When the Gods Are Silent

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MIKHAIL SOLOVIEV

TRANSLATED BY HARRY C. STEVENS

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I Storm over the Steppes



1. The Surov Family

STEPPE, immeasurable steppe. Sunburned earth plumed with feather grass. Only the lofty burial mounds recall its past, and the old songs and legends tell of the wild scurry of horses, the dread thunder of steppe battles, and of all the centuries that have passed over its surface.

The centuries have faded into oblivion, the Scythians have died out; but the steppe remains and lives its own, distinctive life. The widely scattered villages raise their church cupolas to the sky; plaintive songs are sung at the foot of the burial mounds; in these places new legends are being born.

In the very heart of the steppe is a large village. An ordinary Russian village; broad streets overgrown with grass, low houses thatched with straw. During the early years of this century one old house, standing in a side alley, was owned by Timothy Surov, a heavily built, stocky man, his face covered right to the eyes with a mighty beard. He had a large family. His wife, Vera Ivanovna, a tall woman with a shy look, had brought eighteen children into the world. Seven of them had died, but the oldest living child, Jacob, was already in his thirties. The peasants thought it unseemly for a woman to have a child after she was forty, but was it Vera Ivanovna's fault that God did not forget her and sent her infant after infant? She felt ashamed in front of her children and all the world; but now, at the age of fifty, she was carrying yet again.

Her pregnancy was almost unnoticeable; she concealed her swollen belly beneath her ample skirts. To the last day she was active in the house and worked in the yard. And when, one hot summer day, her time came, she slipped into the shed in the far corner of the yard. Before long the sound of a squawling infant came from the shed.

The family's reactions were mixed. The older sons frowned and exchanged disagreeable glances. They went into the shed and surrounded their mother with a solid wall. But she lay still on the straw, afraid to look at them. She cuddled the newborn child close to her, and quietly, guiltily, said, "Let people laugh. God knows what is ordained."

"God knows all right, but you might have kept away from it," the oldest son, Jacob, flung at her moodily. "Half a century, and still dropping...."

"Well, am I to blame?" In her tone there was so much entreaty and appeal for sympathy that the sons looked at one another, embarrassed. "We don't mind your having another, Mamma. Go on till you've had a couple of dozen. We're only thinking of the way folk will laugh."

Timothy Surov did not go to see his youngest son until late in the afternoon. He went up to his wife, bent over her, and tickled her cheeks with his beard. His face wrinkled into dozens of good-natured furrows as he glanced at the baby. He stroked his wife gently on the head.

"So we've brought another squawker into the world, Vera. God doesn't forget us in His mercy."

She gave him a grateful look. "Our sons are angry," she said quietly. "I'm an old woman, and I'm still bearing. I prayed to Saint Mark to keep me from child, but my prayer didn't reach him."

"In this matter our sons are not the law," Surov said angrily. "God knows better than us. We'll call this one Mark. We haven't had a Mark before, have we?"

In the evening Vera Ivanovna walked slowly across the yard, carrying a bundle that yelled desperately. The nineteenth child took up residence in the house.

It was an old house; it had seen many things in its time. It stood with one wall leaning against the byre, behind which extended the garden. It turned its dim little windows to the dusty village street and drew its straw thatch, riddled with mice, black with age, down over the panes. In the course of time it had sunk a little to one side, and the earth had risen round its base; but it stood firmly, as if determined to remain for many a century yet. Like many others, it was divided into two parts, of which one was the kitchen and living room for most of the family, while the other accommodated the rest of the household. A good half of the kitchen was occupied by the great stove.

The cradle slung from the ceiling swung regularly, like a pendulum marking the infinity of time; sometimes a cry and infant weeping came from the cradle, sometimes a contented murmur. Later the cradle was taken down, and the child went for its first painful crawl about the house. When Mark scrambled up onto his two feet, the

world was at once enlarged about him. The most prominent feature of this world was a big and funny man with a beard, which was very good to cling to. His mother had long been part of his world, but now that he stood erect, his father played more and more a part in it. Then there were others, many others, every one like the other. All of them round of face, sunburned; and they all pleasantly tickled him or threw him up in the air, up to the ceiling that was the uppermost limit of his world.

He was better acquainted with the women's faces that came within his range of vision. Especially one, with flying pigtails. That was his sister Tatiana, five years old; she often pulled up his little shirt in all seriousness, to slap him. His other sister, Olga, did not take much notice of him, and he did not know her so well.

By the time he could journey boldly from one part of the house to the other, he knew that the family consisted of his father, mother, nine brothers, and two sisters. So only twelve were left of the nineteen children. His brother Jacob, black-haired and gaunt, had a face overgrown with beard like his father, and, like his father, was gloomy and taciturn. His brother Sergei had whiskers, and was silent and smiling. The two without beard or whiskers were Simon and Dmitri. Unlike their elder brothers, they talked a lot; and Mark couldn't help feeling that they argued and made a lot of noise. When he grew a little older, he noticed that Simon always won the argument. But that was only to be expected—he was the most educated member of the family and had spent three complete years at school, whereas Dmitri had an inborn dislike of all instruction.

Among all his brothers Mark picked out Kornei. Kornei was about sixteen, the age when the village youngsters are thinking of getting married. But whenever that question came up his mother waved her hand hopelessly.

"Who's going to marry a pest?"

Mark had no idea what a pest was, but he felt insulted for Kornei, of whom he was very fond. He especially liked his eyes, which were different from all the other eyes Mark had ever seen. He did not know that those eyes reflected the great troubles that Kornei brought on the family; they were mischievous and bold, and expressed his constant readiness for a fight. And his father beat Kornei almost to death to punish him for his wild fights with other boys.

There was little to be said about the three middle sons, Gregory,

Philip, and Taras. All three tried to behave as if they were older, and all three dreamed of the day when they would be able to grow beards. And then there were the youngest children: Ivan, Tatiana, and Olga. Ivan was only two years older than Mark.

There was another branch of the family also living in that house. Simon was married and had a seven-year-old son named Peter. When Vera Ivanovna first brought Mark into the house and put him in the cradle, Simon led his son up to the cradle and said to him:

"Peter, have a look at your uncle."

"Where's my uncle?"

"Why, here in the cradle."

"But how can he be my uncle when he's in a cradle?" the boy protested. And he pushed the teat angrily into his uncle's mouth.

Jacob had been married, too, but his wife had died two years after the wedding, and he had preferred to remain a widower. Sergei and Dmitri should have been married long since, but somehow they had got past marriageable age; Sergei was twenty-nine, and Dmitri twenty-four. It was rumored that Sergei was responsible for Natalia Somova leaving her husband and going back to her parents, who lived in another village. It was rather more than rumor that he frequently visited her village. Dmitri had a girl friend, but he kept it a dead secret.

The inhabitants of the village could be divided into two approximately equal parts: the peasants who were already beggared, and those who were on their way to beggary. And then there were those who had grown rich, the new masters, who in times of famine bought other peasants' land from them, and then rented it back to them.

Timothy Surov was in the first category. Many years before Mark's birth he had owned cattle, horses, and land; but gradually he had lost it all, till only the old house was left. Several successive crop failures had reduced the family to a poverty that he found impossible to overcome. Moody, taciturn, he worked without respite; he had unusual physical strength, and labored hard enough for three men. But life was even stronger, and that he could not subdue.

So he had gone off to work in the local town and had got a job on the railway. His native wit, his industry, and the humility that life had instilled in him won the notice of his superiors, and within a year he was a stoker. But the blood of centuries of husbandmen flowed in his veins, and he was drawn to the soil, to all the joys and sorrows of the hard peasant existence. For ten years he saved kopeck by kopeck, in order to redeem the land he had sold. And he would have redeemed it, but for 1905.

The wave of strikes and armed revolt that swept over Russia during that year did not pass by the town in which Timothy Surov was working. Revolutionary agitators held meetings in the railway depot, calling on the workers to fight the czarist autocracy. After listening to one speaker, Surov pressed right up to the locomotive from which the man had been orating.

"But how about the land?" Timothy asked.

"The land has got to be handed over to the peasants. We shall take it from the landowners and the wealthy class."

That was good enough. At the head of the procession that marched through the town that day strode Timothy Surov. In his hands he bore a red placard with the words:

"The land to the peasants!"

The demonstrators clashed with the police. Surov was beaten up, arrested, and sent back to his village, with a court order that he was not to leave it.

After that he lived the ordinary life of the poor peasant: he hired himself out to the local landowner, or took any work offered him, in order to keep out the specter of famine that was always at the door.

He was fond of his family, and sincerely attached to his wife. Only she has too many children, he thought sometimes. It was nothing for peasants to beat their wives, it rather relieved the monotony of their life. Surov, too, sometimes used his fists on his wife, but only when he had been seeking relief from his troubles in the tavern and had come home fuddled with cheap vodka. Then he would look around his numerous family and tell his wife:

"You've brought a fine litter of brats into the world, but there's nothing to feed them on." She would not answer, and, irritated at her silence, he would go heavily up to her. "Ah, you're fertile enough, you old—"

The children knew that these words were always followed by a blow. They raised a desperate howl. The littlest ones rushed up to him and hung on his arms and legs. He struggled like a bear beset by dogs, roaring and dealing blows that sent the children flying

against the wall. At the noise the older brothers came in, took their father by the arms, and led him outside.

He would not be seen in the house for several days. His wife took his food out to the shed, and there they had long talks. Reconciliation always took place on the first Sunday after the scene. Father and mother went off to church, and did not return till dinnertime. As he came in, Surov looked at his children through half-closed eyes and said with some embarrassment:

"Well, you mother's children, forgive your father; and when you grow up, don't drink vodka. It's the source of all evil, damn it!"

By the time Mark reached the critical age when his trousers were made without the humiliating slit in the seat, the family's position had improved a little. The seven older sons were all working.

In the Surovs' village, every Sunday there was a battle. One part of the village fought the other part. The fight was bitter, and frequently there were fatalities. But it was all ordained by unwritten peasant law, and no one imagined that a Sunday could pass without the battle for the bridge. In the middle of the village was a pond that divided it roughly into two equal parts. Across the pond ran a wooden bridge. Long before the day came, Mark dreamed of the time when he would be allowed to run onto the bridge and strut across it, throwing out his chest and casting independent glances at the other side, where a horde of children was gathered. But that could only be when he was deemed old enough to take part in the fun.

It was a fine summer morning when, at last, the older lads of his street gave him permission. Grownups were gathering at each end of the bridge, standing about in groups, husking and chewing sunflower seeds, and laughing. The bridge was empty; no one could bring himself to be the first to step on it. The two crowds of boys, dressed in cotton shirts of various colors, hurled defiance at each other across the pond.

"You just try putting your foot on the bridge; we'll give you a bath!"

In answer, a stone came flying from the other side. There was a cry of pain.

"Chucking stones, are you!" the leader of Mark's band roared, and the horde of urchins rushed onto the bridge. The others tore from the other side, and the two groups met in the center.

Burning with ardor, Mark ran over the planks. He suddenly felt ablaze with hatred for those who had dared to step on the bridge from the farther side, and he did not hear the warning shout from the bank:

"Hi, you flea, come back or you'll be crushed!"

In any case it was too late; the fight had begun. Some snub-nosed lad in his teens gave Mark a blow on the ear, sending him staggering. Sobbing and not bothering to wipe away his tears, he dug his fingers into his opponent's hair, and they both went rolling over the planks. The older boy was the stronger; he seated himself across Mark's body and was about to start pummeling, but another lad pushed him off. "No hitting when he's down!" Sobbing with excitement, Mark sprang up again, but the same lad's heavy fist sent him to the boards. At last he managed to keep his feet. Crying with shame, he flung himself at his enemy, beating him in the face, the chest, scratching, and even biting, which was strictly forbidden. His heart beat with joy when the other boy covered his face and lay down on the bridge to get a breather. Mark was looking about him triumphantly for a new victim when the shout arose:

"Beat it, you kids!"

The boys fled back, passing the grown-up men who were striding onto the bridge, rolling up their sleeves as they went. Among them was Kornei, but he swaggered along with his hands in his pockets. His father was standing on the bank, behaving as if completely unconcerned. But he was not there as an impartial observer. For two decades and more he had had the fame of being the best fighter in all the village. He and several others, almost as famous, regularly came in at the close of the battle for the bridge. Because of their strength they were not allowed to take part in the ordinary fighting; they could fight only their equals.

However, it was a long way yet to the kill. The lads were only the advance guard of a series of fights. Mark stood watching his brother Kornei fighting two at once. Kornei dropped to his knees. Mark's heart beat anxiously. If his brother lay down, he would have to lie still to the end; such was the law. "Hold on, Kornei!" his father shouted menacingly. "Hold on, Kornei!" Mark squealed. Kornei rose to his feet. His face was bathed in blood, his fists were covered with blood, his own and others'. He flung himself on his opponents and sent one of them flying. The second at once fell back on him,

but Kornei thrust him up against the handrail and pushed him over into the pond, whence he emerged streaming with duckweed and slime.

Now at last it was the turn of the killers—six to each side. All of them men of mature years, all with beards, all with the reputation of first-class fighters. Timothy walked onto the bridge, calmly stroking his beard and staring at the enemy. All the other fighters had cleared off the bridge, and only the heavy, hollow tread of the twelve men sounded menacingly.

The fight was begun and over almost in no time. They stood in two ranks facing each other. They shook hands, drew on gloves. They aimed only at the chest; the belly and the face were forbidden. Even so, broken ribs were frequent. As Mark watched, he saw his father raise his particular opponent up from the planks. The fight was over, for as soon as one man was felled, all his side had lost.

Late in the afternoon Timothy Surov went over to the other side of the pond to visit the man he had knocked down. This, too, was an immemorial tradition, a safeguard against the hatred that might otherwise have developed. Fighting on opposite sides did not prevent the older men from being good neighbors. But the old tradition was dying out, for the younger men frequently carried the fight on from the bridge into the streets. And, as Kornei was one of the chief instigators of those endless street brawls, his father often thrashed him.

Old Surov did not realize that these fights were a necessity of Kornei's being. His youthful pride could not reconcile itself to the contempt shown for the poor peasants of the village. He had the feeling, and maybe he was right, that even the girls eyed him with contempt because his family was poor. So he went from fight to fight, vaunting his supremacy in that at least. Gradually he became the terror of the village, everybody called him the "pest," and he was even rather proud of it.

Nineteen fourteen arrived.

One morning, when he woke up, Mark had the feeling that there had been a sudden and complete change in the house. It was unusually quiet. His mother was standing dejectedly at the window. Ivan nudged Mark and whispered:

"Jacob, Dmitri, Kornei, Sergei, and Simon have gone off with Father to the war."

Mark had got it into his head that this war with the Germans that the older ones had been talking about was to take place on the bridge. He jumped down from the bunk on the stove where the younger children slept, and darted outside. He stood listening, but he couldn't hear any sound of fighting. They can't have arrived yet! he thought.

His father and brothers did not return till the late afternoon. They poured into the house, unpleasantly excited, and they seemed to avoid looking at their mother. But Timothy went over to her and told her in a strange, unusual tone:

"Well, you ought to be pleased, Mother! Your goods are of the finest quality! They've taken the lot!"

She put her apron to her eyes, and her shoulders shook convulsively. "A woman must weep, they say," Timothy said in a deep tone, and went out hurriedly.

Night came on. For the last time the old house wrapped all the Surov family in its cozy warmth. The father and mother were very late in getting to bed. Vera Ivanovna baked pasties for her sons and cut up hunks of lard. Sighing heavily and taking sidelong glances at her, Timothy packed the food into the linen bags she had made. Four of the brothers were sleeping on a pile of straw in one corner; Simon slept with his wife, behind the partition. The house was filled with the restless breathing of the sleepers, the heavy tread of the parents. Late in the night Mark awoke from a troubled dream of dragons and fights and heard his mother quietly groaning and weeping. Women must weep, he thought, imitating his father. He wanted to speak to her in the deep voice he had heard his father use, but only a thin squeal came. No longer able to choke down the moist lump that would keep rising in his throat, he cried out through his tears:

"Mamma!"

She hurried over to him. But Kornei sprang up from the straw and reached Mark before her. He took the boy in his arms and laid him down beside himself on the straw. The last thing Mark saw as he dropped off was the vague, glimmering white of the canvas bags on the bench by the wall. Five of them in a row.

The old house grew quiet and glum; it seemed to grow still older. Only when letters arrived from the brothers was there the old animation for a brief while. They had all been sent right up to the front

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lines. Their letters said little. As was the old custom, they always began with greetings to all their relations and acquaintances, and no one must be omitted, for fear of giving offense. As the Surovs had a large number of relations and acquaintances, the greetings took up the whole of the letter, and only at the end did the writer mention that he was still alive, fighting at the front, and smashing the Germans.

Kornei never wrote. He was almost illiterate, and later admitted that he found it easier to volunteer for a raid on the German trenches than to write a letter. But one day news arrived from him, too. In addition to the usual greetings and bows "from the white face to the damp ground," the letter informed his parents that he was wounded and in a hospital, had been made a noncommissioned officer for his bravery, and had been awarded the Cross of St. George. That day the Surovs did not know whether to rejoice or lament. The mother sorrowed because her son was wounded and might die; the father reasoned that he could not be badly wounded, otherwise he would not write; and the main thing was that he'd been decorated and promoted. That gave old Timothy reason to show off in the village, and he didn't get such opportunities very often.

One day an unexpected blow fell. Surov was summoned to the local authorities' office, where the secretary informed him that his son Jacob had perished at the front "for the faith, the Czar, and the fatherland." He returned home carrying the official notification in hands extended before him, as if afraid to let it come too close.

Now everything went in accordance with the saying, "Troubles never come singly." A little later Timothy Surov was summoned to the office again. This time it was Sergei who had perished in some place called the Carpathians. Then the old man was summoned yet a third time. The official document informed him that Simon had distinguished himself in battle and had suffered for the Czar and the fatherland: he had lost an arm.

Vera Ivanovna was bathed in tears and sunk in hopeless grief; Timothy went about the village with a brow like a storm cloud. Barbara, Simon's wife, was loud in her lamentations; she had lost her only son quite recently, and now there was this terrible news: her husband had lost an arm.

For a long time the family lived in expectation that Simon would return home; but he did not come. After his discharge from the hospital he disappeared somewhere on the way back, stopping off at one of the large cities. Possibly he didn't want to be an additional burden on his father.

The thunders of war sounded a long way off, but their echoes reached the village. More and more requiem masses were said in the church for fallen sons and fathers; more and more men were sent off to the front.

The peasants, illiterate and under the thumb of life, found it difficult to make sense of what was happening. And now this rumor of revolution. For ages they had lived in the tradition of devotion to the Czar, the anointed of God. But now the war was beginning to have stronger repercussions on the people at home. The peasants were bearing all the intolerable burden of the war, and they had no greater desire than to see its end.

At the front and in the towns there was ferment. Gradually the ferment spread to the villages. Strange stories circulated of risings in various places; the army was refusing to fight. One word, "revolution," was on everybody's lips.



2. Revolution

THE old house suddenly came to life again. One day, as Mark was sitting on the wall enclosing the yard from the street, a light britska, drawn by two dock-tailed horses, halted at the gate. It was wintertime, not the usual steppe winter, but damp and muddy. There was no frost, little snow, and the earth was turned into black porridge. As he sat on the wall, Mark was thinking despondently of his chances of sleighing down the hills.

The britska was piled high with articles, and on the top of them a man in a soldier's greatcoat was sitting with a rifle across his knees. The man confidently turned his horses toward the Surovs' gate. Catching sight of Mark, he stared at him, his mouth gaping. Then he jumped down and strode up to the wall. Baring his white teeth, he jokingly waved his knout.

"Why, don't you know me, Mark?"

Mark squealed with surprise as he recognized his brother Kornei. He threw himself down into the yard and dashed into the house.

"Kornei has come home. And he's got a gun!" he shouted to his mother.

Everybody hurried to the gates; but Kornei had already opened them and was leading in the horses. His mother hung round his neck; his father gravely walked up and scrutinized him. Kissing and laughing, Kornei was passed from hand to hand.

"But wait a bit," he exclaimed. "Save some for Dmitri. He's come with me."

Bothersome times now arrived for Mark. All because Kornei had brought back from the front not only a rifle but a machine gun. Mark had to guard the weapons. He took turns on guard with his brother Ivan, but in his heart of hearts he didn't trust Ivan.

The front-line men who had returned with Kornei removed the articles from the britska; the horses were led away. But the machine gun was put in the Surovs' shed, its short muzzle turned to the wall. Really, it was very difficult for Mark. He would sit for a few moments beside the machine gun, imagining how Kornei had shot down the Germans; then he would run to the house, in order to miss as little as possible of his elder brothers' stories.

Kornei, who was dressed in imperial hussar uniform, had changed greatly. Now he had the self-confidence that formerly was lacking. The very first evening after his return he made a kind of speech outlining a program. From his words Mark gathered that the Czar was finished forever, there was to be no more fighting, and the people themselves would be governing Russia. And he said a lot about the land, which was to be handed over to the peasants.

A few days later Simon turned up, too. He had spent a couple of years in Moscow, and now he was a Bolshevik. The Surov house became a meeting place for the front-line men. At these meetings Simon silently smoked a pipe, but his mind was working arduously. No one knew what ought to be done next, or how to organize the new life. The men shouted till they were hoarse, they cursed and swore, but they never reached any decision. Simon knew what to do just as little as the rest, though he had come from Moscow. They all saw that the land must belong to the peasants. But how was that to be achieved, when there had been no change of authority in the village: the same head was in charge of the district administration, the

peasants were waiting for orders from some new authority, and showed no sign of doing anything themselves to change the manner of their lives?

This was in the spring of 1917. It was an unusually fine and mild season with many brilliantly sunny days, when the scents of the spring and the azure of the sky, the warm winds flowing round the burial mounds and over the steppe, and the first flush of the grass were all blended into harmony. And on one such day the high stone wall surrounding the Surovs' house and yard was plastered with children. They sat like young daws in a row, bawling, arguing, sometimes scrapping. Not for anything in the world would they have abandoned that wall and renounced their chance of watching what was going on.

For in the Surovs' yard a village revolution was taking place.

Mark was on the wall, too, kicking his feet. "They're going to choose a government. Everything belongs to the people now," he told his companions. In all the glory of his ten years he felt almost grown-up, and he was a little condescending to the others. After all, his father and brothers were playing a big part in these events. Mark, too, was on the side of the revolution, but his elders seemed to ignore this fact; that was very insulting and ruined his prestige among his friends. At this very moment a black-eyed, big-headed lad from the next street, the sleeves of his father's jacket hanging round his shoulders, was declaring:

"Mark, you're a liar. I've just seen the village head, and he's still got the plate on his chest. And if he's got the plate, then he's still got the authority. But you say—"

Mark could think up no argument against the plate—the large, flat metal disk that was the badge of authority—so he angrily pushed the black-eyed lad off the wall.

"It's not your wall, you keep off!" he yelled.

The other lad knew Mark would never let him climb back, and so he wouldn't see anything of what happened in the yard. He called up miserably:

"Let me get back, Mark! I won't any more!"

"Do you recognize the new government?" Mark demanded.

[&]quot;Yes."

[&]quot;Cross yourself!"

The lad crossed himself; then, clinging to Mark's hand, he scrambled back to his place.

The yard was filling more and more with peasants. All the front-line men were already there, with their rifles, and in their military greatcoats. Peasants from near and far streets were arriving. The word revolution was on all lips, but apparently no one knew exactly what it meant, or what steps should be taken to apply it. The men looked hopefully at the front-line men who had started all this revolution business. They should know how to get on with it. But, despite their shouting and swearing, it seemed doubtful whether even these makers of the revolution knew what to do.

Yet something had to be done. The front-line men drew a light cart into the middle of the yard, and one-armed Simon scrambled onto it. He stood on this improvised platform, talking about the revolution in the towns. He read out a proclamation issued by the city soviet. It declared that power had to be taken into their own hands. But how to take it? Power wasn't something you could handle, so how could you take it into your hands? If someone resisted and refused to hand it over, that would make things different, everybody would know there'd have to be a fight. But in this village no one was resisting, and so somehow the revolution didn't come off.

After Simon, several front-line men spoke. The fieriest of them demanded that their revolution should be a real revolution, and not like the devil knew what. And that meant that someone or other had to be liquidated. But who? A gaunt soldier climbed onto the cart and declared that it was the harmful class that should be liquidated. And as in their village the harmful class was Nalimov, the landowner, and Gavrilo, the churchwarden, who had refused to let the front-line men have homemade vodka on credit, Nalimov and Gavrilo must be driven out. The rich peasants weren't to be touched, but they were to be loaded down with taxes.

"Brothers, while we were suffering at the front, the wealthy peasants were sitting at home, and Gavrilo was making hooch for them. The revolution should make everybody equal, blast them! So let them hand out three buckets of good liquor for the revolutionary front-line men!"

When the younger men had shouted themselves hoarse, the old men had their turn. One, with an apostolic beard and translucent blue eyes, fidgeted about on the cart for a long time before he could get his words out. He was a rich peasant named Frolov, who had come to the meeting with his two sons, both of them front-line men. Frolov had no doubt that the revolution was necessary, and he had come to give it a hand. Spreading out his beard over his chest, he began in a sonorous voice:

"Everything comes from God, and freedom is from Him, too. We must act in a godly manner, we mustn't offend anyone, and everybody should be allotted his place. My sons are standing here, and I agree to their making a revolution and any other good deed. But I shall withhold my fatherly blessing from any evil deed. . . . Of course it's quite possible to provide three buckets of vodka; I myself will be delighted to provide vodka for our front-line men, and not three, but five of the finest quality; only in a revolution that isn't the main thing. . . . "

He was not allowed to finish. At the news that he would provide all that quantity of vodka the front-line men dragged him off the cart and threw him up in the air. They threw him high, caught him in their hands, and sent him up again. Frolov's silvery beard went flying, and as he went up each time, he crossed himself, white with fear.

The children on the wall joined in the shouting. But they stopped suddenly as they saw a horseman riding up. The man dismounted at the gate, flung the rein over a post, and entered the yard.

"That's Joseph Apanasenko; he's a friend of our Kornei," Mark explained to the others. "They fought together; they killed thousands, perhaps millions of Germans."

The boy wearing his father's jacket wanted to call Mark a liar again; but he held his peace and only snorted indignantly.

The newcomer shook Kornei Surov's hand and asked for a drink of water. Tatiana brought him a mugful, and he jokingly pulled her pigtails. He was well known to the Surovs. Before the war he had worked as a laborer for the local landowner. He lived in a village some twenty miles away and had teamed up with Kornei at the front. They had served in the same regiment; both had received noncommissioned officer's stripes and the George Cross on the same day. And they had returned home together when the front began to disintegrate. Though almost illiterate, Apanasenko was naturally inquisitive and quick-witted and speedily distinguished himself.

Now, after taking a drink, he climbed onto the cart and, stumbling over his words, searching for language in which to convey his thoughts, he told the crowd that in his village the front-line men had already set up a soviet of deputies and taken the power into their own hands. He had come as a delegate to unite the two villages, so that they should work as one.

Now the method of making the revolution was revealed: the village must set up a soviet, which would be the local authority. And so they decided. Swiftly, with no great argument, they elected the soviet. One-armed Simon was made chairman. It proved much more difficult to choose a commander of the Red guard, which, it was decided, would unite all the front-line men in defense of the new authority, though no one knew as yet whom it was to be defended against. The front-line men wanted to make Kornei Surov the commander.

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"He distinguished himself at the front," they shouted. "You don't get three George Crosses just for nothing. He was wounded four times for the toiling people."

"He was wounded for the Czar!" others retorted. "How can we make him commander when he's so violent there's no holding him?"

A fight broke out on the wall, where the boys were split into two opposing groups. They tugged and pushed one another down. Mark and another boy sat astride the wall, industriously punching each other.

"Kornei has the machine gun," Mark roared. "He'll be the commander."

"He won't! He won't!" the other shouted almost tearfully. "He's a pest!"

The lads' quarrel began to disturb the meeting, and Kornei ran to the wall, waving his knout, and shouted:

"Shut up, kids!"

The knout played painfully about their backs and legs. The fighting stopped at once. Mark rubbed a crimson weal on his calf.

"I stick up for you and you wallop me like that!" he said reproachfully to his brother's retreating back.

The front-line men had their way: Kornei was chosen commander. But his father had to climb onto the cart and promise the village to keep an eye on his son.

"Don't you worry!" he said. "If he gets up to any tricks I'll tear his head off, the son of a bitch! D'you hear, Kornei? You see to it that everything's for the good of the people, and none of your temper!" He raised his powerful fist menacingly. There was a roar of laughter, though everybody knew that few could stand up against that fist. Kornei laughed, too, but not without anxiety.

Dressed in their fathers' boots, their mothers' jackets, and old, torn hats, the children ran in a noisy, whistling horde along the streets, some barefoot, some in trousers made from sacks, all in cotton shirts. Though spring had come, the air was still chilly, but even those with bare feet were ready to stand anything rather than go back home and miss the revolution. Behind the children came a slow procession, headed by a light cart, with the machine gun in it. The two horses were driven by a front-line man with a rifle between his knees. Kornei Surov was sitting behind the machine gun, his broad palm on the greenish barrel. The front-line men marched along behind in strict step, their rifles slung across their shoulders. Their fixed bayonets glittered coldly, their faces were stern, concentrated. After them flocked all the other participants in the revolution. Others poured out of the houses to join them, and the procession grew longer and longer. It marched into the village square. Everybody was bubbling with excitement, agitatedly shouting to one another.

They were going to set up the soviet authority.

The village head, a tall, spare, old man, had long been waiting for someone to take the authority from him. Ever since everything had been changed in the town and the old order had broken down, he hadn't known what to do with his authority and had been oppressed by his position. Whenever he met a front-line man in the street he would say to him:

"What's the matter with you, brother? You read and you'll see that everywhere else the front-line men have taken over the authority, but you're doing nothing about it. Will it be soon?"

"Wait a bit, old man!" they would reply. "Making a revolution isn't like patching your trousers. Everything's got to be thought over and prepared; and then we'll deal with you."

The old man had been warned that the revolution was at last taking place, and he had dressed himself in his finest attire and fastened a red ribbon to his shirt front. He sent for the village policeman, an enormous, red-haired fellow. When the police authorities disappeared from the country town and he ceased to receive his pay, the policeman decided that his duties were ended; he had hung his

official saber and uniform up on the wall in his room and had occupied himself on his land. When a messenger arrived to summon him to the village administration, he turned up in his ordinary peasant clothes. But the head waved his arms at him frantically.

"What's this, what's all this? Here's a revolution going on, and you turn up without any uniform. Run and put it on, and your saber; we're handing over the authority."

The policeman wanted to argue about it, but the head would not listen to him.

"Everything must be done with all due solemnity," he said. "After all, it's the new government that's coming."

The bells started to ring in the belfry; the bell ringer swung the clappers vigorously. The priest in full vestments walked out from the church porch, followed by the choir. His feeble voice was drowned beneath the choir's mighty bellow, for which the village church had long been celebrated. The fame was embodied in one particular member of the choir, a peasant named Kuprianov, who had a bass voice made for the world's astonishment and terror. He had been a member of the choir for many years, but hitherto his freedom had been restricted by the choirmaster, who would not allow him to let his voice roll forth in all its power. On one occasion the bishop had visited the village, and even he had called Kuprianov aside before the service and had said graciously to him:

"For God's sake sing only at quarter strength. The Lord has given you a voice of thunder, but not in order to put all the faithful into spiritual fear and trembling."

So Kuprianov had had no freedom to sing as he wished. But on the day the revolution was made he revolted. "If there's freedom, it's for everybody," he told the choirmaster. "I'll sing as I wish now, and don't stick your tuning fork into my belly. I can bowl you off your feet with my voice, you're so weak." The choirmaster shrugged his shoulders and put Kuprianov in the back row.

So he walked along at the back, his mouth wide open, thundering away with all his might. The priest looked at him reproachfully, but it made no difference. Even the bell ringer leaned out of the belfry and shouted something, shaking his fist. But Kuprianov only sang even louder. The bell ringer seized the clapper ropes and jangled all the bells at once; in that babel of sounds Kuprianov's voice was drowned. But he was resolved not to yield. His face went purple,

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his mouth was contorted, he bawled with terrible strength. Then, suddenly, he stopped. Suddenly, the feeble voices of the rest of the choir sounded quite clearly. And through the crowd ran the whisper that in trying to drown the bells Kuprianov had dislocated his jaw. He was hurriedly taken off to the hospital, his lower jaw twisted to one side, his eyes goggling. Everybody stood respectfully, watching him go; after all, he had suffered for the revolution.

Meanwhile, the priest sprinkled the front-line men and the people with holy water. When he reached the cart on which Kornei was standing bareheaded and with knee bent, the priest sprinkled him, too; then, after a moment's thought, he sprinkled the machine gun. The procession moved on to the house of the village administration.

A group of people descended from the high porch. They were led by the village head, carrying the enormous key to the house and his glittering badge with the two-headed eagle stamped on it. He was followed by the redheaded policeman, in full uniform with saber and whistle. His ginger whiskers were dyed and waxed, and they stuck out on either side like arrows. Behind him was the village secretary, a little man in spectacles, and several watchmen from the state graintax warehouses. The procession was closed by the doctor. The village head had assembled all who had been paid by the former regime, on the assumption that they were the old authorities that had to be changed.

Kornei drew himself up to his full height and addressed the village head and his group:

"Well now, citizens, the old authority is being swept away and replaced, and a new one's being introduced, which, in a word, is the people's and elected by the people. And if you resist or organize some 'counter,' we'll strike you down at once."

"What makes you say that, Kornei?" the head replied hastily. "Why should we resist? Take the authority, damn it! Here's the key, here's the badge, take the lot!"

But it was the soviet that was authorized to take the authority and all its insignia. Simon Surov and the other members of the soviet stepped forward; his armless sleeve twitching nervously, Simon took the key and the badge. Everybody cheered, the village head loudest of all.

Then the policeman stepped to the front. He unfastened his saber and began to strip off his uniform. Everybody stood silent. He left himself only in his long, striped drawers and a canvas shirt. He shivered and danced with his bare feet in the mud. The women close to him turned their eyes away from the giant left in such a shocking state, and began to cry out:

"What's he up to, the filthy beast? Is he going to take off his drawers and stand here naked?"

"Shut up, you women!" the policeman bawled authoritatively. "Haven't I got to hand over the government property to the new authorities, damn it? My drawers belong to me, not the government." His eyes staring out of his head, he roared over the heads of the crowd till he was red in the face:

"Claudia, where are you, you cow? Bring me my clothes!" He explained to those around him: "I told my wife to bring my trousers, and she hasn't turned up!"

"Here I am, what are you roaring for?" came a woman's voice from quite close to the cart. The policeman's wife had been struggling to reach her husband, but the front-line men had been holding her back, laughing and preventing her from handing over the bundle of clothes. Cursing incoherently, the policeman hastily dressed. Then he seized his wife by the arm and dragged her away. "I'll teach you to play about with soldiers!" he hissed.

"Stop!" Kornei commanded him. "You're a military authority, and you've got to be cashiered. That's right, isn't it, comrades?" he appealed to the crowd.

"That's right! Cashier him!" the crowd shouted.

Kornei picked up the official saber and drew it out of the scabbard. He had heard that the cashiering of an officer is accompanied by the ceremony of breaking his sword over his head. He turned to the policeman irresolutely.

"Stand at attention; I'm going to cashier you!"

"Well, cashier me then, blast you!"

"Comrades, as is the custom in our glorious army, we cashier this son of a bitch of a policeman, and degrade him to the rank of simple peasant. Let him be indefinitely a peasant without right to promotion," Kornei shouted. He attempted to snap the saber blade. It was made of solid, inflexible steel and would not break. Kornei went crimson with his exertions, but to no effect. Several others also tried their hands. The red-haired policeman stood at attention, waiting, his eyes fixed on the distant belfry. At last he got fed up.

"Give it me! I'll do it myself!" he said, taking the sword. He strained, he went crimson, he set the blade across his knees; but the wretched saber would not break. "Wait a bit, I'll be back in a moment," he said, and rushed off. A few minutes later he returned and handed Kornei the saber. The blade was half filed through, and it broke without any difficulty. Everybody sighed with relief.

Now it was the secretary's turn. He laid a stout volume on the cart running board. "Income in the first part, expenditure in the second part," he explained.

Simon nervously picked up the volume with his one hand and disconcertedly shook it in the air. "We can't keep authority without a secretary." He turned to the crowd. "We've got to have a secretary if there's any writing to be done."

"We'll elect a secretary, at once," the people clamored.

However, that was not so easy, for there was no one literate enough to perform the secretary's functions. "We must keep the old secretary," Simon declared. And the crowd agreed. The secretary picked up the stout volume again and modestly fell in behind the members of the soviet.

"But what have I got to hand over?" said the doctor, a stout little man who was highly respected in the village.

"Comrades, what are we to do about Doctor Ivan Lukich?" Simon shouted. "Perhaps we can leave him? Who else is there to treat the people?"

"But how can we leave him?" a front-line man intervened. "Once he's served the old regime, down with him and make an end of it. The crawling serpent is attached to the old regime, I know that. I went to see him, and he looked at me, and felt me, and said: 'Once you've been gassed I can't cure you; but you'll live, only take care not to fall ill.' But why can't he cure me? He can cure the bourgeoisie: but when it's the working people they can go around sick. That's not good enough! Down with the bourgeois doctor. We'll make Mitka Kurov the doctor; he was a medical orderly at the front, and he told me he knows it all better than any doctor."

"Mitka for doctor!" the front-line men roared.

"We don't want Mitka! He'll only treat his front-line friends, and he'll give it to us others in the neck!" the opposition shouted.

It was the women who had the strongest objection to Mitka's being elected. They had taken no part in the other changes of au-

thority, but they simply stormed when the question of the doctor came up. A young, good-looking widow was particularly violent in her protest.

"We don't want your Mitka!" she screamed. "You can stick him up your arse! He's got no shame; how can I undress in front of him when I've got to be examined and pawed by the doctor?"

"Shut up, you she-devil!" Mitka shouted. "When it's a bourgeois doctor you're quite ready to take your clothes off, but you're not prepared to show your body to the toiling people!"

A bearded, snub-nosed, bald-headed peasant pushed forward and shouted:

"What are you howling at her for? Go along and see her any evening, and she'll show you all she's got just for the pleasure of it!"

The widow's face went crimson with fury.

"We're not going to undress in front of Mitka, and that's all there is to it. He's not a doctor yet, but he's already pawed all the girls all over."

Mitka was voted down; the old doctor was reappointed. But Mitka was given access to the profession of medicine. He was elected the doctor's orderly, with instructions to see that the toiling people were given proper treatment.

And so the revolution in the Surovs' village was accomplished.

Two days later the peasants drove out into the steppe to divide up the land. All the land, including the landowner's and the church's, was thrown into the common stock. Everybody was surprised to see that there was so much land available; there was enough for all. They shared it out in accordance with the number of mouths in each family. The Surovs received some 125 acres; they had never owned so much in all their history. Timothy handed back fifty acres in favor of the men with small families, and others followed his example. Even the landowner was allowed to have as much land as he and his family could work. It was strictly forbidden to hire laborers. The landowner stared at the emissaries who called on him from the revolutionary committee, and said angrily:

"You've robbed me of thousands of acres. You'll return them all to me and throw yourselves at my feet into the bargain before we're finished." He turned on his heel and went into the house.

"You forget all that sort of talk," one of the emissaries hurled at

his disappearing back. "We've done enough throwing ourselves at your feet."



3. The Earth Ablaze

EVERYBODY thought the revolution was over and done with; they did not realize that it was only beginning. They thought that now everything would go on peacefully and quietly; one authority had been replaced by another. Then came November, with its second revolution. Now all the talk was of Lenin, or the Bolsheviks. It was rumored that in the town the authorities had been changed again.

In the old days the village head had run affairs through the secretary; now the soviet of deputies would run affairs through the same secretary. No one had fought for power, no one resisted the new authority, and only a small group of rich peasants, gathered round the landowner, was hostile to all that had occurred. And the people excused them, for everybody realized that the revolution had upset them by taking their land.

But somewhere, a long way off from the steppe villages, clouds were gathering. Vague rumors reached those villages, of brothers fighting brothers. The rumors grew more plentiful, more detailed; the menacing clouds of civil war spread across the sky to hang over the steppe. The peasants went about with gloomy faces; the front-line men had anxious looks.

The Surovs' house was filled with alarm. Kornei was hardly ever at home; he had transferred to the house occupied by the Red guards, taking the machine gun with him. In the early days Kornei had allowed Mark to go into that house, had given him a rifle to hold, and once had even allowed him to fire it. Mark told all his friends he had fired a real rifle, but he said nothing about the pain he had in the shoulder. Now, all this was changed; whenever Mark went near the Red guards' house, Kornei shouted at him:

"Go home, Mark! Stay with your mother."

That was highly insulting. Mark could not understand what was going on all around him. Occasionally Simon came home, but he

never opened his mouth. Someone was coming—Mark and Ivan knew that for certain; but who the someone was, and why he was coming, they had no idea.

"Are they coming?" their father would ask Simon.

"Yes, they're coming," Simon would answer moodily. All Mark and Ivan knew was that Whites were coming. But why should everybody be afraid of them?

They were all expecting misfortune, yet in the end it came unexpectedly. It reached the village from the neighboring districts, from the Don and the Kuban Cossack areas. Led by General Pokrovsky, a large force of Whites marched into the steppe and ruthlessly suppressed the peasant revolt.

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The dawn crept in slowly through the tiny windows, and Mark woke up to the babel of voices that filled the house. As he lay, he could hear his mother crying, Kornei's voice gurgling with fury, Simon's calm remarks. His father was sitting at the table deep in thought, not listening to his sons. They were discussing how best to defend themselves, and whether defense was possible at all. The house was crowded with front-line men. From various remarks Mark realized that the Whites were quite close. During the night someone had secretly posted proclamations on the telegraph poles; the notices said the Whites were coming to restore order and destroy the "revolutionary scum." And they bore a list of the inhabitants who would be hanged as soon as they fell into the hands of the Whites. There were twenty-six names, chiefly of front-line men, including three of the Surovs—Kornei, Simon, and old Timothy.

That day the village was like a disturbed anthill. In the administration meetings went on all day. Toward evening Red guards, from other villages already occupied by the Whites, began to arrive, bringing with them stories of the harsh measures being taken by the counterrevolutionaries. No one was spared, Red guards were shot on the spot, the peasants were driven out into the square and beaten with whips and bayonets, even to death. The Whites were in great force and there was no possibility of resisting them. Fear hung over the village, and only the former rich peasants went about with their heads high—their time was coming. And yet, although everybody realized that they had linked up with the Whites, no one even thought of taking vengeance on them.

The Whites' mounted reconnaissance patrols were already on the outskirts. But still the decision was not taken whether to defend the village or evacuate it. The soviet held the decisive meeting in the Surovs' house, where Mark was a silent participant. He lay on the stove, his head dangling half out from the ledge. His brother Simon spoke quietly, as always, but the stump of his left arm twitched spasmodically, and his white face worked painfully. He said aloud what all were thinking: they must withdraw. "If we try to defend the village we shan't be able to hold it, and we'll lose our force. It's hard to part from our wives and children, but what can we do? After all, the Whites are Russians like us, and they won't harm the women and children. We must retreat to the sands of Astrakhan, to the Kalmuk steppe, and there assemble our forces. . . ."

Kornei's detachment slipped out of the village during the night. Timothy Surov didn't want to leave his home, but his sons insisted on taking him with them. It was hard for his wife to part from her husband and sons, but she wrapped Timothy's neck with a stout green scarf and said through her tears:

"You go, Timothy, you go, or they'll kill you."

"But how about you and the little ones?"

"Don't think of us. God is not without mercy. No one will hurt us."

Very few were left at home. All the older Surovs went off, even Philip and Taras, who hadn't been in the army at all so far. Only Ivan, Mark, and the four women—their mother, Simon's wife Barbara, Olga, and Tatiana—remained behind. A feeling of dread settled in the house and did not leave it. And not only in their house. All the village grew suddenly still, silent.

The Whites entered the next evening. Unlike the Red guards, they were armed to the teeth, were well clothed, and had cannon. They dispersed into the houses, readily falling into talk with the peasants. The village felt rather reassured. There was little to distinguish the Whites from the Reds. They were front-line men, too, they were Russians, too, men from the neighboring Cossack districts.

The difference was revealed the following day. Small squads of officers and Cossacks passed along the streets, with lists of Red guards and of all who had shown sympathy for the soviet regime. Houses were searched, and a large number of people were taken off to the village prison.

An officer and two Cossacks visited the Surovs. The visit was

expected, and the women and children shrank into the corners and were very still. Bowing their heads to avoid the low lintel, the Cossacks followed the officer inside and sat down on a bench without removing their caps. From the stove ledge Mark saw the officer's thin, tired face, the fastidiously twisted lips. The Cossacks were older men, and seemed very similar to the ordinary peasants of the steppe. They looked about the house unconcernedly, and one of them remarked to no one in particular:

"They're poor here, you can see that."

Vera Ivanovna stood in the middle of the room, her hands dangling helplessly. These men didn't seem so very terrible, yet they frightened her. Everything depended on what they had come for.

"Get yourself ready, auntie, we're taking you to the staff," the officer said indifferently. "And everybody else in the house must come with us."

The two weeping women prepared to go with the officer. Vera Ivanovna put on her one Sunday skirt, dressed Mark in his jacket, and tied a kerchief round Barbara's head. As she bent over Mark, a rain of tears fell on his face; they scalded intolerably, and he clung to her all the more tightly. The officer and his men turned and stared out of the windows. But one of the Cossacks could not stand the crying, and turned round.

"There's nothing to cry about! They'll just question you and let you go."

He felt in the pocket of his baggy blue breeches and took out a candy. Blowing the tobacco off it, he held it out to Mark:

"Here, don't cry, sonny. Everything'll be all right. A big boy like you, crying!"

They were escorted through the streets—the mother, Barbara, and Mark. Ivan had vanished; Olga and Tatiana had taken shelter betimes with neighbors. Mark would not fall one step behind his mother. He was wearing a pair of her old boots, and they made walking difficult, but he kept up with her. His mother and Barbara cried all the way, and as the neighbors stared through the windows, they shook their heads pityingly. Never before had they seen women and children being taken off under armed escort.

Next to the village administration, a small house with barred windows stood behind a stone wall. In the old days it had been used to hold peasants who failed to pay their taxes, while on Sundays the policemen had collected the drunk and disorderly and locked them up for the night. But as a rule it was empty, and the children found it an excellent playground; they would climb over the wall and take possession of the house. The soviet had decided that the prison was to be pulled down, for in a proclamation Simon had read that one of the tasks of the revolution was to destroy the prisons czarism had built for the toiling people. But they hadn't had the time to do it.

Now the prison was tumultuous with voices. It had only two rooms, and both were filled to overflowing. All the prisoners were relations of Red guards. Among them was old Frolov, with his handsome, patriarchal beard. He was perfectly calm and assured the others that they would all be allowed to go home. "After all, they're Russians, too, and Christians, and they won't do anything to anger God," he said.

From time to time someone was called out of the prison and did not return. But whether they were released, or whether something worse had happened to them, no one knew. On the morning of the third day old Frolov was called out. He calmly rose from the wooden bench, smiled brightly, crossed himself, and said:

"Very good health, neighbors! I'm going home. And you won't be hanging about here for long, either."

The Surovs were called out late in the afternoon of the same day. They were led into the staff headquarters, in the village administration. There a thin, dark, and rather frightening officer was awaiting them. He began by shouting at the two women, but they only wept. Crushed with terror, Mark gathered that the officer was threatening to catch all the Surovs and hang them, and would strangle Kornei with his own two hands. The man whipped himself up into a frenzy, seized Vera Ivanovna, and dragged her into the next room. She went with him unresisting; Barbara and Mark rushed after her and clung to her.

"Where are you taking her?" Barbara shrieked. "Take us, too."

The officer drove his fist into her face with all his strength, and she fell to the floor. He kicked Mark across the room. The boy struck his head against the window ledge and was stunned. When he opened his eyes, from the next room he heard a heart-rending shriek—his mother's shriek—and her repeated: "Oh, God! Oh, God!" He heard the dull thud of blows. Barbara rushed round the room, weeping, almost mad with grief.

"Save her! They're beating our mother with ramrods! Save her, good people!"

Mark rushed to the door and tried to open it. Someone pulled him back. The same freckled Cossack who had given him the candy gripped him firmly between his knees. Mad with rage, the lad bit him, beat on his face, tore his hair. He could hear nothing but those dull thuds and his mother's screams. Every blow shook him, filled him with terrible pain; and he struggled all the more fiercely in the Cossack's powerful grip.

Then all sounds died away. His mother came out, supporting herself by the wall. Her new Sunday skirt was in ribbons, her jacket torn and hanging in shreds. She groaned; she looked absently round the room. Seeing Mark in the Cossack's grasp, she went to him. The man gently pushed her away and said:

"The boy's mad with crying! He's sorry for his mother, all right!"

All three were allowed to go home. Barbara supported Vera Ivanovna, while Mark, stumbling in his big boots and sobbing, clung tightly to her hand. She did not weep; she only groaned from time to time. When they had passed the church, they were overtaken by a cart driven by the same freckled Cossack. He reined in the horses and took off his cap.

"Get in. I'll take you home."

He drove them home, and even there did not leave them, but came into the house. Vera Ivanovna was already fussing over Mark, pressing him to her. He was silent, but his eyes burned like a young wolf's and revealed the passionate misery he was suffering.

The Cossack rested his heavy hand on Mark's head, and the boy trembled as if burned. Half to himself, the man muttered:

"We've reached a fine state of things! Starting to beat up women and children.... The people are turned like beasts.... Don't cry, auntie. We shan't forget what that officer's done to you. He's been asking for it a long time."

When he had gone, Mark and his mother climbed onto the ledge above the stove. She hurriedly stroked his hand and assured him again and again that she didn't feel any pain; they had beaten her only to frighten her.

That day Mark ceased to be a child; his burning sorrow for his mother flung him into manhood. And that day, for the first time, he felt all his impotence to cope with a life that could be so horrible.

All the next day his mother lay, a small, helpless bundle, on the stove ledge. Tatiana and Olga laid wet towels on her head, washed the livid bruises on her shoulders and arms. Much of the day she was unconscious, but when she came to, she asked at once:

"Has Ivan come back? Lord, save him!"

Mark set off to look for his brother. All the world seemed gray and sunless, though the sun was shining brightly. Fearfully cringing close to the houses, he went on and on, making for the far end of the village, to some shepherds who were friends of the Surovs. Ivan had often gone to them to avoid his father's anger, and Mark thought he might have taken shelter there. To reach their house he had to cross the square, and as he approached, he saw something that made him stop in terror. Bodies were hanging from the telegraph poles; from the very first post hung an old man with a patriarchal beard, which stirred gently in the breeze. It was Frolov. Mark took to his heels and did not stop running till he heard a woman's voice calling to him. She was a frequent visitor to his house, and when Mark went up to her, she seized his arm and dragged him into the house, inquiring anxiously after his mother.

In the house he was surprised to see his brother Dmitri sitting at the table. Dmitri ran to Mark, lifted him in his arms, and kissed him. He was dressed in ordinary peasant clothes, and there was nothing to show that he was a Red guard.

The news of how the Whites had behaved in the village had reached Kornei's detachment. Old Surov wanted to return to defend his family or die with it, but Kornei and Simon had objected. It was decided to send Dmitri. Now, as he listened to Mark's story, he ground his teeth and turned his white face to the wall.

When dusk had fallen, the two brothers set off together to look for Ivan. As Mark had expected, they found him in the shepherds' house. He had spent all the first night hiding in the reeds by the river; but next day, hungry and worn out, he had gone to the shepherds. They had taken him in, and had kept him with them ever since, for they were afraid to let him go out.

The two brothers took Ivan home. Dmitri did not go in, but halted at the window, said good-by, and melted into the darkness.

Day followed day. Vera Ivanovna recovered and sat down to work at her sewing machine. The family had to be fed. Olga went off to live in a neighboring village, to spare the family the difficulty of finding food for her. Tatiana was a great help, for she was not a bad hand at making simple garments for the peasant women, who always dressed in the traditional skirts reaching to the heels, and short bodices. After returning from prison Vera Ivanovna's eyes bothered her, and she could not thread the needle and found it harder to sit from morning till late evening at the machine. Mark and Ivan were left with nothing to do. The yard was empty, the garden produce was gathered, autumn was approaching, and they did not feel like playing with their friends.

The Whites carried off all the grain they could find. The peasants had to manage as best they could; for the Surovs it was a very hard and bitter time. Their mother received such a small return for her work that she found it impossible to feed them all. The two boys saw that she was terribly worried, and one day they both went off. Ivan was taken on by a rich peasant to look after his horses, while Mark hired himself out to the shepherds and went with them into the steppe to look after the sheep. Thus the old house lost two more of its family.

The flocks of sheep wandered slowly over the spacious, sunburned steppe, followed sluggishly by big, shaggy dogs. The shepherds, equipped with long sticks crooked at one end, climbed to the tops of the burial mounds and surveyed the steppe beneath them, boundless, wrapped in the stupefying scent of the wormwood, bathed in sunlight, silent, under a high, still sky.

The sheep spent all their days and nights on the steppe. Here and there were isolated houses, surrounded by sheds and pens. These were their winter quarters. When the blizzards began to rage, the shepherds would drive the flocks into the pens. But when the storm had passed, the sheep would go out into the steppe once more, to search for their food beneath the snow.

In that summer of 1918 one of these winter huts was Mark's head-quarters. He spent two months in the steppe, until he was almost black with sunburn, and his hair was bleached white. The flocks belonging to the peasants of his village wandered about for several miles around. There were four such flocks, each in charge of a shepherd and an assistant. Only old Prokhor, who had taken Mark as his assistant, lived in the winter hut. Prokhor was a kind of commander-in-chief of the ovine army. The old man was a friend of Timothy

Surov, and he looked after Mark, not letting him sleep in the open steppe with the sheep at night.

There was much work to be done, but Mark did not complain. Prokhor would send him out with a cart to one of the flocks, or sometimes to the village to get salt or flour. The shepherds brought in any ailing sheep, and Prokhor and Mark sheared them, smeared a stinking ointment over them, poured some equally stinking fluid down their throats, and kept them in the winter pens until they were well again. However, more often the sheep died, and then Mark had to skin them. He buried the flesh, for Prokhor strictly forbade its being given to the dogs.

This life suited Mark, but one thing troubled him. Behind the wall of the sheepfold there was a low mound, freshly dug. He had noticed it when he arrived. Prokhor said it was the grave of a Red guard whom the Cossacks had killed not far from the hut. He and Mark fashioned a cross for the mound, but Prokhor would not tell him anything more about the man who lay beneath it, would not tell him that it was his brother Dmitri, shot by a White patrol.

It had happened the day after Dmitri's visit to the village. He would have had no difficulty in avoiding the Whites' outposts during the night, but dawn was at hand. A patrol caught sight of the solitary figure striding across the open country. Two horsemen broke away and galloped toward him. Dmitri walked on calmly; it was nothing for a peasant to be walking across the steppe. The riders drew close; the leader was a young, fair-whiskered officer on a raven horse.

"Halt!" he shouted. "Who are you?"

There was something familiar about his voice, but Dmitri had no time to think about it. The young officer rode right up to him, and they recognized each other. He was the son of the rich peasant, Gromov.

"Ah, one of Surovs' whelps!" he shouted, snatching out his revolver. "Take that, you dog!"

Prokhor found the body riddled with six bullet holes, the following day. He recognized Dmitri, and buried him within the bounds of the winter quarters.

