nikita started to run along the deserted district high road. Getting tired, he walked a little while, then he ran again in the free light air past dark fields.

Late that night Nikita knocked at Lyuba's window and touched the shutters, which he had painted green at one time, — now the shutters appeared blue in the darkness. He put his face to the window pane. From the white sheet, falling from the bed, a pale light was dispersed about the room and Nikita saw the child's furniture, made by him and his father, — it was intact. Then Nikita knocked loudly on the window frame. But again Lyuba didn't answer, she didn't come to the window, in order to recognize him.

Nikita climbed over the gate, entered the passage, then the room, — the doors were not locked: the one who lived here did not safeguard his property from thieves.

Lyuba lay on the bed with the blanket pulled over her head.

"Lyuba!" Nikita quietly called her.

"What?" asked Lyuba from under the blanket.

She was not asleep. Maybe she lay alone in fear and sickness, or thought the knock on the window and the voice of Nikita a dream.

Nikita sat on the edge of the bed.

"Lyuba, it's me, I've arrived!" said Nikita.

Lyuba threw back the blanket from her face.

"Come quickly to me!" she implored in her former, tender voice and held out her arms to Nikita.

Lyuba was afraid now that all this would disappear; she grabbed Nikita by the hands and pulled him to her.

Nikita embraced Lyuba with that intensity which tries to include another, beloved person inside its hungry soul; but he soon collected himself, and felt ashamed.

"Are you in pain?" asked Nikita.

"No! I don't feel anything," answered Lyuba.

He wanted her completely, so that she would be comforted, and a brutal, pitiful strength came to him. However Nikita didn't recognize from his deep love for Lyuba a higher joy than he usually knew — he felt only that his heart now dominated his whole body and shared his blood with a poor, but necessary pleasure.

Lyuba asked Nikita — perhaps he could heat the stove, it would be dark outside for a long time yet. Let the fire shine in the room, she no longer wanted to sleep anyway, she'll begin to wait for the dawn and look at Nikita.

But in the passage there was no longer any firewood. Therefore Nikita ripped off two boards from the shed outside, chopped them into pieces and chips and lit the stove. When the fire grew hot, Nikita opened the stove door so that the light would shine outside. Lyuba got out of bed and sat on the floor opposite Nikita, where it was light.

"Are you well now, you're not sorry to live with me?" she asked.

"No, I'm all right," answered Nikita. "I'm already used to being happy with you."

"Heat the oven better, I'm shivering," asked Lyuba.

She was now only in a worn night shirt, and her body, which had lost weight, was chilled in the cool dusk of the late hour.

(1937)

Translated by Alexey A. Kiselev

HOME COMING

Alexei Alexeievich Ivanov, a sergeant of the guards, was leaving the army because of the demobilization. In the detachment where he had served through the entire war, Ivanov was given a proper sendoff such as was due, with regrets, with love, respect, with music and wine. His close friends and comrades rode out with him to the railroad station, and having said their last good-byes, left Ivanov there alone. The train, however, was many hours late, and then, after all those hours had passed, it was delayed some more. Already a cold autumn night was setting in; the station had been destroyed during the war; there was nowhere to spend the night, and Ivanov rode back to his detachment in an automobile going that way. The next day, Ivanov's comrades had another farewell; again they sang songs and embraced the departing in token of everlasting friendship with him, but now they were somewhat more restrained in the expression of their feelings, and only the closest friends participated.

Afterward Ivanov rode out again to the railroad station; at the station he learned that yesterday's train had not yet arrived, and therefore Ivanov could actually again return to his detachment for the night. However, it was embarrassing to go through a sendoff for a third time, to inconvenience his comrades, and Ivanov resigned himself to boredom on the empty pavement of the platform.

Not far from the switch for the outgoing trains stood the switchman's booth. On the bench against that booth there sat a woman in a winter coat and a warm shawl. She was sitting there yesterday also, with her baggage about her, and she was there now, awaiting the train. Last night, as he prepared to ride back to his detachment, Ivanov had thought shouldn't he also invite that solitary woman who could sleep with the medical nurses in their warm hut. Why should she be freezing there all night long; he wondered if she could find some warmth inside the switchman's booth. While he so thought, the automobile in which he had been offered a ride began to move, and Ivanov forgot about the woman.

Now this woman sat again, motionless, in the same place as yesterday. Such constancy and perseverance betokened the loyalty and steadfastness of a woman's heart, — at least as concerned

belongings and the home to which this woman was probably returning. Ivanov came nearer to her: perhaps she would be less bored with him than alone. The woman turned her face to Ivanov, and he recognized her. She was a girl, everybody called her "Ma-sha — the forgotten daughter;" she had spoken thus of herself some time past, because she was indeed a forgotten daughter of an employee in the public bath house. During the war Ivanov had met her a few times, when he visited a certain Airfield Service Battalion (B.A.O.) where this Masha, forgotten by her father, worked in the restaurant as the cook's helper, a private employment.

The autumn countryside surrounding them was sad and depressing at this time of day. The train that was to carry Masha and Ivanov away from there was who knows where in the vast gray emptiness. The only thing that could divert and console a human heart was the heart of another human being.

Ivanov got into conversation with Masha, and it made him feel good. Masha had pleasant features, was simple of soul, and kind, with her large working hands, and her healthy, young body. She was also returning home, and was thinking of

how she would now live the new life of a civilian; she was used to her military women friends, was used to the aviators who liked her as an older sister, gave her chocolate and called her "Spacious Masha" because of her big frame and her heart, which, as with a true sister, embraced all the brothers in one love, and not one in particular. And now Masha felt strange, uncertain, and even fearful of going home to relatives to whom by now she no longer felt very close.

Ivanov and Masha felt orphaned without the army; Ivanov, however, could not long remain in a state of sad depression; he felt at such times as though someone was laughing at him from afar, and was happy in his stead, and he was no more than a dreary simpleton. Because of this, usually Ivanov soon turned to the business of living, by finding for himself some occupation, or some consolation, or else, as he expressed it himself, found something at hand to be glad of — and thus he threw off his gloom. He sidled closer to Masha and asked if she would, in a comradely way, allow him to kiss her on the cheek.

"Ever so lightly," said Ivanov, "the train is late and it is dull waiting for it."

"Only because the train is late?" asked Masha, and looked at him attentively.

The ex-sergeant appeared to be about thirty-five years old, the skin of his face, wind-beaten and tanned by the sun, was quite brown. Ivanov's gray eyes were looking at Masha humbly, even shyly, and he spoke although directly at her, but gently, delicately and courteously. Masha liked his deep, hoarse voice of an older person, his dark coarse face, and its expression of strength and defenselessness. Ivanov put out the glow in his pipe with his thumb, which was insensitive to the dying heat, and sighed, awaiting the permission. Masha drew away from Ivanov. He smelled strongly of tobacco, of dry, toasted bread, lightly of wine, — all those clean substances which either derived from fire, or else could themselves create fire. It was as though Ivanov lived on nothing but tobacco, dry toast, beer and wine.

Ivanov repeated his request.

"I shall be careful, barely touch you, Masha... Just think that I am your uncle."

"I have already thought... I thought that you were my daddy, not uncle."

"...That so... Then you will allow..."

"Fathers do not ask their daughters," laughed Masha.

Later Ivanov confirmed to himself that Masha's hair had the scent of fallen leaves in the forest, and he could never forget it.... Having gone off a little way from the railroad track he lit a small bonfire in order to cook an omelet for supper for Masha and himself.

During the night the train arrived, and carried Ivanov and Masha away to their part of the country, to their homes. Two days and nights they traveled together, and on the third day Masha had reached the city where she was born twenty years ago. Masha got all her things together and asked Ivanov to help adjust the bag on her back, but Ivanov took her bag on his shoulder and followed Masha out of the car; even though his own destination was more than one day of traveling farther on.

Masha was astonished and moved by Ivanov's attention. She feared to remain suddenly alone in the city where she was born and had lived, but which now had become almost foreign to her. Masha's mother and father were carried away from here by the Germans, and perished no one knew where, and now in her home town Masha had only a cousin and two aunts, and in her heart Masha felt no attachment to them.

Ivanov formalized his stop-over in town with the railroad

commandant and remained with Masha. Actually he should have hurried to reach his home where his wife and two children, whom he had not seen for four years awaited him. Ivanov, however, was deferring the joyous and anxious hour of the reunion with his family. He did not know himself why he did it — possibly he wished to be alone and free to do as he pleased a while longer.

Masha was not aware of Ivanov's family situation, and due to her girlish shyness she had not questioned him about it. With her kind heart she trusted Ivanov and thought of nothing else.

Two days later Ivanov was leaving to go farther, to his own home. Masha came to the station with him. Ivanov kissed her familiarly, and courteously promised to remember her features forever.

Masha smiled in answer and said, "Why remember me forever? It is not

necessary, and you will forget anyway... I ask nothing of you, just forget me."

"My dear Masha... Where were you before, why didn't I meet you long, long ago?"

"Before the war I was in my teens, and long, long ago there was no me at all."

The train came and they said good-bye. Ivanov was gone, and he did not see how Masha, now alone, began to cry, because she never could forget either a girl friend or a comrade with whom destiny brought her together even if only once.

From the car window Ivanov looked at the little houses near the railroad track of the small town which he would probably never see again in his life, and was thinking that in a somewhat similar little house, but in another little town, lived his wife Lyu-ba with the children Peter and Nastya, and that they were waiting for him. While yet in his detachment he had sent a telegram to his wife that he was leaving for home without delay and wished to kiss her and the children as soon as possible.

For three days Lyubov Vasilievna, Ivanov's wife, met every train arriving from the west. She begged off from her work, was not completing her norm, and in the nights was unable to sleep for joy, and listened to the slow and indifferent motion of the pendulum of the clock on the wall. On the fourth day, Lyubov Vasilievna sent the children, Peter and Anastasya, to the station to meet their father should he arrive in daytime, but she went out herself to the night train.

Ivanov arrived on the sixth day. He was met by his son

Peter. Now Petrushka was in his twelfth year, and the father did not recognize his son at once in this serious adolescent who appeared older than his age. The father noted that Peter was a short and slender boy with a large head and forehead, and his face was quiet, as though already accustomed to the cares of life, and his small brown eyes looked at the world gloomily and with displeasure, just as though everywhere they could see only things out of order. Petrushka was clad and shod adequately: his shoes were worn but still serviceable, his trousers and jacket were old, made over from his father's civilian clothes, and had no torn places. Where necessary they were mended; where needed there was a patch, and all in all Petrushka looked like a proper little peasant, not well off, but comfortable. The father was surprised and sighed.

"Are you the father, then?" asked Petrushka when Ivanov embraced and kissed him after lifting him up. "You must be Father."

"Yes, Father.... Good day, Peter Alexeyevich."

"Good day. Why were you so slow? We waited and waited."

"The train, Petya, was going slowly. How are Mother and Anastasya? All in good health?"

"Normal," said Peter. "How many decorations have you?"

"Two, Petya, and three medals."

"And I and Mother thought that there was not an empty place on your chest. Mother also has two medals, she has earned them at work... Why have you so little baggage — one bag only?"

"I don't need more."

"But for those who have a trunk, is it difficult at the war?" asked the son.

"It is difficult," agreed the father. "It is easier with only a bag. Over there no one has trunks."

"And I thought they had. I would have kept my things in a trunk — in a bag they can break or get rumpled."

He picked up his father's bag, and carried it home, the father following after him. The mother greeted them on the house stoop. She had again begged off from work, as though her heart knew that her husband would arrive today. From the factory she stopped at home on her way to the station, intending to go to the station later. She feared lest Semyon Evseyevich would come to the house; he, at times, liked to drop in during the day; he had this habit, to show up in the middle of the day, and to sit around

with the five-year-old Nastya and Petrushka. True, Semyon Evseevich never came empty-handed; he always brought something for the children, — candy,

some sugar, or a loaf of white bread, or else an order for some rationed goods. Lyubov Vasilievna herself had never seen anything bad about Semyon Evseevich. During the two years that they had known each other, Semyon Evseyevich had been kind to her, and as to the children, he was like a real father to them, and even more considerate than some fathers. But today Lyubov Vasilievna did not wish her husband to see Semyon Evseevich; she put the kitchen and their room in order. The house must be clean and uncluttered. And later, tomorrow, or the day after, she herself would tell her husband the full truth such as it was. Fortunately, Semyon Evseyevich had not come today.

Ivanov approached his wife, took her in his arms, and so remained standing with her, feeling anew the forgotten and familiar warmth of a beloved person. The little Nastya came from the house, looked at her father whom she did not remember, began pushing him away from her mother, pressing against his leg, and then began to cry. Petrushka stood silently near his father and mother, with his father's bag on his shoulders, and having waited awhile, he said,

"Enough for you, because Nastya is crying; she does not understand."

The father drew away from the mother and took Nastya in his arms. She was crying with fear.

"Nastya," Petrushka shouted to her, "Don't be silly! I tell you, he is our father, he is our own!"

Inside the father washed himself, then sat at the table. He stretched out his legs, closed his eyes, and felt a quiet joy in his heart and a calm contentment. The war was over. His feet had tramped over thousands of miles during those years. The lines of fatigue were on his face, and a sharp pain cut into his eyes under the closed eyelids. They now craved rest in half light or darkness.

As he sat, all his family busied themselves in the room and in the kitchen, preparing a festive meal. Ivanov looked in turn at every object in the house — the clock on the wall, the closet with the dishes, the thermometer on the wall, the chairs, the flowers on the window sills, the large Russian, built-in stove in the kitchen.... For a long time they had lived here without him and had missed him. Now he was back, and he looked at them, getting to

know each one as one of his family who had lived without him in sadness and in

poverty. He breathed in the well-established, familiar odor of home, that of the smoldering wood, the warmth of his children's bodies, of something scorched in the stove. This smell was the same as four years ago, and it had not disappeared or changed in his absence. Nowhere else had Ivanov sensed that smell, even though during the war he had been in various countries and in hundreds of dwellings: the very breath of life was different there, and did not smell like his own home. Ivanov remembered also the odor of Masha, how her hair smelled. It smelled of the forest foliage, of a little known, overgrown foot path, not of a home, but of a return of the uneasy, troubled life. What was she doing now, and how did she arrange her civilian life? Masha, the forgotten daughter. Let her be.

Ivanov noticed that the most active of all in the house was Petrushka. He not only worked himself, he instructed his mother and Nastya as to what had to be done and what should not, and how to do it right. Nastya submissively obeyed Petrushka, and was no longer afraid of her father as of a stranger. She had a bright, intense face of a child who does everything in her life truthfully and in earnest, and had a kind heart because she did not resent Petrushka.

"Nastya, throw out the potato peelings from the mug. I need it."

Nastya obediently emptied the mug and washed it. At the same time the mother was rushing to prepare a spur-of-the-moment pie, without yeast, in order to shove it into the stove where Petrushka had already started the fire.

"Move on, Mother, move faster," commanded Petrushka. "You can see, the stove is ready. You've gotten used to putzing around, Mrs. Efficiency."

"Right away, Petrushka, right away," obediently answered the mother. "I'll just put in some raisins, that'll be all, your father certainly has not had any raisins for a long time. I've been keeping these raisins for a long time."

"He did have raisins," said Petrushka. "Our military receive raisins also. Our warriors, look at them, what mugs they have, they eat rations.... Nastya, you sit down? — Have you come to visit? Peel the potatoes, we shall fry them in the skillet for dinner. A pie is not enough to feed a family!"

While the mother made the pie, Petrushka, using the big rod.

shoved a pot with cabbage soup into the oven, in order that the fire would not

burn for nothing, and at the same time gave instructions to the fire in the stove: "Don't burn so shaggily — throwing yourself around to all sides! Burn evenly. Put the heat right under the food, the trees in the woods were not grown for free.... And you, Nastya, you threw the kindling into the stove every which way, it should be placed as I taught you. And you are again peeling the potatoes too thickly; they should be thin; why are you taking so much meat of the potato. We lose nourishment that way... how many times did I tell you about it? Now I am telling you for the last time, and if not, I'll bang you on the head!"

"Why, Petrushka, do you hassle Nastya so much?" said the mother meekly. "What do you want of her? How can she peel so many potatoes, and so closely for you, like at the barber's without scraping the meat.... Father has returned to us, and you are carping all the time!"

"I am not carping, I am doing what is needed... We must feed Father, he came home from the war, and you are wasting stuff. How much food was lost in our potato peelings? If we had a sow, we could feed her for a year with the peelings alone, then send her to the exhibition, and at the exhibition they would give us a medal.... Just think what it could be, but you don't understand!"

Ivanov did not know that such a son was grown to him, and now he sat and marveled at his intelligence. But he liked better the little, meek Nastya, who also worked in the house with her little hands, and these hands were already trained and capable. It all meant that the children had long been used to the work in the house.

"Lyuba," Ivanov asked his wife. "Why don't you tell me anything, how you lived without me all this time, how your health is, and what you do at work?"

Lyubov Vasilievna now felt shy with her husband, like a bride: she had become unused to him. She even blushed when her husband spoke to her, and her face, as in her youth, had a bashful, somewhat frightened expression which Ivanov had liked so much.

"Nothing, Alyosha. We lived all right. The children were not sick much, I took care of them... What is bad, is that I am with them only at night. I work at the brick factory, on the brick press — it is far from here."

"Where is your work?" Ivanov had not understood.

"At the brick factory, on the press. I had no qualifications at all, at first I helped with all kinds of tasks in the yard, then they trained me, and put me to the press. It is good to work, only the children are always, always alone. You see how they turned out to be, they can do everything themselves; they have become like grownups." Lyubov Vasilievna was speaking softly. "Is that good, Alyosha, I don't know..."

"We will see, Lyuba.... Now we shall all live together, later we can sort out what is good and what is bad."

"With you here everything will be better, because when I am alone I do not know what is right and what is bad, and I was afraid. Now you can do the thinking about how we should bring up the children."

Ivanov got up and walked about the room.

"So, you say it was not so bad with you here in general?"

"Not so bad, Alyosha, and all is now past, we have weathered it. Only we missed you so much, and it was terrible to think that you might never return to us, that you might perish there, as did others..."

She began to cry over the pastry that was already in the tin form, and her tears fell on the dough. She had just brushed the top of the pastry with a raw egg, and her hand was still moving over the dough, continuing to spread the egg, and now her tears, over the festive pastry. Nastya grasped her mother's leg with her arms, pressed her face against her skirt and looked angrily at her father.

The father leaned down to her. "What is it? Nastenka, what is it? You are angry with me?" He lifted her up into his arms and patted her on the head. "What is it, little daughter? You forgot me, you were quite small when I went to the war...."

Nastya laid her head on her father's shoulder and began to cry also.

"What is it, my little Nastya?"

"Mama is crying, and I will, too."

Petrushka, who was standing by the oven door was displeased.

"What is it with you all? Sick with your moods, and the heat is wasting in the stove. Shall we light a second fire, and who will give us an order for more wood? On the old order we have drawn everything and burned everything, only a very, very little

remains in the shed, about ten pieces, and that is nothing but aspen.... Mother, hand over the dough before the heat cools."

Petrushka drew from the oven the large pot of cabbage soup, and spread hot coals over the oven floor, and Lyubov Vasilievna quickly, as though in a hurry to please Petrushka, placed in the oven two tin forms with pastry, having forgotten to paint the second one with the raw egg.

To Ivanov, his own home seemed strange and difficult to understand. His wife was the same, with her attractive, shy, even though very tired face, and the children were the same that were born of him, only grown through the years of war, as they were supposed to. But something prevented Ivanov from feeling wholeheartedly the joy of his return — probably he had grown unused to living at home, and was unable to fully comprehend even his closest, his own people. He looked at Petrushka, his first born, listened as he issued commands to his mother and his little sister, noted his serious and worried face, and admitted to himself with a feeling of shame, that his fatherly feeling for this stripling, his attraction towards him as towards his own son was insufficient. Ivanov was all the more ashamed of his indifference to Petrushka because he felt that Petrushka needed love and attention more than the others, because now he was pitiful to look at. Ivanov did not know exactly the life that his family had lived without him, and he was not yet able to clearly understand how Petrushka had acquired his present character.

At the table, in the circle of his family, Ivanov understood his duty. He should as soon as possible attend to business at hand, which was to go to work in order to earn money, and help his wife to properly bring up the children, then everything would go better, and Petrushka would run about with other children, would sit down with a book, instead of issuing commands from the stove, rod in hand.

At the table, Petrushka ate less than the others but he gathered all his crumbs and put them in his mouth.

"How about it, Peter," his father turned to him, "you eat the crumbs, and you did not finish your piece of the pie.... Eat! Mother will give you another piece."

"One can eat up everything," Petrushka muttered sullenly, "but for me this is enough."

"He fears that if he should eat a lot, then Nastya also, seeing him, will eat much," explained Lyubov Vasilievna simply.

"and he begrudges it."

"And you begrudge nothing," said Peter indifferently, "but I want to leave more for you."

The father and the mother looked at each other and felt shaken by the words of their son.

"And why are you eating badly?" the father asked of little Nastya. "Eat well, or else you will always remain small."

"I have grown big," said Nastya.

She ate a small piece of pastry, but another piece which was larger, she set aside and covered with her napkin.

"Why are you doing that?" her mother asked her. "Would you like me to butter the pastry?"

"I don't want it. I ate enough."

"Then eat it as it is... Why have you set it aside?"

"Uncle Semyon will come. I left it for him. This pastry is not yours, — it is mine; I have not eaten it. I shall put it under the pillow so it would not get cold."

The mother remembered that she also had covered a freshly baked cake with pillows when she made one for the First of May, in order that the pastry would not cool before the coming of Semyon Evseevich.

"And who is this Uncle Semyon?" Ivanov asked his wife.

Lyubov Vasilievna did not know what to answer, and said, "I don't know who he is. He comes alone to see the children, his wife and children were killed by the Germans, he became friendly with the children and comes in to play with them."

"How so - to play?" Ivanov was astonished. "What are they playing at in your house? How old is he?"

Petrushka glanced quickly at his mother and at his father; in answer to her husband the mother said nothing, she only looked with sad eyes at Nastya, while the father smiled unkindly, rose from his chair, and lit a cigarette.

"Where are the toys, with which this Uncle Semyon plays with you?" the father then asked Petrushka.

Nastya came down from her chair, climbed up on another one by the chest of drawers, took some books from the top and brought them to her father.

"These books are toys," Nastya said to the father. "Uncle Semyon reads them aloud to me: see this funny bear Mishka, he is a toy, he is a toy, and he is a book."

Ivanov took the books — toys that Nastya gave him: about

the bear Mishka; about the cannon-toy, about the little house where lived Grandma Donna who spun flax with her granddaughter.

Petrushka remembered that it was time to close the lid in the oven chimney, or else all warmth would be lost to the house.

Having closed the chimney, he said to his father: "He is older than you, Semyon Evseevich! He is useful to us, let him be..."

Glancing through the window, just in case, Petrushka noticed that the clouds in the sky were not those that should be there in September. "The clouds," said Petrushka, "look all leaden. We shall probably have snow from them! Could tomorrow bring an early winter? What shall we do then? The potatoes are all in the field, we haven't laid up any stores.... What a situation!"

Ivanov looked at his son, heard his words, and felt himself grow timid before him. He would have liked to question his wife more exactly as to who was this Semyon Evseevich, who visited his family for already two years, and whom was he visiting — Na-stya, or his comely wife, but Petrushka had claimed Lyubov Va-silievna's attention for household matters:

"Mother, give me the ration cards for bread for tomorrow, and the stubs to attach them to, and also give me the ration cards for kerosene. Tomorrow is the last day. Also we should get charcoal, and you have lost the bag, and there they put it into one's own bags. Now, look for the bag everywhere, or else sew a new one from rags, we can't live without the bag! And tomorrow Na-styka should let no one into our yard for water from our well: winter will come, the water will be still lower, and we do not have enough rope for lowering the pail, and you would not chew snow, and melting it takes wood."

As Petrushka uttered his words he simultaneously was sweeping the floor about the stove and putting away the kitchen dishes. Then he took from the oven a pot of cabbage soup.

"We had a snack with the pastry, now we can eat the meat soup with bread," Petrushka announced to all. "And you, Father, go tomorrow to the district committee and the military command post. They will register you at once, and we shall receive ration cards for you sooner."

"I shall go," meekly acquiesced the father.

"Do go, don't forget, you may oversleep tomorrow and forget."

"No, I won't forget," promised the father.

Their first meal together after the war, the cabbage soup and meat, the family ate in silence. Even Petrushka sat quietly, as though the father and mother and the children feared by a sudden word to break up the quiet happiness of the family together.

Later Ivanov asked his wife:

"How is it with you about clothing, Lyuba — probably all worn out?"

"We wore our old things, and now we might get something new." Lyubov Vasilievna smiled. "I mended everything the children had, then made things for them out of your suit, your two trousers, and all your underwear. You know, we had no surplus money, and the children had to be clothed."

"You did well," said Ivanov. "Don't begrudge anything for the children."

"I did not begrudge, I sold the coat that you bought for me, and now I wear a jacket."

"Her jacket is short, she might catch cold wearing it," Petrushka put in. "I shall go to work as a stoker in the bath house, shall have a pay and will get her a coat. At the market place they sell from hand to hand, I went there, asked the prices. Some coats there might be suitable."

"We shall manage without you, without your pay," said the father.

After dinner Nastya put large eyeglasses on her nose, and sat down by the window to mend her mother's mittens, which her mother now wore under the larger gloves at work, — it was getting cold, the autumn had come.

Petrushka glanced at his sister, and became angry with her. "What are you up to, why have you put on Uncle Semyon's eye glasses?"

"I look over the glasses, not through them."

"What else! I can see! You will spoil your eyes and get blind, and then will have to be supported all your life, and be on pension. Take the glasses off at once, I tell you! And forget mending the mittens, Mother will mend them herself, or else I shall do it when I get ready. Take the notebook, and write the sticks — you can't remember when you studied last!"

"Nastya, does she study?" asked the father.

The mother answered that not yet, she was too small, but Petrushka has been ordering Nastya to study every day, he bought

her a notebook and she draws counting sticks. Petrushka was also teaching his sister to count, putting together and subtracting pumpkin seeds, and she herself

was teaching the letters.

Nastya laid aside the mitten, and from the chest of drawers brought out a notebook and holder with a pen, while Petrushka, satisfied now that everything was done as was due, donned his mother's jacket and went out into the yard to chop wood for the morrow. The chopped wood Petrushka usually carried into the house for the night, and stacked behind the stove in order that it might dry up there, and so give more heat and burn more evenly.

In the evening Lyubov Vasilievna got the supper ready early. She wished to have the children asleep earlier, so that she could sit together with her husband, and talk with him. But after supper the children did not fall asleep for a long time. Nastya, lying down on the wooden cot stared at her father from under the blanket, and Petrushka, in his bedding on top of the Russian stove where he always slept, summer and winter, was turning over, groaned, murmured something and took a long time before he became quiet. However, with the night far advanced, Nastya's tired eyes closed and Petrushka snored some on the stove.

Petrushka slept restlessly and lightly: he always feared that something might happen in the night and he would not hear it: a fire, or thieves and robbers, or that his mother would forget to put the hook on the door, and the door would be open at night, and all the warmth go out. Tonight Petrushka was awakened by the anxious voices of his parents, talking in the room next to the kitchen. What was the time — midnight or already near dawn he did not know, but his father and mother were not sleeping.

"Alyosha, not so loud, the children will wake up," the mother was saying softly. "You should not speak badly of him, he is a kind man, he loved your children..."

"We don't need his love," said the father. "I love my children myself... How fine — he grew fond of somebody else's children! I was sending you a remittance, and you yourself worked, what did you have need of him for, this Semyon Evseevich! Is your blood still on fire? Ay, you Lyuba, Lyuba! And I was thinking of you differently. It means you made a fool of me..."

The father stopped talking, then struck a match to light his pipe.

"How so, Alyosha, what are you saying!" the mother exclaimed loudly. "I took good care of the children, they were

hardly ill at all, and they are well fed."

"What of it!" the father was saying. "Others had four children at home, and they did not live badly, and the children grew up not worse than ours. And with your care what has Petrushka turned into — talking like an old man, but probably forgot how to read!"

Petrushka sighed on the stove and began to snore on purpose, that he might listen further. "Oh well," he thought, "Even if I am an old man, you had it easy on ready rations."

"But then, he has learned everything that is important and difficult in life!" said the mother. "And he will catch up with his studies."

"Who is he, this Semyon of yours? I have enough of your throwing dust in my eyes," the father continued angrily.

"He is a kind man."

"Do you love him, then?"

"Alyosha, I am the mother of your children."

"Go on! Answer me!"

"I love you, Alyosha. I am a mother, and a woman. Long ago, I was with you only, I have forgotten."

The father said nothing and was smoking his pipe in the darkness.

"I was lonely for you... Of course, the children were with me. But they could not take your place, and I was always waiting for you, these long, terrible years. I did not want to wake up mornings."

"And what is his status? Where does he work?"

"He is employed in the shipping department of the materials in our factory."

"Now I understand, a thief."

"He does not steal, I know... And all his family perished in Moghilev, there were three children, his daughter was already engaged."

"Unimportant, he found another family instead, and a woman, not old yet, comely, so that he is not so badly off again."

The mother said nothing in answer. There was silence, but soon Petrushka discerned that his mother was crying.

"He was telling the children about you, Alyosha," the mother spoke up again, and Petrushka could hear then that in her eyes there were large, unshed tears. "He was telling the children how you were fighting for us and were suffering. They were asking

him 'why?' and he told them in answer, because you were good."

The father laughed and shook out his pipe.

"So that is how he is, this Semyon-Evsei. Never saw me, but approves of me. What a person!"

"He never saw you. He was inventing especially so that the children would remember you and would love their father."

"But why, why did he need to do this? The quicker to come into your graces? Tell me, what did he want?"

"Perhaps his heart is good, Alyosha —that is why he is like that. And why not?"

"You are stupid, Lyuba. Forgive me, please. Whatever is done is always calculated."

"And Semyon Evseevich often brought something for the children, he always brought something, candy, or white flour, or sugar, and recently he had felt boots for Nastya, but they were too small. And himself, he asked nothing of us. Neither did we need them, we could get along without his gifts, we had become accustomed, but he said he felt happier when he did something for others, then he felt less keenly the loss of his family. You will see him, it is not what you think."

"All this is rubbish of some sort!" said the father. "Don't try to fool me. You make me weary, Lyuba, and I still want to live."

"Live with us, Alyosha."

"I with you, and you with Senka-Evseka?"

"I shall not, Alyosha. He will never again come to us, I shall tell him not to come again."

"That means that you did, since you will no more? Eh, Lyuba, how you are, all women are like that."

"And what about you men?" the mother was hurt. "What do you mean, all women are like that? I am not like that... I worked day and night, we were making fire resistant units for the locomotive tanks. My face grew thin, I am a stranger to all, a beggar would not ask alms of me. Life was hard for me, and the children were alone at home. Times I would come home, there would be not heat in the house, nothing cooked, all in darkness, the children fearful, it was not at once that they learned how to keep house, the way they do now. Petrushka was a boy also, once... And it was then that Semyon Evseevich began to come to us. He would come, and sit with the children. He lives all alone. 'Will you allow me to visit you from time to time,' he was asking me.

'May I visit you from time to time, and share the warmth in your home?' I told him that it is also cold in our house, that the wood is damp, and he said: 'It is nothing, my soul is chilled through, I shall at least sit a while with your children, you need not light the stove for me.' I said, 'All right, come for the time being, the children will not be so fearful while you are here.' And then I also got used to him, and we all felt better when he came. I looked at him, and was thinking of you, that we do have you. Without you it was so sad and so bad; better let somebody come, it was less tedious then, and the time slipped by faster. What need did we have of time when you were not here!"

"Well, what else, go On?" urged the father.

"Nothing else. Now you are here, Alyosha."

"Well, fine, if so," said the father. "It is time to go to sleep."

But the mother begged him, "Wait a little with your sleep. Let us talk a little. I am so glad to be with you."

"They can't stop babbling," thought Petrushka on top of the stove, "they have made peace, what else. Mother must go to work, must get up early, and she is still enjoying herself, is happy at the wrong time, — however, she is not crying any more."

"And this Semyon — he loved you?" asked the father.

"Wait a while, I shall go and cover Nastya, she throws off the covers in her sleep and gets cold."

The mother tucked Nastya's blanket about her, then walked into the kitchen, and stood by the stove to listen whether Petrushka was asleep. Petrushka understood and began to snore. Then his mother went back to the room, and he heard her voice:

"Most probably, he did love me. He looked at me endearingly, I saw it, and what am I now — am I still good to look at? It was very hard for him and he had to love somebody."

"You could at least have kissed him, since such a situation arose between you," the father said kindly.

"What else? He himself had kissed me twice, even though I did not want it."

"Why did he do that, if you did not want it?"

"I don't know. He said that he forgot himself, was thinking of his wife, and I did look a little like his wife."

"And he looks like me, also?"

"No, he does not. No one is like you, you are the only one, Alyosha."

"I am one, you say? The count begins with one, you know:

first one, then two."

"He only kissed me on the cheek, not on the lips."

"It is all the same — where."

"No, it is not the same, Alyosha. What can you understand of our life?"

"How so? I fought through the entire war, and I saw death closer than I see you."

"You were fighting, and I was here worried to death about you, my hands were shaking from despair, but I had to work cheerfully, in order to feed the children and be of use to the state against the fascist enemy."

The mother spoke calmly, but her heart was tortured and Petrushka felt sorry for his mother: he knew that she had learned how to repair shoes for herself and him and Nastya, so as not to pay high prices to a shoemaker, and also was repairing electric cooking plates for the neighbors for payment in potatoes.

"And I could no longer endure that life, and my longing for you," the mother was saying. "And if I had endured, I know that I would have died, but I have children. I had to feel something else, Alyosha, some joy, so as to have a respite. One man told me that he loved me, and he was so tender with me, as you were, some long time ago."

"Who was it, again that Semyon-Evsei?" asked the father.

"No, another man. He is employed as an instructor in the district committee of our worker's union — he is a refugee."

"The devil take him, whoever he is! What happened — he consoled you?"

Petrushka knew nothing of this instructor and wondered how it was that he did not know him. "What do you know? Our mother is on the ball," he muttered to himself.

The mother said in reply to the father, "I have received nothing from him, no joy at all, and I felt even worse afterwards. My soul stretched out to him because it was dying, but when he became close to me I was indifferent. I was thinking then of all the cares at home, and regretted that I had allowed him to come close. I understood that only with you I may be at peace, happy, and that with you I shall find rest when you will be near. Without you I have nowhere to turn, I

cannot save myself for the children... Live with us, Alyosha, it will be good for us all!"

Petrushka heard how the father rose from the bed, lit his pipe, and sat down on a stool.

"How many times have you met with him, when you were quite close?" the father asked.

"Only once," said the mother. "Never again. And how many times should there be?"

"As many times as you wish — it is your business," said the father. "Why then were you saying that you were our children's mother, and were a woman only with me, and that long ago."

"It is true, Alyosha."

"But how so, what kind of truth is this? You were a woman with him, too?"

"No, I was not a woman, I wanted to be, and could not... I felt that I was perishing without you. I needed someone to be with me, I was exhausted, and my heart grew black, already could not love my children, and you know that for them I would endure anything, for them I would not even begrudge my bones!"

"Wait!" said the father. "You said that you mistook this your new Semyon-Evseika, that you obtained no joy from him, and yet you did not die, did not perish, you remained whole."

"I did not die," whispered the mother, "I live."

"It means you were again lying to me. Where is the truth with you?"

"I don't know," the mother was whispering. "I understand so little of anything."

"All right. But I know a lot, I have lived through much more than you did," said the father. "You are a bitch, and nothing more."

The mother was silent. The father's breathing was audible, fast and labored.

"Well, so I am home now," he said. "There's no more war, but you have wounded me in the heart... Well, good, live now with Senka and with Evseika! You make a joke of me, a laughing stock, but I also am a human being, not a plaything."

In the darkness the father began to put on his clothes and shoes. Then he lit the kerosene lamp, sat at the table and wound his wrist watch. "Four o'clock," he muttered to himself, "It is still dark. That is a true saying that there are lots of women, but even one wife is not to be found."

The house became quiet. Nastya was breathing evenly on the wooden divan. On the warm stove Petrushka pressed his head into his pillow, and forgot that he should snore.

"Alyosha!" said the mother in a kind voice. "Alyosha, for-

give me."

Petrushka heard his father's groan, and then the tinkling of glass. Petrushka could see, through a slit in the hanging drapery that the room where his mother and father sat grew darker, but that the small flame was burning there still. He cracked the lamp chimney. Petrushka guessed correctly. "There are no lamp chimneys to be bought anywhere."

"You've cut your hand," said the mother. "You are bleeding, take a towel from the chest of drawers."

"Quiet!" the father shouted at the mother. "I can't stand your voice... Wake up the children, wake them up at once! Wake them up, I tell you! I shall tell them what kind of mother they have. So they will know!"

Nastya, frightened, cried aloud and awoke.

"Mama!" she called. "Can I come to you?" Nastya liked to climb into her mother's bed at night and be warm under the blanket with her.

Petrushka sat up on the stove, let his legs down over the edge and said to everybody: "It is time to sleep! Why did you wake me up? It is not day yet, it is dark out! Why are you making such commotion and keeping the light on?"

"Sleep, Nastya, sleep, it's early yet, I shall come to you right away," responded the mother. "And you, Petrushka, do not get up, and don't talk anymore."

"And why do you talk? What does Father want?" Petrushka began again.

"And what business is it of yours — what I want!" said the father. "We have a sergeant here!"

"Why do you frighten Mother? She is skinny enough, she eats potatoes without butter, because she gives it to Nastya."

"And do you know what your mother was doing here, how she occupied herself?" the father shrieked in a thin, complaining childish voice.

"Alyosha!" Lyubov Vasilievna spoke meekly to her husband.

"I know, I know everything!" Petrushka was saying. "Mother was crying for you, waited for you, now, you come and she cries just the same. You know nothing!"

"You don't understand anything, yet!" the father was angry. "What an offspring we've got!"

"I understand everything, completely." Petrushka was re-

sponding from the stove. "You yourself do not understand. We have work to do, one must live, and you shout at each other like some fools." Petrushka fell silent; he put his head on the pillow, and unexpectedly and silently he began to cry.

"You have become very bossy in the house," said the father. "But now it does not matter anymore. The master is here."

Petrushka wiped his tears, and answered his father: "Ah, you, what a father, talking like that, and you are old, and you were in the war... You go tomorrow to the disabled's cooperative, there Uncle Hariton works behind the counter, he cuts the bread, he always gives full weight to everyone. He also was in the war, and came back home. Go and ask him, he tells it to everybody, and he laughs, I heard it all. His wife Anyuta learned to drive as a chauffeur; she now delivers bread, and she is good, she does not steal any bread. She also had friends, and visiting, and they feasted her there. That friend of hers had a decoration, he lost one arm,

and is employed as head of the store where they sell industrial goods to private persons."

"What are you prattling about, better go to sleep, it will be light soon," said his mother.

"You also did not let me sleep. It won't be light yet for a while. That one, without an arm, and Anyuta became friends, and they lived well. And Hariton was at the war. Then Hariton arrived and began abusing Anyutka. All day long he shouted at her, and at night he drank wine, and ate snacks, while Anyutka cried and ate nothing. He bickered and bickered, then got tired of it, stopped tormenting Anyutka, and said to her, 'You are a stupid woman, having only one, and he without an arm; when I was without you I had Glashka and Aprosnka, and also Maruska, and your aunt Nyushka, and in addition, also Magdalinka.' And he laughs. And Aunt Anyuta laughs also; later she bragged, 'Hariton is the best, none better anywhere. He killed the fascists, and as to women he could not beat them off.' Uncle Hariton tells us all this in the store, as he receives the breads loaf by loaf. And now they live peacefully, very well. Uncle Hariton goes on laughing, he says: 'I lied to my Anyutka, I had no one — there was neither Glashka, nor Nyushka, nor Aproska, not even Magdalinka. A soldier is a son of his country, he has no time to live foolishly, his heart is against the foe. I lied to Anyutka on purpose.' Lie down to sleep, father, put the lamp out, soot comes from the flame without the chimney."

Ivanov had listened with astonishment to the tale told by Petrushka. "Ah, the rascal!" the father thought about his son. "I feared he might even speak of my Masha any minute."

Petrushka was tired and began to snore; he was really asleep now. He awoke when the day was already quite bright, and feared that he overslept, had done nothing about that house that morning.

Nastya alone was at home. She was sitting on the floor and was leafing through the pages of a picture book that her mother had bought for her long ago. She was looking it over every day because she had no other book, and she moved her finger under the letters as though reading.

"What are you doing with a book in the morning? Put it back where it belongs!"

Petrushka said to his sister. "Where is mother — did she go to work?"

"To work," said Nastya softly, and closed the book.

"And where is father?" Petrushka glanced about the house, in the kitchen and in the room. "He took his bag?"

"He took his bag," Nastya said.

"Did he say anything to you?"

"He did not say, he kissed me on my mouth and my little eyes."

"Ah-Ah!" said Petrushka, and became pensive. "Get up from the floor," he commanded his sister. "Let me clean you up a little and put your things on — then we shall go out."

At that very time their father was sitting at the station. He had already drunk two hundred grams of vodka and had a dinner in the morning on one of the ration tickets which were issued to him for his trip. During the night he had definitely decided to leave and go to that city where he had left Masha, in order to see her there, and, perhaps, to never be separated from her. He regretted being so much older than this forgotten daughter whose hair had the scent of nature. However, time will show what will come of this, it was useless trying to guess ahead.. Nonetheless, Ivanov hoped that Masha would be at least a little glad to see him again, and that would suffice for him; it would mean that he, too, had a new human being close to him, and one beautiful to look at, gay, and kind of heart. And then, time will tell!

Soon the train arrived, the one that was going to that place from whence Ivanov arrived only yesterday. He picked up his bag and went out to board the train. "Masha does not expect me,"

Ivanov was thinking. "She said to me that I shall forget her anyway, and that we shall never see each other again, and yet — here I am, going to her for always."

He climbed onto the car platform and remained there so that when the train began to move, he could look for the last time at the small city where he had lived before the war, where his children were born to him... Once more he

wanted to see the house he had left: it was possible to catch sight of it from the car because the street, on which the house where he had lived stood, ran up to a railroad crossing, and the train was to pass over that crossing.

The train began to move and slowly passed over the station switches out into the empty autumn fields. Ivanov took hold of the hand bars on the platform and gazed at the little houses, the buildings, the barns, at the turret of the fire station in the town which had once been his own. He recognized two tall smokestacks in the distance: one belonged to the soap factory, the other to the brick factory; there at this time Lyuba was working on the brick press; let her now live as she pleased, and he would live as he pleased. He could perhaps forgive her, but what would it mean? His heart was hardened against her, and it held no forgiveness for the person who kissed and lived with another, and that in order to relieve the tedium, the loneliness of the war days, and of the separation from her husband. And the reason that Lyuba became close to her Semyon or to her Evsei was because life was difficult, because the poverty and weariness were torturing her. That, instead of being an excuse, was a reaffirmation of her feelings. All love springs from need and weary longing; if a human being had all he needed and did not feel lonesome, he never would have felt love for another person.

Ivanov was about to move from the platform into the car, in order to lie down to sleep, as he no longer wished to see for the last time the house where he had lived and where his children remained. Why torture oneself in vain? He glanced ahead — how far was it to the crossing, and immediately saw it. The railroad track there was crossed by an unpaved country road, leading into town. Over the ground of this road were strewn branches of straw and hay, fallen from the carts — willow shoots and horse dung.

Usually this road was empty, except on the two weekly market days. Infrequently a peasant would ride into town with a full carload of hay, or one would be riding back to his village.

Thus it was now; the country road was empty: only from the town, from the street that ran into the road, a couple of children were running in the distance; one was bigger, the other smaller, and the bigger one holding the hand of the smaller was fast pulling him along, while the little one, try as he might with his little legs, could not keep up with the bigger child. Then the taller child dragged him after him. They stopped near the last house, glanced toward the station,

seemingly trying to decide, should they go there or not. Then they glanced at the passenger train that was going over the crossing, and ran along the street, directly to the train, as though all of a sudden they wished to catch up with it.

The car where Ivanov was standing had already passed the crossing. Ivanov lifted his bag to go inside the car and settle himself for sleep on the upper berth, where the other passengers would not disturb him. However, did or did not those two running children succeed in reaching at least the last car of the train? Ivanov leaned out from the platform, and looked back. The two children, holding hands, were still running on the road to the crossing. Suddenly they both fell down, got up and continued running ahead. The older one raised his free hand, and looking ahead towards the moving train, towards Ivanov, beckoned with his hand, as though calling someone to come back to him. And all at once they both fell down again. Ivanov could see that on one foot the older was wearing a felt boot, and on the other a rubber, and that was why they were falling so often.

Ivanov shut his eyes, not wishing to see, nor to feel the pain of the fallen, tired-out children, and all of a sudden, his chest felt hot, as though his heart, confined and miserable within him, had been beating long and aimlessly all his life, and only now had broken through to freedom, filling his entire being with warmth and wonderment. He suddenly saw everything that he had known before much clearer and more forcefully. Before, he had perceived life through the barrier of self love, and his own advantage, and now suddenly he touched it with his bare heart.

He looked again, from the car steps, toward the end of the train, at the children who were steadily getting farther away. He already knew now that those were his children, Petrushka and Nastya. Probably they recognized him when his car went over the crossing and Petrushka was calling him home to their mother, while he observed them inattentively, thought of other things, and had not recognized them.

Now Petrushka and Nastya were running far behind the train, along the sandy path by the rails. As before, Petrushka held little Nastya by the hand and dragged her along when she could not keep up with him.

Ivanov threw his bag to the ground from the car, then descended to the lowest step of the platform, and stepped down from the train upon that sandy path along

which his children were running after him.

(1946)

Translated by Alexey A. Kiselev

LIGHT OF LIFE

The deep places of our memory retain both dreams and reality so that after a while we are unable to distinguish that which had actually happened from that which we had dreamt, especially if long years have passed and the recalled experience goes back into childhood, into the distant radiance of primal life. In such a remembrance of childhood a long-vanished world is unchangingly and deathlessly present... In a certain field of the native land there grew a tree lit by the noonday sun of June; the light of the skies lay on the grass and the shadows of the tree leaves trembled silently from the movement of heat over the grassy, shining ground as if it were the visible breathing of sunlight.

The ten-year-old boy Akim found it irksome and dull to sit under that tree, yet in his heart there lived quite independently a feeling of

happy peace nourished by the warmth of the earth, the light of the sun, the blue sky over distant fields; by the image of all this perceptible but as yet unusual world within his own childish mind as if the growing grass, the shining light and the stirring wind were not on the outside but rather deep inside Akim's body — and he liked to personify their being and to imagine the thoughts and desires of the wind, the sun and the grass. At the time of childhood the entire world belongs to the child and Akim applied his own experiences to everything he saw, thinking of himself in terms of a tree, an ant or of the wind, when he was trying to figure out why they existed and what made them feel good. His mother had ordered him to get out of the house, to go for a walk and not to come back before dinner or even better, to stay out till supper so that he would not begin asking for food before mealtime. Akim took offense at his mother's suggestion. "I won't come back ever again, you all can live by yourselves, or

maybe I'll come back in my old age, when you are all dead, and then I will be alone." Akim's mother had many other children beside him, she was weary from want and family cares and she replied to her son:

"Oh, boy, won't we be sorry! Won't we cry hard! You just go wherever you want; who cares if we don't see you for a lifetime!"

And so Akim left his home; he circled round it several times,

walking through the wide fields, through the undergrowth, along the slope of the ravine overgrown with a birch copse, and each time discovering secret, thoughtful places which he had never seen before. Absorbed in his interest and observance little Akim walked softly through creation, as if slumbering. He finally reached the distant acre that lay just above the Old Pine River. It was a summer

feast-day and people were dancing the traditional round dance in a field near the forest clearing; they broke off leafy branches, gathered flowers at the edge of the growing wheat and wove garlands. They were singing songs, holding hands, and someone else's mother who smelled of flowers, new clothing and warm cheeks — a very different smell from that of Akim's own mother — this woman who was a stranger — took Akim in her arms, kissed him, played and laughed with him and then gave him white buns to eat. The merrymakers were from another village; in Akim's village they did not sow wheat nor bake white bread; there they ate black bread, potatoes and onions. Until sundown Akim remained with the strangers, looking into their unfamiliar, kind faces, listening to the accordion tunes and forgetting all about his home. He sat on a cliff above the river. Meadows stretched out on the other shore beyond the river and Akim could see how, far away, the day was coming to an end both on

earth and in the sky — the light was disappearing into the mist, into the blue evening, into the vast and frightening night where summer lightning flashed above deep grasses that were bent down under the weight of sleepy dew.

Time wore away, it grew late; it was long past Akim's homecoming but he, unwilling to go back, was thinking of staying permanently in this new-found place. Then one hefty, jolly, barefoot peasant woman from the other village took Akim by the hand and led him back in the direction from which he had come so that the youngster might go home to sleep. The woman brought Akim to the boundary between the villages and left him there, certain of his ability to find the way to his own village. Akim did not need to be told that the land of his village began there but he did not go home. "It's not time yet," he said to himself — he disliked leaving a place where he had been having a good time — and turned

back to look at the woman. She was running back to her companions, her large feet flapping on the damp grass. "Fat, that's what she is, and well-fed," mused Akim, watching the woman, "They sure got good vittles there... I won't go home; what

haven't I seen there — Mother and Father? Big deal. I will go back to the strangers again: they will all go to their houses and I'll come along, then they will invite me in and I'll eat my fill of white buns and pancakes, my belly will stretch like a drum; I will grow up all at once and become real big and go away into far-off lands... No, I'd better wait awhile before going to their village; better if I follow behind them and give them a chance to forget me a bit. Or else that fat woman might remember me and chase me away: 'Again you've come,' she'll say, 'get away from here, you sleepless tramp!' I better wait... Then later on I will really go visit them: I'll ask to

stay there for five or four days. More bread will be left over at home then so Mother and Father will have more to eat and so will the brothers and sisters. Panka and Dunka, Senka and Filka will get my extra share and nobody at our house will be cursing or using bad language."

Akim sat down under the shade of the ripening, aging rye and carefully touched a stalk with his hand. Then he bent the stalk down and looked closely at the ear of rye: it contained moist, tender seeds. Akim decided that this was just the way it should be, since the rains had been frequent and the dews had been pretty good, only the bread when baked in the oven came out black and sour all the same and did not resemble the bright ears of rye at all.

The fields and the sky now darkened; there came a smell of damp, sleepy earth and of flowers which bent their tall heads down on

the shoulders of neighboring grasses. Akim looked at the rye and discovered that its ears dozed - that meant that the bread too was sleepy and considering this Akim laid down his head on a lump of turned-up earth in order to catch some sleep along with the grass and the rye.

Stars lit in the sky. "They woke up and they are watching!" thought Akim, noticing the stars. "I won't sleep either, I will watch, or else the menfolk and the women will get home to that village of theirs and sit down to supper and eat all the food, and I will be left without anything. You can see at once that their vittles are real good — all their folks are white and plump, well-fed, loud-throated... Now they've had a good long walk, they'll come home and eat every last bit of food. I better go after them, or I won't make it!"

Akim went back to the night-filled meadow above the river. It was already empty; the

people had gone home to bed. Only on

the opposite side of the river four small lights were shining from afar in the huts of the mysterious village that the strangers had come from. Akim walked in the direction of the huts through the dew, afraid to be late for supper.

In a hut near the wooden bridge there lived an ancient man: he was sitting at a small bonfire and warming his supper, which was either a gruel or soup with potatoes and onions — one of those things. Akim asked the old man:

"Grandfather, maybe you saw folks passing on their way to their village; men and women, — or haven't they gotten here yet? They were sitting over there before: singing songs and doing nothing."

The aged man sat still, bending over the food in his pot; he neither looked up at the boy nor answered him, he must have been tired of noticing what went on, tired of talking and thinking, since no matter what happened to anyone else his life had already been lived out and was drawing to a close. In the daytime that old man was continually repairing the bridge and at night he guarded it, yet the bridge went on weakening and dying from old age; under Akim's feet the wood breathed as if it were hollow.

A lifetime later, where is he now, that graybearded watchman of the wooden village bridge? Perhaps alive and still breathing somewhere, having become accustomed to life and forgetting to break himself of the habit. The bridge has probably long ago been washed away by the spring waters. But what is that place like after more than fifty years? The people who were weaving garlands on that high field out of Akim's childhood — are

any of them alive now? What grows on that ground — ordinary grass or something else, and what kind of technical constructions have been erected there?..

Akim crossed the bridge and ran across the meadow towards the light burning in the window of the nearest hut, hurrying so as to be less afraid of the dark.

The hut at the edge of the village was small and rather shabby looking. Akim climbed up on the stoop and peered into the lit window. A thin woman sat in the room at a cloth-covered table and ate supper out of a bowl. Akim thought that the woman was old, but then at the time he considered anybody slightly older or taller than himself an old person. Two crutches were propped against the table next to the woman. "That means she's a limpy!" decided Akim. "She sits all alone, doesn't go garland-weaving; she

has no use for it." He tapped softly on the window. The lame woman turned her face towards the window and Akim saw unfamiliar kindly eyes that looked calmly at him from the depth of a stranger's heart, as if from far away. The woman took up her crutches, leaning on them with her pain-wracked hands, and moved forward to open the door and meet her guest.

Akim entered the hut and asked the lame woman:

"You live here?"

"Here, where else," said the woman. "Sit down to supper with me."

"Pour me a bowl and give me a spoon," agreed Akim.

But the woman took her seat on the bench once more and set down her crutches.

"Pour it yourself," she said. "The pot with milk porridge is inside the oven; the porridge is still warm... Don't you see I am lame? You may take my bowl and spoon — I have eaten enough. Cut yourself some bread. Take the white bread; I ate all the black."

As Akim managed these household tasks himself the woman watched the boy silently, with that sorrowful, patient resignation which resembled a humble yet unshakeable contentment.

"The sun has set a while ago," remarked the woman, and asked: "And you — where do you belong? Where are you going at this dark hour?"

"I am going to the mines," replied Akim; he hadn't thought of his destination before but now he suddenly decided to go there: an uncle of his was a miner near Krindachevka and a long time ago a letter had come from him in

which he wrote that the miners always had plenty to eat. Akim's father had read the letter aloud, spelling it out slowly.

"You will get very tired," said the lame woman. "And your mother and father will miss you."

"Mother and Father will get used to it and then they'll forget," explained Akim, eating the milk porridge from the large bowl. "I'm going to send them my savings after I earn some money."

"Where do you come from, then?" asked the woman and her face glowed with an interest in another person's life — an interest she had forgotten in her sickness and loneliness.

"I'm from different parts myself," Akim told her, "I come from Melovatka."

"From Melovatka?" the lame woman was surprised. "But that is only a mile and a half or so from here, isn't it? What do you mean, you're from different parts?"

"I'm not from far off," conceded Akim.

"What sickness do you have, is it your legs?"

"It wouldn't be so bad if it were just the legs," said the woman, "but I have an over-all sickness: weakness... Eat all of that porridge, don't leave any,-there isn't anyone to eat it."

"I'm eating all of it," said Akim. "Who feeds you?"

"I have sons. They live separately because of their wives, but they're good boys and they feed me well, I can't complain," answered his hostess. "Anyway, it's about time for me to die."

"Go ahead and live, what's the trouble," said

Akim. "You've got vittles, your house is peaceful. It's worse in my home."

"What have I to live for? I am old, sick, I can't walk, I have no one to stay with me — everybody has his own needs, his own soul... Finished eating, have you? It's time for bed, I will be putting out the light."

The woman told Akim to get a clean mat out of the chest and to spread it on the floor. Then she blew out the lamp, laboriously and painfully climbed into her bed and quieted down for the night.

The stray boy found himself settling down in the stranger's hut. He helped his lame hostess clean the room, carried water and gathered straw and kindling for lighting the oven. Akim's presence made the sick woman's life livelier and more comfortable than before. She did not want him to leave, but reminded him occasionally that Akim's father and

mother were missing him and he ought to visit home. Akim, however, didn't want to:

"There's plenty of time for going home," he would reply. "We have a scrubby kind of land back there, full of loam, sand and lime, you never get enough food out of it. Besides last summer there weren't many rains and very little dew and dampness, so there's even less food than usual. It's better if the others are able to eat my share: we have six people in the family, I am the seventh, and all of us have large mouths. Meanwhile I will stay with you; you are lonely and lame, you sit all alone in the hut; it is better for you if I am here."

The lame woman agreed with the youngster that it was better for her to have him there; then she had someone to talk to, to

look at.

"With you my heart is distracted from thinking and the hours go by faster," she told him. "You will soon go to the mines though..."

"Oh, I will stay with you for a bit," promised Akim.

After two or three days of living with the lame woman, however, Akim began planning once more to go away to some more distant places, but first he thought of visiting his home to see if his father and mother and sisters and brothers were still alive, because it does happen sometimes that people die all of a sudden — and the thought made Akim's heart ache unhappily. But he told himself that he must endure life away from home so that his family might have more food.

On the fourth day the old lame woman sent Akim to weed the potato patch which lay near the house beyond the empty threshing-barn. Akim went to the field and the woman

followed him from the house. Akim began weeding out the useless grass while the cripple stood nearby leaning on her crutches and watched the boy, not wishing to be left alone in the hut.

The lame woman hung helplessly onto her crutches, her body bent, and Akim noticed now that she had a small hump on her back — whether she had it from birth or acquired it later he could not say. "She looks like the little hunchbacked horse!" thought Akim, recalling the fairy-tale that his sister Panka read to him. "I'm working hard, and she just stands there and can't do a thing. She has no call to be alive. Well, no, I guess she ought to live, since after all, she has been born. If there was no reason for her to live, she wouldn't have been born. Those who don't need to live — they just don't exist!"

A cold, wavering wind blew from the east; the summer was turning and giving a long

warning of the oncoming autumn: once more Akim would have to sit in a cooped-up hut, play and quarrel with his little brothers and sisters, wait for lunchtime, for supper-time, try to snatch a larger piece of potato or something from the common bowl and get a blow from his father on the forehead with an empty spoon... "No, I won't go home yet; I will go someplace far away while it is still warm," thus Akim weighed his fate in the middle of a potato patch in a strange village.

"Go home, grandma," he said to the cripple, "It's a cold wind. You are going to catch cold and then you'll die!"

"Never mind, my dear," replied the lame woman, "I want

to air myself a bit."

"Look at her, she wants to air herself!"

scolded Akim in a hoarse voice, "why, you're so weak, so sick all over; I'm telling you to get inside the house!" commanded Akim remembering his wrathful father, "You miserable lamey, who'd want to see you in a lifetime."

The lame woman looked at her guest with fear and sadness, then, saying nothing, she went into the house, dragging her weak legs behind.

"Move the pot with the gruel deeper into the oven, or it will be cold before lunchtime," said Akim as she left.

"You needn't shout, I know what to do myself," answered the lame woman from the threshold. "How do you want it, with fat or with oil?"

"With fat," announced Akim.

By lunchtime he managed to finish weeding; then he went out the gate, looked in the direction of his home, and went inside to eat.

The next morning the crippled woman did not rise from bed; she was ill.

"So you've got yourself a cold!" said Akim to her, "Why did you stay out in that wind? Now you'll learn a lesson!"

"I've been ailing for a long time already," replied the sick woman. "On the outside the sweat comes out, but inside I am all dried up. I was lying in bed, sick, even before you had come, but then, when you came to visit me, I seemed to feel better, livelier in your company, — and now it is beginning again. It's not the wind that did it. I have been melting away all by myself for a long time... When I sleep, I feel that I am floating somewhere upon water and the water is draining me out. When I wake, I seem to have

no weight; I am so light it is as though I don't exist..."

"Where do your sons live? Tell me, so I can go and call them here," said Akim.

The woman considered this and told Akim not to go.

"Don't call them yet... Anyway, they're already used to my ailing. The elder one isn't at home — he went to town for a week, and the second one was here recently; he brought me some groats and a bottle of kerosene, so now his wife won't let him come again for a long while unless he drops in someday without her knowing it..."

At night Akim made his bed on the floor right next to the sick

woman's bed in order to hear her if she would

take a turn for the worse and wake up at once to help.

Darkness and silence fell on the village. Two stars could be seen through the window: they were very faint, hardly visible; at times they disappeared altogether but then shone once more, vaguely as if in a dream. Late-season quails cried at intervals in a far-away field: one voice asked a question and the other answered. Again it was silent and from the door, which was halfway open into the anteroom, came the outdoor smell of fresh grass, soaked with dew.

"Time to sleep!" said Akim and rolled over on his right side.

"Go ahead, sleep," answered the sick woman from the bed. "I will prop my crutch here, close to your head. When I'll be turning cold I will knock on the floor with it so you'll wake up and say goodbye to me. Meanwhile, go to

sleep."

"All right," said Akim, and fell asleep.

He woke up in a terrible darkness; even the two faint stars had vanished from the window — everything was empty and black, the quail in the distant rye had fallen silent. Akim would have liked to sleep again but now he was afraid to close his eyes for fear that someone might sneak up on him in the darkness or appear suddenly in the window from the outside.

"Akim," said the sick woman quietly. "It was me knocking with my crutch. Get up, put the light on. I'm feeling bad; I'm turning all cold."

Akim lost his fear of darkness when he heard the woman's voice; he stretched in the sleepy warmth, closed his eyes and, annoyed at himself for not being able to rise, decided to

have a few winks and then to get up at once; the old woman would not turn cold all that soon, he felt, didn't she tell him herself that she was used to feeling sick. Trying to keep in mind the need to get up Akim leaned his arm on the mat and, forgetting himself, put his head back on the pillow.

In his sleep, however, Akim heard a muffled knocking that kept coming closer, as if someone was coming to him from afar, begging to be let into his heart, but he couldn't get up and answer.

The crutch was knocking on the floor near Akim's ear, the crippled woman was calling the boy in a whisper, but Akim was muttering in a childish dream and could not wake up. The woman banged the crutch louder; Akim opened his eyes and remembered the cripple. The crutch had stopped knocking, it was standing

quietly, its lower end right next to Akim's head. It was quiet now; Akim listened intently - the woman was breathing painfully and irregularly but she was not calling him any more. "She'll feel better in the morning." He lifted the crutch carefully and hid it under the bed so that the woman would have nothing to knock with and would sleep. Then he fell asleep once again.

The woman, as she lay on her bed, felt her heartbeat get fainter and fainter from the weakness of old age; she tried to take deep breaths and to fall asleep quickly but her hands were turning cold and losing strength, she was afraid that soon she would be unable to lift the crutch, that she would not wake Akim in time and would die alone, without saying goodbye to anyone. Again she called Akim in a whispering voice and stretched out her hand to knock on the floor, but the crutch was not there. "It must have fallen down beside the bed," thought the sick woman, "I

cannot get up to pick it up now; I haven't the strength to budge, I will have to put off dying until morning, I will just go on breathing and live until Akim wakes up since I have nothing to wake him with."

She lived until morning. Akim had his sleep and woke up. "You still alive?" he asked.

"Still alive," replied the woman from her bed. "I seem to feel better and I am getting sleepy, I have not slept all night long... Cover my feet up warmer, get my pillow out of the chest. Make yourself some lunch — the barley is in a bucket in the anteroom, and cut yourself some fat too..."

"I will make it," agreed Akim. "You are just going to have some sleep and then start living again, right?"

"After I rest a bit I will live some more," promised the sick woman.

"Live right on," said Akim, "I will have lunch and then I'll go on to the mines."

**"Go ahead," said the lame woman quietly.
"When you will be coming back from the mines, come visit with me again."**

Akim covered her feet with a jacket on top of the blanket, fixed the pillow under her head and answered:

"I will come... I won't be coming back soon, but I'll come to you all the same. Then I will bring my wages home and I will buy some sweets or something nice for your to wear."

"Buy me a shawl, a small one will do, so I won't turn cold all over," asked the old woman.

"I know," said Akim, "one made from wool. My mother used to have a shawl, Father sold

it and bought some grain."

After lunch Akim took a large hunk of bread and went to the high road that ran beyond the village. His father had told him once that everyone who goes to the mines takes that road and his uncle had taken it too...

Akim did not return soon — he returned fifty-five years later. Every day of those fifty-five years of absence he longed to go home, but something was always in the way: first poverty and work, then his own children, then prison, then war, then all sorts of other troubles — and so the entire life passed, a short instance of time, as Akim came to realize. Throughout all of his lifetime, he had been dissatisfied, and old age had crept up on him unawares. And now that he was old he was once more alone and free, just as he was in his childhood. His children had grown up and had lives of their own and his wife was dead.

And then old Akim set out homeward. In place of the old high road which had led him to the mines there was now a railroad. Akim, however, did not take the railroad but walked on foot alongside it.

Reaching a spot that he recognized well Akim turned off the high road towards the village where the lame woman who had taken him in lived, and got lost at once, finding everything unfamiliar. He entered a large town full of houses and well-dressed people. Akim walked in the direction of the river following a vague memory, meaning to reach the high meadow and to find his own village beyond it; the village where he had left his first family a long time ago — his mother and father, sisters and brothers.

There was no river. He asked an elderly passerby where the river was. The passerby replied that the river had been channeled into a pipe a long time ago and the pipe had been

buried underground...

The old man went on up the long street surrounded by ornamented houses, all painted a bright yellow. The street continued to be level even after it passed over the underground river which was now hidden in a pipe, and there was no trace of that high meadow where Akim had been as a child watching the garland-weavers.

The old man crossed the whole town and came out upon a smooth asphalt-covered highway. He could no longer find the

place where his native village once stood. Probably only the hearthstones of his father's hut were buried somewhere under the foundation of an unfamiliar building. Akim went back into the town, turned into a side street and came upon a park in a square. There he sat down near a fountain and

gathered his wits about him. It was cool and quiet next to the fountain, there was a smell of expensive hothouse flowers. New, well-fed children played in a sandbox on the other side of the fountain. A young woman with a thoughtful face, wearing a white, flower-embroidered dress, looked after them. She walked around the busily playing children reading a book and from time to time she would say something to the children, evidently lecturing them.

Old Akim approached the thoughtful young woman and asked her, wondering if he were mistaken, if he had come to the wrong place, and not to the old village at all:

"Do you happen to know what used to be here before, when there was no town here?"

"Yes, I know," smiled the young woman in reply. "There used to be fields, woods and straw-roofed villages where sad, poor people

lived."

"That's true," conceded old Akim, and walked away from the attractive young woman.

He remembered the rye stalks and the trees that grew here in the time of his childhood, the shining summer days, the stirring of heat and the trembling of the shadows of tree-leaves on the grass. All of it had vanished from nature and from the world, but in the man himself nothing is forgotten while he is alive. That old man who cooked his supper near the wooden village bridge and the lame woman for whom Akim never did manage to bring a shawl, — their lives have ended long ago but they exist in the feeling and the memory of old Akim, beloved and immortal.

"Come over here!" said Akim to the young girl in the white flowery dress.

The girl approached him silently and politely.

"Where are you from?" the old man asked her. "Have you lived here long or are you a newcomer?"

"I was born here," answered the girl. "I'm a pre-school teacher, I work in the kindergarten, my name is Nadya Ivanushkina. And you?"

"I come from the working class and I was born here too, but a long time ago, before you were born."

"I guess I wasn't," agreed Nadya Ivanushkina. "I haven't been living for very long; nineteen years."