In the steppe, all human agitations and troubles fade to insignificance. Left alone with nature, man begins to feel that he has got away from the anxieties that torment him. So it was with Mark. All he had left behind in the village, in the old house, began to seem almost a dream. Only his thoughts of his mother were constant and warm. As he fell asleep, he thought of her sitting bent over the sewing machine and sewing, sewing, sewing.

One day a large force of Cossacks rode up to the winter hut, to carry off sheep. They took about a hundred from the nearest flock, loading them into carts. After that, these raids became a regular feature. Carts would turn up from one of the forces; the soldiers would bind the sheep and carry them off, leaving Prokhor a note stating they had been taken for military needs. Each time it happened Prokhor went off to the village and reported. The villagers scratched their heads, but they could do nothing. When he returned to the steppe, Prokhor ordered the shepherds to drive the flocks into still more remote pasturages. But the soldiers found them even there. Before long the two thousand sheep in the four flocks were reduced to half. There was no avoiding the pillage. It was impossible to sell the sheep, for no money was of any value. The revolution had abolished the old order, but had not created a new one.

One day a force of a hundred horsemen rode up to the winter hut. Prokhor looked and saw that this time they were not Whites but Reds. A tall man, sitting easily in the saddle, raised his cap.

"Hello, Daddy Prokhor! Here are some guests for you."

He was a former shepherd from this same winter hut. Now he was a Red commander.

"Why, didn't you know me?" he laughed as he sprang from his horse.

"Of course I did! How are you, son; and why has God sent you here?"

"I know you'll be angry, old man," the commander began. "But there's nothing else for it.... I've come to take away the sheep, all of them. Every single one."

"All of them?" Prokhor gasped. "Are you mad?"

"Yes, all of them. We've got to feed our Red guards; and besides, we're not going to let the Whites eat all the sheep; they belong to the peasants."

Prokhor blew his nose with a tremendous blast.

"I shan't let you have the sheep," Prokhor said obstinately, mentally turning over scheme after scheme for avoiding this disaster. "I don't want our own Red guards to be infected with a filthy disease. And all

our sheep are ailing—I think it's the sheep pest. And if you eat them you might die."

"You don't say!" the commander exclaimed in feigned horror. "But you know, we don't worry about the pest; we've got the pest ourselves—Kornei Surov, you know. He's our commander. So we'll take the sheep just the same. Kornei ordered me specially to call here. Otherwise, he said, you might be offended."

The men rode off to the flocks, making straight across the steppe. It was obvious that their commander knew where to look for the sheep.

"I've taught him to my own sorrow," Prokhor said bitterly, as he watched them ride away. He hurriedly began to prepare for a long journey, putting a spare pair of boots and canvas trousers in his knapsack, as well as a can of the stinking ointment. Then he told Mark to sit down beside him on the bench.

"I can't believe they'll take the sheep," he said, in a voice quivering with indignation. "How could I go back to the village after that? For more than forty years I've seen to the sheep, and I've never had to go home without them before. So I'm going with them; I may be able to save a few. But you wait here for the shepherds, and tell them to go back to the village. And you go back, too. Tell my old woman not to worry. As for the rest, it's as God wills.

He flung his sack across his shoulder and strode off toward the highroad.

On his return home Mark found the place crowded with armed Cossacks. They were quartered in all the houses. In his own house there were six, all of them elderly men, with families left behind in the Don district. In the stable six horses were munching the Surovs' hay; the stirrup straps of six saddles hung from the low crossbeam. The staid Cossacks spent their time in unhurried conversation, grooming their horses, cleaning their equipment, or went unhurriedly to church. They became quite friendly with the Surovs. One of them, Nikita Gerasimovich, an elderly, bowlegged man with heavily bearded face and rows of medals and crosses on his chest, enjoyed special authority among them.

"What brought us here?" he said in a voice that was rather thin. "Is it our job to join in quarrels over other people's land? We've been tricked. These peasants have shared out the land, and quite right, too.

But now we've come and taken the land from the people who work it, and handed it back to the landowner. What for?"

The village was filled with rumors concerning Kornei Surov and his force. There were reports that they had made an attack on the railway and had fought desperate battles with the Whites. Then it began to be whispered that the force had crossed to this side of the river and was quite close to the village. The Cossacks, too, talked more and more about Kornei. They laughed when his name was mentioned, but behind their laughter was a hint of respect. From time to time they rode off, returning only after some days. And then they would tell the mother:

"We've had another little clash with your sons, Vera Ivanovna. That Kornei of yours might well be a Cossack. Some of our men say he's enchanted and can't be touched by sword or bullet. What do you think?"

The Reds were beginning to give the Whites cause for great anxiety, cutting their communications, and making raids into the villages where they were stationed. The two forces led by Kornei Surov and his friend Joseph Apanasenko were commanding more and more respect. The Surov force roved the steppe in the vicinity of their village, sometimes not more than ten miles away. Apanasenko's force swept still farther across the steppe, and suddenly the news spread that he had won his native village back from the Whites. A wave of excitement swept over the village, and everybody expected the Surov force to be arriving any day. When it was reported that Apanasenko had withdrawn his men into the steppe, leaving his village to the Whites, it was not believed.

Nonetheless, the tide had turned. All but surrounded, the Whites decided to evacuate the villages and form a solid front across the steppe. The Cossacks rode off; the landowners and rich peasants slipped away. One morning at dawn a stream of horsemen poured into the streets. Kornei had led in his men—over a thousand of them.

They held the place for only a few hours. The Whites were still strong enough to prevent their dominating their rear. But during the few hours Kornei was in the village a new sorrow brought the tears to his mother's eyes. He told her that his father, Timothy, had died.

It had happened during the winter. One frosty day the Surov force was forced to retreat across the steppe, hotly pursued by Cossacks. Its rear was brought up by a small baggage train, including sledges of

wounded Red Army men. Timothy Surov was driving one of these sledges. Kornei made for the river, hoping for reinforcements. They did not come. In the ensuing battle Kornei led his main force across the river, but the baggage train was cut off.

Infuriated by their failure to smash the main force, the Whites turned to capture the baggage train. The only hope was to reach the river, and Timothy and the other drivers drove their horses on madly. But one of Timothy's horses was wounded, and he had to waste precious time cutting the traces. A fellow villager saw the old man in difficulty and called to him to jump into his sledge. But Timothy would not abandon his wounded. The man drove off, and the last he saw of Timothy was a figure standing beside his sledge, bareheaded, as the Cossacks galloped up.

As soon as Kornei heard what had happened, with Gregory, Philip, and Taras, he turned his force back into the steppe in a desperate attempt to overtake the Cossacks. From the top of a burial mound the four sons saw the Whites ride into a hamlet.

In the early evening Gregory made his way on foot into the hamlet. In the center he saw his father and the four Red guards who had been in his sledge, all hanging from telegraph poles. His father's green scarf was lying at the foot of the post. Gregory picked it up and concealed it at his breast.

Deep in the night Kornei led his force against the hamlet. The night suddenly exploded with shouting, firing, howling. Abandoning their guns and equipment, suffering losses in killed and wounded, the Cossacks fled into the steppe. Peering through their windows, the inhabitants saw the Reds raging along the streets, led by four men who slaughtered the Cossacks ruthlessly and were not to be withstood: Timothy's sons were taking vengeance for their father's death.

In the morning large Cossack reinforcements came up, but there was nothing left for them to do but collect and bury their dead comrades.

Timothy was buried in the Astrakhan steppe; the Reds took his body with them as they retreated across the river.

Beneath this new sorrow Vera Ivanovna was bowed down. She shed few tears but sat silent on the bench, her eyes fixed on the corner where the lamp was burning before the icon. She sat there all day, all the night, and all the next day. Kornei and his men retreated into the steppe, but she did not even hear her four sons say good-by to her before they left the old house. She did not even raise her head when the White guns opened fire. She was crushed by her grief and had no knowledge of anything else. Tatiana fussed over her, wept for her, kissed her hands; but her mother saw nothing, not even her own children's tears. Her hair, which had been very black, turned gray.

Along the front formed by the Whites the struggle went on with increasing success for the Reds. The country of the steppe came more and more under their control. The Surovs' village lived in the continual sound of gunfire, which hung in the air, ominous, sometimes louder, sometimes softer, but steadily drawing closer. Carts laden with wounded soldiers and Cossacks dragged through the village; there was continual movement of cavalry and infantry forces. But the former good-natured relations between the Whites and the villagers had gone, and the soldiers pillaged the peasants.

Hand-to-hand fighting went on in the outskirts, and for some time the Whites succeeded in holding on to their positions. Then, on the advice of Simon Surov, who had been elected chairman of the district revolutionary committee, the Red commander, Ipatov, sent Apanasenko's and Kornei's forces into the attack on the village. The Whites could not beat off men who knew every little rise and tiny ravine in the neighborhood, and they were forced to evacuate.

Toward evening of the next day a column of prisoners was driven in from the steppe. Half naked, beaten with rifle butts, bloodstained, they dragged along with heads hanging, under the guard of Red cavalry.

There were over a hundred. Mark stood watching as they were marched into the prison. Suddenly he started back in alarm. Among them was an officer with a swarthy evil face—the officer who had beaten up his mother. And there was Nikita Gerasimovich, the Cossack who had been quartered at the Surovs'.

The Surov house was crowded and noisy with talk and movement. Waving his empty sleeve, Simon was explaining to the peasants the new order that would now be established. Vera Ivanovna was fussing around getting dinner ready.

Flushed and panting, Mark burst in and rushed to his mother.

"Mamma, d'you know who I've seen?" he shouted.

The men sitting at the table glanced at him angrily. "Hold your tongue!" his mother ordered sternly.

"I've seen him . . ." he tried to go on.

"Who have you seen?"

She bent down, and he whispered in her ear, taking anxious glances at Simon. "I've seen that black officer who..."

She understood at once, and took him hurriedly into the other part of the house. "Hold your tongue, for God's sake; don't say a word to anyone," she told him. "Your brothers will never spare him.... Let God be his judge for the evil he's done. Don't tell a soul you've seen him."

"And I saw Nikita Gerasimovich too," he added.

"May God preserve him!" she crossed herself. "He's a good man and never did us any harm."

Their mother prepared a great feast, and everybody in the house sat down to the table. Taras and Philip were there. So were Kornei and a tall black-whiskered man called "Comrade Ipatov," and Mark deduced that he must be the big commander who had been talked about so much recently.

Vera Ivanovna glanced again and again out of the window. "Simon, when will Gregory be coming?" she asked at last.

"He won't be coming," Philip said in his deep voice. "We've captured a gun from the Whites, and he's greasing and cleaning it."

She sighed. So she wouldn't be seeing Gregory for awhile; Dmitri was missing too, and when she asked Kornei about him, he seemed reluctant and evasive. She filled up the great dish again and again with food. They all ate out of the one dish. There was not much talk during the meal, the only sound was the clatter of wooden spoons. But when they laid down their spoons and wiped their whiskers they all began to speak at once.

"We've taken over a hundred prisoners," Simon said to Ipatov. "I've given orders for them to be brought here. The Whites shot four hundred of our men and buried them just outside the village. . . . What are we to do with the prisoners?" His empty sleeve quivered violently. Ipatov stared at the sleeve as though it had asked the question. Without raising his eyes, he said:

"We'll do with them as they did with ours-shoot them."

Vera Ivanovna started away from the wall where she had been standing and went to the table. Without saying a word she dropped down on her knees beside Ipatov. At this unexpected turn there was a sudden hush. Fixing her eyes on Ipatov's face, she said in a trembling tone:

"Spare them; don't shed any more blood. . . ."

The men were embarrassed. Kornei was the first to recover. He jumped up and raised his mother from her knees:

"Get up, Mother; it's not for you to go down on your knees to us."

But as soon as he let her go, she sank down on her knees again, pleading:

"Don't shed more blood.... They were mad. The Lord sees all things, and He won't forgive. You're killing one another; but children are being left fatherless; old mothers are left without a place for themselves. Blood only results in blood. You men are hard; you've grown cruel. Spare these men at least. They've got mothers; they've got wives and children. If you kill them, you kill little children too, waiting at home for their fathers to come back. Don't be so... terrible. Man has need of mercy."

Ipatov squatted on his heels in front of her. Laying his hand on her shoulder, he said in a sorrowful tone:

"Dear Vera Ivanovna, we're all your sons, and there's no reason for you to go down on your knees to us. Believe me, there's nothing I wouldn't do for you...But you're asking on behalf of those... and they shoot every Red Army man they capture. They have much blood unnecessarily shed on their consciences, and it isn't our fault if we have to repay them in the same coin..."

"Blood never pays for blood," she whispered. "Repay evil with good. Have pity on them for the sake of their innocent children."

Grinding his teeth, Ipatov rose and went to the window. For a moment or two there was a silence broken only by her bitter weeping. Then he turned and raised her from the floor.

"What do you think, Simon Timofeevich? Maybe your mother's right. Blood doesn't wipe out blood. Perhaps if we let them go the swine will stop killing our men."

Simon was about to answer, but his mother rushed to him, hung on his shoulder, and her passionate whisper filled all the house:

"Simon, my beloved son, for your father's sake, for the sake of your young brothers . . ."

Simon stared at the floor, and his words had a heavy, morose note as he said:

"I've got no pity for these men.... They've drowned the earth in

blood; they've left many orphans in our country. It's wicked the way things have gone. Russians killing Russians; and they've found protectors among the rich, who're ready to drive us down into the earth. I've got no pity for these men and never will have; but my mother's made me think. Give your orders, Comrade Ipatov; as you order, so shall it be. Maybe my mother's heart is wiser than all our heads; maybe if we show mercy they'll follow our example."

"I think my own mother would have said the same as you," said Ipatov, "but they killed her because she was my mother." For a moment his face twisted, his eyes turned steely. But then they glowed with warmth as he turned to Vera Ivanovna. "All right. We'll do as you say. We'll release the prisoners."



4. On the Highroads

Now once more it was very quiet in the home. Only rarely did a letter arrive from one or another of the brothers. Kornei was in command of a regiment, Gregory was a squadron commander, and Taras and Philip were members of Kornei's staff. Kornei had become famous in the Budenny First Cavalry Army. His brothers wrote that he had been wounded several times, but never seriously, that he continued in active service even when wounded, and would never stay more than a week in a hospital.

Simon had become quite a big man locally. But to look at he was still the same old Simon, gaunt, harassed, one-armed, with the same ragged jacket round his shoulders, the same shapeless boots on his feet. He had no time for such things as dress. He found it difficult, very difficult, to have to run a whole district. He hadn't the education or the knowledge for such a big job. And now that he was gray-headed he had to try to make up for lost time. His chief friends in the district were the teachers. He was frequently to be seen bent over a school exercise book, even at some important meeting.

At home, life was very quiet. The sewing machine hummed from morn till night, and Vera Ivanovna sat bent over her work, shortsightedly examining the seams. Ivan and Mark sat at their school lessons. Barbara, Simon's wife, moved silently about. She was almost forty now, but her womanly strength seethed within her and could find no satisfaction. Sometimes at night she would wander into the room where Vera Ivanovna and the younger children were asleep. Barefoot, in her undershirt, her long black hair hanging down her back, she would come, burning with heat, and would burst into tears.

"Mamma, I can't stand it," she would moan in her singsong Ukrainian voice.

The youngsters had no idea why she wept so much at night, and did not dare to ask why one day she suddenly went off to her husband in the district town. So only Vera Ivanovna, Tatiana, Ivan, and Mark, were left.

The year 1919 passed in anxieties, agitation, and need; 1920 arrived. Now that everywhere the Soviet regime was victorious, the people of the remote steppe villages thought peace had come at last. But those who had gone off to fight for the new government did not return.

At last news arrived that Kornei had been wounded yet again, and was in a hospital. The Red Army man who brought the report told Vera Ivanovna that Taras was in a hospital, too. This further anxiety sapped the old woman's strength; her heart was filled with anguish, and she went about pale of face, and silent, in her eyes a look of dumb suffering.

One afternoon in the late summer of that year, Tatiana, Ivan, and Mark made their way together to the local railway station. They did not take the usual road across the fields from the village, but went along a deep, dry ravine that ran right up to the track, avoiding inquisitive eyes.

There was a train about to leave. Tatiana, Ivan, and Mark halted just outside the station. Mark had a small bundle of clothing in his hands, while across his shoulder was another bundle containing food—a loaf of bread, a piece of old, rancid lard, salt wrapped in a clean rag, an onion, and several hard-boiled eggs. He was wearing a jacket in good condition, a clean shirt, and canvas trousers. The boots he was wearing were only used on solemn occasions.

Tatiana, a comely girl of eighteen, was paler than usual and adjusted the bundle on Mark's shoulder with even more than her normal fussiness. There was a look of anxiety in her eyes, which were gray, like those of all the Surovs. Ivan seemed very glum, and he kept his eyes fixed on the ground. Mark was suspiciously agitated.

"Perhaps you'd better not go, after all, Mark?" Tatiana said quietly, looking hopefully at her brothers.

"But we've settled that, Tatiana; we've agreed again and again that I'm to go. And once we've agreed, I'm going," Mark said.

The idea that one of them should go in search of their elder brothers at the front had occurred to them after Mark's last visit to Simon. Simon had no news of his brothers, except that Kornei had distinguished himself again in battle, and had been wounded. Vera Ivanovna derived no pleasure from hearing the stories of his exploits, and had only grown more sorrowful. Her thoughts were not so much of him as of her younger sons, Taras, Philip, and Gregory; for she did not even know whether they were still alive.

Her younger children were upset to see her grieving, and they decided that one of them must go in search of their brothers and bring back news of them. They discussed the plan for a long time, and keeping it secret from their mother, the three of them made preparations for Mark's journey into the unknown. Budenny's Cavalry Army was somewhere in the Ukraine, and that did not seem very far to the youngsters, who had no idea of the immensity of Russia. Mark thought he would only have to travel a little way beyond the town where Simon was working to get to the Ukraine. And once there, of course he'd find his brothers easily.

That evening the house was loud with lamentation, when Vera Ivanovna learned that her very youngest son had gone off to look for his brothers. She guessed what difficulties he must overcome if he was not to die on the great and terrible highroads, and the thought of his death was like a nightmare to her. She went to the station, but was told there would not be another train till next day. So she lost a whole day, for she planned to go to the town where Simon was, in the hope that Mark had called to see him, and that Simon had kept him there.

But Mark had thought of that; he had realized that Simon might well prove the biggest obstacle of all to his plans. He did not stop to see him, but went on by the next train.

The thirteen-year-old Mark was now plunged into a world of milling, struggling human bodies, the backwash of four years of world war and three years of civil war. The railways were like blocked veins in a living organism. Life crawled along them sluggishly, threatening to come to a complete stop at any moment. The stations were packed with human beings. People waited for weeks, sometimes for months, for an opportunity to make a journey. And at every station, and even along the tracks, children, girls and boys who had lost their parents or been abandoned by them, stood cringing, begging for food. And everywhere there was filth, hopelessness, numb despair.

The food Mark had brought did not last a week, and he had to rely on his wits to find ways of getting more. The majority of those who were in a similar plight resorted to barter, exchanging their last embroidered towel, their last piece of soap, or home-grown tobacco, for bread. Mark had nothing he could exchange. Sometimes he would go early in the morning to the market place, to help the women stallkeepers arrange their goods or sweep between the stalls. He always made a special attempt to help the women who sold pies. It was their custom to take up their stations sitting on top of enormous earthenware jars that were filled with hot pies. There each would sit perfectly still until a customer came along. Then she would slip off the jar, lift the rag covering the pies, and take one out. Such a woman often needed errands run, someone to go home to ask for a fresh batch of pies, or to ask a merchant to keep some flour. And Mark was always ready to oblige and receive a hot pie for his trouble. Yet such opportunities were rare, and more often than not Mark went hungry.

Many people died while traveling on the railway. Human beings lived like wolves, and when the wolf lost its capacity to obtain food, it died quietly and unnoticed, in some corner. Then the body was carried into an empty warehouse used as a mortuary. No one asked whose it was, or why it had come to that spot to die. Man was too insignificant as an individual for anyone to be interested in him.

Yet of all the terrible things Mark saw as he wandered from station to station in that devastated land, he thought the louse was the worst. That tiny insect had declared war on man. In the peasants' houses, such as Mark's, the louse enjoyed a certain, limited right of habitation. But there it was domesticated and was kept within bounds.

What he saw on the railways was almost an open offensive of insect against man. The lice invaded the stations and conquered the human beings crowded there. The floors, the benches, even the walls were spattered with their crawling bodies. Every morning the cleaners would turn all the human beings out of the halls in order to sweep the floors. The rubbish they swept out was alive, and moving. As they got up to go out, the people brushed the insects off their clothes by the hundreds.

At one station Mark found the railwaymen and some Red Army men working hurriedly in an empty warehouse. They installed a great locomotive boiler in the warehouse and worked day and night until they had everything ready. Then they nailed up an inscription in blood-red letters above the entrance: "Slaughter-louse."

The battle on the lice opened that same day. Railwaymen together with an armed guard went to each waiting hall in turn, and the railwaymen explained that they wanted to improve the passengers' conditions a little, and invited them to avail themselves of the services of the "slaughter-louse." The guards acted rather more resolutely. They told off two hundred people and drove them to the warehouse.

Only one hundred at a time were allowed inside; the others had to wait. Mark was among those who waited, and he climbed up to one of the large windows, in order to watch the massacre. He saw that the warehouse was empty, except for the boiler, which had a great fire roaring under it. The people were compelled to undress and tie their clothes in bundles, to which they attached metal numbers. Leather articles could not be treated, and Mark grinned at the sight of naked people with only their boots on, and leather belts round their sunken bellies. He noticed that one young man was wearing officer's breeches, very good leg boots, and an officer's crossbelt with handsome buckles. After undressing he stood with the straps and belts over his body and the fine boots on his feet.

The railwaymen pushed the bundles of clothing into the boiler and fastened the door tightly. Everybody waited patiently. Ten minutes later the door was opened. The waiting people set up a howl. Inside the boiler the bundles were burning furiously. They rushed to rescue their clothes, but it was too late. In their frenzy they turned on the railwaymen, and were kept back only by the threats of the armed guards. Shivering with fear, the workmen huddled in a corner, while the guards stood round them with fixed bayonets.

One man—it was the youngster in officer's garb—managed to break through the cordon. Wild with rage he flew at one little workman and seized him by the throat. Screaming unintelligibly, he dragged the man toward the boiler door, with the obvious intention of flinging him inside. But then he had a still better idea. He thrust the man into a corner and stripped him of all his clothes. Then he hurried off and dressed in the clothing he had obtained.

Mark was not allowed to see the end of the fight against the lice. A squad of railway guards hurried up and drove the crowd back, and their lice with them.

Struggling continually against difficulties, Mark slowly advanced toward his goal; at last he reached the Ukraine. Budenny's Cavalry Army was somewhere in the Ukraine, but no one could tell him which way to go in order to find it. He roamed backward and forward over the country, following up rumor after rumor—a tiny point in a great chaos. Yet that tiny point shifted. He traveled by every conceivable means of conveyance. Until it grew too cold at night, he climbed onto railway-car roofs, where there was always room. You could ride on the buffers, too, but then you had to cling very tight and not fall asleep. There was no hope of riding inside a carriage or truck, for not even he could wriggle into the solid mass of human beings already inside. The most unpleasant of all ways of traveling was on a gasoline tank. The tanks swayed and rocked, and Mark had to cling on for dear life. And he was almost stupefied with the fumes of the gasoline or kerosene.

In that quest for his brothers he came at last to a station where he had to hang about for a week. Then the stationmaster happened to take some notice of him. Learning that he was wandering in search of the Budenny Cavalry Army, he sent for the boy.

"In the next town there's a hospital attached to the Budenny Army," he told Mark. "You go along there, sonny, and they'll help you to find your brothers. I'm afraid you'll have to walk it, but it isn't far—only twenty miles."

Mark reached that town the very next day.



5. With the Red Cavalry

A PIERCING autumn wind was blowing. It howled through the telegraph wires; it drove the masses of gray cloud across the sky. On the outskirts of the small Ukrainian town were brick buildings surrounded by a high wall. Old houses, timeworn, stood in a semicircle round a large, handsome church with massive cupolas. The place was a former monastery.

Darkness had fallen when a boy stole through the wide open gates. He shivered as he went, and stumbled over the stones. Inside, he stopped and looked about him uncertainly. There was no one to be seen. The buildings were gray, unfriendly; a light shone through a window here and there, but even that light seemed to repel.

A gust of wind swept over the buildings, shook the trees, filled the spacious yard with rustling and roaring. The boy huddled into himself still more, and timidly went up to the building in the center of the yard.

He knocked quietly on the door. After waiting a moment or two, he knocked again, louder. The door was opened, and a curly-haired lad appeared, lit up by light from the corridor. Without saying a word the lad took Mark by his collar and pushed him down the steps.

"You again, you lousy kid?" he shouted angrily. "You wait, I'll tell your father in the morning." He slammed the door. The boy stood for a moment or two, then knocked again. The lad opened it at once; but now he had a whip in his hand.

"I'll give it to you!" he said, raising the whip. "I'll teach you to come around here playing your games!"

"Stop it!" a quiet voice called behind him. A woman in a black kerchief came along the corridor. "Who are you, boy, and what do you want?" she asked.

Mark shyly stepped into the stream of light and looked at the woman hopefully. He hurriedly expained that he had come a long way in search of his brothers, who were in the Budenny Army. The stationmaster had told him there was a hospital here.

The woman took him by the hand and led him into the room, seating him on a chair.

"But what regiment are your brothers in?" the curly-haired lad asked.

"I don't know."

"It won't be easy to find them," the woman said. "The Budenny Army is very big, and it has lots of regiments. What's your name?"

"Suroy, Mark Timofeevich Suroy,"

"Surov?" she exclaimed. A ghost of a smile appeared on her face. "Why didn't you say so before? You may not have to look far for your brothers—we've got two Surovs here. But one of them—" she stopped short. Mark had a feeling that something had snapped inside him. He wanted to ask, "What about one of them?" But he didn't dare.

She took him along a corridor and opened a door at the far end. A kerosene lamp was standing on a table, and in its light he saw Kornei. His brother was studying a large sheet of cardboard. (Mark saw later that the multiplication tables were written on it.) When the door opened he raised his head, but the lamplight did not throw as far as the door, and he could not see who was standing there.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"It's me... Mark!" The boy's voice shook; he was very near to tears.

Kornei started up and ran to the door. "Mark!" he exclaimed joyfully. "But where the devil have you come from?"

"Don't come too close, I'm smothered with lice," Mark warned him.

"I'm not afraid of lice!" Kornei cried, as he seized his young brother and lifted him off the floor.

The farther corner of the room was plunged in darkness. But Mark could see a bed, and someone lying on it. Kornei followed his glance, and his face darkened.

"It's Taras....He's pretty bad." He dropped his voice to a whisper.

From the bed came a feeble voice.

"Did I hear Mark? Or was I dreaming?"

Kornei pushed Mark across to the bed. As he bent over Taras there was a tender note in his voice:

"No, you weren't dreaming, Taras. Mark is here."

Mark stood, not knowing what to say. Now he could see his sick brother's face, pale, thin, covered with sweat. Where his legs should have been, the blanket was flat. Mark felt so frightened that he snatched convulsively at Kornei's hand, digging his nails into the flesh.

"Is Mother all right?" the feeble voice asked.

"Yes...she's quite all right," the boy whispered, unable to take his eyes from the spot where Taras' legs should have been.

"That's good? And Dad? He's back at home now, isn't he? I must go out into the steppe and find my horse..." He passed into a quiet, incoherent muttering. Mark clung to Kornei's hand.

"What's he saying?" he whispered.

"He's gone off again," Kornei answered thickly.

The curly-haired lad took charge of Mark and led him downstairs, where the woman in a kerchief was waiting for him. A tub of hot water had been placed in a small room. The lad took away Mark's clothes and boots and made him get into the tub. Then he scrubbed him furiously with a handful of sawdust. He had no soap except some green, semiliquid mass, which he used in large quantities. Mark had the feeling that he was being flayed. But he made no protest; he was still overwhelmed by what he had just seen. Taras without legs; Taras dying.

The lad helped him out of the tub, then went and fetched clothing while the woman rubbed him dry with a towel. The clothes were Taras'. "But how about Taras?" he felt like asking. Then he remembered that flat blanket.

As the days passed, Taras' life slowly guttered out. He regained consciousness more and more rarely. The doctors who came and briefly examined him turned away without speaking. Kornei would overtake them in the corridor, and each time there was the same conversation:

"Hopeless?"

"Absolutely. General gangrene has set in."

The last night arrived. Taras suddenly recovered consciousness. Mark and Kornei were sitting at his bedside.

"My toes are hurting," he complained.

Mark shivered with horror.

"You go back home, Mark!" Taras whispered. "There's no point in your being here with us. You look after Mother; she's all the world to us.... You'll send him home, won't you, Kornei?"

"Yes, Taras; don't you worry about that."

"But don't tell Mother ... you've seen me. . . . Just let her think

I'm missing.... She's only got you and Ivan to help her now.... Tatiana will get married.... Don't leave Mother alone. You take over my horse, Kornei. He's a good horse, a faithful comrade.... Don't feel sorry for me; I shall be glad to die. I'm tired out.... And don't be angry with me for not obeying your orders, Kornei. I paid them out for Father, for Dmitri... and for Mother.... I've got no pity for them.... After the way they beat our mother with ramrods... you know that dark officer, Mark; I caught him and killed him.... 'Float on, float on, waters so deep....'"

He wandered off into delirium again; he began to shout; his eyes dilated and stared at the ceiling. Then he grew very still and quiet, only just breathing. Kornei held Mark's hand, Mark clung to Kornei. So they sat on, till the woman in the black kerchief said softly:

"He's gone."

Mark raised his eyes to Kornei's face. His brother's cheeks were streaming with tears. The boy burst into a terrible sobbing and ran out of the room.

Taras was buried in the monastery cemetery.

Kornei could not bear to go on living in the hospital; he was desperately anxious to return to his regiment. But he had to fight a battle with the doctors, who were not willing to discharge him until he was perfectly well. His leg was not properly healed, and he limped; he kept his left hand always in his pocket, for he had received a saber cut on the shoulder and could not use his arm. But he was determined to return to service, and the battle ended with him and Mark getting into a cart and being driven to the army staff.

Mark had to be very careful not to knock against his brother's arm; he saw Kornei suppress a grimace as he accidentally caught the edge of the cart. He plucked up courage to ask:

"When was that?" he nodded at the arm.

"When was what?"

"Why, your arm. Was it that time when you met the Pole? You know, the fight they wrote about in the papers. Tell me all about it," he pleaded.

"There's nothing to tell. He galloped at me, I at him. He came at me with his saber, I at him. He missed, I didn't. There's nothing interesting in that."

"No, there's nothing interesting in that," Mark agreed. "He missed,

I didn't," he mentally mimicked his brother. "But how about Taras' horse?" he suddenly asked.

"It's dead." Kornei turned away, and his voice sounded annoyed. "Taras didn't know it was killed under him.... It's dead.... And Taras is dead," he went on in a tone of slow, cold fury. "Father, Dmitri, Gregory, and now Taras...."

"Gregory, too?" Mark exclaimed in horror.

His brother frowned as if he had a toothache, and clutched his saber.

"Yes, Gregory, too.... He died of typhus.... I didn't write and tell Mother; she's got enough sorrow without that."

Mark was overwhelmed. So Gregory was gone, too; and he had been so fond of dancing and playing the accordion. The boy was upset, and he heard only vaguely what Kornei was saying. His brother sat leaning forward tensely, his eyes fixed on the distance; he spoke slowly, painfully:

"So Father's gone, and Dmitri, and Gregory, and Taras. And others will go, too. The Surov family is being wiped out.... I couldn't save Taras, either.... He tried to silence a Polish gun singlehanded...."

Mark saw the tear roll down his brother's cheek. He suddenly felt pity for him and silently stroked his sleeve.

"This wind's making my eyes water!" Kornei said. He wiped the tears from his cheeks and turned his back.

Regimental commander Kornei Surov strode about the room, irritably shaking his head. Mark stood huddled in a corner, his head thrust forward obstinately. His eyes followed his brother's movements. Those gray eyes were alight with determination; his freckled, weather-beaten face was beaded with sweat, though the room was not at all warm. His chin was sunk on his chest, and he looked like a young goat that has rammed its horns into a wall and won't draw back.

"Don't you understand that I can't drag you about with the regiment? I can't risk your life, Mark. And I can't send you back, either; you'd never get home. So the best thing will be to leave you here while we're on active service. I've made arrangements with the people here for you to live with them until I come back. We shan't be away long, and you may be with us again in a fortnight."

"But I'm not staying behind! I don't want to stay here without

you. And besides, I'm not a child, to be left in the care of old women!"

Kornei irritably strode out of the room, slamming the door behind him. The kid's got quite out of hand, he thought as he went. How can I take him with us? Supposing something happens to him? He pictured his mother's sorrowful face and felt all the more annoyed. "It's not my fault that you've got such a fractious lot of children," he muttered as if she could hear him.

He called for an orderly, and sent him to the second squadron; the orderly returned accompanied by a tall Red Army man with closely trimmed whiskers. The man wasn't young, maybe about forty; he had on a long greatcoat and an enormous fur cap. He followed the orderly into the regimental commander's room and put his rifle down with a clatter against the wall. He took a keen look at Mark, who was still standing in the corner, but made no comment.

Kornei rose to meet him from his seat at the windows. "Good morning, Tikhon Sidorovich."

"Good morning, Regimental Commander Kornei Timofeevich," the man stolidly answered, dropping into a chair.

"Mark, you can go," Kornei ordered.

When the two men were left alone, Kornei shifted his chair right up beside Tikhon Sidorovich.

"Come to my rescue, old man. I simply can't think what to do with Mark," he began in a miserable tone. "We're ordered up to the front again, as you know. And it's too risky to take the boy with me. He might easily be wiped out. I've sent Philip off to school, but now I've got this one to tackle. And he's our youngest. After what happened to Taras I'm afraid for my brothers. I feel responsible for his death...."

"Of course you aren't, Kornei Timofeevich. When Taras tried to silence that gun, you were lying almost dead yourself."

"All the same I ought to have bridled his spirit more. . . ."

The regimental commander and Tikhon Sidorovich were closeted together for a long time. At last they went out onto the veranda. Kornei looked for Mark, saw him among a crowd of cavalrymen, and called him across.

"As you don't want to stop here, I'm assigning you to the second squadron and placing you entirely at the disposition of Tikhon Sidorovich," he said angrily. "From now on he's your commander, and

you'll do exactly what he orders. And if you don't, don't come running to me. Though I'm your brother, I shall see you get the punishment you deserve."

On his return to regimental headquarters Kornei had found it in a state of excitement and bustling activity. The hopes that the civil war was over and there was no more need for bloodshed had been dashed. Nestor Makhno had raised a revolt against the Soviet regime in the Ukraine, and was sweeping over the countryside with a band of several thousand men. The Budenny Cavalry Army had been ordered to destroy Makhno and clear the Ukraine of his followers. So the Cavalry Army was going into battle once more.

The winter of 1920 was unusually severe. Freezing winds swept across the steppe, driving clouds of stinging snow before them. The frosty nights were beautiful, but they were bitterly hard for the cavalry, which hung on to Makhno's tail. Surov's regiment had been ordered to maintain contact with the enemy at all costs and not let him escape. It halted for a rest only when Makhno's rear guard halted; frequently the regiment bivouacked on one side of a village, and the Makhno band on the other. But neither side would give battle; the time for that was not yet.

For two months that pursuit went on, around the Ukrainian country-side. More and more of Surov's men had to be sent to the hospital, suffering with frostbitten feet and hands. The regiment's course was marked by a trail of dead horses; their bodies were turned into mounds of snow along the wayside. But Makhno continued to maneuver over the country, not allowing himself to be drawn into battle or cut off from the frontiers, which he could cross if his situation grew hopeless. To the Reds' plan of forcing him into a final fight he opposed his own plan of exhausting them in fruitless pursuit, joining battle only when they were worn out.

The regiment dragged slowly along the road. Kornei rode a fine gray horse at its head. From time to time he glanced back, and a look of annoyance crossed his face. The regiment had lost almost half its complement; every day it had to leave men behind. As for the horses, they were completely exhausted. If they could only have two or three days of rest, the regiment might regain its striking power; but order after order came from higher authorities that they were not to ease

up, not to lose sight of the enemy. So they went on day and night, through blizzards and through still, freezing weather.

It was bitterly cold. The Ukrainian steppe lies exposed to all the winds of heaven. The men had their fur caps drawn right over their ears and sat hunched in the saddle. The horses' flanks and necks were covered with a rime of frozen sweat. The stirrups were wrapped in straw and rags, for the bare metal would have scorched with the cold. The animals dragged themselves along, their heads drooping wearily, yellow icicles of frozen spittle hanging from their lips. Surov had every confidence in his men. With them he had covered thousands of miles, had fought dozens of large and hundreds of smaller engagements. But the horses?

He reined in his own steed and dismounted. The order was passed along the column, and all the regiment followed his example. The men went for awhile on foot, leading their mounts by the rein. Then they climbed into the saddle once more and rode along, swaying rhythmically.

Mark was riding among the men of the second squadron. He was dressed as befitted a cavalryman, in a short, dark fur coat, a fur cap, and felt boots. His clothing had been provided by the men of the squadron. Such things were not easy to come by, but nothing is impossible to a soldier. Half frozen themselves, they took the greatest care of this boy whom fate had cast among them; they were already calling him "the son of the regiment." Tikhon Sidorovich was particularly solicitous of his charge. The regimental commander had given him special, secret instructions that if an engagement began, Tikhon was to send Mark back to the baggage train, using force if necessary, and hand him over to the service corps, who were to keep him safe till the fight was ended.

From the very beginning Tikhon and Mark were inseparable. The boy was devoted to this tall soldier, who rode on a lop-eared horse so small that he seemed to be carrying her between his legs. He was an amusing sight, and the men of the other squadrons would shout to him:

"Hey, daddy, isn't your horse heavy to carry that way?"

He never took offense at the jokes, but he never made any retort. He would tuck up his knees and tickle the horse with his spurs, and his skewbald nag would carry him off at a fast trot. He would not have parted with that horse for anything, though she was nothing to look at. On the other hand, he had taken great trouble to get a fine mount for Mark. The boy had a raven horse, not very high, with lean legs and a small head carried beautifully, a small white blaze on the forehead. "Raven" was young, and although exhausted by the long pursuit, from time to time he would forget his weariness, playfully toss his head, and begin to dance along. Tikhon was very proud of Mark, and satisfied with the weapons he had obtained for him. From somewhere he had got hold of a very short rifle and an officer's short saber. Mark thought of himself as quite an old campaigner, and his heart swelled with pride.

From time to time his brother ordered him to report to him. A shout would go up far ahead, and the word would be passed back along the column:

"Mark forward! He is to report to the commander."

At the shout Mark would turn out of the column and gallop along at the roadside to where Kornei was riding at the head. Trotting up to the commander, he would salute irresolutely. Kornei never insisted on being saluted, but Tikhon Sidorovich had strictly enjoined Mark to salute his superiors. Kornei laughed.

"You're quite a Budenny man now, Mark. A fine horse, fine weapons. You're even dressed like an old soldier."

"Tikhon Sidorovich got hold of it all for me," his brother replied. "I know. He's like a father to you. Somehow I never have any time to spare for you. But tell me the truth: you're hungry, aren't you? Didn't I tell you you could ride part of the time on a machine-gun

cart? That way you'd get some sleep. And the machine gunners always manage somehow to get hold of food."

"I want to be with the other men. And I don't bother you because you're always busy." As he spoke, Mark stared at his brother's thin face and thought anxiously: You're hungry, too, by the look of it. "Don't you worry, Kornei; we're not starving. Tikhon Sidorovich always manages to get food.... But don't make me go to the machine gunners. I'm not in the least tired. I'm not a baby!"

"All right, I know you're not a baby. But tell me what you've had to eat today."

Mark flushed. "I haven't had anything yet. But as soon as we arrive at a village, Tikhon Sidorovich—"

"I know, he'll get food. But evening is already coming on, and you've had nothing all day."

Jacob, the commander's orderly, rode up. Among his tasks was that of feeding Kornei, and he did this job with unflagging zeal, though with varying success. He had just been along to the machine gunners, and now he took a hefty loaf of bread from under his greatcoat. The bread was frozen hard, but by sheer strength he broke it into three pieces, giving one each to Kornei and Mark, and keeping the third for himself.

Mark buried his teeth in the solidly frozen mass; it crumbled and gritted on them. But it was good bread, and its healthy scent was not to be suppressed even by the binding frost.

They rode along for some time in silence. Remembering that Tikhon Sidorovich hadn't had anything to eat, either, Mark slipped a piece of the bread into his pocket. As Kornei was about to say something, a solitary horseman came into sight, furiously lashing his horse as he galloped toward them.

"That's a man from one of our patrols," Jacob remarked. "It must be something urgent, the way he's using his whip...."

Kornei abstractedly handed the rest of his bread to the orderly and rode on at a sharp trot to meet the horseman. It seemed that he had already forgotten Mark's presence.

Suddenly a gunshot sounded behind the oncoming rider. In a moment the scene was transformed. Mark was afraid of being cut off from Tikhon Sidorovich, who would tell him what to do, so he turned his horse and rode it hard back toward the second squadron. Now shells were beginning to burst among the men at the head of the column. Men and horses rolled over on the frozen ground, and others scattered to both sides of the road. Looking back, Mark caught sight of his brother, reining in his gray horse. He was shouting something, but the boy could not distinguish the words. I've got to be with him, he thought, and sharply turned his horse. In a moment he was in the very midst of a shambles of horses and men lying about the road. Raven snorted, charging against the flanks of other horses. Mark lashed him with the end of his reins, and Raven dashed on. The next thing Mark saw was a horse's hoofs waving in the air above him. But that's Raven! he thought. What on earth is he doing? Then darkness fell around him, but he exerted all his will and drove it off. High above him he saw Tikhon Sidorovich's bearded face, drawing down over him. "I failed to look after him, poor kid!" the face whispered. Over Tikhon's shoulder peered Mark's mother. She was smiling faintly,

encouragingly. A gripping feeling of sorrow for her made him stretch out his hands toward her.

"Mummy!"

Her face drew away, began to dissolve, as though it were woven of tenuous cloud.

"Mummy, don't go!" he called, desperately anxious to keep her with him. Then a voice said, "He's calling for his mother." Whose voice? He did not recognize it.

He opened his eyes and fixed his gaze on a sky that was black, with bright patches. That absurd, stupid sky amazed him. Then he realized that it was made of straw and was held up by poles. His mind cleared. What he thought was the sky was a straw roof, and the patches were holes through which the real sky showed. He was in a shed. Along the wall wounded men were lying on straw. Beside him Mark saw a strange, bearded face, giving him a friendly smile.

"Where am I? Am I dead?"

"Where d'you get that from?" the man said cheerfully. "You're only wounded." He called into the depths of the shed. "Auntie Nadia, Mark's woke up."

"Auntie Nadia" came along to them. She was a nurse, and all the regiment called her auntie, though she was not more than eighteen. She had quite a youthful face, but it always wore a harsh frown, and she seemed never to smile. Now she came up with her brow knitted, her lips tightly compressed. A burning pain in his left leg made Mark squeal a little. She drew off his felt boots. He had no idea what had happened to him, but suddenly he was seized by a terrible thought: They'll cut off my legs. He saw again his brother Taras, a stump with no legs. "I won't let you! I can't have that!" he shouted, tearing himself out of Auntie Nadia's hands. His forehead was beaded with sweat. "I'd rather die . . . like Taras. I'd rather die,"

Her face bent right over him. "Don't worry, it's not a serious wound," she said. And unexpectedly she smiled at him. A smile just like a child's.

Her words made no impression on him, but her smile was reassuring. He glanced surreptitiously round the shed, to see whether anyone had noticed that he had been on the point of crying.

Now he could see things distinctly. Several soldiers, groaning quietly, were lying about on straw. Two men from his own second squadron were trying to bandage their own arms. Four others were

stretched out in a row at the door. Why were they clinging to the ground like that? And lying in the snow, too.

He could hear the sound of artillery and rifle fire; the shed seemed to be almost in the very heart of the battle. He stared at the wounded men's faces. But they showed no signs of anxiety. Evidently everything was going as it should go in battle.

He had to summon up great strength of will to keep himself from crying out, to drive away the mist that came over his eyes, to remain on the very verge of consciousness. He felt that some monster had buried a hundred fangs in his leg and was chewing slowly, unhurriedly. The pain darkened his mind, and he feverishly began to tear off the bandage. The bearded soldier, though he was wounded in the thigh, rolled all his body against Mark, seized his hands, and, when the boy grew still, made him comfortable on the straw and wiped his sweating, distorted face with the edge of his own greatcoat.

Jacob, the commander's orderly, hurried into the shed, bringing an order from Kornei that Auntie Nadia's field dressing station was to remain there till nightfall, when the wounded were to be transferred to the village. Jacob hurriedly said that the fight was at its height and the regiment had been forced to dismount and take up defensive positions. The Makhno men had all but broken through to the Red foxholes, but the regimental commander had led the reserve squadron into the attack and flung them back. Now they were bombarding us with gunfire, but they were poor marksmen and our artillery was silencing theirs. The commander was awaiting the arrival of two more regiments, when we would hurl ourselves on the enemy and finish him off.

Jacob hurried along by the wall, looking at the wounded men. When he saw Mark, he smacked his thigh and almost squatted down in his astonishment.

"So there you are! We've been searching everywhere; we've examined all the dead on the road and checked up all the ditches. The commander's clean crazy about it. He said he saw you fall from your horse."

Jacob dashed out of the shed, and Mark saw him gallop past the open door.

It was getting dark when Kornei and his orderly came into the shed. He went silently up to Mark, laid his big, coarse hand on his brother's forehead, and feeling the heat, knitted his brows. Mark felt

terribly like crying with self-pity, with the pain, and because he guessed what Kornei was thinking, how he was reproaching himself for what had occurred. Treacherously moist tears misted his eyes, but he held on and even found strength to repeat Auntie Nadia's words:

"It's nothing; nothing to be alarmed at."

Kornei was deeply upset. Careless where his own life was concerned, he was solicitous for the lives of his brothers and already felt that he had been responsible for Taras' and Gregory's deaths. And now here was his youngest brother, thirteen-year-old Mark, lying wounded, and saying it was nothing to be alarmed at! In war everything is measured in short distances. If the shell fragment had caught the boy six inches higher he would have been killed.

"But how about Tikhon Sidorovich?" Mark suddenly asked.

Auntie Nadia turned and looked at him. "He was killed," she said. "Killed?" Kornei started.

"Yes. He brought Mark in, but he had hardly got outside again when he was hit in the temple."

"And I didn't even have the chance to thank him for saving Mark," Kornei said thoughtfully.

Tikhon Sidorovich dead! Somehow that was impossible for Mark's heart and mind to take in. The news brought the tears again to his eyes. They poured down his face, and he made no attempt to wipe them away.

"Don't cry, Mark." Kornei forced the words out. His face was distorted with suffering. "That's how it goes; in war one moment you're alive, the next you're dead. I'm sorry about Tikhon Sidorovich. All the same, don't cry. Every one of us carries death in his knapsack."

He slowly stroked Mark's tangled, tear-sodden hair and then walked to the entrance. He stood beside the four dead bodies, taking off his cap. Silently he went out into the gathering night. There was a clatter of horse hoofs as with his orderly he hurried back to the thick of the fight.

Ten days later Mark was carried into the same hospital where he had found his brothers Taras and Kornei.

The hospital life threw him entirely into the company of grown-up men. As in the regiment, so here, all life was built upon dreams of the future. It was that radiant future which justified and explained the present. Each man had his own idea of what that future would be like, but they all thought of it in terms of happiness and joy.

In those days, like the men around him, Mark, too, learned to dream. The war will end, he thought, and we'll all go back home. We'll all have big houses with lots of room in them, we'll all be dressed in Sunday clothes, and we'll walk about the streets enjoying ourselves. And it'll be like that always, always.... It won't be necessary to fight any more. And there won't be any lice-ridden people hanging about the stations; they'll all get where they want to get to.... And the houses must have gardens. So we'll have to pull down the old houses, and build new ones. But he recalled his own old home with a pang.

As he listened to others talking, and read for himself about the people's government, he imagined how the head man of the village, elected by the people, would go from house to house and ask what each one wanted. The people's government would provide sweets for the children and toys for the little ones. But he kept this part of his dreaming secret from the grownups, for he wasn't sure whether they would agree not to beat the children, and always give them what they needed—trousers, for instance, with two pockets, and a pair of boots for every child.

In his ward there were fourteen men, all from various regiments of the Budenny Army. The army was beginning to be flooded with propaganda literature, and brochures, printed on coarse wrapping paper, were sent to the hospital. One day bales of what appeared to be beer-bottle labels were brought in. The labels had been found in a brewery storeroom and had been printed on the reverse side with sentences from Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and revolutionary slogans. The men in the hospital turned over the pages of the brochures and studied the labels in search of the revelations they were needing so desperately. In Biblical times the people had rejected the commandments Moses had brought them, and so he had smashed the tablets. The people of the revolutionary era believed that the tablets would be brought to them, and they seized greedily on the paper covered with revolutionary writings. Surely these would open up entrancing horizons, would outline the world of the future.

Mark's immature mind was incapable of digesting the heavy dough of these new thoughts and humbly submitted to them; he accepted the tablets on which he read the outline of the future. Nor was his the only immature mind; in their thinking the grown-up occupants of the ward were no more advanced than thirteen-year-old Mark. They were guided more by instinct than thought. An instinct for freedom had lined them up under the Red banners of revolution, had led them through fields of battle, had given them a sense of the rightness of the road they were traveling. One thing, and one thing only, was clear: the ranks of their enemies consisted of the landowners, the capitalists, the generals, and other exploiters, who wished the ordinary people to bow before them. On the other side were the people who did not want to be slaves any longer. And so they inevitably became Bolsheviks, Communists. They could not become anything else. Many of the wounded were illiterate, but they, too, declared that they were Communists. They were advancing toward a future whose outlines had been sketched for them by the Bolsheviks.

Of all the patients in the hospital Mark was the best educated. And so he had to read everything that arrived for them. He not only read, he tried to understand what he read. Then he would explain it all to the others. And thus he became a propagandist.

Late one night he was called from his bed to go to a ward at the far end of the corridor. It was set aside for those whose days and hours were numbered. Here a man lay stretched out on a bed in one corner. His chest rose and fell violently with his painful breathing; the breath wheezed out of his throat. He was a man named Ananiev, from ward six. Mark had often sat by his bed, talking, and the two had become good friends. Ananiev, an elderly workman from the Volga area, was illiterate. He had had a long and bitter life, working hard from his early boyhood in order to maintain his family. When he was fourteen, his father, a stevedore, had been crushed to death by crates falling on him, and so Ananiev had had to work for his two young brothers and his sick mother. He had tried his hand at many jobs, but none of them had brought him any nearer to happiness. When the revolution broke out, he was among the first to stand to the barricades of his home town. He had gone on from one fight to another, had been wounded twice, had returned each time to his regiment, had somehow been sent to the Budenny Army, and now, when the war was almost ended, when the fires of civil war were dying down, he had been wounded a third time, in the chest. He had hovered between life and death for almost two months, but as soon

as he had taken a turn for the better, he had asked Mark to read to him.

Now he was lying in the ward that no patient left on his own feet. And in the tiny scrap of consciousness that still held him to life, Mark and books haunted him. So he had asked for Mark to be sent to him.

"Well, Mark...so I'm dying." His voice was broken, gasping. For a long time he said nothing, then he opened his eyes again.

"Read to me, Mark. Read something."

Mark hurried off and got his books. Ananiev was lying with his eyes fixed on the door. The hospital was not lighted by electricity, but the orderly left them his kerosene lamp, and by its light Mark began to read the A.B.C. of Communism. Ananiev lay with closed eyes while Mark read page after page; the moment the boy stopped the man opened his eyes and gasped:

"Go on!"

"The supreme principle of communist society is: from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," Mark read aloud. "The achievement of this principle in life depends entirely on the development of the productive forces and the productivity of labor. Under communism the productivity of human labor will be increased to such an extent that one hour's work a day will suffice to provide man with all the necessities of life in abundance."

"That's fine!" Ananiev gasped. "Only one...hour's work!" His fading consciousness clung to the memory of how he had had to work day and night, to work till he dropped, simply in order to keep alive.

Over the dying many people read the Bible. But the harsh men of the revolution had renounced God; they had found a new bible, and believed in it with all their simple and innocent minds. Mark sat at a dying man's bedside and read this new gospel. The room was half sunk in shadow, the lamp smoked, outside dawn began to come, but he read on and on, raising his voice. Left alone with this dying man, he felt afraid. The gasping groan that burst from Ananiev's throat frightened him, and he tried to drown it with his own voice. Then the groan died away, but Mark read on, afraid to turn his eyes from the book. At last, overcoming his fear, he stopped and looked. Ananiev was staring at him with glazing eyes, staring without blink-

ing. For a second he thought the man wanted to ask him something; then he realized that this was death.

His shoulders quivering as if he were cold, he went into the corridor and called the orderly.

The order arrived that Mark was to be transferred to a political training school.

This was due to the arrival of an instructor from the Army Political Department. He turned up at the hospital late one night and made himself comfortable in a chilly room downstairs. Next morning he sent for Mark. When the boy entered, the instructor was lying on a pile of newspapers that he had brought with him, and was covered with a wretched, ragged greatcoat.

Victor Emelianovich Peresvetov, as the man was named, had joined the revolutionary movement at the beginning of the century. He came of a wealthy family; his father had owned large sugar refineries. Victor Emelianovich had been drawn into revolutionary activity while still a student, and had joined the Social Democratic Party, adhering to the Bolshevik section that afterward became the Russian Communist Party. He had graduated from law school, but after leaving the university, he had plunged headlong into revolutionary work. In 1907 he had been arrested and sent into exile, but had fled. He had come into personal contact with Lenin, and this had confirmed him in his choice of road. When his father died, leaving him a considerable fortune, he had handed it all over to the Party. He regarded the 1917 revolution as marking the arrival of a long-awaited liberation, became a member of the Petrograd Soviet, and helped the Bolsheviks to seize power.

The revolution had opened a great field of activity to him. Lenin had the gift of appreciating his friends and followers. Peresvetov was appointed to a high administrative post. And now for the first time he discovered that life was not by any means so simple as he had expected, and could not be confined within the framework of any theory. In theory everything was clear; in life everything was complicated and confused. He ascribed the difficulties that arose to his own incapacity for administrative work, and asked to be given a more modest job. He was offered the position of political director to the Red Army, but flatly refused to accept it, and soon after became instructor for the Political Department of the Budenny Cavalry Army.

All these details Mark learned much later; on that first meeting he saw Peresvetov in a really wretched state. Poorly dressed, thin, emaciated, he was burning with a feverish fire. Seating Mark beside him, he looked at him a long time without speaking, then smiled at some thought and said, evidently more to himself than to Mark:

"Yes, a generation young and intractable . . ."

Mark brought him some hot tea and a piece of bread. As Peresvetov drank the tea and indifferently chewed the bread, the boy saw that he was getting on in years; his face was deeply furrowed, and was lit up by translucent blue eyes with a gleam that often became unbearable to look at. Mark had never seen such eyes.

The instructor listened to the boy's description of the sick and wounded men in the hospital, the books he had read, and the books he wanted to read. Mark told about the evening talks in which he took part, and about Ananiev, to whom he had read the A.B.C. of Communism.

"And you weren't frightened?"

"I was," Mark admitted. "He snored terribly. It was awful."