"I was almost an old man already at that age: I had worked in the mines for a long time, got married and my son was growing up, and

when I was a kid I did a turn in jail, and not for the last time either,"

"Does your son live here?" asked Nadya.

"No, he doesn't," said Akim. "I came by myself... Go, take care of the children."

Nadya stood next to Akim a few moments longer, uneasy and embarrassed, then turned back to the small children.

Old Akim had called her to him because he did not like her, but he did not hurt or offend her.

The people of the past, the dead and the old, had to live in poverty and sadness in shabby shacks so that this Nadya Ivanushkina might have an easy job, that she might be pretty and thoughtful, wear a white dress with flowers, live in a stone house and eat good meals at lunch and suppertime. In the old days people

did not spare themselves — they lived in vain and they died in vain. And these young ones — look what kind of a life they've invented for themselves!

The old man wondered, grew sad, felt tired and fell asleep; he sat on the bench, resting his head on his arms, surrounded by sweet-smelling flowers, the coolness of the fountain, the quietness of the park which had unfurled all its leaves.

It was twilight when he woke up. The children at the fountain were gone; their parents probably took them home. But Nadya Ivanushkina sat alone now at a distance from Akim. The old man looked at her and closed his eyes once more.

Nadya came up to the dozing old man of her own free will.

"Grandfather," said she, "are you staying

with people you came to visit?"

Akim opened his eyes at her.

"I came to visit you," he said angrily.

"All right, let's go," agreed Nadya Ivanushkina.

The old man rose: "What's the difference," thought he, "I might as well go look."

Nadya lived nearby — in a clean, neat room. She welcomed the old man and filled him a plate of soup with meat in it.

"Eat," she invited. "I have had my dinner already.

"Married?" asked Akim.

"Not yet. I live alone," said Nadya. "I'll warm up the second dish for you right away."

"Go ahead," said Akim. "And where am I going to sleep, you have just one bed?"

"That's where you are going to sleep — on the bed," said the young hostess. "I will make myself a bed on the floor. I'm used to it; I have worked on constructions, I've lived in hostels and barracks and I've seen a little of everything."

The old man looked closely at the young girl.

"Is that so!" he said.

After eating supper Akim at once lay down on the soft bed. Tired and old as he was he could not fall asleep for a long time, being used to discomfort. Nadya had already been asleep for a long time on a narrow rug on the floor, cuddling up like a child under the sheet.

In the middle of the night the old man suddenly got thirsty.

"My hostess, give me a drink!" said Akim loudly.

Nadya got up at once as if she hadn't been asleep, went to the kitchen, wearing just her nightshirt and brought back a glass of water, then lay down again.

Having drunk his fill the old man fell asleep and began to cry in his sleep as if his saddened soul, worn out during his long life, was finally freed inside him. He had no dreams and felt no suffering but he felt lighter and lighter, sleep embraced him more deeply, and he rested; Akim was unaware that he wept.

The old man woke up at dawn. Nadya was sitting near his head and wiping his tears with her palm.

"Calm down," she was saying, "you've been crying a long time."

"I don't feel it," said Akim.

"Well, now wake up and be calm," begged the young woman and kissed Akim on the forehead. "I understand."

The old man drew Nadya to him, clasping her head in his hands.

"The people of the past are forgotten, they are dead and their huts have rotted away," said Akim. "But you are not worse than they were, you must be better."

"We are better," said Nadya trustfully.

"I remember them, you remember me, and you will be remembered by those who shall be born after you, and those unknown ones will be even better than you," said old Akim.

"That

way each will live in another like one light."

Nadya listened to the old man. Akim fell silent. He was no longer uneasy here, in the strange town that rose in the place of his native village. Before him was that same eternal human being which he had known from childhood, only this human being was younger than the old lame woman and more happy than she had been.

"I shall prepare breakfast," said the girl. "I have to go to work today."

"Sure, make it, what are we waiting for," answered Akim.

"Grandfather, why did you cry at night?" asked Nadya.

The old man said nothing. He did not remember that he wept.

Nadya grew thoughtful.

"You must have had a hard life. You had gone far away and forgotten everybody, then you returned and did not recognize us. And those you had forgotten have all died while you were away, but at night they came into your heart. But now they aren't here any more, don't cry, now only we are alive..."

Old Akim stayed silent. He understood that people's life was now raised to a higher level, and he felt timid before the girl Nadya.

(1939)
Alexey A. Kiselev

Translated by

THE COW

A gray Circassian cow from the steppes lived alone in a shed; this shed, made of boards painted on the outside, stood in the railroad trackman's small courtyard. In the shed, next to the firewood, hay, millet straw and obsolescent household things, — a trunk without a lid, a burnt-out samovar pipe, rags, a chair without legs — was the shelter for the cow at night and for her life during the long winters.

During the day and in the evening the boy Vasya Rubtsov, son of the owner, would visit her and pat the skin around her head. Today, also, he came.

"Cow, cow," he would say, because the cow didn't have a name of her own and he called her as it was written in the school reader.

"You know, you are a cow!... Don't be lonely,

your son will get well, my father will bring him back soon."

The cow had a bull-calf; the other day it had choked on something and from its mouth saliva and bile began to flow. Father was afraid that the calf would fall, and today had led it to the station to show the veterinarian.

The cow looked sideways at the boy and was silent, chewing an exhausted blade of long-withered, death-tortured grass. She always recognized the boy and he loved her. He liked everything about the cow — the kind, warm eyes, rounded by dark circles, as if the cow were constantly tired or thoughtful, horns, forehead, and her big lean body, which was such because the cow did not save all of her strength for her own purpose in acquiring fat and flesh, but spent it instead in milk and in work. The boy looked again at the tender, calm udder with small dried teats from where the milk which he drank came, and touched

her strong, short chest and the forward protuberance of strong bones.

Looking awhile at the boy, the cow bent her head and took several blades of grass from the trough with a temperate mouth. She had no time to look aside for long, or to rest, she had to chew continuously, because the milk inside of her was also surging unceasingly, and the food was meager, monotonous, and the cow needed to labor on it for a long time in order to take her fill.

Vasya left the shed. Outside it was autumn. Surrounding the trackman's house stretched flat, empty fields which, having

produced and made merry during the summer, were now reaped, quiet and drab.

Now the evening twilight began; the sky, covered by a gray, cool gathering of clouds,

was already enveloped by the darkness; the wind, which all day stirred the stubble of cut rye and bare shrubs, numbed for the winter, now abated itself in quiet, low places of the earth and only barely squeaked the weathervane on the chimney, beginning the canto of the fall.

The single track of the railroad line ran not far from the house near the front garden, in which at this time everything had already withered and wilted — both the grass and the flowers. Vasya was reluctant to enter the fenced area of the front garden: it seemed to him now to be a cemetery of plants, which he had planted and brought to life during the spring.

Mother lit the lamp in the house and placed the signal lantern outside on a bench.

"Soon the four-o-six will be going," she said to her son, "you see it off. Father doesn't seem

to be coming. He is sure not to have gone on a spree!"

Father had left for the station, seven kilometers away, with the calf in the morning; he probably gave the calf to the veterinarian, and is either sitting at the station gathering, drinking beer at the bar, or has gone for consultation concerning basic technology. And, perhaps the line at the veterinarian's is long, and Father has to wait. Vasya took the lantern and sat on a wooden beam near the crossing. One could not yet hear the train, and the boy was vexed; he had no time to sit here and see trains off: it was time for him to prepare the next day's lessons and go to sleep, for in the morning he had to rise early.

He walked every morning to the collective-farm-seven-year school five kilometers from home and studied there in the fourth grade.

Vasya liked going to school because listening

to the teacher and reading books he fancied in his mind the whole world, which he still did not know, which was, as he thought, at a distance from him. The Nile, Egypt, Spain and the Far East, the great rivers — the Mississippi, the Yenisei, the Quiet Don and the Amazon, the Aral Sea, Moscow, the mountain of Ararat, the Lonely Island in the Arctic Ocean — all of this excited Vasya and allured him. It seemed to him that all the countries and people had long waited for the time when he would grow up and come to them. But

he still had not succeeded in visiting anyplace. He was born in this very same place where he now lived, and had been only in the kolkhoz, in which the school was located, and to the station. Therefore with anxiety and joy he gazed into the faces of the people looking out of the windows of the passenger trains, — who are they and what are they thinking

about, — but the trains swept by quickly, and the people passed by in them without being discerned by the boy at the crossing. Besides that, there were few trains, just two pairs during the twenty-four hour period, and of these, three trains passed at night.

Once, thanks to the slow pace of a train, Vasya distinctly made out the face of a young thoughtful man. He was looking through the open window into the steppe, at a place on the horizon which was unknown to him, and he smoked a pipe. Seeing the boy, standing at the crossing with the raised green flag, he smiled at him and said clearly: "Goodbye, man!" — and furthermore waved his hand for remembrance. "So long," answered Vasya to himself. "When I grow up we shall meet again. You live a while and wait for me, don't die!" And, subsequently, for a long time the boy remembered this thoughtful man, traveling in the coach for an unknown place: he must have been a paratrooper, actor, or a

man of distinction, or someone even better, so Vasya thought to himself. But soon the memory of the man who once passed their house was lost in the boy's heart, because it was necessary for him to live on and think and feel other things.

Far away — in the empty night of the autumn fields — the steam engine sang out. Vasya walked nearer to the track and raised the bright signal for the clear passage above his head. He still listened for some time to the growing rumbling of the running train and then glanced towards home. On their courtyard the cow lowed mournfully. She was waiting unceasingly for her son — the calf, but he was not coming. "Where is Father on the loose for such a long time!" thought Vasya discontentedly. "Our cow is already crying! It is night, dark, but father is still gone."

The engine reached the crossing and, turning its wheels heavily, breathing with all the

strength of its fire into the darkness, passed a solitary person with a lantern in his hand.

The engineer did not even look at the boy, — leaning far out of the window, he watched the engine: the steam had buffeted through the grease-container of the piston rod and was shooting out with every run of the piston. Vasya noticed this also. Soon the difficult

climb would come, and for the engine which was missing in one cylinder it would be difficult to pull the echelon. The boy knew how the steam engine worked, he had read about it in the physics textbook, and if there had been nothing written about it there, he would have found out what the engine was like at any rate. It distressed him if he saw any kind of object or material and did not understand how it lived within itself and functioned. Therefore, he did not take offence at the engineer, when the latter passed by and did not look at his lantern: the engineer was

anxious about his engine; the steam engine could stop during the night on the long climb, and then it would be difficult for him to move the train forward; during the stopping the cars would drift slightly back, the echelon would become stretched out, and then one could tear it starting with force from a standstill, while gently one would be unable to move it altogether.

Heavy four-axled wagons began moving past Vasya; their springs were compressed, and the boy understood that a heavy, expensive cargo lay in the cars. Then open platforms passed upon which stood automobiles, undetermined machinery covered with a tarpaulin, piled coal, heads of cabbage arranged in the form of a mountain; after the cabbage there were new rails, and again the closed wagons began, in which livestock was transported. Vasya shone the lantern on the wheels and the axle-boxes of the cars — to see if anything there was out of order, but

everything was all right. From one car with livestock someone else's anonymous heifer cried, and then from the shed the cow answered with a drawling, bleating voice, fretting for her son.

The last cars passed Vasya very slowly. One could hear how the steam engine at the head of the train was straining in heavy labor, but the wheels skidded in vain and the echelon did not move up. Vasya headed for the steam engine with his lantern, because the engine was having a difficult time and he wanted to stay near it, as if in this way he could share its fate.

The steam engine worked with such effort that pieces of coal flew from its stack and the hollow breathing inside the boiler could be heard. The wheels of the engine slowly turned, and the engineer watched them from the window of the cabin. The assistant engineer walked on the tracks in front of the

steam engine. With a shovel he took sand from the ballast and poured it along the rails, so that the engine wouldn't skid. The light of the front steam engine lanterns illuminated the man, black, smeared with

grease, and weary. Vasya placed his lantern on the ground and went out to the ballast toward the assistant engineer, who was working with a shovel.

"Let me do it," said Vasya, "and you go and help the steam engine. It is on the brink of stopping."

"And you will manage?" asked the assistant, looking at the boy with big light eyes from his intense dark face. "Well, try! Only be careful, watch out for the engine."

The shovel was big and heavy for Vasya. He gave it right back to the assistant.

"I'll do it with my hands, it's easier."

Vasya bent down, gathered sand in his cupped hands and quickly poured it in a line on top of the rails.

"Pour on both rails," directed the assistant and ran to the steam engine.

Vasya began pouring alternately, first on one rail, then on the other. The steam engine was ponderously and slowly following the boy, steadily grinding the sand with its steel wheels. The soot and moisture from the cooled steam fell from above on Vasya, but it was interesting for him to work, he felt himself more important than the steam train, because the engine itself was following him and only thanks to him did not skid and did not stop.

If Vasya forgot himself in the diligence of his work and the steam engine approached

almost touching him, the engineer would give a short toot and shout from the engine:

"Hey, look out!... Pour it thicker, more evenly!"

Vasya kept a wary eye on the engine and worked in silence. But then he grew annoyed with their shouts and commands; he ran off the tracks and started shouting himself at the engineer:

"And you, why did you set out without sand? Don't you know?"

"We ran out of it," answered the engineer.

"We have too small a container for it."

"Set up an extra one," suggested Vasya, walking next to the steam engine. "One can shape old metal and make a container. You place an order with the roofer."

The engineer looked at this boy, but could not see him well in the darkness. Vasya was dressed carefully and shod in boots, he had a small face and he did not take his eyes from the engine. The engineer had the same kind of boy growing up at his own home.

"And you let the steam escape needlessly: it is escaping

through the sides of the cylinder and boiler," said Vasya. "You're uselessly losing the energy through the cracks."

"How d'you like that!" said the engineer.

"Why don't you sit down and lead the echelon, and I will walk next to it."

"Let's!" agreed Vasya gladly.

Suddenly the steam engine, with its full speed, began to turn its wheels in place, as though a

prisoner lunging for freedom, — even the rails under it began to rumble far along the track.

Vasya leaped out again in front of the steam engine and began to throw sand on the rails under the front wheels of the car. "Had I not my own son, I would adopt this one," mumbled the engineer, curbing the skidding of the steam engine. "Even as a youngster he is already a full man, and yet everything is ahead of him... what the hell: could it be that the brakes are still held down somewhere at the rear of the echelon and the crew is dozing, as in a health resort. Well, I will shake them up on the slope." The engineer gave two long toots, so that they would release the brakes of the echelon, if they were jammed somewhere.

Vasya looked back and walked off the tracks.

"And what are you doing?" called the engineer to him.

"Nothing," answered Vasya. "Soon it will no longer be steep, the steam engine will go without me, by itself, and then down the mountain..."

"Everything can happen," stated the engineer from above. "Here, take this!" And he threw two big apples to the boy.

Vasya picked the treat up from the ground.

"Wait, don't eat!" the engineer said to him.

"As you go back, look under the cars and listen, please, if the brakes are jammed anywhere. And then walk out to the hill, give me a signal with your lantern, do you know how?"

"I know all the signals," answered Vasya and grasped the ladder of the steam engine, in order to go for a ride. Then he bent down and looked somewhere under the engine.

"It's jammed!" he cried.

"Where?" asked the engineer.

"You have it jammed — the small cart under the tender! There, the wheels are turning slowly, but faster on the other cart!"

The engineer cursed himself, the assistant, and life in general, and Vasya jumped off of the ladder and went home.

His lantern shone on the ground in the distance. Just in case, Vasya listened to how the moving parts of the cars were working.

but nowhere did he hear the brake shoes rubbing or grinding.

The train passed, and the boy turned to the place where his lantern was. The light of the lantern suddenly rose in the air, some person

had picked up the lantern. Vasya ran up and saw his father.

"And where is our calf?" the boy asked his father. "Did he die?"

"No, he recovered," answered Father. "I sold him for slaughter, they gave me a good price. What do we need a bull calf for!"

"He is still young," uttered Vasya.

"A young one is worth more, its meat is more tender," explained Father.

Vasya switched the glass in the lantern, replacing the white with green, and slowly raised it above his head and lowered it downward several times, turning its light in the direction of the departing train: let it go on, the wheels are moving freely under the cars, nowhere are they jammed.

It became quiet. Despondently and meekly the cow lowed in the trackman's yard. She did not sleep in anticipation of her son.

**"You go on home," said Father to Vasya,
"and I will go around our plot."**

"And the instrument?" Vasya reminded him.

"That's O.K.; I will only look where the spikes have come out, and will not work now," Father said quietly. "My heart aches because of the calf: we raised and fostered him, already became used to him... Had I known that I would feel sorry for him, I wouldn't have sold him..."

And Father went along the line with the lantern, turning his head first to the right, then to the left, examining the track.

The cow again gave a long moan when Vasya opened the gate to the courtyard and she

heard a human being.

Vasya entered the shed and fixed his eyes on the cow, adjusting them to the darkness. The cow was not eating anything now; she was breathing quietly and sporadically, and an oppressive, difficult grief languished inside of her, a grief which was inconsolable and could only become greater, because she didn't know how to alleviate her grief within herself with either a word, or a conscious thought, or a friend, or a diversion, as a human being can. Vasya stroked and petted the cow for a long time, but

she remained immovable and indifferent — all she wanted now was her son — the calf, and nothing could replace him: neither man, nor grass, nor sun. The cow did not understand that it was possible to forget one happiness, find another one and live again, not suffering any longer. Her dim mind didn't

have the power to help her to deceive herself; that which once had entered her heart or her sensibility, could not be suppressed or forgotten there.

And the cow bellowed despondently, because she was completely obedient to life, to nature, and to her need of her son, who was not yet grown enough so that she could leave him, and she was hot and anguished inside. She stared into the darkness with big bloodshot eyes and could not cry with them in order to exhaust herself and her grief.

Early in the morning, Vasya went off to school and his father began to prepare the small one-share plow for work. Father wanted to plow a small section of ground using the cow in the area of the railroad land, in order to seed the millet there in the spring.

Returning from school, Vasya saw that his father was plowing with their cow, but had

plowed little. The cow obediently dragged the plow and drooled saliva on the ground with her head bent. Vasya and his father had worked with their cow before, and she knew how to plow and was patient and accustomed to walking with a yoke.

Toward evening Father unharnessed the cow and allowed her to graze on the stubble in the old field. Vasya sat in the house at the table doing his homework and from time to time gazed out the window — he saw his cow. She stood in the nearby field, not grazing and doing nothing.

Evening was approaching the same as yesterday, gloomy and empty, and the weathervane was squeaking on the roof, as though singing a long song of the autumn. Staring into the darkening field, the cow awaited her son; now she no longer bellowed for him and did not call him; she suffered and did not comprehend.

Having done his lessons, Vasya took a chunk of bread, sprinkled it with salt, and took it to the cow. The cow did not proceed to eat the bread and remained indifferent, as before.

Vasya stood awhile near her, and then hugged the cow from below around the neck, so that she would know that he understood and loved her. But the cow jerked her neck sharply, threw the boy away from

her and, uttering a strange piercing shriek, ran into the field. Having run far, the cow suddenly turned back and now jumping, now collapsing on her front legs and pressing her head to the earth, started to approach Vasya, who waited for her in the original place.

The cow ran past the boy, past the courtyard and disappeared in the evening field, from where Vasya again heard her strange, hoarse voice.

Mother, who had returned from the collective-farm cooperative. Father and Vasya wandered until midnight in different directions across the neighboring fields and called out to their cow, but the cow didn't answer them; she was nowhere to be found. After dinner Mother began crying over the loss of their provider and worker, and Father sat down to compose a declaration to the registry of mutual help and to the railroad workers' union so that they would give compensation for the purchase of a new cow.

In the morning Vasya was the first to awake; a gray light was yet in the windows. He heard someone breathing and moving about in the silence near the house. He looked out the window and saw the cow; she stood at the gates and waited to be let into her home...

From that time on even though the cow went on living and working when it was necessary to plow or travel to the kolkhoz for flour, her

milk dried up completely and she became morose and slow-witted. Vasya watered, fed and cleaned her himself but the cow did not respond to his tending — she didn't care what they did with her.

During the day they let the cow into the fields, so that she might roam freely and her lot might be easier. But the cow walked little; she would stand in one place for hours, then she would walk a bit and stop again, forgetting to walk. Once she wandered out to the tracks, and slowly began to walk on the ties; then Vasya's father saw her, curtailed her and led her off to the side. Previously the cow had been timid, delicate, and never went off to the tracks on her own. Vasya therefore began to fear that the cow would be killed by a train or that she might die by herself, and sitting in school he thought about her all the time and after school he would quickly run home.

And once, when the days were shortest and

twilight had already fallen, Vasya, returning from school, saw that a freight train was standing opposite their home. Alarmed, he immediately

dashed to the steam engine.

The familiar engineer, whom Vasya had recently helped marshal the echelon, and Vasya's father were dragging the slain cow from under the tender. Vasya sat down on the ground and grew numb with grief at this first close encounter with death.

"You know, I was tooting to her for almost ten minutes," the engineer was saying to Vasya's father. "Is your cow deaf or feeble-minded? I had to put the whole echelon on emergency brakes and even then I couldn't stop in time."

"She's not deaf, she is crazed," said Father. "She dozed off, probably, on the tracks."

"No, she was running from the engine, but slowly, and didn't think to run off the tracks," answered the engineer. "I thought that she would figure it out."

Together with the assistant and the stoker, the four of them dragged the disfigured body of the cow from under the tender and dumped the beef in a dry ditch near the track.

**"She is all right, fresh," said the engineer.
"Will you corn the meat for yourself or will you sell it?"**

**"We will have to sell it," decided Father.
"We'll have to raise money for another cow; it's difficult without a cow."**

"It is impossible for you to be without one," agreed the engineer. "Collect the money and buy one, I will throw in some money too. I don't have much, but I'll find a little. Soon, I will get a bonus."

"Why are you giving me money?" Vasya's father was surprised. "I am not a relative of yours or anything... And I will manage myself: the trade-union, savings association, my job, you know yourself — from here, from there..."

"Well, but I will add some," insisted the engineer. "Your son helped me, and I will help you. There he sits. Hello!" smiled the engineer.

"Hello," Vasya answered him.

"I have never in my life run over anyone," the engineer said, "once — a dog... It will lie heavily on my own heart if I do not pay you something for the cow."

"And why are you receiving a bonus?" asked Vasya. "You run poorly."

"Now I have improved," the engineer began

to laugh. "I have learned. We don't have, sonny, enough material, you won't get an extra pound of oakum, that's the reason one can't run well."

"Did they supply another container for the sand?" asked Vasya.

"No, they replaced the small sand-container with a larger one," answered the engineer.

"Finally they figured it out," said Vasya angrily.

At this point the head conductor arrived and gave the engineer some paper, where he wrote about the cause of the train's stop at the stage.

The next day Father sold the entire carcass of the cow in the agricultural cooperative; a strange cart came and took her. Vasya and Father went along with this cart. Father

wanted to receive the money for the meat, and Vasya thought of buying himself some reading books in the store. They stayed overnight in the district and spent half the next day there shopping, and after dinner went home.

They had to go through the kolkhoz where the seven-year school was which Vasya attended. It was already quite dark when father and son reached the kolkhoz; therefore Vasya did not go home, but remained to spend the night at the school guard's, so that he would not have to walk back again very early in the morning and get tired needlessly. Father went home alone.

That morning in school they began testing for the first quarter. The students were assigned the theme of: "How I will live and work, in order to be of usefulness to our fatherland."

Vasya wrote in his notebook the answer to this assignment: "How I will live, I don't

know, I have not thought about it yet. We had a cow. While she lived. Mother, Father and I ate her milk. Then she gave birth to a son — a calf, and he also ate her milk, the three of us, and he the fourth, and there was enough for everyone. Besides that the cow plowed and pulled a load. Then we sold her son for meat, they killed him and ate him. The cow began to torment herself, but soon died from a train. And they ate her also, because she was beef. Now, there is nothing. Where is the cow and her son — the heifer? It is unknown, but everyone was well because of them. The cow gave us everything, that is, milk, her son, meat, leather, entrails, and bones — she was kind. I also wish for all the people of our fatherland to have usefulness and good because of me, and let me have less, because I will remember our cow and will not forget."

Vasya returned home in the twilight. Father was already home, he had just arrived from the track; he showed Mother one

**hundred rubles, two notes, which the engineer
had thrown him from the steam engine in a
tobacco pouch.**

Translated by Alexey A. Kiselev

THE TAKYR

One night long ago forty or more horsemen rode quietly alongside a stream in the Firyuze valley. The mountains of Kopet-Dag loomed dim and protective above the cool gorge that divides Persia from the plain where the free men of Turkmenistan live. For a thousand years men have traveled the old Persian highway, in triumph, or despair, or death. And on this night long ago fourteen people walked roped together alongside the mounted detachment. Among them were nine young women, and one little girl, who was not tied to the others and who kept falling behind from exhaustion. These people were so sick at heart that they were scarcely conscious of their own existence, and they walked without, as it were, so much as drawing breath. The forty horsemen, on the other hand, were happy, and they kept a jealous watch over their happiness so as to preserve it intact until they

reached their homes, far away beyond the mountains in the dark desert. One of the mounted men, however, was dead; he had been killed by the Kurds in Iran, and he now rode bent low, tied to the horse's saddle (for his horse had escaped death) so that his family might see him, and weep.

At midnight the valley grew lighter as the moon surmounted the mountain-tops, and the river could scarcely be discerned in the moonlight. The detachment drew up to rest in the shade of an old plane tree which had struggled towards the sky for centuries past, resisting death. The mounted men worked quickly; they lowered their horses to the ground like camels, settled the captives alongside them, and lay down themselves. The Kurds might still appear in pursuit at the exits from the defile, bringing with them Persian border guards; on the nearby mountains there were still watch-towers made from the stones and mud of the river bank.

These towers used to house troops from Persian market villages and settlements, whose task it was to guard the highway against Turkmen raids and to send back warning of danger into Persia — by means of smoke signals — along a line of towers stretching right back into their homeland. The most dangerous of these was the Russian mounted frontier patrol, around whose outpost the detachment had made a detour through the mountains on the previous night. The Turkmen warriors knew about

this and kept their rifles across their chests, ready to kill any enemy who might appear.

This was the time of the last few such raids. Soon the Persian captives fell asleep, their grief cut short by their loss of consciousness. Only one young woman, Zarrin-Taj, had a mind as active as her heart, and did not sleep. She was fourteen; she felt stifled by grief, and

gazed into the darkness in the direction of Khorassan where she had been captured. Sometimes she could hear sounds above the noise of the river, and then she would decide that this must be the train from Iran to Turan, which she had once seen in her childhood, hooting loudly as the smoke streamed behind it. The Turkmenians, worn out by the raid and by the hardships of their desert life, closed one eye at a time so as to doze and yet to see; their horses lay with their heads stretched out level with the ground and made no move to touch the grass nearby. Zarrin-Taj got up. The night wind from Persia blew languidly along the ravine; there was a scent of flowers in the air; a solitary bird sang for a moment far off in the distant mountains and then fell silent; only the river flowed on, working its way over the stones, always and forever, in darkness and in light, as a slave works on the Turkmen plain, or as the ever hot samovar simmers in an inn.

The Persian woman looked at the old plane tree — seven great boughs grew from it and one feeble branch; seven brothers and one sister. It would have taken a whole tribe of people to have reached their arms right round it, and its bark, diseased, gnawed by wild beasts, scratched by the hands of the dying, yet protecting beneath itself the sap of the tree, was warm and pleasant to look at, like soil. Zarrin-Taj sat on a root of the plane tree — a root that went deep into the ground like a plundering arm — and noticed that there were stones growing at the top of the tree.

At some time, when the river had overflowed its banks, it must have bombarded the tree just below the crown with stones from the hillsides. But the tree had ingested the huge stones into its own body, covering them with its accommodating bark, swallowed them, taken them over, and then grown again, tenderly cherishing that which should have been the cause of its own destruction. "It

guards its stones as I guard my heart and my child. Let my grief grow to be a part of me, so that I may no longer feel it." Zarrin-Taj started to cry. She was two months pregnant by a Kurd herdsman, for she had felt she must love at least one person

in her life. The Turkmenian nearby looked at her with both eyes open, content that if the girl knew how to cry she would quickly get used to being a wife, and would die peacefully beneath her Persian veil in Turkmenistan.

The moon disappeared behind the dark mountains, and the darkness was once more impenetrable, the wind blew like a shadow across Zarrin-Taj's face and she lay down on the ground amongst the others.

"Gel-Endam was carried off by the Ersars," the Persian girl whispered to herself so as to assuage her own grief by comparing it with

the greatest possible suffering. "Fatma was drowned in the Amu-Darya, and I am told that my best and dearest friend, Khanom-Aga, now lives by the sea among the Dzhafabaitses, and bears children. Shall I too be with them?"

The Persian girl fell asleep, soothed by the memory of those of her friends who had also crossed this cool, grassy ravine and had not died.

In the morning the mounted Turkmenians led their prisoners out from the mountains of Kopet-Dag; and then some of the Kurd and Persian women started to weep, overcome with grief at the sight of the alien desert and the strange sky, whose light was so different from that of their own land. But Zarrin-Taj did not cry; she had been brought up in a mountain grove in Khorassan, and she looked with curiosity at the empty light of the Turkmen plain, oppressive as an infant death,

and could not understand why people should choose to live there.

The Turkmenians waited throughout the day in a depression in the foothills. They were thinking of the Kurds who sometimes crossed the Persian border and went right into the open desert in pursuit, and they did not wish to forfeit their victory on the very borders of their own land.

All the next night and half the day the Turkmenians drove their captives on, into the very heart of the lifeless desert. Then they rested and lay up for the night in a village burial mound, made of mud, embraced their women captives, and again went on their way. Soon Zarrin-Taj grew to know her husband and master, Atakh-baba, a Turkmenian of the Teke tribe, a man more than forty years old. He had a beard and dark unchanging eyes which never looked either weary or sad. Occasionally Atakh-baba called Zarrin-Taj to

him and stayed behind the others to lie with her on the sand.

As she lay beneath him the Persian girl would listen to the sand shifting a little beneath her; it, too, had its own existence, small and monotonous. Atakh-baba's horse would stand and wait nearby, and look at the two human beings. During this love-making Zarrin-Taj spread out her fingers and let the sand trickle through them; she looked at the sky above and thought of something else. Atakh-baba made love gloomily, seriously, as though it were a routine obligation, wasting neither suffering nor enjoyment upon the task. "I suppose I shall live with him," thought Zarrin-Taj to herself silently, and she saw that it was neither terrible nor interesting; for herself she felt nothing except the weight of Atakh-baba and the touch of his beard.

On the twelfth night after leaving the prisoner's homelands the raiders reached the tents near the Tagan well. Here there lived a few families of the Kandzhin people of the Teke tribe. Atakh-baba was met by his four wives, who greeted him only by a change of expression and who paid no attention to Zarrin-Taj. Atakh took Zarrin-Taj into the tent and gave orders that she should be fed and given a place to sleep as one of the family. Atakh himself went off to hand over the kinsman who had been killed in the raid; his body had already started to rot on the journey and his horse, scenting a corpse, had therefore drunk little at the watering-places.

Zarrin-Taj sat on the floor of the tent, confused by such strange surroundings. At home, from the age of six, she had collected brushwood and dry twigs in the mountain groves of Kho-rassan for the master with whom she lived in return for food twice a day; she was used to life there and the years of her

youth had passed unmemorably, for the pain of hard work had been so commonplace that her heart had got used to it. The best times are those that pass quickly, when the days have no time to leave the mark of their grief. One old wife of Atakh-baba asked the Persian, in Kurd, what people she came from and in whose tent she had been born. "I don't know when I was born," Zarrin-Taj replied. "I've been alive for a long time."

She really did not remember her father or mother, and had never been aware of the passage of time; she thought life had al-

ways been as it was now.

Suddenly there was a sound of weeping and of hostile cries. Three barefooted women came into the tent moaning, and squatted around the Persian. First they addressed Zarrin-Taj incomprehensibly, sadly, and then they

crawled towards her, seized her and began to scratch her face and her thin body with their nails. The Persian shrank back, making herself as small as possible in self-defence, but she realized secretly that the woman's anger was not great, and so she endured the pain without much fear. When Atakh-baba came back he stood quietly for a time and then said, "That's enough; she's young and you are old hags," and he drove the strange women out.

They went off and when they got outside began to wail again for their dead husband.

That night Atakh-baba lay alongside his captive; and when everyone was asleep and the desert hung at their bed-head like a spent world beyond the thick felt of the tent wall, the master clasped the body of the Persian woman, thin with poverty and traveling. Everything was quiet except for the breathing of those who slept, and the sound of soft footsteps on the dead clay, where perhaps a

scorpion went on its way. Zarrin-Taj lay and felt that a husband was just one more burden, and put up with him. But when Atakh-baba grew more cruel in his passion, then two other of his wives stirred and knelt up. At first they whispered frenziedly together, and then said to their husband:

"Atakh, Atakh. Don't spare her. Make her cry out."

"Remember how it was with us. Why are you so gentle with her?"

"Mutilate her, and then she'll be used to you."

"Oh, you're a deep one."

Zarrin-Taj did not hear them to the end; she fell asleep from exhaustion and indifference to the love-making.

Zarrin-Taj took up her life as a nomad. She milked the camels and the goats, kept count of the sheep, and fetched as much as a hundred or two hundred skins of water a day from the wells on the takyr. She never again saw a bird, and she came to forget the sound of the wind among the ancient leaves. But in

youth time passes slowly; for a long time the Persian girl's body was tormented by life, as if it were constantly seeking happiness.

When the sheep began to die for lack of pasture Atakh-baba would order the tents to be taken down, and they would pack their household goods into bundles and go off into some remote uninhabited spot where the earth was fresher and the thin grass untouched. Every member of the small group would leave the exhausted patch of land and cross the burning takyr in search of some lonely and deserted spot. The leader would go

first and then the wise husbands on he-asses; the she-asses carried great mounds of dismantled tents and the older wives; behind them strayed the flocks of sheep, like old men out of their wits, and behind them Zarrin-Taj, and the other slaves went on foot, carrying food in pots, and the heavy silver which their husbands had received as gifts from their old friends.

The Perisan girl was delighted if they were obliged to go over sand hills, where their feet sank into the warm sand; she would watch the wind stir some long dried-up plant, which had grown, no doubt, in the dim blue valleys of the Kopet-Dag or on the gray banks of the Amu-Darya. But most commonly they had to cross great stretches of takyr, the impoverished clay where the heat of the sun was never dissipated, never cooled, like the grief in the heart of a slave, the land where God had once kept his martyrs, and where the martyrs had died, the land where thin

twigs shriveled up and were carried off wherever the wind might take them.

The new place was always worse than the old. There was the well to clean and prepare, pasture to be sought out in those far-off spots where the scrub had survived though bowed down by the sand.

In the course of time Zarrin-Taj began to lose her former interest in things, and even in herself. When Atakh-baba had meat to eat and what he left was sufficient only for his other wives, the Persian girl was not tormented by hunger or envy, she remained silent and busied herself with the animals never acknowledging her own feelings, and so she grieved for nothing.

Sometimes she lay down on the takyr from sheer exhaustion, surrounded by emptiness and light. She would look on the world of nature, the sun and the sky, and her heart

would be filled with astonishment. "This is all there is," Zarrin-Taj would whisper, taking in the whole of life; the everyday world was there

before her eyes and that was all there was.

She would run her hands over her body; the bones were already near the surface, her skin was dried up with hard work, her hands worn down to the sinews — her life was gradually slipping away; the moon rises slowly but sets quickly.

In a few months Zarrin-Taj bore a little daughter. Atakh-baba was pleased at this alien birth, because the child would be his slave, and he ordered that she should be called Jumal. The Persian woman hugged the child to herself and realized that she had not yet endured all. It was winter and rain-water from the takyr was flowing into the wells; the

ass cried out with grief as if he had been left an orphan on the earth and was overcome with sorrow.

After a time Zarrin-Taj's strength began to fail; she grew sick and lay down and could not get up again. The child lay beside her, warming herself against her burning body. A draught blew in under the tent, and the dead takyr hummed with the sound of streaming rain.

Atakh-baba stood over the Persian woman and his tears fell on her bed; he was grieving that he would no longer be able to lie with this girl who was so thin and who no longer remembered him. Every day he ate meat and mutton fat, and there built up in his heart great desire which could not now be assuaged by this gentle girl who lay in a feverish delirium. Occasionally in the dead of night Atakh-baba had laid the child to one side and embraced Zarrin-Taj in an excess of

oppressive giref. But this was the time of year when the wind, blowing over the sands, carried off the birds of spring to green, well-watered glands. The Persian woman would imagine in her delirium that somewhere there grew a solitary tree and that on a branch of it there sat a small, unobtrusive bird which sang a slow, disdainful song. Camel trains would go past the bird, horsemen gallop by, the train to Turan would hoot its way past. But the bird just sang, more wisely, more quietly, as though to itself, it was by no means clear who would prevail in the world, the bird, or the caravans and the hooting trains. Zarrin-Taj woke and determined to live like the bird which she had seen in her dream. She got better. But Atakh-baba ordered that she should not work for several days.

The other wives brought food to her bed grudgingly, because she lay there well, while they old and ailing as they were, alone endured the wearing tasks of the day.

Zarrin-Taj soon got up of her own accord; she had nothing

to think about or to feel and she, therefore, found it easier to busy herself with endless household tasks, and thereby to allow her heart to heal. She felt herself again at peace when she bound Jumal upon her back and stooped to milk the goats, to collect the goat-droppings for fuel, or to draw water from the well. Even if she had been happy she would have been busy with the same tasks, just the same, for if one is to preserve one's happiness one must lead a normal everyday life.

Jumal lay for a long time against her mother's back, wrapped tightly in a bundle to help her to recover from the shock of birth, and listened to her own heart, waiting for it to stop beating so that she might sleep; then gradually Jumal learned to walk and to become conscious of her own existence. "It's

me," she would think, and wonderingly feel the gristly sinews which would one day be her bones.

But for a long time after this Jumal never went away from her mother. She would stroke her mother's bent back, hot and damp, where she lay and kept warm and slept. She began to like life, and she would eat mud, grass, sheep droppings, coal, and suck the thin animal bones which fell in the sand, even though her mother had plenty of milk for her. Her little body filled out with the things that she ate, all of which helped her to grow. Her eyes, still fresh and keen, scrutinized each everyday object carefully; she grew used to the beating of her heart and was no longer afraid that it would stop.

4

Her childhood wore on. Each day the sun shone in the sky, the wind blew and stopped

blowing, the children played and wept amid the silence of the sand-hills, then the sun grew huge and red and heavy, and sank in the distance and the pale moon shone like a silver shadow of the sun on the tormented face of her aging mother who was always busy; as she milked a camel her mother would look at the moon, the lamp of beggars and of the dead, and then she would lie down on her couch, and find the time to caress her daughter for only a moment before a rapid sleep separated them.

In the spring Zarrin-Taj showed her daughter birds for the first time as they flew over the sand, no one knew where. The

birds cried out as though they were sorry for mankind and quickly disappeared forever.

"Who are they?" asked Jumal.

**"They are happy creatures," said her mother.
"They can fly beyond the mountains to a land
where there are leaves on the trees, and the
sun is as cool as the moon."**

**Jumal had never known such things and she
did not, therefore, pine for rivers and leaves.
She had grown up here amongst the dunes,
and from the height of the sand-hills which
the wind formed, she could see that the world
was everywhere the same — empty. Her
mother, however, would sometimes weep and
press her child to herself, and at such times
the child would represent for her the distant
river, the forgotten hills, blossoms on the
trees, and shade on the takyr.**

**"Did you like it there by the river and the
mountain?" Jumal asked.**

"No, I suffered there," said Zarrin-Taj.

"Why do you think it was nice then?"

"I don't think, it just seems," replied Zarrin-Taj.

Little Jumal did not understand; she took her mother's hand and gave her this advice:

" 'It just seems...' You just love me and then everything will be fine. We don't need mountains and rivers."

Whenever they left one place for another Jumal always said a long and sad farewell to the things they left behind — to the clump of scrub beside which she had played, to a piece of glass, to the dried-up lizard which had been a sister to her, to the bones of a sheep long since eaten, and to the various objects whose names she did not know, but which were familiar and which she had loved. Jumal's heart grieved at the thought that they would pine and die when people left them and went off to a new pasture ground. A tiny blade of grass, dry and stiff as a piece of tin, was

sufficient to nourish camels and sheep. The asses, no doubt, remembered better food in a forgotten world and often cried out in their need for it.

On the way from one pasture ground to another Jumal rode on the smallest ass; as the desert passed beneath her dangling feet she looked at the great head of the ass, larger than that of a horse, and at its ears where the wind blew, and thought that the ass was all that remained of a giant, now grown small from grief, hard work and too little food.

5

After a long time had passed and Jumal was twelve she filled out and became attractive; her face was clothed in beauty as if it portrayed the love and passion of Zarrin-Taj for Jumal's unknown father. Nothing, neither grief nor her poverty as a slave, could take

from Jumal her bright, clean, nubile appeal. However monotonous or poor her food might seem to be, it was yet compounded of sunlight and spring breezes and rain and dew and the warmth of the sand, and so Jumal's body was tender and her gaze attractive, as though some light shone within her.

There was nowhere for Jumal to wash, there was scarcely enough water for the sheep, and when her skin was thick with grease she would go to some spot where the wind blew, so that the wind and the sand might freshen and cleanse her as they blew over her.

Once Atakh-baba took his tents to a gloomy spot where for a whole day's journey there was nothing but black clay, and there he ordered a halt. Never had Jumal seen so wretched a takyr, nor indeed had Zarrin-Taj. It seemed likely, therefore, that no one had settled there for a long time past, and so on the edge of the takyr there huddled some good

pasture, hiding from the heat and from the sand which would have destroyed it.

There was a hollow in the center of the takyr, and there on the dark clay stood a broken-down stone tower. Atakh-baba disposed his family in this tower; Zarrin-Taj and the other women of the nomad group began to clear out the well near the old tower. No one knew whose the tower was, nor what it had been used for in times past, whether people had prayed there or killed.

At the bottom the lower outside wall of the tower was set with light blue tiles, and the little dome was covered with dark blue tiles upon which was depicted a golden snake.

Jumal worked at the well with the other women; she carried away the wet sand and found various bones in it. On the edge of the takyr one could just make out some sand-hills where the storm-clouds drowsed until winter,

and in the other direction, Atakh-baba said, were the Amu-Darya and rich Khiva. At night Jumal lay near the wall of the ground floor of the tower; she listened to the rustle of the scorpions in the cracks in the dried mud, and through the open door she watched a single star traveling across the sky like a nomad, and felt at one with the mournful

sand which she could hear trickling against the foot of the tower; there was both joy and sorrow in her heart, but she drew each breath carefully, wonderingly, unable to make sense of life.

Atakh-baba got up from his couch and began to make his way through the other sleeping wives towards Zarrin-Taj. Jumal waited a while and then called her mother to warn her of Atakh's approach. But her mother did not reply and Atakh found her. Jumal turned her face down into her blanket and froze with

grief. At this moment a strange dark man came down from the top of the tower and stopped in the middle of the sleeping group, making a sign of peace and welcome. Jumal went up to him and returned his greeting. The man was foreign and quite unlike anyone Jumal had ever seen: he was tall and thin with a kind face, like that of an animal, and his eyes, despite the darkness, looked at the little figure of Jumal sadly, as though he were dead.

Zarrin-Taj, seeing her daughter and this other man, said, "It is our own affair on our own couch," and she turned again to embrace her husband and master.

Jumal seized the hand of the departing guest and wept for her mother; but the guest had no time to console her; he ran off into the distant night, for Atakh-baba jumped up and chased him away. When Jumal saw this and saw how wretched her mother was she also

ran off after the visitor.

The sound of the chase rang out over the takyr, but grief is always stronger than anger, and the unbidden guest ran past the sleeping tents and escaped from Atakh-baba, who was exhausted, by fleeing into the darkness. Jumal ran after them, not knowing where she was going; she felt suddenly that the time had come for her to live her own life; she was entirely alone; even her mother lived apart with her own feelings and her own involuntary independence. She lay down on the cold clay, silent in her solitude — and the ground beneath her was silent. Atakh-baba came back from the chase; he had grown old and fat since the time of the last Persian raid. He caught sight of Jumal, young and defenseless. She had grown up among his flocks, and she was now filled with the sadness of youth. Atakh picked her up from the ground, grasped her small, unpracticed body, and carried her off to the depths of the

takyr. Jumal dug her nails into his throat, but even if his head had been cut off he would not have put her down; he did not, then, feel any pain that she might inflict as he greedily sniffed the scent of wormwood and wind in her hair.

Jumal did not return home next day. She went off to the very edge of the takyr and sang there alone, making up songs for herself; and she decided that she did not want to live any longer. There was a new land beyond the takyr where the sand was mixed with mud; there the grass grew thicker, and the sheep which it nourished moistened the ground with their saliva.

In the evening when Jumal fell asleep her mother found her and took her home, for Atakh-baba had already sold her and had received half the bride-price — 400 Russian roubles and sixty head of cattle of various

kinds. Jumal counted as a half-breed — that is, she was not of pure Turkmenian blood, and the price was set as though she were a Kurd.

Her intended husband, Oda-Kara, an elderly man, sat on a carpet with Atakh and discussed the general tenor of life in the desert; what was happening in Hassan-Kul, or on the banks of the Amu; in Bukhara, it seemed, they were again opening a market for slaves. Oda-Kara was very knowledgeable, but he said that his mind was already getting muddled up with his beard from the lack of a young wife to comfort him.

Atakh-baba agreed that without such comfort no man could live; it was better that a man should beget children than that he should shed tears.

"But, Oda, it isn't long since you took a wife from Kurban-Hiaz's tents," said Atakh. "She is by no means old, and she's very attractive."

"That's true," said Oda, "but now I'll have another one. I used to have six old wives living in my family; one died, and now the sheep and asses have increased in number. Who's going to cope with them? Old wives get older and die; I must take two who are young so that they won't die soon."

"You don't value young wives very highly," said Atakh-baba, "and you don't pay the bride-price outright."

"That's not so," protested Oda-Kara. "I thought a great deal about what I should do, take three old wives already broken in, or take two young ones. But old wives can't chew their meat properly, and they swallow a lot of it; whereas young ones eat less, though they get upset very easily. I decided to take two young ones."

Atakh-baba laughed, and Oda-Kara chuckled too.

"They'll get upset, Oda, your new wives. How can an old man like you have love enough to satisfy them?"

"I have two wives whom I have never touched," said Oda

with a smile. "They have lived in my household for thirty years, and I used to ask them: "Old women, where is your love, where has it gone?"

"And what did they say?" Atakh asked with a smile.

"They'd shed a few tears and then say, 'It's disappeared into the sand.' And I'd say, 'I might as well go and ask the old asses and mares.' "

Zarrin-Taj and Jumal sat outside the tower, near the entrance, and listened to the

conversation. The Persian woman was now old. She wept and held her daughter to her. Jumal embraced her mother in return, and felt no grudge at what had happened in the night—her child's heart already lived without memory.

"Mother, someone came out of the darkness to visit us when you were with Atakh," said Jumal. "He ran off onto the Takyr." Zarrin-Taj told her daughter that the other women had heard of this solitary visitor from the desert. He had fought with the Russians far off in that land where there are lakes and woods; the Russians had taken him on a raid and he had run away from them into the desert and now lived alone, afraid and in hiding.

"So, he'll be dead before long, he has nothing to eat," Jumal decided.

"He's been in hiding for over a year," her

mother said. "He makes pots out of clay and leaves them on the caravan routes; people take the pots and leave him dead sheep. Oda says he even goes off into the villages and mends samovars in the inns, and makes clothes for people, and gets food that way."

Jumal grew thoughtful. She was attracted by the secretive-ness and the spaciousness of life, by the far-off sound which she had heard several times as she lay with her ear to the ground. Zarrin-Taj got up to take fresh tea to her husband and his guest, but suddenly her face grew dark and she fell in a faint even before she got to the carpet where Oda-Kara sat; she sprawled disrespectfully before the guest, and the damp frenzy of death appeared upon her lips. Oda-Kara jumped up and ran off in fear, while Atakh-baba kicked her over with his foot so as to turn her horrifying face away from him. Zarrin-Taj turned herself away and was still; she could feel the heat burning into her weary bones and flesh, and

she began to feel less ill, as though everything inside her which had been twisted in pain now stretched and cracked.

6

**Next morning the nomad camp was deserted.
Atakh-baba**

had given orders in the night that the herd should be assembled, and had abandoned on the spot all his household goods. The family had fled from the plague which had stricken the Persian woman in the old tower—and now the place would be uninhabited for a hundred years, because the people of the desert guide their lives by rumor and by the length of their memories. Jumal scrambled up the worn steps, once of stone, and hid in the topmost room of the tower; there was a wooden spoon abandoned on the ground, and a piece of bread and three unfinished pots. No

doubt that the uninvited visitor who had run off into the desert, had lived here in secret.

Jumal went a little way down the stairs to see what was happening to her mother. Zarrin-Taj lay alone on the stone floor, black, but sadly resigned to the knowledge of her impending death. Zuleika, a Persian who had been captured at the same time as Zarrin-Taj, came and stood some distance away to look at her. Then there came another Persian, Kasem, and two laborers, Agar and Lala; they touched the stone slab where the dying woman lay, and went away feeling that they had said an eternal farewell. Jumal dare not go down to her mother in case they carried her off, so she waited for them to go right away.

Atakh-baba came last of all and looked round the room with regret for the loss of his carpets, bed, and dishes. He stopped some little way from Zarrin-Taj and shouted his

last words—words usually whispered into the ear of the dying between kisses—so that the dying woman should remember them and pass them on to God in heaven at the time of her death.

"Speak to God then, please; after all, it's all the same to you—you're dead already. Tell Him that I am left alone in the world. I have few sheep; they're all dying off. And there's only me to cope with them, whereas other people become spirits and live with God in heaven, where you will live."

He went off, but soon returned with Oda-Kara to look for Jumal and take her with him, for she was already partly paid for. Then Jumal ran downstairs, clung to her mother and embraced her with all her might. Zarrin-Taj was still just breathing, her spirit was still in the land of the living.

Oda-Kara and Atakh were afraid to carry off

a bride who had embraced the plague, and so they went away, cursing their common loss; the one had not received his full price, and the other had paid something for nothing.

"According to Mohammed," said Oda-Kara, "death is the great divider of men, but it has divided me from my sheep and my rams."

People, flocks, dogs, all went away; the takyr was as dead and empty as the Turkmen sky. Jumal began to organise a domestic life with the few things that were left. For food she found the bodies of three dead rams which had been left behind in the flight from death even though they were hardly touched. She made soup for her mother and fed her a little of it. Zarrin-Taj was still just about alive, though afraid to get really well in case she should not die quickly. In the evening Jumal looked from the top of the tower out into the desert, watching and waiting for the man who

had run off somewhere into the sand. But no one came—only some loose grass blew about on the takyr, drifting off to some place where it could grow again.

The sun set and rose again; time passed and the misery which torments the heart of every man came to seem no more than normal. Zarrin-Taj got somewhat better, and began to go about as before.

When there was nothing more left to eat Zarrin-Taj went with her daughter across the takyr to try to get the Khiva caravan route. However, when they were halfway across the takyr, ZarrinTaj sank to the ground and could go no further.

"Mother, let me die with you," said Jumal. She lay alongside her mother and closed her eyes in resignation. "You close your eyes too and don't look at me," she asked. "Then we shall die quickly, why should we look to no

purpose when there is nothing to see; we've seen everything after all."

Jumal drew her mother closer to herself and noticed how small and shrivelled and old she was now—smaller even than Jumal herself. She tried to move her: Zarrin-Taj was as light as a dry branch.

Jumal got to her feet and picked her mother up. She found she could manage her, and so she took her far across the takyr, having decided to die a little later. By nightfall Jumal had carried Zarrin-Taj as far as the sand at the edge of the takyr, and she lay down with her for the night in a warm hollow in the ground.

In the morning they found a strange man sitting beside them. He greeted the mother and daughter and took a piece of mutton from his bag and offered it to them. Jumal recognised him immediately as the man who

had come in from the desert.

and was overjoyed at his arrival. The stranger was not Turkmenian, although he could speak Turkmenian; he was dressed in gray, and his clothes were completely in rags; his face was young and open, and yet already used to grief and suffering.

"Who are you?" Jumal asked.

"I am an Austrian, Stepan Katigrob," said the wanderer. "And who are you?"

Jumal had never heard of Austrians; only twice in her life had she seen so much as a permanent village settlement, and she was still ignorant of the existence of towns or books, or war, or woods, or lakes.

While Jumal was talking, or eating and exchanging smiles with Katigrob, Zarrin-Taj

lay alone in the sand and silently died.

In a little while Jumal thought to give her mother something to eat, and so she called to her, but the Persian woman did not reply. Jumal went and touched her mother. She lifted the clothes from her breast and saw what looked like two dark dead worms that had eaten their way into her chest—this was all that remained of the nipples that had once suckled Jumal herself; the skin fell loosely between her mother's ribs and there was no sign of any heartbeat. The whole breast was so small that it could only have housed something tiny and dried up—the old woman had not had the physical capacity to feel happiness, her strength has been sufficient only for suffering. Such a breast was incapable of love or hate, but one could bend over it and weep. The slave was dead.

Katigrob stood to one side and looked on, sad and thoughtful, while the daughter embraced

her mother's dead body. Then, when Jumal had whispered in her mother's ear her request to heaven for a happy fate, Stepan Katigrob went up to the dead woman, picked her up, and carried her off to bury her. Zarrin-Taj gave off neither scent nor warmth—to Katigrob she seemed like some form of mineral, and he instantly felt sick at heart and bitter in mind. He, too, wept and turned away. Somewhere in the world there was his native land, there was a war. He had run away, disappeared for many years, perhaps forever, into the hungry desert, and had scattered the dust before the wind. Once he had been a Viennese optician, now he saw only mirages, the fleeting ephemera of light and of life.

Katigrob pulled himself together. Jumal stood before him expectantly. She had been brought up in grief and hunger and

slavery, but she was alive and clean and patient. The Austrian took her hands and helped her to her feet, and then kissed her dark and trusting eyes.

That night Katigrob took the dead Zarrin-Taj far beyond the edge of the takyr and buried her body in a hollow in the sand. He piled the sand high over her, but he knew that the wind might soon disperse the sand and so he measured the number of paces from the spot to the edge of the takyr, for he did not want any human being, even a dead one, to be forgotten. He made a record of the distance in his notebook.

Jumal fell asleep on the very spot where her mother had died. Katigrob woke her and took her off to live in the mud tower in the middle of the takyr. He realised that the Turkmenians would not soon return, that they would come only when one war in Europe was finished and a second one perhaps beginning, and by

that time he would have died here alone.

Next day Katigrob left Jumal alone in the tower with a few remains of food from his bag, and went off to the caravan route to Khiva about forty miles away by the Borkan well.

He stayed there six days; two merchant caravans went by, and then a group of thieves and deserters on foot who were hoping to take refuge by the Caspian sea. Katigrob worked for those who needed help, and received in return mutton, rice, onions, matches and wine. He mended shoes and travelling utensils, treated the sores of camels and asses, did a few conjuring tricks and told stories.

He would usually return to Jumal on the takyr after nine or ten days with the food and the goods which he had earned; once he brought a sick ass which had been abandoned by a caravan train, and Jumal treated it and

nursed it. On another occasion Katigrob brought her a string of beads made of cockle shells from the Aral Sea, and kissed her on the lips. Jumal did not resist his feeling, but for her own part she was indifferent, quite unable to understand how one person might love another. She remembered her dead mother and the other women of her tribe, for many of them, when a husband died, would sprinkle their veils with water to provide a show of tears for their dry eyes.

8

They stayed there together for six years, and the takyr around the mud tower lay silent and lifeless as before, as devoid of incident as the fate of Jumal. From time to time Stepan Katigrob went as before to the caravan route, but the caravan trains had become less frequent. Only rarely did he succeed in earning half a bag of rice, or an emaciated sheep.

One silvery night when Katigrob was away Jumal heard distant sounds of gunfire. She took a dagger, matches and a little rice, got on the ass and went off in the direction of the firing. She rode all night and all next day until evening, but she met no one; the ass, weary with the journey across the burning hot sands, refused to go further. Jumal got down and pulled him forward on the rein in the hope of meeting someone or of finding a well.

She spent the night in some unknown spot and next morning led her donkey off again. Towards evening she came to a small takyr where there was a well with a pail and a pulley. Jumal drew some water. The donkey drank and drank—three whole buckets—till it drank too much and died. Jumal knew that she too would die on the morrow and was sorry only that she would find rest so far from her mother.

When night came Jumal dozed, and then she could not shake off her drowsiness—she forgot that she was alive, and simply did what she had to do. She would get up and walk about, and then lie down again, then run, or smile, or weep; and all the time she would try to remember, to grasp something which became less and less tangible, which seemed to retreat into the shadows like some cry heard from afar.

That night she dreamt that there were thousands of people running across the takyr, and that she heard shots and screams. She seized her dagger and ran in the direction of the sounds until she fell in tears at her own loneliness and despair.

However, she was quite calm when she awoke. It was cool. The moon shone in her face and there were people around her talking quietly, Atakh-baba, Oda-Kara, and four people she did not recognize. In the sand beyond the

takyr some horses, still saddled, were grazing, and there was a small campfire with a kettle boiling over it.

Jumal got up; no one seemed either pleased or surprised that she was still alive—no doubt such people have their own cares

and concerns which cannot be laid aside. All the same Oda-Kara gave Jumal a piece of bread, and she looked at the rifles which lay beside each man. They asked whether she had seen the Reds or not, but Jumal did not understand what they were talking about. Atakh did not believe this.

"It's you who poison the wells," he cried.

"No," said Jumal.

"You're lying, you're a spy," said Atakh in disbelief, "you filthy half-breed. You slaves

are all Reds."

**"Give me something to drink," begged Jumal.
"The water in the kettle is going up in steam."**

**"You shall drink your fill tomorrow," said
Atakh. "There's salt water for you."**

**They drank their tea, and used up all the
water in the kettle. Jumal turned away from
them; she was so angry that she did not even
want to drink their water.**

**Towards morning they all fell asleep except
Oda-Kara, who was left on guard over the
horses and the guns. But Oda-Kara
remembered that he had paid the bride-price
for Jumal, and he crept over and lay beside
her. However, while he was occupied in
embracing her, Jumal seized him by the beard
and stuck her dagger into his throat.**

Oda-Kara had no time to cry out; he

managed only to whisper his last word before he died.

Jumal shoved the body to one side and raised herself on one elbow. The other five were all asleep; the moon was setting in the dawn sky; she was surrounded by a broad expanse. She made up her mind that since her slave-mother lay dead in some desert spot, then these free and wealthy people should also perish in the desert wastes.

She got to her feet and went up to the hobbled steppe horses, and without more ado set them loose. She kept one horse for herself, however, and collected up all the rifles, which she tied in a bundle so that they would not slip about and put them over the saddle. She gave the horse a slap and went off at a trot into the desert, fresh and alert in the dawn, as though she had drunk her fill of the dew. The horses which she had set free had not eaten for so long that they too rushed straight after her,

thinking that there would be water.

9

It was many years after this before Jumal returned to the takyr—ten years indeed. She spent this time in Ashkhabad and Tashkent, and eventually took a degree in agricultural science.

Jumal Tajieva (she adapted a surname from her mother's name) made every possible inquiry about the Austrian prisoner-of-war, Katigrob, but she could get no news of him.

Jumal knew that somewhere near the Zaungus valley there was a little depression in the land where old plants still grew, and she knew that there lived there a solitary man with a rifle and two dogs. There, no doubt, were to be found the mud tower and the great takyr. But she had really no occasion to go

and see, and she kept putting off the journey from year to year.

One year, towards the end of spring, Tajieva was given the task of setting up an experimental plant reservation in the heart of the Kara-Kum desert. Naturally it was better to set up such a reservation on a takyr rather than on the eolithic mineral sands. Jumal Tajieva abandoned her European skirt and blouse and put on traditional Persian dress, covered her head with a fine, white shawl, and set off one morning from Ashkhabad on horseback alone. She had a scale map of the desert area, and she tried to work out from it where there might be a large takyr. But ahead of her were the age-old mysterious plants of the desert, in which she took an interest both as a specialist and as one who had lived in the desert.

She travelled for four tedious days, and then she suddenly caught sight of the dome of a

tower, blue with a golden snake on it, in the middle of the takyr.

The horse's hooves rang out on the hard slabs of dried mud as if on frozen ground, and the atmosphere grew oppressive, as if Jumal herself were still young and downcast, as if she had never seen towns and rivers, as if she knew nothing in the world except the wind howling over her empty heart. It was mid-day, and the May sun lit up the whole sad, desolate world of clay which was Jumal's birthplace. She went right up to the abandoned tower, which had been erected long ago by a weak and dying people. She thought to herself: "The takyr here is extensive; there's a good well and fresh water at hand; here I shall settle, and here we shall plant a garden, for this is the impoverished land of my birth."

Jumal went into the tower. The lower rooms were empty

and unwelcoming as before. On the floor there lay a crushed finger-bone, and in the corner there was human skeleton covered with the remnants of clothing; its bones had been crushed as a result of some death-dealing violence. Jumal bent over the skeleton. Its bones had long ago dried up, the skull was turned towards the wall, some ribs were missing, and the rib-cage was smashed in as though with a blow from a sledge-hammer.

She found a pocket in the rags of the Austrian jacket, but she could not find a notebook, nor any papers that she could recognize. Only on the wall over the entrance could she make out an inscription in German written in indelible pencil:

"You will come back to me, Jumal, and we shall meet again." And Jumal said aloud as she stood alone under the lofty vault of the

echoing tower: "I have come back to you and we have met again."

She went out of the tower and rode round the takyr so as to make a rough plan of it and to estimate the size of the plantation which was to be made there. A few miles away she saw to one side of the takyr, in the sand, a barbed-wire fence. Beyond the fence there was some sparse grass and a small workman's hut. Among the vegetable plots there were three Russian crosses erected over some odd graves, and one slab of the local stone, placed on end: there was an inscription cut into the stone in Latin letters: "Old Jumal." Jumal got down from her horse and knelt in front of the barbed-wire. She put her Persian kerchief over her face and then could not think what else she should do. She remembered the anguish with which her dead mother had once said of someone else: "How sad I felt at the thought that he who goes never returns."

Jumal took the kerchief from her face and looked at the old plant with the gray stem which grew as a memorial around her mother's headstone. She knew the plant's name, if only from the drawings which she had seen of it, and from her childhood memories, but she was no longer conscious of the significance which it had once had. So she had come to the place where she wanted to be—here was a corner of the earth which still nourished those plants which were rapidly dying out elsewhere.

**(1934)
by Marion Jordan**

Transla ted

THE THIRD SON

In a provincial town an old woman died. Her husband, a seventy-year-old retired worker, went to the telegraph office and sent off six identically worded telegrams to different parts of the country: "Mother dead come father."

The elderly woman in the telegraph office took a long time to count the money, making mistakes, writing out the receipts and stamping them with shaky hands. The old man watched her kindly through the window in the wooden partition with his red-rimmed eyes, and wishing to dispel the grief in his heart thought vaguely about something else. The elderly clerk, it seemed to him, must also have a broken heart and a soul forever troubled — perhaps she was a widow or by a cruel stroke of fate a deserted wife.

And now she was working slowly, confusing money, her memory and her attention failing; for even simple, easy work calls for a happy heart.

After dispatching the telegrams the old man returned home. He sat down on a stool by the long table at the cold feet of his dead wife, smoked, whispered mournful words, watched the solitary life of the gray bird that hopped from perch to perch in its cage, occasionally wept softly, then calmed down, wound up his pocket watch and gazed out of the window. Outside, the weather was changing; dead leaves would fall, together with wet, weary snow flakes alternating with rain, followed by a late sun, its light cool like that of a star, — and the old man sat there waiting for his sons.

The eldest son arrived by air the very next day. Within the next two days the other five had gathered.

One of them, the third, arrived together with his six-year-old daughter, who had never before seen her grandfather.

The mother had already been waiting on the table for four days, but no odor of death clung to her body, so much was it cleansed by illness and a dry exhaustion. Having given a wholesome, rich life to her sons, the old woman kept the small sparse body for herself and had tried for a long time to preserve it, even in its miserable condition, for the love of her children and pride in them until death.

The large men, whose ages varied from twenty to forty,

stood silently around the coffin on the table. There were six of them. The seventh, the father, was smaller and much frailer than his youngest son. In his arms the old man held his granddaughter, who kept her eyes screwed

shut in fear of the strange dead old woman whose pale unblinking eyes looked at her through nearly closed lids.

The sons wept silently, only once in a while shedding a checked tear, their faces distorted in an attempt to bear their grief soundlessly. Their father no longer cried; he had wept his fill alone, before anyone came, and now occasionally he would glance with covert excitement and an inopportune delight at the able-bodied half a dozen that were his sons. Two were seamen, naval commanders, one a Moscow actor, another, the one with the daughter, a physicist and Communist, the youngest was studying agronomy, the eldest headed a workshop in an aircraft plant and wore a decoration on his chest, a testament to his worth as a worker. The six men, seven including the father, gathered quietly around their dead mother and wept for her silently, concealing from each other their despair, their childhood memories of a vanished joy in the

love which had continuously and generously lived in their mother's heart, always reaching them across thousands of miles, and they had always unconsciously felt it and grown stronger for the knowledge that encouraged them to strive for greater achievements in life. Now their mother was a corpse, she could no longer love anyone, lying there like any indifferent strange old woman.

Now each of her sons felt lonely and frightened, as if somewhere across a dark field a lamp was lit on the windowsill of an old house, lighting up the night, the flying beetles, the blue grass, the swarms of midges in the air — the world of childhood around the old house abandoned by those who had been born in it; the doors of that house were never locked so that those who had left it might return, but nobody had returned. And now suddenly the light seemed to have gone out behind the somber window while reality had turned into memory.

As she lay dying the old woman asked her old man of a husband to have a requiem mass said for her by a priest while she was still at home, while she did not mind being carried out and lowered into the grave without a priest so as not to offend her sons who would then find it possible to follow her coffin. It was not so much because of her faith in God, as her desire that her

husband whom she had loved all her life would grieve and mourn all the more as prayers were being chanted and the light of the wax candles flickered over her dead face; she did not want to depart from life without solemnity and remembrance. After the sons' arrival the old man had been looking for a priest for a long time, finally, at nightfall, he brought an old man in lay clothes, pink-cheeked from keeping fast on a vegetarian diet, his lively eyes sparkling with some petty, objective thoughts. The priest arrived

wearing an army commander's satchel slung around his hip; he carried in it all his clerical belongings, incense, thin candles, a prayer book, a stole and a small censer on a chain. He quickly set and lit the candles around the coffin, fanned the incense in the censer and without any warning or preliminaries, began mumbling the prayers out of the book. The sons, who were in the room rose to their feet; they felt awkward and embarrassed for some reason. Motionless, with downcast eyes, they stood one behind the other before the coffin. In front of them an elderly person chanted and muttered hastily, almost ironically, glancing occasionally with small, comprehensive eyes at this bastion of the deceased old woman's offspring. What he felt for them was partly fear and partly respect; apparently, he would not have minded starting a conversation with them and perhaps even professing some enthusiasm for the building of socialism. But the sons were silent and none of them, not even the old

woman's husband, made the sign of the cross — it was rather like a vigil over the coffin than an attendance of a religious service.