Peresvetov walked about the room, thinking. Suddenly he halted and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Get ready to go away, Mark. You're going to study, my boy. We're just starting to organize a political school, and you'll be attending it. And afterward we'll consider what you shall do next. Your generation has got the task of remaking the world, and to do that you've got to study a lot and thoroughly."



6. In the Caucasian Mountains

For nearly two years Victor Emelianovich's political school roamed from place to place in the wake of the Cavalry Army. The students, with rifles across their backs and books tied to their saddles, went right through campaigns, frozen, weather-beaten with the steppe winds, exhausted by long marches. Whenever the army halted, they piled their rifles in one corner of a hut and brought out their books.

They discussed and argued; they listened with bated breath to Victor Emelianovich; with hard, painful thought they settled the complicated problems of political science.

Mark Surov was one of those weather-beaten, taciturn men who went armed with rifles and books. During those two years he grew tall and broad-shouldered, but he also grew awkward and angular, like most boys of fifteen and sixteen. Nowadays his thin face with its peaked nose always expressed the tenseness of his thought, and his eyes had acquired a look rather akin to the expression of Victor Emelianovich's.

One autumn day Mark was walking along a road that rain had turned into clinging porridge. The sky was free of clouds, but it was hung about with a gray, dense mist, from which a cold, slanting rain occasionally sprinkled down. The mountains were a vague, indefinite mass, like giants wrapped in cloaks against the foul weather.

The road was deserted. In such weather no one ventured out from the villages; everybody sat at home in his warm house, passing the days in petty domestic tasks and cares. Mark had covered many miles of this muddy, clinging road, and his forehead was damp with sweat, his face gray with weariness. As he walked along, he looked like some ordinary Cossack lad wandering from village to village. He was dressed, Cossack fashion, in a short, quilted coat belted with a narrow thong at the waist, high, coarse leg boots coated with mud, and an old Cossack army cap with a faded crimson band.

When the road ran downhill, he found walking even more difficult, for his feet slipped and stumbled in the mud. But ahead of him he could see a village, and he sighed with relief. It was quite a small place, of some fifty houses. Right in the heart of the foothills, it was in a narrow valley, and so its houses stretched along both sides of the single road. At one time it had been an outpost defending the plain from the eruptions of the mountain tribes, and high stone walls turned each house into a small fort.

The numerous sheds and the abundance of cattle in the yards testified to the wealth of the inhabitants. Mark walked the street from one end to the other but met no one. When he reached the far end of the village, he turned back and went up to a well, with a pole of the crane rising high above it. Now a tall, broad-shouldered old man with a long gray beard and rather staring, gray eyes, a typical Cossack of the older generation, was standing at the well, watering a horse.

When Mark asked him for a drink he held out the bucket without speaking. Mark set his lips to the rim, glancing sidelong at the old Cossack as he gulped down the cold water. In his turn the man was scrutinizing Mark, running his eyes over the lad's patched clothing, his patched boots, with mud halfway up the legs. Mark raised his head from the bucket, and the old man inquired with assumed indifference:

"Come a long way, Cossack? By your boots it looks as if you've been treading the mud a long time."

"Do you live here, daddy?" Mark answered with a question.

"Yes. You could say I'm a native Kuban Cossack."

"I've come from Maikop; I live there with my aunt," Mark said. "But my father's in Kizhnatsky district. You may have heard of Timothy Kononenkov; well, he's my father."

There are several Kononenkovs to be found in every Kuban Cossack village, so Mark was not risking anything. The result was just what it always was when he told Cossacks this story. The bearded man raised his head, and tried to recall whether he had ever met Timothy Kononenkov. When he next spoke, there was a warmer note in his voice:

"No, I've never chanced to meet Timothy Kononenkov; but we've got a Larion Kononenkov in this village. He doesn't happen to be a kinsman of yours, by any chance?"

Mark also deemed it proper to think this over, fixing his eyes on the roof of the nearest house, and even removing his old cap and thoughtfully scratching his nape. Of course he could not remember any connection with Larion, and answered with a sigh:

"No, he's no kinsman. Sidor Kononenkov's a kinsman, and Seraphim Kononenkov comes from my uncle's side; and Paul Kononenkov's my grandfather. But none of them live here."

"If you were on your way to your father's village, how did you get to our little place? It'll be a good twelve miles off your road. You're like the Cossack who was always going home and always found himself in the tavern." The Cossack laughed at his joke, displaying two rows of white teeth.

Mark gave the old man's sturdy form another swift glance and said in an injured tone:

"I wouldn't have got here if it hadn't been for the Reds. They picked me up on the road and made me ride with them..."

As Mark mentioned the Reds, the old man pricked up his ears and looked at him fixedly. But the lad was ready for that!

"They brought me to the ravine some six miles back. They gave me a letter, and told me to bring it to this village and give it to someone named Klopov. They said everybody here knows him. But I was just wondering where to ask for him."

"But where did the Reds go to?"

"They turned back. 'Hand over the letter,' they said, 'and you can go your way.' All very fine, but I'll have to tramp a whole day through this mud to get back onto my road."

"Come along, sonny." The old Cossack took him by the sleeve and led him to the nearest house. He opened the side gate, let Mark go through in front, then led in his horse. Then he took Mark into a large room with several windows lined with fading geraniums. An old woman was busy at an enormous stove, and the place smelled of freshly baked bread and the herbs of various kinds that were hanging round the walls.

The old man went across to the icon corner and told Mark to sit down beside him. "Give me the letter," he said. "Let's see what they've written."

"But they said I was to give it to Klopov," the boy objected.

"Give it here! I'm Klopov. But there are six of us Klopovs in this village, and I'll have to look to see which one it's for."

Mark handed him the envelope with its wax seal. The old man took a wooden spectacle case down from behind the icon; but before opening the letter he said to the old woman:

"You've got some beet soup left, and find something else to eat, too. We'll give the lad a meal; he's been on the road."

He arranged his spectacles deliberately on his nose and opened the envelope. Several printed leaflets giving details of Lenin's amnesty decree for all who were in revolt against the Soviet regime fell out. He pushed them aside. He's seen them somewhere already, Mark decided, watching closely even as he wielded his wooden spoon energetically on his plate of steaming soup. In addition to the leaflets, the envelope contained a typewritten letter. The old man was obviously not a very good reader; he read it syllable by syllable, moving his lips and muttering to himself. He ended just as Mark was emptying a plate of curd dumplings and cream. Thoughtfully removing his

spectacles, he looked at his wife, who so far had not said a word, and remarked slowly:

"Listen, Mother! The Reds have written a letter to our Paul. They advise him to surrender while the amnesty is in force." He turned back to Mark. "The letter's addressed to Paul Klopov, and he's our son. So you've come to the right address first time. I'll see he gets the letter, but you'd better stay with us for a day or two. We may have need of you."

Without waiting for Mark to agree, the old man rose from the bench and went out. His wife seated herself in the corner by the stove and cried quietly, wiping away the tears with the edge of her skirt. Mark said nothing. He knew he had to stay here, whether he wished to or not. Every step he took would be watched.

The dark autumn evening crept into the house. Outside, poplars were rustling; occasionally they scraped their branches over the house roof. As noiselessly as a wraith the old woman moved about the rooms. She lit a tiny lamp made from a can filled with oil, with a wick passing through a hole in the lid. The light did not reach as far as Mark's corner. He began to doze off, and his thoughts passed sluggishly through his mind. The people are dead out of luck, he thought. Take these Klopovs. Only a small family, but the son's gone off into the hills, and his old mother, like my old mother, is sitting crying. There's nothing to fight over, you'd say, and yet fighting goes on. . . . In this village the Cossacks aren't so badly off; but in other places the people's bellies are swelling with hunger. . . . Lenin's right in calling on everybody to go back home.

He was aroused by a gentle touch. He looked up and saw the old woman standing over him; her deeply sunken eyes were burning with a dry gleam.

"Tell me," she said eagerly, "is it the truth Lenin writes, or can't we trust him? You see, Paul's our only son. Supposing he comes back home, and they catch him and kill him, what then? But if he doesn't come back, that'll be the end of him just the same. They aren't very strong, and the Reds will finish them all off."

She scorched him with her burning breath, and he felt almost physically, almost painfully, all the weight of the doubts oppressing her. She was eaten up with anxiety for her only son, and there was nothing Mark could do to comfort her so long as the threat to him was not removed. He did not answer, and she quietly went away, saying as she went:

"Go and lie down, sonny. I've made up a bed for you."

The bed was made up on a broad bench running along the wall. He took off his boots, lay down, and pulled a large sheepskin coat over himself. The old woman put out the light and went into a side room, where there was a great bedstead. Drowsiness flowed over the lad, enveloping him more and more closely. He had learned to sleep half awake, retaining control over himself by remaining on the fringe of consciousness. He started into watchfulness more than once as he felt someone approach him. It was the old woman. She came and whispered something over him, adjusted the sheepskin, and went away again.

In his half-awake state Mark was reliving the chain of events that had brought him here. He recalled the news that had terminated his political schooling. Lenin had summoned Peresvetov back to Moscow. Rumors reached the army that he was working with Lenin in the Kremlin and occasionally traveled abroad. After his departure the students and the army staff lost interest in the school; soon it was abolished altogether, and the students were returned to their regiments. So Mark found himself once more in his brother's old regiment, riding his Raven, who had been cared for all the time of his absence. But now Kornei was no longer a regimental but a divisional commander. He sent for Mark to be with him, as if it were easy for the lad to abandon the regiment that had come to regard him as its son. And he refused to go.

His brother Simon also was climbing steadily up the ladder of official rank, and his speeches at congresses and conferences were printed in the papers. Ivan was still at home with his mother, but he wrote his brothers desperate letters demanding that he, too, should be allowed to join the army. He could not stomach the fact that Mark was a soldier while he, two years older, was still at home.

There had been other changes, too. For one thing, the Surov family had diminished still further. Somewhere in the burning sands of Turkestan, outside a fortress with the absurd name of Kushka, a tribesman's bullet had torn its way into Philip Surov's heart, and he had turned the ground crimson with yet more Surov blood shed for the Soviet regime. And, in their mother's memorial volume, the list

on the page devoted to prayers "for the peace of..." grew still longer. On that page, stained with candle wax and scalding tears, were the words:

"A prayer for the peace of:

Soldier Jacob.
Soldier Sergei.
Soldier Timothy.
Soldier Dmitri.
Soldier Taras.
Soldier Gregory.
Soldier Philip.

"Remember, O Lord, the souls of thy slaves who have fallen asleep."

Back in the regiment Mark felt that he was among his own people. There were familiar faces all around him. The school had added greatly to his knowledge, and now he could tell the soldiers what the Communist society for which they were fighting would look like; he could answer their questions, could discuss things with them. The regimental political commissar was delighted at his return. The commissar was a very young man named Bertsky, from a middle-class Jewish family. At the outbreak of the revolution he had been a student, and without thinking he had thrown up his university career and joined the army. But he found it difficult to understand the ways of thought of the simple Russians to whom he was appointed political commissar. Mark was able to act as a go-between, making it easier for the youthful commissar to make contact with these men to whom he was drawn by all his instincts and feelings.

The Budenny Army was now quartered in barracks in the North Caucasus region. Supplies were more plentiful, the older men were demobilized, and the task of politically educating the men had become one of prime importance. Instructors were sent out from the Political Department, classes for the abolition of illiteracy were started, newspapers arrived regularly.

However, the "transition period" was proving to be longer and more difficult than anyone had expected. The country was completely ruined. The peasant farmers still kept going somehow or other, but the new government had to squeeze out everything the farmers possessed in order to save the townspeople from death by starvation. Food requisitioning detachments went from village to village, col-

lecting the grain. Then a new disaster occurred—famine. Drought, followed by crop failure in the Volga areas, the Ukraine, and the North Caucasus, doomed millions of people to death, and the Soviet regime could do nothing to help. Cases of cannibalism were being reported, and if it had not been for the aid sent from other countries, and above all from America, the catastrophe would have been far greater.

For the first time doubt arose in the hearts of the fighters for the revolution. Yet the patience of the ages made the people believe that they only had to hold out and wait. The Russian people had always had to suffer need, misery, lawlessness. However, not all were prepared to suffer and wait, and here and there the peasants broke into unorganized, violent revolt. Though restricted to small areas, armed risings began to present a serious danger. Moscow was especially disturbed at the continual struggle that went on in the North Caucasus region. The Caucasian foothills were highly favorable to partisan warfare, and the district was inhabited by militant-minded Cossacks. They organized in partisan bands, "Green" detachments, and raided villages and hamlets, ruthlessly eliminating the representatives of the Soviet. It was not long before a large area, rich in grain and cattle, was alienated from Soviet rule.

Such an example might well prove infectious, and Lenin called for the suppression of the centers of Cossack resistance. The Budenny Army was ordered to create twelve special task forces for fighting banditry, each force to consist of three hundred reliable and seasoned men. One of these forces was drawn from Mark's regiment. With it went a complete reconnaissance troop, which included Mark.

For four months this force roved through the foothills, until men and horses were utterly worn out. The Green partisans avoided open clashes with the Reds, relying on making sudden sallies and as suddenly vanishing again. Some two months after the campaign had opened the commander of the Red force reckoned up the results. They had destroyed not one group of the Greens, had caught not one partisan, had not set up a single soviet that could hope to survive more than three days after the force's departure from a village. They had lost fifty men killed, ninety-five wounded, over a hundred horses, and three machine guns, which the Greens had impudently carried off during a night bivouac. Evidently the same results were reported by the other special forces, for the army staff sent out the

order for Mark's force to halt and attempt to clear up the area in which it found itself.

Now all the burden of activity fell on the reconnaissance troop. It was ordered to find out where the Greens were hiding and what stores, reserves, etc., they had. The reconnaissance men ranged over the district, but they, too, found nothing. The enemy was all around them, but the enemy was invisible. Goliakov, the troop commander, a heavily built, stocky man with incredibly broad shoulders, was ready to blast his men's heads off in his fury.

"For the Lord's sake!" he complained. "A fine reconnaissance troop like mine, and not one of those Green devils to be seen! We can smell them around us, but we can't lay our hands on them. You look for a flea in a rick, and it turns and bites you in the arse."

At last he had an idea. He sat staring at Mark, scratched his head thoughtfully, and sighed. A day or two later he sent for the lad and took him out to the outskirts of the village in which they were quartered. They halted by a hayrick, hobbled the horses, and sat down on the scented hay. Goliakov lit a cigarette, thought for a moment, then held out his pouch to Mark.

"Here, have a smoke. I give you permission!"

They were silent; Goliakov was thinking hard. Finally he fixed his little eyes on the lad.

"Listen, Mark; your brother put you into my hands to look after you like you were my son. And he ordered me to be strict with you. So if I shout at you sometimes or lash out at you, don't be upset. It's all for the sake of discipline."

Mark smiled. Goliakov did shout at him sometimes, but he shouted at everybody else. They were all used to it, and no one took offense.

"I've been wondering, my boy, whether you're grown up now and I can tell my secret to you, or whether you're still a child. What do you think?"

"How can I be a child, when I do my duty as well as any other man?"

"I'm not thinking of duty, Mark. You know quite well that when Goliakov's in command a babe straight from its mother's titty would make a good reconnaissance.... Well, then I'll tell you straight out. You're my only hope. Those Greens have put me to shame, blast them! This is my idea.... But it's hard for me to tell you; if

Kornei finds out, he'll blow my head off. If anything happens to you, I'm finished. You know what your brothers are like."

"What have my brothers got to do with it?" Mark said angrily. "What do you want me to do?"

Goliakov scratched his nape and shook his head.

"You've got to go off into the Cossack villages on your own. I'd go myself, but anyone can see with half an eye I'm a Soviet man. But you could get away with it. A bit of a lad wandering about, what can he do? And who would do anything to him? Go and find out where the Greens are hiding. Then you'll save the troop from everlasting shame."

So it was decided. Goliakov was right; the gaunt lad in old Cossack clothes attracted no particular attention in the village streets and on the roads. Mark saw that the Greens were everywhere. He came upon armed men in the village streets; saddled horses stood in the yards. A wedding would be celebrated, and the guests always turned up equipped with rifles and sabers. The groom himself would be sitting beside his bride, holding a rifle in his hands. Everything Mark saw and heard he confided to his memory. Then he would leave reports in various spots along the highroads. He dug a hole under a tree that stood out as a landmark, buried a note in it, and broke a branch above the hole. Goliakov's troop would be following up somewhere behind him as he shifted from place to place, and when the commander saw the broken branch, he would search till he found Mark's report. Then he would lead his troop to the village Mark had indicated. But they found it deserted, lurking in ominous silence. The armed men had vanished; everything seemed quite peaceful. And the troop could do nothing. It would stay in the village for a day or two, then ride off again, to the inhabitants' ironic comments.

But Goliakov was well content with Mark's work. When the commander arrived in any village, he knew where the wedding had been celebrated, where the partisans had been fed, where they had spent the night. He would knock at a window. An old woman would look out, see a Red Army man, and spit with fury.

"Well, grannie, you don't happen to have any pies left over from the wedding, do you?" Goliakov would ask.

"We haven't had a wedding."

"Now, now, grannie! You married your Tania to the partisan commander Grushko. I've arrived too late for the wedding, unfor-

tunately, but I could just about do with a pie...or a currant cake, like the one you made for the partisans."

The woman would cross herself, for she had made such a cake, but apart from the guests only evil spirits could have known about it. Goliakov would already be knocking at another door.

"Let me have the pistol you've got hidden in the eaves of the porch. The Greens forgot to take it with them," he would say to the young woman who answered his knock.

"What pistol?" she would scream at him. Then, remembering that there was a pistol hidden as he had said, she would stare in alarm at this all-knowing Budenny man. Goliakov would rummage in the eaves and bring out the pistol.

"This pistol!" he would mimic her. "And I may know even more than that. I may know who was kissing and cuddling you last night. But don't be afraid, I shan't tell your husband."

So he would go from house to house, alarming the inhabitants by the extent of his knowledge. And the rumor ran through the Cossack villages that the Reds had an invisible commissar who went from house to house, hearing everything, seeing everything, but never being heard or seen.

Yet it seemed as if all this information was of no real value, for the Reds were still unable to take the Greens by surprise. But suddenly the situation changed completely. In the name of the Soviet Government Lenin proclaimed an amnesty and guaranteed perfect safety to all who voluntarily laid down their arms. The partisans were given a month in which to surrender. In these new circumstances the information Mark collected acquired unusual value. The regimental commander and commissar were ordered to get into direct contact with the Greens, to bring influence to bear on them, to persuade them to take advantage of the amnesty. When Mark returned to the task force and reported on all he had seen and heard, the commissar seized his hands and madly danced him round the room. During the next few days packets of proclamations announcing the amnesty were distributed in all the villages and hamlets, and leaflets were posted on the walls of houses and sheds. The commander and commissar wrote letters to the Green commanders and gave them to Mark to carry to the villages. Sometimes he threw the letter unnoticed into a house where he knew partisans were in the habit of congregating; but more often he called at the house and said the Reds had ordered him to

deliver the letter. Sometimes he was allowed to go away again at once, but usually he was told to wait, and asked to take a letter back to the Reds.

Now he had brought a letter for Paul Klopov, the commander of a Green detachment.

During the night a storm broke. The wind rushed along the narrow valley, sending the tall poplars swaying, and roaring down the chimneys. The branches of the poplars growing right outside the Klopovs' house scraped over the roof, and it sounded as if someone were running across it, seeking to find a way inside. Mark dozed fitfully, listening to the howling of the wind, the rustling over the roof. Then the noises seemed to withdraw, the howling died down to a more musical hum, and he imagined he heard his regimental band playing. He thought he had lost consciousness only for a second; but, opening his eyes, he saw the dawn streaming through the windows. The storm had blown itself out. The old woman was puffing the stove embers into a blaze; by their feeble light he could see two men standing at the door. He had not heard them enter. He saw they were carrying weapons, and a cold shiver ran down his back. I'm caught! was his first thought. And I've got nothing I can defend myself with. He did not stir, but watched the two men through the narrowed slits of his eyelids. He could not distinguish them very clearly, but neither of them was old Klopov. Next moment a heavy hand gripped his shoulder and gently shook him.

"Listen, friend! Wake up, we've got business with you."

He did not move, but his mind worked feverishly. Who were they, and what did they want him for?

The hand shook him more vigorously, and the hoarse voice repeated:

"Wake up, my lad, or you'll oversleep the kingdom of heaven."

He opened his eyes and sat up. The man standing over him was about thirty-five and was wrapped in a Caucasian cloak with a cowl; a small, round Kuban cap of Astrakhan fur was drawn over his eyes. From his comparatively friendly tone Mark judged that he was in no danger at the moment.

"You'll have to ride with us on important business, my lad. So get yourself ready!"

Mark silently drew on his boots. The old woman set a plate of

boiled meat and some bread on the table. Mark washed in a trough by the stove, then went to the table. He and the two men ate their breakfast in silence and went into the yard.

Under the open shed three saddled horses were standing. The man in the cloak untied the reins of one of them, bridled the horse, and handed the reins to Mark. The old woman had already opened the gates. They rode out of the village and into the hills. The narrow road led across a small stream, through a hillside wood white with the bark of plane trees glimmering in the early morning mist. They rode in silence. The men were obviously in a hurry, and by the way they urged on their horses Mark decided that they could not be planning to go far. The animals' flanks were soon covered with foam, and they began to stumble over the stones. But he was wrong. After some two hours, at the edge of a forest three more saddled horses were waiting for them, in charge of a young partisan armed with a rifle. They changed horses and set off again at a trot along a path that led steadily upward.

About an hour later they halted again. Dawn had come long since, but the morning was hazy and raw; the mountain summits were wrapped in a dense milky mist. They had turned off the track some time before and had been riding through a forest of ancient oaks. Now the trees suddenly came to an end at the foot of a bare cliff.

The older man took off his cowl and held it out to Mark. "Bind your eyes, my lad," he said in his hoarse, deep voice. At Mark's gesture of protest he clapped him reassuringly on the back. "There's nothing to fear. We'll return you safe and sound to wherever you came from, and you needn't be afraid of us. You don't need to know the road."

Mark had to obey; a rough hand felt the cowl to make sure it fitted closely to the eyes. Led by the rein, his horse went on slowly. After a while he felt that it was setting its hoofs down very cautiously, as though it were on the edge of a precipice. Then the path turned steeply upward. The horses snorted and strained as they went, and the stones rolled downward from under their hoofs. They crossed a small stream, then the path climbed up again, but now not so steeply. Several times the men ordered Mark to stoop, and he felt tree branches scraping over his back.

They halted. He slipped off the horse. A rough, unceremonious hand took his and led him on foot. Apparently the second horseman,

a lad only a little older than Mark, had remained behind with the horses, for he could not hear a second pair of footsteps. Now they passed under an arch of some kind; a fierce draft blew at them; their steps sounded hollow and were echoed from above. He could hear human voices. Suddenly someone standing right beside him said:

"Why, you've wrapped him up as if he were a scarecrow. Take the cowl off!"

The cowl was removed. The first man he saw was old Klopov. Beside him was a tall fellow some twenty-five years of age and strongly resembling him. The younger man was wearing high leg boots, a Cossack cap, and a finely embroidered white shirt, over which was flung a Caucasian felt cloak.

Mark stared about him in astonishment. He was in a cavern. The light came from above, streaming through a cleft in the rock. The entrance took the form of a lofty gallery, and the cavern was so vast that several hundred men could have been accommodated in it. The farther corners were lost in darkness. The uncertain light gave the place a gloomy air. Mark looked at the men surrounding him; they were of various ages and were dressed in many different styles. One man was obviously very old. As he stood leaning on a stick there was something in his face and bearing that made him look like a vulture examining its prey. He fixed unwinking, rheumy eyes on Mark; his lips, showing between his thin beard, moved as if he were trying to say something but couldn't get the words out. A saber hung at his side, and a revolver was in a holster attached to his belt. He was dressed in an old sheepskin jerkin and Cossack blue riding breeches. Apart from him and old Klopov, all the men were comparatively young, some of them hardly more than lads. They had an abundance of weapons; rifles were stacked by the walls or hung on hooks driven into chinks in the rock. Saddles were lying about, though no horses were to be seen or heard. Pallets built up on poles were ranged along the walls. By one wall was a roughly built hearth of stones; the smoke from the fire curled upward to a vent in the roof. In a distant corner sheep's carcasses were hanging.

The man in the white shirt came right up to Mark, an encouraging, friendly smile on his face. The others stepped aside respectfully, and by his resemblance to old Klopov Mark guessed that the man was Paul Klopov, commander of the partisan detachment.

"Well now," he said quietly, "tell us how the Reds came to give

you this letter. We want to know all the details; it's a very important matter for us. What did they tell you when they gave it to you? You didn't tell my father everything, did you?"

What's he getting at? What haven't I told his father? Mark's mind worked feverishly. They must have guessed the truth. But his voice was calm as he repeated word for word the story he had told old Klopov the previous evening.

They listened to him attentively. When he had finished, no one said a word; obviously they were thinking over what he had said. Old Klopov thrust his fingers into his beard, stepped forward, and turned to his son:

"Excuse me, Paul, my boy, for speaking before you, as you're the commander. The situation's such that we don't need commanding, but hard thinking. So I'll begin. Unless Ipat Vikentich would like to?" He turned to the old man who resembled a vulture. Ipat Vikentich stopping chewing his lips and thrust out his beard.

"You go on, Matthew Sidorovich; I'll say my say later," he answered in a voice surprisingly powerful for his undersized body.

"This is what I think, my sons," the older Klopov began, his fingers still in his beard. "The main thing is, can we or can't we trust Lenin and his decree. You can't smash a rock with your fist, as the saying is; and it's too much to expect our small forces to defeat the Red Army. All the same, we can hold out in the mountains. We're only a handful today, but tomorrow we may be more. If the Soviet regime squeezes any harder, everybody'll be taking to the hills and the forests. But maybe that won't happen; maybe this devilish government will stop tormenting the people. And who wants to fight, these days? We've fought till we're sick of fighting. So where do we get to? It's bad whichever way you look at it. We can hold out in the hills, but we can't live. Winter'll be coming on before long, and then without an airplane you won't be able to get any food—"

Old Ipat had been listening closely. Now he fiercely interrupted in his powerful voice:

"What are you tossing this way and that like a horse's tail for, Matthew Sidorovich? Say straight out whether you're for surrendering or fighting this government that has seated itself on our backs and is driving us with a knout."

"I'm going to," Klopov answered imperturbably. "You're right about the knout, and God save even the heathen Turks from such a

government. All the same, it's just possible that they'd like to be reasonable. They've called off the food-requisitioning detachments. It's a heathen government, I agree, but only if all the people throw it over is there any sense in our fighting it. And if the people don't rise, you and I aren't going to overthrow it by ourselves. We all know why we've come up into the hills. To stop them from plundering us. so that they shouldn't destroy our farms. Well, and now the government has said it won't do it any more. It sort of admits its guilt to us. The only thing is. Can we believe what Lenin says? But that's just what I don't know, and so I can't say any more."

He was silent. It was impossible to tell whether he had been advising them to return home or not to trust the amnesty and remain in the hills. Each man could interpret it as he wished. A hum of voices arose. The old vulture's voice rose above all the rest.

"May the time never come when I shall make my bow to this government. Only fools can believe that Lenin writes the truth. They'll put us all up against a wall, they'll wipe us all out, there'll be no mercy for anyone. And all that that commander and commissar have written to Paul Klopov is rubbish. They want us to go down to them, to put ourselves in their hands.... We ought to question this whelp here properly, to see whether he's one of their Red band. I kind of feel they've got little animals like him to help them in their job." He turned to Mark, and his rheumy eyes enveloped the lad with hate. Going right up to him, he hissed: "If you were in my hands, you bitch's whelp, I'd show you how to carry letters. You'd tell me whose messenger you are, and who sent you here to upset us!"

"Leave the boy alone, Daddy Ipat," young Klopov said firmly. "He hasn't done us any harm."

The old man gave Mark another furious look and fell back. A sturdy, elderly Cossack flew at him, and for a moment he seemed about to grab the old man's beard. Shaking his fist right in front of Ipat's nose, he shouted:

"There's nothing we can do up here in the hills. The government may have come to its senses. We've got our wives and children at home, and no one to look after our farms...."

"So anxious to get back to bed with your wife?" Ipat thundered. "Hungry for a woman?"

"Yes, I am! You, you old devil, all you could do in bed with a woman is tickle her with your beard!"

The quarrel was taken up by others and threatened to develop into a fight. But Paul Klopov's low, authoritative voice broke in, and they were all silent.

"This isn't the place or the time for squabbling. We've got to decide sensibly, as a group, and see that our decision is sound. You've made me your commander, but this is a question we've got to settle together. I tell you I'll accept whatever you decide. If it's decided that we stay in the mountains, I remain with you; if you want to return home, I return, too, no matter what happens to me. Let each man think it over for himself and for the others. In a word, we've got two roads: either surrender and trust the amnesty, or remain up here in the mountains. I expect each of you has made up his mind long ago. So the next step is very simple. Let all those who are prepared to surrender to the Soviets go over to that wall." He pointed to the wall. "But those who want to stay in the hills remain where they are."

A movement began among the men. Many went over to the wall at once, and the few who hesitated, when they saw the majority had gone, followed after them. The dream of a quiet life with their families proved stronger than their hatred for the Soviet Government. Only three men remained in their places: old Ipat and two others.

Mark spent the night in the cavern. Many of its inhabitants passed the evening in talk, cleaning their weapons, repairing harness. Others went and lay down on the pallets immediately after the meeting, whispering among themselves and smoking enormous twists of homegrown tobacco. Slowly the shadows enveloped all the cavern. The early autumn night came on; the light faded through the cleft overhead. Two great campfires were lit, sending gigantic shadows dancing over the walls. As long as there was daylight, Paul Klopov had sat writing, and now he shifted near a fire and went on writing. The man at the hearth banged a spoon against a frying pan; the sound bounced off the walls in echoes and slowly, mournfully died away. Everybody went to the hearth, filled his mess can with greasy soup, and returned to his place. Old Klopov came back with two cans and handed one to Mark.

While they were having their supper, Paul Klopov came across and said to Mark:

"I forgot to ask your name."

"Mark . . . Kononenkov."

"You've done us a great service, Mark. Now ride back to the

district center and hand over our reply to the Soviet commander. You can add a word for us, too; I'll explain that to you tomorrow. Will you do this for us?"

"Why not? Of course I will."

It was time for sleep. Snores were already coming from some of the pallets. There was room for Mark between Paul and his father, and drawing Paul's cloak over him up to his chin, the lad soon got warm. The sounds of snoring blended with muffled voices, and the cavern reminded him of a buzzing beehive. Mastering his drowsiness, he listened to Paul, who, like many others that night, could not get to sleep. The commander lay on his back smoking and quietly talking, almost to himself:

"You know, I was in the Budenny Army right to the end of the Polish war. I was made a squadron commander, I became a Bolshevik, I joined the party. I was proud to defend the new regime. And I felt fine. I was happy to be serving the people, and I thought that after the shake-up we'd had, the people would be living in clover, and they'd have a good word to say for us. If anyone had told me to give my life for the Soviet regime, I'd have done it without thinking twice about it. I was wounded in Poland, and after I came out of the hospital, I was sent home. And I thought: I'll go home, I'll help the new government to get strong in my own district, I'll win the people over to the Communistic faith. And I came back home as an apostle."

He was silent while he rolled a fresh cigarette. Lighting it from the old butt, he turned on his back again:

"Are you listening, Mark?"

"Yes, I'm listening."

"Well, and I arrived home. And it was coming back from heaven to earth. For I saw that the new government was squeezing the people so hard, it was like squeezing the whey out of the curds. Maybe I wouldn't have felt so bad about it elsewhere, but I was at home, among my own people, and it hit me in the eyes. The regime was stripping the Cossacks clean of their grain, driving off their cattle. The Cossacks buried their grain in the ground, and there it rotted; they drove their cattle into the hills, and there the animals perished of hunger. The Cossacks were mad with the regime. But the regime gave us no rest; they sent detachment after detachment, put men in prison, stripped the people of everything. . . .

"At first I tried to explain to my people about the difficulties of

the new government; I tried to persuade them to help it to get on its feet. My words sounded fine, but the reality was too glaring: the food-requisitioning detachments went on pillaging like a lot of brigands. I rushed to the town to complain about it, but they wouldn't listen to me. They said as a Communist and a Budenny man I ought not to be defending the Cossacks, but making those bloodsuckers hand over their grain and cattle to the state. I came back home, thought it all over, and saw that the Soviet Government wasn't working for the people's benefit, but for their harm. All the same, I stuck it and said nothing. I thought perhaps I didn't understand it properly, and it would all pass before long. I thought of the capitalist encirclement and blamed everything on that.

"I might have gone on sticking it; but a food-requisitioning detachment came to our village. Well, of course the Cossacks refused to hand over their grain and cattle. And in any case there wasn't as much grain and cattle in the village as the Soviet authorities were demanding. So they arrested all the old men and put them in a cellar. 'We'll keep your old men in that cellar till you tell us where your grain's buried,' the commander said. Well, they kept them there one day, two days, three days. And they gave them nothing to eat. On the fourth day they brought out the oldest man of the lot, drove all the villagers to the well, and shot him in their sight. That was too much for me. I saddled my horse and rode off to the mountains. I rode about for three days like a man with the plague, and couldn't find any rest. Then I took off the Order of the Red Banner, which I'd won in the Red Army; I tore up my party ticket and scattered it to the winds. I didn't feel at all sorry about that, but I was sorry about the Order; I'd won it for being wounded, for not sparing my life. But now I saw that it wasn't for the right thing that I'd spent my life in fighting and struggling, so there was no point in my keeping the Order. I roved the hills around my village, and more and more men came out and joined me. And we had a meeting and decided that the main thing was to punish those who were guilty of putting old men in cellars, shooting, and tormenting the people. So we raided the village and wiped out the food-requisitioning detachment. Only one of them hid in a cowshed, and the women found him next day and brought him to me. A little fellow he was, very fair, but his hands were large and black with soot. 'Who are you?' I asked him. 'I'm a smith,' he said. 'Then how can you, a working man, treat other working men like this?

I shall have to shoot you.' I saw his face change, but he didn't flinch and didn't throw himself at my feet. 'I know you'll shoot me,' he said, 'bandit that you are. You can't understand what it means to a working man to see his children swelling with hunger and not have a bit of bread to give them. I've got three kids, and you won't feed them. That's why I joined a food-requisitioning detachment, to get bread for our workers' children... And to smash counterrevolutionaries like you, who hide your grain in holes and won't let us have it. So now shoot, and damn you! What's there to talk about?"

"I saw he'd face it out. And I couldn't feel mad with him. My friends were waiting for me to decide; they'd made me commander. But I stood and couldn't say a word; I couldn't raise my hand against that worker who was getting food for his kids. So I let him go." He stretched himself till his joints cracked. "We've given the Soviet regime a few blows since then. But we all want to go home. And now it looks as if the Soviet Government's beginning to take the right road. They've stopped the requisitions and proclaimed an amnesty...."

Covering his head with the cloak, Mark fell asleep without hearing Paul's story to the end. The cavern grew still; the fires died down to heaps of red-hot embers casting a soft velvety crimson over the walls.

In a distant corner two men—old Ipat and his son—were muttering together. The son, Alexander, was a taciturn fellow of about thirty-five. He had served in the guards during the czarist regime and had reached subaltern's rank. During the civil war he had fought in the White armies but had not distinguished himself in any way. When the Whites evacuated Russia, he had remained behind and had returned to his father. Old Ipat had drawn him into the struggle against the Soviets, though on the whole Alexander was completely unconcerned what government took charge in Russia, and only wanted to have a break after ten years of fighting. Now, when all others in the cavern were asleep, old Ipat nudged his son.

"Listen, Alexander," he whispered, "that whelp's a Soviet spy. He's pretending to be a ninny, but his eyes are watching all the time."

"But why worry?"

"You don't understand a thing. If we don't interfere, all these fools will believe in the amnesty, and only you and I will be left up here. But if we find out that they've sent him to us, many of the men will be too scared to go back."

"Ah, Father, but perhaps we ought to go back, too. What can we

do up here in the mountains, when all Russia's silent and has given up fighting the Soviets?"

"Hold your tongue, you stupid child! You reached officer's rank, but you've got no more sense than a babe. You may be an officer, but I'm your father, and I'm in command here. We've got to question that boy, where he comes from and what he's after. Come on!"

Two shadows emerged against the velvety crimson glow on the wall and slowly made their way through the cavern.

Suddenly Mark felt someone touch him. At once he was wide awake. Not knowing what to expect, he lay tense, ready for struggle. But he made no sign that he was awake. He lay still even when he heard old Klopov's voice.

"What d'you want? What are you here for?"

"We've come to question that boy," Ipat answered. "We don't know who he is or where he's from. He may have been sent to us on purpose."

"There's nothing to question him about," old Klopov answered unconcernedly. Before Ipat could say any more Paul woke up and joined in.

"You can get that idea out of your head, Daddy Ipat! We're not going to let you torture the boy. It's not for you to decide the fate of us all. And you, Alexander, you should get your father to see reason."

"It's nothing to do with me," Alexander quietly replied. "I've had enough myself of my father's spleen."

"Shut up, you whelp!" the old man hissed. "I haven't given you any right to judge me."

"Then, get out of here!" Paul said sharply. "Go and settle your family quarrels elsewhere."

Early in the morning Mark was awakened by the sound of the guard lighting the campfires. Paul and his father got up. But Mark pretended to be asleep, and threw the cloak off him only when Paul shook him by the shoulder. Old Klopov bent over him and said in almost a pleading tone:

"Well, Mark Kononenkov, we all ask you to take a letter to the Soviet commander and, if he wishes, bring him back, or anyone he appoints, to talk it all over.... Paul will see you off and tell you more what to say."

Mark was quickly ready. After splashing his face with icy water

from a wooden tub, he had breakfast of cold lamb and bread. Old Klopov bound his eyes again with a cowl, and Paul took him by the arm and led him out. Mark remembered the way he had come, and as soon as he felt that they were outside the cavern he prepared for a steep descent. But the slope was hardly perceptible, and the walk proved to be very short. In fifteen minutes or so they were at the spot where his eyes had been bandaged the day before.

Here horses were already waiting, in charge of the same youngster as yesterday. His other companion of that ride was asleep under a tree. The day promised to be cloudy. Dawn had almost fully arrived when the group of horsemen set off along a faint track through the forest. But now they took a different route, and quite quickly they reached the outskirts of the Klopovs' village. Right ahead of him Mark saw the houses and the well where he had fallen in with old Klopov. He tried to estimate how far the cavern really was from the village. Yesterday they had ridden possibly twenty miles, but today not more than six or seven.

Paul was in a hurry; they rode at a smart trot, but they went round, not through, the village. Some distance beyond it they halted on the road by which Mark had originally come. At the spot where they halted was a solitary old oak, extending its branches over the road. Not far off, at the very edge of the forest was a hay shed, blackened with age and weather.

"Remember this spot, Mark," Paul said, laying his hand on the mane of Mark's horse. "If you're asked to bring envoys here, don't forget that you must stop under this oak and wait till someone comes from us."

He handed Mark a packet wrapped in a clean white rag and tied with strong string. Mark made to dismount from his horse.

"You needn't get off," Paul stopped him. "You can ride that horse back to the district center. Hand it over to the regimental commander and say it's sent by the former Budenny squadron commander and Communist, Paul Klopov, as a gift to Comrade Budenny. Let him accept this present from us; we send it to him not with evil in our hearts.... It's a good horse, a thoroughbred, and even Budenny wouldn't be ashamed to ride it."

Mark wanted to reply calmly that he would do all as Paul had told him; but when he heard his own voice, he was embarrassed. There was no calm in that voice; to tell the truth, it was much too agitated for a member of Goliakov's reconnaissance troop. Knitting his brows and angrily kicking his heels into the horse's flanks, he rode off. Only when he had gone a little distance did he stop and call back:

"Don't worry; I'll do all that's necessary."

The handsome creature carried him at a swift trot toward the highroad. From time to time he turned in the saddle and saw the three horsemen halted by the wayside oak, gazing after him. Then the forest hid them and the oak from his sight.

He reached the district center and hurried into the house in which the reconnaissance troop was quartered late the same afternoon. He should have taken the packet straight to the task-force staff, and the horse too; but the troop commander would have sternly punished such a violation of protocol. An hour later Goliakov took him along to the staff, and with an air of unconcern asked the secretary where the commander was.

"What d'you want him for?" the secretary asked.

That was enough to send Goliakov into a fury. He always regarded secretaries as the lowest creatures in the army.

"You ink-slinger!" he shouted. "How dare you question me? Possibly I've got a secret that can't be trusted to worms like you!"

At the noise the commander came to the door of his room. Seeing Mark, he went swiftly to him and asked:

"Have you brought anything back with you?"

Mark was silent, as his troop commander always insisted. On the other hand, Goliakov made the most of the situation. Drawling his words, he reported:

"Well, I've got a report, comrade commander. Mark Surov has fulfilled his military obligation down to the last dot! He's delivered the letter and brought back an answer."

"Then where is it?"

"In a packet I've got in my pocket."

"Hand it over!"

"One minute! In addition, Mark Surov has brought back a horse for Comrade Budenny."

"Give me that packet!" the commander roared, and his eyes went bloodshot.

"Just one moment!" Goliakov calmly answered. "So I request you note that the reconnaissance is functioning first class—"

The commander dropped his voice to a hiss, leaning across to Goliakov and baring his teeth:

"You ichthyosaurus! Give me that packet, or I'll wring your neck!"

"Why, of course I'll give it to you!" Goliakov said slowly, thrusting his hand into his pocket. "The packet is for the commander, and the reconnaissance troop is for the purpose of getting the packet and saving the force from shame—"

The commander snatched the packet out of his hand and, cursing under his breath, strode into his room.

"There's a devil!" Goliakov said good-naturedly. "He can't open his mouth without turning the air blue. But tell me, Mark, what is an ichthyosaurus?"

"I don't know."

Goliakov stood thinking for a moment, then turned to the secretary, who was smiling at something or other. But he could not bring himself to ask the secretary what the word meant. He went out, beckoning to Mark to follow him.

Meanwhile, the commander and the commissar had shut themselves in their room and would see no one. They were obviously arguing furiously about something, for the commander's violent remarks, loud and sprinkled with oaths, and even Bertsky's quiet voice, could be heard outside. The secretary listened and shook his head mournfully. From past experience he knew that these arguments usually ended with the commander going out and slamming the door, while Bertsky would go running from corner to corner, clutching his head and muttering incoherently. But this time the argument went on much too long. True, the commander did run out of the room, but only to take a look at the horse the partisans had sent.

The conference did not end till late in the evening, at an hour when Mark was sitting in the warmly heated house occupied by the reconnaissance troop and was glancing with longing at the heap of straw covered with horsecloths that was to be his bed. The commander looked out of his room and, seeing the secretary, ordered him to summon Mark Surov to the staff immediately. When Mark entered, the commissar was striding from corner to corner, while the commander was sitting at the table, obviously in a temper. Mark had little difficulty in gathering what the dispute had been about: who was to go to negotiate with Paul Klopov.

"The point is, the commander can't leave the force and go riding

off goodness knows where," Bertsky said. "Supposing the letter's a trick, and there's an ambush.... And besides, this is a political matter, and that's what I've been sent here for, to do the political work. Stop arguing and let me go to the meeting."

"You know, you talk like a rabbi in the synagogue," the commander said, flinging out his hands. "Very persuasively and quite unintelligibly. Who was put in charge of the force to liquidate the Greens in this district? I was! And I've been ordered to make contact with them and persuade them to accept the amnesty. But I'll let you go, commissar. But only because Mark Surov will be going with you as your nurse. Though he's young in years, he's worth a dozen such cavalrymen as you."

A smile played over his weather-beaten face, and he turned to Mark.

"Take care of our commissar for us, Mark. He's got baggy breeches, and it would be awkward if he brought back in them something a bear would leave on the road." He removed the smile from his face and adopted a stern expression. "You'll be riding with the commissar the day after tomorrow to the place Klopov appointed for the meeting. He writes that you know exactly where it is. The second squadron will ride with you, but it'll halt a couple of miles before you reach the spot and you and the commissar will ride on alone. Only I don't quite know what to do! You see, they saw you in civilian dress, and won't it make things difficult if they see you in uniform now?"

"They guessed I'd been sent from the force," Mark answered confidently.

Two days later two horsemen halted by the wayside oak. One of them looked as though thick yellow cream had been poured over his upper part, while he must have been visible for miles because of his bright crimson breeches; the other was in a long green coat and had a short rifle slung over his shoulder. The squadron had been left behind. Bertsky and Mark dismounted under the oak. The commissar was agitated. He walked round the tree, taking great strides, and stared dubiously at the dark line of the forest a little way off. Mark tethered their horses to the tree, brought them an armful of hay from the shed, then squatted down under the oak. He stared at the surrounding mountains and the yellowing, half-naked forest. Straight in front of him was the shed from which he had brought the hay.

The silence all around them was such as falls only on a cloudy, but still and warm autumn day. Such days come unexpectedly, just as autumn seems to have taken possession of all nature, when the rains are cold and unpleasant, the trees are shedding their leaves and stand with branches extended hopelessly, and the earth is brown with faded grass. Then such a sunless yet warm day will arrive in a mirage of milky mist, through which the horizon seems to be only a hand span away, and in an all-pervasive silence; it is as if the invisible sun were pouring not sunlight but floods of steaming milk down to the earth, and through that flood not a sound can penetrate.

Mark could not help thinking that perhaps there wouldn't be any meeting with Klopov after all; but he did not dare say so to Bertsky. On the way to the oak he had noticed a horseman riding among the trees of the forest. Paul Klopov probably knew already that the Soviet emissaries had come accompanied by a squadron; and if the partisans took alarm, they would not keep the arrangement.

He ran his eyes casually over the countryside. The shed came within his range of vision. And suddenly, as he looked, he saw the door slowly open. A moment previously it had been closed, but now it was already half open; then it stood wide open. Out of the shed came Paul Klopov, followed by old Ipat and the elderly Cossack who had acted as cook in the cavern. Mark told himself that Goliakov would rave if he found out that Mark had actually been in that shed, but had not noticed that it had a second entrance on the farther side, enabling the three partisans to enter it from the forest unobserved.

Bertsky hurried to meet them. The commissar's face expressed ineffable joy; he might have been going to meet his greatest friend. Paul Klopov gave him a hearty handshake, then held out his hand warmly to Mark. He laughed heartily when the lad would not look at him.

"We guessed at once that you'd been sent to us by the Reds," he said; "but we didn't want to frighten you."

The elderly Cossack also shook hands with Mark, but the old vulture looked at him with bleary eyes and spat on the ground furiously. As they walked back to the oak, Bertsky remarked casually that he and Mark had been escorted by a squadron but had left it behind.

"Cunning!" Mark thought. "As if they don't know a squadron came with us without our telling them!"

Paul invited Bertsky to the village for the talk. The commissar agreed. Paul nodded to the elderly Cossack, and the man whistled. It was a feeble sort of whistle and failed to penetrate the mists that hung about the valley.

"I don't suppose they heard that," Klopov said. "Try again, but louder."

But before the Cossack could obey, Mark had set two fingers into his mouth and whistled as he had learned to whistle when minding sheep on the steppe. Bertsky's horse reared in alarm, and Raven, who already knew that sound well, raised his head and pricked up his ears.

"First rate!" Klopov laughed.

"That's how we do it!" Bertsky said with a satisfied air, giving Mark an approving look.

In answer to the whistle a rider leading several horses emerged from the forest. Mark recognized him at once; it was the same youngster who had come to Klopov's house to take him to the cavern. He led the horses up at a gallop, sprang to the ground, and attended to the saddle girths.

They rode off to the village, Bertsky and Klopov leading the way, then Paul's two companions, with Mark and the young partisan bringing up the rear. The lad subjected Raven, the saddle, and Mark's sword and rifle to critical inspection.

"A good horse!" he said, raising his eyes to Mark's face.

Mark examined his companion's horse, equipment, and clothing just as critically. At their previous meeting the young partisan had been dressed simply and roughly; but now he was in all his Cossack finery: fine, chrome-yellow boots, a black cloak negligently flung round his shoulders, a high-standing fur cap fitting his curly head closely. But his saber was unusually striking. The scabbard was decorated with niello silver ornamentation, and the ivory hilt was inlaid with gold. Mark had already seen similar family sabers, which were passed down from father to son and had been brought from distant countries by their Cossack ancestors. But he had never seen such a handsome specimen before.

The two lads were almost of the same age. They chattered away merrily as they rode, feeling no enmity for each other despite their differing politics. Ostap, as the partisan was named, and Mark could be friends at least during that short ride to the village.

The village streets were as animated and crowded as if the day

were a great holiday. The people poured out of the houses and stood about the gates, husking sunflower seeds and shouting cheerfully to one another. Bertsky felt a little uncertain. He had the feeling that his crimson breeches might have the same effect on these Cossacks as the toreador's cloak has on an infuriated bull. He failed to realize that those breeches of his were making an extraordinary impression; when they saw them, the villagers were convinced that the Reds had sent a comrade of high authority to negotiate with the partisans.

The Klopovs' home had been submitted to a thorough cleaning and tidying up. Old Mrs. Klopov was running about nimbly, and it was difficult to recognize her as the same woman who had been bowed down with sorrow, until Mark noticed her eyes, anxious and expectant. Several younger women neighbors were assisting her. The table was laid for a great feast. A number of the men from Klopovs' detachment were sitting on benches round the walls.

Bertsky did full justice to the occasion. He made a long and good, though not always intelligible, speech. He did not conceal that the young Soviet regime had made many mistakes. He sharply condemned the pillaging of the peasants, but turned at once to speaking of the war and the devastation of the country. He laid special emphasis on the fact that grain requisitioning had been replaced by a food tax. "We've got to get everybody back to a peaceful life. In your hot blood, not understanding our position and rising against the misdemeanors of the local authorities, you resorted to arms and began to fight the Soviet regime. But that's a hopeless job. Once it had settled with its external enemies it was easy enough to deal with the internal ones. But that's not the point. The Soviet Government thinks you've taken the wrong road, but you aren't really its enemies. Take Paul Klopov, for instance. A hero of the civil war, a squadron commander. He's still remembered in the Cavalry Army, and Comrade Budenny himself gave orders to search him out and bring him back to the right path. . . ."

The speech had a profound effect on most of the partisans, but not on all. Old Ipat sat leaning on his stick and gazing at the commissar unconcernedly. When Bertsky had ended his speech, having exploited all his gifts of argument, Ipat rose to his feet and made for the door.

"Where are you off to, Daddy Ipat?" Paul called after him.

"I've heard enough of this red-shanked nightingale," the old man

said from the door. "If we're to believe him, even when asleep the Soviet Government does nothing but dream of how to press us to its motherly titties. Only, mark my words, that government will put its arms round you and choke you, it loves you so much. You can do as you like, but don't count on my agreeing. I don't want the antichrist government's pardon. Here I'm on my own soil, and I'll put my teeth into the throat of anyone who tries to order me about. I'm too old to pray to Lenin instead of God. Come along, Alexander."

The old man went out, but his son Alexander remained. For a moment or two there was an oppressive silence. Bertsky had to resort to all his arts to restore the former situation. But the majority of the partisans were anxious for peace, and Paul Klopov proposed that they should discuss the conditions of surrender. But now a difference of opinion arose between him and Bertsky. Klopov insisted that the partisans must surrender in their own village, and the Soviet representatives must come there to accept it. But Bertsky knew how important it was that the surrender should take place as publicly as possible, in order that other partisan detachments should hear of it. He flatly rejected Klopov's proposal, and in the end Paul was forced to agree that his detachment should surrender at the district center. It was settled that he was to lead them to the town four days later, on a day which, as Bertsky knew, was a great church holiday.

Goliakov had been very busy since early morning. That day would mark the triumph of his reconnaissance troop. Paul Klopov's detachment—not some insignificant little partisan group but a force renowned all over the area—was to surrender. And in his heart of hearts Goliakov ascribed this success solely to himself and his men.

Nonetheless, he foresaw the possibility that the partisans might yet spring a surprise on the Red force, and he hurried round the town, selecting points at which guards could be posted. He demanded that the commander of the heavy machine-gun troop should place three machine guns at his disposal. After long argument he got his way and posted them secretly at points of vantage. He climbed the church belfry and posted one of his own men there with a hand machine gun. Only then did he report to the force commander for instructions.

"Comrade commander," he said, "what do you think? The partisans may take it into their heads to give us a blood bath. We ought to post guards."

"You're quite right, Goliakov. I've just been thinking the same thing. You take on the job...."

"Thinking, thinking!" Goliakov mimicked the commander as he hurried out. "While you've been thinking, Goliakov's been acting. You'd be dead meat without your Goliakov."

By noonday the square was filled with people. They included not only the local inhabitants, but many who had come in from outlying villages and even from other district centers. They came in carts, on horseback, on foot; men, women, children. Some of them had suspiciously swollen sides, as if weapons were concealed beneath their outer clothes. But the commander and the commissar decided to ignore these details.

The Red force marched into the square a few minutes before noon and drew up round a small rostrum that a troop of Red Army men had been working all the morning to erect. Bertsky had obtained a piece of brilliant crimson material from somewhere or other, and the platform now had the requisite air of solemnity. Mark and Goliakov were posted on the left flank of the force; all the rest of his troop Goliakov had posted at machine guns and in the lofts of houses. The people stood in a solid mass round the square. Among them Mark recognized people from the Klopovs' village, including Paul's own mother.

Bertsky began to fidget nervously. The time agreed upon with Paul Klopov had arrived, but there was still no sign of the detachment. The commander stood on the rostrum, waiting. He was already mentally considering the pungent remarks he would make to his commissar if Klopov didn't turn up. The commissar hurried over to Mark, beckoned him aside, and quietly asked:

"What do you think? They haven't changed their minds?"

"No," Mark said confidently. "There are people from Klopov's village here. They wouldn't have come all this way, nearly thirty miles, if they'd changed their minds."

Bertsky's face cleared. He gazed hopefully along the road out of the village. But the road was empty, except for a single cart moving slowly along it. He again began to despair. But, just as he was giving up all hope, the people in the square began to sway with excitement, and horsemen emerged from a side turning coming from a direction quite different from that expected. Paul Klopov rode slowly along on a huge gray horse at their head. Everybody watched tensely as the men rode into the semicircle formed by the Red force. Paul did not turn his head, but kept his eyes fixed on the platform and the semicircle of Budenny caps with their blue stars—blue to distinguish cavalry units—like the one he had once worn. His detachment followed him, riding in double file. Thirty-two men altogether, against three hundred Red Army men. Mark was struck by Paul Klopov's desperately pale face, and reflected that the partisan leader would sell his life dearly if anyone attacked him now. Among the horsemen was Ostap, and beside him Alexander, the old vulture's son. Has he broken with his father then? Mark wondered. He gave Ostap an encouraging smile; but apparently the lad needed no encouragement, for his eyes were glittering merrily and a smile flickered over his lips.

In his delight Bertsky ran up to Klopov and shook his hand, then walked along the files, shaking hands with each of the men. His saber and Mauser got between his legs and then slipped round onto his belly, but he took no notice.

When Klopov reached the platform, he raised his hand, and the detachment halted. He raised his hand again, and they dismounted, standing to their horses' heads, holding the reins in one hand. Bertsky, Klopov, and the Red commander mounted the platform, and the commissar made an eloquent speech to fit the occasion. He was followed by Klopov, flushed and stammering. Paul Klopov admitted his error in fighting the Soviet regime and asked pardon for himself and his men. Then the partisans piled their arms round the platform and tethered their horses to it. But the commander and commissar had their own plans. They ordered that only the firearms and the sabers of army pattern were to be given up. The majority of the partisans were left with their family sabers. Only army saddles were removed from the horses' backs; Cossack saddles with their high pommels and velvet or leather paddings were left. Then Bertsky announced that the partisans could take back their horses and keep them as their own property; an approving murmur came from the people watching in the square.

The official part of the ceremony drew to its close. But the crowds did not disperse. They hung around, waiting to see if the partisans would really be allowed to go home. The partisans themselves broke up into small groups and walked along the ranks of the Red force, exchanging jokes with the Red Army men, and offering their pouches

of home-grown tobacco. Ostap walked up to Mark, unbuckling his saber as he came.

"Here, take this, Mark." He held out the saber. "It's a gift to you from all of us. We've all decided to give you my saber, because you helped us all to come back home."

Mark stood saying nothing, hanging his head. To take the saber would make them blood brothers in a sense. And that would be fine. But what could he give in exchange? He had nothing to equal such a magnificent gift. Behind him he heard Goliakov's hiss:

"Take it, you silly fool! Give him your own sword, and as it's of military pattern I'll take it from him at once." He thought he had spoken quite softly, but everybody in the vicinity heard him and laughed.

Ostap insisted on unfastening Mark's sword from his belt and replacing it with his own. Mark raised his eyes to the young Cossack's face. The lad looked cheerful and carefree, as if he had no regrets concerning his saber. Mark went to Bertsky and explained his difficulty. The commissar decided that in response a suitable gift must be made to Ostap. That was necessary for political reasons, he declared.

"But what can I give him?" Mark insisted.

"You're right; it's difficult to think of anything.... I know what. We'll give him your horse."

"My Raven?" the lad exclaimed in dismay.

"And why not? Don't you see, my boy, it isn't simply a matter of responding to the gift, it's a question of high politics. We must win their sympathies entirely to our side. Give them your horse; the story will come to the ears of other partisans, and they won't be afraid to surrender. On the other hand, if we don't give them something worthy of their saber, they'll laugh at us. So that's settled: you'll give him your horse."

"But Goliakov will eat me alive!" He clung to the last hope. "He'll wring my neck if I give away my horse."

Bertsky stood thinking. He did not relish the prospect of arguing with the fiery reconnaissance officer. But there seemed nothing else for it.

"Don't worry," he decided at last. "We'll do it first, and I'll tell the commander about it after. This is what we'll do: you ride out to the

rise beyond the village and wait on the road until the partisans go back home..."

Mark listened glumly. It was hard for him to part from Raven, with whom he had shared so many experiences. But life demands sacrifices, as he knew only too well. So he went slowly across the square toward the large house in which the reconnaissance troop was quartered.

At that moment a single horseman on a big rawboned chestnut horse rode at a walking pace into the square. He rode with the reins lying on the animal's mane, his body bent a little to one side, in the manner of the older Cossacks. It was Ipat, the vulture, who had flown down from the hills. His short sheepskin was buttoned up tightly; a saber with silver ornamentation was belted to his side; a rifle was slung across his back. He rode along in silence, and his morose features were inscrutable. His eyes were fixed on his horse's mane; the fur cap was pulled right down over his brows; his straggling beard lay over his chest. All his aspect was gloomy, disturbing, as if both horse and rider had risen from the grave and had been riding thus, unhurriedly, uninterruptedly, for a long time. Everybody stared in surprise, but he made his way slowly into the center of the square, where the partisans and Red Army men were fraternizing. They all fell silent, and only one man said half to himself:

"Old Ipat! Surely he hasn't decided to surrender?"

Ipat's son, Alexander, was standing with a small group of Red Army men. His father rode toward him, halted his mount, and stared moodily into Alexander's eyes. His words sounded quietly and ominously:

"Alexander, what are you doing here?"

The son was silent. Thin, aged tears started to Ipat's eyes; his voice sounded almost tender as he repeated:

"Alex, what are you doing here?"

"Father," Alexander hurriedly answered, "you know why I'm here. I've laid down my arms like the others.... I don't want to fight any more."

The old man sat thinking for a second or two, chewing his lips. Then he fixed his eyes again on his son.

"None of our line can be at peace with this regime that wants to sit on our backs. You have brought shame on my old head, Alex. I don't want to die in the shame you've brought on me."

"You're old, Father; there's much you don't understand. . . . "

"Hold your tongue, you nitwit!" the old man shouted. "Never let it be said that one of us served this antichrist government; I have no need of a son who has bowed himself down to it..."

He suddenly drew himself erect in the saddle, tore his saber from the scabbard, and brought it down like a flash of lightning on his son's head. A gasp of amazement, a cry of horrow flew across the square. For a moment no one moved. The old vulture dug his heels into his horse's flanks and galloped savagely toward Mark, who was standing in the middle of the square. Mark saw the horse's muzzle tearing toward him, and above it Ipat's face, distorted with fury. And above that face the upraised sword. "I've got you, you serpent!" Ipat crowed like a bird of prey. The saber flashed in his two hands; Mark fell headlong.

"He's killed Mark!"

It was Goliakov's shout. He was the first to come to himself; he rushed to where the boy was lying. Cursing violently, he fired his pistol in the air. Bertsky hurried after him, but Ostap and Paul overtook them both. Goliakov was wrong; Mark was not dead. He had saved himself by dropping to the ground a fraction of a second before the saber caught him, and it had slipped past his shoulder, slicing off a piece of his greatcoat. Now he arose to his knees and tore the rifle from his shoulder. The sound of his shot was drowned in the sharp stuttering burst of a machine gun. The man posted in the church belfry had opened fire.

Yet it is true that there are some whom a bullet cannot reach. Possibly Ipat was one of them. His chestnut horse rolled over headlong, and the rider flew out of the saddle. He sprang to his feet; but now many Red Army men were running toward him, unslinging their rifles. A long-legged soldier ran right at him, shouting something with wide open mouth. A rapacious, incoherent roar came from Ipat's throat, and he slashed with his saber at that gaping mouth, at the hateful star on the cap, at everything that came within reach. The man fell with a groan, and a triumphant smile twisted Ipat's aged, withered face. But others were now quite close. "You'll never take me!" he roared. He thrust the hilt of his saber into the earth and, hurriedly crossing himself, flung all the weight of his body on to the point of the blade.

"D'you remember that ride through the Ukraine, Raven? I didn't even realize I'd fallen off you. Only when I saw your hoofs did I guess what had happened. You and I both still bear the marks of that day, old Raven. And d'you remember how they kept you for me, and I came back, and you knew me at once, my dear old Raven? But now we're to part forever.... The commissar says it's politics commands us to part.... Damn politics!"

The lad sobbed aloud, biting his lips and looking suspiciously about him, in case anyone should see his weakness. But there was no one in sight; only he and Raven stood on the road running across the rise. In that afternoon hour the road was empty. He stood at the top of the rise, with Raven beside him, and the horse rubbed its nose against his coat, or deliberately caught his hand in its rough lips and dribbled over it. He stroked the horse, smoothed the blaze to make it show more clearly; then he took a clean rag out of the saddlebag, wiped Raven's eyes, and wiped his own eyes with the same rag. He felt a dull ache in his chest.

"Good-by, Raven," he said. "There's nothing we can do against politics.... Don't grieve, Raven, old boy; Ostap's kind, he'll love you as I love you. Don't grieve, Raven; I shall never forget you, and don't you ever forget me."

In the distance a group of horsemen appeared, a string of carts behind them. Women, children, and old people, all the partisans' kith and kin, were riding on the carts. Under them, under the straw, rifles, pistols, hand grenades were hidden. If the Soviet authorities had broken their word and attempted to arrest the partisans, they would have had no easy task. All these people, sitting so peacefully on the carts, had been ready to fight for the lives of their dear ones.

Bertsky, clearly distinguished by his crimson breeches, was among the horsemen. He nodded approvingly when he saw Mark. He had no idea what it was costing the lad to part with his horse. The gift was soon offered and accepted, and Bertsky and Mark rode back to the village. But now the lad was riding a small horse of indeterminate color that had been Ostap's. "A mouse," he thought unkindly of his new mount. There was a suspicious moisture in his eyes, but he retained his self-control. At first Ostap had refused the gift of Raven; he had flushed and stood embarrassed. Only when Paul Klopov sternly ordered him to accept it did he take the reins from Mark's

hands. Bertsky had seized the opportunity to make a speech, declaring that this gift consolidated the friendship between the former partisans and the Red Army. Paul had nodded to show that he agreed, and the Cossacks had ridden off. Bertsky and Mark had stood a long time at the top of the rise, and Mark could not resist the feeling that Raven had looked back at him with sad, reproachful eyes.

When he returned to the reconnaissance troop's quarters, he sat down in a dark corner and pretended to be asleep. No one knew he had parted from Raven; he had put the unpleasant horse in the stable. But Goliakov heard about the exchange before the day was out. The news sent him into a frenzy.

"As your commander I order you to ride to the village tomorrow," he stormed. "If that half-dead rat which you've brought back to bring shame on the troop gets you there, you can ride; if it drops dead on the road, you can walk. But either way you'll bring Raven back. If you don't, you needn't come back yourself."

"But the commissar ordered me to give it . . . for politics. . . ."

"I spit on the commissar and his politics!" Goliakov roared. "I'll tear his crimson legs off and stick them on his head; perhaps that way he'll have more sense. That devilish commissar gets hold of an unintelligent kid, tricks him, and makes him give away the very best horse we've got. But I won't let it remain like that. As for you"—he turned back to Mark—"get out of my sight before I kill you. I might do you an injury without realizing it."

But events took an unexpected turn, and Mark was saved from the consequences of his conduct. Late in the night he was summoned to the staff. There he found everybody in excitement. A dispatch rider had arrived from a distant town. Telegraphic communications no longer existed; the wire still hung from pole to pole, but it was gradually disappearing, taken down for other purposes. All communications with the army headquarters were by means of dispatch riders. Sometimes the rider would disappear on the way, and then it was thought that he had been killed by partisans. But sometimes he would arrive safely.

This particular dispatch rider had had a successful journey, but he did not meet with so much success in the staff. He had had a troop for escort, and had been three days on the road. The town was 110 miles away, and three days did not seem so very long for such a

distance. But the force commander had other views. When Mark entered, he was grilling the dispatch rider.

"Three days on the road," he was shouting, "when they're urgently waiting for our answer! Do you understand that Budenny himself is waiting for our report? He sends me orders that my reply is to be in his hands by two A.M. on Wednesday night. You've taken three days to get here, and that means we've got to get the reply back in twenty-four hours. How d'you like that?"

Noticing Mark, he took him into his room.

"You, Mark Surov, are being assigned a difficult task. That camel outside has taken three days to bring us a certain order. We have got to get the report back to Budenny by two o'clock tomorrow night. It's hopeless to think of sending anyone but you. It will be hard riding in such a short time. But you can do it. You're light, and your horse will cover the distance easier. It means riding across the hills, and that won't be so good. All the same, we've got to try. D'you think you can manage it?"

The lad stood with head hanging. He was not thinking of himself, but the horse. His heart went out in yearning for Raven, who could have run up and down the mountains all day. But the commander gave him no time for thought.

"You've got to ride through a district where there are partisans. But it's impossible to send an escort with you, they'd only hold you back. I've sent a patrol ahead to clear the most dangerous section of the road, but beyond that you must look after yourself. If you run into partisans, destroy the report and act as you think best. You'll ride the horse Klopov sent for Budenny. It's a strong animal and should be able to stand the journey, though God knows what it'll be like by the time you hand it over. I've sent it on ahead with the patrol. Do these twenty miles on your own horse, then transfer to the other; it will be all ready for you."

By the time he had finished giving him instructions about the route, the halts, and other details, the secretary had completed the report, and the commander sat down to read it. At two in the morning Mark left the staff, carrying the packet concealed in the lining of his cloth helmet. A few minutes later horse hoofs clattered rapidly past the windows. Mark urged on the wretched, big-headed little horse he had been given in exchange for Raven. He urged it on, but he had no trust in it.

The moon peered from behind clouds. The pallid light fell over the great Caucasian cliffs, the forests in the valleys, and silvered the rivers. The solitary rider sped swiftly over the hill road, plunged through the forest, reached the entrance to a gorge, and vanished into it. Only the dashing clatter of hoofs proclaimed that a tiny speck of human dust was boldly making its way through the nocturnal gloom.



7. The Ride

IF ONLY I were riding Raven, Mark thought as he swayed in the saddle. He listened anxiously to the breathing of his little horse; he was afraid the horse would not stand up to his task.

He was carrying nothing but his weapons. He had removed the saddlebags, which contained all his possessions: a spare set of underwear, a tunic, and towel; he had emptied the oats out of the fore-saddlebags. The horse had been well fed, and he moved at a measured, never varying trot. An hour passed, but he was still going as steadily as at the start. From time to time Mark slowed him to walking pace, but he obeyed reluctantly. Gradually his certainty that he had a sorry nag under him began to crack. Though he still had doubts, he could not help noting that the horse was breathing regularly, and broke into a trot without hesitation. And the nearer he drew to the spot where the patrol was waiting for him, the calmer he grew: the big-headed, ugly horse was gradually coming to occupy a place next to Raven in his heart.

The troop had bivouacked in a small village, and had lit a campfire in the street to warm themselves. The handsome horse presented by the partisans was standing a little apart. Beside him Ostap's horse seemed wretched and miserable. But after carrying Mark twenty miles he was standing quietly, without the least sign of weariness. Now Mark felt sorry to part with him, for he had taken possession of his heart.

I'll ride with two horses, he suddenly decided. Some tiny drop of Mongolian blood flowing in his veins suggested the idea to him: when

setting out on a long journey, the Mongols had been in the habit of taking two or even three horses, changing from one to another, and thus covering great distances. The patrol commander didn't care how Mark went on, as long as he went on at once. In a few moments Mark was vanishing into the early morning mist. Now he was riding the high-standing horse, while the little one ran at his side, tied by a leading rein.

Ninety miles of riding ahead of him, and twenty hours to do it in. But the journey involved traversing mountain spurs, swimming several streams, climbing right up to the clouds through passes, and then dropping down to the valleys. Even in normal times it was a lonely road; but now it was lifeless and gloomy. The only people he was likely to meet were partisans, and then . . . But he did not think of what would happen in that case. Life had taught him not to think too much about dangers.

He had already given his two horses names. The chestnut he called Yard, and Ostap's horse was Inch. Yard had a long, striding trot, and to keep up with it Inch often had to break into a gallop. Then Yard looked contemptuously out of the corner of his eye at the little horse galloping alongside. Mark soon noticed that there was no need to keep Inch tethered to Yard; he never hung back on the rein, and when Mark released him, Inch continued to canter alongside. Where the path was too narrow to run abreast, he dropped back, but kept immediately behind Yard's tail. It's not the first time he's done this sort of thing, Mark thought with satisfaction.

After some time he changed over to Inch, and led Yard by the rein. Then he slipped out of the saddle and ran with the horses for awhile. Speed's the main thing, he thought as he ran.

He carefully avoided all villages, and so added unestimated miles to the journey. He watered the horses in the fashion passed down from earliest times. After letting the heated animals drink he went on at once, and even increased the pace a little, otherwise the cold water would have ruined them. They took the passes more easily than he had expected. Inch could run up a slope as if it were a level stretch. In places the path was almost impassable, but the little horse went up it swiftly, and Mark had to scramble up behind him. Twice he had to tie Yard's rein to Inch's saddle and leave the little guide to lead the way, while he clung on to Yard's tail. Yard lashed out with

his hoofs at such an indignity. But peace was quickly restored, and they went on and on.

The lad began to feel anxious as he realized that he himself was growing weary. To spare his mounts he had run quite a few miles at their side, one hand on the saddle. All right, I can stick it out! he told himself obstinately, and went on running till his heart beat violently, his feet grew as heavy as lead, the sweat poured down from his cloth helmet into his eyes. Then he climbed into the saddle and rested.

Soon after midday they left the last mountain spur behind them. Now they had only steppe to cross. They had covered the forty-five miles of mountain road in thirteen hours. Before them stretched the greater part of the road, the lesser part of the time. By a hayrick he gave the horses a rest, leading them about so that they could cool down, then unsaddled them and rubbed them vigorously with handfuls of hay. For two hours they rested, while he studied his watch anxiously. Before they went on he honestly shared between them the oats he found in Yard's saddlebag, and ate a piece of bread provided for himself.

Then once more he rode on, mile after mile. He varied the pace frequently, from jog trot to trot, from trot to walk. Every two turns he changed from one horse to the other.

Unexpectedly the bigger horse began to show signs of exhaustion, whereas Inch was still going well. So he had to rearrange the turns, riding Inch for three turns, and Yard for two. When evening fell and only some twenty-five miles were left, he added still further to Inch's portion and lessened Yard's, for Yard was all but ready to drop.

He rode into the town at midnight. For the last seven miles he had had to rely entirely on Inch, for Yard was hardly able to carry himself. The little horse seemed to understand how urgent it was that Mark should hurry. By Inch's heaving flanks and nervous snort the lad felt that his strength was almost gone; but he had no right to spare him, and he forced Inch on and on. As soon as they reached the outskirts, he knocked at the window of a house and handed Yard over to the old man who came out.

In the railway station a train consisting of three large saloon cars was standing. The yard was crowded with military carts and horses. Hay had been flung down on the cobbles for the animals. Mark made room for Inch to get at some hay; then, ignoring the shouts of orderlies

looking after their commanders' horses, he went to the platform and up to a brilliantly lighted car. The sentry would not let him enter, but whistled for the commander of the guard. The officer listened to his story, scrutinized the dusty, travel-stained youngster suspiciously, and ordered him to wait. A moment or two later he returned and called him inside.

In a small compartment he was taken to a short, bewhiskered man with closely trimmed, grizzled hair and a square-cut face. At the sight of such an insignificant-looking dispatch rider the chief of staff wriggled his whiskers discontentedly. Mark reported on his mission, took off his cap, and felt in the lining. His hand came upon something sodden, slippery, shapeless. The chief of staff silently took the packet and went out. The lad was terrified at the thought that he had not taken proper care of the packet, that his sweat had rotted the paper. He imagined how furious Budenny would be at the sight of the packet. He would shout at him, possibly even have him put under arrest.

He felt that he had been standing to attention in the compartment for an age when an adjutant looked in and beckoned the lad to follow him. He walked behind the officer into a saloon crowded with people, mainly divisional and regimental commanders. Evidently the business part of the conference was ended, for a stocky, young-looking woman was laying the table for supper. Budenny was sitting at a small side table, his tunic unbuttoned. When Mark entered, the army commander turned to him, and the lad thought he saw Budenny's whiskers stirring angrily.

"Now I'm in for it!" he thought miserably.

"Come here!"

He heard the command as though through a haze. He went up, saluted, and again made his report. He was about to add that he admitted his guilt in spoiling the packet, but Budenny did not let him finish. Turning to another officer, he said:

"Look at this little fellow, Klim. He's brought in a report from a task force. He's ridden a hundred and ten miles in twenty-three hours and his breath isn't even disturbing his whiskers."

A stocky man with a round face and widely set eyes came across to Mark. The lad guessed at once that he was Voroshilov.

"Of course not, he hasn't got any whiskers." Voroshilov retorted. "But I tell you what, Simon! Order him to blow at your whiskers.

Even you and he together would never blow them away!" He stared at Mark closely and suddenly asked, "But what are you so angry about, young comrade?"

"I'm not angry," Mark stammered. "I was only afraid you'd give me hell for spoiling the report...the paper's all wet."

Budenny and Voroshilov looked inquiringly at the chief of staff. The officer laughed and explained:

"He hid the report in his cap, and he sweated just a bit on the road. But his commander had anticipated that and wrapped the packet in oilskin."

Bending over Budenny, the chief of staff quietly reported on the contents of the packet. Voroshilov listened intently. As he turned over the report, the man suddenly raised his eyes from the paper and looked at Mark closely. Then, without saying a word, he held a sheet out to Budenny. Leaning on Budenny's shoulder, Voroshilov also read the note. Budenny looked up and stared at Mark.

"So you're divisional commander Surov's brother? Look, wife," he called to the woman bustling round the table, "this is Kornei Timofeevich's brother."

She came across to the lad and nodded. "Why, of course; he's just like him," she replied in the singsong tones of a Don Cossack woman.

A tall, broad-shouldered man stepped forward. "I know him, too," he said. "We're neighbors at home, but he's grown proud and doesn't wish to recognize me." Mark turned his head, and saw that it was Apanasenko.

"I'm not proud," he said. "I just didn't notice you."

"The boy didn't notice an elephant!" Voroshilov roared. "All the White armies have noticed Divisional Commander Apanasenko, but you didn't!"

"What are you tormenting the child for!" the woman said testily. "What he wants is some food, and quickly; and you're keeping him standing there while you talk."

"Some child!" Budenny laughed. "He's been doing such things that heaven knows what we're to do with him now. Put him in command of the army, perhaps. And what a saber you've got there...."

But Budenny's wife took Mark by the sleeve and led him out of the saloon, snorting, "It's all very well for them to talk—they've all got full bellies." The cook brought him a plate of meat, a glass of tea, and white bread. A little later he brought some more food, but by then Mark was asleep. The warmth worked together with his weariness; he dropped back on the divan and slept until long past sunrise. He was awakened by the clatter of wheels. The train was moving. He at once thought of his horse, started up, and went into the corridor. He ran into the chief of staff and told him of his anxiety for the horse he had left behind.

"A little one, mouse-color, with a big head?" the officer suddenly showed great interest.

"Yes, that's right."

The man burst into a roar of laughter. He slapped Mark on the shoulder, tried to say something, but choked again with laughter, holding his belly with both hands. At last the officer recovered his control and asked:

"Do you know what trouble your rat has given us?"

"His name isn't Rat. It's Inch."

"All right...please yourself. The report said you'd be arriving on a horse presented to Budenny, and it would be difficult to find another horse like him. When you fell asleep, Budenny wanted to see the horse. He went out and asked where it was. And they brought up-" He burst into laughter yet again. "And there he stood, like a rat, his legs straddled, his head hanging, and you'd have said he was laughing at the army commander. Budenny was mad. 'A poor sort of joke,' he said. 'I'll twist the head off that commander, the son of a bitch.' Voroshilov began to argue that the horse wasn't really so bad, only he was bored with looking at us, so he hung his head. And at that Budenny went really raging mad, swore for all he was worth, and pushed the horse away. And that horse didn't stop to think but grabbed the army commander by the sleeve and tore away a good half of it. And Budenny went back to his compartment, and no one has seen him since. Of course, to saddle a rat and send him to the army commander is a bit of an insult."

"It isn't a poor horse at all," Mark said determinedly. "It covered a hundred and ten miles without stopping. But he's my horse, and I brought another for the army commander. That one couldn't last out so I had to leave him on the edge of the town."

His story seemed to amuse the chief of staff even more. Hurriedly

telling him his horse was being cared for, he went off to the army commander's car.

An hour later Mark was summoned to report to Budenny. This time only the army commander and Voroshilov were present. Evidently they had heard about the horses, for Budenny said:

"You needn't worry about my horse; he'll be collected and brought to me. But now Klimenty Yefremovich wants to talk to you."

Voroshilov gazed at Mark with a look of great interest. Then he rose and, firmly laying his hand on the lad's shoulder, made him sit down. He began to stride from end to end of the saloon.

"It's time you were done with fighting, Mark!" he said, halting in front of the boy. "At your wonderful age you must study, study, study, and go on studying. And so, dear comrade, you're to be disarmed. You've done your bit.... What would you like to be?"

The boy did not know what to answer. He had often thought of the future, but had never found any place for himself in it. He had always thought of himself as engaged continually in fights and campaigns. He did not reply.

"All right, Mark!" Voroshilov said. "I can see you haven't thought about it. You'll go to Moscow. I'll give you a letter to someone there, and you'll study. And when you want anything just write to me or Simon Mikhailovich, and we'll help. And when you're in Moscow don't be afraid. You know what an attack is. Well, now you've got to attack a big and strong fortress. It's called knowledge. But you're a Budenny man; you won't be afraid."

The autumnal wind roved over the steppe, hurling itself with a savage, brigand whistle at the towns and the villages, roaring along the narrow streets, then sweeping up and playing the hooligan among the clouds, driving them across the sky, huddling them into a heap, like a sheep dog rounding up sheep. Then it suddenly began to disperse the clouds, to tear them to shreds. It grew tired of playing high above the earth and dropped down again; and once more it howled down the chimneys, whistled through the telegraph wires, complaining of something, swearing at someone.

The train, too, was buffeted by the wind. It flew at the cars as if trying to blow them off the rails; it beat violently at their wooden sides, tore in through the windows, through the unglazed frames, and hurriedly, surreptitiously began to rummage about the car, forcing

the travelers to huddle still deeper into their clothes and to sit closer together for protection.

In one corner of the car the wind came upon a lad, his Budenny cloth helmet pulled down low over his eyes, heavy, clumsy, patched felt boots on his feet. On his knees he had a small bundle, containing all his possessions. He sat gazing out of the window at the steppe slowly rolling past, blackened, autumnal, yet very dear to him.

Mark Surov was on his way to Moscow.

Perhaps the steppe wind was raging because it had decided to give the lad a good send-off. They had met, the wind and the lad, again and again on the great highways, so perhaps it was not surprising that the wind was accompanying Mark with a dashing, brigand whistle.

The wind howled. The wind of the steppe.

II When the Gods Are Silent



1. Six Years Later

WITH a huge five-pointed star clutching its breast, the locomotive tore into the spring that advanced on Moscow with an irresistible onrush of blossoming orchards and fields flushed with tender green. A little town dotted with the cupolas of ancient churches flowed past the car windows. But beyond the town rose the chimneys of a small, new settlement growing up around a factory. The little town with its cupolas still evoked the shades of a history-laden past.

The moment the Eastern Express slipped out of Moscow all the scents and smells of that great, slatternly city vanished, dispelled by the gentle, freshening breath of the spring. And now it seemed that everything in the world—the wide expanse of earth; the orchards, like the raging foam of a waterfall; the gracious sun; and the azure sky—was all blended in a single rejoicing and vitalizing chord that pierced into the heart.

In one of the train compartments sat Mark Surov. He was now a broad-shouldered youth of twenty-three, somber of face, with rather prominent cheekbones. He wore a simple, cheap, Moscow suit, a white shirt with unbuttoned collar, and a dark cap. In a crowd of Moscow students he was distinguishable from the others only by a faint trace of military carriage that had not left him. Like millions of other Soviet youngsters, he had been nurtured on high ideals and great, world-shaking events. The gods of the past had been flung down; the country was rearing like a fiery horse. Mark's mind, heart, and feelings all belonged to his generation, and that generation knew only one road: forward. His generation was enormously, immeasurably wealthy. It had nothing; yet it was rich. Badly clothed, still worse fed, having missed all the joy of carefree childhood, it was inspired by a great dream of the future, and in the light of that future all the present-day poverty was cast into the shade.

Mark had arrived at the Moscow station six years before, a speck in a crowd of bustling passengers, a boy in a greatcoat, carrying a small bundle. He had been absorbed into the streets of the city. On his arrival at the University preparatory department the professors had examined him to find out how much he knew, and had clutched their heads. "Why, all your knowledge is a blank," the oldest of them

all had exclaimed mournfully. Thrusting out his chin and crumpling his Budenny helmet in his hands, Mark had quietly answered: "I know. But I can learn.... And I promise.... I'll try to understand everything." The professor had gazed into his eyes and had said as quietly: "You try.... Nothing is impossible if you set your mind to it."

Often hungry, often plunged into despair, he spent two years studying in preparation for the University. Then he had entered into its community of strict professors and chattering horde of students.

All the laws governing Moscow University life before the revolution had been abolished, and new laws had not yet been established. Together with the thousands of new students—new in their character, their outlook, their shocking irreverence for all the past, sacred traditions—politics had passed through the gates. The chapel was turned into a club, and across its porch was a streamer: "Science to the toilers." The professors must have thought their students had come from another planet. The newcomers were greedy for knowledge; yet they were unbounded in their criticism; they cast doubts on all that had long been regarded as indubitable truth. This was particularly so in the humanities, in which the indubiety of truth is never raised to the rank of an absolute. The new students took to the study of philosophy only to demolish it. Law was studied for the same purpose. Marx dominated their minds; he was the beginning and end of all existence; his bearded features stared down from the walls of all the lecture halls; his thoughts were treated as revelations not calling for verification. It was not possible to achieve any link between the new symbol of faith and that of the professors, who knew that not everything had begun or ended with Marx.

Mark lived with three other students, Yura, Leonid, and Alexander, in a students' hostel, some distance from the university.

"Really, though, it is good to be alive," Alexander, who was nick-named Byron because of his devotion to poetry, dreamily remarked as the four friends walked along. "You somehow don't notice it in the daytime; but at night all the beauty of the world floods down over you, and you feel that you're a tiny speck of dust being carried you don't know where and you don't know why." He was walking between Mark and Yura; his eyes were turned to the stars. Mark noticed that his face was tense, almost tortured.

"And besides, comrades, think how good it is to be living in the

age when the universal Communist brotherhood of the peoples is coming to birth...." He stopped short. That wasn't what he had been wanting to say; he was moved by other, more vague and gentle feelings. But he could not be blamed for the fact that even on the most beautiful night he was dominated by the day with its ringing, challenging slogans.

"Have you heard that Vishinsky's being assigned to the University, Mark? He'll be a tower of strength to us," Yura remarked.

Mark did not know the name Vishinsky, but he realized the turn Yura had given to the conversation. For two years now a desperate struggle had been going on between Trotsky and Stalin. In that struggle youth was playing the same role that Mark and the other boys had played during the Sunday battles for the bridge in his native village. Passions were inflamed; the party struggle had split the University into two irreconcilable camps. Yura was one of the minor Trotskyist leaders. Mark often thought with a feeling of regret that all this conflict was unnecessary; it prevented people from living; it upset everything. He was not without political passions himself, but he thought that such disputes could be settled without resort to a dangerous struggle. Apparently Vishinsky was one of the Trotskyist leaders, as Yura was so delighted about his appointment to the University. Yura could hardly know that Vishinsky, one of the first Mensheviks to go over to the Bolsheviks after Lenin seized power, was already set upon another somersault in the struggle between Trotsky and Stalin, switching his servile fealty from the former to the latter.

"I think the whole business rather boring," Mark said glumly. "Here you are going into raptures because Vishinsky's coming to the University! But what good will come of it? You'll still go on attacking the Stalinists, and the Stalinists will go on attacking you. You're already coming to blows."

"Don't worry!" Yura said confidently. "We shall wring the necks of the Stalinist spongers. We shan't let them destroy the achievements of the revolution."

"That's exactly what the Stalinists say about the Trotskyists!"

"It's perfectly hopeless trying to make you see political sense." Yura grew angry. "You still don't know whose side you're on."

"I'd rather be on the side of the Party and the Soviet regime," Mark retorted. "I don't want to serve either Trotsky or Stalin but

our ideals, our Communism, for which ..." He had been intending to say that his father and brothers had laid down their lives for Communism, but he refrained. They had fought and died for land and freedom; Communism had been only a vague abstraction to them; whereas for Mark it had acquired the clear outlines of the future.

"You're an opportunist, that's what you are!" Yura snapped.

Mark came to a stop and said in a burning whisper:

"I don't know. Maybe you're right, and I am nothing but an opportunist. Only I have no desire—you get me?—no desire whatever to play at politics. Simple things are only fogged by such theories as the permanent revolution. Brrr! Could you think of anything more horrible than a never ending revolution? Can't Trotsky see that? The people have passed through the revolution, have gone through a sea of blood. Let it rest at that. The people have won, and don't hinder them in enjoying their victory. I'm a Communist, you know that. I believe in Communism, I try to see the road to it; but I don't want to strew that road with the tin tacks of chewed-over theories. What if I am an opportunist? So far as I'm concerned I think it far more important than all your wrangles that the workers and peasants should have a good life and freedom, and that there should be no more wars or fear of war. People like you have got your noses out of joint, somehow. Today you condemn the wearing of collars and ties; and let some idiot put it into your head tomorrow that galoshes should be abolished because Emperor Alexander II wore galoshes, and you'll go and abolish them, not stopping to think that man shouldn't have to go with wet feet just for the sake of your theories. I hear a society's been formed calling on everybody to strip their clothes off and go about naked. And you'll accept it because it's new, and you'll think it revolutionary. But I know that in order to march to Communism the people need galoshes. And possibly collars and ties too. As for trousers, they're indispensable. And you can go to the devil..."

He turned on his heel and strode off down a dark side street, swinging his arms vigorously. All was quiet in the hostel when he arrived. Mark swiftly undressed and dived into bed. I must think that one out, I simply must! he told himself as he drew the blanket over himself. He badly wanted to know why life was such a discord. Yura, of whom he was genuinely fond, was ready to devote himself wholly to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution as if it were the only thing that mattered. Every one of them was studying hard. He closed

his eyes, and his confused and difficult life in Moscow passed before him. He saw himself among a crowd of youngsters struggling round a pedestal surmounted by a winged creature with a subtle human face turned skyward. The face was astonishingly like Alexander's.

"Our generation has been born to overthrow the gods," shouted Yura as he rushed to the pedestal. Mark stared in astonishment. For the moment Yura had shouted, the winged creature disappeared from the pedestal. It was not overthrown; it had simply vanished. Only the hard block of the pedestal was left. . . .

During the long vacation many of the students took jobs. They labored on public works, in factories, or as porters on the railroads, for they had to get money to buy good boots for the winter and books and to save up for the purchase of extra food. One call came for "tested and reliable" students to work in the Kremlin. Mark was among those chosen and put in the charge of a good-natured, stout engineer known as Paul Sergeevich. They were to repair and redecorate the Kremlin living apartments.

Of all the apartments Mark saw in the Kremlin, Stalin's was the most modest. An inconvenient, rather dirty staircase led up to the second floor, where there were four or five rooms simply furnished, with windows that let in little light, a private office with a huge safe more suitable for a bank, and an enormous writing desk. The day after they had started on the repairs Stalin's wife, Nadejda Alliluyeva, came in to see them. She was tall, with a pleasantly long face that one couldn't help noticing. She looked quite young. She was wearing a simple, gray costume, but it had obviously been cut and fitted by a good tailor. She had elegant high-heeled shoes, and her fine stockings fitted closely to her rather full calves. Late in the afternoon Stalin came in, too. He arrived unheard, with a quiet, catlike tread, in soft leather boots and a simple canvas tunic, his light gray trousers tucked into the legs of his boots. Mark could not help thinking that this simplicity of dress was deliberate and exaggerated. But at that time he did not take any great interest in Stalin, who was still only on the road to power, and his stock was not quoted highly on the market of human glory.

"How's it going, Nadia?" he asked in his guttural tones.

"Quite well, Joseph Vissarionovich," she replied.

Mark noticed that he called her by the diminutive of her name,

Nadia, whereas she gave him his full Christian name and patronymic, as though emphasizing the inequality that existed between them. At the age of forty-six Stalin looked much older. It was not that he gave any impression of ill health, but something had aged him. As Mark glanced at his yellowish eyes, they reminded him of a cat's eyes and seemed stained with tobacco smoke like his whiskers.

Stalin and his wife went into his private office, talking loudly. A little later he came out with a roll of paper. Picking his way among the tools lying on the floor, passing round a bucket of paint and a bundle of parqueting, he went to the room where the foreman, Vlas Tarasovich, was painting the wall. There he stopped and took out his pipe, and soon the room was filled with the scent of good tobacco. Vlas Tarasovich never let slip an opportunity to smoke and talk; he stopped work and rolled himself a twist of cheap, home-grown tobacco. The scent of Stalin's pipe was blended with the stink of the cheap twist.

"Well, old boy, still working?" Stalin remarked as he leaned against the window sill.

"Well, yes, Comrade Stalin. Not so much that I could say too much, but quite enough." The foreman had a way of expressing himself enigmatically. But now he apparently decided to explain what he was getting at:

"Of course, it isn't like when I was young. The horse has been ridden too hard. But of course we've got to build socialism."

"Well, what do you think? Will you live to see socialism?" Stalin laughed.

"It's quite in the cards that I shall."

"But many people don't believe it's possible to build socialism!"

"Everybody's got his own ideas," Vlas Tarasovich answered weightily. "Take me, for instance; all my life I've been building something or other: houses, prisons, barracks. And maybe I shall build socialism too. But here's the snag: I can't build socialism for myself! I live in a mansion of sixteen square yards. That's three yards for each of us, and one over. Draw in all the air you want!"

"So it's like the saying: a shoemaker without shoes, a tailor without trousers, and a builder without a roof to his head." Stalin grinned. "It's always been like that in Russia."

"Very true, Comrade Stalin," Vlas Tarasovich replied without hesitation. "Russia's a rich country, only there's no order in it. My

little son tells me the Russians invited the Varangians into the country many centuries ago. 'Come to us,' they said; 'we've got a large and a fertile land, but we simply can't do anything with it.' Well, and the Varangians came and gave us a bit of order, and we haven't got over it yet. Maybe we shall have order here in a thousand years."

"You've got a sharp tongue, old fellow," Stalin said good-humoredly. "But if the Soviet Government falls into good hands, it will divide your thousand years by ten."

"So we'll be getting a good life not in a thousand but in a hundred years! Thank you for nothing, Comrade Stalin! You and I will begin to live in real earnest then! But after all, the Soviet Government isn't a bad sort of government, if you look at it not from in front but from behind. It's like when a man's young; you walk along the streets and see a real beauty just in front of you. She moves like a swan, she's as slender and shapely as any man could wish. And, of course, like a young fool you catch up with the beauty in order to have a look at her face. And you're bowled over. It's not a face you see, but a mug you couldn't imagine even in your dreams. And that's how it often is; from behind, 'God grant it!'—from in front, 'God help us!'"

Stalin listened with his head sunk on his chest, as if thinking over the old man's remarks. He smiled and looked at his watch, picked up his cap, said good-by to the workman, and went to the door. Then he turned and said:

"So long, old fellow. Keep well!"

"So long, Comrade Stalin," Vlas Tarasovich replied. He was about to say something more, but Stalin and his wife were already going downstairs. The other workmen gathered round him and swore that they'd all suffer through his talking too much. At that moment Alliluyeva happened to return, and overheard them. Going up to Vlas Tarasovich, she said in a kindly tone:

"Comrade Stalin liked you very much. He said that if he gets the time he'll come and have another talk with you."

She passed through the room to go to the kitchen, her hips swinging almost imperceptibly, all her movements expressive of restrained strength. There are human beings who radiate such a mighty current of vitality that all those around them are subdued by it. Stalin's wife was like that. Mark smiled so frankly and boldly that the foreman, who happened to glance at him, remarked in astonishment:

"What's the matter with you, my boy? You look as if you'd seen a vision!"

Among the girl students in the University Lena, who was studying law, dominated Mark's dreams. Tall, with full breasts, her large gray eyes looking straight at the world, she seemed to Mark the embodiment of the woman of the future.

He and Lena had become friends very soon after he entered the University. They had met at a Young Communist meeting, had got into a violent argument, and walked home together in order to finish it. They had argued bitterly over the question of the new morality, and what lines it should take in the socialist society. The discussion was going on all over the country; it had found its way into the columns of the press and was taking extreme forms. In this discussion the youth went very far. Girls and boys who had had no experience of love discarded it as a bourgeois survival and classified people into moral reformers who did not recognize love and citizens who were still in the bonds of old conceptions. Lena was a conscious reformer; Mark was a citizen. But this did not prevent their being friends, though that very friendship became the cause of continual quarrels between them.

"You're horribly reactionary, Mark. Anyone would think you were living not in the age of revolution, when everything has to be destroyed, but in the stuffy old days."

"You can put it like that if you wish," Mark rejoined. "But I think you're too advanced. So you think we ought to eliminate the capacity to fall in love, and then people would be happier?"

"Fall in love!" she drawled contemptuously. "Even your phrase-ology is old-fashioned. My dear Mark, there's no such thing as love, and never has been. It's all an abstraction, and . . . the interplay of hormones." But she blushed as she said the words, and looked away. Then she frowned and looked boldly into his face. "I'm rather backward, too; I still feel ashamed to say the simplest of words. I've still got vestiges of the past in me, but not to the same extent as you. We've got to reorganize our life so that it doesn't include any of this love illusion. And to do that we must first establish exactly what love is."

"Fall in love and you'll find out."

"Don't be silly. How can I fall in love when there isn't such a thing? It's all a simple question of sexual relations, of physiology."

As Mark walked along beside her, his mind was occupied with something very different. She really was stunning! A plain cotton dress, small tennis shoes, a kerchief flung over one shoulder—her finery could hardly have been more modest; but no one could help noticing a girl with wavy hair like hers—hair that had never been touched by a hairdresser—with breasts that strained her cotton dress and threatened to split it, and with those gray eyes that looked resolutely into your soul.

"If love's only a question of sexual relations you go and talk to Yura Begoun. He's a specialist in that subject," Mark retorted.

"Yes, Yura's advanced," she agreed. "But that's just it; I've got nothing to talk about with him. He and I see these problems in exactly the same light. I want to re-educate you. It's simply disgraceful—you, a Young Communist, you grew up in the army, but you fail to understand the simplest of things."

"Simplest of things!" Mark grew even more angry. "If you had your way, you'd make the devil knows what of the simplest of things. Take that trial and condemnation of collars and ties you and Yura arranged last year. There's nothing in the Party constitution that says we've got to fight against collars and ties. We've got a much stronger and more important enemy than such petty details, but you turn them into world problems. Let a man wear a tie if he wants to! But not you! You talk about the freedom of the personality, but you want personality to be fettered by abstract conceptions of what is allowed and not allowed. A man may feel like wearing a tie, but he'd better not dare put it on without first asking your permission! You'll start a struggle against handkerchiefs next, and then we shall all have to come running to you to blow our noses on the hem of your dress."

"Don't be annoyed, Mark," she said in a conciliatory tone. "But you just haven't grown up to understanding such things. Why do you want that unnecessary adornment round your neck, when the neck ought to be free, so that you can breathe easily? Simply in order to stress the inequalities that exist in society? The bourgeois wears a tie, and so does the professional man; but the factory worker goes without a shirt or sweats in a canvas boiler suit. You call it a detail. But that only shows you don't understand that the life of each generation is

made up of just such details; and if we, the people of the new generation, have been called upon to transform the world, nothing must be allowed to slip by; everything that prevents us doing our work must be eliminated."

"We've got to *learn,*" Mark said morosely. "First learn, and then transform the world; not the other way round."

Some time later Lena asked him to go for a walk with her in the garden. Her clouded, resolute expression, her proudly tilted head, indicated that she had a serious conversation in mind.

They strolled in the garden without speaking. Gradually his feeling of depression was replaced by one of joyous apprehension; he couldn't help thinking that now at last his solitary dreams would come true. But she walked on and on until they reached the farthest corner of the garden. As they halted by a wall, she turned her agitated face to his.

"I want to have a frank talk with you, Mark," she said. "I've been intending to for a long time, but somehow it just hasn't come off."

He made no comment.

"You know, you're terribly mistaken in defending the old as you do. All our girls think you're terribly backward in regard to the new morality. You've read Without a Fig Leaf, haven't you?"

Yes, he had read the story, which had recently been published in a large edition. In it the writer had stripped love of all its wrappings; with cynical frankness and elderly lechery he had reveled in details of intercourse between man and woman. Mark knew that among many of the students the book was regarded as the latest revelation of Communistic relations.

"It's just as I've always told you," she went on in a quivering voice. "We must put an end to the old ideas of love and all the other rubbish. If I, as a woman, feel attracted to you, nothing can prevent my belonging to you. Isn't that so? If you want to know, I've always considered that having a man is as simple as swallowing a glass of water."

Mark involuntarily closed his eyes. "How do you know?" he asked hoarsely. "Have you ever had a man?"

"Not yet." She reddened. "But believe me, it's quite simple!"

Hope died within him, and he felt bored and disgusted. Always harping on the one string! Sometimes he had the feeling that she was

in love with him; but when she began to talk and in all she said there was not one word of love, his own feeling for her faded. What love could survive her manner of talking?

"Don't mumble, Mark," she said, excited. "You're not educated yet in the new relations between the sexes. It's all quite clear and intelligible, really. I can see you're attracted to me, and that's how I feel for you. You and I are new people, and we ought to arrange our relations on the new lines." Her face was flaming, but she suppressed her feeling of embarrassment. When he remained obstinately silent, she said in an offended tone:

"Ah, Mark, you're an amazing little bourgeois, after all! You've been in the army, you've been through an awful lot, and yet you've got a queer way of looking at things. You're looking for some non-existent beauty of relationships. We've got to renounce all that, and only then shall we be really new people. Well, I'm ready, Mark."

"Ready for what?" he exclaimed in utter lack of comprehension. "I'm ready to belong to you."

She had great difficulty in getting out the words. As she said them, the light faded for Mark. His face went tense with anger, he seized her head roughly in his hands and turned her face to his. Gazing into her eyes, he almost shouted:

"I don't want you. Understand? I don't want you. Everything you say is disgusting. I know you're not really like that, but your words have built a barrier between us, and I can't drag my love for you across it." He pushed her away and rushed off. She started to run after him; she called to him. But he did not stop. Hanging her head, she slowly walked out of the garden.

It was almost dawn when he returned to the hostel. After leaving her, he had wandered about the streets, and late at night in some dive he had fallen in with a woman who had the familiar challenging yet promising expression in her eyes. He had gone off with her into the night. In some dark alley she had led him into a small room where the air was heavy with the scent of powder and perfumes. The bed was hot. And the woman's body was hot as she put her bare arms round his head and whispered words of love. He responded, deluding himself that she was Lena; frantically bearing with all his weight on her body, sensually crying out, all but mad. Late in the night he gently unwound her arm from his neck and got up, making no sound.

He swiftly dressed, put all the money he had on the table, and cautiously opening the door, slipped out.

After that night he tried to avoid meeting Lena. Quite suddenly he realized that she had won his heart, and the knowledge was frightening. Love that provoked such strange expressions as she used frightened him. The memory of the woman in the hot bed—the pungent scent of a sweaty feminine body and the animal urge to which he had yielded, joyfully ready to turn himself into an animal—pursued him and made him avert his eyes whenever he ran into Lena. She put her own interpretation on his behavior, and made no attempt to talk to him.

Representatives of the "Down with Shame" Society invaded the University. They distributed leaflets everywhere, proclaiming, in very revolutionary terms, that they must liberate the beauty of the human body, and that shame was unworthy of the great proletarian revolution.

Mark turned into the club, where a debate on the new morality was taking place, and seated himself on a window sill. Lena was making a speech, and her powerful voice was quivering with agitation. She came right to the edge of the platform and shouted to the audience:

"Comrades! Girls and boys! We've had the good fortune to be born at a time when a new page is being written in history, and the first words on that page have been inscribed with the blood of our fathers: "Revolution in Russia!" Those are great words, comrades...."

While she was speaking, some little distance from the University an event was occurring that all the inhabitants of Moscow had been awaiting, some with interest, others with disgust. The day was gloriously fine, the sidewalks crowded with people, the restaurants and cafés were doing a brisk trade. And, as always on such fine days, there were so many street sellers about that Moscow resembled a great market.

Suddenly the people hastened in the direction of one of the main thoroughfares, from which shouting, catcalls, and whistling were coming. Marching along to this accompaniment was a little group of people, fifteen altogether, both men and women. They were all naked except for broad crimson sashes that ran across their chests from one shoulder. On each sash were the words "Down with shame!"

People on the sidewalks looked outraged, but the procession marched on calmly in the roadway, as if they were doing nothing at all unusual. They were equally deaf to the sneers and jeers. As they went barefoot along the road, a policeman rushed up to them. But the man at their head was ready for him; he took a document out from behind his sash and handed it to the officer. The policeman read it, threw out his hands, spat noisily, and demonstratively turned his back on the marchers. The leader led his naked followers on in the direction of the University.

Meanwhile, Mark was sitting on the window sill, listening intently to Lena. She continued to the approving exclamations of her listeners:

"No, comrades, we shall not pour young wine into old bottles. We shall shatter not only the outward but the inward old world. Man must unfold his wings. Man must feel that he is not the slave of circumstance, but is forging his own happiness. Love? You can put what content you like into that word, but most of all it implies the worker's duty to allow himself to be exploited. 'Love your neighbor as yourself!' Do you order a man who is being ruthlessly exploited to love his exploiters? As for love between man and woman, if we really are materialists, we must resolutely discard that rotten idealism. Not love, but the movement of hormones, naked physiology, or, if you like, the instinct to continue life, like that of the wolves when they arrange their lupine nuptials."

Mark was about to shout a protest, when his attention was distracted by a noise in the courtyard. He looked through the window and saw the procession of naked men and women, with the raging sea of people behind them. Lena had run to the window, and now she was standing beside him; out of the corner of his eyes he saw her deathly pale face, her lips bitten to blood.

"There are your wolves," he remarked. Without saying a word she seized him by the hand and drew him to the door. The crowd pouring out of the club parted them, but he already knew what he had to do. He went leaping down the stairs at the risk of breaking his neck. He saw Yura Begoun running in front of him.

The leader had some presentiment of the danger that threatened him from the two youngsters running across the courtyard toward him. He held out his magic document. But, whatever else they could have been accused of, bureaucratism was not one of their weaknesses. They showed no respect whatever for the official document.

"What do you want, you lousy reptile?" Yura's voice choked with fury and he made queer, groping movements with his hands, not knowing what to seize hold of on this naked fellow. There was only the crimson sash, and he tore it off. Now the man really was naked. Yura slashed the material across his face, the man turned his back to avoid the blows, and with a furious swing of his foot the youngster sent him staggering down the steps.

Meanwhile, Mark had tackled a little man with flabby belly, tearing the crimson sash off him. The man squealed like a pig, but Mark bowled him over and set one knee on his belly.

"Behave like a lot of filthy brutes, would you? I'll shake the life out of you!"

The man grunted miserably and gazed up terror-stricken at Mark. Half mad with fury, the young student seized him by the feet and dragged him like a sledge toward the gate. The crowd greeted the fight in the courtyard with an exultant roar. As he turned round after flinging his victim out, Mark noticed Lena. She was stepping slowly backward, protecting her face with her hands, while a naked harridan stormed at her, trying to thrust her talons into the girl's hair. Mark ran up just in time. He put one hand round the woman's chest, felt all the flabbiness and chilliness of her breasts, and flung her to the ground. Without thinking he bent down and slapped her face; and again he felt the cold, repellent contact of the flabby flesh. Yet he was simultaneously seared with the thought that he was striking a woman. Don't hit a woman! he told himself. Overcoming his aversion, he stooped and helped her to rise. As she got up, she hurled such a flood of invective at him that he turned mad with rage; despite his own injunction he twisted her round and shoved her so hard with his foot that she flew several yards with her arms outstretched, to fall face downward.

Led by Yura, other students chased the rest of the naked band some distance through the streets. But Mark had not the heart to go with them. He turned back to the University building, and saw Lena walking along with her head hanging. He felt a deep pity for her, and took her by the arm. Her strong body hung limply on his arm. Suddenly she stopped, gazed with her sorrowful gray eyes straight into his eyes, and said in an agitated yet resolute tone:

"So long, Mark! I'll go on by myself now."

"So long, Lena."

They parted without another word, as they had parted so often since her strange confession in the garden. Meanwhile the struggle between Stalinists and Trotskyists was working up to its own climax. The passions of the leaders were being reflected right through all the strata of the Party. Yura was devoting all his time to factional activity. Rumors sped through the University that a political demonstration was being organized. His friend Leonid, who was not interested in politics and took no part in the struggle, tried to restrain him.

"Drop the whole idea, Yura," he said. "No good will come of it."

"My dear Leonid, what do you understand about politics? We intend to march and show our solidarity with Trotsky, and that will be quite a blow at the Party bureaucrats and Stalin."

Leonid shook his head dubiously and whispered into Yura's ear:

"I warn you there's something fishy about all this. The Stalinists say Vishinsky's on their side, and you Trotskyists say he's with you. You're preparing placards with the words 'Stalin is the enemy of the people,' and the Stalinists are preparing placards with the words 'Trotsky is the worst enemy of the people.' I can't help feeling there's something behind it all."

"I can tell you in confidence," Yura replied quite seriously, "the demonstration will be completely in our control. You needn't worry, Vishinsky's with us. Only yesterday he sent me to—" He broke off, and simply remarked that Leonid and Mark would soon see for themselves.

He was right in that. The day when they saw for themselves was an ordinary University day; the lecture halls were crowded with students; the professors were lecturing. Suddenly there was a shout:

"Comrades, all out to the demonstration!"

In a moment a mass of students filled the great courtyard.

Leonid clutched Mark by the arm. "Believe me, Mark, this has been provoked," he said agitatedly. "Surely we can do something to stop it?"

"What can we do, just the two of us? It'll all go off all right, I expect. We'll march along one or two streets, we'll shout one or two slogans, and then we'll march back."

"Don't you believe it. There's going to be some dirty work before the day's out."

Columns of marchers from other higher schools in the city began to arrive. The trams were brought to a standstill; the police were reinforced; crowds of ordinary people gathered to watch. Red banners

were raised high above the heads of the demonstrators; many of the banners bore Trotskyist slogans, many others, Stalinist. As the various processions arrived, they immediately split into two hostile groups. The leaders of the demonstration led the way to a street in which there was a small hotel, the Paris. As the noise of the thousands of marchers was heard in the distance, a group of men came out on the hotel balcony. Trotsky was at their head. His shock of curly, grizzled hair was tousled by the wind, his eyes were flashing. He was in his well-known state of nervous exaltation in which his speeches could rouse his listeners to the utmost enthusiasm.

Some distance from the hotel a great caldron for heating asphalt was standing in the road. Usually the caldrons were left uncovered, but this one was covered with planks—the platform had been prepared in advance. As soon as the leading ranks of the demonstrators reached the caldron, Vishinsky climbed onto it, a bag of fruit in his hand. The procession halted. Pointing to Trotsky, standing in full view on the balcony, Vishinsky shouted in his ringing, powerful voice:

"Comrade students! There before you stands Trotsky, the man who would sell out the revolution. That wrecker wants to make a speech to us. What can he say? He won't tell us how he is betraying the party of Lenin, how he is licking the heels of all the enemies of the great Soviet land....Comrade students! Close your ranks around the Leninist Party Central Committee and Comrade Stalin. Smash the Trotsky scum, drive them out, destroy these traitors...."

Angry shouts came from the Trotskyists; exultant roars of approval from the Stalinists. The men on the balcony were taken aback. Trotsky tried to shout something, but it was of no use, he could not make himself heard. Yet to retreat would seem like flight. Fighting broke out in the crowd. A seething mass of human bodies surged toward the hotel. Trotsky raised his hand in an appeal for silence, but no one took any notice. At that moment an apple skillfully flung from below struck him in the face. The apple was rotten, and the brown mash spattered all over him. That was the signal for rotten fruit, bad eggs, and tomatoes to be hurled at the balcony. Trotsky covered his face with his hands, but the rain of rotten food continued until someone dragged him inside. As he retreated, there was a triumphant roar from the Stalinists.

University life gradually returned to its normal course. Political

passions died down. Stalin was seated firmly in the saddle at the head of the Party; Vishinsky's reward for his part in routing Trotsky was the rector's chair at Moscow University.