Having said his hasty mass for the dead, the priest hurriedly gathered his belongings, blew out the candles around the coffin and put away his property in the army satchel.

Furtively, the father placed some money in his hand and then, without further delay, the priest made his way through the ranks of the six men, who did not so much as glance at him, and disappeared rather timidly behind the door. In fact, he would have liked to stay for the memorial wake to talk over the outlooks of wars and revolutions — this encounter with the representatives of the new world, which he secretly admired but which he could not penetrate would have consoled him for a long time to come. In his loneliness he dreamed of some heroic exploit that would be a breakthrough into the bright future, the circle of the new generation and to that end

he had even applied to the local airport to be taken up to the highest altitude from where he could be dropped

by parachute without an oxygen mask but he had not received an answer.

At night, the father made up six beds in the second room but his granddaughter he laid down to sleep alongside himself in the bed where his wife had slept for forty years. The bed was in the same large room in which the coffin was set up and the sons went into the other room. The father lingered by the door until his children undressed and settled down for the night, then closed the door, put out the lights everywhere and lay down beside his grandchild. The grandchild was asleep, alone in the wide bed, the blanket pulled over her head.

The old man stood over her in the semi-

darkness of the night: the snow which had fallen outside absorbed the scant, diffused light of the sky and shone dimly through the window lightening the gloom within. The old man went over to the open coffin, kissed the hands, the brow, and the lips of his wife saying to her: "You may rest now." Then he carefully lay down next to his granddaughter and closed his eyes to make his heart forget everything. He dozed off and then awoke with a start. Light filtered from under the door of the room where the sons slept. The light had been turned on again and loud conversation and laughter could be heard coming from there.

Because of the noise the child began to twist and turn; perhaps she had not been asleep either but was simply afraid to thrust her head out from under the blanket for fear of the night and the dead old woman.

The eldest son spoke with the eagerness of

conviction about hollow-bodied metal propellers, his voice sounding rich and powerful, one could sense his sound teeth which had been taken care of in good turn, and his deep red throat. The seaman-brothers were sharing their experiences in foreign ports and laughing heartily about the old blankets which their father had used to cover them, the same blankets of their childhood and youth. Strips of white cotton with "head" and "feet" were sewn to the top and bottom of these blankets to spread the blankets properly so as not to cover the face with the soiled, sweaty edge which goes to the feet. Then one of the two seamen started wrestling with his brother, the actor, and they rolled about on the floor as they had done in their childhood when they all lived together. The youngest son kept egging them on and boasting that he could handle them both with his left hand. Obviously, the brothers loved each

other and were joyful for their reunion. They had not gathered together for many years and no one knew when they would meet again. Perhaps, not until their father's funeral. Carried away by their romping the two brothers overturned a chair, quieted down for a moment, then, apparently remembering that their mother was dead and could not hear anything, they resumed their game. Soon, the eldest son asked the actor to sing something in a low voice: he would know some good Moscow songs. But the actor said that it was difficult to start just like that — offhand. "Why don't you cover me up with something," asked the Moscow actor. They covered up his face and he sang from under the cover to hide his shyness about breaking into a song. While he was singing, the youngest started jostling the other son who fell out of bed and onto the third one on the floor. They all burst out laughing and ordered the youngest to immediately pick him up with his left hand. The youngest answered them

quietly and two of them roared with laughter so loudly that the little girl showed her head from under the blanket in the dark room and called:

"Grandpa! Hey, Grandpa! Are you asleep?"

"No, I'm not asleep, I'm oh, I'm all right," the old man replied coughing timidly.

The little girl could no longer contain her desire to weep and let out a sob. The old man stroked her face: it was wet.

"Why are you crying?" asked the old man in a whisper.

"I'm sorry for Granny," said the granddaughter. "They are all alive, they laugh and she is the only one who is dead."

The old man did not say anything. He merely snuffled and coughed intermittently. The girl

grew frightened, — she raised herself up to get a better look at her grandfather and make sure that he was not asleep. Discerning his face she asked:

"And why are you crying? I've stopped."

Her grandfather stroked her head and answered in a whisper:

"Oh.. I'm not crying, that's perspiration on my face."

The girl sat at the head of the bed next to the old man.

"Do you miss the old woman?" she said. "No use crying any more; you're old, you'll soon die and then you won't cry anyhow."

"I won't," answered the old man softly.

In the noisy room next door silence suddenly fell. A moment earlier one of the sons had said

something. They had all in-

stantly grown hushed. Then, one son again said something softly. The old man recognized the voice of the third son, the learned physicist, and father of the child. Up to now he had not uttered a sound: he neither spoke nor laughed. Somehow, he had quieted his brothers and they even stopped talking.

Shortly thereafter their door opened and the third son came out fully dressed as in the daytime. He went up to his mother in the coffin and bent over her dim face which no longer reflected any feeling for anyone.

There was the stillness of the late night. The street was empty of pedestrians or passersby. The five brothers in the next room did not stir. The old man and his granddaughter watched the son and the father intently and nearly breathlessly.

The third son suddenly straightened up, reached out his hand in the darkness, grabbed the corner of the coffin, but losing his balance dragged it slightly aside along the table and fell on the floor. His head like some strange object hit the boards of the floor but the son did not utter a sound, only his daughter screamed.

In their underwear the five brothers rushed out to their brother and carried him into their room to bring him back to consciousness and soothe him. After some time, when the third son regained full consciousness, they were fully dressed in their uniforms and suits, although it was not yet two o'clock in the morning. Then, each of them wandered off alone, secretly, in the house, the yard and in the darkness around the house where they had spent their childhood, weeping, murmuring to themselves and complaining as if their mother was standing over each of them, listening to them and mourning for

having died and making her children grieve for her. Had she been able, she would have lived forever, to keep them from suffering for her in their heart and body which she had brought into the world... But the mother hadn't been able to continue living for very long.

In the morning the six sons shouldered the coffin and carried it away to the grave while the old man took his grandchild in his arms and followed in their steps, by now he was used to grieving for the old woman and was pleased and proud at the thought that one day he, too, would be carried to his grave by these six mighty persons, and that it would be just as fine a show.

(1936)
Alexey A. Kiselev

Translated by

FRO

He had gone far away, for long, almost never to return. Speeding away the steam engine of the express train whistled a distant farewell in the open space; the people who had seen off the passenger left the platform and returned to their daily routine; a porter appeared with a mop to sweep the platform like the deck of a ship, which had been stranded on a shoal.

"Step aside, miss!" said the porter to a pair of lonely stout legs.

The woman stepped aside to the wall, towards the mailbox and read on it the times of the mail collection: they collected often, one could write letters every day. She touched the iron of the box with her finger — it was strong, no one's soul enclosed in a letter would be lost from it.

Behind the station lay a new railway town; the shadows of tree leaves moved along the white walls of the houses, the summer evening sun clearly and sadly illuminated the landscape and the dwellings as if through a lucid emptiness, where there was no air for breathing. On the eve of the night, everything in the world was too clearly visible, blinding and transparent — and, therefore, seemed unreal.

The young woman paused in surprise amidst such strange light: in the twenty years of her life she did not remember having ever seen such emptied, radiant, silent space; she felt that within her, her own heart was weakening from the lightness of the air, from the hope that the man she loved would return. She saw her reflection in the window of the barbershop: her commonplace looks, her hair teased and set into waves (such hair-dos were worn back in the nineteenth century), gray, deep-set eyes gazing with keen tenderness,

ostensibly contrived — she was used to loving the man who had gone away, she wanted to be loved by him always, continuously, so that inside her body, amid her ordinary, pedestrian soul a second, sweet life should languish and grow. But she herself was unable to love as she had been wanting to — intensely and constantly; she sometimes grew tired and would then cry, distressed that her heart was not indefatigable.

She lived in a new three-room apartment: in one room lived her widowed father — a railroad engineer, the other two were

occupied by herself and her husband, who was now gone to the Far East to tune up and set mysterious electric instruments to work. He was always busy with the mysteries of machinery, hoping by means of mechanisms to transform the whole world for the good and the delight of mankind or for some other

purpose: his wife did not know exactly.

Because of his age her father seldom traveled. He was listed as a reserve engineer, replacing people who had fallen ill, breaking in engines which had come from the repair shop, or driving lightweight local trains. A year ago, they tried to pension him off. The old man, not knowing what this meant, had agreed; but after living through four days of freedom, he went out to the semaphore on the fifth day, sat on a mound by the permanent way, sitting there long after dark, his weeping eyes following the steam engines straining at the head of the trains. Henceforth, he would go out to that mound daily to look at the engines, to live on sympathy and fantasy, arriving home at nightfall weary as if returning from a long railroad run. Back in the apartment, he would wash his hands, sigh, say that on the 9000th slope the brake shoes tore off from one of the cars, or that something else of that sort had happened; then, he would timidly ask his

daughter for vaseline to rub on his left palm, as if it were sore from tugging on a tight regulator, eat supper, mutter, and was soon blissfully asleep. The next morning, the retired engineer walked again to the permanent way and spent another day watching, in tears, in fantasy, in sympathy, in a rage of lonesome enthusiasm. If from his point of view there was something wrong on a passing steam engine, or if the engineer was running the engine improperly he would shout accusations and instructions from his high point: "You gave too much water! Open the tap, you jerk! Blow it through!" — "Go easy on the sand: you'll get stuck on the climb! Why pour it, stupid?" — "Pull up the flanges, don't lose steam; what is it — an engine or a steam-house?" If the train echelon was improperly composed, the light empty flatcars at the head and in the center, in danger of being squashed in case of sudden braking, the retired engineer on top of his mound shook his fist at the tail-end

conductor. And when the retired engineer's own engine was passing by, led by his former assistant, Benjamin, the old man invariably detected some visible disrepair in the steam engine — during his term such things had never happened and he advised the engineer to take measures against his careless helper. "Dear Benjamin, dear Benjamin, punch

him in the mug!" cried the old engineer from the mound of his estrangement.

When the weather was overcast he took an umbrella along and his only daughter brought him dinner to the mound, because she felt sorry for her father when he returned in the evening thin, hungry and furious with a frustrated workingman's lust. But recently as the old engineer was doing his usual yelling and swearing from atop his hill he was approached by Comrade Piskunov, the party-organizer of the depot; the party-organizer

took the old man by the hand and led him to the depot. The depot clerk once again entered the old man's name for steam-engine work. The engineer got into the cabin of a cold engine, sat down near the boiler and began to doze, exhausted by his own happiness, one arm hugging the steam-boiler — the livelihood of all working mankind with which he was once more in communion.

"Frosya!" said the father to his daughter, when she returned from the station, having seen her husband off on his long journey.

"Frosya, get me something from the stove to chew on, it may happen that they call me out to travel during the night."

He waited constantly to be called out on a trip, but they seldom called on him — once in three or four days, when there was a light echelon for a short trip or when another easy job was at hand. Nevertheless, the father was worried lest he had to go out to work unfed,

unprepared, sullen; therefore he constantly fretted over his health and his spirits, watched his digestion, considering himself part of the leading railroad personnel.

"Citizen engineer!" the old man would sometimes address himself in a dignified and articulate manner, and would then fall significantly silent in answer, as if listening to a distant ovation.

Frosya took the pot from the oven and gave her father something to eat. The setting sun shone through the apartment, the light penetrating Frosya's innermost body, inside which her heart kept warm, continuously pumping up the flow of blood and instilling her with the feeling of life. She went to her room. On the table she kept a childhood picture of her husband; ever since his childhood he had not made any photographs of himself because he was not interested in himself and did not believe in the importance

of his looks. The yellowing photograph showed a boy with a large, baby head, in a tattered shirt, cheap trousers, standing barefoot against a background of magical trees and further away there was a fountain and a palace. The boy was gazing

attentively into the still unfamiliar world, unaware of the beautiful life behind him on the canvas of the photograph. Beautiful life was inside this very boy with the broad face, enthusiastic and shy at the same time, who held some stalks of grass in his hands instead of toys and touched the earth with trusting bare feet.

Night had already fallen. The local shepherd drove the milking cows home from the steppes and to their night lodging. The cows lowed, asking their owners to let them in for a rest; the women, the housewives, took them in to the courtyard; a long day was cooling off

into night. Frosya sat in the dusk, blissful with love and memory of the man who was gone. Outside the window the pines grew, embarking upon the straight journey into the happy expanse of the sky, delicate voices of some tiny birds sang their last, drowsy song; the guardians of the dark, the crickets, emitted their short appeasing sounds, — to wit that everything is well and they do not sleep, but watch.

Father asked Frosya if she was going to the club: today, there was a new play, a flower-contest, and a performance of humorists from the Conductor Reserves Corps.

"No," said Frosya, "I am not going. I shall be pining for my husband."

"For Fyodor?" uttered the engineer. "He will turn up, a year will pass and he will be back... Go ahead and brood, why not. At times when I went away for a day or two your late mother

would already miss me: she was a bourgeois!"

"And I am not a bourgeois, but I miss him anyway!" said Frosya with surprise. "No, perhaps I am a bourgeois after all..."

Her father comforted her:

"No, what sort of bourgeois are you! There are none left, they died long ago. To become a petty bourgeois you must still live and learn a long time: those were good women..."

"Papa, go to your room," said Frosya. "I will soon give you supper, I wish to be alone now."

"It is time to eat now!" agreed the father. "Or else the messenger may come from the depot: perhaps someone was taken ill, or had a fit of hard drinking or had a family drama—anything can happen. Then, I must be there at once: transportation must never stop! Hey, that Fedya of yours is now rushing on the

express — the green signals are lit up for him, forty kilometers ahead they clear the track for him, the engineer gazes into the distance, his

cabin is illuminated inside by electricity — everything going smoothly!..."

The old man was lingering, shuffling his feet and continuing his muttering: he loved to be with his daughter or with another person when his heart and mind were not occupied by the steam engine.

"Papa, have your dinner!" his daughter commanded; she wanted to hear the crickets, see the pines at night beyond the window and think about her husband.

"Well, she's become decadent!" said her father quietly and went away.

Having fed her father, Frosya left the house. There was rejoicing in the club. Music was playing, then the chorus of the humorists from the Conductor Reserves was heard singing: "Oh, spruce, what a spruce! Oh, what pine-cones does it have!..." "Too-too-too-too" — the steam engine: "Roo-roo-roo-roo" — the airplane; "Purr-purr-purr-purr" — the ice-breaker... "everybody stoop together, everybody rise together, say 'too-too,' say 'roo-roo,' every coffin come alive, lots of plastic, lots of culture, more production — our goal!..."

The people in the club moved about, murmuring timidly, and tormented themselves for the sake of happiness, following the humorists.

Frosya walked past; farther, it was deserted, the protective tree plantings began along the main track. From a distance, from the east, an express train came; the steam engine

worked on a long stretch, waging a victorious battle with space and its entire front emitted a radiant beam of light. Somewhere, this train had met the Far East express, these cars had seen it after Frosya parted from her beloved, and now with diligent attention she viewed the express train, which had been near her husband after her. She walked back to the station but as she walked along, the train left after a short stop; the caboose, forgetting about all the people it met and passed by, disappeared in the darkness. On the platform and inside the station Frosya did not see a single stranger, not one new face — none of the passengers had gotten off the express train, no one to ask anything about the courier train they met or about her husband. Perhaps someone had seen him and knew something!

But only two old women sat in the station, awaiting the midnight local; and the peasant she had seen during the day was

again sweeping the litter underfoot. They always sweep when one wants to stand and think, they don't like anyone.

Frosya moved a few steps away from the sweeping peasant, but he was creeping toward her again.

"Would you know," she asked him, "about the courier train number two — is it riding safely? It left here this afternoon... Have any reports come in about it at the station?"

"One is supposed to come on the platform when the train approaches," said the cleaner.

"No trains are expected now: go inside, young lady... there are all kinds of persons knocking about here all the time — why aren't they home on cots reading the newspapers. But no, they insist on coming to litter..."

Frosya set off along the tracks following the

pointers — in the opposite direction from the station. There, there was a circular depot for freight trains, coal delivery, slag pits and a steam engine circle. Tall lanterns brightly lit the area, clouds of steam and smoke drifted overhead; several engines breathed heavily, raising steam for a journey, others released steam, being cooled as they were washed.

Four women with iron shovels passed Frosya, followed by a man, the foreman or brigadier.

"Who did you lose here, beautiful?" he asked Frosya. "If you lost someone — you won't find him; if he left — he won't come back... come on with us to help with the transport!"

Frosya hesitated.

"Give me a shovel!" she said.

"Have mine," answered the brigadier and handed the tool to the woman. "Women!" he

said to the others. "Go and work at the third pit, and I will be at the first..."

He led Frosya away to the slag pit, into which the steam engines cleaned their furnaces, and directed her to work, while he himself walked away. Two other women were already working in the pit, throwing out the burning slag. Frosya also climbed down into the pit and began working, glad to have unknown friends at her side. The soot and gas made breathing difficult, throwing the slag upward turned out to be tedious and awkward, because the pit was narrow and hot. But then, Frosya felt better within her heart: here she was diverted, here she was alive and with people — girlfriends, here she saw the great, free night, illuminated by stars and electricity. Love slumbered peacefully in her heart; the courier train had sped off far away; encircled by Siberia, her sweet

man slept on a second-class upper berth. Let him sleep and not think of anything. Let the engineer look far into the distance and not permit an accident!

Soon thereafter, Frosya and another woman climbed out of the pit. Now they had to load the shoveled-out slag into the car-platforms. Hurling the slag aboard the platforms, the women glanced at each other and talked from time to time, in order to rest and catch their breath.

Frosya's friend was about thirty years old. For some reason she was getting chilly and kept adjusting or fretting over her humble dress. She had been released from jail today, she had spent four days there because of the slander of an evil man. Her husband worked as a watchman, he wandered around the cooperative all night with a Berdan rifle, and received sixty rubles a month. While she was under arrest the watchman cried for her and

went to the authorities to beg that they release her; but before the arrest she had lived with a lover who unthinkingly told her in confidence (it must have been out of weakness or fear) about his swindle, and then, apparently became frightened and wanted to destroy her, so that there would be no witness. But now he himself was caught — let him suffer for awhile — and she would live with her husband in freedom: there was work, bread was being sold now, and as for clothing, the two of them would somehow scrounge it up.

Frosya told her that she too had a sorrow: her husband had gone far away.

"He went away, he didn't die, he'll return!" her working friend comforted Frosya.

"There, in that jail, I became downcast, I was sorrowful. I had never been in before, I wasn't used to it; if 'I had I wouldn't have cared so much. But I have always been so innocuous that the government left me alone...

I walked out from there, came home, my husband was happy and started to cry, but he is afraid to hug me; he thinks I'm a criminal — an important person. But I am the same, I am accessible... And in the evening he must go out on duty; we felt so sad. He took the Berdan rifle — let us go, he said, I will treat you to fruit water: I have twelve kopecks, that is enough for one glass, we'll split it, half and half. But my spirits are low, it does not pass. I told him to go down to the canteen alone, let him drink a glass of sweet water, and when we save enough money and I get over my prison depression, then we shall both go to the canteen and empty a whole bottle... That

is what I said to him and I walked to the tracks over here to work. Perhaps, I think, they line the ballast, they change the rails, or something else. Even at night there is always something to do. I think I will stay with people there, my grief will pass, I will become

peaceful again. And it is true, now I have talked a bit with you, it's like meeting a cousin... Well, let's finish up the platform: in the office they give us money, in the morning I'll buy bread... Froся!" she called into the slag pit where Froся's namesake was working. "Much left there?"

"No," answered the other Froся. "Just a trifle, only the leftovers."

"Come up here," ordered the wife of the Berdan-rifle night-watchman. "Let's finish quickly, we'll go together to get our pay."

The foreman arrived.

"So how is it, women? Finished the pit yet?... Aha! Well, get going to the office, I'll come up in a minute. And there you'll get some money — then you'll see — some are going to dance at the club, and others home - to make children! Lots of things for you to do!"

In the office the women signed their names: Efrosinia Evsta-fieva, Natalia Bukova and three letters, resembling the word "Eva," with a hammer and sickle at the end instead of still another Efrosinia, who had a relapse into illiteracy. They received three rubles twenty kopecks each and went to their homes. Frosya Evstafieva and the guard's wife, Natalia, walked together. Frosya invited her new friend to come to the house so that she could wash and clean up.

The father was sleeping in the kitchen on a trunk, fully dressed in a heavy winter jacket and a cap with a steam engine badge: he was ready for an emergency or some kind of general technical accident, to appear instantly in the midst of disaster.

Quietly the women took care of all the necessary things, powdered their faces a little, smiled, and went out. By now it was late, the dances and the flower competition at the club

would probably have started. While Frosya's husband was asleep in a faraway second-class carriage, his heart feeling nothing anyway, his memory blank, his love for her shut away, — as though she were all alone in the whole world, free from happiness and pain, — she felt like dancing a little for a while, listening to the music a little, and holding other people's hand. And in the morning, when he

wakes up there alone and at once remembers her, she will perhaps break out crying.

The two women ran all the way to the club. The local train passed by: it was still midnight, still not very late. In the club an amateur jazz-orchestra played. The assistant engineer at once invited Frosya Evstafieva to dance to the "Rio Rita" waltz.

Frosya entered the dance with a blissful expression: she loved music, it seemed to her

that sadness and happiness were inextricably combined in music, just as in real life, as in her own soul. While dancing, she was hardly aware of herself, she moved in a light dream of amazement, and her body followed the rhythm effortlessly, because Frosya's blood was warmed by the melody.

"Has the flower-competition already taken place?" she asked her partner quietly, breathing rapidly.

"It has just finished: why were you late?" asked the assistant engineer meaningfully, as if he loved Frosya eternally and languished after her constantly.

"Oh, what a shame!" said Frosya.

"Do you like it here?" asked her partner.

"Well, of course, yes," answered Frosya. "It's so beautiful."

Natasha Bukova did not know how to dance; she leaned against the wall in the hall clutching her nocturnal friend's hat.

During the intermission, while the orchestra was resting, Frosya and Natasha drank lemonade and finished two bottles. Natasha had only been in this club once, and that was long ago. She examined the clean, decorated premises with a meek happiness.

**"Frosya! Say, Frosya!" she whispered.
"Under socialism will all the rooms be like this, or not?"**

"How else then? Of course they will!" said Frosya. "Well, maybe even a bit better!"

"That wouldn't be bad!" agreed Natalia Bukova.

After the break, Frosya danced again. Now the chief dispatcher invited her. The music

played the fot trot "My Baby," the dispatcher held his partner tightly, trying to press his cheek against Frosya's hair-do, but this secret caress did not excite Frosya — she loved the one who was far away and her poor body was tense and unresponsive.

"Well, what is your name?" whispered the partner into her ear during the dance. "Your face is familiar but I forgot who your father is."

"Fro!" answered Frosya.

"Fro?... you're not Russian?"

"No, of course not!"

The dispatcher reflected.

"And why not?... Your father is Russian: Evstafiev!"

**"That doesn't matter," whispered Frosya.
"My name is Fro!"**

They danced in silence. People stood at the wall watching the dancers. Only three couples were dancing, the rest were shy or did not know how to dance. Frosya bent her head closer to the dispatcher's chest; below his eyes he saw her hair fluffed up in an old-fashioned hair-do and he found her mollified trustfulness sweet and pleasant. He was proud in front of the others. He felt like patting her head inconspicuously, tenderly, but was afraid of attracting attention. Besides, his agreed fiancée was there, who could subsequently inflict physical harm on him because of his closeness to this Fro. Therefore, for the sake of decency, the dispatcher gently backed away from the woman; but Fro moved again closer to his chest, against his tie, the tie slipped aside under the weight of her head and an opening formed in his shirt revealing his bare body. The dispatcher continued to dance,

worried and uneasy, waiting for the music to stop. But the music continued, even more exhilarating and energetic, and the woman did not retreat from the embrace of her partner. He felt tickling drops of moisture threading their way down his chest, bare now under the tie, to where his masculine hair grew.

"Are you crying?" the dispatcher was frightened.

"A little," whispered Fro. "Lead me to the door. I won't dance any more."

Her partner led Frosya to the exit without slowing down his dance step, and at once she went out to the corridor where there were few people, where she recovered.

Natasha brought the hat to her friend. Frosya went home and Natasha made her way to the cooperative storehouse, which her husband

guarded. Adjacent to that storehouse was a yard for building materials guarded by an attractive woman and Natasha wanted to check whether there was any secret love and sympathy between her husband and this watchwoman.

The next day in the morning Frosya received a telegram from a Siberian station beyond the Urals. Her husband wrote: "Dear Fro, I love you and dream of you."

Her father was not at home. He had gone out to the depot to sit and chat awhile in the recreation and reading room, to scan

through "The Whistle," to find out what had happened during the night at the railroad engine section and then drop in to the tavern to drink some beer with a passing friend and talk briefly about his profound inner interests.

Frosya did not bother to brush her teeth; she barely washed herself, splashing water on her face, not troubling more about her looks. She did not want to spend time on anything but the feeling of love, and she did not have the womanly diligence to her body in her now. From above the ceiling of Frosya's second floor room, intermittent sounds of a mouth harmonica resounded constantly; the music would cease for awhile but soon resume. Frosya had wakened up that morning while it was still dark and fell asleep again afterwards; it was then that she heard that modest melody coming from above, resembling the song of a gray working bird in the field with no breath left for song, its strength being spent in toil. There, above, lived a small boy, the son of the lathe operator from the depot. The father had probably gone to work, the mother was washing the laundry — it must be boring, very boring for him. Without touching a morsel of food Frosya went to school — she attended courses on

railroad communications and signaling.

Efrosinia Evstafieva had not been to the courses for four days, her friends probably missed her but she did not really feel like going to them. Frosya could get away with a great deal due to her aptitude for study and a deep understanding of technical subjects; but she herself did not quite know how all this came about. For the most part she emulated her husband, a man who had completed two technical institutes and who had an insight into the mechanisms of machines with the clarity of his own flesh.

At first, Frosya was a poor student. Her heart was not attracted to Poupin's coils, to the relay devices of electrical switches or to the computation of the resistance of iron wire. But these words had once been pronounced by her husband's lips; and, more than that, with the sincerity of an imagination which projected itself even in the dark indifferent

machines he described to her the animated workings of mysterious objects which had seemed lifeless to her and the secret quality of their sensitive computations upon which the life of the machines depended. Frosya's husband had the ability to respond to the tension of the electric current as a personal passion. Touched by his hands or his

thoughts, things came to life, and he, therefore, acquired a genuine understanding of the flow of force in any mechanical device and was directly affected by the resistance patiently endured by the metal body of the machine.

Henceforth, the coils, the Wheatstone's bridges, the contactors, the units of watts had become sacred to Frosya, as if they were in themselves spiritualized parts of her beloved; she began to understand and safeguard them in her mind and in her soul. On difficult

occasions, upon arriving home Frosya would say despondently: "Fyodor, there's that micro hi-beam and all those stray currents, I'm bored!" But, hugging his wife after a day of separation, Fyodor would himself change for a while into the micro hi-beam and the stray current. Frosya could almost visualize that which earlier she had only wanted and couldn't grasp. These objects were as simple, natural and fascinating as the multi-colored grass in the field. At night, Frosya often grieved that being a woman she could not experience the feeling of being a micro hi-beam, a steamship or electricity, while Fyodor could do so, and she would lightly run her fingers along his hot back; he slept and did not wake up. For some reason, he always felt hot all over and strangely enough could sleep amidst noise, ate food in the same fashion whether it was good or tasteless, was never ill, loved to spend money on trifles, planned to go to southern Soviet China and become a soldier there.

Now, Frosya Evstafieva sat at the courses, her thoughts vague and scattered, absorbing nothing of the lectures. Gloomily, she copied the vector diagram of the resonance of currents from the board into her notebook and sadly listened to the instructor, who spoke about the influence of saturation of iron on the appearance of the highest ripples. Fyodor being away, communications and signaling did not thrill her and electricity became alien. Poupin's coils, the micro hi-beam, the Wheatstone bridges and the iron cores withered in her heart and she no longer understood the peak ripples of the current; the monotonous tune of the child's mouth harmonica persisted in her memory: "Mother's washing the clothes. Father's at work, he will not come soon, it is a bore, a great bore to be alone."

Frosya lagged in her attention to the lecture and wrote down her thoughts for herself in the notebook: "I am stupid, I am a miserable

silly girl, Fedya, come back quickly, I will learn communications and signaling, otherwise I will die, then you can

bury me and leave for China."

At home, her father sat shod, dressed, and in his cap. Today they will certainly call him for a trip, so he assumed.

"Are you back?" he asked his daughter. He was happy when someone came to the apartment; he would heed all the steps on the stairway, as if in constant expectation of an unusual guest who would bring him happiness on a silver platter.

"Shall I warm up the porridge with butter for you?" asked the father. "I'll do it quickly."

The daughter refused.

"Well, I'll fry some sausage!"

"No!" said Frosya.

The father fell silent, then again he was asking but more hesitantly:

"Perhaps you want a bit of tea with crackers? I will warm it up right away..."

The daughter did not respond.

"How about yesterday's macaroni!... It is still there, I left it for you..."

"Why don't you lay off!" Frosya said. "If they would only send you to the Far East..."

"I asked, but they don't take me, they say I am old, poor eyesight," the father explained.

He knew that children are our enemies, and he did not get angry at enemies. However, he worried lest Frosya would go to her room

now, and wanting her to stay with him and talk for awhile, the old man looked for a reason to hold Frosya back.

"Why didn't you put lipstick on your lips today?" he asked. "Or did you run out of pomade? I will buy some for you, I will run out to the drugstore..."

Tears welled up in Frosya's gray eyes and she went to her room. The father remained alone; he began to tidy the kitchen and occupy himself with housework; then, squatting, he opened the oven door, hid his head inside and started crying over the frying pan with the macaroni.

There was a knock at the door. Frosya did not go to open it. The old man withdrew his head from the stove, all the rags were dirty — he dried his face and went to open the door.

It was a messenger from the depot.

"Sign your name, Nefed Stepanovich: today you are to re-

port at eight o'clock — you will accompany a cold steam engine to capital repairs. They will hitch it up to the three-hundred-and-tenth echelon; take food and clothing, you won't be back in less than a week."

Nefed Stepanovich signed the book, the messenger left. The old man opened his little iron box: yesterday's bread, an onion and a lump of sugar were still there. The engineer added an eighth of a pound of millet, two apples, thought a bit and closed the traveling chest with a huge padlock.

Then he cautiously knocked on the door to Frosya's room.

"Daughter!... Close the door after me, I'm off on a trip — for about two weeks. They gave

me a 'T' series steam engine: it is cold, but that's nothing."

Frosya didn't come out until after her father had left, and she closed the door of the apartment.

"Go on, play! Why aren't you playing?" Frosya whispered in an upward direction, where the boy with the mouth harmonica lived. But he had gone, probably for a walk — it was summer, the days were long, the wind had settled down for the evening amid sleepy, blissful pines. The musician was still young, he had not yet chosen something singular for eternal love from the whole world, his heart beat empty and free, grabbing nothing from the treasures of life for himself alone.

Frosya opened the window, lay down on the big bed and dozed off. One could hear the faint squeaking of the pines from the upper flow of air and the chirping of a distant

cricket, without waiting for the night to fall.

Frosya awoke: it was still light out in the world, she must get up and live. She was lost in contemplation of the sky, exuding tender warmth, covered with the living vestiges of a vanishing sun, as if happiness, created by nature from all of her sheer strength, was placed up high to penetrate man from the outside.

Between the two pillows Frosya found a short hair; it could have been only Fyodor's. She studied the hair in the light, it was gray: Fyodor was already in his twenty-ninth year, and he already had gray hair, about twenty of them. Her father's hair was also gray, but he had never come close to their bed. Frosya sniffed at the pillow on which Fyodor had slept, — it still smelled of his body, his head; the pillowcase had not been washed since her husband had last raised his head from it. Frosya buried her head in Fyodor's pillow

and grew still.

Upstairs on the third floor the boy returned and began to play on the mouth harmonica — the same tune which he had played at the crack of dawn. Frosya got up and hid her husband's hair in an empty box on her table. The boy stopped playing: it was time for him to sleep, he gets up early — or else he was busy with his father who was home from work, and was sitting on his lap. His mother cracks sugar with pliers and says that they have to buy more linen: the old is tattered and falls apart when you wash it. The father is silent, he thinks: we'll manage as is.

All evening Frosya walked the tracks of the station, over the neighboring groves and fields overgrown with rye. She visited the slag pit, where she had worked yesterday — again the slag was almost overflowing, but no one was working. Natasha Bukova lived who knows

where — Frosya had not asked her yesterday; and she did not feel like visiting friends and acquaintances, she was ashamed of something with other people, — she could not talk to others about her love, and the rest of life had become uninteresting and dead to her. She passed the cooperative storehouse, where Natasha's solitary husband walked with the Berdan rifle. Frosya wanted to give him a few rubles, so that he could drink fruit water with his wife tomorrow, but she felt shy.

"Pass on, citizen! You can't be here: this is a storehouse — government property," the guard said to Frosya, when she stopped and groped for the money somewhere in the slits of her jacket.

Beyond the storehouses lay desolate, vacant land; it was overgrown with some kind of short, tough, malicious grass. Frosya came to that place and stood awhile in languor amid the small world of sparse grass from where

the stars seemed to be only about two kilometers away.

"Oh, Fro, Fro, if only someone would put his arms around you!" she said to herself.

Returning home Frosya immediately lay down to sleep, because the boy who played the mouth harmonica was asleep long ago and the crickets had also stopped chirping. But something prevented her from falling asleep. Frosya glanced around in the semi-darkness and sniffed: the pillow on which Fyodor had once slept next to her bothered her. A smouldering earthy smell of a warm, familiar body still rose from the pillow, and from this smell a depression grew in Frosya's heart. She wrapped Fyodor's pillow in a sheet and hid it in the cupboard and then fell asleep alone, like an orphan.

Frosya no longer went to the communication

and signalling courses - science had become incomprehensible to her now. She lived at home and waited for a letter or telegram from Fyodor, fearing that the mailman would take the letter back if he did not find anyone at home. However, four days had already passed, then six, but Fyodor sent no news, except for the first telegram.

Father returned from the trip having driven the cold steam engine; he was happy that he had traveled about a bit and had worked for some time, happy to have seen many people, distant stations and various incidents; for a long time now there would be something to remember, to think about, and to talk about. But Frosya didn't ask him about anything; then her father began to tell her how the cold steam engine had gone and how it was necessary to stay awake at night so that the metal workers at the passing stations would not disassemble parts of the engine; he would tell her where cheap berries are sold and

where the frost had killed them in the spring. Frosya didn't answer and even when Nefed Stepanovich told her about the voile and about the artificial silk in Sverdlovsk, the daughter was not interested in his words. "Is she a fascist, or what?" her father thought about her. "How did my wife conceive her? I don't remember!"

Not receiving either a letter or a telegram from Fyodor, Frosya went to work in the postal department as a letter carrier. She thought that the letters were probably getting lost and therefore she wanted to carry them personally to all the addressees. And she wanted to get Fyodor's letters quicker than an outsider, a strange letter carrier, would bring them to her, and in her own hands they would not get lost. She arrived at the postal service earlier than the other letter carriers — even before the little boy started playing his mouth harmonica on the upper floor — and she voluntarily took part in sorting out and

distributing the correspondence. She read through the addresses on all the envelopes which arrived in the settlement, — Fyodor was not writing anything to her. All the envelopes were addressed to other people and inside the envelopes there were some kind of uninteresting letters. Nevertheless Frosya carefully delivered the letters to the homes twice a day, hoping that they harbored comfort for the local inhabitants. At dawn she walked quickly along the street of the settlement with a heavy bag on her stomach, looking pregnant, knocked on doors and handed the letters and the printed matter to people in their underpants, to half-naked women and

small children who woke up before the adults. The sky above the neighboring land was still a deep blue, yet Frosya was already at work, hastening to wear out her legs, so that her uneasy heart might tire. Many addressees

were curious about her personal life and would ask mundane questions as they got their mail: "Do you work for ninety-two rubles a month?" — "Yes," Frosya would say, "that's with deductions." "And do you have to walk when you have your periods or do they give you a break?" — "I get a break," informed Frosya, "they give you a government issue sanitary belt, but I haven't received one yet." "They will give it to you," promised the letter-receiver, "after all, it is the rule." A subscriber to the magazine *Red Virgin Soil* proposed marriage to Frosya - by way of an experiment: just to see how it would work out, perhaps there would be happiness, and that is useful. "How do you feel about it?" asked the subscriber. "I'll think it over," answered Frosya. "Don't think!" advised the magazine receiver, "come and visit me; get the feel of me first: I am an affectionate man, literate, cultured — you can tell by what I read! It is a magazine, published and edited by an editorial board;

these, you see, are smart people — and there's not just one, but many of them, and there will be two of us as well! All of this is respectable and you, as a married woman, will enjoy greater prestige!... Why, an unmarried girl, what sort of thing is that, a lone person, an antisocial behavior of sorts!"

Holding a letter or package in front of strange doors Frosya got to know many people. Some even tried to offer wine and snacks and they unburdened their problems to her about their personal life. Nowhere was life empty and calm.

On leaving, Fyodor promised Frosya to let her know the address of his work right away; he did not know exactly where he would be. But fourteen days had passed since his departure and there was no mail from him, and she had no address to write to. Frosya endured this separation, delivering the mail even more expediently, breathing even more

rapidly, so as to occupy her heart with outside work and wear out its despair. But once, she inadvertently started to scream in the middle of the street — during the second postal delivery. Unaware of the sudden pressure in her chest and the rolling back of her heart, Frosya let out a long high-pitched cry. Passersby saw her. Coming to her senses, Frosya ran off into a field with the mail pouch because she could hardly

endure her vanishing, empty breath; there she fell on the ground screaming, until her heartache stopped.

Frosya sat up, straightened her dress and smiled; she was well again and there was no need to scream any more. After finishing her round Frosya dropped in at the telegraph office where a telegram from Fyodor was waiting with his address and a kiss. At home, without eating, she immediately began

writing a letter to her husband. She did not notice the end of the day outside her window, she did not hear the boy who played his mouth harmonica before going to sleep. Her father, after knocking on the door, brought her a glass of tea and a buttered roll and turned on the light so that Frosya would not ruin her eyes in the dusk.

At night, Nefed Stepanovich dozed off on the trunk in the kitchen. For six days now there was no call from the depot: he reckoned that tonight there would be a journey for him and he waited for the footsteps of the messenger on the stairs.

At one o'clock in the morning Frosya came into the kitchen carrying a folded sheet of paper.

"Papa!"

"What, daughter?" The old man slept lightly.

"Take this telegram to the post office, I am tired."

"What if I leave and the messenger suddenly comes?" said the father, anxiously.

"He'll wait," said Frosya. "You will be gone only for a little while... But don't you read the telegram, give it right through the window."

"I won't," promised the old man. "Weren't you writing a letter, — let me take it while I'm there."

"It's none of your concern what I was writing... Do you have money?"

Her father had money; he took the telegram and set off. In the telegraph office the old man read the telegram: who knows, he decided, perhaps my daughter is writing some nonsense, one must take a look.

The telegram was directed to Fyodor in the Far East: "Take the first train your wife daughter Frosya dying deathbed complications respiratory tract father Nefed Evstafiev."

"Young blood!" thought Nefed Stepanovich and handed the telegram through the receiving window.

"Why, I saw Frosya today!" said the telegraph clerk. "Has she really taken ill?"

"Well, obviously," explained the engineer.

In the morning Frosya sent her father to the post office again to take her request to be released from her work for reasons of health. The old man went again, he wanted to go to the depot anyway.

Frosya began mending the linen, darning

socks, washing floors and cleaning the apartment and didn't leave the house.

**Two days later a wireless answer came:
"Leaving worried suffering hold burial until
arrival Fyodor."**

Frosya had figured out the time of her husband's arrival precisely and on the seventh day after receiving his telegram she was pacing the station platform, trembling and gay. From the east the Trans-Siberian express arrived on time. Frosya's father was on the platform also but kept away from his daughter, in order not to disturb her mood.

The express train engineer maneuvered the train into the station with magnificent speed and smoothly, gently put the echelon on brakes. Observing this, Nefed Stepanovich shed a few tears, forgetting even why he had come here.

Only one passenger got off the train at the station. He wore a hat and a long blue raincoat; his deep-set eyes were burning with attention. A woman dashed up to him.

"Fro!" said the passenger and threw the suitcase onto the platform.

The father then took this suitcase and followed his daughter and son-in-law.

Half-way home the daughter turned around to her father.

"Papa, go into the depot and ask them to assign you to a trip, — it must be boring for you to sit at home all the time..."

"It is," agreed the old man, "I'll go now. Take the suitcase from me."

The son-in-law looked at the old engineer.

"Hello, Nefed Stepanovich."

"Hello, Fyodor. Welcome home!"

"Thank you, Nefed Stepanovich..."

The young man wanted to say something else but the old man handed the suitcase to Frosya and went off towards the depot.

"Dearest, I tidied up the apartment," Frosya was saying. "I wasn't really dying."

"I guessed as much on the train, that you weren't dying,"

answered her husband. "I didn't really believe your telegram for long."

"Why did you come then?" Frosya was surprised.

"I love you, I missed you," said Fyodor sadly.

Frosya grew distressed.

"I am afraid that one day you will no longer love me and then I will really die..."

Fyodor kissed her from the side on the cheek.

"If you die you will forget everyone, including me," he said.

Frosya recovered from her grief.

"No, to die is a bore. It is passive."

"Of course it is passive," smiled Fyodor; he loved her lofty, learned words. In the past, Fro had even asked him especially to teach her high-flown phrases and he wrote her a notebook full of glib and meaningless expressions: "He who says 'a' must say 'b,' " "To lay a cornerstone," "If it were true it would indeed be true," and so forth. But Frosya saw through the trick. She asked him: "And why after saying 'a' must one say 'b? And what if one mustn't and I don't feel like

it?"

At home, they immediately lay down to rest and fell asleep. In about three hours the father knocked on the door. Frosya opened the door to him, waiting for the old man to fill his iron box with food and leave again. He was probably going on a trip. Frosya closed the door and went back to bed.

When they woke up it was already night. They talked for awhile, then Fyodor embraced Fro and they lapsed into silence until morning.

The next day, Frosya quickly prepared the meal, fed her husband and ate herself. Now, she went about her work carelessly, negligently, but to both of them food and drink were of no importance, they must not waste the time of their love on material, superficial wants.

Frosya told Fyodor that henceforth she would study well and diligently, learning much, working hard, so that the people in her country would have a better life.

Fyodor listened to Fro, then he expounded his thoughts and plans to her at length — about the wireless transmission of power, by means of ionized air, the increase in the strength of all metals through ultra-sound wave processing, the stratosphere at an altitude of one hundred kilometers, where lighting, heating

and electricity are different, capable of insuring eternal life to man, — thus the dream of the ancient world about heaven has now become reality — and Fyodor promised also to consider and do many other things for the sake of Frosya and for the sake of all the rest of the people as well.

Frosya listened to her husband blissfully, her weary mouth slightly open. Having talked enough, they embraced — they wanted to be happy instantly, immediately, not waiting for that personal and universal happiness which would eventually come as a result of their future diligent effort. No heart can endure delay; it hurts, as if it believed nothing. Sleeping off their weariness from thinking, talking, pleasure, they woke up refreshed, ready for the repetition of life. Frosya wanted to give birth to children, to rear them, they would grow up and finish their father's work, the work of Communism and science. In the passion of imagination Fyodor whispered to Frosya words about the mysterious powers of nature which will give wealth to humanity and about the complete transformation of the petty soul of man. Then they kissed and caressed each other, their noble dream turning into sheer bliss, as if it had come to fruition.

In the evening Frosya would leave the house briefly to buy food for herself and her husband; their appetite was growing all the time now. They had already lived four days and nights without parting from each other. Her father had not yet returned from the journey: probably, he was again conducting a cold steam engine far away.

After two more days Frosya told Fyodor that they would stay together this way a little longer, and then they would have to start working and living.

"Tomorrow or the day after we'll begin to live seriously," Fyodor said hugging Fro.

"The day after tomorrow!" agreed Frosya in a whisper.

On the eighth day Fyodor woke up in a depressed state.

"Fro! Let's get to work, let's go and live, as one should... You must resume your communications courses."

"Tomorrow!" whispered Fro and she took her husband's head in her hands.

He smiled at her and yielded.

"When, Fro?" Fyodor asked his wife the next day.

"Soon, soon," answered the dozing, gentle Fro; her hands held his hand, he kissed her on the forehead.

Once Frosya woke up late, the day had come into existence long ago outside. She was alone in the room; it was about the tenth or twelfth day of her inseparable meeting with her husband. Frosya immediately got out of bed, flung the window wide open and heard the

mouth harmonica, which she had completely forgotten. The sounds of the harmonica did not come from upstairs. Frosya looked out the window. Near the shed, on a log, sat a barefooted boy with a big, childish head playing the mouth harmonica.

It was quiet and strange throughout the apartment; Fyodor had gone somewhere. Frosya went to the kitchen. There was her father on a stool, dozing with his cap on, his head resting on the kitchen table. Frosya woke him up.

"When did you arrive?"

"Oh?" exclaimed the old man. "Today, early in the morning.

"And who opened the door for you? Fyodor?"

"No one," said the father. "It was open..."

Fyodor found me at the station, I was asleep there on a bench."

"And why were you asleep at the station, what's the matter with you, don't you have a home?" Frosya was angry.

"Why not, I got used to it there," her father said. "I thought I would be in your way..."

"All right, never mind, you hypocrite! And where is Fyodor, when will he be back?"

The father hesitated.

"He won't be back," said the old man. "He left..."

Fro was silent. The father scrutinized an old piece of rag and continued:

"In the morning the courier train came, he boarded it and went to the Far East. Perhaps, he said, I'll make my way to China — I don't

know."

"And what else did he say?" asked Frosya.

"Nothing," answered her father. "He told me to go home and take care of you. He said when his work is done he will either return, or else send for you to join him."

"What work?" inquired Frosya.

"I don't know," uttered the old man. "He said that you know all about it: Communism, maybe, or something else still — whatever comes of it!"

Fro left her father. She went to her room, leaned against

the windowsill with her stomach and stared at the boy playing his mouth harmonica.

"Little boy!" she called. "Come visit me."

"Yes, coming," answered the harmonica player.

He got up from the log, wiped his harmonica with the hem of his shirt and walked towards the house for a visit.

In a nightgown Fro stood alone in the middle of the large room. She smiled waiting for her guest.

"Goodbye, Fyodor!"

She may be foolish, her life may not be worth two kopecks and there is no need to love her and take care of her, but then she is the only one who knows how to make two rubles out of two kopecks.

"Goodby, Fyodor! You'll return to me and I'll be waiting for you!"

The little guest knocked shyly on the outside

door. Frosya let him in, sat down on the floor in front of him and took the hands of the child in her own two hands admiring the musician: this human being was probably that very humanity about which Fyodor spoke his gentle words to her.

(1936)
Alexey A. Kiselev

Translated by

THE CITY OF GRADOV

**My composition is boring and patient
like the life from which it is composed.**

Iv. Sharonov, late 19th century writer

1.

From the Tartar princes and murz,¹ called Mordovian princes in the chronicles, came the Gradovite high nobility — all these princes Engalychev, Tennishev and Kugushev, who to this day are remembered by the Gradovite peasants.

Gradov lies five hundred versts from Moscow, but the revolution came here on foot. The ancient patrimonial province of Gradov did not submit to the revolution for a long time: the Soviet authority was established in the regional town only in March of 1918 and in

the outlying districts towards the end of fall.

This is quite understandable; in few places of the Russian empire were there as many Black Hundreds² as in Gradov. The town had three holy relics: St. Evfimy — the decrepit cave dweller, Petr — the misogynist, and Prokhor — the Byzantine; in addition, there were four mineral health springs and two recumbent old prophetesses who, though alive, lay in comfortable coffins and lived on nothing but sour cream. In the years of famine, these old women jumped out of their coffins and became black marketeers, and the fact that they were holy women was forgotten by all, such was the turmoil of life in those days.

A traveling scholar told the authorities that Gradov is situated on a river plateau, and a circular about this was published for general information.

Gradov was irrigated by the small river

Zhmaevka, so the first-graders learned in school. But in the summers it was dry in the streets, and the children did not see that the Zhmaevka irrigates Gradov and didn't understand their lesson.

The city was surrounded by settlements of free peasants. The indigenous Gradovites called these settlers the 'insolent ones,' since they abandoned arable land and strove to become service men and functionaries; during the period between the tsars — when the settlers couldn't find any jobs — they worked as shoe-shiners, tar-sprayers, they resold grain and had insignificant jobs. But the crux of the matter lay in the following: the settlers took

the lucrative jobs in the establishment from the Gradovites so that the latter became insulted and estranged from the rural obnoxious practical jokers. Hence, three times

a year — on Whitsunday, St. Nicholas' Day, Twelfth Day (Epiphany) —fist-fights were held between the townspeople and settlers. The settlers, fed on rich food, always beat the townspeople who had wasted away on conventional grub.

If you approach Gradov not by railroad, but by dirt roads, your entry into town is imperceptible: you'll see fields all around, then huts made of clay, hay and thatching, then churches and already you're in the central square. In the center of the square stands the local church and across from it a two-story house.

"But where's the town?" the traveler will ask.

"It's right here, that's where!" the driver will answer and point to that two-story house of ancient architecture. From the house hangs the sign: "The Gradov Provincial Executive Committee."

Around the market place stand a few more houses of eternally bureaucratic appearance; there are also the necessary provincial institutions.

In Gradov there are living quarters and relatively decent huts. These are roofed with iron, in the courtyards are the outhouses, and on the street side the front gardens. Some of the houses also have small gardens where cherry and apple trees grow. The cherries are used to make brandy, the apples for retting.

The occupants of these houses are government workers and grain buyers.

During the summer evenings the town is filled with the undulating sound of church bells and the smoke from the chimneys of samovars.

The people in the town lived a slow-paced life and did not worry about a supposed better life. They served diligently in their posts,

maintaining order in the province, but never becoming frenzied in their endeavors. They traded a bit, without taking risks, and steadily earned their daily bread.

The town had no heroes; it accepted resolutions dealing with affairs of the world meekly and unanimously. But perhaps Gradov did have its heroes, only they were directed by precise lawfulness and proper legislative enactments.

Hence, no matter how much money was given to this province — a ramshackle place, troubled by bandits and overgrown

with burdocks, nothing significant was ever accomplished with the money.

In Moscow the provincial leaders told the government that, although it's hard to say exactly on what the five million rubles allotted

to agriculture had been wasted, there must have been some good gained from these millions since, after all, the money had been spent in the Gradov province and not in some foreign place; somehow it'll show up.

"Maybe in ten years," said the head of the Gradov Provincial Executive Committee, "the rye will begin to grow from the shaft and the potatoes in round forms. And then we'll see, where the five million rubles got to!"

What actually happened was that a famine had hit the Gradov province. And the five million rubles were spent on feeding peasants and on special hydraulic works.

The presidium of the Gradov Provincial Executive Committee met for eight sessions: what's to be done with the money? The discussion of this serious question lasted four months.

The distinction between starving peasants and the well-nourished ones was made on the basis of the class principle: help would be given only to those peasants who possessed neither cow nor horse and who had no more than two oxen and twenty chickens, excluding the rooster; the remaining peasants, who owned a cow or horse, would be given rationed bread, when the body displayed scientific evidence of hunger.

The scientific definition of hunger was entrusted to the veterinarians and rural pedagogical personnel. Furthermore, the Gradov Provincial Executive Committee worked out a detailed plan: "A Register Inventory of Peasant Economy for Reconstruction, Strengthening and Growth, which could, to a Certain Degree, be Influenced by a Partial Crop Failure in Several Regions of our Province."

In addition to natural means of feeding, it was

decided to begin hydraulic works. A special commission for the selection of technicians was created. However, it didn't select a single technician, since it turned out that in order to construct a rural well the technician would have to know all of Karl Marx.

The commission decided that technical personnel was nonexistent in the republic and, according to some good advice, resolved to assign this kind of work to the former soldier-prisoners of war as well as to the local self-taught men who would even

clean and repair watches in addition to building embankments and digging water holes. One member of this selection read aloud the book which told of how the serf Mikishka had built an airplane and had flown it in front of Ivan the Terrible, and thus finally convinced the commission of the secret powers of the proletariat and working

peasantry. Consequently, the commission decided that the measures launching the province on its fight against crop failures will help "to reveal, utilize, take into account, and, in the future, make use of the intrinsic intellectual powers of the proletariat and poorest of peasants and therefore the hydraulic works of our province will have an indirect cultural impact."

Six hundred dikes and four hundred wells were constructed. There were no technicians whatsoever, well — maybe there were two. The dikes, not completed by the fall, were washed away by summer's light rains, and the wells almost all stood dry.

In addition, a certain agricultural commune, called 'Import,' began to build a railroad ten versts long. This railroad was supposed to link 'Import' with another commune — 'Faith, Hope and Love.' The railroad, however, was never completed; the commune

'Faith, Hope and Love' was liquidated by the province on account of its name, and a member of the board of directors of 'Import,' sent to Moscow to buy a two hundred ruble locomotive, somehow never returned.

Moreover, the foreman of the commune arbitrarily had eight gliders built from the money, supposedly to aid the postal system and for the transportation of hay; he also built a perpetual motion machine that ran on moist sand.

2.

Ivan Fedotovitch Shmakov came to Gradov with a clear-cut assignment: to infiltrate the provincial affairs and rejuvenate them with his common sense. Shmakov was thirty-five years old, he had distinguished himself by his abilities in law and administration, for which he received the approval of high government organizations and was sent to a responsible

post.

Shmakov was thinking about what he knew of Gradov. He knew one thing, namely that it was an impoverished town and that the people there lived such a haphazard, unorganized life that even the black earth would not yield grass.

Two hours before arriving in Gradov, Shmakov stopped at a small station. Looking around in a frightened manner, he hurriedly gulped down a glass of water, knowing well that the Soviet authorities didn't approve of vodka. An unusual feeling of boredom and uneasiness overcame him, as he walked through the somber, inhospitable rooms of the station. In the third-class waiting room sat those without jobs, eating cheap, soggy sausage. Children were crying, intensifying the feeling of anxiety and helpless pity. The low-powered trains whistled despondently, as

though preparing to cope with the boring autumnal land, filled with sparse and wretched life.

The travelers lived as though they were journeying on some strange planet and not in their homeland; each man ate in seclusion, not sharing his food with his neighbor; nevertheless, the people crowded close to one another, seeking protection during their fearful journey.

Shmakov got back on the train and lit a cigarette. The train moved on. An old woman, carrying apples, hurriedly jumped off the train, having gotten mixed up in changing a grivennik for a passenger.

Shmakov, irritated at the lengthy journey, spat and sat down. Outside the window the shacks of some small town moved by and a lone windmill waved its dilapidated wings, heavily churning the coarse grain.

An old man was telling his neighbors witty anecdotes; the people laughed and goaded him on.

"And what did the Mordvinian reply?"

"The Mordvinian waits! One year goes by, then two pass by. The Russian gets richer and the Mordvinian simply waits for when the Russian will invite him over. For four years he's in anguish, then he goes to the Russian's house. He enters the hut and..."

"The Russian's?"

"The Russian's; that's obvious from the story. The Russian grabs the Mordvinian's hat right off his head, hangs it first on one nail, then on another, then on a third. 'What are you up to?' asks the Mordvinian. 'I can't seem to find a suitable place for you,' says the Russian. 'Are you honoring me, eh?' — 'Of course, I'm showing my respect for you.' The Mordvinian

sits down at the empty table, looks around to see what he can grab in the way of food. He sees the Russian dragging forth a pitcher. 'Drink!' he

says. The Mordvinian snatches the pitcher, thinking: here's some moisture at last — but it's only water. He has a drink. 'That'll do.' he says. 'Drink!' says the Russian, 'don't insult me, please!' The Mordvinian, being of course a respectful man, drinks. Barely has he drunk up the pitcher when the host brings him a bucket and fills up the pitcher and treats his guest. 'Don't insult me,' he says, 'help yourself, for Christ's sake!' The Mordvinian drinks three buckets of water and goes home. 'Did the Russian treat you well?' asks the wife. 'Quite well,' says the Mordvinian, 'it's a good thing it was only water he offered me, for I would have died from so much vodka; I drank three buckets full!...' "

Shmakov dozed off due to the smooth movement of the train and lost track of the old man's story. In his sleep he had a nightmarish vision — the rails weren't lying on the earth, but on a diagram, and signifying a dotted line, that is, indirect submission; Shmakov mumbled something and woke up. The old man had disappeared with his sack of produce; in his place sat a komsomol member who was preaching:

"Religion should be punished by law!"

"Why by the law?" maliciously asked a stranger who had previously been stating the millet prices in Saratov and Ranen-burg.

"I'll tell you why!" said the young man, smiling indifferently and knowingly, obviously pitying his companions. "I'll tell you everything in order! Because religion symbolizes the misuse of nature! Do you follow? It's really very simple: the sun begins

to heat the manure; first it stinks, then grass grows out of the pile. All of life has proceeded in such a manner; it's very simple..."

"I beg your pardon, comrade Communist," shyly said the stranger who knew the price of millet, "what if, let's suppose, you place manure on the stove shelf, stoke up the fire so as to make it warm and fight... then, according to you, grass will grow out of the manure? Or not?"

"Sure it will!" answered the knowledgeable boy. "It makes no difference whether you use the stove or the sun..."

"And will this happen also on the stove bench?" the stranger asked cunningly.

"Obviously, yes!" affirmed the young Communist.

A man on the way to the Kozlov

slaughterhouse asked wheezingly: "Please tell us, citizen Communist, is it true that they want to partition off the Dnepr and flood Poland?"

The young Communist expert flared up at this question and immediately told everything known and unknown about the Dnepr Construction Site.

"It's a serious matter!" was the Kozlov man's personal conclusion. "Only don't let them hold back the Dnepr water!"

At this point Shmakov spoke up: "Why do you say that?"

The Kozlov man glowered at Shmakov as if to say: what kind of worm has dug itself into our conversation?

"Because," he replied, "water is a serious

phenomenon; it erodes rocks and smooths iron, but Soviet material, that's a soft thing!"

"The bastard is right!" thought Shmakov.

"The buttons on my new trousers have already come off, and I bought them in Moscow!"

Shmakov didn't listen any further; he was overcome with mournful thoughts about the malignant character of life. The train thundered around a sharp curve and the powerless brakes gnashed their teeth.

It was a sad, silent September in the cool, desolately empty fields where there was no sign of activity. One of the compartment windows was open and people walking along the tracks screamed at the train:

"You bastards!"

Shepherdesses they passed by would ask:

"Throw us your newspapers!" They needed the paper to roll cigarettes.

The young Communist who had grown benevolent due to his display of knowledge, tossed them his newspapers and the shepherdesses caught them before they hit the ground. But Shmakov didn't give them his — you can never tell what might come in handy in a strange town.

"Gradov! Who's going to Gradov? First stop!" yelled the conductor and began to sweep up the litter. "You messed up the place as if you were out in the fields, you idiots! One should make you pay for it, excepting you've got no money. Hey, grandma, move your legs!"

Shmakov got off in Gradov and was overcome by a feeling of terror.

"Here it is, my settlement," he thought, and

looked around the quiet station, at the unpretentious people who rushed to get on the train.

Even though this junction was connected by railroad with

the entire world, with the Afiny and Apeninsk Peninsulas, even with the shore of the Pacific Ocean, no one ever came here; there was no reason to. And if someone were to travel here, he'd get lost on the way; the people here led a dull, confused, disoriented life.

3.

Shmakov found lodgings in house no. 46 on Korkina Street. The house was of average size and was inhabited by an old woman, the sentinel of her own immobile property. From her husband's pension she received 11 rubles, 25 kopeks a month and in addition she rented

out a room (with heat) for 8 rubles.

Ivan Fedotych sat down at the empty table, looked out at the courtyard where the grass was dying and became despondent. After sitting for a while, he lay down, rested a bit, then got up to buy some food.

He returned to the emptiness of his dwelling before the sun had set. The old woman was sighing in the kitchen about the changes of power and was breaking up kindling for the samovar.

Shmakov ate some sausage and then sat down to work on the form of his signature for future documents. "Shmakov," he wrote. "No, that's not strong enough," he thought and again wrote "Shmakov," but this time more artlessly and as though by chance copying Lenin's handwriting, because of the simplicity of its outline.

Then Ivan Fedotych spent a long time thinking about whether he should place the letters Iv. — Ivan in front of his last name. In the end he decided to put them there: after all, someone might mistake him for another person having the same last name, although the name Shmakov was quite rare.

At eight o'clock the old woman stopped sighing and quietly began to snore; she must have fallen asleep. Then she woke up and mumbled endless Slavonic prayers.

Ivan Fedotych pulled shut the small curtains, sniffed at the sick plant on the window sill and drew a leather notebook out of his suitcase. On the leather was inscribed the title of the notebook:

"Notes of a Government Worker."

He opened the notebook on the 49th page and read it over

so as to catch the train of thought, and continued:

"I conduct my work in secret. But at some point it will become a judicial text of world significance; I say that the bureaucrat, and any government functionary for that matter, is the most valuable agent of socialist history, is a living tie under the railroad track to socialism.

"Service to the socialist fatherland is the new religion of the man whose heart is stirred by feelings of revolutionary obligation.

"Verily, in 1917, the harmonic logic of order was first victorious in Russia!

"The present-day struggle with bureaucracy is based in part on a non-comprehension of things.

"The bureau is a small office. And the office desk is the indispensable essence of any government apparatus.

"Bureaucracy has done a great service to the revolution; it has glued together the splintering segments of the people, it has permeated them with a desire for order and trained them for a monotonous understanding of typical problems.

"The bureaucrat should be squeezed out of the Soviet government, like acidity out of a lemon. But if you did that only the mouldy shit inside the lemon would remain, and that certainly wouldn't add any special flavor to the fruit!"

"You skunks!" someone screamed under the window. "I'm going to disembowel every bastard, every Baptist heretic..."

And suddenly the voice became gentler and

even sounded charitable: "Friend, tell me, for your mother's sake, in Church Slavonic!... Aha, never!... You... you nitwit!"

The footsteps moved away and a rattling sound was heard in the distance, warning of theft.

At first Shmakov pricked up his ears, but then fell back into a state of depression because of the seeming multiplicity of caddishness.

After overcoming his moral anxiety, he continued:

"What do they offer us in place of bureaucracy? They give us faith instead of documental order, that is, they give us rapacious-ness, rubbish and poetry.

"No! what we need is for man to become enlightened and moral, otherwise he has

nowhere to go. Everywhere there should be documents and general order.

"A memorandum is only a symbol of life, yet it is also the

shadow of the truth, and not a caddish invention on the part of the government worker.

"A memorandum, properly planned and formulated as to the essentials, is the product of superior civilization. It takes into consideration the depraved nature of men and helps to modify their actions in the best interest of society.

"Furthermore, a memorandum teaches people social morality, since nothing can be kept hidden from officialdom."

It often happened that Ivan Fedotych's

thoughts were sidetracked in a direction injurious to his purpose. So now, disregarding time, he got to thinking about the relative administrative power of a chief of the District Executive Committee and district police officer. Then he thought about the water of the earth and decided that it would be better to lower all the oceans and rivers to the bowels of the earth, so as to produce dry land. Then there wouldn't be any concern about rain and people could be settled further away from one another. The water needed would be sucked up from the depths of a pump, clouds would disappear, and the sun would shine forever in the sky, like a visible administrative center.

"The worst enemy of order and harmony," thought Shmakov, "is nature. There's always something happening...

"And what if one were to establish a judicial power to deal with nature and punish her for

excessiveness? For example, one could flog vegetation for crop failures. Of course, it wouldn't be easy to give her a whipping, but one could do it somehow cunningly — chemically, so to speak!

"They won't agree to it," sighed Shmakov, "lawbreakers are sitting all around!"

"Before my weary eyes I see as ideal that society where the official bureaucratic memorandum penetrates and controls people to such a degree that, even though they are sinful by nature, they become moral. Since the memorandum and attitude proclaimed in it would follow people's actions relentlessly and would threaten them with lawful punishment, morality would become a matter of habit.

"Bureaucracy appears as the primary force, transforming the world of sinful existence into a world of law and nobility.

"This thought should be given serious consideration. I am completing today's installment of my notes, so as to think in earnest about the nature of bureaucracy."

Here Ivan Fedotych got up and really started to think. He thought at length about bureaucracy, until he was interrupted by a dog howling on the street; then he fell asleep, forgetting to extinguish the lamp.

The next day Shmakov appeared at work in the Provincial Land Headquarters, where he had been assigned command of a sub-department. After making his appearance, he sat down silently and began to leaf through judicial documents. The other workers looked shyly at the new, taciturn man in command, sighed, and unhurriedly continued their scribbling. Ivan Fedotych gradually became completely absorbed in his work, but immediately discovered detrimental features

in the composition and clerical logic.

That evening, Shmakov lay on his bed, thinking about his new job. The range of each worker's obligations was insufficiently outlined, the workers bustled about without accomplishing anything, and the papers revealed a constipation of meaning and slippery, planless logic. In the overcrowded sub-department, the workers were losing sight of the very goal of their labors and the historical significance of their work.

After finishing the leftover sausage, Shmakov sat down to compose a report to the head of the Agricultural Department.

"On the coordination of workers within the sub-department assigned me, with a view to the rationalization of the agricultural enterprises of the province commanded by me..."

Ivan Fedotych finished his treatise late at night — after midnight.

In the morning the housekeeper took pity on the lonely man and gave Ivan Fedotych tea free of charge. During the night she heard the dry food growling and grumbling in the sleeping man's stomach.

Ivan Fedotych accepted the tea without any sign of approval and listened disinterestedly to the woman's tales of the desolate district.

It seemed that in the neighboring villages — not to speak of the ones further away, those on the woodland side — until this day in springtime, at the new moon and the first thunderstorm, people bathed in the rivers and lakes, washed themselves in the silvery moonlight, poured wax, fumigated their cattle against disease, and the wind whistled.

"What servility!" thought Shmakov, listening

to the old

woman. "Only the living strength of the government — the military, service people — is capable of regulating this obscurantism."

On his way to work, Ivan Fedotych felt a lightness in his stomach from the woman's hot tea and was contented at the realization of his firm belief in the wholesomeness of the governmental beginning.

At work, he was given the case concerning the allotment of land among the offspring of a certain Alena, the ringleader of insurgent detachments in the Potsensk Region in the 18th century, who had been burned for witchcraft in the demise of the town of Kadom.

Shmakov read in the report: "Our fathers, thievish Cossacks, roamed around the

districts, attacking landowners supported by peasants, but they neither attacked nor stole from rogues, peasants, boyars' servants or other proletarians."

This case concerning the allotment of land among Alena's descendants had already been dragging on for five years. Now a new memorandum came, with instructions from the bureau chief:

"Comrade Shmakov. Please decide this matter once and for all. Red tape about the seven dessiatinas (1d. = 2.7 acres) has held up the case for 5 years. Inform me of your decision immediately."

Shmakov pondered the case and concluded that it could be resolved in three ways; he composed a special report of these alternate resolutions and sent it to the department, not deciding the question, but placing it at the discretion of superior authorities. At the end

of the note he added his personal dictum, namely that red tape is the intelligent, collective working out of social truth and not a vice. Having taken care of Alena, Shmakov delved into the case concerning the settlement Gora-Gorushka, situated in a sandy area but unwilling to move to better land. It seemed that the settlement lived by plundering the railroad which passed by two versts away. The settlement had been given both money and agronomists, but it continued to just sit there on the sand and supported itself, no one knew how.