Yura Begoun disappeared, and with him many another of Trotsky's supporters. Some were deported from Moscow; others were simply expelled from the University; yet others were sent into exile, and Yura was one of those. Vishinsky's exaltation and the downfall of Yura and his friends proved a searching test for Mark. He was unshaken in his devotion to Communism and the Soviet regime, but he felt that in this fight against the Trotskyist opposition, methods were being used that he could not consider just. Vishinsky's treachery stung him, but he realized that in the fight Stalin was forced to resort to such services. He approved of Trotsky's exile to Turkestan. He had always regarded him as the gentleman of the revolution, and was glad that Stalin had won, for Stalin was closer to his own soul. Trotsky coruscated, Stalin worked. Mark felt that the political disagreements were not really the important issues, but rather what was to be the dominant factor in the Party: Trotsky's revolutionary aristocraticism or the Bolshevism of the masses expressed from below. He was sorry about Yura, but he realized that the most active of the Trotskyists had to be removed for the sake of peace in the capital.

"The task before us is so huge that we have no right to boggle over petty details," he frequently reflected.

Returning late one night from one of his nocturnal wanderings about the city, Mark found the staircase of the hostel completely in darkness; evidently some homeless children had unscrewed the bulbs again, and tomorrow the hostel manager would complain bitterly. He struck a match and looked for the bulb. It was gone, as he expected. By the match light he saw a piece of white cardboard hanging from the socket. That was the manager's idea; he had provided all the lights on the stairs with notices: "High tension, fatal to life."

He struck matches to light his way up the stairs, and came to the next landing. There, in one corner he noticed a heap of rags. Bending over it, he discovered a sleeping boy; the rags were his clothes. An overpowering scent of eau de cologne came from him, and he was emitting gurgling noises; at his side was a half-empty bottle of the spirit. His right hand was clutching an electric bulb. Overcome by weariness and the potent eau de cologne, he had fallen asleep in a corner.

The match burned out, but Mark did not strike another. He stood over the heap of rags, listening to the boy's muttering. There were so many of these children wandering about the country, a living reminder of the terrible years of civil war and famine. Each morning they emerged from secret lairs, from house garrets, from filthy asphalt caldrons, and spent the day begging and stealing. Then at night they vanished back into their dens. Mark might well have become one of those homeless children in those days when he had gone to look for his brothers. But he had been far better off than these kids; he had a mother and brothers and a future.

He reached down and shook the sleeper. The boy jumped to his feet and tried to tear himself away. He dropped the bulb and it smashed on the floor. "Let me go, daddy; I won't do it again!" the kid whined, though in the darkness he could not see who was holding him. Mark silently dragged him up the stairs and along the corridor to his room. The boy went obediently, realizing that he could not get away from that grip. Mark pushed him into the room, lit the lamp, and saw a boy about ten years of age, a small, round face black with grime, and an absurd snub nose. He stood examining Mark, no sign of fear in his eyes. "Well, here we are!" Mark said. "What's your name?"

"Yasha," the boy answered hoarsely.

Mark put a large kettle of water on the stove to boil. His first task must be to give this little animal a good wash. It was no use questioning him; he wouldn't tell the truth anyway. Why should he, when his only idea of grownups was that they were all enemies, every one of them? When the water boiled, Mark soaped Yasha's head vigorously. The boy spluttered and spat but did not resist. The job was soon done, and Mark told him to get into the bed Yura had left vacant. Then, putting out the light, he lay tossing and turning on his own bed. Sleep mastered him slowly; just as he was dozing off Yasha called across to him:

"Mister, I say, mister! S'posing I get up and clear off?"

"You'll be a fool, that's all. Go to sleep!"

"But s'posing I pinch all you've got here and beat it?"

"I've just told you you'll be a fool. There's nothing here you can make off with; I don't possess much more than you do. On Sunday I'll take you to a home and arrange for you to stay there."

"A kids' home, d'you mean?"

"Possibly. I don't know yet."

The boy said no more. Perhaps he had dropped off to sleep.

Next day Mark had a couple of hours free from lectures, and he took Yasha for a walk. As they went along the street they looked like two brothers, one big, one small. Some of the girl students had made Yasha's trousers more or less presentable. His jacket was of feminine cut, but what did that matter? As they walked along, they halted outside a movie theater.

"Mark, let's see a movie!" Yasha asked.

But Mark walked on, making no reply. That day he was feeling low. He was still on bad terms with Lena, and disturbing rumors were circulating about her. She was spending a good deal of time in the company of Kostia Priakhin, the son of one of the professors. Mark had never liked Kostia. Always smartly dressed, artificially gay, and with an unpleasant look in his small, dark eyes, he seemed to Mark to be unhealthy-minded. And yet here was Lena, of all girls, going around with him. As he walked along, Mark reflected that he must see her and warn her. But how can I? What can I warn her against?

"Mark, let's see a movie!" he heard Yasha plead again. "Why don't you want to? It's a lovely picture."

"Well, will you pay for us?" Mark said angrily. "I haven't got the money."

"Money! I'll make ten rubles for you in less than no time! Give me a box of matches."

Without asking permission he slipped his hand into Mark's trouser pocket and took out his box of matches. Then he darted off in front. Mark had paid no attention to his remark. Where could the kid get hold of ten rubles? It was too much for him to beg.

He saw Yasha, a little ahead of him, stop a well-dressed woman in furs and wearing a hat—sure signs of affluence. He hurried to catch up with him, for he was feeling rather anxious now, but stopped again. The woman rummaged feverishly in her bag, then gave the boy a note. Surely not money? Yasha took it from her, dashed off, and disappeared down a side street. And as he went, the woman broke into a desperate shriek: "Police! Police!"

A policeman came up. Stuttering with agitation, the woman told him a boy had accosted her. "He looked like a homeless child and he vanished down that street," she gasped.

"But what about him?" the policeman asked sternly.

From her incoherent story it appeared that Yasha had stopped

her and shown her the matchbox. "Give me a ten-ruble note or I'll chuck lice all over you!" he had said, opening the box. She glanced inside it and saw lots of lice crawling about in it. Yasha told her they had been collected off someone ill with typhus, and if he threw them over her, she'd get typhus, too. In her fear she had given him a note, and he had vanished. "It's perfectly disgusting," she screamed at the policeman. "It's quite impossible to walk along the streets now. Boys with boxes of lice everlastingly demanding money. Ten rubles!"

"Don't worry!" the policeman tried to console her. "We'll find the boy, and then we'll ask you to come and identify him."

"For the Lord's sake!" the woman protested. "What for? He'll only do something even more unpleasant to me. A friend of mine fell ill with a shameful disease because one of these boys spat in her face."

Mark did not stop to see the end of it all, but turned back. He was angry with Yasha, but he could not help feeling amused at the hysterical woman. But where had the kid got the lice?

He turned into the boulevard and strolled past a refreshment booth. As he went by, he caught sight of Yasha sitting at a table, with a cup of coffee and real cream in front of him. Hurriedly gulping down the coffee, the boy dashed out after him.

"See that, did you?" he asked boastfully. "Ten rubles in one go."

"I saw! And I'll pull your ears off for you! To make a poor woman give you ten rubles!"

"You're a fool, Mark; that's what you are. Do you ever see poor women got up like that? All in furs, rings on her fingers, and gold teeth in her head? Anyone could see she was a bloody bourgeois. You and your 'poor woman'!"

"All the same, you had no right to take the ten-ruble note."

"Why not? I only asked her."

"Asked her! Threatened her with lice in a box! Where did you get them?"

The boy sniggered self-satisfiedly and took out the matchbox and opened it. It contained broken-off match heads. But when he shook his hand very gently the heads started into movement, and it was obvious that the woman in her fear had taken them for crawling lice.

Mark turned away and strode off. Yasha dragged along behind him. But when Mark turned into the street in which the hostel stood, he noticed that Yasha had disappeared. Cleared off for good, perhaps? Yet Mark rather doubted it.

A girl with a heavy, almost masculine appearance was waiting in his room for him. She was a friend of Lena and shared a room with her in a distant suburb. As he entered, she jumped up from her seat and asked him anxiously: "Mark, would you come to Lena, please? We can't do anything with her." Stumbling over her words, she explained that Lena had been out all night, and had not arrived home until the early morning. And then she had cried and cried, but wouldn't say a word. Then she had gone out. When she did not return, they had gone to look for her and had found her in the garret, trying to hang herself. But she had still refused to answer any questions, and wouldn't say a word.

Mark ran out of the room, leaving the girl to follow. He dreaded being too late. The tram dragged along like a snail. But at last they reached Lena's house. The little room she occupied was in semidarkness; she had blanketed the window with a tablecloth. Now she was huddled on her bed. When Mark went in, the woman with her rose and went out, leaving him alone with Lena. Her knees drawn right up to her chin, her face turned to the wall, she looked such a picture of misery and helplessness that his heart quivered with pain. When he went to the bed, she did not stir.

"Lena!" he called softly.

She started, hunched herself up still more, and whispered, "Don't touch me! Please, don't!"

"I'll stay and sit with you," he said.

There was a long silence. He sat with his head sunk on his chest and felt the pain intensifying within him.

"What are you thinking, Mark?" She raised herself on her elbow and gazed at him with her large, gleaming eyes.

"I don't know, Lena. I'm not thinking of anything."

She started up on the bed and huddled against him. Her face, wet with tears, her swollen lips, the unhealthy glitter in her eyes, made him start back.

"You must hate me as much as I hate myself." She jumped off the bed and clutched his head between her slender hands. Her body shook with sobs. He raised her in his hands and laid her back on the bed. She clung tightly to him. "Don't go away, Mark. Please don't go away. I'll tell you everything, just as I'd tell my brother. Only you and he would understand...."

Stammering, hesitating over her words, she continued:

"I don't know how it came about, but I found myself always thinking of him. If I didn't see Kostia for any length of time, I rang him up or tried to meet him in the University. We often went to the theater or the movies together; once or twice he took me home and introduced me to his family. When he said we must put our relationships on the new basis, I agreed. And yesterday a lot of us went off to the lake, and we drank, we sang, we had supper round a campfire. Then all the others wandered off, and I was left alone with him. I felt rather anxious . . . he'd had too much to drink. . . . I tried to stop him. And then I thought that after all I was a modern girl.... But then, when we were left alone together, I was frightened...you understand? He went on insisting, but I just couldn't bring myself to. That went on for a long time. And he had such hot hands! And I hadn't the strength to resist. And when ... oh, it was disgusting, horrible. I cried out and tried to get away, but he threw me down on the ground and tore my clothes off.... I hadn't the strength even to cry out. And when he hurt me-oh, how filthy it all is, Mark! After that I hated him. But he laughed and said I wasn't experienced in the new relationships. I slapped him on the face.... But that doesn't alter anything . . . nothing at all."

Yasha returned to the hostel soon after Mark had hurried off to Lena. He was carrying a pile of books of poetry, which he intended to present to Alexander, who had been complaining that he hadn't any money to buy such books. Alexander's eyes lit up when he saw them. But he was torn away from his blissful contemplation of the precious volumes by Yasha's question:

"Where's Mark? When I left him, he was coming home."

Leonid was lying on his bed, enjoying the luxury of an after-dinner rest. "I haven't seen him," he answered. "I've only just come back myself."

"Mark went off somewhere," Alexander said, still turning over the pages of a book. "Some girl with a man's voice came and took him off. In fact, he ran out!"

Leonid suddenly felt uneasy. Muttering something to himself, he laced up his shoes and put on his jacket. Then he turned to Alexander and observed in a tone of boundless contempt:

"You're not a poet, Alex, you're a blockhead! If Mark was as upset as that, something serious must have happened. It's not that easy

to upset him. That girl with the man's voice is a friend of Lena, so it must be something to do with her."

He ran out of the room with Yasha hard on his heels. Alexander stood thinking for a moment, then, drawing on his jacket as he ran, leaped down the stairs two or three at a time after his friends. They all arrived together at Lena's room. But the girl with the masculine voice would not let them enter. When Leonid explained that they were looking for Mark, she melted and drew them into the kitchen. There she explained what had happened—evidently Lena had now told her, too. "But Mark ran out looking terribly pale. I'm sure he's gone to look for Lena's seducer," she declared.

Now Leonid was really alarmed. Priakhin lived on the other side of the city. He took out his purse, but it contained only a ruble or two, not enough for a taxi. And it was no use asking Alexander for money. But Yasha came to his rescue; he thrust his last three rubles into Leonid's hand and whistled to a taxi that happened to come up.

As they were going up the stairs to the professor's flat they saw Mark coming down slowly, holding on to the banisters. He was without jacket, his shirt was slit from the collar to the belt, there were bruises on his chest, his face was covered with scratches and abrasions, one eye was half closed. When he saw his friends, a look distantly resembling astonishment passed over his face, but he went past them without saying a word.

"Mark's done for him! He's done for that Kostia!" Yasha exclaimed. "And serve him right. I'd have done the same myself."

Leonid turned pale and went back downstairs after Mark. At the bottom a door opened into a dark room where the women of the house did their laundering. Fortunately, it was empty, and he pushed his friend into it. Mark humbly allowed him to wash the blood from his face and hands.

Then Leonid went back upstairs to see what had happened to Priakhin. The door was open. The dining room was a wreck. The table had been overturned, the buffet and all the articles on it were smashed, bits of glass and pottery were scattered over the floor, chairs were broken. Kostia was lying in the middle of the room, beside a sofa. His clothes were in ribbons. Leonid turned him on to his back. His face was like a hideous mask, his mouth a gaping, bloody wound, his eyes had disappeared under the swollen flesh, the nose was swollen, too. But he was still alive, and Leonid sighed with relief.

"Kostia, can you hear me?" he asked, bending down. Kostia opened his eyes, and quietly answered, "I'm still alive.... Mark beat me up.... Don't tell anyone; it was a fight of honor."

Snatching up Mark's jacket, Leonid went downstairs. From his relieved expression Alexander guessed that the worst had not happened. Throwing the jacket round Mark's shoulders and somehow concealing the rent in his shirt, they left the house.

A week later Lena went back to her oldest brother, who had brought her up as a child, in Turkestan. And at a meeting of the Young Communist organization in the University Kostia was expelled from the Party as a demoralizing influence.

Not long after this incident Alexander disappeared. He had organized a literary competition for the most humorous story of University life. A number of students sent in entries, but his own was adjudged the best of the lot. However, his story, satirizing the regime, met with the higher authorities' disfavor, and he was arrested. Mark was badly upset by his arrest, but he still felt that the harsh times called for harsh sacrifices. When you chop wood, splinters will fly! Nonetheless, he went to the Public Prosecutor's office and handed in a request for his friend's case to be reconsidered. But nothing came of it.

Now he devoted himself almost entirely to study. He grew thin, unsociable, and even neglected work in the Young Communist League. Whenever attempts were made to elect him to a committee or send him on an official lecture to a factory, he frowned and angrily said that so long as he was at the University he intended to study, and not sit on committees.

Yet he passed into the Party almost automatically. It was on the anniversary of Lenin's death. A Party meeting was held, and in the course of it the secretary of the Young Communists announced that Mark Surov was being transferred to the Party. Mark went to the platform and slowly, distinctly, declared:

"I promise you that I shall serve the people all my life.... Communism, our iron faith, is the greatest hope of the world. Man can find no greater happiness than to serve it. That is why I am studying, in order not only to believe, but to know how to transform that truth into life. I give everything to the people, even my life if necessary.... The joy of our great faith is not to be measured, and with that joy I join the Communist Party. Along the road of my father, my brothers... the road of Lenin and Stalin."

Mark was in the midst of his graduation examinations when he was summoned to the rector's office. Vishinsky was not there; in his place sat a man with yellow, expressionless features, in which everything was on a small scale—a low brow, eyes of indefinite color, a well-shaped but too small nose, a tiny chin. Mark was one of some twenty students who had been summoned to the office. The stranger with the small and expressionless face stood up; he was small even in height. Thrusting his hands into his belt, he said:

"Let me introduce myself, comrades. I'm Yezhov, head of the Personnel Department of the Party Central Committee. I've asked you to come here because we need educated and trained workers for the government administration. The Central Committee has decided that you are to be mobilized for an important assignment."

He said much more, but Mark did not listen closely. In his mind's eye he saw his native steppe; of recent months he had been passionately longing to go back home. Suddenly that dream was shattered when Yezhov turned to him. "Comrade Surov, we have assigned you to the most distant and most pivotal part of our country, the Far East. That is a great honor. You'll be working in difficult conditions there."

"I'll do by best," he replied simply.

So now the Eastern Express was carrying him to the farthest region of Russia's boundless land. Day and night the wheels would clatter; before him lay thousands of miles of travel across the great Russian plain, across the Urals, more thousands of miles across Siberia, and after that still more through the Far East, through a land almost unexplored, its flanks bathed in the Pacific Ocean, in several seas, and in the mighty waters of the river Amur. But behind him was the platform of the Moscow station, his friends waving their hands in farewell, and among them an old woman in black, who had come to stay with her son during his last year in Moscow. She stood leaning on a stick. She gazed after the train, shielding her eyes with one hand, as if she could still see her son, her very youngest son, journeying away into an unknown country. She was still whispering the words she had said to him at parting: "I can't keep you back, son. You're all flying off, every one of you. God have you in His keeping."



2. Hummingbirds Are Lucky

VAVILOV, the regional Party secretary, paced the room from one end to the other. Halting at the table, emphasizing every word, as if drawing an invisible line to add up the total, he said:

"We all agree that it is not within our competence to review the instructions issued by the Central Party Committee, still less to alter them. I'd be a pretty poor Party secretary if I agreed with Vinogradov and Surov. Moscow's instructions are perfectly clear: we're to transport people to the construction site at once, without regard to the difficulties. Comrade Stalin's telegram says in so many words 'without regard to the difficulties.' Moscow's instructions must be carried out. We won't waste time on argument. The only road in wintertime is over the ice of the Amur. If we neglect that road, everything goes to hell and we shan't be sitting here for long. We can't get thousands of men to the site through the taiga; the navigation season's months ahead; and in any case we haven't got anything like the number of river craft necessary. In a word, comrades, I call for the discussion to be closed and all forces to be thrown into carrying out our instructions to get people to the construction site."

The Party regional committee meeting was being held in Vavilov's office. It had begun in the evening; it was now midnight. The office was on the upper floor of the House of the Soviets, a building accommodating all the most important departments of the region. The members of the committee were seated in a semicircle round Vavilov's desk—a score of elderly, harassed men. Large desk lamps lit up their faces, and anyone watching them closely would have noticed that as Vavilov spoke, a look of unconcern appeared on those faces. Stalin had ordered. All that remained was to carry out the order.

A tall, gray-haired man with obstinate gray eyes rose from his seat at the desk. His high, massive forehead, deeply furrowed, formed the base of the inverted cone of his face. That face expressed will and determination. His lips were pressed firmly together beneath his short, neatly trimmed mustaches; he had a thin, rather long nose, thick gray eyebrows. A face that remains in the memory.

"I would like to draw your attention—" Vavilov waved his hand with an air of finality.

"No, Comrade Vinogradov; everything's said that can be said. It's not within our competence to judge who is right, you or Moscow." There was a threatening note in his voice. Vinogradov noticed it but showed no reaction. Waiting till the Party secretary had ended, he calmly resumed his remarks where he had been interrupted.

"I must warn you, it is my duty to warn you, that to send thousands of men into the taiga without adequate preparation will yield no practical results and will cost many lives—"

A stocky man with an angular, unhealthy face rose noisily from his chair and said in a hoarse, cutting voice:

"These opportunistic observations must stop! Stalin orders, and Vinogradov, unfortunately, doesn't agree! He dares to have his own opinion.... He doesn't realize that we've got to keep up the enthusiam of the Young Communists who have undertaken to build the new city."

Now Vinogradov interrupted. Without even a glance at the hoarse-voiced man he commented:

"Enthusiasm, the enthusiasm Comrade Sinitsin has just referred to, is a fine thing. But there's mathematics as well as enthusiasm. There are four things Moscow is not prepared to take into consideration. First: our winter is such that there is no place on the riverbanks where people can survive. The soil is frozen to a great depth, and it won't be possible even to dig dugouts. Second: there will be no food for the men, as the construction plan has only just been approved and nothing has been transported to the site. Third: the men cannot be sent on that journey nor can they survive in the taiga with only their town jackets and overcoats to keep them warm. They must have furs, but furs will not arrive till the spring. Fourth: there's nothing to be done at the site at present, as neither instruments nor machinery have been transported there yet. . . . I'm a non-Party engineer, I don't know much about enthusiasm, but I do know something about science and constructional work. . . ."

Mark Surov stood at the window, hardly listening to the discussion. Only eight months had passed since his arrival in Khabarovsk, the capital city of the Soviet Far East. A short period, but long enough to enable him to realize all man's insignificance in face of the automatically functioning governmental machine. He was beginning to feel that he, too, was only a tiny, impotent screw in that machine. At the age of twenty-four he was already an important regional official,

in charge of one of the area departments to be found on the floor below. But that was the floor below; here, a floor higher, the Party regional committee was functioning. In this house there was no higher floor than that, but in the government edifice there were very many other floors: national commissariats and the government of the republic, the all-Union commissariats and government, the Party Central Committee. And at the top of all was Stalin.

Vavilov grew more and more agitated. After all, he, too, was only a screw in the machinery of government. Bayenko, the chairman of the Regional Executive Committee and Mark's immediate chief, remained calm. He looked at Vinogradov wearily as if regretting that the engineer insisted on going on now that everything was clear. There was no point in any more talk; the Young Communists had to be transported to the site of the proposed new town. On Vavilov's and Bayenko's instructions Mark had studied the problem and had reported on it that evening to the Party committee. Vinogradov had put all the material he had at Mark's disposal, and the engineer, who had planned the construction of the town on the bank of the river Amur and had now been appointed chief engineer of the works, had talked to him a great deal about it.

Vinogradov had begun to draw up plans for the construction of the city while he was held in prison. An old military engineer, remote from politics and devoted to town-planning, he had been accused of participation in a counterrevolutionary conspiracy. In prison he had quickly distinguished himself by his inexhaustible powers of invention, and in the G.P.U. reports he began to be mentioned as an outstanding specialist on constructional work in the zone of permanent frost. At last he had been sent to Moscow, to explain his plan for a town and war industries on the bank of the river Amur. At first the bold, audacious idea had met with strong opposition; but he had stuck to his point, and Stalin had grown interested in the scheme. He sent for Vinogradov. After listening to him, he summoned his secretary and dictated a governmental decision: "For special services to the country, engineer Vinogradov is released before expiration of his sentence." As he said good-by, Stalin held out his hand and said:

"Your plan is first rate. But there's one mistake in the estimates, and you'll have to put it right."

"What is it?"

"You've spread the construction period for the town and works over eight years. They've got to be completed in two."

"Impossible!"

"Possible!" Stalin said confidently. "A little more exertion and sacrifice, a little less sentimentality, and the impossible becomes possible."

Winter had arrived when Vinogradov returned to Khabarovsk armed with his mandate as chief of the construction work. Stalin publicly called on the Soviet youth to undertake the task of building a town on the bank of the Amur. From all parts of the country volunteers began to stream into the unknown Far East. The erection of a new Far Eastern city was proclaimed a task of honor for the youth. But in Khabarovsk there was consternation. The officials had no accommodations ready for the youngsters as they arrived; they had nothing to clothe them in, nothing to feed them on. Vinogradov sent telegram after telegram asking for the flow of volunteers to be stopped until the spring. Vavilov and Bayenko supported him. Meanwhile several thousand lads and girls, the future builders of the city, were already concentrated in Khabarovsk. They were housed in icy wooden barracks and lived on semistarvation rations. Many of them filled the hospitals. The realities of the Far East killed their enthusiasm.

Mark and Vinogradov had sought for a way out of the impasse, but could not find any. Now Mark reported in detail to the Party committee. "Three things must be done. At all costs the flow of volunteers must be stopped. Those already here must be distributed among the existing factories, and we must insist that the factory directors provide them with tolerable conditions. And the time until the spring must be used in preparations for the constructional work. Prefabricated houses must be made, river craft prepared, supply bases organized."

"You're simply repeating what Vinogradov has already said," Vavilov interrupted him. "Stalin's orders are that the people are to be transported to the site. Further argument is unnecessary. We've decided to send you with the first transport, Comrade Surov. We've appointed you our plenipotentiary to travel to the site with the column." He turned away without waiting for Mark's comment. In any case no Communist could raise any objection to a decision taken by the Party regional committee. And Mark Surov was above all else a Communist.

A ringing silence filled the night, dominating the earth with all the might of frozen immobility. Turning up his fur collar, Mark walked swiftly along the empty street. After the smoky atmosphere of Vavilov's office his lungs were crying out for fresh air; but he did not dare take a deep breath, for the frosty air would scorch his throat and sting his lungs with icy prickles. His fur coat provided a sure defense against the frost; all his face except his eyes was covered by the collar. Before long his eyelashes and eyebrows were transformed into fluffy white icicles. Freeing his mouth from the collar, he spat. The spittle froze in its flight and fell to the ground in the form of a small glass ball. Over sixty degrees of frost, he thought as he hastened his steps.

He came to the bank of the river. Before him extended a wide expanse of ice, the road he would have to travel into the unknown. But he did not stop to think about it; there was plenty of time for that tomorrow. He hurriedly turned into a side street and tapped at the lighted window of a small, low house. A shadow flitted across the window; a face was set close to the glass. But the panes were too frosted to see through. He drew off one warm glove and scratched on the window, then knocked three times. The shadow vanished. Drawing on his glove, he went up to the little wooden, creaking veranda. While he stood waiting, he was suddenly possessed with vague alarm. He had the feeling that someone was peering out at him, and glanced round swiftly. The street was empty. At last someone inside drew back the bolt, and the door was opened by a woman. She took him by the sleeve and drew him into the dark corridor. He glanced again over his shoulder; the street was still empty.

Two shadows, a man's and a woman's, appeared on the lighted window. And at that moment a snowdrift not far from the house began to stir, to rise, and changed into a man completely enveloped in a white fur coat. Dark, widely spaced eyes gazed keenly from under the white fur, earlapped hat. They watched the lighted window.

It was warm in the room, but Mark was cold; throwing off his fur coat, cap, and gloves, he put his arms round the great brick stove. As he stood embracing the stove, he watched the girl hanging his coat on a nail and spreading his gloves out to dry. She was beautiful, with an unusual kind of beauty. Her features were a reminder that this land was part of Asia; the rather broad cheekbones, the almost im-

perceptible slant of the eyes indicated that she was not Russian. Yet she had burnished gold hair lying in a crown on her forehead, a pale, smooth complexion, with a fine skin through which such a brilliant flush flamed from time to time that he involuntarily closed his eyes. All the disturbing outline of her figure was perceptible through her close-fitting, simple, sleeveless dress. She moved about the room easily, with a catlike suppleness, as though to instill fear of the might of feminine beauty.

"Hummingbird, you're the most beautiful girl I have ever known," Mark said ardently.

"All the same, the first thing you embrace when you arrive is the stove." She laughed, revealing white teeth between her full, enticing lips.

"That's simply not true," he laughed, clinging still closer to the stove. "I embraced you first. And besides, I embraced the stove in order to give you time to hang up my coat and dry my gloves. Last time after seeing you I was reminded of you all the next day; my gloves were quite wet."

"If the way you pressed me against the cold wall in the corridor, and then pressed me against your cold coat, and trod on my foot into the bargain is what you call an embrace, then of course you're right."

"My absurd little creature, don't be so fussy about details. You must get used to my treading on your foot; whenever I attempt to kiss a woman, I always step on her toe."

The girl left his coat and came across to him. He held out his hands, took her by the shoulders, and drew her to himself. She raised her face to his and laughed quietly, happily. "Yes, I remember your first kiss. You seemed so glum and unsociable I couldn't believe you'd done it. And when you kissed me, you blushed as though you were ashamed. But when I kissed you back you burst into a laugh. How strange it all seems. We'd only known each other a few days...."

"Yes, Katya, only a few days. But as soon as I saw you, I realized you were meant for me. I'd been looking for you a long time. And I found you."

The light in the room went out. The man in the white fur coat remained standing outside a little longer, but the light did not return. He waddled along the empty street, through the profound stillness.

The dark room was filled with two quiet voices.

"Tell me, Mark," she said, "were you upset when you arrived? You looked back so queerly as you came in."

"I was just being stupid," he replied. "I'm getting nervous. I had the feeling someone was gazing at me from the street."

The girl made no comment. He lay thinking that he must clear up the equivocal situation into which he had got himself and Katya. If you loved a girl and she loved you, you ought to get married as soon as possible. But in this case there were certain circumstances that did not depend on him.

"You know, I've had enough of this way of going on," he said. "We'll get married, and then it won't be necessary to hide away from everybody."

"I agree, dearest. But you know we've got to wait."

He caught the anxious tone of her voice and squeezed her to himself. "Don't be afraid, hummingbird," he said. "We'll find a way out, we've simply got to. I don't like the situation you've been placed in at all, and we've got to think hard to find a way of getting matters straight."

"I don't like it, either," she whispered. "But I told you how it was. If Papa had foreseen all this, we'd have remained in Harbin. But he longed to come back to his own country, and I did, too."

Truly, he could not condemn her. She had told him all about herself. Her father had been an official employed on the Chinese Eastern Railway, when it was jointly owned by Russia and China. In Manchuria he had married a Japanese woman, and soon they had had a child, Katya, the girl whom Mark had nicknamed "hummingbird." Her mother had brought her up as Japanese, her father wanted her to be Russian. And so she had grown up susceptible to both these two often mutually exclusive influences. Until she was fourteen she had regarded herself as Japanese, and had had difficulty in speaking Russian and had tried to be like her mother in every respect. Then her mother had died, and her father had transferred all his affection to his daughter. She was very receptive, and she quickly began to take an interest in Russian books; she attended the Russian school and came to talk Russian just as well as Chinese and Japanese. Like her father, she had dreamed of returning to Russia, and they had returned twelve months before Mark met her. Her father was arrested at once for taking part in the White counterrevolutionary movement at the beginning of the revolution. The nineteen-year-old girl saw that Russia was not at all like the picture her father had described to her. But she felt that she must do something to save him, and when certain Russians suggested that she should offer her services to the Japanese consulate in Khabarovsk, she fell in with their plans. The consul regarded this girl who had been brought up by a Japanese mother, and who could speak Russian, Japanese, and Chinese, as suitable for a servant. So she did housework and washed and ironed for him. But besides this, she carefully collected the scraps of paper from the wastepaper baskets and took them home with her. With those scraps of paper she ransomed her father's life.

Later a new official had arrived from Japan to work in the consulate. A stocky, broad-shouldered Japanese, Yoshima was always smartly dressed and had a brisk manner. He began to annoy Katya, insistently paying court to her. The taciturn Russians who had instructed her to obtain work at the consulate and to whom she handed the scraps of paper sternly enjoined her not to reject Yoshima's attentions. By now she had met Mark, and it was hard for her to act on these instructions, but she could not risk her father's freedom. She had confided it all to Mark. Now she was no longer doing housework, but was a receptionist at the consulate, though no one ever called there.

A week earlier, Mark had had an interview with the men who were instructing Katya. He had met them before from time to time; sometimes they were in military uniform, more often in civilian dress. There were three of them, and they always went about together. They occupied a house in a quiet side street, and when he called, one of them opened the door to him.

"Come in, Comrade Surov," he said. "We don't welcome visitors. But as you insist on talking to us, we're ready."

The large, well-furnished room was warm. The three men sat at a round table on which several books were lying, all of them primers in Japanese. They seated him with them at the table. "Vodka, liqueur, cognac?" one of them asked him. "No, thanks, I've come on business." Mark pushed the glass away. "I want to talk to you about Katya Antina." The same man threw himself back in his chair and, folding his arms, said calmly:

"We're aware of that, Comrade Surov. What have you got to say?" "I want you to leave her alone!" he said glumly. "I don't have

to tell you why I'm interested in her; you know all about it. What you're making her do will end in her ruin. You can't force her to do ... such things, in order to save her father."

The man interlocked his fingers and squeezed them till the knuckles cracked.

"You mean that we can't force her to engage in espionage?" he asked in a colorless voice. "You're very . . . sensitive, Comrade Surov. So sensitive that you're afraid to call things by their correct names. You don't like the word espionage. I suppose you're thinking you've had to come and talk with spies who have got your Katya to help them in their dirty work. That's so, isn't it? To shorten this interview and conversation we can tell you this much: we aren't in the least interested in Katya Antina as an individual. But she has got to work as our agent, our spy if you like. You can think what you wish of this kind of work; we're not interested in your opinion. But we can tell you there's no better way of serving the party and the Soviet regime than the way we've opened to Katya Antina. We know all about your relations with her, and we put up with them . . . so long as they don't run counter to our plans. But if they do, we shall stop them; be sure of that. We're not trying to frighten you; but remember that if you try to interfere your relations with her will come to an end. We can put an end to them quite easily. Now sign this and good-by."

He held out a sheet of paper. Mark glanced at it and saw that it contained a promise not to reveal the conversation to anyone. Without saying a word he got up and went to the door. No one attempted to stop him. He went out blazing mad and walked straight to the headquarters of the Soviet secret police. He was shown into the office of Tomin, an elderly man who at one time had worked in close contact with Kornei Surov. Tomin was lying on a sofa, toweling his face, which was covered with great beads of sweat. He suffered from attacks of malaria, and each attack left him worn out and unable to work. Mark realized that it was hopeless to try to talk to him in that state, and he went away. Afterward he decided that in any case Tomin wouldn't help him. He told no one, not even Katya, of his visit to the espionage agents.

"You know, Mark," she said as they lay together on the bed, "Yoshima's really an army officer; he's not a regular diplomat at all. For some reason I've grown terribly afraid of him. Even the consul

fears him. He spends two hours every day studying Russian, though it's very difficult for Japanese to talk Russian really well. What does he want to know it for?"

"Probably for espionage, like . . ." he stopped short.

"You were going to say, 'like I need Japanese,' " she said sorrowfully. "I know what I'm doing is espionage, but what else can I do? But you'll leave me. Mark; who wants to be friends with a spy?"

He turned to her impulsively, gave her a strong hug, and whispered:

"My little hummingbird, you're a stupid little twitterer. How could you imagine that I was comparing you with that yellow face? I was thinking of someone quite different, someone who's learning Japanese with the same persistency with which he's learning Russian. But no one would ever think my little hummingbird was born to do such filthy work. The little bird has been caught in a net, but we'll find a hole in the net and you'll fly out to freedom. You see if we don't!"

She laughed happily and clung to him with all her body.

The sky turned completely black, the icy stars had faded, dawn was coming. Mark got up, bristling with the cold. He wrapped Katya closely in the warm blankets and swiftly dressed. He brought in an armful of wood from the hall and lit the stove. She watched him with eyes still sleepy. He was so clumsy in all he did that she laughed.

"Mark, come here!" she called.

He went and bent over her. She put her arms out and clutched him round the neck. But he kissed her bare arms and put them back under the blankets.

"It's so cold, you might lose your little wings," he said. She was conscious that his voice had lost its warmth, and she waited silently for what might come next. "You know, we've got to part, Katya. Only for a short time," he added, as he saw her face grow tense. "I'm being sent away, but I'll soon be back. Until I go I shall be very, very busy, and I'm afraid we shan't be able to see each other quite so often."

"But I must see you, Mark. Without you I'm . . . uhhappy."

"But I shall have to work day and night."

"Then I'll come to you."

"My room's so cold that not even a crow would survive. I live in a house with central heating, and it never works."

"I shall come to you all the same," she said quietly.

He turned round awkwardly, sending some small articles flying off

the bedside table. A mirror fell and broke; pins and little bottles were scattered over the floor. He went down on his knees to pick them up.

"The mirror's broken," she said mournfully. "That's a very bad sign."

"It's a sign of my clumsiness, that's all," he answered. He picked up a large brooch, which she was in the habit of wearing at her collar. It was a blue stone carved in the shape of a small humming-bird with outstretched wings and parted beak, as if it were emitting a joyous cry. He looked at it closely.

"That's why I called you my hummingbird," he said. "When I first saw you wearing this brooch, the little bird seemed in its joy and color to be symbolical of you."

She leaned across to him, looked into his eyes, and said, "You know, Mark, my mother used to say hummingbirds are lucky."

"You've brought me luck," he said in a husky voice and put his head on her shoulder. "The luck and happiness I was dreaming of and seeking. You don't know what great happiness you've brought me, hummingbird."

"And I'm happy, too, Mark, very, very happy. May it always be so!" "Always."

A dull dawn was breaking when he left the house. A Chinese in a white fur coat and white cap was going by, and gave him a close scrutiny as he passed.

He was fully occupied in the task of organizing the transport to the site of the future city. On his office door hung a card: "Comrade Surov cannot see anyone. On matters connected with his department apply to his assistant." Vinogradov had given him the difficult task of finding clothing for the men who were to travel to the site. The shops in the town had no winter clothing in stock. And there were no warm boots. He organized general searches through the warehouses of the various government organizations and finally obtained possession of anything that could be put to use. The Fur Trust put up a lengthy resistance to his attacks, but it had to give way. After he had had several talks with Vavilov, followed by requests, demands, threats to the Trust, the furs in its warehouse were handed over and turned into sacks, in which human beings could shelter from the cold. In the warehouse of the Fur Export Department he found a hundred

women's coats made of blue squirrel. At the sight of them he exclaimed in delight:

"What wonderful coats! The height of luxury."

The director showing him round rubbed his hands with satisfaction and replied:

"They're the finest quality. And highly prized abroad. We're dispatching them to a foreign market shortly."

That was not Mark's idea when he went into raptures over them; but the man flung out his hands tragically when he heard that his guest intended to take them for some group of Young Communists going to build a town, people who wouldn't have the least appreciation of their quality. But although a long-distance telephone call had to be put through to Moscow before the official would let the furs out of his grip, in the end Mark had his way.

His next visit was to the office of the G.P.U., the Soviet secret police. Mark had known Yuzhny, the assistant head of the local G.P.U., since his arrival in Khabarovsk, and always felt mingled astonishment and dislike at the sight of him. Yuzhny was in charge of the frontier guards and was deputy to Dorinas, the G.P.U. chief. Though his was not an insignificant position, Yuzhny seemed quite a petty, loud, and generally unpleasant individual. He was young, not more than five years older than Mark. It was said he had got his job through his wife, who was related to a very high official in the Kremlin. Everybody in the regional area was afraid of him, and he enjoyed his power. His effeminately round face was always gloomily clouded; he was constantly irritable and ready to raise his voice.

"You've got a lot of short fur jackets and felt boots in the frontier guards' warehouse," Mark said. "Let us have them for the construction workers. The Young Communists must be properly clothed before we can send them to the site."

Yuzhny fidgeted in his armchair and snorted discontentedly.

"You say we've got a lot of fur coats and felt boots?" he asked. "How do you know? Do you supervise what we've got in our warehouses?"

"Rather the reverse," Mark said, trying to repress his irritation; "it's your job to supervise me. Vavilov rang up your supplies depot and they told him they'd got the things, so now I've come to you."

"Have you been assigned to Vinogradov as his nurse?"

"I'm carrying out Party instructions, and Vinogradov doesn't need a nurse. I'm talking of jackets and felt boots now."

"You won't get either the one or the other." Yuzhny rose to his feet. "You'll get nothing!" he began to shout in his unpleasant falsetto voice. "D'you think we're here in order to clothe and feed Vinogradov's builders? Well, you're wrong! I shall forbid my men to tell you what there is in the depot. Perhaps you'd like a few of our frontier guards too. I happen to know you've visited the army depots today, and in our language attempting to find out the details of military stores is called espionage. D'you get that?"

Mark was completely carried away by his fury. He stared hatefully into Yuzhny's eyes and said tensely:

"That's a poor sort of joke! The Party's as well acquainted with Surov as it is with Yuzhny. I have been to the military supplies depots, and when I leave you, I'm going straight to the army command. I'm sure Blucher will react to my request very differently from you. Anyone would think you don't care a damn whether people die on the journey or not!"

"If they do," Yuzhny almost shouted, "you and Vinogradov will soon find out how much I care!"

The rather foppish adjutant nodded to Mark to follow him, and showed him into the army commander's office. A man of medium height, with broad shoulders and an open, pleasant face and large gray eyes, rose to meet him. The commander-in-chief of the Eastern Army held out his hand, then pointed to a chair. His eyes narrowed into a cheerful smile, and Mark himself involuntarily smiled. The celebrated Blucher's entire attitude was expressive of his good will.

"I wouldn't dare to bother you, Vasily Konstantinovich," Mark began, "if it wasn't urgently necessary."

"I know, I know, Comrade Surov," Blucher interrupted, seating himself opposite Mark. "Vavilov's told me everything, and asked me to do what I can. It's not an easy task, my boy. Not even for the commander of the special Far Eastern Army. However, easy tasks never come our way; even a pair of felt boots and a single fur coat get magnified into a problem of all-Union significance! But I'll do all I can." He pressed a bell on his desk. The adjutant appeared at the door.

"Let me have the telegram I sent Comrade Voroshilov an hour ago," Blucher ordered.

"I'll tell you the plan I've thought of," he turned back to Mark. "We'll call the first transport to the construction site a militarized advance. They like that sort of talk in Moscow. And that will entitle us to clothe all who take part in military clothing. I'm sure Voroshilov will agree; we should have his answer today. In the telegram we've specified three hundred and fifty men."

"But Moscow's insisting that the first transport is to consist of a thousand men." Mark said.

"I know; but if we ask for a thousand sets of winter clothing they won't let us have any. Believe me, three hundred and fifty is the maximum. We'd like to let you have more, but in our present state God himself couldn't do better."

Three hundred and fifty sets of army winter clothing were far more than Mark had dared to hope for, and he expressed his gratitude. When he left Blucher, he walked along the street with his chin buried in his collar. The frosty air was pure and translucent, the smoke from the chimneys columned straight into the sky, the snow crunched pleasantly underfoot. The thought of those three hundred and fifty sets of clothing made him feel happy. Suddenly, just in front of him he noticed a woman wrapped in a long fur coat and an absurd fur cap like an airman's helmet. "Why, it's Katya!" He smiled joyfully as he recognized the helmet.

She cried out in alarm when someone's hands embraced her from behind and lifted her off the ground. "My darling," he whispered to her.

She stood gazing at him without saying a word. Her breath came in a light cloud and settled on her collar, her thick woolen scarf, and her face, covering her flushed cheeks with a fine rime. But Mark noticed not only the flush on her face, but a look of consternation.

"What's the matter, Katya?" he asked. "Has anything happened?" She stroked his sleeve caressingly and quietly answered:

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you this. I wanted to keep it from you, but perhaps my meeting you was providential.... Those men have ordered me to photograph all the documents I can. They're teaching me how to do it. They're demanding that I should steal the green file that Yoshima always locks in the safe. They've given me keys to fit it. My dearest, I don't want to do it. It's horrible. And I'm frightened. But they insist.... You won't feel contempt for me,

will you? You know I can't avoid doing it. Otherwise they'll put Papa in prison again."

Her tone was so imploring that his face twisted with pain. She was right; the men who were ordering her to do all this were inexorable. And she was in their hands.

"Katya, my dear," he said, putting one arm round her waist. "Of course I know you can't avoid doing it. I don't feel any contempt for you, but I love you so much it hurts; I want to help you to get out of their clutches, but I don't see how it's to be done. But we'll find a way, my darling. For the time being, promise me you'll be careful. I'll be back soon, and then we'll get away together. Meanwhile, don't do anything risky; you must promise me that. Don't be afraid; they don't want to lose you altogether. You understand, Katya?"

"I understand," she said. "I know you've got to go away. But come back quickly, Mark. I shall be waiting for you."

In the early morning the riverbank resounded with hubbub. The deep, powerful roar of automobile engines was suddenly joined by the ringing, far-carrying hum of propellers. The heavily loaded aerosledges and trucks began to crawl over the ice, stretching in a long black ribbon that emerged distinctly against the frozen surface of the mighty river. The men fussing round the trucks and sledges were dressed in an amazing variety of attire: some in warm parkas, others in long fur overcoats of army pattern, yet others in elegant manteaus of blue squirrel. But they all had one quality in common—their youth.

The first transport was ready to depart. With it were to travel seven hundred builders of the new city.

Among those hundreds of youthful faces the dark, spade-shaped beard of the engineer Smirnov stood out. Vinogradov had appointed him to the command of the column. A stumpy, gurgling pipe in his mouth Smirnov went from truck to truck, from aerosledge to aerosledge, checking up on the loading. His small eyes, lurking below bushy brows, noticed everything. He did not like the rather feverish excitement of the Young Communists who were going on this trip. The frost seemed to be asleep, but he knew that toward nightfall it would clutch the earth again in its murderous grip. The men would need to conserve every ounce of strength in order to fight the frost and the dangers of that untracked route, but these lads were dancing. They did not realize that the North has to be conquered silently, per-

sistently, that the North has no liking for noise. "I'll have to speak to Surov and get him to explain to them." He raised his eyes to the sloping bank of the river, and a smile flickered behind his black beard. Surov was still standing at the top of the lofty bank; beside him was a girl in white, holding him by the sleeve.

Katya was struggling hard to keep back her tears, but they welled onto her frozen eyelashes.

"Mark, dearest, come back quickly!" she entreated, with her arms around him.

He was silent and looked at her longingly. Then he turned his eyes away.

"I love you, Katya. Wait for me. I'll be back soon."

"Oh, Mark, I shall be so afraid without you. . . . I'm all alone."

"I shall be afraid for you, too. But you won't be alone for long. I'll be back soon. . . . You know I've got to go away."

A tiny aerosledge driven by a miniature propeller slid onto the ice. Vinogradov was standing up in it. It sped bravely along the column and went ahead.

Mark gave Katya a long kiss.

"God keep you!" she whispered, and made the sign of the Cross over him.

He ran down the slope and climbed into the cabin of a heavy caterpillar truck loaded with a portable workshop. The roar and thunder increased, the column moved slowly away. Katya stood perfectly still at the top of the bank, her eyes fixed on the river.

Slowly the line of vehicles crawled over the ice of the Amur. Vinogradov's tiny aerosledge turned back, and a large aerosledge, with Smirnov in it, took the lead. The rear was brought up by the heavy truck in which Mark was traveling. Slowly the day passed, and the heavy black caterpillar continued crawling with a clatter and thunder over the ice. Night came on, but the thunder did not die away, the column did not halt.

On either side were the wild, deserted banks of the river; only at rare intervals were human settlements scattered along the shores. Here was the realm of primeval chaos, an untracked land that guarded its virginity with intense frosts, untraversable swamps, the impenetrable taiga.

Mark sat beside the driver, mentally projecting their route to the spot that Vinogradov's exuberant imagination had destined to develop into a city. In the lower reaches of the river, not far from the Gulf of Tartary, which separates Sakhalin from the mainland, was the little village of Permskoe. It was not to be found on any map. But that village was to be transformed into a city. Vinogradov's plan had found a place within Stalin's clear and precise calculations for shifting the strategically important bases from the west to the east. Komsomolsk was to be the farthest eastern outpost of the Soviet war industry. The plans for the future city included a gigantic airplane factory that would be invulnerable from land, sea, or air. All the vast machinery of the state and Party had been set in motion, and now the first caravan carrying the builders of the new city was creeping toward its destination.

The ice was covered with a smooth light layer of snow, and the aerosledges made tracks through it with their runners for the trucks to follow. But for this aid, the wheeled vehicles would hardly have been able to move. Twice every day and once every night the caravan drew over to the bank, enormous fires were lit, canned foods were warmed up, and soup was cooked. But they set out again as soon as the meal was over.

"We must keep moving," Smirnov declared. "If you stop during such a journey, it doesn't mean that you rest. Let each man get what rest he can while traveling."

By the end of the second day the mechanics and drivers had the looks of martyrs. There were two to each truck and aerosledge, but not one of them had much more than a moment's rest. From time to time a green signal rocket sailed high into the air from the end of the column, signaling that one of the trucks had broken down, and the mechanics traveling with it were calling for assistance. Then, cursing violently, all the reserve drivers and mechanics hurried to the rear. They flung themselves on the breakdown desperately, as though hoping to frighten the capricious engine into life. When at last they got it going, they went back to their posts, their hands bloody with scratches and showing the white patches of frostbite. The very touch of the icy metal burned the skin, but they worked silently, with a touch of exasperation.

Silent and gloomy was that first transport to Komsomolsk. The seven hundred youngsters huddled deep into the bodies of the trucks and sledges, sat pressed close to one another, and stared gloomily at the banks flowing slowly past them. Mark kept an anxious eye on their morale, noting that a dull despair was settling in their eyes. Anxiously he wondered whether they would be able to bear it to the end. These youngsters had been gathered from all parts of the Soviet Union; they included Ukrainians, and Volgaland peasants, Muscovites, and Ural dwellers, men from the White Sea and the Black. There were Uzbeks from the unchanging warmth of Turkestan, Kalmuks from the steppes, even Ossetines from the Caucasian mountains. For every one of them the Far East was a new and terrifying experience. Would they hold out?

The endless wilderness through which they journeyed was most intimidating at night. The darkness concealed the banks. The truck and aerosledge headlights shot yellowish golden beams into the gloom, but they could not pierce through the dense black emptiness that slowly advanced on the caravan. In that struggle between the lights and the darkness there was a hint of desperation and hopelessness to which even Mark reacted unpleasantly. His feeling of anxiety continually increased, and he became conscious of the growing alarm that was expressed in the very breathing of these seven hundred youngsters. During the day fear was seen lurking in their eyes, in the abashed humility with which they carried out orders; at night it hung over them all in a cloud, invisible, yet always perceptible, crushing, oppressive.

At night Mark's truck was usually driven by a man named Tamanov. He was taciturn and cross as a bear that has abandoned its lair too soon. He would utter a string of incoherent curses, then for a long time be silent. His silence was due not only to a natural taciturnity, but also to the fact that his tongue was swollen, and it was difficult for him to speak. Day and night he was called upon to wrestle with breakdowns. Mark observed the desperate resolution with which he bent over the engine to put the end of the gasoline line into his mouth and blow through it. Little pieces of skin from his lips were left on the tube.

One night, as he was sitting beside Tamanov, Mark felt the driver's body go tense. A black bundle dropped from the truck in front, broke across the beam of their headlights and vanished in the darkness. Without stopping to think, Mark jumped down to the ice and rushed after the man. As soon as he passed outside the range of the headlights, he was enveloped in a dense, impenetrable blackness, pierced only by a fading howl. He ran in the direction of the howl.

Suddenly the darkness turned lurid; a crimson rocket shot into the sky. By its light he descried a man running a little way ahead. He put on a spurt, and by the last dying gleam of light he caught up with the lad, hurled himself at him, and sent him to the icy surface. The howl rose to a scream, the boy tore himself out of his captor's hands. Mark lost his left-hand glove, and the other found his hand and set his teeth into the flesh. Now the scream stopped, and he heard someone running toward them, panting violently.

"This way!" he called. Someone ran up, fell over them, groped down, and dragged the boy from under him. By the incoherent cursing he guessed that it was Tamanov who had come to his aid. They went back to the lights, Tamanov on one side, Mark on the other, supporting the howling lad. Suddenly Tamanov said in an unexpectedly gentle tone, "It's all right, my boy; it'll pass. Don't be frightened; it's only all that bad at first." The howling died down into sobbing. That bitter, childish sob shook Mark to his very heart. Tamanov went on talking. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Sergei," the lad answered between his sobs.

A frightened crowd was assembled round the truck in which Sergei had been riding. As they came within the beam of light, Mark and the others were greeted with a strained silence. Mark went up to the crowd.

"It's all right now, comrades. His nerves gave way, and he ran for the bank." Mark could hardly get the words out through his frozen lips. The frosty air scorched his throat, his bitten hand was throbbing. "Comrades," he added, "the main thing is to hold on. If we don't, we're finished."

"What are we being taken there for?" a strained, youthful voice called. "What the hell can we do on the bare bank? We came to the Far East to build a city, not to freeze to death on this accursed river."

"You're being taken to the site because Comrade Stalin has ordered it. And you are going to build a city," Mark answered. "It's hard, it's cold, we can't get any rest, we're overwhelmed by everything all around us... we all know that, comrades. But you know as well as I do that you can't even kill a flea without some trouble, far less build a city. We'll have a talk about it tomorrow. But now back to our places. But one more thing, comrades: on such a journey we've all got to help one another."

They silently went back to their trucks. Mark sent up a signal rocket, and the caravan slowly went on.

At every halt Surov and Smirnov spent a great deal of time discussing how to raise the spirits of these youngsters. They both felt that something had to be done, for it was growing more and more difficult to persuade the lads to leave their trucks and walk. Yet if they did not walk from time to time, they would inevitably get frostbite; two aerosledges were already loaded with sick men. Smirnov went from campfire to campfire, telling the men of the danger that continually threatened. Especially the occasional patches of thin ice. Even at times of the deepest frosts there were places where the Amur was frozen over only with a thin sheet of ice. The natives had an instinct for detecting such spots, but even they sometimes fell victim to the treacherous places. They looked no different from the rest of the ice, as all the surface was covered with a thin layer of snow. But if any heavy truck passed over such a spot the ice would break, and the vehicle would be hurled into the dark, swirling waters.

"So you see, comrades, it's better to spend less time on the trucks and more on your feet. Such patches are not dangerous for the walker," Smirnov said.

But when he gave the signal to set off again, all the seven hundred men spontaneously hurried to the trucks and huddled inside them. Smirnov wriggled his beard discontentedly as he ran his eyes along that line of twenty-eight trucks and twelve aerosledges.

With Smirnov in the leading sledge was an old native of the Amur district, who had often made his way along the frozen river right to its mouth. Smirnov accepted his orders implicitly, calling him the pilot. At night a powerful searchlight at the front of the sledge lit up the ice ahead. The old man sat with his eyes fixed on the icy field. From time to time he raised his hand, pointing to right or left. The driver obediently steered the sledge in the direction indicated, and all the caravan followed after it.

Day after day that line of vehicles crept along over the ice. But one gray, windless day, when the black taiga, the whitish, colorless sky, the gloomy banks all seemed to be accentuating the endlessness of that oppressive emptiness, a shout rose from the middle of the line. Men dropped from the trucks like a lot of peas and scattered in all directions. Mark leaped down to the ice and hurried toward the shouting. He found several trucks crawling slowly backward. Then he saw what

was frightening them—a terrible black gap, stretching for twenty yards in the ice. In that gap, the heavy, almost oily water was slowly eddying.

Mark ran up to the black hole just as Smirnov's aerosledge arrived from the head of the column, Eyewitnesses told them what had happened. A six-wheel truck that had traveled continually in the middle of the line had crashed through the ice, and one small truck had followed into the swirling waters. There were two drivers in the heavy truck, and two drivers and four passengers in the other. Two men had managed to jump out and cling to the firm edge of the ice. All the others had perished. The doctor was already attending to the two men, who had been hauled out. Their bodies were frozen into solid blocks, and within those blocks life glimmered very faintly. The doctor ordered all their clothes to be cut away from them with knives, and they lay naked, unconscious, on the snow, while others rubbed them furiously. The old native stood mournfully shaking his head. Then he spat and remarked: "You can't play about with the Amur. It's a serious river, and it doesn't like people driving along it like a lot of fools,"

The two men were carried to Smirnov's aerosledge, and the doctor rubbed them with ointment. Smirnov ordered a mug of neat spirit to be poured down their throats. The other members of the expedition stood for a moment with bare heads over the chilly grave of the first six victims. Then the rest of the column made its way round the gap and joined the others.

The next day Mark assembled the Young Communists, and walked along their ranks.

"Comrades! Until now I did not feel that I had any right to inform you of a secret order I have been given. But I tell you now that the commander-in-chief of the Special Far Eastern Army has proclaimed our expedition a military advance. I shall read his order to you." He unfolded a sheet of paper. "I command the Young Communists sent to the construction site of the city of Komsomolsk to submit to military discipline and to regard themselves as a component part of the Special Far Eastern Army. . . . I call on the Young Communists to perform their duty valorously and self-sacrificially. . . . I appoint Mark Surov commander of the first group of Young Communist builders of the city. He is hereby granted the right to designate his assistants. Signed: Commander of the Special Far Eastern Army, Blucher.'"