Shmakov wrote the following resolution of this problem:

"Gora-Gorushka should be considered a free settlement, like the German town of Hamburg, and its inhabitants be declared vandals; their land should be taken away and given over to more fruitful use."

Next there appeared a declaration from the inhabitants of the farmstead Devy-Dubravy about the necessity of obtaining an

airplane to hunt for clouds during the dry summers. Their statement was accompanied by an excerpt from the "Gradov News," which had given the Devy-Dubravy farmstead hope of attaining their goal.

"Proletariat Ilya Prorok.

"The Leningrad Soviet scientist. Professor Martensen, has invited airplanes which will spontaneously disperse rain on the land and will create clouds above the farmland. During the coming summer it has been proposed to test these airplanes in peasant surroundings. The airplanes do all this by means of iodized sand."

After studying the entire text, Shmakov set

down his conclusion:

"In view of the dispersion of sand from the airplane, which would be detrimental to the high quality of the arable land, it seems that to give such an airplane to the farmstead Devy-Dubravý would be premature; please inform the petitioners accordingly."

Shmakov completely wasted the rest of the working day filling out inventory forms; he greatly enjoyed the columns and terminology of the accurate government language.

On the fifth day of work he met Stepan Ermilovich Bormotov, the head of the Finance Department of the Land Commission.

Bormotov received Shmakov calmly, like some foreign apparition alien to the interests of work.

"Comrade Bormotov," began Shmakov, "we

have something to take care of: you have ordered the mail to be sent out only twice a month, when it's convenient..."

Bormotov remained silent and signed some allocations.

"Comrade Bormotov," repeated Shmakov, "I have urgent papers here, but the fact that the mail will be sent out in a week completely..."

Bormotov rang the bell, not looking at Shmakov.

A scared, middle-aged man entered and screwed up his eyes at Bormotov with respectful, strained attention.

"Take this to the Artisan's Board," said Bormotov. "Then call in one of the ballerina-copyists."

The man didn't dare reply and left.

A typist entered.

"Sonia," said Bormotov, not looking at her but recognizing her by her scent and other indirect means. "Sonia, have you copied the oper-plan yet?"

"I've done it, Stepan Ermilych!" Sonia answered. "Is it an operations plan? Oh well, then, I haven't copied it!"

"Well, ask first and then answer., and you say you copied it!"

"Are you asking about the operations plan, Stepan Ermilych?"

"Of course, not about the opera plan!! An oper-plan is an operations plan!"

"I just put it in the typewriter!"

"Keep it there!" was Bormotov's reply.

At this point Stepan Fedotych finished signing the allocation sheets and noticed Shmakov.

Bormotov heard him out and answered:

"How do you think the Babylonians built aqueducts? Did they build them well? Yes! Strongly? Yes! And the mail then was sent out only twice a year, not more! What do you say now?" Bormotov gave a knowing smile and resumed the signing of acknowledgements and reminders.

Shmakov quickly shut up in the face of Bormotov's reasoning and left quite perplexed. On the way out he noticed the familiar smell of old government papers and tried to figure out what the Artisan's board, mentioned by Bormotov, was. Shmakov also thought about something else, but what exactly, is unknown.

Two people were arguing at the entrance of

the finance department. Each of them was exceptional looking: the first was fragile, emaciated, and unhappy; he got drunk every payday; the second beamed with the wholesomeness of life, because of the filling food and internal harmony. The first, skinny one ferociously tried to convince the other that the lump he held in his hand was clay. The other, however, maintained that this was sandy soil and was pleased by the fact.

"But why? Why sand?" the frail one asked him.

"Because it crumbles," reasoned the calm one, "because it fills the air with dust, like flour. Blow on it!"

The emaciated one blew, and something flew up.

"Well?" asked the fragile one.

"Well what?" said the thick-set man. "It crumbles, that means it's sand!"

"You try spitting on it," tried the fragile one.

His adversary grabbed the lump of unidentified soil and spit with relish, convinced of the unsoakability of sand.

"Well?" exclaimed the skinny one grandiloquently. "Do you believe me now?!"

The other one immediately agreed, so as not to upset the balance of feelings.

"It's clay; it stains!"

Shmakov listened to the conversation of the friends and, upon reaching his desk, immediately sat down to write the director of the department a memo: "On the necessity of strengthening internal discipline in the

department entrusted to you, so as to eliminate secret sabotage."

But soon sabotage appeared before Shmakov as a legitimate phenomenon. In the sub-department entrusted to Shmakov sat 42 men, but there was work for only five. Shmakov, frightened, dashed off a report informing whomever concerned about the necessity of cutting down the number of workers by 37.

But he was immediately summoned to the local Trade Union Committee, where they informed him that this was an unacceptable thing to do — the Trade Union will not tolerate petty tyranny.

"What are the men going to do then?" asked Shmakov. "There's no work for them here."

"Let them dawdle about," said the Trade Union official, "give them some old documents to leaf through; what's it to you?"

"Why should they leaf through them?" added Shmakov.

"So that all the material is in systematic order for posterity!" elucidated the Trade Union official.

"Right you are!" agreed Shmakov and calmed down; nonetheless, he informed his bosses so that his conscience would be clear.

As a result, the boss told Shmakov: "What a sap you are!! You've listened too long to professional babblers; work like a secret police agent! Show your intelligence!"

One time the department secretary came over to Shmakov and offered him some crumbling cigarettes.

"Try them, Ivan Fedotych! They're new, five kopeks for forty of them, made in Gradov. They're called 'The Red Monk,' and this here

on the mouthpiece means that they're made by invalids!"

Shmakov took a cigarette, although he usually never smoked out of economy; he only indulged when they were free.

The secretary came closer to Shmakov and whispered:

"You're from Moscow, Ivan Fedotych! Is it true that forty carloads of matzos arrive there daily and that it still isn't enough? It's true, isn't it?"

"No, Gavril Gavrilovich!" Shmakov assured him. "It's less than that. Matzos aren't very nourishing, and the Jews love fatty foods, and eat matzos only as punishment."

"That's exactly what I've been saying, Ivan Fedotych, and they don't believe me!"

"Who doesn't believe?"

"Well, nobody: neither Stepan Ermilovich, nor Pyotr Petrovich, nor Aleksei Palych — nobody believes me!"

4.

In the meantime a sad, gentle winter reached Gradov. Its inhabitants met in the evenings to drink tea, but their conversations did not stray from discussions of official obligations: even in private apartments, far from the office, they felt like government workers and talked about state matters. One time when Shmakov came to such a tea gathering he was pleased to notice the incessant and sincere desire of all the co-workers of the Land Department in their jobs.

The stench of cheap tobacco, the rustle of papers that recorded the truth, the peaceful way in which business was transacted — in

proper order, all this the inhabitants had substituted for the smells of nature.

The office had become a treasured landscape for them. The gray calm of a quiet room, filled with intelligent workers, was for them more cozy than virgin nature. Behind the enclosing walls they felt safe from the wild existence of the unregulated world, and in increasing the number of written documents they felt that they were increasing order and harmony in an absurd, undocumented world.

They acknowledged neither sun nor love nor other fallacious phenomena, preferring written facts. Moreover, neither love nor the calculation of the sun's activities penetrated the pure circle of their clerical work.

One dark evening, already in December, when it both rained and snowed, Shmakov was hurrying along the streets of Gradov in

extreme agitation.

A feast had been planned, at 3 rubles a head, in honor of Bormotov's 25 years of service in the government.

Shmakov was brimming over with the nobility of unrevealed discoveries. He wanted to stand before Bormotov and the others and expound on his favorite theme:

"Sovietization as the Beginning of Global Harmonization." This is how he wanted to retitlе his "Notes of a Government Worker."

Gradov was not asleep yet because it was eight o'clock in the evening. The boredom even angered the dogs in each courtyard. In the distance shone an electric light — magnificent, because it was the only one in town. The sky was so low, the darkness so thick, and the town so silent, ungreat and clearly well-behaved, that on first glance there seemed to be no nature; there was no

need for it.

Walking by the fire tower, Shmakov heard the lonely fireman sighing, languishing in contemplation.

"At least he's not sleeping," thought Ivan Fedotch with a citizen's contentment, "that means he knows his duty! Although there can't be any fires here: all people are careful and orderly!"

Shmakov was the first to arrive at the party, held at the house of the widow Zhamovaya, who rented the place for 2 rubles. The widow met him without any display of friendliness, as though Shmakov were the most starved of men and had come merely to grab the food.

Ivan Fedotych sat down and was silent. He knew no way of relating to people other than to office workers. If he were to marry, his wife would become an unhappy person. But

Shmakov rejected the idea of marriage and was not about to complicate history with offspring. Shmakov did not perceive any special charm in women; he was a genuine thinker in whom coursed naked duty, and nothing else. He knew no personal freedom, he felt cheerful obedience, similar to voluptuousness; he loved his work so much that he even kept fragments of uncertain origin, mislaid in his desk drawer, as some sort of kingdom of submissiveness and uselessness.

The second to appear was Stepan Ermilovich Bormotov. He acted not like the guest of honor, but like the master of ceremonies.

"Marfushka," he turned to Zhamovaya, "You should have put down a doormat in the entrance way! People's feet are likely

to be dirty, people don't have money for

rubbers, and you have a decent place here, not a public tavern!"

"Right away, Stepan Ermilych, I'll put it there right away! You go right in — I prepared the place of honor for you. There won't be any one of higher rank than you here, will there?"

"There shouldn't be, Marfa Egorovna, there shouldn't be!" And Stepan Ermilovich sat down in the best armchair of the old-fashioned establishment.

The other guests quickly began to arrive, as though they knew that Stepan Ermilovich was now present. They were: four office managers, three accountants, two heads of departments, two bookkeepers, three heads of sub-departments, the typist Sonia and citizen Rodnykh, the head of the local tile-manufacturing company. These people constituted the limits of Bormotov's world in

its horizons and planned perspectives, and the tea-drinking began.

They drank their tea silently, with pleasure, warming their mood with it. Marfa Zhamovaya stood behind Bormotov and filled his empty glass, sweetening the tea with yellow, coarse, unrefined sugar, bought at the cooperative as rejects.

Stepan Ermilovich Bormotov sat there, fully aware of his honor and worth. The respectful conversation did not go beyond office matters. They reminisced about the evil occurrences of delay in the instructions of the Provincial Executive Committee; the voice of the man speaking betrayed his fear and hidden joy of deliverance from responsibility.

The topic of the disappearance of the Gradov province also came up in the conversation. The center had suddenly stopped sending out circulars. Bormotov had voluntarily gone to

Moscow by cheap train to talk things over. He was given very little money; no credit came from Moscow, but instead, doughnuts from an invalid bakery, and a certificate concerning the assignment. In Moscow Bormotov discovered that they wanted to transfer Gradov to the jurisdiction of the region, hence all of Gradov's credit was given to the regional city.

But the regional city refused to incorporate Gradov.

"It's not a proletarian town, they say, they gave it to us to spite us!"

Thus Gradov hung suspended without any official government status. After his return, Bormotov convened the old-timers in his apartment, wanting to declare the Gradov province an auto-

nomous national republic, because the province contained 500 Tartars and around 100 Jews.

"I didn't need a republic," explained Bormotov. "I'm not a national minority, but represent the governmental origin of all things and the preservation of the continuity of clerical work."

Shmakov smouldered in his excitement and his overflowing heart pounded, yet he remained silent for the time being and rubbed his scribe's hands.

The people present recollected many more incidents. History was moving along their heads, but they sat in their native town, huddled together like bugs, and laughingly observed what was happening. They laughed because they were certain that that which was moving along would move on a little and then come to a stop.

Long ago, Bormotov had said that everything in the world not only flows but also stops. And then perhaps the church bells would ring again. Bormotov, a man who considered himself a Soviet man, did not grieve for the sound of the bells; neither did the others lament. But for the control and hypnosis of the masses of a unified ideology, bells aren't bad. But the sound is undoubtedly beneficial in the governmental backwoods, even from a poetic point of view, since in good government even poetry occupies its preordained place and does not sing useless songs.

They hardly noticed that the tea had come to an end and the samovar fire died. Marfa grew pinched and sat down in a corner, tired of serving the others. It was only after the tea that the hard drinking began.

"Now, citizens," said the accountant Shmachnev, "I will confess that I have only one consolation in life — vodka!... Nothing

moves me as much as vodka, neither music nor song nor faith. That means, my soul is so strong that it approves only of a poisonous substance. I acknowledge nothing spiritual, that would be bourgeois deception..."

Shmachnev was obviously a pessimist and in general tended to go overboard on things.

But really, only the vodka was capable of thawing out the consciousness of the persons present and of giving their hearts warm energy.

The first to get up, according to rank, was Bormotov.

"Citizens! I have served in many places. I have outlived 18 chairmen of the Provincial Executive Committee, 26 secretaries

and 12 bosses of the Land Department. 10

heads of the Provincial Executive Committee have been replaced during my time! And among the clerks with special commissions — personal secretaries, chairmen — 30 of them have come and gone... I am a sufferer, my friends, my soul is bitter, and nothing can move it... All my life I have tried to save the Gradov province. One particular chairman wanted to turn the dry land of the province into an ocean and the ploughmen into fisherman. Another of them thought up a plan to dig a deep hole in the earth, so that liquid gold might well up from it, and assigned me the task of finding a technician to do the job. A third chairman continually bought cars so as to establish a fitting system for the entire province. Do you realize what service means? I'm supposed to smile benevolently at everyone, torturing my common sense and destroying order, established by the essence of work. And furthermore, the Artisans' Board, that is the Professional Workers Union, once expelled

me from the Union of Forestland Workers because I had called membership dues a tax for the benefit of professional workers unions. But, I remained a member of the union; it couldn't be otherwise. The Artisans' Board is unprofitably depriving itself of the taxpayer and my men have to worry about the rest; without me, they'd have nothing to do."

Bormotov swallowed some beer for his throat, looked around the meeting under his jurisdiction and asked,

"Ah? Don't I hear anything?"

The meeting was silent, destroying the fodder on hand.

"Vanya!" Bormotov turned to the man who was mixing beer with vodka. "Vanya. My dear friend, close the casement window. It's still early and all sorts of rubble is milling about the streets... Well, as I was saying, what

is a provincial committee? I will tell you: the secretary — is a bishop, and the Provincial Committee — is his diocese! That's true, no? And the diocese is wise and serious, because a new religion is coming that is more serious than orthodoxy. Just try not showing up at a meeting, the vespers and matins! They'll say: give us your card and we'll give you a mark! If you get four marks, they'll rank you as a heathen. And heathens don't get any bread from us. That's how it is! And speaking for myself, I say: who put the business mechanism into the diocese? M! Who established the Worker-Peasant Inspection and the Treasury — our Provincial Finance Department; who found men to work in them. Who?! And who eliminated all sorts of

party cards, grades and other unsanitary phenomena from the offices? Well? Who?.."

"Without your Bormotov, my friends," said

Stepan Ermilych with tears in his eyes, "there would be in Gradov no establishment or office, the Soviet power would not survive and no trace would remain of the olden days, without which we couldn't live! I was the first to sit down at my desk and take up the official penholder, without making any speeches!

"Thus, my dears," expostulated Bormotov, "we see where the center of power and kindness of reason is upheld! I should be the tsar of worldly territory and not have to preside over the maternity and youth care of my typists or watch over the laziness of my office managers!.."

At this point Bormotov was overwhelmed by his own words and sat down, fixing his eyes on the food at the table. The gathering rustled with approval and fed itself on sausage, thereby maintaining good feelings. The vodka made the rounds slowly and according to plan, going around in a definite order;

thereby the mood of the partygoers soared upwards not by fits and bounds, but by a harmonic curve, like on a diagram.

Finally the accountant Pekhov got up and sang, above the noise of the conversation, a song about wild burial mound. Accountants are a nation of artists, and there is not a single accountant or bookkeeper who would not look on his profession as something temporary and worthless, holding sacred his primordial calling as an artist — singing and, less frequently, playing the violin or guitar. The accountants do not tolerate a less noble instrument.

Following Pekhov, without any warning, the bookkeeper Desushchy got up; he was famous for his correctness and culturedness in the realm of art and also for the complete desolation of his bookkeeping.

Rvannikov, the head of a sub-department of

the Land Division, got up and' banged with his fork, demanding silence.

"Beloved brothers in the revolution!" he began, grown kind due to the alcohol. "What has brought you here, regardless of the night? He —Stepan Ermilovich Bormotov — the fame and administrative brain of our establishment, the revolutionary mentor of order and of the great governmental apparatus of our province!

"And let him not nod his wise head there, but drink ashber-ry brandy with golden lips when I say that there is no one equal

to him among the human remnants after the revolution! Here is a genuine man of pre-revolutionary qualities!

"Citizens, Soviet workers!" roared Rvannikov in conclusion. "I invite you to

drink to Stepan Ermilovich Bormotov's 25 years of service, to the true founder of our province which is still liable to be organized by such people as our marvelous and wise hero of the evening!..."

Everyone jumped up from their seats and crowded around Bormotov with their glasses.

Crying and exultant, Bormotov kissed them all; he'd been waiting for this moment all evening, thirsting for recognition.

At that moment Shmakov couldn't stand it any longer and got up on the table to deliver a strikingly agitated speech — a long quote from his own "Notes of a Government Worker!"

"Citizens! Permit me to say something concerning the news of the day."

"We allow it!" the meeting said collectively.

"Speak up, Shmakov. Only try to economize; speak briefly, with proof, give us the essential facts!"

"Citizens!" Shmakov began boldly, "right now there's a war on against bureaucrats. And what sort of person is Stepan Ermilovich Bormotov? A bureaucrat or not? A positive bureaucrat! Let this speak in his honor; let it not be considered detrimental or be condemned! Without bureaucracy, respected government warriors, the Soviet government could not maintain itself even for an hour — I have come to this conclusion as a result of long thoughts... Besides... (Shmakov got mixed up, his head became empty; everything went around in a circle.) Besides, dear brothers in arms..."

"We're not warriors," someone roared, "we're knights!"

"Knights of an intellectual field!" Shmakov

seized the slogan. "I'm about to reveal to you the secret of our century!"

"Well now!" the gathering became positively benevolent, "reveal it!"

"In a minute." Shmakov was pleased. "What kind of people are we? We are the de-pu-ties of the proletariat! For example, one could say that I am the deputy of a revolutionary and master! Do you see the simplicity of it? Everything has been replaced. Everything has become counterfeit! What was cream has become margarine: tasty but not nourishing! Do you understand, citizens?... That's why the so-called bureaucrat, abused by all malefactors and idiots, is precisely the architect of a future, articulate socialist

world."

Shmakov sat down and drank his beer with

dignity; it was a relatively pure drink and he never drank anything stronger.

But at this point Obrubaev got up... he'd had enough; he was angry and prepared to stand guard. His position was obvious — candidate for the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks; but that fact didn't help him in his job — he was and remained a clerk who received 28 rubles a month and ranked in the sixth category according to the tariff scale, with a ratio of 1:8.

"Respected comrades and co-workers!" said Obrubaev, having finished eating something. "I understand neither comrade Bormotov nor comrade Shmakov! How is all this permissible?! We are faced with a clear directive from the Central Committee: the struggle against bureaucracy. We are presented with the division of Soviet institutions on a 9-year prescription. And here they're saying that a bureaucrat is, how was it

phrased, an architect and some sort of provider. I hear that the Provincial Committee is a diocese, that the Provincial Union of Professional Workers is an Artisans' Board, etc. What is all this?? I proclaim that this is going too far. This is the eclipse of the basic directive on the party line, proclaimed in all seriousness. And in general I will give you my personal opinion on the questions touched on by the preceding orators; I condemn comrades Shmakov and Bormotov! I have finished."

"The law, comrade Obrubaev!" Bormotov said quietly, trying to be rational and sympathetic. "The law! If you destroy bureaucracy, lawlessness will set in! Bureaucracy is the fulfillment of predetermined law. And you can't do anything about it, comrade Obrubaev, it's the law!"

"And what if I were to inform the Provincial Committee, comrade Bormotov, or the

Worker-Peasant Inspection?" said Obrubaev darkly, lighting a cigarette "Cannon" for show.

"But where do you have the proof, comrade Obrubaev?" asked Bormotov. "Who's kept a record of this meeting, Sonia, did you take any notes?" Bormotov turned to the only typist here, the one who was especially valued in the Land Department.

"No, Stepan Ermilych, I didn't write anything down; you didn't say anything to me, otherwise I would have," answered the drunk and blissful Sonia.

"There you have it, comrade Obrubaev," Bormotov smiled wisely and contentedly. "There's no evidence and hence no fact!"

**And you say — a fight against bureaucracy!
If you were a protocol officer, you'd roll us**

right into a GPU office. The law, comrade Obrubaev, the law!"

"But there are live witnesses!" exclaimed Obrubaev, as if infected with the plague.

"The witnesses are drunk, comrade Obrubaev. Point one. Secondly, they constitute a mass that hasn't understood and isn't capable of understanding the essence of our disagreement, and the case is closed. Thirdly, comrade Obrubaev, I ask you: is a disciplined party member going to bring out in the open internal strife for judgment by the masses at large, by that petty bourgeois mass? Well? Comrade Obrubaev, let's drink; everything will be clear then... Sonia, are you asleep? Oblige comrade Obrubaev, practice your handwriting... Desushchy, let's hear you croak something very sincere, from the depths of your soul."

Desushchy began to sing sweetly, abuptly

pouring out the deep notes of a strange song that spoke of a sufferer who despised nothing but a golden harp. In the meantime the clerk Myshaev took up the balalaika, saying: "Even though I'm only an artisan in the realm of art, I'll rattle something!" And he moved his fingers quickly, beating out a fast rhythm with his entire body.

Bormotov feigned complacency, screwed up his slightly crossed and anguished eyes and, even though ruined by everyday diplomatic work, abandoned himself to the senseless dance, straining his martyred legs and enlivening his indifferent heart.

Shmakov began to feel sorry for him, sorry for the worker in the cornfield of the world's state system, and started sobbing, having come across something salty.

And in the morning Gradov was on fire; five houses and one bakery were burning. The fire started, they said, in the bakery, but the baker assured everyone that he always threw the cigarette butts into the dough and not on the floor; dough can't burn, it sputters and extinguishes the fire. The inhabitants believed him and the baker continued to bake bread.

Life went on as usual and in agreement with the edicts of the Gradov Provincial Executive Committee, studied in fear by the citizens. The citizens jotted down their perpetual obligations

in calendars. Shmakov discovered this fact by looking in the calendar of Chaly, one of the department heads, and the discovery produced a sweetness in his soul.

The calendar showed a notation for almost every day, for example:

"Appear for revision of materials in the territorial district; my initial is Ch.; give a report at work about absenteeism without lawful justification."

"Elections of the town council at 7 o'clock; the candidate is Makhin, put forth by the cell; vote unanimously."

"Go to the Communal Department, hand in money for water; last chance — otherwise you're fined."

"Inform the City Sanitation Commission about the state of the courtyard, — a fine, see resolution of the Provincial Executive Committee."

"Meeting of the cooperative's inhabitants concerning the requisition of the shed to make an outhouse."

"Protest against Chamberlain, and, in case of

need, be prepared to take up arms."

"Go stand in the 'Red Corner' this evening, otherwise they'll consider you an apostate."

"Combine the wife's name-day party with proper economy and productive effect. Invite the young people's commissar."

"Find out from Marfa Ilinichnaya how to make raspberry compote."

"Inquire in registrar's office, how to change the name of Chaly to Blagoveshchensky, similarly change name from Frol to Theodore."

"Exterminate bedbugs and check on how much money the wife has."

"Saturday — openly inform the head of the department that you're going to vespers, don't believe in God but go there on account

of the choir; if we had a decent opera here, wouldn't go."

"Ask co-workers for some kerosene. There's none available, everything's been used up. Pretend to need it for alarm clock grease."

"Lay aside the 366th bottle for cherry brandy. This is a leap year."

"Dry some sugar in reserve — there's going to be a war with someone in spring!"

"Don't forget to compose the 25-year perspective plan for

agriculture; there are two days left."

Every day was filled up.

Shmakov observed, and not for the first time, that marvelous phenomenon — that man has very little free time for personal life — this

has been replaced by governmental and socially useful activities. The state has become the soul. And this is as it should be, in this is contained the nobility and greatness of our epoch of transition!

"Comrade Chaly, does your region have a definite construction plan?"

"Of course, sir! The 10-year plan includes one hundred elevators. We're going to build ten a year; furthermore we've planned to build 20 slaughterhouses and 15 factories for the production of felt shoes... Furthermore we're going to dig a canal to the Caspian Sea, so as to teach the Persian merchants to trade with Gra-dov."

**"Well now!" said Shmakov in conclusion.
"This is a significant course of action. Well, how much money do you need for these considerable enterprises?"**

"We'll need a lot of money," Chaly informed him in a solemn tone of voice. "Not less than three billion, exactly 300,000 a year."

"Oho," said Shmakov, "that's a respectable sum! And who's going to give you the money?"

"The main thing is to have a plan!" answered Chaly. "They give money according to a plan..."

"That's true!" Shmakov agreed.

The question had been properly clarified.

6.

Shmakov had been living in Gradov for almost a year already. Life for him went along in a satisfactory fashion: everything occurred in line with general order and according to law. Shmakov's face was already that of an

older man, showing no worries, indifferent, like that of an actor in a forgotten play. The opus of his life — "Notes of a Government Worker" —was coming to an end. Shmakov was only pondering its concluding chords.

Like everywhere else in the republic, at night the sun didn't shine in Gradov but, to make up for it, shone on foreign stars.

While taking his constitutional and looking at the stars, Shmakov at last found the concluding chords for his opus:

"In my heart breathes an eagle and in my head shines the star of harmony."

After arriving at home and finishing the manuscript, Shmakov sat over it till early in the morning, admiring and enjoying the reading of his composition.

"Is it worth it," he read somewhere in the middle, "to think up inventions if the world is dialectical, that is, since every hero has his own corpse? It's not worth the effort!"

"For example: twenty and even five years ago, Gradov had only two typewriters (both systems "Royal," meaning "kingly") and now there's close to forty of them, irrespective of the brand.

"But has the social benefit increased due to this? Not in the least! Namely: previously the scribes sat over their paperwork, were provided with goose quills and just wrote. When the quill became blunt or got worn out from overzealousness, the scribe fixed it; he did so himself, looking at the clock all the while. He sees that the working day is over and it's time to go into his own wooden house, where he's met by food and the coziness of order provided for, in a higher manner, by the governmental structure.

"And nothing disturbed the course of events in the scribe's ordered existence. Nothing hurried, and everything had its proper time and place.

"But what do we have now? The young woman doesn't even have time to powder her nose, before they thrust new rough drafts at her...

"And it's clear that no sooner does a man appear, than paperwork is found for him, and quite a pile at that. And what happens when there's no extra man to be found? Perhaps there won't be any source of paperwork then?..."

Here Ivan Fedotych sighed and started to think:

Isn't it time for him to set out for some solitary monastery, so as to mourn no more for the sick world? But that would be

inadvisable.

Although one could justify such an action by saying that the world, officially, hasn't been established by anyone and, it would seem, doesn't exist from a judicial point of view. If it had been established and possessed regulations and certificates, one still shouldn't believe these documents, since they are handed out on the basis of a statement, and the statement is signed 'petitioner

of the above,' and how could one have faith in this? Who certifies the 'petitioner' himself, if he presents a statement about himself?

Feeling heartburn in his stomach and nausea in his heart, Ivan Fedotych went to the kitchen to drink some water and see who was eating there.

After returning, he resumed his reading,

trembling all over.

"...Let's take the sub-department that I coordinate. What do we have there?"

"I don't reproach my subordinates for their errors, but merely draw a conclusion, which means that there's work to be done. And when they informed me that under my leadership the reservoirs had been destroyed almost level to the ground, I answered that their construction, consequently, had been accomplished..."

"No soil holds water, one need only observe the phenomenon of ravines..."

After reading this, Shmakov calmed down and fell asleep, light of heart and satisfied of mind.

But is anything in the world certain? Are all the facts of nature properly defined? Not

really! Doesn't the law itself, or another establishment, represent destruction of the live earth's sphere, that trembles in its contradictions and thus attains unified harmony?

This criminal thought woke up Ivan Fedotych.

As it turned out, it was an early, happy morning. In Gradov the ovens were stoked up, yesterday's dinner was warmed up for breakfast. Housewives went to get their husbands warm bread, the breadcutters in the bakeries cut the bread and weighed it metrically, philosophizing about grams; they didn't believe that a gram is better than a pound, but knew that it's lighter.

Furthermore, everyone felt happy at the fact that the new day was becoming similar to yesterday and hence wouldn't cause any torment.

7.

Ivan Fedotych's neighbor, Zakhar, was awakened each morning by his wife with the words:

"Zakhary! Get up and sit on your throne!"

The throne was a round tree stump on which Zakhar sat in

front of his workbench. The stump was worn down by one third from all the sitting, and Zakhar often thought that man is more durable than wood. That's how it was.

Zakhar got up, lit his pipe and said:

"I am superfluous in the world. I do not live but merely am present and not a registered member of any group... I don't go to meetings and don't belong to anything!"

"Let it be, Zakhar!" his wife said. "Stop mumbling, sit down and drink your tea! A member! Just think... a member!"

After tea, Zakhar sat down to work, the kind of work that no animal would endure: it demanded so much courage and patience.

Shmakov always had his boots patched by Zakhar, a man who amazed him.

"Ivan Fedotych, your shoes are already eight years old, how do you do it? When they were made in the factory, since that time children have grown up and learned to read and write, many of them have died, but your boots are still alive... Bushes have turned into forests, the revolution has taken place and perhaps even some stars have died, but your boots are still alive... This is unfathomable!.."

Ivan Fedotych answered him:

"There's order in all this, Zakhary Palych! Life may commit outrages, but the boots are whole! Herein lies the wonder of man's cautious intellect."

"In my opinion, however," said Zakhar, "excess is nobler! Otherwise you'll sit on the shoemaker's throne yourself, as I do!"

Ivan Fedotych persuaded Zakhary Palych not to look on life in such a sentimental manner and not to mourn over such an involved idea. There's nothing in the world which can console man's aimless heart. And what is consolation, if not Philistinism, discredited by the October Revolution?"

"Order is not a decorous matter," said Zakhar. "Ivan Fedotych, the stalwart earth has been angered! You can't put in order with goodness, you have to lay waste to it, there's no other way!"

After Ivan Fedotych left, Zakhar Palych secretly thought that a glum, boring life is still better than noble excess, and looked in satisfaction at his empty courtyard, whose landscape was a wicker fence and whose inhabitant was a chicken.

8.

Three months later battle days befell the Gradov government population. The center had decided to merge all four provinces, including Gradov, into one region.

And the four provincial cities began arguing about which one was most suitable to become a regional city.

Gradov was especially fiercely involved in the matter. It had 4,000 Soviet workers, 2,837 jobless men and only the regional territorial organization could swallow up this scribbling

nation.

Bormotov and Shmakov, with the managers of the Provincial Planning Committee — Nashykh, and other exemplary people of Gradov led the paper battle with other towns against Moscow.

The Gradovites hurriedly proceeded with the digging of the canal, beginning it in the burdocked outskirts of Morshevka settlement, in the estate of citizen Moev.

This canal was being established to provide continuous passage into Gradov of the Persian, Mesopotamian and other commercial ships.

The Provincial Planning Committee wrote three volumes about the canal and sent them to the center, so that they'd be informed. The Gradov engineer Parshin composed a project of air service within the future region,

elaborating on the necessity of air transportation not only for baggage, but also for bulky fodder for pigs. For the latter purpose the workshops of the District Agricultural Union were building a particularly high-powered airplane with an engine that ran on gunpowder.

Comrade Sysoev, the deputy of the Provincial Executive Committee, ranted and raved about the province entrusted to him, saying that only Gradov can be the regional center; no other population point can.

Comrade Sysoev took care of the ordering of seals and signs with the designation of the Gradov Regional Executive Committee and gave the order to have himself henceforth called 'Deputy of the Provincial Executive Committee.'

When none of the workers deserted the region for the province, either physically or mentally,

comrade Sysoev's good feelings arose and he told whomever he met:

"We've got a region, brother! Almost a republic! And Gradov is a capital of almost European dimensions! And what is a province? A contra-revolutionary tsarist cell, nothing more!"

An unparalleled battle of workers began. The neighboring cities — pretenders to the regional throne — did not fall behind the Gradovites in their strenuous effort.

But Gradov annihilated all before silent Moscow. Ivan Fe-dotych Shmakov wrote on 400 pages of average format a project for the administration of the projected Grado-Chernozemny Region and was sent off to the center to get the appropriate signatures.

Stepan Ermilovich Bormotov approached the

whole matter step by step. He suggested the establishment of a provincial executive committee, so that he would convene sessions in all the former towns of the province and would not have a permanent abode in one eternal building.

But here there was subterfuge: Moscow, of course, would never agree to this, but would ask who had thought up this plan. And when it became known that this fabrication stemmed from a citizen of the town of Gradov, Moscow would smile but realize that there are smart people living in Gradov, men capable of leading the region.

Hence Bormotov on one occasion revealed his thought to comrade Sysoev, the chief of the Provincial Executive Committee. The latter reflected and said:

"Yes, this weapon reveals higher psychological exploitation and right now any

try, no matter how shitty, is worth it," and signed Bormotov's report for its expedition to Moscow.

The Gradovites were kept busy by many matters, to prove their superiority over their neighbors.

Shmakov suffered and ached from a general feeling of illness in his body; he thought with anguish about the defeat of Gradov but silently set his heart on the thought of Gradov as a regional center.