At first the realization that they had been placed under military discipline oppressed the youngsters, but then it gave them strength. Now Surov was inflexible; he made them march on foot for four hours, then allowed two hours' riding in the trucks. His assistants were as inexorable. He himself marched continually with the column and took special care to ensure that the changes from foot to truck were made strictly on time. He divided the seven hundred into three shifts, each of roughly 230 men, and while one shift rested, two shifts marched. But when the men fell in to march after their rest, he would observe their blue faces, their trembling bodies, and summon the assistants he had put in charge of the shift.

"It is your military task to attack the left bank of the river. Drive out the enemy from the edge of the forest, clear the left bank as far as that distant bend, and return to the main force in thirty-five minutes."

The assistants would look at their watches and be plunged into despair. All that in thirty-five minutes! But they could not stop to discuss it; they, too, were quite sure they had been mobilized by order of the army commander. Each assistant would bark at his frozen army, draw them up in attacking formation, and lead them into the charge against the bank, shouting, "Hurrah." Perhaps not in thirty-five minutes, but soon after he would bring his men back to the main column. Mark would look at his watch and assume a dissatisfied look.

"You're behind time, comrade commander." But in his heart there was a song of joy. The men returned tired but cheerful, full of life. And in this way he brought them along behind the caravan.

Far along the empty bank of the river Amur columns of smoke were rising. Twelve columns. At the base of each column was a tiny hut. Twelve huts. They were half sunk into the ground, and their tiny windows gazed fearfully across the snowdrifts. The windows were not glazed but were covered with reindeer bladders. The twelve huts constituted the village of Permskoe, which was to be transformed into a city.

They had been on the journey eleven days and had now reached the goal that had once seemed unattainable. Mark was at the head of the column, marching with the men along the ice. Smirnov called him back to his truck.

"Now we're faced with the most difficult job of all," he told Mark.

"I'll ask you to maintain the military discipline for a few days longer; we may need it now even more than before."

"But Blucher may throw me into prison for inventing this story of his order and all the rest of it," Mark objected. Then he recalled Blucher's open, friendly face and added, "But I don't suppose he will."

The doctor had already arranged for the sick men to be looked after in huts; but where was the shelter for all the others? "We must start digging in at once," Smirnov said. "Mark Timofeevich, order your men to start digging dugouts." After a moment's thought he added, "That's no good. The earth's frozen, and it's quite impossible to dig. They must hollow out holes somehow, to shelter from the cold, and extend and deepen them afterward."

Mark ordered the Young Communists to fall in. "Comrades!" he shouted. "One of the tasks which Army Commander Blucher has set us is as follows." He took a sheet of blank paper out of his pocket and pretended to read. "To be able to fend for yourselves in the conditions of the taiga in winter. A soldier must defend himself against the cold." He put the paper away. "Company and squad commanders, get your men to work at once to dig holes in which they can shelter. Engineer Smirnov will give full details of the size. A special report will be made to Army Commander Blucher on the company first to be sheltered adequately below the surface, and on its commander."

The work went ahead rapidly. The men gnawed their way into the earth with crowbars and spades. The frozen soil resisted; it rang like iron. They lit campfires to melt it out. Inch by inch they deepened the shallow depressions. Tamanov was the first commander to report. He straddled his legs like a bear and breathed heavily; he had obviously worked as hard as the others; his face was sheathed in ice.

"I have to report that the sixth company has completely disappeared underground," he announced.

"You're the first," Mark said. "I shall make a special report about you to Comrade Blucher. Altogether you have done a great deal to secure the success of the expedition."

Tamanov's face dissolved into a broad grin. "I serve the toiling people!" he said, drawing himself up to attention.

Soon all the other companies were sheltered underground. The pits were covered with several layers of branches over which earth was piled, and only a small hole was left for the men to crawl in and out. Meanwhile Tamanov's company had set to work to dig a more spa-

cious pit, which was assigned to Smirnov and Surov, and at once nicknamed The Staff.

Some hundred and fifty pits were dug, each accommodating four or five men. A fire was lit at the bottom of each pit, but it gave off not only warmth, but smoke. The melting walls oozed with moisture. The warmth, the damp, and the smoke were inseparable, and it took great resolution to remain for any length of time in these graves that were the only possible means of keeping alive. Again and again the men dashed out into the open air, cursing everything on earth and wiping soot, dirt, and tears from their faces.

The riverbank around the settlement of Permskoe was transformed. In that little sector of the river hundreds of men began a stern struggle for life. Not for the future city, not to carry out the orders of faraway Moscow, but for their own lives. Smirnov and Mark saw that their chief task would be to organize some sort of resistance to the winter. Mark watched the lads anxiously. Their dirty, unwashed faces told him they were on the very verge of weary despair. They huddled in little groups close to their holes. When he went up to them, they crowded round him silently and morosely.

"Comrades, we've got to hold out!" he said quietly. "That's all I can say to you. We've got to hold out."

"What have we been brought here for?" some of them muttered. "We've been sent to our deaths."

"I know all that, comrades. I'm not trying to pull the wool over your eyes. We've got a very difficult winter ahead of us. But we've got to hold out; that's the only hope. Comrade Stalin has called for you lads to be sent here. . . . It's his order, and we've carried it out. . . . Now we've got to fight for our lives . . . and help one another."

A tall young Uzbek, wrapped in an indescribable variety of rags and constantly dancing with the cold, suddenly stopped and thrust his face into Mark's. In his characteristic guttural tones, his voice rising to a shout, he demanded:

"Why tell us that? We know it without being told! I'm the secretary of the Tashkent Young Communists. Stalin gave the order because he doesn't know what it's like here. It's not Stalin's fault, but those who're organizing the construction work. They're wreckers and counterrevolutionaries. When we were in Khabarovsk, we heard that the head of the construction work is an enemy of the people. And it's he

who's driven us here to our deaths! But we'll fight; we'll hold out! We'll build the damned city! Won't we, comrades?"

The others stared glumly at the ground and made no response.

In Smirnov's dugout Surov found the cooks, the storekeeper, and two of the local inhabitants. The dampness, the smoke of the fire, and the smell of rank tobacco made him squat down and cough. Smirnov was saying:

"We must take care of every crumb. . . . I will ask the local people to start fishing for fish under the ice without delay. We'll send some of our men to help."

"The meat position is very bad," the storekeeper said.

"We must reserve the meat for the sick," Smirnov replied. "They need it to keep up their strength."

"I've been thinking about that," Mark said, drawing closer to the fire. "There's plenty of game around, and we've got to find it. But none of our youngsters are experienced hunters. Only two of the men in the village have agreed to go hunting, and they won't be able to get hold of much meat. Our only hope is to find the Nanaitz natives. The local people say one of their villages must be quite close; they settled down for the winter late last fall. Tomorrow morning I'll take a guide and go and look for them in the taiga."

"Looking for them in the taiga is like looking for a needle in a haystack," Smirnov answered gloomily. "But you're right; we've got to try."

The moment Mark followed his guide into the taiga he was engulfed in a whitish mist. The oncoming dawn was left behind on the riverbank; in the forest night reigned, and such a night as seemed endless. The trees stood motionless, not visible so much as guessed at, and in that closely enveloping darkness Mark felt as if he had found his way into some enchanted kingdom and would never find the way out again. He could not see his guide, though he was only just in front of him. He could hear an incoherent muttering and the measured swish of skis over the snow. Gradually he began to distinguish the tracks made by the skis; then the man loomed up before him. Somehow or other dawn broke through even into this kingdom of darkness, and now the trees grew visible. His guide was a little man in bulky furs. "Daddy Sidor" was a Russian whose family had lived for generations beside the Amur; he had never been anywhere else. He had even

forgotten the tally of his years, and when anyone asked him how old he was, he threw out his hands in perplexity. "Who knows? No one's counted them. When my old woman was alive, she counted the years, but I don't have any need to. She died when I was fifty-five. That was when the first steamer sailed along the Amur; she took fright and yielded her soul to God."

The first steamer had sailed along the Amur forty-five years before, so the old man must be at least a hundred. He was completely withered and yellow; old Sidor was hunched, he creaked, but he could make his way through the taiga on skis, was a first-class hunter, and didn't know what illness was.

The old man trotted along nimbly in front, an enormous, ancient firearm across his back. The gun was so big and Sidor so small that the butt dragged in the snow from time to time. Mark found it difficult to keep up with him. In Moscow he had become quite a good skier, but now his Winchester rifle weighed his shoulder down, and it had an extraordinary capacity for hooking into trees or bushes. Gradually he grew accustomed to the skis, and by the time light had fully dawned he was striding along as if he had been using them in the taiga all his life.

The short winter day swiftly died. Sidor moved more and more slowly; evidently he, too, was growing tired. Mark had no idea how the old hunter found his way through this sea of forest, and for that matter the old fellow would have been rather surprised if Mark had asked him why he took any particular direction. He was guided by the instinct of an old taiga hunter, and he submitted unconsciously and wholly to that instinct.

"No more!" he said at last, coming to a halt. "Time for a rest."

He set to work at once to build a campfire. A tiny bluish flicker turned into a flame, throwing a string of sparks upward and gathering strength. All round them the forest danced in fantastic shadows. Soon a little pot containing pieces of meat was boiling on the fire. Meanwhile Sidor was building a triangular shelter of pine branches, with the apex and one side against a tree. The open side faced the fire. Within this shelter he arranged a pile of branches to form a couch.

Mark made a hasty supper, and without waiting for the old man to make some tea in the same pot, flung himself down on the couch and dropped off to sleep. He was not disturbed when Sidor lay down beside him. At dawn he was aroused by human voices. The fire was burning as brightly as it had the night before. Sidor was standing beside it; with him were two living bundles of fur.

"Pah!" he heard Sidor grunt. "How did you come up without my hearing you?"

One of the bundles of furs moved a little, and Mark heard a thin laugh and an unfamiliar voice, speaking Russian with a strong accent.

"I and my son Uren stopped for the night. Uren said, 'There's smoke.' The smoke was far off, a day's journey. We took a little rest, then made for the smoke. We went on all night till we found you. You were both asleep. We made up the fire and had a little sleep, too."

Mark jumped up, and the two natives made room for him at the fire. Sidor threw another large piece of branch onto the embers, and it burst at once into flame. Mark took a good look at the two new arrivals. One of them was getting on in years; his face was deeply furrowed; his broad, flat nose appeared above a thin, straggling beard; he had small, kindly eyes, rather slanting. He was slowly chewing, and the yellow foam on his lips gave off the smell of chewing tobacco. The other was quite young, with a brown, round face and skin so smooth and shining that it seemed to be drawn very tight, like a drum skin. He had slanting eyes, like his father's, but his beard was only just beginning to sprout. Each wore a fur cap with long earlaps, and each carried a heavy, clumsy firearm.

"We go looking for the Nanaitzes, and they find us!" Sidor remarked to Mark.

"Yes, yes," the older man nodded joyfully. "We're Nanaitzes. We heard, lots of people on the Amur. To build a town. Uren and I go to see. I'm Tanilo. And this is my son. We have a nomad soviet, and I'm its chairman."

Mark was delighted at the news. He knew that the native soviets represented only a change of name, that they retained their tribal system of government by a headman, and now they called the headman the chairman. But at the moment he didn't particularly care what the old fellow called himself. He swiftly explained the situation at Permskoe.

"Food is the main problem," he said, "and we've got very little. So we would like the Nanaitzes to help us get through the winter. We need meat, as much meat as we can get...."

Tanilo sat for a long time chewing, not saying a word.

"But tell me," he said at last, "why did you bring these people here? To build a town? It's winter now; it's hard to make even dugouts. Why didn't you wait till it was warm?"

"It was ordered, Tanilo. Stalin in Moscow himself gave the order." "Stalin doesn't know the taiga. He hasn't spent the winter in it. He's never shot a squirrel. How can he give such an order? He should ask those who know. How many people have you brought to Permskoe?"

"Seven hundred."

"Bad. It will be difficult. Can't you take them back?"

"No. It's Stalin's orders."

"I shall write a letter to Stalin," Tanilo said, after thinking for a moment. "I shall write that he cannot do this. Tanilo knows the taiga. The Nanaitzes will help, you can be sure. We don't like hunting the master. That's what we call the bear. But if it's necessary, we shall turn the master out of his lair. We have reindeer; but they are only to be eaten if things are very bad. Not many reindeer."

Tanilo's words filled Mark with anxiety; only now, as the old native spoke, was he really beginning to understand what difficulties were involved in keeping those seven hundred men alive for the next few months. And the conviction was borne in on him that it was his duty to remain with them; he had no right to abandon them as long as he could do anything to help. Momentarily he thought of Katya, but he had to drive out the thought. No matter what happened, there could be no going back to Khabarovsk for him. He arranged with Sidor that the old Russian would return to Permskoe, and sat down and wrote a hurried note to Smirnov.

"I have decided that I can't go back and leave you here. If the people at Khabarovsk do decide to send a further batch of workers what could I do to stop them? Here I can be of some use at least. I know I shall be violating Vavilov's instructions, and they may even expel me from the Party for violation of discipline. But I can't go back!" He shut his eyes to drive away the picture of Katya, then went on: "I shall remain with these natives, and find ways of making contact with other camps of theirs. I shall send you all the food the taiga can provide. Write and tell Khabarovsk that just because I am a Communist I had to do this. Otherwise I'd be a deserter."

Sidor made his way back to Permskoe. Mark and the two Nanaitzes took the opposite direction. Tanilo and his son could travel at an

astonishing speed on their skis, and they had to halt again and again to allow Mark to catch up with them.

A week passed; the frost perceptibly lightened. The smoke from the pits crawled along the ground, and the snow lost its virgin purity, turning a dirty yellow. The bank seemed deserted, and a visitor would have found it hard to believe that hundreds of men were lurking on it. They had grown used to their lairs and did not leave them except when it was absolutely necessary. At mealtimes strings of men carrying buckets went off to the little house in which Smirnov had had the kitchen fitted up. But as soon as they had had their food, the bank grew empty again.

Smirnov's black beard was not especially conspicuous now; there were many black, as well as red and fair, beards among the inhabitants of the underground encampment. He had a tough job administering this band of inexperienced youngsters. They went about filthy, covered with soot and dirt. He ordered that at a given signal they were all to come out and wash themselves with snow. But each pit sent out only one man, who stood for a moment beside the entrance hole, bent down two or three times and pretended to gather up snow, then dived back into the pit.

The cooks were his most frequent visitors. He kept a strict check on the food situation and decided to lower the fat ration. Fortunately, they still had a plentiful supply of groats, and these were the staple diet for dinner. It was not long before everybody was referring to the thick porridge almost without fat as the "road to socialism." Outwardly Smirnov showed no sign of agitation, smoking his stocky pipe as he went his rounds from pit to pit. But as he went, his eyes anxiously scanned the surrounding taiga.

One day his eyes lit up; a dark line emerged from the trees. He counted five reindeer sledges. He gave an exultant whistle. The men poured out of the pits and rushed toward the slowly advancing train. Whistling and laughing, they flocked round the sledges and concealed them from his sight. But by their excited shouting he guessed that the sledges were loaded with something to cause rejoicing. He walked toward the train, and as he caught sight of their load, he dropped his pipe in his delight. He stooped to pick it up, and when he straightened up, his face was calm and inscrutable.

An awkward Nanaitz with a yellowish foam bubbling on his lips

stepped toward him, a younger man, with very smooth and shining skin, at his side. The old man raised his hand; the sledges halted. The reindeer drooped their heads low and breathed heavily. Smirnov went up to the old man and held out his hand. The Nanaitz removed his fur glove and shook hands, laughing a thin laugh as he said:

"I'm Tanilo. And this is my son, Uren. We have brought you five masters. Are you Smirnov?"

"Yes."

"I knew you at once. Mark said you have a beard that a bird could nest in. And a pipe sticking out of the beard. I don't smoke; I chew. It's better. I'll teach you. Where shall we take the masters?"

Shouting and joking, the lads of the camp dragged the bears off the sledges and over the snow. As the cooks came out to see what was happening the youngsters shouted, "You can stop cooking gruel. We've got something better than the 'road to socialism.'"

Tanilo and the five other natives who had come with him went with Smirnov to inspect the huts. They talked rapidly to one another in their own language and smacked their lips disapprovingly. Once or twice they lay down and looked into the pits. Then they smacked their lips disapprovingly again.

"Bad!" Tanilo said to Smirnov. "Bad to live in such holes. Much smoke, much damp."

The lad, Sergei, whom Mark had chased and caught during the journey, was standing with his head stuck out from one of the holes. Tanilo halted by his pit and suddenly put his gloved hand on Sergei's head. The lad vanished into the pit, and Tanilo dived in after him. Inside, he squatted down on his heels opposite Sergei.

"Bad hole, not right hole!" he said. "Get out; we make new one."

Sergei climbed out, and pots, spoons, and damp blankets flew out after him. Then Tanilo emerged and said something to his companions, pointing to the pit. Two of them went off to the taiga; the others began to strip the roof off. A crowd gathered to watch them pulling their handiwork to pieces. Tanilo asked for spades, and they began to enlarge the pit. The earth had thawed out, and it was quickly made twice as wide. The two who had gone off to the taiga returned, carrying bundles of poles and brushwood. Tanilo and the others drove a series of poles into the earth close to the walls, then swiftly plaited brushwood between them, until they were thoroughly lined. In an hour they made a similar covering for the floor. Then with poles and

brushwood they built a raised bunk large enough for five men to lie on. They covered the top of the pit with stout poles, heaped earth over them, and trampled it down firmly. Next they lit a campfire, not inside, but on top of the flat roof. When the fire blazed up, it quickly heated through the roof and warmed the pit.

The days lengthened into weeks, but Mark did not return to the camp. He had taken on the task of providing food for the expedition, and he traveled from one native camp to another, guided by an old native named Aiya. Together they journeyed for hundreds of miles through the taiga. Mark himself began to look like a Nanaitz; he wore a warm fur coat with seams stitched with reindeer tendons, his hair was unkempt, and he grew a beard. He went in underwear that was filthy, never changed, and in holes; he washed only when absolutely necessary; he ate meat without bread or salt; he could drink the strong-tasting blood of a slaughtered reindeer, that being the natives' only protection against scurvy. Led by an unerring instinct, old Aiya took him from camp to camp. When they arrived at a camp, they found the natives had learned they were on the way, and were waiting for them. They sat down round a caldron of meat, then lay and slept on warm furs, covered by more furs. While they slept, the natives prepared a caravan, loading bear carcasses onto sledges and bringing in reindeer that were destined to feed the strange men on the riverbank, who for some unknown reason had arrived in the depths of winter and were now starving. When Mark woke up next morning, the caravan was already gone. But he and Aiya plunged once more into the taiga, to make their way to another native camp, several days' journey farther on.

But now the blizzards began to hurtle to the earth in whirling clumps of snow. The taiga howled with infuriated voices; the sky shifted from its place and flew in a white pall just above the trees. The whirling flood tore down from above and up from below, and all the world became a raging, merciless ocean of snow. Day and night the blizzard raged over the camp where Mark and Aiya had taken shelter. Day and night they sat in a tent of reindeer skins, a smoking fire their only light. Mark listened anxiously to the furious roaring that filled the universe and began to think there would never be any end to it. He threw back the tent flap; but the storm stung his face with snowflakes, and he went back to the fire. He sat beside the

fire, while Aiya dragged out an interminable melody. Day and night the howling went on around the tent, and day and night Aiya droned away inside.

From Smirnov Mark received two notes, passed on to him by way of dozens of Nanaitz hands. They informed him that two further transports had arrived at Permskoe, one with food, the other with people. Now there were some two thousand, among them five hundred girls, living in the underground camp. And although a food transport had arrived, they had had to reduce the ration again. Smirnov was restrained in his remarks, but every word he wrote made Mark feel more anxious. He sent several photographs that somehow he had succeeded in taking and developing. They showed the familiar bank of the river and the ragged, spectral-looking men. One, however, had no sign of life; it showed the edge of the taiga, with a foreground of small mounds. The mounds were arranged in a regular row, so long that the photograph could not cover them all. Mark counted eleven, but on the back of the print Smirnov had written: "Our first construction work in Komsomolsk-the cemetery." Just below this was the number 48.

Those photographs burned their way into Mark's mind; he could not forget them. Until the blizzards set in, they drove him on and on through the taiga, from camp to camp. Now that the storm had pinned him down to one spot, he felt wretched, for he knew that as long as it continued not one caravan could set out for the riverbank. The moment the storm stopped, he tried to forestall the spring. For when spring arrived, all the roads to Permskoe would be closed. The frozen surfaces of the swamps would thaw out, and a little later the many nameless rivers would burst their icy fetters. And then not even a man traveling light could make his way through the forest. He hurried, but spring was not slow in coming. He and Aiya discarded their fur coats for short leather jackets. During the day the sun began to feel warm. The snow in the glades and on the edge of the forest grew spongy and could not bear the weight of the skis. The trees were still bare, but life was beginning to rise within them. Their branches were no longer weighed down to the ground, but stretched up to heaven. The daytime thaw obliterated animal tracks. The night frosts turned milder, still milder.

One morning Aiya gazed at the low, pale blue sky, followed the

flight of a flock of birds, set his ear to an ancient pine, then turned to Mark and said:

"Finish. End of winter. Expect spring."

Now they were able to make their way to another camp; but the caravan they dispatched returned the next day. It was not possible for it to get through to the Amur. The swamps were brimming with water; the ice on the rivers had turned translucent; the snowy crust was running off the earth in little streams.

"Perhaps a man could get through?" Mark asked.

"No, neither man nor beast can get through the taiga now." The natives shook their heads. "Wait! If you want to get back to Permskoe, you'll wait a long time. If you want to go the other way, you have to wait less. There is a way across the hills, and then the iron reindeer is quite close. You can ride along the iron sticks to the town."

So Aiya and Mark went on living in their tent. For days on end the Russian lay on a heap of reindeer- and bearskins, and for days on end Aiya sang his endless songs. Each morning they went to a nearby swamp and climbed a small mound. There was no way of traveling from the little island of firm earth on which the native camp was pitched. With every day Mark's fears increased for those on the bank at Permskoe. And at the same time his anxiety for Katya returned in all its force.

At last, one day when he and Aiya went to the mound, the old native combed his beard with his fingers, swept the horizon with narrowed eyes, and suddenly remarked in a cheerful tone:

"The tents with wheels have started to float along the Amur."

Mark was amazed; how did the old fellow know that steamers were navigating the Amur already? Hundreds of miles of marsh and taiga lay between them and the river. He looked about him, saw the buds beginning to sprout on the tree branches, the sky flooded with sunlight, and accepted Aiya's word. He smiled for the first time in many days. The steamers were navigating the Amur! So their sufferings at Permskoe were over. But his smile faded almost as soon as it appeared. One of his anxieties was dispelled, but what of the other? What of Katya? Now he must hurry. As though guessing his thoughts, Aiya said:

"In five suns we can go, Mark. Ask the shaman; let him send the

spirits to help. Ten suns will pass, and we shall be beyond the hills. Then another five suns and you will see the iron reindeer."

Aiya went to the shaman to ask aid of the spirits. Mark had no objection. If the spirits could help, let them; he would be grateful.

Five days later he and Aiya strode out of the camp into the embrace of the green taiga.

Ten times the sun rose and set. Rising the eleventh time, it found the two travelers standing on the bank of a narrow river in full flood, quietly rushing past stony banks. They sat on a little cape thrusting out into the water.

"But why not come with me, Aiya?" Mark said. "You'll be my guest, and then you can float back to Permskoe on a tent with wheels."

"No, Mark." The old man shook his head. "The Nanaitz remains in the taiga. Aiya does not like the big stone tents. There are no reindeers, no dogs, no squirrels to shoot. Aiya will not go with you farther; I shall go back to my tent. Tanilo is waiting; my wife is waiting. You remain with us, Mark. It's a good life. We'll find you a wife; you'll have little Nanaitzes."

But Aiya knew Mark would not remain in the taiga, just as Mark knew Aiya would not go with him. They belonged to two different worlds, and each would go back to his own. So Aiya said:

"Follow this river. Don't turn away from it anywhere. Go on for five suns. You will come to the stone tents, and there you will find the iron reindeer."

He shook food out of his sack and divided it into two portions. He replaced the smaller portion in his sack, then put the larger in a wallet of reindeer hide and gave it to Mark. When Mark shook his head, he shouted angrily:

"Take it, Mark. You're young, you've got strong teeth. You need to eat lots and lots. Old Aiya has enough. The taiga will feed him. Take it, or Aiya will be angry."

As Mark strode away from that stony cape, Aiya stood gazing after him for a long time, leaning on his ancient firearm. Then he flung his sack across his shoulder and vanished into the taiga.

The sun rose, the sun set, and each time it found Mark farther down the river. Towns, houses, people—all this now seemed a dream he had once dreamed long ago. There weren't any towns really, or houses, or people, and all the earth was wild and untracked, like the land he was now traveling in solitude. And for him there remained only two realities: this path that he was taking along the somber river and, at the end of the path, a girl with large eyes and flushed face, a girl repeating again and again:

"Mark, come back! I'm all alone. And I'm so afraid."

One more night came on. Perhaps tomorrow he would see the railway, as Aiya had promised. Perhaps tomorrow, or maybe in a year. But even if it was a year, he would arrive. Darkness descended over the river, and he stopped for the night, swiftly lit a fire, sat down with his back to a tree, and ate his supper. But his weariness overcame him, and he fell asleep. The bread and the piece of broiled reindeer dropped out of his hands. With a last effort of will he clutched the cold steel barrel of his Winchester.

Some two hours' journey farther along the same river, a campfire was dying down. Beside it a man was sleeping. The moonlight streamed over him, but he slept heavily, though the big black dog at his feet raised its head suspiciously.

A light breeze rustled through the treetops. The air turned chilly, and the man shivered in his sleep. The dog gazed into his companion's face. A look of suffering distorted the sleeper's face, and he awoke. Dawn began to break. The silvery mistiness of the moonlight was merged into the tender and subtle hues of the sunrise. The man glanced around indifferently and wearily scrambled to his feet. He was tall and thin, his eyes were deeply sunken, his hair was sprinkled with gray. Yet his face was youthful. He hurriedly rolled his blanket, threw a rifle across his shoulder, and strode off down the river. The dog glumly followed.

Some hours later Mark Surov arrived at the spot where the man had slept. He had already noticed signs indicating that someone was walking along ahead of him, and he felt such a longing for human company after his several days of solitude that he determined to overtake the stranger.

That day passed. Night fell, and the taiga crowded down to the river. But now it was a different part of the taiga, a different river. The stream beside which Mark Surov and the tall young man had been traveling had poured its waters into a mighty and majestic river. The young man stood on the riverbank, the dog at his feet. But now he was holding in his arms a slender woman.

"No, Peter; I've made up my mind. I'm going with you."

"But it means your death, slow but certain death, Maria."

"I know. We won't quarrel about that. There we may find death, but there we shall find freedom. We shall win a little life for you and and a little freedom for us both. So I'm going with you."

"But think, Maria. You're young. . . ."

"So are you."

"You've got all your life before you. You're a gifted engineer. You have a future before you."

"So did you, but you've been robbed of it. You're an engineer, too, but your hair is gray though you're still young. Oh, Peter, you can't leave me behind, and alone."

"Maria," he cried in desperation. "Don't you understand what it means?"

"Oh, Peter, darling. I know what it means. I want you. What good is all my future if you're not with me?" She started to cry, and Peter bent down to kiss her. Her arms tightened around his neck, but he pushed them away.

"Wait..." He unrolled his blanket, spread it on the ground, and drew Maria down beside him.

A little while later Peter moved away and sat up, his head in his hands.

"Darling, I love you so. But you mustn't come with me . . ."

"Listen, Peter, we've decided. Dearest, don't argue any more. I only want to be with you. You will wait for me here; I'll be back in three hours' time. We shall cross the river in a boat and take the train to the coast. Peter, dearest, only another three hours of separation, and then we shall be together, together to the end."

"Yes, Maria . . . to the end."

"And we shall have nothing to be afraid of; we shall be free, and no one will dare to interfere with us. And that's all we ask of life, isn't it, Peter?"

"Yes, Maria."

"Then wait for me. In three hours' time. Our last three hours away from each other."

She went to the water's edge, scrambled into a rowboat, and pulled strongly for the opposite bank. The boat disappeared into the early morning mist. Peter stood among the bushes, motionless, gazing across

the river. The east was burning; the sun had not yet risen, but its light was playing over all the world. Suddenly he clutched his head and cried out desperately:

"I can't! I mustn't!"

Feverishly, almost frantically, he took out a notebook, wrote a few lines on the cover, and fixed it to the bark of a tall tree. In the same desperate haste he rolled his blanket, threw his gun across his shoulder, and hurried off along the riverbank. He took one look back; the white patch on the dark bark was visible from some distance away. The black dog followed.

An hour or two later Mark Surov reached the same spot. He leaned wearily on his rifle; a happy smile played over his face. Across the waters of the river came the sound of a locomotive whistle. On the other bank stood a little town, the railway terminus, set down in the heart of the taiga. Now he must go to the right; there should be a ferry a little farther down. He turned and was about to go on when his eyes caught sight of a lofty tree, standing by itself. Or rather, he noticed a white oblong patch on its bark. He went up and saw that it was a notebook firmly pinned to the tree. On the cover he read:

"My dearest Maria! I am going away alone. That is hard for me. But though my heart bleeds, I must tear it from yours. I cannot let you share my fate. I love you madly, but for that very reason I must go alone. On that island I shall find freedom, if only for a short time, and at a terrible price. There will be time enough to think of you, to remember you, to love and long for you. Peter."

Mark raised his hand to unpin the notebook. God knows what it's all about, he thought, and sat down to read the notes.

DIARY OF PETER NOVIKOFF

Mother, my dear Mother, you were not wrong in saying that I was born under a lucky star.

I found coal! Yes, I, Peter Novikoff, who graduated last year from the Leningrad Geological Institute, found coal, and in a place where no one could even suspect its presence. Now I find myself in Khabarovsk. I am setting out on the road to fame, and I have decided to keep this diary from the very beginning, for you, Mother, and for one other woman whom I love as strongly as I love you. In Kha-

barovsk I was told that Moscow is very interested in my findings. The point is that the presence of coal in the place where I found it solves the problem of fuel supply for future railway lines. It will not be necessary to bring coal from the Donbass, thousands of kilometers away. The Suchan coal fields in the Far East produce little coal. On the whole, people here depend on coal from the Donbass. And do you know, Mother, what this means? A coal train coming from the Donbass to the Far East burns up one half of its load before reaching its destination.

In Khabarovsk everyone assures me of complete success. Everybody congratulates me. Professor Zaikin even predicts that I will receive a decoration. You know, I will tell you this in secret: in my mind I already try on my decoration on the gray coat, and it seems to me that the Order of the Red Star would match it best. It would look both beautiful and modest.

I have returned to Kogocha, where our headquarters are located. I spent the entire day in the Bureau of Geological Research. Maria was happy at my success no less than I was. But then we have already been sharing everything—our joys and our sorrows—for a long time. It will not be long now; soon we will be married. Funny, Maria still has doubts about me. When we were walking to the station, she suddenly stopped short and turned me around so that we were face to face.

"Tell me, Peter, if you become very famous, will you lose interest in me?" Maria asked me. I burst out laughing and kissed her right there on the street. She is already an engineer, but she still is as naïve as she was then, when we went to high school together.

Damn it! I really am becoming famous. *Izvestia* has printed an article about me—179 lines. I counted them myself. The regional newspaper, *The Pacific Star*, printed this article from *Izvestia* as well as its own, in which there are 236 lines. Altogether 415 lines about the young geologist, Peter Novikoff, who found coal in the taiga.

Today I was called to the telegraph office. The telegraph operator greeted me as if I were a very important person. "Moscow wants to speak to you on the direct line, but you will have to wait a little while until we link up the chain." I did not understand what "the chain" meant, and Maria and I exchanged glances. A "chain" had to be

established, and only for a conversation with me. On this end of it I will be, Peter Novikoff, and on the other, Moscow. Between us there will be a distance of nine thousand kilometers. We had a very long wait, and only about eight in the evening did the apparatus start to hammer.

"Who is at the apparatus?" I read on the ribbon. "Engineer Peter Novikoff speaking," answered the telegraph operator without even asking me. Letters on the ribbon began to jump. "Good evening, Comrade Novikoff. The Assistant to the People's Commissar speaking. Comrade Ordjonikidze commissioned me to ask you if you are absolutely sure of your calculations on the extent of the coal deposits?"

"What shall I answer?" asked the telegraph operator. "Transmit that we measured the seams vertically and horizontally at fourteen points, and that apart from that we found six places at which seams come to the surface." "Please repeat this sentence by sentence, or else I will mix everything up," the telegraph operator pleads as he starts his ticking. "We measured—" Maria says from behind my shoulder, "and are absolutely certain."

Our conversation with Moscow was suddenly interrupted. New letters appear on the ribbon, forming the words: "Moscow, we are disconnecting you with Kogocha." "Why? What has happened?" asks Moscow. "We are disconnecting you with Kogocha... Calling all stations, calling all stations, disconnect the chain and return to normal operations. Calling all stations." The apparatus is silent.

I express my amazement. "What is this? Who is it that broke in?"

The telegraph operator winked at me knowingly and didn't answer anything.

I don't understand. Maria assures me that it was the censorship people. They must be powerful indeed if even the name of Ordjoni-kidze means nothing to them. But anyway, this is not my business. I am only a geologist.

It has been a whole week since I have written anything. I am completely exhausted. The coal I have found has started a fever. This is what must have taken place once in the Klondike. But then there were not the countless offices that wanted to know everything. I could never have imagined before that we have so many authorities, and now I definitely no longer know who is responsible to whom. I had thought at one time that the regional executive committee was

the most important organ in the region, but now I see that it is not so. Yesterday I received a telegram: "Come to Khabarovsk at once to report to the executive committee." I had prepared to leave when a representative of the G.P.U. called our office. I had seen this official several times before—a grayish and transparent-looking individual. He addressed me briefly:

"You don't have to go to Khabarovsk."

"But I have received a telegram. The executive committee—"

"Never mind the executive committee."

"But how? I cannot disobey."

"If my words are not enough you will receive a telegram from the executive committee."

He said this very abruptly. And I did actually receive a telegram an hour later: "Your trip to Khabarovsk canceled."

Now try and figure out who obeys whom. According to the Constitution, the G.P.U. is subordinate to the organs of the Soviet Government, and here I am told to pay no attention to the regional executive committee. How much simpler and more precise everything is in geology.

It's a good thing that I do not write these notes in the form of an everyday diary, because it would turn out to be more of a weekly diary. Once again I have not written a single line in four days. I have had to be everywhere at the same time. A Comrade Berman, assistant to the director of the G.P.U., arrived from Moscow. For some reason everyone is afraid of him, but I felt no fear of him at all. I even liked him. He called for me and greeted me very simply, almost as a friend. I took Maria along with me to have her meet the high officials. I am ashamed to admit it, but I was thinking: "Let Maria see, Peter Novikoff, let her see your glory. For talking to Berman is clearly an evidence of glory." When we entered the office of the representative of the G.P.U., Berman was standing facing the window. Before him, our local representative was standing at attention. Berman turned around sharply and stretched out his hand. "I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Comrade Novikoff," he said. "Your discovery has a very great significance. You will be very glad to hear, of course, that it has been decided to begin the exploitation of the coal region you have discovered immediately." While saying this, Berman looked attentively first at me, then at Maria. I realized that I should present

Maria to our important visitor. Upon learning that Maria is my fiancée and an engineer, Berman stretched out his hand to her in a very friendly way and said, "As the fiancée of our young explorer you will be very glad to hear something that I was going to keep until the end of our conversation. The government has decided to reward Comrade Novikoff with the Order of Lenin. Congratulations!"

With these words Berman searched in a brief case and handed over to Maria a Moscow newspaper three days old. Moscow newspapers reach us usually on the tenth day, but this issue had arrived by plane with Berman. I imagine that I must have looked rather stupid upon hearing the news. Maria deliberately stepped hard on my foot. In my dreams I had had visions of the Order of the Red Star on my coat, or even something more modest, like the Badge of Honor—but the Order of Lenin—that was too much! After all, it is the highest decoration in the land.

I cannot picture at all how it will be possible to begin working at the coal fields right away. They are, after all, more than four hundred kilometers from Kogocha as the crow flies. The coal-bearing area lies in the depths of the taiga, where not only roads, but even paths cannot be built on short notice. There are many marshes on the way. And then, how can the coal be brought out of this region?

However, there is probably a way to overcome these obstacles, for otherwise Moscow would not have made such a decision.

Yesterday it became clear that my conversation with Moscow had been interrupted on Berman's orders. He said as much: "By the way, I hope that you are not offended because I interrupted your conversation with Moscow. The point is that Comrade Ordjonikidze's assistant still did not know at that time that the exploitation of the Kogocha coal fields has been placed on the secret list. Had he known about it, he would not have talked with you on the ordinary telegraph. It is necessary, you know, to interfere once in a while."

After we had left Berman, Maria surprised me. She said that she did not like Berman at all. She feels that he tries to appear as if he were very simple, but that actually he is not simple at all. She insists that his eyes are completely dead and expressionless. These women, they will always notice everything. I, for instance, did not even notice Berman's eyes.

I have been ordered to prepare to leave. Together with a few

hundred others, I am to go to the place where I found coal, and stay there for as long as it will be necessary. It is now the end of September. If we start out in three or four days we should be there about October 20. There will be many detours ahead, because at this time of the year the marshes are impassable.

I feel that these notes will be totally incomprehensible because they have no beginning. What coal this is, and why and how I managed to find it, I will attempt to tell about briefly.

I was simply lucky, in fact wildly so. I must confess that I never expected to make that discovery, as all my thoughts were directed to returning as quickly as possible to Kogocha, where Maria was waiting for me. When we were on our way to the Far East, from Leningrad, we expected never to part. Immediately upon our arrival, however, I was assigned to an exploring unit, while Maria remained in Kogocha, where she was asked to systematize and edit the reports that came in from field workers. And this is how it happened that in a year of work I had seen Maria only twice, and even on those occasions, for only a very short time. Yet we are lucky that we were both sent to the same "bush." It might well have happened that we should be sent to opposite ends of the country, separated from each other by thousands of kilometers.

Our expedition spent that year in the taiga, studying the soil, collecting samples of species, digging in the eternally frozen ground. Our group was led by an elderly engineer called Viktoff. Actually he is not a geologist, but a transportation specialist. But it was he who had been given the main task of exploring the possibility of building a railway trunk line in that area.

One day engineer Viktoff gave me a special assignment. Together with another man I had to make my way through a valley in which a small river was flowing to a mound where the valley ended. Viktoff wanted to make sure that this valley would not present unexpected obstacles. The task was a simple one, requiring nothing more than strong feet. There was no need at all to use one's brain. And it was, in fact, because of my feet that Viktoff had selected me.

I expected to return to our camp on the third day. In the taiga this might be called a short trip. As I was leaving, no thoughts about discoveries of any kind entered my head. And had I followed Viktoff's instructions exactly, everything would have continued peacefully and

quietly. On my second day out, I found that the valley I was exploring was moving away from the mounds that had bordered it. Soon I arrived at a point where the valley broke into branches, as in a slingshot. I should have followed the main branch, as Viktoff had instructed me to do, but it appeared to me that the side branch was shorter, and I moved on in that direction. It was not more than two hours later that I arrived in the kingdom of coal. The valley narrowed down to the size of a small gully, and both sides of it were black. Layers of coal were hanging like clods over my head. They began three or four meters under the ground and sometimes came right up to the surface. This gully fascinated me because it looked like a gigantic version of a model we had in the Geological Institute on which we used to study the different ground layers. I did not think at all, at that time, that my discovery had any practical value. There are many scattered coal deposits whose location renders them useless.

We slept on the slope of the mound that night. We returned to our camp at the end of the third day, heavily laden with our supplies and with samples of rock. After reporting our observations on the terrain to Viktoff I poured out my samples in front of him. At the sight of the coal Viktoff reached for it excitedly, and after hearing my story about the black valley, he said in an excited voice:

"Do you realize what this means? Coal right by the trunk line. This alone may well decide the fate of our projected railway."

And this is how it all started. On the very next day our entire group left for the place where I found the coal. For fifteen days we measured the area of the coal seams, and dug pits in different directions. It was a primitive sort of exploration, but nevertheless it enabled us to determine that we were not dealing with an isolated deposit, and that we had stumbled into a coal region whose reserves were of industrial scope. Viktoff prepared a detailed report and sent me to Kogocha with it. I did not even know that in the report the discovery of the coal was attributed to me. I was thinking only that I would be able to spend several days with Maria. Subsequent events, however, were not so simple, and unexpectedly I became the hero of the hour.

We are preparing to leave for the taiga. As it turned out, our party will not be so small, after all. Nearly five hundred people. A G.P.U. official—the same one who broke into my conversation with Moscow

—is appointed head of our expedition. My immediate superior is engineer Zatetski. He is polite, well-bred, and tactful. Apparently he is one of the "have-beens." He has been working for the G.P.U. as a civilian for many years. From the head of our expedition I learned accidentally that he had once been a prisoner himself. Zatetski is a highly experienced man. He has built mines in the Donbass, is familiar, it seems, with gold mining, and in my own field, in geology, he is well qualified. So that, to tell the truth, I don't see at all why he needs me, unless, perhaps, as a guide.

Today Zatetski brought me a newspaper, *The Pacific Star*. There was an article in it based on a conversation I had with a correspondent. This time, instead of being pleased, I was furious. What a scoundrel, this correspondent! While I did talk to him, I did not say any of the things that he has written. I went to the G.P.U. official who was now my superior. The G.P.U. official read the article attentively and asked me in a calm voice: "With what is it that you do not agree? Everything seems to be correct."

"But I have never told the correspondent anything of the sort," I insisted. "Everything that you see is his own invention. I spoke to him about coal, and not about myself. Just see what he writes." I pointed out a few lines at random. "I am proud to live and work in the country that is being led forward by Comrade Stalin.'" I never told him any such thing.

"But are you not proud that you live and work in the country that is being led forward by Comrade Stalin?" the official asks me.

"I am proud, of course," I explained, "but why shout about it? Or else, here again: 'To the Soviet youth, to which I belong, Comrade Stalin is a great example for emulation.' We never even spoke of this."

"And you feel that this is not so?" the official said in the same quiet, unpleasant voice, apparently not able or else not disposed to understand me. "You feel that this is not the truth?" he asks.

I felt that I was about to lose my temper.

"Of course, it is the truth, but I have never said it."

"I am sure that you have thought of it, and the task of the Soviet press is to convey the inner thoughts of Soviet people," moralized the official. "Why their inner thoughts? Because our people do not know how to express them, and they keep them to themselves. The press, however, does express them.

He must be making fun of me, I thought, as I stood by his table. In the meantime, he continued:

"Incidentally, it is I who inserted all these words. You spoke about the coal at great length, but the discovery of coal is classified information and I deleted what you said. Because of your modesty you said little about your own feelings, which cannot be classified. I filled in this gap, and I hope I did this accurately."

I left him with a feeling of having been deeply humiliated. I really do want to serve my country. Stalin really is, to me, a great man who should be emulated. But why should the G.P.U. official express my thoughts? I could do it myself.

I haven't written a word for over a month. We left Kogocha on September 28, and we arrived in the coal region only about November 1. It was not exactly easy to get through, but we did it. At first we relied on our maps, but this did not help us much. We found swamps where the map showed taiga. Rivers were often shown inaccurately, and a number of times we crossed the same river twice. This was not nearly as bad as the marshes, however. While a small group might pass through them, it was impossible for our large expedition. We were deflected from our course several times as a result, and by the time we reached our destination, we had traveled six hundred kilometers instead of four hundred.

Our expedition consists mainly of soldiers of the G.P.U. Interior Military Forces. There are more than four hundred of them. Several dozen people belong to the civilian group, of which I am a member. Our transport consists of hundreds of horse-drawn wagons heavily loaded with supplies, mainly food. But on each wagon there is the inevitable coil of barbed wire.

This is the fifth day that we have been here. We are all busy building a large house. In the taiga, gigantic logs are cut and then drawn by ten horses to the site of construction.

Half of the soldiers work with the barbed wire. I hate to think that prisoners will be brought here. The only thing ready for them is huge squares enclosed by barbed wire, and high watch towers under construction. It seems to me, sometimes, it is all my fault, that they will bring here masses of nondescript people and force them to dig

out of the earth the coal I have discovered. But on such troubled occasions I tell myself that reason will come to my aid. I tell myself that every one of them earns his lot. It is true that I have often heard that they sometimes arrest people without cause, but I do not believe this. How is it possible to seize a man, put him in jail, and send him to forced labor if he has not committed any crimes?

I hear that after finishing the house intended for the guard and commandant's office of the camp, we will start building lodgings for the prisoners.

Strange, but we have stopped work. The big house for the guard is ready, and we have moved in. After the tents, it is very pleasing to feel a solid roof over one's head. The soldiers have accommodated themselves quickly in the house, and now spend the whole day playing cards. I have to talk about this to Comrade Vesioly. Vesioly (meaning Cheerful) is the head of our party. His name is most unfitting, as it is hard to imagine anyone less cheerful than he.

After the conversation, I felt as if I had been splashed all over with dirt. I came up to Vesioly while he was sorting papers in his room. I asked him, as a matter of course, when we shall start to build the houses or barracks for the prisoners. I even made a stupid joke, saying that a barbed-wire fence was poor protection against the cold. Vesioly looked attentively at me and, after a pause, asked:

"Do you seriously suppose that we will build quarters for prisoners? Do you not think that it would be most unusual for G.P.U. personnel to do such work?"

"But what will happen to the prisoners when winter sets in?"

"Let them worry about it themselves. You will see that man is a viable animal, and can accustom himself to any conditions."

"But after all, how is it possible to adapt oneself on a piece of bare ground enclosed by barbed wire? And, besides, you know what winter here is like."

"I know very well. And I know much that you will never know. In particular I know that we cannot butt into someone else's business."

The hint was clear enough, and I left Vesioly. I wandered for a long time through the taiga. I walked around the barbed-wire grounds. And I still cannot understand how people will adapt themselves to

these conditions! Today the first snow has fallen. In a week the marshes will freeze, and over them parties of prisoners will begin to arrive. I understand why we must have prisoners. In such a large country as ours there will always be a certain quota of criminal elements that have to be isolated from society. For this reason jailers are also needed in our socialistic society. Nevertheless, I do not want to be a jailer myself. Why did they need me here? My field is geology.

The first column of prisoners arrived yesterday, about six thousand of them. Thank God there are no women among them. This is my first serious test of loyalty to the Party. I never imagined that such things exist. The people were marched on foot from Kogocha, a route of four hundred kilometers. Very few of them were dressed sufficiently warmly. It is true, winter is only beginning, but today the thermometer dropped to 18° C. below zero. They were on the road twelve days and arrived half dead from fatigue, cold, and undernourishment. Together with them came a food transport, but, nevertheless, they were fed strictly on rations fixed for nonworking prisoners. How could men marching the frozen taiga be placed in the category of "nonworkers"? Yet they were given only five hundred grams of bread [a little more than a pound] and thin hot soup twice daily. They did not all arrive. The head of the convoy reported to Vesioly that he "lost" one hundred and fifty men on the way. I heard this accidentally and understood well what was meant by "lost." Plainly, they perished by the roadside. But Vesioly did not even bat an eyelash at this announcement.

Even the head of the convoy, who has seen many things during his lifetime, helplessly shrugged his shoulders when he was ordered to lead the prisoners into the barbed-wire enclosures, which contained nothing but snow-covered earth.

Vesioly forbade the civilians, consequently myself, to appear where the prisoners were kept. From a distance, I saw how this huge crowd of people crawled into the camp. In thick gloom they stood, listening to Vesioly's order. The order was short. The prisoners themselves had to prepare their own dugouts or to accommodate themselves as they wished. For this task they were allowed two days, and on the third day everyone had to start digging coal.

Until nightfall, I wandered outside the barbed-wire fences, on the

other side of which intensive work went on. People were warming the ground with bonfires and digging out pits. I was struck by their silence. They worked with their eyes on the ground. At the far end of the camp, close to the wire, a few men were digging a pit together. I approached within speaking distance of them and stopped. The watchman nearby pretended not to see me. It was the same soldier who usually receives cigarettes from me. The men saw me but did not raise their heads. And only one of them, an old man, with an unkempt beard, dressed in a dirty fur jacket, looked me over carefully.

"Well, grandfather, will it be hard for you here?" I asked.
"What shall I tell you? It is a good place for a grave."

Large tears rolled down his cheeks and disappeared into his beard.

Only a month has gone by since the arrival of the first group of prisoners. Yet we have already mined whole mountains of coal. The prisoners in the camp now number twenty-four thousand. Their original dugouts have gradually turned into underground homes. They live in them in groups of ten to fifteen. It has been very cold, and fires in the dugouts are kept burning through the night. They burn directly on the bare ground, and the smoke fills the dugouts. It is hardly possible to bear the smoke. But people become accustomed to everything, and I often remember the words of Vesioly that man is a viable animal. The prisoners resemble ghosts. Dirty, saturated with smoke, with full-grown beards, they hack away at the coal seams, carry it away on wheelbarrows, piling it up. The mountains of coal grow, and with each day my hatred for this coal increases. It was born in me when I first had a close look at the prisoners. It is putting to a severe test my loyalty to the Komsomol, to the Party, to Stalin.

I loathe this coal growing around me in mountains. The feeling that I have committed a crime does not leave me.

The more I observe the prisoners, the more I recognize them for what they are, the more bitter I feel. Nearly all the prisoners belong to the category of kulaks. Actually they are all ordinary peasants. Their crime was their unwillingness to surrender to the power that drove them into collective farms. They wanted to remain masters of their own land, to have in their yard their own horse and their own

cow. They did not oppose the establishment of collective farms, but they did not want to join them either. And then they were declared kulaks. Armed men broke into their houses. The peasants and their wives, together with their children and old folks, were driven from their homes. They were loaded onto freight trains and like cattle shipped to Siberia. On the way, the men were separated from their women and children. Numberless peasant families were broken up. All too often bodies of those who had died on the way were dumped alongside the tracks, including corpses of small children, and survivors were carried farther to the dreaded Far East.

I understood why they were so silent. These ghosts from another world.

Today has brought me an unexpected satisfaction. It has been almost a month and a half since I have opened this notebook. It is hard to write about the things that go on. But today something good happened—it has just been ascertained that there is not a sufficient reserve of coal here for industrial purposes. We did not err when we arrived at our estimates last summer. Our methods of measurement were simply too primitive. All our calculations were correct, except for one: the coal does not lie in a continuous seam, but is distributed instead in scattered nests. Between these nests there is no coal. Wasn't it just our luck that all fourteen of the measurements that we took were made at points where coal was present!

Those thousands of people will now leave the taiga, and so will I. Let them not give me a decoration. Let them not write about me in the newspapers. If only this nightmare would come to an end, I would lose the feeling that I had condemned these unfortunates to this life of slavery. Only Maria could understand me.

It is becoming warmer now. The snow is melting. The convoys with food, that until now had been arriving regularly every day, are beginning to arrive late. Today only one half of the food train reached us, the other half turned back to Kogocha because the horses could not pull the loaded sleighs on the melting snow.

Spring. The taiga has become alive. It is filled with the singing of birds, and the sound of running brooks. The food carts have ceased to arrive altogether. A detachment of soldiers that was sent to meet

them returned and reported that the rivers had left their banks, and that the marshes were covered with water. It is impossible to get through, by horse or on foot. Vesioly says that this does not disturb him. There is enough food on hand for two weeks, and by that time the rivers will return to their banks. Perhaps he is right, and perhaps he is not. The rivers may return to their beds, but the marshes may remain covered with water for a long time. What will we do if Vesioly is wrong?

A week ago twelve of the prisoners ran away. Today eight of them came back, thin, miserable, and half-starved. They found it impossible to get through the marshes. Four of them died in the taiga. The eight who returned were shot.

For some reason Vesioly's dog has become attached to me. It is called Karo. In the East this means black. It is black, long-haired, and very somber. I am slightly afraid of him. During the winter I witnessed how at a signal from Vesioly he threw himself upon a prisoner who was attempting to escape. He threw him on the snow and sank his teeth into his throat, without barking or growling. The prisoner died the same day.

Karo accompanies me everywhere. Sometimes I go into the taiga with my rifle, and he follows me. He has none of the characteristics that are common to all dogs. Sometimes we see wild goats. Karo does not run after them as any other dog would, but stays where he is, his brown eyes following them with a slow disinterested look. He remains still even when a bird jumps under his very nose. But when he comes across some prisoners in the taiga, being marched to cut trees, then Karo changes immediately. The fur on his back rises, his throat swells, his eyes fill with fury. I feel sorry for this poor creature at the same time that I fear and loathe him.

A catastrophe has befallen us. For three weeks now no food trains have come through. Vesioly cut the ration of the prisoners by one half. All work has stopped. Today I walked past the cemetery. I counted ninety-six mass graves. This means that nearly five thousand prisoners lie buried under fresh mounds, as Vesioly had given orders to bury fifty bodies in each trench dug for a common grave.

Vesioly has stored the remainder of the camp's food supply in the house. There is nothing left for the prisoners. Vesioly has removed the guards, and the prisoners are free to leave if they wish. Some of them have been leaving, but soon return. The taiga is still impassable.

Vesioly has issued orders to slaughter fifty horses. This will provide for each prisoner less than two pounds of meat. There is neither bread nor grain left. Vesioly assures us that the horse meat will enable the prisoners to last another ten days.

Vesioly has placed the remaining horses within the central group of buildings. They are surrounded by soldiers with tommy guns. Vesioly fears that the prisoners may seize the remaining horses.

The prisoners roam in groups around our house. The fifty horses are already eaten.

I can see the prisoners sway as they wander among the dugouts. They are cooking pieces of bark in little pots. Here and there a corpse is lying. No one removes the dead.

Vesioly has reached a decision. "Comrades," he announced, after having called the guard and the civilian personnel together, "the situation is hopeless. We cannot count on the arrival of food trains before another ten or fifteen days. This, in effect, means death. In the circumstances, I consider it necessary to think only of our rescue. The prisoners will perish, and nothing can be done to save them. We, on the other hand, will go into the taiga with the remaining provisions, and wait for the waters to go down so that we can make our way to Kogocha."

We are abandoning some twenty thousand human beings to certain death. I never thought that I would fall so low, yet it appears that I, too, am going to join Vesioly's group, which has taken over the remaining food. It is tormenting to feel like a scoundrel, but I want to live so much. Perhaps now Maria will turn away from me when she learns that I am capable of such monstrous behavior. It is nighttime, but no one is sleeping in the house. Vesioly is waiting for the prisoners to disappear into their dugouts, and this will not be until early morning when it gets cold.

In the evening prisoners wandered back and forth in front of my

stead on the right. Closer to the door was an enormous stove, like a great battleship. The room was lit by a small kerosene lamp hanging from the ceiling. Next to the stove was a door leading into the other half of the house.

The man who had opened the door for Mark was an ordinary peasant, broad-shouldered, his face overgrown with beard right to his eyes. He stood with one hand thrust into the thong girdling his waist, staring at his visitor.

"I am Khanin," he said. He took another look at Mark; his eyes rested on his fur-lined leather coat, and even longer on the protuberance of his right-hand pocket.

"Are you Comrade Surov?"

"Yes."

"You've come to the right place. Take your coat off; you'll be my guest."

Stepping quietly, he went into the next room. Mark heard the sound of someone grumbling in a sleepy voice, and the man's voice: "Get up! Your guest has arrived. Get up, I tell you!"

The bearded man returned to the room. Behind him appeared a youthful, agitated face. The hair hung in tangles over gleaming eyes that were lit up with expectation and anxiety; on his lips was an embarrassed, rather disconcerted smile. He walked across to the table.

"Do you recognize me, Comrade Surov?"

Mark slowly rose to his feet, astonishment and disbelief written on his face.

"Alexander!"

"So you do recognize me!" Alexander's face broke into a happy smile. Mark seized him by the shoulders and shook him. "How on earth did you come to be here?" he said. "Is it really you, you would-be poet?"

"It's me all right... the ineffectual Byron, fallen among bears." Alexander laughed. He made no attempt to tear himself away from his old University chum's strong grip. "But you, you're just as temperamental as ever, Mark. You're shaking me as though you were shaking pears off a tree!"

Mark let him go, but Alexander seized his hand and pumped it rhythmically, crying, "Hill never meets hill, but man and man are always meeting." "And smashing each other's faces in!" Mark added.

"Quite possibly. But as far as you and I are concerned that can come later. I saw Lena today, and she told me, 'Razin's received an order to meet Comrade Surov at the station. D'you think it might be Mark?' I remembered that your mother had brought an awful lot of Surovs into the world, and although bullets had reduced the number, Mark wasn't the only one left. All the same, we couldn't help hoping it was Mark Timofeevich who was going to call. We'd heard he was working in our parts and had become a big shot. I want to tell you something, but first let's agree that no one takes offense?" Mark nodded. "I'm wrong in thinking so often of Mark Surov. Maybe he's nothing but a dirty swine. Maybe his official job, his Party ticket, and all the rest have turned him into filth of the finest quality?"

"And maybe you're right, Alex." Mark stared at him challengingly. "Perhaps that's just what he is. I've got my Party ticket with me; I can show it. My official position isn't a very big one, but I hold it. Isn't that enough to show you that Mark Surov is ... a dirty swine?"

Alexander caught the bitter note in Mark's voice. "Forgive me, Mark," he said seriously. "It's never any use judging people by stereotyped patterns. I only said all that because I was delighted. You're not what you could have been.... Don't be angry."

Mark raised his eyes to Alexander, and asked, obviously with difficulty, "And did Lena also think that?" He was silent in expectation of the answer. The lamplight lit up his face, and Alexander felt a deep pity for his old friend.

"How broken... and unhappy, you are, Mark," he said quietly. Mark's face twitched. "I'm not broken, and I'm not unhappy," he said resolutely. "If I am broken, if I am unhappy, it's no more than everybody else is—you, Alexander, and Lena, and all our generation, which once was called the generation of world-transformers."

"Oh," said Alexander, glad of a chance to change the tone of the conversation, "I've forgotten to introduce you to my granddad. He's a great old granddad I can tell you. He's just one solid chunk of black earth, and he's rooted into the earth right up to his knees. He acts as a mother to me, too. You may remember that my mother gave her life for the 'great poet' Alexander, going to her fathers in the act. And this old granddad of mine brought up the worthless Alexander, who never

became a poet or anything else. He kept me in cottonwool; he'd have fed me at his breast if he could; and he brought up a blockhead to his own mortification. And later he went hanging around all the concentration camps in which that blockhead resided, until he got hold of his cub and brought him back home."

The old man held out his callused hand to Mark, and his beard wriggled; he may have been smiling.

Someone was approaching the house. Alexander went to the door. There, he turned.

"Don't speak, Mark, and don't breathe!" he said. "Here's another animal that has crossed your path before."

When he returned, he was followed by a man in a heavy sheepskin jacket; he was so tall that he had to bow his head to avoid hitting the lintel. He took off his cap. Mark saw a longish face with fluffy mustaches, a sharp, rather aquiline nose, and calm, watchful eyes. He knew he had seen this man before; he tried desperately to remember where. The man's fluffy mustaches quivered, and an expression of impudent resolution, mingled with open curiosity, crossed his features.

"Ostap?" he breathed the question. He spontaneously rushed to meet him, and they linked their arms in a strong embrace. Alexander stood beside them, smacking each of them on the back in turn, and saying, almost shouting:

"Friends meet again. I don't care what language you say it in, that's got a good sound to it."

Meanwhile the old man was setting a pot of roasted meat on the table; then he arranged a little pile of pickled cucumbers and cut a mound of bread. Finally, with an old man's groan, he bent down and fished a bottle of vodka out from under the bed.

The second cock crowed, but the lamp still burned in the third house on the left. The old man said not a word all the evening, but sat with his head between his hands, listening closely to the others. Thoughtfully drawing his fork over the table, Ostap told Mark his story:

"We lived in peace for five years; but in 1929 they began to drive us all into the collective farms. The Cossacks resisted, and some of them went off into the mountains again. Then the local authorities decided that the people were resisting because former enemies of the regime, the men to whom Lenin had given amnesty,

were still living in the villages. They began to round us up and carry us off. Of course, Paul was the first to be arrested. By then his father was dead. They took us to the prison in Krasnodar. We didn't have any trial; they just read out the sentences to us. They led us out into the yard and announced that Paul Klopov and two others were to be shot, and the rest sent to penal servitude."

He twisted his head as though he had suddenly got toothache, and went on more slowly:

"There on the spot they shot Klopov and the other two. They led them up to a wall and ordered them to stand facing it. But Paul turned and said calmly, 'Shoot in my forehead, not in my nape, you curs; but before I die I'll spit in your faces. And remember, you'll pay for our heads, you Stalinist dogs.' He spat into the face of one of them, and the man put five bullets into him one after another.... I was sent to a concentration camp to use a spade in the name of Stalin. And I felt so fed up I was only sorry they hadn't put me up against the wall together with Paul. In the camp all my thoughts were of escape. And I'd have tried, and I'd have been shot, or worried to death by the dogs, if I hadn't had a bit of luck. I fell in with Alexander, and he helped me."

"If anyone helped you, it was Oleg Kutov," Alexander exclaimed. "What had he got to do with it?" Ostap objected. "He didn't die just in order to help me. You see, our camp was being shifted from one spot to another, and he died on the road. That night, when we came to a station, we were ordered to put the body out of the wagon. Alexander and I carried him out, with the guard behind us, as usual. We laid the body down on the embankment, and the chief of the guard came up, shone his lantern into Oleg's face, and took out his notebook to make a note of his name, so as to strike him off the list. He asked his name, and I was just on the point of saying, 'Oleg Kutov,' when Alexander cut in before me and gave my name. So my name was struck off the list, and I became Oleg Kutov. Kutov had only a short term left to serve, and six months later I was sent for and given my discharge. Alexander told me how to get to this village, and soon after he himself turned up. And ever since we've gone through everything together.... We heard you'd become a big shot, but we didn't dare let you know we were here. We didn't think you'd want to meet us again, and it might be the worse for us if you did."

As he listened to Ostap, Mark had sat lost in thought. Now he raised his head and asked, looking from one to the other:

"So you did think . . . you did think I might give you away, might report that you weren't Oleg Kutov, but a runaway Cossack from the Kuban?"

"Don't take it badly, Mark, but we did," Ostap calmly answered. "We did think that, and it was a bitter thought. But think of the times we live in! If they find out, there'll be no mercy for me, Mark. It's not that I'm afraid of death, but to die unnecessarily . . . I don't want to go down without having been of some use."

"And how about you, Alexander?" Mark turned to the silent, smiling poet. "Surely you didn't think of me like that?"

"Well, not altogether; all the same, I was on my guard. Or rather, a little afraid of meeting you again. After all, you're a big shot, and I'm only a former student, and a former and possibly a future prisoner."

Mark sat with his head sunk on his chest, his eyes fixed on the vodka-stained table. He was affronted by their words; yet he could not condemn them. An animal fear had crept into men's souls, and had taken possession of them. People had begun to think that man and man were wolves to each other, and so they shut themselves off. And yet there was still a chink through which human feelings could find expression. The great cleavage that Communism had caused had brought about a spiritual scission in human beings. Perhaps only the next generation would be able to heal that breach; the one to which they belonged was filled with fear and would never escape from that fear.

Finally Mark roused himself and said, "Good! We won't go into that now. Maybe you're not entirely unjust. But let us agree that despite everything we'll remain friends. And we'll never forget that friendship."

Alexander, who was a little tipsy, expressed his feelings boisterously. "Good! We'll never forget it!" he shouted. But Ostap stared seriously into Mark's eyes and said quietly, insistently: "It's you who must remember it, Mark. And never forget it!"

"All these years I haven't forgotten you or Alexander. When that stupid business of yours happened, Alexander, and you were arrested, I continually tried to persuade myself that you had had to be arrested in the name of our ideal."

"And nonetheless you went and made application for my case to be reviewed," Alexander laughed. "It didn't help me, but at least I was glad to think my friends were concerned about me."

A noisy cockcrow heralded the approach of dawn, but the friends still sat on around the table. The old man had gone off to bed without saying a word, and now was tossing sleeplessly. Mark obstinately kept his head bent and talked quietly, hoarsely; but in that quiet voice Alexander and Ostap were conscious of extreme agitation. "No other way has been given us," Mark argued, "and there is no other faith for us. Millions have gone to their deaths for our faith, and as they died, that faith made death easy for them. To be a Communist you have to feel how much blood your soil has drunk, how many human bones have disintegrated into it. And when you feel that, you realize that you have no right to ruin the cause that has been begun in so much blood. Difficult? I know. But once you've taken up the burden of that heritage you must go on carrying it. Fall; stream with bloody sweat; but carry it!"

Ostap tried to catch Mark's eyes, but could not. "But supposing it isn't a heritage, but a mirage?" he said softly. "Use your eyes and you can see, Mark; there's blood everywhere. The people are suffering. Is that what they died for?"

"No!" Mark banged his fist on the table. "That's not what they died for. Not for Paul Klopov to be put against a wall and shot, not for the people to suffer and the children to weep yet again. But although Klopov was shot and the children are crying, and although you, Ostap, and you, Alexander, and Lena, and millions of Ostaps, and Alexanders, and Lenas have been flung behind the barbed wire, that still doesn't mean that our faith is bad. But it does mean that we've turned off the straight road, and now we're stumbling through a pathless wilderness. You say you don't want to stumble? But then seek a road, and don't wait for a Moses to come and lead you out. Seek, because the Gods won't show you the roads; they're silent, and man must carve out his own road. You hate what is happening in our country. You hate Communism; you hate the Soviet regime. I understand how you feel, though I don't believe there's any strength to your hatred. And I realize that your hatred is sterile. And if it were in your power today to destroy all that we're doing-granted that it's bad, but it does exist, it is living and developing-you'd destroy, but you'd not build up anything in its place."

"As I look at you, Mark, I'm astonished at myself," Alexander said. "I should regard you as an enemy, but I just can't. And you ought to regard me and Ostap as enemies, but here we are sitting side by side. Perhaps you're a poor Communist after all, Mark. After all, a Communist faithful to Stalin should destroy people like Ostap and me ruthlessly."

"No, I'm not a poor Communist, Alexander," Mark replied thickly. "I still believe in Communism as I believed in it when you and I were friends, Alexander, and when you and I were blood brothers, Ostap. Man is given one faith, and if that faith is true, it will guide him all through his life. I can't regard you as enemies simply because you haven't accepted my faith. Communists, like the first Christians, are fighting to spread their faith."

Alexander shook his head energetically and opened his mouth to say something, but Mark would not let him speak.

"I know what you're going to say. The Christians themselves suffered and died for their faith; they were driven into the amphitheaters and died there, torn to pieces by lions, and thus they strengthened and extended their faith. On the other hand, the Communists are imposing their faith by force and are forcing the unbelievers into bondage or are destroying them altogether. Of course there is an essential difference, and it isn't to our advantage. But don't forget that new times call for new songs. The first Christians perished because they were weak; but when Christianity grew stronger, they soon stoked up the fires of the Inquisition to strengthen the might of their faith. And so with the Communists. Under czarism the revolutionaries went to prison, went to death; true, they weren't devoured by lions, but quite a few of them perished, nonetheless. That was the primitive Christian stage of Communism. But then Communism got the power. And it lit the fires of its inquisition. But, like the Christian, so the Communist inquisition will only be temporary. The fires will die down and go out; but from the flames of those fires the faith will rise stronger and purer. Fire is a great cleanser."

"Surely you're not trying to justify everything that goes on; surely you don't accept all of it?" Ostap said sadly. "Do you accept the violence done to the people; do you accept the concentration camps? They've driven freedom into the grave, and man can't even breathe. Surely you don't justify that?"

"No, I don't try to justify everything; I don't accept everything. There's a lot that drags our faith down from heaven into the mud. Human habits hang like weights on the wings of our faith and won't let it fly. There's a lot that I can't justify. Power has gone to men's heads, and they're like infuriated bulls, trampling down everything in their way. Violence has become a part of everyday life. Communists are not liberal talking shops, but men who think realistically; and they realize that without violence you can't open the door into the future. But the violence has gone beyond what is necessary and has become a habit. That's not through the faith; that's through the people, through their slavish nature. A slave's idea of freedom is to have power over others, and we're all slaves, more or less. But if Communism were to triumph in some other country of Europe, it would be different, not so awkward and harsh. But in Russia, where man has always been a slave, Communism still has to pass through the stage of eliminating the heritage of serfdom. We're passing through that stage now; we're smashing everything down all around us in order to clear the ground for the future....I'm not saying all this in justification; it's terribly painful for me, too; and if it were not for our Communist faith, life would be horrible."

"If you really do believe, Mark," said Alexander, "then your faith gives you strength to live and to accept a great deal. But... forgive me, I don't think your faith is so unshakable; I don't think you really are free from doubts."

Mark did not reply for some time. When he did, he spoke slowly, emphatically:

"If one loses faith in Communism, there's only a vacuum left. It would be terrible to realize that blood had been shed in vain, that people had died in vain.... But it simply can't be that such terrible sacrifices were in vain. Christianity grew out of the blood of its martyrs; and so Communism will grow out of the blood of millions of unknown people who perished in the fight for the Soviet regime. No, there cannot be any room for doubt!"

"We won't talk any more about that, Mark," Alexander said, putting his hand on his friend's shoulder. "You almost seem to be arguing with yourself. Your faith grew up with you, you grew up with your faith, and now it's difficult for you to live without it. But you'll never find the strength to drive all doubt away, and I think you've got a hard road before you.... But tell me, what would you think of anyone who suddenly stepped apart from all that's happening in our country? Would you condemn him?"

"There's nowhere he could go," Mark said moodily.

"But supposing there were? Supposing someone you know suddenly disappears, cuts himself off from everything, becomes an outsider to it all? Supposing, let's say, he slips out of Russia, across the frontier? After all, the frontier isn't far from here, for instance."

Mark gave him a long, fixed stare. "I've already thanked you for your trust, and I promise not to betray it. You're either poor conspirators or friends who have great faith in me. I'd like to think the second assumption is correct. You've already told me a lot with your half admissions and hints. But you ought not to go any further. Let's keep up the barrier that will allow you to think whatever is in your minds."

Alexander began to roll pellets of bread in his hand. "All the same, that's no answer," he said.

"All right, then I'll answer!" Mark said with obvious reluctance, turning his eyes away. "I'd say of any man who left his native soil that he was a deserter who had fled from the field of battle, forgetting the land entrusted to him by his fathers and forefathers."

Ostap irritably dropped the fork he had been playing with. "All very well, but damn it, the land's been taken away from him! Supposing he goes away from the land in which he isn't allowed to live in order to fight for it? How is he a deserter then?"

"I'd say he's a deserter who's forgotten his duty to the soil on which and for which his fathers and grandfathers died...."

There was a strained silence for a moment or two. Then Mark spoke again:

"You've said a lot about the collective farmers. A few days ago I heard Dorinas and Vavilov expressing their surprise that collectivization had been carried through so easily in these districts. They were expecting the peasants to put up some resistance, but there hasn't been any."

"And how did Dorinas explain that?" Alexander asked with an obvious sneer in his voice.

"He explains nothing; he simply establishes the fact."

"Before long that cur will establish yet another fact that will make him feel pretty sick," Ostap said in a menacing tone. "He certainly did his best to provoke the peasants into resistance. His assistant, Yuzhny, brought up G.P.U. forces and made ready to drown the frontier districts in blood. But the peasants carried out orders and joined the collective farms, so there was nothing for Yuzhny to do. He shot a few all the same, those who hadn't got the strength to hold out. They couldn't wait."

"Wait for what?" Mark asked.

"Man is always waiting for something," Ostap replied enigmatically. His face and Alexander's suddenly went blank and even rather hostile.

An automobile horn sounded some distance away. Alexander went out and folded back the shutters. A vague dawn seeped into the room. Mark was putting on his coat when Alexander came back. As he entered, he remarked: "All life consists of meetings and partings. I'm glad we've seen each other for a last time, Mark."

"Why for a last time?" Mark exclaimed. "I'll drop in to see you on my way back. I don't want to lose touch with you three: you and Ostap, and Lena, too. Oh, and that reminds me," he added hurriedly. "Do help Lena all you can. And on my way back we'll talk over how we can fight to get her free."

"It's certainly urgently necessary to fight to free her," Alexander answered thoughtfully. "She's crushed and all but ready to go under. She's got to live with Razin, and she hates him so much it's terrible to contemplate. How can she help hating him when he's wading up to his knees in blood. There's a ravine not far from here where the condemned are shot. And that's where he'd been yesterday. You wouldn't think, to look at him, that he'd just been killing people, would you? And Lena's in his hands. But we'll fight to get her free."

Mark was astonished to note that Alexander seemed suddenly transformed. His eyes had grown steely; his mouth was set in a look of determination. "We'll fight for Lena," he repeated; and there was determination in his voice.

Mark took Alexander's hand in a firm grip. Then he shook hands with Ostap. "We'll meet again before long," he said as he left to go off to the automobile. He did not hear Ostap's quiet comment:

"No, Mark. We shan't meet again."

* * * * * * *

4. For the Last Time

MARK found Bayenko in a dreary frontier village. He was in an unsociable mood, a frequent state of his these days. At such times he was sullen, uncommunicative, and avoided company. The frontier guard commander showed Mark the house in which the executive committee chairman was staying. "We offered to put him up, but he wouldn't have it and ordered that he wasn't to be disturbed," he told Mark. Probably he had already informed Dorinas that the chairman was behaving in a very unsatisfactory manner.

Bayenko greeted Mark with a gloomy, dissatisfied stare. He was sitting on a bench in one corner of a half-dark, wretched peasant hut; the air was heavy with the reek of sour bread and dung. A cow had calved during the night, and the calf had been brought into the house out of the cold. Now it was staggering about the kitchen on its absurdly long and refractory legs. A litter of young pigs, shut off by a low wooden fence, were squealing round the stove.

Bayenko shook his head irritably when he saw Mark, and asked in a voice hoarse with the cold, "I suppose Vavilov's sent you to give me a hand!"

Mark silently took off his greatcoat, found a nail in the wall, hung up the coat, then went across to Bayenko, who was watching him with an unfriendly stare.

"Yes, Vavilov ordered me to come out to you. He said you might need me," he answered calmly.

"Now isn't that thoughtful of him!" the chairman snorted discontentedly, and continued with growing exasperation: "He's afraid I'll deviate from the general line and send all this business to the devil! Stalin needs the timber; he needs to do business with the capitalists! But Bayenko can squeeze the people till the whey drips out of them, as long as they get the timber for us. . . . Stalin's personal plenipotentiary! Everybody's afraid, everybody trembles, the pressure comes down from above, and at the bottom of the press are peasants like the man this hut belongs to. A fine mansion, isn't it! He lived in this mansion before the revolution, and he's still living in it today. Filth, stink, bugs in plenty! His wife in rags. But we say: 'Get us the timber. Go and cut timber for us, but don't require anything from us. Your

wife can go in rags, your little son can stick his nose in his own shit, but you go and cut timber. We've got to trade with the capitalists.' And he brings us the timber, he hands over his grain, he works day and night, but we give him the knout. And if that isn't sufficient, then a cudgel comes down on his back. See how the people are living, and then go and read the papers with their endless legends!"

"There was poverty before the revolution, so what is there to be surprised at?" Mark quietly answered.

For a moment Bayenko sat thinking, then he rose heavily from his seat, enormous, disheveled, terrible to see.

"That's true! But all the same the hut was newer then, and there weren't quite so many bugs in it. And the women had some clothes to wear, but now they've got rags. And the master was to be found at home; no one drove him by force out into the forest. You know, you find yourself in this peasant kingdom and you feel such a . . . swine you don't know what to do with yourself. I think I'll just stay in this village. I'll become a collective farmer. Then some son of a bitch can come and drive me off to get timber for Stalin. And I'll get married, and my children can go without trousers and shirts and will grow up in filth and shit."

He suddenly stopped striding from corner to corner, and Mark saw that his attack of insensate fury had passed. Only during such attacks could he ever have wished to become a collective farmer, to give up his comfortable town house for a smoking and stinking peasant hut.

"No," he said now. "After all, it's better to be an oppressor than one of the oppressed. That's so, isn't it, Mark?" Without waiting for an answer, he went on: "And what did Vavilov have to say about me?" Now his voice expressed not irritation and anger, but fear. Despite what he had just said, Mark realized that the executive committee chairman was afraid of losing his position. The time had long passed when he had been guided by faith in the truth and value of the idea he served. The years of office had brought weariness, the habit of living well, and much else that separated him more and more from the environment of his youth. Gone, too, was his confidence in his own powers; his devotion to the ideal had died; and all that remained was a lonely man who was conscious of his dependence on the will of another. Locked into the gigantic mechanism of the

ruling party, all he had left was his realization of the necessity for obedience.

Next morning at dawn he and Surov left the village to drive to the lumber camps.

The sleigh runners squeaked smoothly and easily over the packed snow. The driver, wrapped in an enormous sheepskin greatcoat, sat motionless, leaving the horses to follow the road. For a long time they drove without conversation. At last Bayenko remarked: "I'm afraid I let myself go too far yesterday."

"You didn't say anything special yesterday," Mark replied at last. Bayenko sat huddled for a while, then he threw back the broad collar of his fur coat. Evidently he felt a compulsion to talk.

"Every man goes off the rails at some time in his life," he said. "Take yourself, Mark; you don't always keep in step. Before I left, Yuzhny had a talk with me. He assured me you were taking a wrong road; you're very critical of lots of things."

Mark smiled. Only yesterday Bayenko himself had been indulging in an extreme form of criticism, and now he was lecturing Mark on the limits of criticism permitted to a Communist.

"You've got no fear, Mark," he went on. "You haven't sufficient political wisdom."

Mark turned and looked at him, and felt sorry for this man, who shared his own conflict, the conflict between the personal element, the longing for freedom, perhaps even anarchy of action, and the Party element, which shackled their wills.

"After all, Comrade Bayenko, you joined the Bolshevik Party in 1905," Mark rejoined. "You were in prison during the czarist regime. And all in order to raise the working people up. Now you've become a bigwig—chairman of the regional executive committee isn't a small post. But when you see that, after all, the workers are being driven under the yoke by such swine as Yuzhny, do you really think we ought to keep silent? Why? Just in order to keep our jobs? But the only reason you need that job is in order to serve the cause to which you devoted your youth..."

"That's true, every word of it; only the times are changed. In those days we had czarism to fight against, but whom are we to fight now, when we ourselves are in power?"

"Fight the things that are wrong. Other people have got the power

now, but the wrongs remain the same. In what way is Yuzhny any better than a czarist gendarme?"

The remark amused Bayenko. He almost shouted into Mark's face: "You're crazy! Why, Yuzhny's worth twenty gendarmes. You could always talk to a gendarme, but you try talking to Yuzhny. You have tried, and you know."

An hour had passed since they set out. Now they sat silent again. It was still dim in the forest, and it was difficult to see the branches of the trees overhanging the road. Suddenly the driver pulled up the horses. Ahead of them appeared a dark mass of people, coming on in twos, saws over their shoulders and axes in their belts. Bayenko turned back his coat collar and stared at the men as they came up.

"What's your assignment?" he called to them.

A question in that form could be asked only of prisoners, as no other workers were sent on "assignments." And Bayenko had good reason for thinking these men were prisoners, for there were two armed escorts at the tail of the column. The first couple halted, and the others halted behind them. One of the two came across to the sleigh and attempted to see who was in it. Speaking in a deep voice, he said weightily:

"We, my dear comrade, are not prisoners; we're free collective farmers from the collective farm named after our dear leader Stalin."

Bayenko started up and leaned half out of the sleigh. The two escorts with rifles came up. The chairman's voice was quiet and curt as he asked, "Why are you escorting collective farmers under arms?"

"Why, if you let these devils go unescorted they'll all scatter at once," a little soldier answered. "They're such a stupid lot they'd run away. But you know, they wouldn't try to get back home; they'd stay somewhere else for a week. But who are you to ask?" he began to stammer, realizing that he was answering a stranger.

"Drive on!" Bayenko hoarsely ordered, nudging the driver in the back. They started off again.

As they passed round a sharp bend, they saw a group of low buildings ahead of them. The collective farmers sent to cut lumber were accommodated in these so-called habitations, miserable barracks that were buried almost to the roofs in snowdrifts. A tall, gaunt man in a new G.P.U. uniform hurried out to meet them. As he approached the sleigh, his pimply face was fixed in a stern frown; but he recognized Bayenko and at once dissolved into a servile smile

and bowed. He conducted Bayenko and Mark into one of the barracks. It was large and well lit, clean and warm; bedsteads provided with sheets and blankets were set out round the walls. There were six guards in the barracks; evidently some of them had just come off duty, as they were getting ready to turn into bed. One soldier was cranking a gramophone. From behind a partition came the appetizing smell of roast meat.

"This is the accommodation for the camp guard," the pimply officer proudly announced.

"Show me the accommodation for the collective farmers," Bayenko asked morosely.

The barrack he showed them was smoky, cold, and filthy. Bunks were ranged in three tiers along the walls, with space only enough for a man to lie down in between each tier. There was no sign of any provision for cooking, although the collective farmers had to prepare their own food and drink.

The officer of the guard talked almost without a break.

"I beg to report, Comrade Plenipotentiary of Comrade Stalin, that the camp now contains four hundred and two men from five collective farms. Even so the guard consists of no more than twelve men. It is very difficult to maintain guard with such a small number, but we have undertaken our socialist obligation. In order to improve our work I have asked that several rolls of barbed wire be sent, and we'll set it up round the camp. There will be fewer escapes then."

"But these men aren't under arrest!" Bayenko said through his teeth.

"Perfectly true, Comrade Plenipotentiary of Comrade Stalin. The order issued by the head of the Far Eastern Department of the G.P.U., Comrade Dorinas, states that we must treat the comrade collective farmers with all respect, and our task consists only in not allowing them to escape from the lumber camps. The construction of socialism demands—"

"I'm not interested to hear what the construction of socialism demands." Bayenko turned pale. "Just show me the camp, that's all!"

They went into a barrack in which the air was heavy with the stench of suppurating wounds. The officer in charge crackled away incessantly:

"And here, as you see, Comrade Plenipotentiary of Comrade Stalin, we've organized a hospital. Really, it's not a hospital, as there's no

one here who can give treatment, but an isolation ward. We separate the sick so that they shouldn't get in the way of the fit. There are seven men in here; I've released them from work.... This one's very bad, and it's quite likely he'll die; this one was wounded last night while trying to escape. And these two have got frostbite in the foot. I suspect..." He put his mouth to Bayenko's ear. "I suspect they got frostbite deliberately, to dodge work. I'm holding an inquiry."

Bayenko shifted away from him fastidiously.

"The others are sick with something I don't understand," the man continued. "But, of course, they're ill; otherwise I wouldn't have released them from work. As a candidate for Party membership I realize that the country needs timber."

Mark moved closer to Bayenko and put his hand on his sleeve, to distract the chairman's attention. He was afraid of what he saw in his face. But it was too late. Bayenko bent over the sick man and raised him by the shoulders.

"Take hold of his feet," he ordered the officer.

"But, Comrade Plenipotentiary of Comrade-"

"Take hold of him, blast you, you..." Such a torrent of curses streamed from his lips that the man turned pale and fell back, staring at him in terror.

They carried two of the sick men to the guards' barrack. Bayenko and the officer took one, Mark and the soldier-driver managed the second. Bayenko led the way to a corner where a bed was standing a little apart. It was covered with a good blanket and even had a snow-white pillow.

"That's mine!" the officer stammered. But Bayenko gave him such a look that he thought it better to hold his peace. The sleeping guards were turned out of their beds, and, under Mark's direction, they brought across the rest of the sick men. Glowering at the officer, Bayenko hoarsely roared:

"You're not a candidate for the Party; you're a son of a bitch. Here are men rotting under your very eyes, and you're amusing yourselves with a gramophone. Drive to your bloody chief at once and bring back a doctor. And meanwhile hand over your Party ticket; on my way back I'll have another talk with you."

As Bayenko and Mark left the camp the officer danced servilely round their sleigh.

"I ask you to believe," he said in an ingratiating tone, "that there'll

be hot water provided for the camp, and I'll arrange for a doctor at once; only, Comrade Plenipotentiary of Comrade Stalin, you must realize that it's nothing to do with me. All the orders come from my superiors, and I'm always ready to follow the Party directives and I've taken on myself the socialist obligation—"

"Drive on!" Bayenko ordered moodily.

Mark had the officer's Party ticket in his brief case. It was not the only one in the case; Bayenko had collected a dozen other Party tickets by virtue of the powers Stalin had conferred on him.

"Did you see all that?" Bayenko turned to Mark.

His companion made no comment. There was nothing he could say. What if Bayenko had shouted at the pimply-faced officer? That wasn't the point. Bayenko was simply using him as a safety valve, and he himself knew quite well that he couldn't alter anything fundamentally. He would never dare, for instance, to demand that Dorinas should withdraw the order for guards to be placed over the collective farmers. "A brave man among sheep!" Mark thought angrily. Suddenly a stifled laugh came from the driver in front of them.

"What's that for?" Bayenko asked in astonishment.

"I just remembered the way you let fly at him. It made even his pimples blush!" the soldier replied, laughing again. Bayenko snorted contentedly into his coat collar.

They were approaching the lumber camps in which prisoners were employed. Vague knockings and shouts reached their ears. Soon they saw men working among the trees. Leaving the sleigh, Bayenko and Mark went to the men, plunging through the deep snow. Now they could clearly hear the whine of saws, the ringing blows of axes. Occasionally a tree crown shook feverishly, then, with a mortal crack, hurtled down and thudded heavily on the snowy ground. Men were working on the felled trunks, cleaning them of branches and boughs. Straining and snorting, horses dragged the heavy logs down to the road and then away.

Mark examined the prisoners closely. Ragged, emaciated, they were working with a dull desperation. They greeted and accompanied the two men with silence as Bayenko and Mark made their way farther into the clearing. Here and there guards in warm sheepskins and felt boots were standing motionless.

Mark's attention was drawn to a man standing frozen into a deathly stillness on a felled tree trunk. He was a prisoner; Mark saw

that at once by his thin, exhausted-looking face and his rags. He went up to the man. There was a dry glitter in the prisoner's eyes; his head was drawn down between his shoulders; his hands were hidden in the rags that covered his chest. A fine, irresistible shiver was shaking all his body. His youthful face was almost transparent and blue with the cold; his lower jaw was trembling like all the rest of his body, and his teeth were quietly chattering. He raised first one foot, then the other, in an attempt to get warm; but obviously he was on the very brink of exhaustion and might drop at any moment.

Mark had heard before of this punishment inflicted on prisoners. They were made to stand on a fallen trunk without moving, for an hour, or even two or three. Sometimes they dropped dead. As he looked at the man, he saw mute entreaty in his eyes. He turned and went to the guard standing by a blazing fire, and pointing to Bayenko, who had gone on ahead, told him, "That's the plenipotentiary of Comrade Stalin. He wants the prisoner to be freed from further punishment."

The snub-nosed youngster guarding the prisoners didn't look a bad sort, but you can't judge a man by his face. He took the cigarette out of his mouth, spat, and answered: "He can get down, damn his eyes! I'll forgive him, damn his eyes!"

The half-frozen prisoner fell off the trunk into a drift, scrambled painfully to his feet, and hobbled away. Mark watched him go, then went after Bayenko.

He found Bayenko confronting a short, broad-shouldered man in military uniform and soft, warm, felt boots. He had an expressionless, square-cut face and was the commandant of the concentration camp, in which there were five thousand prisoners. About a hundred of the prisoners were standing around, listening to Bayenko as he said in an irritable, fuming tone:

"But all the same, why have the men been sent out to work without the tea and piece of bread they're entitled to?"

"I'll explain that to you when we're alone, Comrade Bayenko," he answered. "The reason is very political and secret."

"But where's the secret in men being sent out to work hungry? Are they under punishment?"

"Yes."

[&]quot;What for?"

"I must tell you in private. I am observing my instructions to the letter."

The camp itself was not far off—a score or so of low barracks and an entire underground town, including several hundred smoky dugouts. The camp commandant led the way in his sleigh. A little off the road was a long shed guarded by a sentry. The commandant got out and led Bayenko and Mark inside. At first sight the long, twilit interior seemed entirely without interest, and Mark thought drearily that evidently the commandant had decided to show them all the work of his camp. Several dozen logs were lying on the earthen floor; they looked no different from the many they had seen in the forest.

"Take a good look at them," the commandant said. "This is a museum of the counterrevolution."

Bending down and examining them closely, Mark and Bayenko saw that each log had a small patch cleared of bark and covered with lettering. On one of them they read the inscription written with indelible pencil: "This timber has been cut by slaves. We are perishing. There are millions of us Russians in concentration camps. Save us!"

On another log were the words: "When you buy this timber, you are buying our blood."

The commandant showed them log after log, as if he were a guide showing them over a museum. He revealed carefully carved-out hollows in which the prisoners had inserted letters; he drew Bayenko's attention to places where the bark had been raised very slightly; long letters describing the conditions of forced labor in the forest had been extracted from under the bark. Then he led them to a log lying right by the entrance. He bent down and with his knife removed a slip of bark. The white expanse of the heartwood was revealed; the words were carved neatly into it: "Will no one help the Russians whom Stalin has turned into slaves and forced to cut this timber? Help us!"

"This is the latest specimen," the commandant said. "It was found last night among logs already hauled down to the river. And that's why all the prisoners have had their bread and hot tea stopped this morning."

"Have you established who did it?" Bayenko asked.

"Not yet, but we shall. I guarantee you that, Comrade Executive Committee Chairman."

Bayenko did not wish to enter the camp. He had no power to help the prisoners. This was the kingdom of the G.P.U., and he was only a representative of the Soviet Government. To all his remarks the commandant gave the stereotyped reply that he was acting in accordance with his instructions, and only within the limits of those instructions had he any power to accept instructions from the Comrade Chairman of the Executive Committee. Bayenko rejected the commandant's offer of hospitality; he felt averse to spending a night in a concentration camp. Moreover, he could feel that he was about to have one of his attacks of melancholia, which always ended in a violent bout of drinking. And at such times it was better that he should be in some quiet, dark corner than under the eyes of Dorinas' men.

That same night, while Bayenko and Mark slept, something was going on in the house where Mark had met Alexander and Ostap. There was a small group of men in the kitchen. The majority were old, bearded peasants with weather-beaten faces. They greeted Ostap and Alexander silently. When they were assembled, Ostap bent down at the stove and drew a packet of papers from beneath it. He slowly spread them out on the table, thoughtfully stroked his cheeks, then ran his eyes over the men gathered round him.

"Today is Wednesday; action has been fixed for Saturday," he began. "We shall start operations at eight in the evening. Everybody we have listed here is to be arrested within fifteen minutes, quicker if possible. Their families are not to be touched. There are to be no unauthorized lynchings; everybody will act in accordance with what we have agreed, strictly to the plan. But, to provide against all contingencies, Alexander will read out the plan of operations again."

Alexander picked up a sheet of paper from the table. His voice was dry, his tone resolute. "The village of Kramarovo will move off first; it's the nearest to the frontier. Sixty-four men with fowling pieces and other weapons will attack the frontier post at Bolshaya Luka at nine forty-five. Here there are not more than twenty frontier guards. After dealing with them, the men will split into two forces. One will move to the right, the other to the left. The one going to the right must reach the village of Vatanino, where the frontier guards have their staff headquarters. The staff is to be destroyed; the rank and file guards are to be bound and left. The inhabitants are to be

informed that we are retiring into Manchuria, and anyone who wishes can join us. The force moving to the left must reach the settlement of Gremechy and eliminate all the frontier posts. As a result we shall have three miles of open frontier to cross. Meanwhile, the women and children will be crossing to the Manchurian side of the river. That side is almost unguarded. But if there is any attempt to stop us, the Chinese are to be bound or driven off.

"The other villages are to cross immediately after Kramarovo, and in the same spot. The Kramarovo forces will remain at their posts until notified that the operation is completed. Then they will cross over straight ahead. The staff headquarters for the operation will be at the mine. The column of prisoners released from the mine will pass through under cover of the villages of Ramino and Rybachy. The staff must be provided with three liaisons and ten men from each village to act as rear guard. These men must approach the mine through the taiga, bringing any prisoners with them. Is everything clear?"

"Ouite clear!"

"All instructions must be carried out implicitly," Ostap added. "The chief thing is to ensure that no outsiders should get wind of our plan or any traitor betray it. For this reason the people are not to be informed of it until the very last moment."

Late on Saturday afternoon the collective farmers engaged in timber-felling in the forests had hardly made themselves comfortable at home when armed men went from window to window, shouting, "Get ready! We're advancing." "Where to? What's it all about?" "We're going off to Manchuria. We've served Stalin long enough."

The villagers were bewildered, the women began to raise a howl; but meanwhile armed men had burst into the headquarters of the local Party secretariat, had seized the secretaries and the soviet chairmen, and had dragged them outside, shouting and jeering. The peasants ran up and, seeing the hated officials who had done so much to ruin them, flung themselves on them. When the solid mob broke away only human remains were left on the ground. The peasants scratched their heads at what they had done and remarked: "Now there's nothing for it but to go off to Manchuria!" They hurried home, flung their household belongings onto their carts, led out the horses from the collective-farm stables and harnessed them, tied the cows

to the backs of the carts, threw on their fowl and other poultry, alive or dead; on top of the goods they put their children, the old, and the helpless. Then they drove out of the yards to take their places in the line, ready to set off.

It was completely dark, but the keen-eyed villagers noted that some sort of order was being imposed. Armed men were drawn up in rank; commanding voices—their own neighbors' voices—were issuing orders; and they began to believe in the possibility of crossing the river in safety. Those who had doubted, who had not yet decided, ran back to their houses and piled their goods on their own carts, if they had horses left, or on others if not.

The armed men marched off in the darkness. The train of carts slowly set off, to the agitated and protesting lowing of cattle, the joyous barking of dogs. The last cart drove out; the village, which had been the home of generations of peasants, was left deserted, dead.

Meanwhile, the armed men had advanced to the bank of the river marking the frontier. Several broke away and vanished into the darkness in ones and twos. The positions of the frontier posts were well known, and they were easily found. Noiselessly, like apparitions, the men stole out of the forest toward the frontier line. The watchdogs grew excited on their chains; the guards peered anxiously about, but they could see and hear nothing. They released the safety catches of their firearms and waited. Silent shadows emerged quite close to them. They at once opened a desperate fire. One or two of the shadows groaned and fell, but already the guards were struggling in the grip of other shadows; rifle butts were brought down on their heads.

The commands in the frontier villages were alarmed and confused. Shots could be heard coming from the frontier. The commanders sent out men to discover what was happening, but they returned without information. Now rockets, green, red, and white, were shooting into the sky above the villages. The peasants poured into the streets, many of them in panic, but others with weapons. The armed men dealt with the command headquarters, burst into the barracks. The commanders were killed; the officers beaten up; the guards left alive were bound and locked into an icy storehouse.

Two men went up the steps of the high veranda to the neat little house in the Kholodny mine center. Someone inside shot back the bolts; the door was noiselessly opened. One of the two men remained on the veranda; the other entered the dark house. Someone's hand was

laid on his shoulder, and he was gently guided toward a farther, lighted room. The man went toward this room, and through the halfopen door saw Razin sitting at the table, cleaning his Mauser. As the door creaked, the G.P.U. man raised his head; the look of indifference on his face was replaced by one of surprise and fear. He was confronted by a tall man in a short, fur-lined coat. A steely pistol gleamed in the man's hand. "What ... who are you? What d'you want?" Razin stammered. The man stood silent, staring into his eyes. Seized with terror, Razin slipped down to his knees, begging. Ostap shot, and Razin crumpled to the floor. Ostap waited till the body was quite still, then went out. Now there were three shadows—two men's and a woman's-on the veranda. Shouting and hubbub were coming from the barracks. Shots from the direction of the guards' quarters. The prisoners poured out of their barracks; someone shouted to them that their day of liberation had come and they would be conducted into Manchuria.

Ostap silently went down the steps. As he reached the ground, a rosy light began to spread through the sky. Tongues of flames burst from the director's house. Now the barracks were burning and the guards' quarters behind them. In the uncertain light people were rushing about, apparently in aimless confusion. But Ostap and Alexander, watching those movements, could see that they were in accordance with the plan. The shouts and the cries were not to be contained within any plan.

"I'll go to the women," Lena said.

"Yes, do, Lena," Ostap replied.

Bayenko and Mark drove into a little village, a hamlet of a couple of dozen houses. It greeted them with a disconcerting silence. Not even the sound of a dog barking. If they had driven farther into the village, they would have noticed broken articles lying about, doors wide open, a dead man huddled beside the well. But the horses, and Bayenko, were tired; he gave the driver orders to turn in at the first house from which light could be seen coming through the shutters.

Mark knocked long and persistently at the shutter. At last someone came to the door. It opened with a mournful creak, and Mark saw an old woman holding high a kerosene lamp to see who was knocking.

"We want to come in for the night, grannie," he said. "Don't be afraid; we won't do any harm."

"You can," the old woman mumbled; "there's plenty of room."

Fortunately, they had brought food with them, for there was nothing in the house, and the woman who had let them in was the only living soul in it. When Mark asked where everybody was, she did not reply, but retreated behind the partition. The driver led the horses into the yard, unharnessed them, and put them in the stable. Bayenko entered the hut, threw his fur coat over a bench and wearily dropped onto it. Mark and the driver brought in armfuls of wood from the yard and lit the stove; the warmth stole through the house.

They hurriedly ate the canned food and bread they had brought with them, and Bayenko was soon snoring noisily. The driver began to accompany him in a higher register. Mark lay down on a heap of straw; but though he was tired, he could not sleep. Where had the inhabitants of this house gone? Not even a dog was to be heard. That was particularly disturbing. He had a vague feeling of uneasiness, and he began to strain his ears to catch any other sounds than those of the two men's snores. He groped for the driver's rifle and drew it nearer to himself, then put his hand into his jacket pocket, breathing more easily as he felt his pistol.

He was just falling off to sleep when he heard the furious baying of dogs. As his mind cleared, he caught the tones of human voices outside at the gate. He started up and laid the rifle across his knees. Someone began to bang violently on the shutters and the door. In the darkness he shifted quietly toward the porch and heard someone shout in the distance:

"They must be here. Here's their sleigh. And the horses are in the stable."

Outside the door a voice he thought familiar exclaimed, "So the dogs led us aright, damn their eyes!"

He went to the door, and called, "Who's there?"

"Comrades! We've been sent to look for you," the same voice shouted. "We're guards from the camp."

Mark had already identified the voice as coming from the snubnosed guard who had been standing over the prisoners a few days ago. He opened the door. The cold, starry sky hung above him, and by the starlight everything, even the faces of the three men at the door, seemed bluish and heavy. Several saddled horses were tethered to the gateposts.

"The camp commandant has sent us to find the Comrade Chair-

man," one of the three said hurriedly. "The camp commandant orders—I mean, he asks you to come at once to the camp."

"What's the matter?" Bayenko's voice came from behind Mark.

"A rising at the Kholodny mining center or in the villages round about. The camp commandant has sent us to secure the safety of the Comrade Chairman. I'm the deputy commandant."

Mark felt Bayenko beginning to tremble behind him, and there was a note of bewilderment and misery in the chairman's voice as he asked:

"What did you say? Surely not a rising? Now where can we go?"

"The most reliable spot is our camp," the soldier answered coldly. "But you've got prisoners there, and they'll revolt, too!" Bayenko exclaimed.

He turned and led the way into the house. Mark tried to light the lamp, but Bayenko seized him by the arm. "For God's sake! They'll see the light and come!" he said hoarsely. They swiftly collected their things in the darkness; the officer flung the heavy fur coat round Bayenko as he went out. Meanwhile, their driver had harnessed the horses, and a few moments later they were driving away. Bayenko insisted that the deputy commandant was to sit with him in the sleigh, and Mark mounted the G.P.U. man's horse. He was glad, for he had been unpleasantly astonished at the chairman's fear; he had never thought that this big, disheveled man would be so easily panicked. But as he rode along on the little horse, he did not stop to think about Bayenko; his mind turned to those at the mine and in the village where he had met Alexander and Ostap. Would they be able to help Lena? Beside Mark was riding the snub-nosed man who was so fond of damning people's eyes.

"How far is it to the mine?" Mark suddenly asked him.

"About fifteen miles; but less than twelve if you take the direct road," he answered.

Mark touched up his horse and overtook the sleigh. But when he heard the chairman and the officer deep in conversation, he changed his mind, deciding not to break in on them, but to slip off without asking permission. He reined in his horse and asked the soldier in the rear for directions as to the way. The man told him of a forest track that would bring him out on the main road to the mine. And he turned off into the taiga.

It was not easy to follow that track, for it ran almost imperceptibly

through the virgin forest. But at last he came out on the main road. The starlight was not strong, but it enabled him to see. His mount moved along quietly.

"Are guards posted on all the roads?" Ostap asked the group of men accompanying him.

"Yes."

Several former prisoners hurried up to the fire where they were standing. The men were breathing heavily; evidently they had been running.

"Some of the prisoners don't want to go with us," one of them gasped out.

"Why not?" Ostap asked in astonishment.

"There wasn't time to question them. They just don't want to leave their native land, that's all. What are we to do with them?"

Ostap stood thinking for a moment; then he answered, "Tie them up. Tie up to trees all who don't want to go."

"But why tie them up? Let them stay behind if they want to," someone remarked.

"No; they've got to be tied up," Ostap insisted. "If we leave them free, they'll be shot on the ground that they helped us. If we tie them up, they can say it's because they offered resistance."

As the men went off to act on this instruction, Alexander stepped into the firelight. "A beautiful firework display we've organized for Stalin's benefit," he said excitedly to Ostap.

The mining center was one raging sea of flame. The barracks, the offices, the employees' dwellings were blazing to the sky. Ostap turned his back on the sight and gazed into the taiga. No report had yet come in concerning the crossing of the frontier, and he was beginning to feel anxious. His face was clouded; he had been responsible for many executions that day. Already several groups of bound men had been brought to him from various villages; Ostap had run his eyes down the lists and had coldly told them: "You've been responsible for oppressing the people and doing them violence. Their blood is on your hands. You are to be hanged." Many bodies were hanging from trees along the edge of the forest.

Still no news arrived from the river crossing. And at any moment Soviet troops might be arriving. "Alexander," Ostap said, "ride and check up on the guards posted on the road to the lumber camp."

Alexander went off under the trees; a moment or two later he led out a horse, mounted, and rode off into the taiga.

The powerful little horse carried Mark steadily on. Now a light rosy gleam tinged everything around him. He could not tell where it was coming from, but it grew brighter and brighter, till even the sky was flushed with rose. Suddenly the horse carried him out onto a hillside, and in the distance he saw a fiery pillar. The mine was blazing. His heart beat violently. He dug his heels into the animal's flanks. But now he was beginning to tire. The mining center seemed quite close. He had no idea what he would do when he got there; he had no idea what he would find there; but he saw Lena's pale face before him, and it drew him on with irresistible force.

Suddenly the horse came to a stop, rearing on to its hind legs. A voice shouted, "Halt!" Before he could pull out his pistol someone seized him round the waist and dragged him out of the saddle. He tried to resist, but he was gripped by several men. In a moment his hands were tied behind him, and he was hauled to his feet. Three men, breathing heavily, stared at him with hatred in their eyes. Setting the barrel of a fowling piece against his chest, one of them forced him back until he was against a tree trunk. The other two searched through his pockets and took out his pistol and documents.

The dancing light of the flames playing on Mark's face revealed that he was smiling—a strange, broad, joyous smile. One of his captors began to stutter with rage. "What are you laughing at, you vermin? We're just going to do for you, and you're smiling!" But the smile did not leave his face. Meanwhile, another man was examining his wallet. A large brooch fell out of it, gleaming in the rosy light as it dropped into the snow. The man picked it up and looked at it closely. "Look at this rubbish he's carrying about with him! A woman's brooch with a bird on it!" He put the brooch back in the wallet and took out a small booklet in a cardboard sheath. Striking a match, he read slowly: "Party Card No.——Mark Surov; Communist Party Member."

"You could see at once the sort he was!" the man who had driven Mark back to the trunk exclaimed. "A Communist! You are a Communist, aren't you?" he demanded. Mark did not reply but nodded his assent. "A leather coat, a pistol in his pocket, and he's laughing, too! Of course he's a Communist!" another declared. "String

him up, the vermin!" Mark still smiled, and the peasant choked with fury. "Laughing, the swine! Take that!"

He brought the heavy rifle butt down on Mark's head; Mark slowly slipped down the trunk and lay motionless at its foot.

When he regained consciousness, he saw above him a woman's face, amazingly familiar, lit up by the rosy gleam of the conflagration.

"He's coming to," she said, and a gentle hand wiped the blood off his cheek.

"Where am I?" he asked thickly.

"They'd just decided to hang him when I rode up," Alexander's voice said. "I took him across my saddle and brought him in."

Then Ostap's voice, calm and businesslike: "Is the skull smashed?" Alexander's voice: "I don't think so."

Supporting himself on the woman's arm, Mark sat up. Now he realized that it was Lena. He gently pushed her hand away and saw Ostap and Alexander, standing a pace or two behind her. Mark understood all. And once more an unexpected smile played over his face. "So we've met again after all," he said. "Well, are you going to hang me? Or will you shoot me because of my military record?" he asked with a sneer.

Ostap went up to him and stared into his eyes. "Don't laugh, Mark; this is no time for laughing. We aren't going to kill you; we know of nothing you've done to deserve death."

"You don't know!" Mark challenged. "But I'm a Communist, I'm in charge of a regional department. Just the sort to have a rope round my neck."

"We know which ones to put the rope round," Alexander intervened in a sharp, strange tone. "But we won't have you laughing at us. The men on the road told me you were laughing. We shan't take your life, but for God's sake stop laughing, Mark. To laugh at us is to laugh at the people."

Mark's face turned pale and wretched. Lena bent over him and wiped away the blood streaming down his cheeks. He saw that she was weeping.

"You mean you won't kill me?" he asked.

"We give you a choice, Mark," Alexander said. "You know now what's happened. The frontier villages are going over to the other side of the river, into Manchuria. That's the peasants' answer to violence. The people are seeking their freedom, and in the name of

freedom they're leaving their native land. Two thousand people who yesterday were Stalin's slaves today become people without a native land, but free. With them will go all those here whom you know. Professor Borodin's already crossed the frontier. And we're just about to leave. Come with us, Mark."

"No, I shan't go with you!" Mark said quietly. His throat had suddenly gone dry, and he had difficulty in speaking. "My place is here, on this soil...."

"Our place is here, too," Ostap said. "But all the same we're going. Here the choice is to be either a slave or the overseer of slaves. Do you really want to be an overseer, Mark?"

"No, I don't. But this is my land. My fathers and forefathers irrigated it with their sweat and blood. How can I abandon it?"

Alexander caught the sound of gathering tears, and he felt a deep tenderness for his old friend. Gently and warmly, he said, "You won't go with us, Mark; I know that. But at least let us part as friends. You are our friend, you know that, Mark."

"And you are my friends," Mark said sadly. "Life is driving us in different directions, but you are my friends.... I wish you luck. Though I doubt whether my wish will come true. Your country will call you."

"And we shall return," Ostap replied. "But tell me, before we go, why were you laughing just now and in front of the men on the road?"

Mark was holding Lena's hand, and it seemed as if he now spoke only to her. "I thought it was the end. Everything would be clear. Mark Surov had lived, he had fought for the Soviet regime, and had died for it. What could be clearer and more definite than that? Do you understand, Lena?"

"I understand, Mark," she whispered. "You wanted to avoid the future in which you no longer believe. You're afraid to admit that you're at a dead end, and death would be a way out for you. You think that if you'd died at the hands of your Party's enemies, you'd be worthy of your father and the men in gray greatcoats whom you remember so well. But you're making a mistake, Mark—a bitter and terrible mistake."

"I've already made a mistake, Lena," he said quietly, pressing his cheek against her palm.

"Come with us," she implored. "I've always loved you, Mark."
He passed his eyes slowly over the conflagration, the taiga, the

sky sprinkled with sparks, rested his eyes on Ostap and Alexander, smiled bitterly at Lena, and said, "No, my place is here."

In the early morning light the green forage caps of the frontier guards appeared among the trees. Just outside the mining center they released Mark from a tree trunk. His head had been properly bandaged; his face was caked with dry blood. At his feet was a wallet. As soon as he was set free, he stooped and picked it up. In it were the hummingbird brooch and all his documents. Smiling wanly, he put the case into his breast pocket. The soldiers passed on between the trees, releasing prisoners, cutting down bodies.

Mark stood gazing silently at the heaps of glowing ashes—all that was left of the mining center of Kholodny.



5. Loneliness

THE Pacific Ocean hurls its heavy billows against the harsh land that stretches in an endless gray streak along the Far Eastern edge of the Russian soil. Even the coastal hills, and the cliffs jutting out into the ocean do not modify the general impression of joyless monotony conveyed by this barren land.

A small coastal steamer voyaging between Sakhalin and Vladivostok was pursuing a course not far from the shore. Occasionally on that shore buildings came into sight, and then the vessel gave a long blast on her siren, turned toward the jetty, and anxiously gushing steam, sidled up to it. After taking on goods and passengers, she turned away from the land and once more plowed persistently through the waves.

Mark paced slowly up and down the deck. He ran a bored and indifferent gaze over the watery waste, ignoring the other passengers gathered in little groups. Halting at the taffrail, he stared at the stern coast showing in the distance, as though its grayness and monotony were in some way linked with his own spiritual world—a world just as gray and monotonous, conveyed in a single word: loneliness.

The events at the mining center had had a number of consequences. The flight of the frontier-district peasants into Manchuria had shown that the machinery of government was functioning badly. Such a flight could not have been carried through without long and thorough preparation. The peasants had carved their way out of their native land over the bodies of those who represented authority; the victims of the people's anger had been the petty Party and government officials. Their ruthless execution indicated the strength with which the people hated the regime. Many months had passed since those events, and summer had come. But instructions were still coming in from Moscow: "Personal from Comrade Stalin. Investigate. . . . Decide who was responsible."

Dorinas cunningly presented the situation in such a light that responsibility for what had occurred fell on the regional party organization, and therefore on Vavilov and Bayenko. Recently they had both been assigned new assistants, and that could mean only one thing: Stalin was preparing to dismiss the present regional government heads. Bayenko and Vavilov reacted differently to this threat. Bayenko, whom the incidents at Kholodny had shaken so badly that he had lost all control over himself, lost heart completely. Stalin's trust had guaranteed him his high position, and, say what he liked, he preferred to remain an oppressor rather than become one of the oppressed. He tried to ingratiate himself with his new assistant and with Dorinas; he wrote miserable reports to Moscow, every word of them expressing his fear, his entreaty for and timid hope of pardon. Remembering his outburst in the peasant's hut, Mark irritably thought that Bayenko was worse than a swine.