It would be worth writing a long book, describing the fight of the five provincial cities. There'd be as many letters in it as there are burdocks in the Gradov province.³

The shoemaker Zakhar died, not having waited out the coming of the region; Shmakov himself dropped on his incline toward middle age.

Bormotov was relieved by an older inspector of the People's Commissariat of the Worker-Peasant Inspection on account of the red tape and the sickly affairs of his house; he started a private office for the working out of records of the governmental organiza-

tions' activities; in this office he worked by himself, without pay or worker's benefits.

Finally, three years after the start of the regional battle, the resolution from Moscow came:

"Organize the Verkhne-Donsk Agricultural Region as part of the territories of the below-named provinces. Consider Voro-zheev the regional city. Establish the following points as neighboring centers. The city of Gradov, since it has no industrial significance whatsoever, since its population is occupied primarily with agriculture and service offices, shall be given

rank as a demoted town, losing its former status; we have established a Village Soviet in it, to replace the one from the hamlet Slabye Vershiny."

What happened next in Gradov? Nothing significant occurred — only fools made expenditures. Shmakov died a year later from exhaustion while working on his great socio-philosophical treatise: "Principles of the Depersonalization of Man, with the Goal of his Rebirth into an Absolute Citizen Possessed of Legitimately Regulated Actions for Every Moment of his Existence." Before his death he served in the Village Soviet as commissar of dirt roads. Bormotov is still alive and every day purposefully takes a walk in front of the house where previously had been headquartered the provincial executive committee. Now from this house hangs the sign: "Gradov Village Soviet."

But Bormotov doesn't believe his eyes —

those same eyes which at one time had been the bearers of an unflinching governmental gaze.

(1926)
Friederike F. Snyder

Translated by

NOTES

1. *Murz* - feudal title in Tatar nations in the fifteenth century.

2. *Chernosotenets* - member of armed bands of violent reactionaries in Tsarist Russia, called "The Black Hundreds," during the period 1905-1907.

3. [Footnote in 1974 edition, *Potomki solntsa*, p. 363] : But one can forget about writing it since there's no reason for the Gradovites to read it and other people wouldn't be interested.

MAKAR THE DOUBTFUL

Amidst the rest of the laboring masses there lived two citizens of the State: an ordinary peasant, Makar Ganushkin, and a more distinguished one. Comrade Lev Chumovoi, who was smarter by far than anyone else in the village and because of his intelligence he supervised the progress of the people forward in a straight line towards the communal weal. As a result the entire population of the village would say of Lev Chumovoi whenever he was passing by anywhere, "There goes our leader; see him walking. There'll be measures of some sort taken tomorrow — you just wait... A real smart head he has; it's only that his hands are hollow. He lives by his bare brain..."

Makar, on the other hand, just as any other peasant, liked migrant jobs better than plowing and was concerned with spectacles

rather than bread, because he had, according to Comrade Chumovoi, an empty head.

Without obtaining Comrade Chumovoi's permission, Makar once organized a public spectacle — a merry-go-round pushed round about itself by the might of the wind. The public swarmed to Makar's merry-go-round like a dense thundercloud and awaited the storm which might start the merry-go-round turning. The storm, however, seemed to be long in coming, the people stood about doing nothing, and in the meantime Chumovoi's colt ran off into the meadows and got lost there in the damp grounds. If the village community had been at leisure, it would have caught Chumovoi's colt at once and would not have allowed Chumovoi to undergo a material loss, but Makar had distracted the community and thus helped inflict a loss on Chumovoi's property.

Chumovoi himself did not chase the colt but

approached Makar, who was silently pining for his storm, and said, "Here you are distracting people, and I haven't got anybody to retrieve my colt..."

Makar awoke from his reverie because something dawned on him. He was unable to think, having an empty head above clever hands, but on the other hand he could immediately sense things.

"Don't be sad," said Makar to Comrade Chumovoi, "I will make you a self-driving machine."

"How?" asked Chumovoi, because he did not know how to make a self-driving machine with his hollow hands.

"From hoops and ropes," answered Makar, not thinking, but sensing the pulling power and the rotation of those ropes and hoops to

be.

"Then do it quickly," said Chumovoi, "or else I'll make you legally responsible for illegal spectacles."

But Makar was not thinking of the fine he'd have to pay, — being unable to think, — instead he was recalling where it was that he had seen iron, and could not remember where, since the whole village was put together from superficial materials: clay, straw, wood and hemp.

No storm came, the merry-go-round did not move, and Makar returned home.

At home Makar drank some water to drown his sorrow and felt the hard taste of that water.

"That must be the reason why we have no iron," surmised Makar, "it's because we

drink it all down with the water."

At night Makar climbed down into a dry well which had fallen into disuse, and lived inside it for a day and a night looking for iron under the moist sand. On the second day the peasants dragged Makar up under the direction of Chumovoi, who was afraid that a citizen might perish outside the front line of socialist construction. Makar was difficult to lift — it turned out that he was holding brown chunks of iron ore in his hands. The men lifted him out and cursed him for the heavy weight while Comrade Chumovoi promised to lay an additional fine on Makar for creating a public disturbance.

Makar, however, ignored him, and in a week's time made iron from the ore, using the stove after his woman had finished baking bread loaves in it. How he managed to melt the ore nobody knows, because Makar acted with his clever hands and his taciturn head. A day

later Makar fashioned an iron wheel and then another iron wheel, but neither wheel turned by itself — one had to roll them with one's own hands.

Chumovoi came to Makar and asked him, "Have you made a self-driving machine to replace my colt?"

"No," said Makar, "I was thinking that they would roll by themselves, but they don't."

"What did you deceive me for, you elemental head!" exclaimed Chumovoi in an official voice. "In that case - make me a colt!"

"I don't have any flesh, or I'd make one," declined Makar.

"Oh, and how did you make iron out of clay?" remembered Chumovoi.

"I don't know," replied Makar, "I don't have any memory."

Here Chumovoi took offense.

"Oh, so you're going to conceal a discovery of national economic significance, you scoundrel of an individualist! You're not a man, you're a private property owner! I'm going to fine you head to toe — that'll teach you how to think!"

Makar became submissive, "But I don't think at all. Comrade Chumovoi, I'm an empty-headed man."

"Then keep your hands in check, don't make things you don't realize," Comrade Chumovoi reproached Makar.

"If I could have a head like yours, Comrade Chumovoi, then I would think too," confessed Makar.

**"That's exactly right!" confirmed Chumovoi.
"But there's only one such head in the whole
village and you have to obey me.**

**And here Chumovoi fined Makar from head
to toe, so that Makar was forced to set out for
Moscow to earn some money to pay this fine,
leaving the merry-go-round and his farm
belongings to the zealous solicitude of
Comrade Chumovoi.**

*** * ***

**Makar had last gone train-riding nine years
ago, in 1919. At that time they let him ride for
free because Makar immediately struck them
as a hired field-hand, and they did not even
ask him for any documents. "Ride on," the
proletarian guard used to say to him, "we like
you, because you don't have a stitch."**

**This time Makar got into the train just as he
did nine years ago, without asking anybody's**

leave. The scarcity of people and the number of open doors surprised him. Nevertheless Makar did not sit inside the train, but between the cars, so as to watch the work of the wheels in motion. The wheels started to turn and the train set out for the core of the nation — for Moscow.

The train was going faster than any average horse. The prairie plains kept running toward the train and would not stop coming.

"They're going to work the machine to death this way," said Makar, feeling sorry for the wheels. "Indeed, what a lot of

things there are in this world since there is so much space and emptiness in it!"

Makar's hands were resting, their free clever strength flowing into his empty, spacious head, and he began to think. Makar sat

between the cars and thought as well as he could. However, Makar did not sit there long. An unarmed guard went by and asked him for his ticket. Makar had no ticket with him since, as he supposed, a firm soviet rule had been established and was now giving free rides to all the needy. The controller-guard told Makar to avoid trouble and get off the train at the next railway station, which would have a cafeteria, so that, heaven forbid, Makar should not die of hunger in some deserted spot in the middle of nowhere. Makar saw that the government was disposed to take good care of him, since it did not simply kick him off, but offered him a cafeteria, and he thanked the train official.

All the same, Makar did not get off at the small-town station, although the train stopped there to unload envelopes and post-cards from the mail car. Makar remembered a certain technical concept and stayed on the train in order to help it on its way. "The

heavier a thing is," compared Makar, imagining stone and feathers, "the farther it flies when you fling it; in the same way, I will be like an extra brick on the train, so that the train might rush to Moscow."

Not wishing to offend the train guard, Makar climbed all the way into the bowels of the machine, underneath the car, and there he lay down to rest, listening to the quivering speed of the wheels. From the tranquility and the sight of the railroad sand Makar fell into a deep sleep and dreamed that he was torn away from the ground and was flying along with the cold wind. This luxurious sensation made him pity the people who had remained back on earth.

"Serezhka! You're not supposed to throw the bolts while they're hot!"

Makar woke up from these words and touched his neck to check whether his body

and all his innermost life were safe and sound.

"It's all right!" yelled Serezhka from afar.

"It's not far to Moscow: it won't burn!"

The train was standing at a station. Workers were checking the car axles and swearing under their breath.

Makar climbed out from under the car and saw in the

distance the very center of the whole nation—the capital city of Moscow.

"Now I will make it on foot just as well!"

Makar realized. "Chances are the train will manage to get there without the extra weight!"

And Makar set out in the direction of the towers, the churches and the awe-inspiring

buildings — into the city of scientific and technological miracles in pursuit of a living for himself.

*** * ***

Having unloaded himself from the train, Makar set out toward the visible Moscow, feeling an interest in that central city. So as not to lose his way, Makar walked along the railroad tracks and was surprised at the numerous station platforms. Near the platforms grew woods of pine and fir and in the woods stood small wooden houses. The trees were sparse and underneath them candy wrappers, wine bottles, sausage skins and other wasted products lay scattered. Grass did not grow here, being oppressed by man, and the trees for the most part also suffered, growing very little. Makar's understanding of this kind of nature was vague, "Maybe some special scoundrels live here, for even the plants die from being near them! This is

extremely sad, that man should live and create a desert around himself! What happened to science and technology?"

Stroking his chest with regret Makar walked on. On another station platform they were unloading empty milkcans from the train and putting milk-filled cans into the train. Makar stopped, arrested by a thought, "Again there's no technology!" said Makar, defining the situation out loud. "It is right to carry the milk-filled containers, since there are also children in the city who await their milk. But why use the machine to carry empty cans? That's just a needless waste of technolgoiy and those containers take up a lot of room!"

Makar walked up to the manager who was in charge of the cans and advised him to build a milk-pipe from here all the way to Moscow, in order not to waste train-power on empty milk containers.

The milk manager heard Makar out — he respected people who represented the masses — however, he advised Makar to ap-

ply to Moscow: that's where all the wisest people are, and they are in charge of all the remedies.

Makar became annoyed, "But it's you, not they, who does the carrying of the milk! They only drink it, they cannot see how extra technology is being wasted needlessly!"

The manager explained, "My business is to assign loads: I am an executive, not an inventor of pipes."

Then Makar left him alone and walked, doubtful, all the way up to Moscow.

In Moscow it was late morning. Tens of thousands of people rushed along the streets

like peasants hurrying to gather the harvest.

"What kind of work are they going to do?"

Makar stood thinking in the thick of the crowd. "They must have mighty factories here which clothe all the far-off villagers and provide them with shoes!"

Makar glanced at his boots and said "Thank you!" to the running people; without them he would have been barefoot and undressed.

Almost all of the people were carrying leather bags under their arms - that's probably where they kept the shoe-nails and cobbler's thread.

"Only why are they running, wasting strength?" puzzled Makar. "Better that they should work at home and food could be carted around to their houses on a moving platform!"

However, the people continued running, climbing into tram-cars which were so

overloaded that they sagged, and they did not spare their bodies for the sake of useful labor. This satisfied Makar altogether. "These are good people," he thought, "it's very hard for them to make their way to the workshops, and yet they want to get to work so badly!"

Makar was pleased with the tram-cars because they moved by themselves and because the driver in the front car sat very lightly, as if he were not driving a thing. Makar also got into a tram-car without any effort, being pushed inside by the hasty people from behind. The car moved smoothly, the invisible power of the engine growling beneath the floor; and Makar listened to it and sympathized with it.

"The poor hard-working thing!" thought Makar of the engine. "How it pulls the car and strains itself. But it's good that it carries useful people to one spot, thereby preserving live feet!"

A woman — the tram-car hostess — was passing out coupons

to the people, but Makar, not wishing to trouble the hostess-woman, refused to take one, "It's all right!" said Makar, and walked by.

People yelled to the hostess, asking her for something or other "on demand" and she would agree. Wishing to check what was being handed out here, Makar also spoke up, "Hostess, give me something on demand too!"

The hostess pulled a cord and the tram instantly stopped in place.

"Get out; here you are on demand!" said the citizens to Makar, and they forced him out by their pressure.

Makar came out into the open air.

It was the kind of air proper for a capital city: it smelled of seething gasoline fumes and dust from cast-iron tram-brakes.

"Where do you have the very central spot of the whole nation around here?" Makar asked a chance passerby.

The man pointed with his hand and threw his cigarette into a street garbage can. Makar approached the can and also spat into it in order to have the right to use everything there was in the city.

The houses were so bulky and towering that Makar felt sorry for the soviet government: it must be very difficult maintaining such a housing enterprise.

At a crossing a policeman raised a red stick while making a fist with his left hand towards a wagoner, who was driving a load of rye flour.

"They have no respect for rye flour hereabouts," concluded Makar, "here they feed on white buns."

"Where's the center around here?" he asked the policeman.

The policeman pointed towards a slope and informed Makar, "Near the Bolshoi Theater, in the ravine."

Makar walked down the hill and found himself between two lawns with flower beds. On one edge of the square stood a wall and on the other — a house with pillars. These pillars were holding up four cast-iron horses, and the pillars could have been made a bit thinner because the horses were not that heavy.

Makar began looking about the square for some kind of a rod with a red flag, which would signify the middle of the central city and the very core of the nation itself, but

there was no such rod anywhere: instead there was a stone with an inscription. Makar leaned on the stone so that he might stand in the very center and fill himself with respectful feelings towards himself and his

country. Makar sighed happily and felt hungry. Then he walked toward the river and saw the construction site of an enormous building.

"What are they building here?" he asked a passerby.

"An eternal building out of iron, concrete, steel and bright glass!" replied the passerby.

Makar decided to visit it so that he might work awhile on the construction and get something to eat.

A guard stood at the gate. The guardsman

asked, "Whad-duya want, fella?"

"I'd like to do some work; I 've grown so skinny," announced Makar.

"How can you work here when you've come without any employment coupon?" said the guardsman sadly.

At this a stone-mason came up and stopped to listen to Makar.

"Go to our barracks and to the communal mess; the guys will feed you there," said the mason helpfully to Makar. "As for working here, you cannot join us right away: you're living free, and that means you're nobody. First you have to register in a worker's union and go through class-background investigation."

And so Makar went to the barracks to eat from the communal pot in order to sustain life

in himself for a better fortune in the future.

*** * ***

Makar settled down nicely at the construction site of that Moscow building which had been called eternal by the chance passerby. First he ate his fill of black and nourishing mush in the workers' barracks and then went out to take a good look at the construction work. The earth was indeed stricken with pits everywhere, people were bustling about, machines whose names Makar did not know were battering piles into the ground. Concrete mush was pouring out through a trough and other industrial events were also taking place right before one's eyes. It was evident that a house was being built, though there was no knowing for whom. Makar was not even interested in knowing who would get what — he was interested in technology as the future well-being for all people. The boss of Makar's native village. Comrade Lev Chumovoi,

would naturally be interested in the assignment of housing

space in the future building instead of becoming wrapped up in a cast-iron pile hammer, but then Makar only had learning in his hands, none in his head, so all he could think of was doing something.

Makar walked all about the construction area and saw that the work was going quickly and well. However, something inside Makar was surging dismally though he did not know what it was yet. He walked into the middle of the construction work and surveyed the whole scene of labor: there was obviously something lacking, something was missing, but he could not define it. It was just that a certain conscientious workingman's sorrow was growing inside Makar's chest. From sorrow, and from having had a full meal, Makar found a quiet spot and went to sleep there. In

his dreams Makar saw a Jake, some birds, a forgotten village copse, but the necessary thing, the thing which was lacking at the construction site — that Makar did not see. Then Makar woke and suddenly discovered the deficiency at the construction site: the workers were packing the concrete into iron casts to make a wall. But there is no technology in that, only senseless labor! To do it according to technology one must send the concrete up in pipes, while the worker merely holds the pipe in place without tiring, thus not allowing the festive force of the mind to escape into the common hands of unskilled labor.

Makar at once went to look for the chief Moscow office of scientific technology. Such an office was located in a sturdy fireproof building which stood in one of the city's dales. There Makar found a young lad standing at the door and told him that he had invented a construction hose. The fellow heard him out

and even asked about some things which Makar himself did not know and then sent Makar up the stairs to a chief clerk. This clerk was an educated engineer, yet for some reason he had chosen to write on paper without touching construction work with his hands. Makar told him about the hose too.

"Buildings should not be built, they should be cast," said Makar to the learned clerk.

The clerk listened to him and concluded, "And by what means will you prove, Comrade Inventor, that your hose is more economical than the usual method of concrete construction?"

"By the means that I feel it very clearly," asserted Makar.

The clerk pondered something in secret and sent Makar to the end of the corridor, "There indigent inventors are given a ruble

for food and a train ticket back home."

Makar received the ruble but refused to accept the ticket because he had decided to live forward, without turning back.

In another room Makar was given a document for the workers' union so that he might get special assistance there as a man from the masses and a hose-inventor. Makar thought that at the union they would at once give him money for making the hose and so joyfully went there.

The workers' union was situated in an even more enormous building than the technological office. For about two hours Makar roamed in its caverns in search of the manager in charge of the massive people, as was laid down in his document, but the manager was not to be found in his working place — he was off somewhere taking care of

the other laboring masses. As the sun was setting the manager came, ate some fried eggs and read Makar's document through the help of his assistant — a rather nice-looking, modern-type young girl with a long braid. This young girl went to the cashier and brought one more ruble for Makar, and Makar signed a receipt for it as an unemployed unskilled laborer. They gave Makar back his document. There was now written on it among other letters: "Comrade Lopin, help this member of our union to arrange his hose invention in an industrial way."

Makar remained pleased with this and the next day he went to look for the industrial way on which he expected to see Comrade Lopin. Neither the policeman nor any of the passersby knew anything about such a way and Makar decided to find it independently. Posters and red satin cloths were hung out on the streets, displaying the name of the very

institution that Makar needed. It was clearly stated on the posters that the whole proletariat must stand firmly on the way to industrial development. This enlightened Makar at once: first he must find the proletariat, underneath the proletariat would be the way, and Comrade Lopin ought to be found somewhere nearby.

"Comrade policeman," demanded Makar, "show me the road to the proletariat."

The policeman took out a book, found the proletariat's address in it, and told grateful Makar what that address was.

*** * * Makar walked across Moscow towards the proletariat and**

wondered at the city's power, running in busses, tram-cars, and in the live feet of the crowd.

"You need lots of grub to feed such bodily movement!" reasoned Makar inside his head, which knew how to think when his hands were not occupied.

Puzzled and saddened, Makar finally reached the house, the location of which the policeman had pointed out to him. This house turned out to be a free night lodginghouse where the poor class lay down its head during the night. Before, in pre-revolutionary days, the poor class simply lay down its head on the ground, and the rains fell on it, the moon shone over it, the stars passed, the winds blew, while the head lay, grew chill and slept, being tired. But nowadays the head of the poor class reclined on a pillow beneath a ceiling and the iron covering of a roof, and the night wind of nature no longer disturbed the hair on the head of the poor man who had once upon a time lain right on the surface of the terrestrial ball.

Makar saw several neat new houses and remained pleased with the soviet authority.

"Not a bad power!" appraised Makar. "Only it must not get out of hand, because it is ours!"

There was an office in the night lodginghouse, as there was in every Moscow residential house. Without an office, apparently, the end of the world would set in at once, while the office clerks gave a slow but accurate rhythm to the life process. Makar had a respect even for clerks.

"Let them live!" decided Makar on the subject of clerks. "They must be doing some sort of thinking since they get a salary, and since they are thinking because of duty, they will probably become intelligent people, and those are the kind of people we need!"

"What do you want?" the lodginghouse

official asked Makar.

"I need the proletariat," Makar informed him.

"Which layer?" the official inquired.

Makar did not start to ponder, — he already knew what he wanted.

"The lower," said Makar. "The lower level is the thickest, it has more people; that's where the real mass is!"

"Aha!" understood the official. "In that case you have to wait for the evening: you'll go spend the night with the largest

bunch that comes — that will be either the seasonal workers..."

"I'd like to go with the ones who are building socialism itself," pleaded Makar.

**"Aha!" said the official, again understanding.
"Then you want the ones who are building
the new buildings?"**

But this time Makar grew doubtful.

**"Why, before, when there wasn't any Lenin,
they used to build buildings too. What kind of
socialism is there in an empty building?"**

**The official also grew thoughtful, all the more
because he himself did not know for certain in
what guise socialism should appear, — would
an amazing joy come with socialism, and
what would it be like?**

**"They did build buildings before," the official
conceded. "Only then scoundrels used to live
in them, while now I am giving you a coupon
for spending the night in a new building."**

**"Right," Makar agreed happily. "That means
you're a true helper of the soviet power."**

Makar took the coupon and sat down on a heap of bricks which had been left over from some construction job and lay homeless.

"And look here..." Makar reasoned, "there's this brick lying under me, it was the proletariat who made this same brick and labored hard over it — soviet rule is too limited if it can't watch its own property!"

Makar sat on the bricks until evening and watched things happening in sequence: the sun fading away, the lights coming on, the sparrows abandoning the manure pile and going to their rest.

Finally the proletarians began appearing: some with bread, others without it, some sick, some tired, but all nice-looking from long toil and kind with that kindness which comes from extreme weariness.

Makar waited until the proletariat had made

itself comfortable on the government cots and had a chance to catch its breath after the day's construction work. Then Makar walked boldly into the sleeping hall, and taking a position in the middle of the floor, announced, "Comrade laboring workers! You are living here in our own city of Moscow, amid the very central force of the State, but meanwhile you have disorder and waste of valuable material going on here..."

The proletariat stirred on its cots.

"Mitry!" said someone's broad voice hoarsely. "Give that guy a bit of a shove to make him normal..."

Makar was not offended, because it was the proletariat and not some hostile force that lay before him.

"Not everything has been invented here yet,"

Makar went on. "Milk cans are being transported in valuable train-cars when the cans are empty, when the milk has already been drunk. For this a pipe and a piston pump would have been enough... The same goes for building houses and barns — they should be cast whole by means of a hose, and you build them bit by bit... I've thought up this hose and I'm giving it to you free so that socialism and other good arrangements might come about sooner..."

"What hose?" uttered the same hoarse voice of the unseen proletarian.

"My own hose," affirmed Makar.

The proletariat was silent at first but then someone's clear voice cried out certain words from the far corner and Makar heard them like the wind, "It isn't force that matters to us — we'll build buildings the hard way, so what, it's the soul which we care about. If

you're a man, the important thing is heart, not buildings. All of us here work on accounts, we conserve labor, we belong to trade unions, we have recreation in clubs, but we pay no attention to each other — we do not take care of each other — we've left that up to the law... If you're an inventor, why don't you make some invention for the soul?"

Makar's spirits fell at once. He had invented all kinds of things, but had never touched upon the soul, and now it appeared that this was the most necessary invention of all for the people who lived here. Makar lay down on a government bunk and grew still from doubt that all his life had been spent on nonproletarian work.

Makar did not sleep long, because in his sleep he began feeling tormented. And then his torment turned into a dream: he dreamed of a mountain or a height on which there stood a scientific man. Meanwhile, Makar lay at the

foot of that mountain like a drowsy fool and stared at the scientific man, waiting for either a word or a deed from him. But that man stood motionless and silent, not seeing the grief-stricken Makar and thinking only about the overall scheme, not about the individual man Makar. The face of the most learned man was illuminated by the glow of a distant

life for the masses which was spread out far before him, and his eyes were horrible and dead from standing on the elevation and staring too far into the distance. The scientific man remained silent while Makar lay in his sleep and grieved.

"What must I do in life to be useful both to myself and to others?" asked Makar, and grew still from horror.

The scientific man was as mute and unresponsive as before and millions of living

fates were reflected in his dead eyes.

Then in astonishment Makar began crawling up the slope over the dead stony ground. Three times fear before the motionlessly-scientific one seized him and three times the fear was conquered by curiosity. If Makar had been an intelligent man, he would not have gone clambering up that slope, but he was a backward person, having only a pair of inquisitive hands beneath an imponderable head. Thus by the force of his inquisitive foolishness Makar climbed all the way up to the highly educated one and lightly touched his obese, enormous body. Under his touch the strange body stirred as if it were alive, and then at once fell down on Makar, because it was dead.

Makar woke up from a blow and saw the lodginghouse overseer standing over him and touching him on the head with a kettle to wake him up.

Makar sat up on his cot and saw a pock-marked proletarian washing himself out of a saucer without letting a single drop of water go to waste. Makar was surprised at this method of washing oneself thoroughly with a handful of water and asked the pockmarked one, "Everyone has left for work — how is it you're standing there alone and washing yourself?"

The pitted one rubbed his wet face in the pillow, dried off, and replied, "There are lots of proletarians who work, but only a few of those who think — I have assigned myself to think for everyone. Did you understand what I said, or are you silent from being stupid and oppressed?"

"From being sad and doubtful," answered Makar.

"Aha, in that case let's go: come with me and we'll think for everyone's sake," declared the

pitted one, figuring it all out.

And Makar got up to accompany the pock-marked man, whose name was Peter, in order to find his vocation.

Toward Makar and Peter walked a great variety of women, dressed in tight clothing, which indicated that the women would prefer to be naked: there were also men, but they used a more

comfortable covering for their bodies. Great thousands of other men and women, careful of their flesh, were riding in cars and carriages, and also in barely budging tram-cars which squeaked from the live human weight, but suffered patiently. Both the riding and the walking people were pressing urgently forward with scientific expressions on their faces, which made them basically similar to that gigantic and powerful man

whom Makar had contemplated from afar in his dream. As a result of observing exclusively scientific and literate individuals, Makar experienced a sinking in his inner feelings. He glanced at Peter for help; what if Peter too was only a scientific man with his gaze set into the distance?

"I bet you know all the sciences and you see everything too far ahead?" asked Makar timidly.

Peter concentrated his consciousness.

"Me? I strain myself to be something like Ilych — Lenin: I look far and near and wide and deep and high."

"Oh, yes, that's it!" said Makar, relieved.

"Because the other day I saw a huge scientific man: he doesn't look anywhere except far off while next to him — about two yards away — one individual person is lying and suffering

without help."

"No wonder!" uttered Peter intellectually.

"That man stands on a slope, that's why it seems to him that everything is far off and not a damn thing close by! While at the same time another man looks only beneath his feet, scared of stubbing his toes on a lump and killing himself and considering himself righteous, while the masses are not interested in living at a slow pace. We're not afraid of lumpy ground, brother!"

"Our people are pretty well shod nowadays!" confirmed Makar.

But Peter continued with his own thoughts, refusing to be distracted by anything.

"Have you ever seen the Communist Party?"

"No, Comrade Peter, nobody's ever shown it to me! I've seen Comrade Chumovoi in the

village, though!"

"We've got a full collection of Chumovoi's kind here as well. No, I'm telling you about the pure Party, which looks clear and straight, right into the heart of things. When I find myself at a meeting of the Party, I always feel like a fool."

"Why so, Comrade Peter? You look almost like a scientific man yourself."

"It's because my mind eats up my body. I want food, and

the Party says, 'Let's build some factories first, because bread grows poorly without iron.' Do you understand me, what this is all about?!"

"I understand," replied Makar.

Those who build machines and factories — he understood them at once just as if he were a scientist. Makar had observed clay-and-straw villages from the day of his birth and had no faith whatsoever in their future without fiery engines.

"See then," announced Peter. "And you say you didn't like that man the other day! We don't like him either, the Party and I: he was created by stupid capitalism, and we're pushing suchlike and similar persons gradually down the slope!"

"I feel something too, only I don't know what it is!" said Makar, expressing himself.

"Well, since you don't know what it is, then follow my directions in life; otherwise you're sure to take a nose dive off the narrow line."

Makar let his gaze wander, and watching the Moscow people, thought, "The people here

are well-fed; they all have clean, neat faces, they live in plenty — by rights they ought to be multiplying, and yet there don't seem to be many children about."

Makar mentioned this to Peter.

"Over here, instead of nature they have culture," explained Peter. "Here people live in families without multiplying, here they eat without producing labor..."

"How is that?" said Makar in surprise.

"Just like that," the knowledgeable Peter told him. "Sometimes a man will write out a single thought on a certificate-paper, and for that he and his entire family get fed for a whole year and a half... And someone else doesn't even write anything, just exists as an example for others."

Makar and Peter walked about until evening;

they inspected the Moscow River, the streets, the textile stores, and a desire to eat grew in them.

"Let's have dinner at the police station," said Peter.

Makar went along; he figured that one gets fed at police stations.

"I'll do the talking while you keep quiet and act somewhat pained," said Peter, warning Makar beforehand.

At the station there were burglars, vagrants, peoplebeasts, and nameless miserable persons. Facing them all sat an officer on

duty and received people squarely head-on. Some of them he sent to the jailhouse, some of them to the hospital, and others he rejected and sent away.

When it was Peter and Makar's turn, Peter said, "Comrade superior, I've caught you a loony on the street and brought him here by the hand."

"What kind of a loony is he?" inquired the officer on duty. "What has he disrupted in a public place?"

"Nothing," said Peter candidly, "he's just walking around agitatedly, but then one day he'll go and kill somebody. The bringing him to law won't be much use... Prevention is the best method of combatting criminal activity. So here I have prevented a crime."

"That makes sense!" agreed the officer. "I'll refer him to the psychopathic institute for a general examination...."

The policeman wrote out the certificate and grew depressed, "But there's nobody to take you there — all the men are out..."

**"Let me lead him there," suggested Peter.
"I'm a normal man myself, it's he who is the loony one."**

"Get going!" said the policeman, cheering up, and handed the piece of paper to Peter.

Peter and Makar got to the institute for the mentally ill in an hour's time. Peter said that he was assigned by the police to accompany a dangerous fool and could not leave him for a single moment, and that the fool had not had anything to eat and would turn violent any minute.

"Go to the kitchen, they'll give you something to eat there," the kind caretaker-nurse directed them.

"He eats a lot," Peter demurred. "He needs a pot of cabbage soup and two bowls of mush. Better have it brought over here, or he might belch into the common cauldron."

The nurse gave official instructions. A triple serving of tasty food was brought for Makar, and Peter had his fill along with Makar.

In a short while a doctor received Makar and began questioning him about such circumspect ideas that Makar, having led an ignorant life, answered the doctor's questions like a madman. At that the doctor examined and found that there was surplus blood swelling in his heart.

"We'll have to keep him here for a check-up," decided the doctor.

So Makar and Peter remained in the mental hospital for the night. In the evening they went to the reading room and Peter began reading Lenin's books aloud to Makar, "Our administrative offices are crap," read Peter from the works of Lenin, while Makar listened, amazed at the accuracy of Lenin's

mind. "Our laws are crap. We're good at giving instructions, but bad at carrying them out. In our administrative offices are people who are hostile to us, while some of our comrades have turned into pompous courtiers and are doing their work like nincompoops..."

The other mentally disturbed persons also listened avidly to Lenin — they had not known until then that Lenin knew everything.

"That's right!" assented the workers and peasants whose souls were sick.

"We must have more workers and peasants in our institutions," the pock-marked Peter read on. "Socialism must be built by the hands of the man from the masses, not by the bureaucratic pieces of paper issued by our administrative offices. And I do not lose hope that one day we shall be most deservedly hanged for all this..."

"You see?" said Peter to Makar.

"Bureaucratic institutions could tire out even Lenin, and all we do is walk and lie around. Here's the whole Revolution for you written down live... I am going to steal this book from here, because this is an institution, and tomorrow you and I will go to any office and say that we are workers and peasants. You and I will sit down in some administrative office and start thinking for the good of the nation."

After reading this Makar and Peter lay down to sleep, so as to rest from the cares of the day in the madhouse. Especially since on the morrow they were both supposed to go and struggle for the cause of Lenin and all the poor people.

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Peter knew just the place to go: the RKI, where they like plaintiffs and all kinds of

oppressed people. Opening the first door in the top corridor of the RKI building they saw an absence of people. Over the second door hung a curt poster: "Who's stronger?" — and Peter and Makar went inside. There was no one in the room except Comrade Lev Chumovoi, who was sitting there and administrating something or other, having abandoned his

village to the mercy of poverty.

Makar did not get scared of Chumovoi and said to Peter, "Well, since it's said 'Who's stronger?', let's show him..."

"No," said the experienced Peter, rejecting this idea, "we have a government here, not a free-for-all. Let's go further up."

Further up they were received because there was a great thirst for people and for genuine

laboring-class intelligence there.

"We are members of the working class," Peter said to the highest official. "We have an accumulation of brains, give us power over the oppressive bureaucratic bastards."

"Take it. It is yours," said the high official and gave the power into their hands.

From then on Makar and Peter sat at desks across from Lev Chumovoi and began talking to the poor people who came there and decided all the cases in their heads —on the basis of sympathy for the poor. Soon people stopped coming to Makar's and Peter's office because their way of thinking was so simple that the poor themselves were able to think and decide the same way, and so the working people began thinking for themselves in their own apartments.

Lev Chumovoi was left alone in the office,

since no one recalled him by means of a written notice. And he remained there until the time when a commission was appointed for the liquidation of the State. Comrade Chumovoi worked in this commission for forty-four years and died in the midst of oblivion and official affairs, those with which his precious administrative mentality had been invested.

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Alexey A. Kiselev

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