Vavilov's reaction was very different. The threat had restored him to strength and energy; the Party secretary bubbled with energy now as he had not done for a long time. The features of his aging face had grown sharper, and an expression of determination and hard obduracy had appeared in his eyes. He hurled a whole series of accusations against Dorinas. A stern struggle began between the Party organization and the secret police. The outcome of that struggle was dependent on Stalin's decision.

On Mark, too, the events at the mining center had left their imprint. He was filled with an overmastering, corroding anxiety. "I've already made a mistake," he had confessed in that night when the earth had flamed to heaven. As he had watched the burning mine, the

armed, resolute men, he had realized that the edifice he and others like him were helping Stalin to build would crumble before the people's fury. Ever since that night he had been filled with anxiety, as though he had made that confession not to Lena, but to him himself—a confession that he had lost his road and had no idea how to get back to it. Now he was almost painfully conscious of the two elements within him, the one born of the Mark Surov who had been a son of the regiment and had absorbed the greatcoated soldiers' hard and inviolable faith in the future; the other turning him into a tiny cog in the monstrous machinery of government, ordering him, "Submit! Hold your peace! Do as you're told!"

Now he was returning from the island of Sakhalin, to which he had been sent by Vavilov, who was afraid the events of Kholodny would be repeated there. The northern part of the island, belonging to Russia, was largely inhabited by fishermen, and of late they had been sending cable after cable to the regional government. If these morose, uncommunicative people had started to make complaints about the local authorities, the situation must be really serious, and steps must be taken urgently. Otherwise the fishermen might decide to flee from the Soviet to the Japanese part of the island; it was even easier for them to cross the frontier than for the peasants of the Kholodny district. So Mark had been sent to Sakhalin.

As soon as he arrived, he saw the danger that Vavilov had feared. The fishermen greeted him sullenly and distrustfully. They put their complaints before him in few words. It had long been their practice to hand over their catches to the canning factories. That had been the arrangement even under the czarist regime. When the factories were taken over by the Soviet State Fisheries Trust, the same relations were maintained: the fishermen supplied fish to the factories, and the Trust paid them in cash, supplied them with provisions, and obtained new gear for them. But this year the Trust had abruptly informed them that it was no longer prepared to conclude contracts with them but proposed to take them on as members of the factory staffs, giving them monthly wages. Even the fishing gear was to be state-owned.

The fishermen were up in arms. They would not go out to fish, and some of the factories had been brought to a standstill. The Fisheries Trust had taken alarm, and the director promised Mark that he would notify the fishermen that very next day that he accepted their conditions. But at this stage a third power intervened, to make

window. They are very weak and can barely stand on their feet. Very close to my window an old man stopped, although he may not have been an old man at all. It is impossible to tell here who is old and who is young. The faces of all the prisoners have become covered with a layer of earth-colored soot. The prisoner who stopped in front of my window looked in my direction and whispered something. I understood that he wanted something to eat. Vesioly was still giving us our rations, and I had a piece of bread in my pocket. "Who are you?" I asked the prisoner. "Where are you from?" "From near Moscow. Stalin took everything away." His lips quivered, and a pinkish foam covered them. I handed the bread over to him. But even before it reached his hand, several other prisoners hurled themselves at him. A desperate struggle ensued. Soldiers rushed out of the house. They struck the prisoners on their heads with the butts of their rifles, separated the struggling bodies with their feet. Growls and stifled cries were heard, then everyone crawled away, only the one to whom I had given the bread remained. He lay facing the ground, his right hand, which had been holding the bread, closed tightly. He was dead.

Zatetski came over to me and said, "Your liberalism is needed by no one here. You gave a prisoner a piece of bread, and others strangled him trying to take it away. Learn to know life. In order that we may survive, these must perish. Such is the law of the survival of the fittest, and it is not we who can presume to change it." There was so much coldness and indifference in the eyes of Zatetski that I left without saying a word. I still find myself unable to accept the base role that it has fallen to my lot to play. But I know that I will play this role, for I want to live so much! The strangled prisoner remained under our window. Dozens of bodies are scattered around the house. They were shot by the guards when they attempted to kill the horses. How many of the prisoners are still alive in the camp? I do not know. Wherever you look, you see corpses. And still there are many left, many thousands. They crawl about the camp, or go off swaying into the taiga. Karo remains with me all the time. What does he want? If he is able to understand, he knows that I fear him and that I hate him. In the last few days Vesioly has ordered him to attack prisoners on three different occasions, and three times Karo threw himself on the victim, strangling him. Then Karo would return to the house and somberly come over to me.

Today I saw a prisoner returning to the camp with a horrible load. Some pinkish flesh was in his shaking hands. He had finished off one of the dying prisoners. According to Vesioly, there are already quite a few cannibals in our camp. Vesioly took a tommy gun from one of the soldiers and fired a short burst through the open window. The prisoner fell.

The hour has struck. Vesioly has given the signal for us to depart.

I do not know how many days have passed. Perhaps three days, and perhaps twenty. All that has happened to me since then seems to have been a nightmare. To make sure that it had all really happened, I returned today to the scene.

But I will tell everything in the order in which it took place. We had succeeded that early morning in bringing the horses to the house and harnessing them to the carts. We then drove the carts out and into the taiga. There were about four hundred of us, and there were about twenty carts loaded with food. The guards were well armed, and we, the civilian personnel, were armed, too. Behind us, suddenly a clamor and shouts arose. We could not move fast through the thick of the taiga, and the horses were able to pull the carts only with the greatest of efforts. The men helped the horses, but they too got stuck in the swampy soil. By noon we had gone not more than ten kilometers and were exhausted. The noise behind us increased; the prisoners were following in our steps.

We found ourselves surrounded by marshes through which it was impossible to move the carts and the horses. We faced the necessity of abandoning the carts and moving along the hillocks, but that would get us deeper into the taiga. Without any food it meant certain death. Everyone understood this. To turn back and follow the opposite direction was impossible, too. Behind us—the horde of prisoners. Vesioly called the officers to a brief consultation. Zatetski was among them. Upon returning, he informed us of the decision: to wait until the prisoners came close and then annihilate them. After this, we were to return to the camp and take an eastern direction.

The decision not to shoot came to me suddenly. I remembered Maria and thought that if I did this I would never be able to look into her eyes again. I took my rifle and left for the woods. I thought that with the aid of my rifle for hunting I might hold out for some time. I could not do otherwise.

I had reached the middle of a hill when shouts, wails, and the sound of gunfire reached my ears. I could see the place where our detachment had stopped. Vesioly had placed the men in a semicircle, as if a real battle against an attacking enemy was about to take place. The prisoners began to appear among the trees. They were moving chaotically, as if pushed on by an invisible hand. A salvo resounded. After the first shots the crowd stopped, but only for a few moments. A furious scream was heard. The horde pressed forward. Shot after shot came from the carts where Vesioly had placed his men wielding tommy guns and pistols.

Each step cost the prisoners a hundred dead. A veritable carpet of corpses was stretched through the forest. Nevertheless, the mob moved on. With fury, with savage cries, it moved on. Fresh mobs of prisoners appeared from under the trees. Some tottered, others crawled on all fours, not having the strength to get up on their feet. All sought to reach the carts loaded with food. Vesioly sent Karo forward. I saw how he threw himself under the feet of the approaching prisoners, how he hurled himself at their chests, and how they fell under the impact of his paws. But then they would rise again. Death no longer meant anything. The food carts became a gigantic magnet for the mass of unfortunates. Had Vesioly stepped aside, no one would have noticed him. But the soldiers with their smoking tommy guns were standing on the path to the carts, and the entire horde was moving toward them. I saw how the human tide reached the spot where Vesioly and his men were standing, and flooded it. The figure of Zatetski carrying his rifle flashed for an instant as he rushed into the bushes. The maddened crowd, hardly slowing down, moved on to the carts. Vesioly and his men stood their ground. They were crushed to death. There were no more shots. The food from the carts disappeared in an instant. New mobs kept crawling up from the woods. They seized the horses, killed them, and tore them to pieces on the spot. They sucked on shreds of horse skin. People writhing in stomach pains fell to the ground already covered with corpses. Karo ran toward me. His nose was stained with blood. Perhaps he should have been destroyed, but I found myself unable to level my rifle at him.

I have heard it said that a criminal is drawn to the scene of his crime. I wandered around in the taiga managing somehow to find food. A flock of birds hovered over the place where the massacre

occurred. Today I came back to the hill from which I had seen everything that day. The foul odor of decaying corpses hung about the area. Meat-eating animals gathered there from afar. Among them wolves and foxes could be seen. The beasts were in a comradely mood, for there was enough food for all. Fires were burning at the edge of the forest. I saw people squatting around them. They were cooking meat. The same kind of meat that the wolves and birds were feeding on. A truce had been declared between man and beast. All here were meat-eating animals. All were feasting at the same table.

Now I will try to reach Kogocha.

Well, I got through the marshlands. Tomorrow I will be in Kogocha. Maria, do you know that I am near and coming to you straight out of hell? One must run away from these monsters. Back to the taiga I go.

Twenty kilometers from Kogocha I met some hunters of the Yudehe tribe. This small, half-wild people wanders through the taiga, living according to ancient customs, and tries to keep away from cities. Overflowing rivers and flooded marshlands force the little tribe to come close to Kogocha. Their members now were hurrying back into the taiga.

"Russian, you should not go there," warned the oldest tribesman when I encountered a group of Yudehes. "It will be bad for you there."

"Why?" I asked.

"We know where you are coming from, and that is why we are telling you: Stop! You'll come to no good end."

And they told me how in the vicinity of Kogocha, those coming out of the taiga were being rounded up.

"It is bad for those who are caught. Soldiers shoot and kill them like squirrels. Oh, many killed already. Those are the orders of the big chief in Moscow—to leave no one alive from up there."

Nevertheless, I went forth in the direction of Kogocha. I had to see Maria. After I had gone several kilometers, a young Yudehe caught up with me, and wiping the sweat from his face, started to talk.

"Please do not go there, Russian. All our folks advise you not to go. The shaman said that if you are killed, the spirits will not send our tribe good hunting. Pray, do not go there..."

I begged the young Yudehe to take a letter to Kogocha, a note to Maria. The hunter left with my message, and I remained.

Toward evening when the hunter was due to return, I saw him running among the trees, pursued by someone. The hunter rushed up to me and in a panting voice urged, "Do run away, the chief is chasing me."

He handed me a folded piece of paper—a letter from Maria—at that moment the most important thing in the world for me.

"Aha, one more coal miner!" I heard a shout in my direction. From the corner of my eye I could see a soldier lifting his rifle. All that mattered to me was that letter from Maria. There was a growling, and Karo shot past me. The thud of a body falling, a groan, and five steps away a soldier in a G.P.U. uniform lies beside his rifle. His head is in a pool of blood. The native hunter disappeared.

It would require three days to get to the place Maria specified for our meeting. How can I tell her what I have decided to do? I will go to live with people who are doomed. But freedom awaits me there. She will understand that I have no other way out. I will not become one of those I saw behind the barbed wires of Vesioly's camp. And even such a fate is not likely for me. Probably a bullet would convert Peter Novikoff into nothingness. No, for me there is only one way out. To go to that outcast island off the Siberian coast where not a single undiseased person is to be found. Only there can I live in freedom, and there I will go. Maria! I know what this will mean to her.

Dearest Mother, you know that for your Peter there is only one path. You and Maria belong to a world in which I am no longer allowed to live. Understand and forgive....

Mark was aroused from a long reverie by the quiet splash of oars. He hastily pinned the notes back on the tree and disappeared into the bushes. He turned and through the branches saw a boat coming toward the bank. In it was a woman; she sent it through the water with powerful strokes. The bow scraped on the sand. She stepped onto the bank and raised her face to the sunlight—a youthful, beautiful face set with resolution. She looked about her in astonishment; the silence disconcerted her. She called quietly toward the bushes,

"Peter!... Peter!... Where are you, dearest?" She began to walk hurriedly along the bank, calling, "Peter!"

She stopped; evidently she had caught sight of the paper fastened to the tree. Through the bushes Mark watched her take it down. As she read her shoulders began to heave with sobs; then she slipped to the ground, as though she had lost all strength in her legs. Mark guessed that she must be the Maria to whom the note was addressed. He heard her crying a long time before she at last slowly got up and went to the boat, her head on her chest, a bitter misery in her face. She pushed the boat off from the bank, stepped into it, but did not row. As it drifted with the current, she sat gazing vacantly, her face shining with tears. Mark stared after her until the boat vanished round a bend. Only then did he stir. He walked away slowly, pondering on the tragedy of which he had been an involuntary witness.

A little later he crossed the river and reached the town. In the afternoon he received a telegram from Vavilov and Bayenko in answer to his. "Welcome back. The local bank will advance you cash."

At noon the following day he stepped down from the train at Khabarovsk. An automobile sent by Bayenko was waiting for him in the yard.

"You know, Comrade Surov, we all thought you must be dead." The young driver bared his teeth in a cheerful grin and sounded his hooter violently. "We heard you'd perished in the taiga. But now where to, Mark Timofeevich?"

"Where to?" Mark thought. Bayenko and Vavilov could wait; they both knew he was back. Why not straight to Katya? He pointed in the direction of the river, and the driver obediently swung the car round. He, like many others, knew of Surov's attachment and drove straight to the little house at which Mark had been a frequent visitor ... six months ago.

A strange woman answered his knock. Seeing the automobile at the gate, she gave him a friendly smile. Mark stared at her in bewilderment.

"Do you want us, comrade? Please come in," she said.

He followed her into Katya's room. But as soon as he entered, he saw it was not Katya's room. He glanced around helplessly. The bed with the four brass balls on the posts, the simple bedside table, the bookshelves with the paint peeling—all these were the same. But those clumsy chairs had been brought in since, there was a pierglass

where he had hung his coat, and colorful rugs hung on the walls. Turning to the woman, he asked her hoarsely:

"But where is . . . Katya Antina?"

"What are you staring at me like that for?" the woman cried, falling back.

"Where's Katya Antina?" he almost shouted. "What's happened to her?"

She retreated into a corner; but he advanced on her, demanding, "Speak, woman! For God's sake, speak!"

"I don't know, comrade," she said hurriedly. "There was a Russian or Chinese woman or someone living here before us, but we heard she'd gone away. I don't know for certain."

He dashed out of the room, ran down the steps, and flung himself into the automobile.

"Step on it!" he ordered the driver. The woman put her head out of the window and waved Mark's cap. But the automobile was already well away.

"No one knows anything, Mark Timofeevich," the driver said, glancing sidelong at Mark. "We heard all sorts of rumors. But if she was still in the town I'd have been sure to see her. It's three months now since she vanished, and nobody's seen her since. I wanted to tell you, but I just couldn't."

Some minutes later Mark was shown into the room where he had met the three men sitting at the round table. The same three were still sitting there. The same Japanese primers were on the table. "Vodka, cognac, liqueur?" the same man asked as before.

"Where is she?" Surov forced the words out.

The man looked at him fixedly and replied with emphasis on every word:

"There's no point in our concealing the truth from you. It wouldn't soften the blow at all.... Katya Antina's gone. And she won't be coming back. That's all we know. I can add that she performed a great service to her native country, and if she has... vanished, it must be because she rendered that service."

Mark sank slowly back into a chair. His burning eyes bored into the man, who went on in the same even, dispassionate tone:

"Katya Antina put very valuable clues into our hands. But our calculations went wrong somewhere and...this time we lost the trick. We know all about you, Comrade Surov, we trust you, and we

would like to soften the blow for you by telling you that she served her country, the country you are serving. You can accept our word that we've made the most searching investigations. We know someone called for her early in the morning, but we cannot make out why she opened the door, as we had forbidden her to do so. The neighbors heard a cry, but when they ran out there was no one to be seen. Only the traces of a sleigh, drawn by two horses. The traces were lost in the ruts of the main street. That is all we know. The one thing we can say with confidence is that it was the Japs' doing."

Mark slowly rose from his chair and fixed his burning, hate-filled eyes on the eyes of the man:

"You trust me, you say! I spit on your trust. You're a lot of swindling gamblers, playing with other people's lives. You forced the girl to do work she hated. You caught her on a hook baited with her father. And then you say, 'She served her country.' She hadn't even seen that country. You made it filthy to her. You've lost the life you staked, but your own lives go unscathed!"

He slammed the door as he went out. The man looked at his companions and pointed to his heart.

Furiously, rancorously, Mark Surov worked in his office, worked himself almost to a standstill. All his efforts to find out more about Katya were fruitless. Vavilov, Bayenko, Tomin, all interested themselves in the case, but they all sent for him only to tell him: "You must make the best of it. She's gone, and you'll never see her again." The army commander, Blucher, listened to his story and sent for his chief of military intelligence. But a few days later he asked Mark to call and told him with genuine warmth in his tone:

"I know what I've got to say will be a bitter pill for you, but Katya Antina is simply not to be traced. I understand how you feel; I'd help if I could. But there are many things impossible in this world. And it's impossible to find out what happened to the girl."

Night after night Mark Surov buried his teeth in his pillow, feeling not a cry, but a howl, rising in his throat and bursting from his lips. Then, in the middle of the night, he would go to his office, and the light would burn till morning. He worked furiously, frantically. But from time to time he raised his eyes from his papers, and his face was distorted with pain. "Forgive me, hummingbird... forgive me for losing you," he whispered. He felt that she was in the room with him,

that she was looking at him. Her eyes shone like stars as they turned to him in mute entreaty. "Don't leave me alone, Mark, I'm so afraid." "But I had to go, Katya. I had to go to help fight against death. I knew you'd wait for me, and I was needed there. I wanted to come back. But I came back too late." She took a step toward him, yet remained in the shadows beyond the range of the desk lamp. "You don't know how I waited for you, dearest," she whispered. "I know," he answered. "But you didn't come back, and those men made me . . . you know that, don't you, Mark?" "Yes, I know. Curse them!" "But it's all one now," she added. "I want to be with you," he quietly pleaded. "You're my hummingbird, and hummingbirds are lucky. I want to be with you." She stretched out her hands to him; he rose and went to her. One step, two steps, five steps—his hands came up against the chilly wall. He pressed his burning forehead to the wall. "She's gone," he whispered, "and she won't be coming back." He tore himself away and returned to his desk. "I think I'm going mad. But I won't ... I won't give way!" He buried himself in his papers again, and the policeman on guard outside the house saw that the light in that window on the second floor burned all night.

Spassk, a small town lying between Vladivostok and Khabarovsk, was chosen to be the scene of celebrations to mark the liberation of the Far East from Japanese occupation. Vavilov and Bayenko went to the town to take part in the ceremonies, and Vavilov ordered Mark to go, in order to get him away from his work. The Party secretary was alarmed at the way in which his young subordinate was driving himself; he had a high opinion of Mark, and felt sorry for him.

Part of the celebrations was a diplomatic reception. There were several foreign consulates in the Far Eastern territory, and Moscow desired them to be drawn into the proceedings. The reception was held in the municipal theater. Chefs and waiters were brought from Vladivostok; a symphony orchestra and other artists came from Khabarovsk.

Mark was present at the reception. There were not many guests—some thirty Russians and a dozen or so foreigners. Bayenko, who acted as host, did not feel at all comfortable. An old Bolshevik from a peasant family, he was used to mixing with the simple people like himself whom the revolution had raised to high and responsible positions, but he had never had anything to do with foreign consuls

before, and he preferred to have nothing to do with them in the future. However, for them he was the supreme representative of the Soviet regime in the Far East, and that imposed heavy and oppressive responsibilities upon him. Fortunately, he was attended by a diplomatic agent sent from Moscow, and a group of interpreters. Otherwise he would have been in a mess.

"Say the same thing to them all," the official from Moscow had assured him. "When they offer their congratulations, you reply: 'I thank you in the name of my country, your Excellency. The anniversary of the liberation of my country from foreign occupation is a great festival for us. We are glad you are taking part in our celebrations.' That's all you need say."

The guests began to arrive. One after another the foreign consuls and their assistants came up to Bayenko and congratulated him on the anniversary. He thanked them, shook their hands, and presented them to his assistants, who stood behind him in a semicircle. Mark was on the extreme right. The Japanese consul was the last to come up. A small, withered old man with long, protruding teeth. A happy, almost too happy, smile was on his face. With refined courtliness he bowed and said to Bayenko in reasonably good Russian:

"Allow me, your Excellency, Mr. Chairman of the executive committee, to offer through you my congratulations to the country in which I have the honor to represent the Minister of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Japan. The anniversary of the liberation of the Soviet Far East, your Excellency, is an important date in the history of your country, with which Japan is bound by tried and strong bonds of friendship."

"Thank you," Bayenko barked, towering like a block of granite over the Japanese consul. "I thank you in the name of my country, your Excellency. The anniversary of the liberation of our country from foreign occupation is a great festival for us. We are glad that you are taking part in our celebrations."

He felt that it was rather amusing to say all this to the consul of the country from which the Far East had been liberated. He smiled cheerfully and added on his own responsibility:

"Of course, I realize it isn't exactly a holiday for you. We gave you a good bashing, didn't we? But we don't bear any grudge; we'll celebrate it together."

The Moscow agent looked sour at this liberty, but the Japanese didn't bat an eyelid; he went on smiling happily and bowing deeply, servilely. The young Japanese standing behind him smiled, too, but not so happily.

Bayenko introduced Mark, and the smile on the Japanese consul's face grew even happier and more dazzling. He squeezed the Russian's hand and said, nodding at every word:

"I am very, very glad to see government officials so young as you. Mr. Surov." Mark bowed and said nothing. The consul went on: "Ah, youth is the happiest time of our lives. . . . Allow me to introduce my secretary to you. He's young, too, and you and he will have much in common—Mr. Yoshima."

Mark stared at the Japanese named Yoshima. The young man bowed politely and gave Mark a friendly look. It must be the same Yoshima! the thought drummed in his brain. The Jap's cold, strong hand gently squeezed his. Then the consul and his secretary passed on, but Mark could not turn his eyes away from the young Japanese.

At supper Mark and Yoshima were seated opposite each other. Yoshima expressed his pleasure at this, but Mark was silent. They sat in superficially friendly talk.

"The Far East is a fine country, isn't it?" Yoshima said. And in his eyes Mark read the thought: And it will be ours sooner or later. We shall drive these filthy Russians out.

"Oh, yes. Foreigners always have greatly liked our Far East," Mark replied.

"Naturally! We Japanese, for instance, have always watched sympathetically the development of the eastern parts of Russia. We have always wanted to have intercourse with you. Among us Russian is one of the most popular of languages. We're in the habit of devoting two hours a day to the study of your language."

"I'm very pleased to hear you're so interested in everything Russian. True, we haven't quite the same desire for intercourse with you, but that may be because as a nation we keep to ourselves. Very few Russians study Japanese. But when they do they devote far more than two hours a day to it."

"I think Japanese must be very difficult for Russians, isn't it? I know many Japanese who speak Russian, but I've met very few Russians who speak Japanese."

"Surely you must have met some Russians who speak Japanese very well? Especially women, perhaps?"

Yoshima's face twitched, and his eyes turned cold and menacing.

"Russians speaking Japanese remind me of a certain little winged creature. The birds regard it as an insect, while the insects think it is a bird. It is called the hummingbird."

Yoshima saw the blood drain away from Mark's face, and a spasm of exultation flamed up and died away within him.

"Hummingbirds are lucky," Surov remarked, as if half asleep.

"Yes, we in Japan think so, too," the Japanese responded. "Only we have a superstition that it's a dead hummingbird that's lucky...."

Mark stretched out his hand for his glass of wine and tossed it off in one gulp. A faint smile played in Yoshima's eyes as he noted that the Russian's hand was trembling.

"A strange superstition," Mark answered. He was very pale, and his eyes glittered feverishly. "I always thought all religions were considerate of the life of birds. So your superstition is rather exceptional."

"Not really. You see, we believe birds, too, are immortal, and so sending a bird to another world is no violation of the promise of immortality. The only condition is that the bird's last request must be observed."

"And is it?" Mark asked.

"By Samurais, it is."

The Japanese consul was beckoning to Yoshima. The young Japanese rose, bowing politely. Mark left the table, too; he went to the spacious vestibule. He pressed his forehead to the glass of the window and stood thus for some time.

"Good-by, Mr. Surov." He heard a voice behind him.

He turned. It was Yoshima, who held out a small packet tied with pink ribbon.

"I'd like you to accept this in memory of our meeting. It's nothing, only a little keepsake." He bowed courteously and followed the consul out into the dark night. An automobile started up; a band of orange light extended along the street. Then the blackness returned.

Mark hurriedly tore open the paper wrapping and took out a small, plush-lined box. He opened it; inside was a brooch, a blue stone carved in the shape of a small bird with outstretched wings and open beak. Katya's brooch. He stood dumfounded, staring at it.

"Hummingbirds are lucky!" he muttered.

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3. Friends Meet Again

Who would maintain that there is any limit to the power of the human heart? If that were true, Mark Surov's heart would have broken that night when Yoshima presented him with Katya's brooch. But the human heart has an unlimited potential.

The gloomy days passed into months, the months into a year, and Mark was still working at Khabarovsk, in the same office. Again and again, during many sleepless nights, he had seen an uncertain form emerge from the darkest corner of the room, had talked with that form. "Forgive me, dearest, for not taking more care of you," he muttered.

There was silence in the room, but his heart caught the answer: "I longed for you so much, Mark; I was so afraid."

He clutched his head and quietly groaned. "It's all my fault.... I went to fight death, but death cheated me. I saved others, but it stole you from me. I came back too late.... I want to come to you, Katya." He rose from his seat, but the movement frightened her, and she vanished. He forced himself to turn his mind back to his desk, littered with papers. "I won't give in! I've no right to give in." He wrestled with himself.

Slowly, step by step, Mark battled it out. Katya appeared to him more and more rarely, and at last her visits stopped altogether. The large brooch with the blue bird and a deep furrow on his brow were all that was left to him from her, together with a numb pain in his heart. That pain was with him continually, and if it had suddenly vanished, there would have been nothing to fill the void.

With that dull, nagging pain he went through the days, weeks, the months. And, strange to say, it became a necessity of his being; it advised and counseled; sometimes it even argued with him.

"But we can't do otherwise; it's the only way our Party can take. We must smash the past that is part of us and everything around us. That's harsh, I know, but we do it in the name of the future, which will not be harsh. You can't chop wood without making splinters." He clung firmly to his faith. "To understand is to forgive. History will understand us, and it will not condemn us because of the splinters we're making in our great work of construction."

But another voice spoke quietly and firmly:

"But look how many splinters there are, Mark. Before your eyes the country is being crisscrossed with the barbed wire of concentration camps. There are millions of people behind that wire. Do you think all of them are your enemies?"

"No, I don't. But we've got to build, and we must sweep aside all who interfere. Enemy or friend, it makes no difference."

"But is that what your father, your brothers, gave their lives for? Is that what you dreamed of in those days when you were living with the soldiers? Do you remember the dying man to whom you read the A.B.C. of Communism? But now look—everywhere concentration camps, suffering, death. You say it's in the name of the future. But can you justify all that is happening like that?"

"No, I don't try to justify all of it. There's much unnecessary cruelty. Much is due to ourselves; we're slaves who have gone through a bloody struggle to achieve our freedom. But we still don't know what freedom looks like. A slave is always the worst of oppressors, because his idea of freedom is freedom to crush others. But that will all pass. A new generation that has outgrown slavery will grow up. Freedom will throw off the guise of force. That's what I believe."

"You don't really believe it. You'd like to, but you just can't any longer. You find it terrible that all the blood was shed in vain, but you cling to your faith because you believe it justifies everything. Now you're sitting considering the lists of people who have been deprived of their electoral rights. What are you considering them for? Let them go hang, accept the lists as necessary, forget that every name in those lists represents a living person with all his pain and suffering. Then you'll be a real Stalinist, and the groans of human beings will be your symphony of construction."

"I'm already a real Stalinist. That's exactly why I'm considering these lists. Half a million people in our area have been deprived of their electoral rights. That means that half a million people will be thrown out of work, and in view of the present shortage of labor that's a crime. Stalin calls on us to have thought for people, and that's just why I've taken on the job of revising these lists, to save these people for our socialist construction and not allow them to be flung into the enemy camp."

"Don't lie, Mark." The voice sounded reproachful. "You'll say all that again to the executive committee today, but that's not the real

reason why you asked for permission to revise the lists. You know that the Stalin call to have thought for people is eyewash, and that he has issued instructions that ways are to be found of driving the peasants into the collective farms. And those who refuse to join are to be deprived of their electoral rights. And not only that—they're deprived of their houses, their land, their cattle. And then they resist being evicted; they slaughter their cattle; they conceal their possessions. And all that is called stealing, and they're put behind barbed wire. They're not brought to trial; a triumvirate consisting of Dorinas, Yuzhny, and Vavilov fixes the term of their confinement in the concentration camp—from five to ten years. And some are shot. You can't really find any justification for that."

"You're wrong, I can. These things are local distortions of the Party line. The men who have come to power are still dominated by the past ages of slavery, and so they are harsh. I'm harsh, too. And don't tell me to think of the tears of the children, the wives and mothers. I'd rather not."

"You'd like to be harsh," came the whisper, "but you can't. You're guided by your father; you're afraid for the cause for which he died. You believe in your truth, but you see it being swamped in human suffering. And do you think you can keep the truth on top with your petty activities? Well, try then; there's no other way. Or perhaps there is, only you don't see it."

He attended the executive committee meeting and reported on the position in regard to those deprived of their electoral rights. He spoke in dry, official tones, and it might even have been thought that he did not care which way the decision on his report might go.

"On your instructions, comrades, I have reviewed the lists of those persons deprived of electoral rights.... Half a million people were placed on the lists. Comrade Stalin's instructions that we were to have regard for the people have been violated. Our local organs are not following the Party and government directives on this matter. We must suspend the administrative measures being taken against those on the lists, while a general revision is made. The toiling masses must be brought into co-operation on the task. It is the prerogative of the local soviets to place people on the lists, but it will be entirely in accord with the directives issued by the Party and by Comrade Stalin personally if we ask the toilers themselves to review the lists.

Comrade Stalin teaches us that when we are in a difficult situation we must rely on the people's wisdom; I think that this is a case in which we should act in that spirit."

"But first and foremost Comrade Stalin teaches us to be ruthless to our enemies," Yuzhny commented in the authoritative voice of a G.P.U. spokesman.

"Perfectly true," Mark agreed readily. "Ruthlessness to an enemy is an inalienable attribute of a Communist. And the organ in which Comrade Yuzhny functions is the supreme expression of Communist ruthlessness. But I know that in this matter he will agree with me. In a province with a population of three million, in other words, with one and a half million adults, it is impossible that there should be half a million enemies of the Soviet regime. It has got enemies, and quite a number; but no one can allow one third of the population to be entered in that category."

"Anyone would imagine Surov was Comrade Stalin's personal representative," Yuzhny said irritably.

"Every Communist is a representative of Comrade Stalin," Mark said in the same unconcerned tone as before.

"Surov fails to take into account the fact that our area is in a special category," Vavilov interrupted. "Relatively we have more enemies of our Party in this district than in any other part of the Soviet Union. The people here live a life comparatively cut off, and their collective instinct is poorly developed. And so we get particularly strong resistance to collectivization. All the same, in fighting the enemy we must always aim our blows wisely. And there I agree with Surov's arguments."

Mark hardly listened to Vavilov. He knew already that the Party secretary would insist on the lists being revised. He had long since lost all respect for Vavilov, not because the man was quite a nonentity; Mark did not think of him like that. But life had raised him to a position too high for his capacities and had confronted him with tasks that overwhelmed him. He did not possess that innate wisdom that would prompt him aright; so he followed the majority. He talked in broad generalizations, like a newspaper editorial. He had become an executive, leaving the solution of problems to others with stronger minds. From that point on he had shone with the reflected light of Stalin. In all probability he was himself aware of this, and suffered inwardly, but saw nothing else to do.

"You do want to be decent, don't you, Mark?" Vavilov continued. "It's not for a Communist to be decent," he retorted. "It's too great a luxury for a Communist to be decent. Communism is built on calculation, and simple calculation has shown me the necessity to insist on a revision of the lists. Stalin knows better than I what needs to be done. One must be strong, and then everything will be easy. We're doing a great work of construction, and that calls for sacrifices."

Mark's proposal to revise the lists was accepted by the Party. He knew that everybody on such lists automatically fell into the category of enemies of the people, and so were doomed to outlawry. Their children could not attend school, and they themselves had no right to any decent job, to live in any of the large towns, or to enjoy any of the little advantages and conveniences of life. Those on such lists were outside the ordinary laws. But this peculiarity of Soviet elections had a strictly economic significance as well. The moment anyone lost his electoral rights the local authorities burdened him with oppressive taxes, and frequently he had to surrender all he possessed in order to avoid prison, forced labor, or the concentration camp. Any government official could act quite arbitrarily in regard to such people, and it was useless to complain. The law allowed the local authorities to make a very broad interpretation of the principle by which deprivation of rights was determined, and anyone out of favor for any reason with the local bosses could be placed on the list.

Mark also knew quite well that in securing the revision of the lists he was throwing down a challenge to the G.P.U., for it was understood that the local G.P.U. organs had insisted on certain people being included in the lists, so that repressive measures could be taken against them.

Immediately after the Soviet elections Yuzhny visited Mark in his office.

"I want to return to this question of revising the lists," Yuzhny began. "Don't you think, Comrade Surov, that a *very* serious error has been committed?"

"No, Comrade Yuzhny, I don't. Here, come and have a look."

He beckoned Yuzhny across to a cupboard occupying the whole of one wall. Inside there were three shelves. The two upper shelves were packed with yellow files. The lowest was only half filled with green files. "The two upper shelves contain the files of lists drawn up by the local organs of administration," he explained. "The lowest shelf contains the files of lists after they had been reviewed by workers and collective farm meetings. As you see, half a shelf is sufficient. There were over half a million names in the old lists; in the new there are sixty-seven thousand. So you see, the people have modified the administration's work pretty thoroughly."

They returned to the desk.

"Your reference to the people doesn't free you of responsibility, Comrade Surov," Yuzhny said. "The people is an abstraction. We shall see what sort of people corrected the Party's work."

"The lists were drawn up by the administrative organs of the government, not by the Party," Mark parried.

"That makes no difference, no difference whatever. The Party is the administration. The Party is us."

"So far as I know, you are the G.P.U.; in other words, only an organ of the Party."

Yuzhny sat thinking for a moment, then said in an unusually quiet tone:

"Formally you're right, of course. The G.P.U. is not the Party, but a sword in the Party's hands. But formal logic is no justification for your action."

"I'm not trying to justify myself. If you arrest me, I shall try to do so then, and I hope successfully. At the moment I'm only trying to show you that in this matter of the revision of the lists everything has been done in perfect order."

Slowly rising from his chair, Yuzhny coldly answered:

"I know your views on this question. Please inform Comrades Vavilov and Bayenko from me that the G.P.U. is not in agreement with what you're doing in organizing the revision of the lists. And another thing—we don't like our advice to be ignored. Remember that."

"I am carrying out Party instructions," Surov replied unconcernedly.

"The instructions must be repealed."

"As they haven't been so far, I must carry them out."

A week later, Mark went to see Vavilov personally.

"I've just been notified that the Party committee has passed a vote of censure on me," he said. "Is that correct?"

Vavilov received him not in the secretary's office, but in a little room beyond, to ensure privacy.

"Neither my work here nor my life generally affords any justification for a vote of censure," Mark went on.

"I know that," Vavilov said in a weary tone.

"The terms of the censure say it has been passed because I have not shown sufficient vigilance during the election campaign. That's damnably unjust, and you know it. I simply carried out the instructions of the Party committee and the executive committee."

"I know all that, Comrade Surov. I understand how you feel. But believe me, the vote of censure was the easiest way of putting an end to the matter."

"But the revision was necessary, and you yourself agreed."

"I know that perfectly well."

"Then why the censure? And why only me? Simply because I wanted to see fewer abuses in the administration's work?"

"It's difficult for me to answer these questions, Surov. But I assure you the vote of censure was the best that could be done for you in the circumstances."

"But why?"

"You see, good deeds have to be paid for. You did a good deed, and a large number of people should be grateful to you. Only, it's got to be paid for. You have done a good deed with one hand, and got a rap over the knuckles of the other. A piece of paper that has no practical meaning. Do you really think it too high a price to pay?"

Surov's face expressed his astonishment. He had expected any argument but that. Vavilov went to his office, and came back with a file. Taking out a document, he handed it to Mark. It was a letter from the local G.P.U., proposing that Mark Surov should be punished for interfering with the G.P.U.'s work in drawing up the lists. "After he has been expelled from the Party, the G.P.U. will see that he answers for his conduct." The document was signed by Yuzhny. Vavilov handed Mark another document—the reply. "The Party regional committee has investigated the fact of Comrade Surov's interference with the affairs of the G.P.U. and recognizes that he did so owing to the vagueness of the instructions given him. In this connection the regional committee has decided: taking into account that Mark Surov is a young member of the Party, has rendered services to the revolution in the past, and has made this mistake owing to inadequate

Party experience, to confine itself to passing a Party vote of censure on him."

"You understand?" Vaviloy asked.

"Yes."

"If we hadn't passed the vote of censure, Yuzhny would have taken the matter into his own hands. And you wouldn't get away from him with a vote of censure. Let's leave it at that. And remember that not every price is too high when there's a possibility of doing some good. And I helped you to do it, so that in a sense the vote of censure is on me, too, though it doesn't say so. These days we have to be flexible. You can't go straight ahead; get that clear, Mark. I've long noted that you're too hot, too blunt. You haven't any sense of fear."

"But I'm in my own country; what have I got to be afraid of?"

"Perfectly true. Only our country is like a horse reared on its hind legs. It can easily crush its own foal. I'm not in a foreign country, am I? Yet I'm afraid. There's a lot that I'm afraid of..."

He seemed to realize that he had gone too far; he pursed his lips and shook his head dissatisfiedly. "Good-by," he mumbled, and returned to his office.

Mark was disconcerted. Unexpectedly Vavilov had revealed that work in the organs of administration had an aspect he hadn't taken into account. In all that everyone did there were two elements at work: the authoritative element, derived from the omnipresent Kremlin, and the human element, which, if it could not change the course of things, could at least make it less harsh. The system and the man—the terrible problem of the age. The system was soulless; like a blind monster it smashed everything in its path. It was completely independent of the human will, and it functioned of itself and only in the one direction for which it was created, incapable of either accelerating or retarding its movement. Yet it was not entirely lifeless. It had been born, and in its youth it had been different from what it became later. It developed in accordance with laws unknown to man, and ended by turning everything, including man, who had given birth to it, into its slaves, its involuntary accessories.

We shan't follow our road to Communism blindly, Mark reflected. The system must serve us, not we the system.

But why can't the course of a mechanized system be retarded or altered? Why has man got to adapt himself to it? Isn't all we do only a continual attempt to resist the system, which is striving to transform

man into a subservient mechanical accessory? A system cannot endure any other absolute, whether of good or evil; it alone is absolute and boundless. We think the system serves us, but we serve the system. Didn't you feel you were a slave of the system that night at Spassk. when you felt like killing Yoshima, but didn't? The system forbade you, and you submitted to it. And doesn't everybody else do the same? Even those in the Kremlin. Aren't they simply screws in the system, too, firmly screwed in and fulfilling a natural function? But if that is so, where is this alien and incomprehensible power dragging us? Isn't it simply in our pride that we believe man is capable of creating something and running something? What if the truth is that man himself is being run, and run more than any other creature in the world? What if he's a robot, which has to be kept oiled with human feelings? Take Vavilov: for years now he's been submissively obedient to directives. He always talks like a book, never trusting his own brain. And yet he saved me from a nasty blow. Why? Wasn't it because a robot needs to be oiled with human feelings? Or is it really because there is nothing perfect and complete in this world, not even a perfect scoundrel, or even a perfectly good man?

So the only thing that is clear is the goal, and there can be no other. And the way to it is clear; there is no other. And so we are marching along that road, we stumble, we lose one another, but we go on. And as we march, the ranks are straightened out; and the time will come when we shall cease to be robots and shall subject the system to ourselves. We shall come to power over the system through subjection to the system. That one simply must believe, and never dare to doubt.

Late one night Mark was summoned to Vavilov's office. He found Dorinas, the G.P.U. plenipotentiary for the Far East, talking with Vavilov. Dorinas responded amiably to Mark's greeting; Vavilov pointed him to a chair. He sat down.

For some reason, whenever he met Dorinas Mark felt a strong desire to get to the bottom of the man. Dorinas, whose very name made people tremble, outwardly belied the brutal power of life or death that was in his hands. He could have passed for a fairly young and amiable professor. He was short and neatly dressed with a fine, intelligent face and a small, pointed beard. Mark wondered whether he smiled when he signed death sentences.

Mark's brother Simon had written, when he first came to the Far

East, warning him, "Beware of Dorinas. Don't be taken in by his looks. They conceal a cold, calculating ruthlessness. As you're my brother, I think he'll leave you alone. Not because he and I worked together for a long time during the civil war; friendship means nothing to him; but simply because I happen to know something about him."

When Mark entered, they were discussing the collective farms, into which, by Stalin's order, all the peasants had been driven.

"No matter how it was done, we've carried out Moscow's order," Dorinas said in his soft, velvety baritone voice. "The manner in which the order was executed is not very important. We live in stern times, and every step demands sacrifices."

"Yes, that's perfectly true," Vavilov assented.

"But this is the strange feature of the campaign," Dorinas went on. "We expected the strongest resistance to be in the Amur and Zee districts, where there are long-established Cossack settlements. But in fact collectivization went through more easily there than anywhere else. One or two isolated revolts, but much less than we expected. If we accept my deputy Yuzhny's explanation, this was all due to his efforts." He smiled expansively, and taking out an expensive cigarette case, lit a cigarette.

"I think," Vavilov said, "the Amur Cossacks realize the advantages of the collective-farm system, and that's why they joined without much resistance."

"The newspapers say it's enthusiasm that's bringing the people into the collective farms," Dorinas observed. "But you and I know..." he glanced across at Mark, "and Comrade Surov knows that the peasants simply don't understand... and for a long time to come will not understand the advantages of the collective-farm system. As for their enthusiasm, it is more than doubtful. But then we have the Party and the G.P.U. to make up for the shortage of enthusiasm. Isn't that so, Comrade Surov?"

The question took Mark by surprise. He paused over his answer. "The results of collectivization still need to be studied," he said. "We need to make a thorough psychological analysis; we've got enough material for that."

"I knew," Dorinas commented with an amiable smile, "that you'd answer somewhat on those lines. Your brother Simon is equally good at getting to the heart of the matter. How is he, by the way? I hear he's given up his Party post."

"Yes, Simon has quite a small position in the economic sphere now. He's director of the Caspian fisheries industry. He asked to be released from Party work. His health has broken down badly; he hasn't the strength, these days."

"Pity!" Dorinas said. "A great pity! Few Party members had such possibilities of advancement as he had. Too bad his health let him down."

"We can leave detailed analysis till later." Vavilov resumed the main subject. "The most important thing now is what we can report to Moscow about the achievement of complete collectivization. Ninety-seven and two-fifths per cent of the peasant husbandries have joined the collective farms."

Dorinas turned to Mark:

"I know Comrade Bayenko thinks a great deal of you and finds your assistance invaluable. As you know, at present he's in the river Zee district, entrusted with a special commission from Comrade Stalin, in connection with the preparation of timber for export. We have reason to believe that he badly needs your help on the spot. I have asked Comrade Vavilov to send you to assist him for a short time. That is all."

The truck that took Mark to the Zee district left him off at a small gold-mining center. There was a great trench running along the bottom of the hill, and Mark walked along one side, watching the activity on the other. Out of the black quarries moved two-horse carts loaded to the top with sand and stones. Women in short, padded jackets held the reins and shouted desperately, but the animals went at their customary pace, hardly shifting their legs. Mark could not discern the women's faces; they were wrapped in gray kerchiefs. Here and there groups of men were at work, digging with spades. He could not see their faces clearly, either, but the only difference between them and the women seemed to be that they wore caps instead of kerchiefs. Here and there armed soldiers were standing about idly, watching the workers.

The road turned, and the low buildings of the mine administration came in sight. A lumbering, pretentious house with a wooden mezzanine floor was the office; a crowd of people was hanging around it. Beyond it were several large sheds. Then came a number of dwelling houses, with chickens and pigs wandering about nearby. A

little apart were four barracks, in a barbed-wire enclosure with turrets at the corners. A little distance from these was a small but attractive house with a high veranda. Unlike all the other buildings, some care had been taken over its construction; it was built of smoothly adzed logs.

Mark made his way to the office. The felt-padded main door opened to let him into the overheated and smoke-laden house. Someone showed him the door of the mine director's room. As he entered, a fat little man with a puffy face rose to meet him, saying in an unexpectedly falsetto voice:

"Comrade Surov? I'd been informed that you'd be passing through and would spend the night here. I'm very glad to have you as my guest. Comrade Bayenko is out at the headquarters of the lumber camps, some fifteen miles from here. We'll run you out to him tomorrow."

The director poured out his sentences in a torrent, as if they were accumulating in his throat and had to be ejected as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, he was fussily hanging Mark's coat on a nail, his back and his fat bottom turned to his visitor. He was dressed in the usual manner of Party and economic workers, in a tunic of military cut, drawn in tightly at the waist by a broad, officer's belt. His legs, in blue cloth breeches, looked like bollards in their leather boots. His head was going bald; the lower part of his face was broader than his forehead. His eyes were colorless and his swollen mouth shapeless. He was a second edition of the commissar of civil-war days, gone fat and fusty, but retaining the orthodox Communist appearance.

"Things aren't too good here," he went on. "Since we changed over to working the mine with prisoners we've had to send away all our wives and children. In order to fulfill the plan we're having to sacrifice all our conveniences. Would you like to see the mine? Outsiders are strictly forbidden to enter its area, but of course you're different." He choked with the spate of his words. "All the work is in charge of the G.P.U. now. That's simple and convenient. We've signed a contract with them, and we're spared all anxiety about labor power. Before, it was sheer agony; we had a big plan and simply couldn't get the workers. When we sent to the villages to enroll workers they turned round and asked, 'Can you give us any cloth or material?' And where were we to get it?"

As Mark followed the director out, he did not listen to him. They

went in the direction of the sluice, around which there was feverish activity. The carts drove up one after another to halt by the monster's open maw. A dozen women wrapped in padded coats flung themselves on each cart as it arrived. Shouting and straining, they pushed the body over, and the sand disappeared into the sluice. As soon as the empty car drove off another took its place; the women clung to its side, put their shoulders to it, and overturned it. Mark stood watching them for a minute or two. The majority were young; but on their faces was a look of dumb, dogged despair. He could see they were not working women. His attention was drawn to one small, round-faced girl, beneath whose awkward padded coat he discerned a slender and handsome figure and legs that looked like matchsticks. She stopped occasionally to wipe her sweating face with the end of the dark toweling she was wearing instead of a kerchief. She gave Mark a challenging look with her fine blue eyes and muttered something to her companions.

He felt bitterly ashamed as he stood watching the women at work. He knew there were many women in the concentration camps, and he knew that the bread of the camps was bitter and gained in bitter labor. But this was the first time he had seen women doing work to which they were not and could not become accustomed. What would it have cost, he wondered, to provide automatically tipping carts, thus lightening their labor? But what difference would it make? he could not help asking himself. If that one job is mechanized, possibly still harder work will be found for them. That's not the point, not the point at all. The point is that here are these women, with all their abilities, doing this sort of work. Why?

The girl broke away from her group and came up to Mark, choosing a moment when the director had moved away. In a pleasant voice that quivered with agitation she said, "There's some talk of an amnesty. Is it true that wives of enemies of the people are to be pardoned?"

"I don't know," Mark forced himself to reply, turning his eyes away. His mouth went suddenly dry. In a quiet, hoarse voice he asked her, "What were you sent here for? Who are you?"

"I'm a musical-comedy artist. My husband was shot. So there isn't to be any amnesty?"

The director hurried back to the spot where Mark and the woman were standing. He waved his short arms indignantly; his face ex-

pressed his annoyance. He ran up to her and shouted in his shrill, unpleasant voice, "Get on with your work! You know you're not allowed to talk to strangers. You'll find yourself in a cell, you stupid fool."

The woman humbly returned to her friends, her legs dragging painfully in their enormous, disintegrating felt boots.

"It's nothing but trouble with these women." The director turned to Mark. "They're strictly forbidden to talk to anyone, but they simply don't understand. Whenever they see a fresh face, they at once want to know if there's to be an amnesty for wives of enemies of the people!"

Mark went down the ladder to the channel along which the muddy water was carrying away the sand. It was covered with fine wire netting, fastened in places with wax seals, which could be broken only by the officials empowered to remove the gold. The director followed him, talking incessantly:

"These prisoners aren't workers, but a perfect plague! And all because the G.P.U. sends us a lot of intelligentsia! I've asked and asked again for kulaks to be sent to the mines, but they won't send them. These rotten intelligentsia don't even know how to handle a spade. Look at that professor down there! What can you do with him, when all he's capable of is adjusting his spectacles on his nose?"

He noticed something going wrong on the farther side of the sluice and left Mark for a moment. Mark's face was inscrutable; his lips were compressed; his eyes glittered like icicles under his knitted brows. He had not heard what the director was saying; all his attention was concentrated on the man with a gray unkempt beard whom the director had called a professor. The man was standing at the end of the channel, shoveling away the washed shingle. He turned his thin, emaciated face, sweaty and weatherworn, in Mark's direction. On his nose was a pair of spectacles, with only one lens. Because of this he gazed at Mark with one eye screwed up, staring through the single glass.

"They're not very good spectacles you've got, Professor Borodin," Mark said quietly, going up to him.

"So you know me!" the professor answered with a hint of excitement in his voice, and he leaned his spade against the channel. "How do you know my name?"

"You were at Moscow University. I remember you disappeared during the Trotsky-Stalin struggle."

"Just imagine!" Borodin remarked. "I never thought I'd meet with so many acquaintances in the concentration camps. Wherever I've been during these past five years I've found people who knew me. Sometimes students, sometimes colleagues.... And so you've devoted yourself to the glorious profession of the G.P.U.?"

"No, Professor; I'm a worker in the government administration."

"Ah, so you haven't yet achieved that higher degree of Communistic understanding. No matter, you've got plenty of time. Maybe you will."

"You shouldn't take the trouble to insult me, Professor Borodin," Mark said quietly but emphatically. "You must face up to the fact that you and your generation didn't exactly show us the road to the future, and so we've had to seek it for ourselves. We frequently go wrong; but we do seek, and that is our justification."

Borodin scrutinized Mark with one eye, then said in a slightly ironical tone, "Diogenes also sought a road, and for that purpose restricted his world to an empty barrel."

"And so Diogenes didn't find anything," Mark replied with conviction. "Even the lantern with which he sought for a man among the people was of no help. We're seeking something different, something more earthly, but also more necessary today, at once."

"In Diogenes' time," Borodin said thoughtfully, "there was one man who belonged entirely to the earth: Alexander of Macedon. In his quest he came to Diogenes, and the poor philosopher gave a lesson in wisdom to the lord of the world. When, struck by his wise advice, Alexander asked him if there was anything he could do for him, Diogenes answered, 'Stand out of the sunshine.'"

"This world consists not of people like Diogenes, but of people who belong to this earth," Mark said, still quietly and confidently. "And these earthly people cannot find accommodation in Diogenes' barrel. They aren't so self-righteous as Diogenes, but they are people, and they do search, while Diogenes sought for nothing."

The guard standing at the end of the channel gave a curt whistle; he was gazing in their direction. With a sigh, Borodin picked up his spade.

"You're a good sort, my boy," he said, and Mark detected a note of kindly condescension in his voice. "I don't know whether you'll

find the road you're looking for; but you won't give up the search, not for a long time. You're quite right. You weren't shown the true road, and you've got to look for it yourselves. But is there any true road? In the last resort all the roads on this earth are dubious, and the higher roads are for men like Diogenes. Good-by; otherwise I shall find myself in a cell; and the sun never shines in there."

"Good-by, Professor."

The professor gently nodded.

When he was gone, Mark thrust a hundred-ruble note into a pack of cigarettes and then put it into a pocket of Borodin's coat, which was lying on a heap of sand.

On their way back to the office the director told him that in accordance with regulations he must go to the chief of the local G.P.U. and obtain permission to remain in the mine area. "It's only a matter of form," the director said. "Comrade Razin knows you're here; it was he who issued the order to have you brought by truck. But the formality has to be observed."

He went on to his office, and Mark made his way to the small, attractive house that stood not far from the block of prison barracks. To enter, he had to go up steps to the high veranda. The front door was not fastened, and he went in. It was dark in the front room, which was lighted only by fanlights above the doors of other rooms, and for a moment or two he could not get his bearings. The house was quiet; there seemed to be nobody about.

"Is anybody in?" he called.

Suddenly a woman emerged from the far, darkest corner. She went to a door and opened it.

"Go in . . . Comrade Surov."

The voice sounded strangely familiar, and in his surprise he fell back. But the light streaming through the door fell on him and left the woman in shadow. He went into the large room; she followed. He turned and saw an emaciated face crowned with chestnut hair. The bloodless lips were twisted into a miserable, embarrassed smile. The pale cheeks passed into a softly outlined, femininely rounded chin. And, as if reflecting all the pallor of the face, large gray, mournful eyes stared at him.

"Lena!"

So they remained, staring at each other, saying not a word. She leaned against the doorpost, and now he could see her clearly. She

wore a simple black dress with short sleeves, and had cheap town shoes on her feet. The dress was tightly drawn around her thighs and her full, matronly, flabby breasts. Tears were gathering in her eyes, but she blinked them away. Her lips parted in a desperate attempt to speak, but the words came with difficulty:

"Yes.... It's me.... I knew you ... were coming.... I was waiting for you ... Mark Timofeevich."

"What have they done to you?" he cried bitterly. "Lena, what are you doing here?"

The anxiety, the bitter despair, the gentleness in his voice shook her, and she started to cry.

"I've had two years in concentration camps.... I thought you wouldn't want to recognize me...."

Mark was shaken and crushed by what had happened to Lena. One anxious, painful question rose again and again: What have they done to her? He did not even stop to think whom he meant by "they." He remembered the bold, intelligent, saucy Lena with the challenging gleam in her gray eyes, and compared her with this other, in whose voice, in whose sobs, he caught the echo of bitter pain, recognized a soul broken with incessant suffering.

He stretched out his hand to her, but she pushed it away. "Please, don't!" she pleaded, and the words turned his mind back to the day when, lying a wretched, helpless bundle on her bed, she had said the same thing.

She went and sat down on the edge of a sofa, her shoulders huddled, her head sunk on her chest. She wiped away her tears with her apron. The sobbing gradually died down.

"Forgive me... Comrade Surov, for giving you such a welcome." She raised her eyes and looked at him.

"Why 'Comrade'? Why Surov?" he asked. "There was a time when you called me Mark." He sat down on the sofa beside her and laid his hand on her knee. "How did you get here, Lena? How did it all happen?" he said.

She caught the note of warm anxiety in his voice, and did not remove his hand. She had stopped crying, and a faint, miserable smile flickered over her pale lips.

"I got here like everybody else; there's one road for us all. I've been in concentration camps for two years, and it's beginning to be difficult to believe there's another world apart from the camps and the prisoners in them and the armed guards standing over them. These days I often have the feeling that all the world consists of concentration camps, and it couldn't be otherwise. Today I heard that the G.P.U. commander had been ordered to meet someone named Surov and arrange his transportation to the lumber camps. I didn't know whether it would be you or one of your brothers. But any Surov was from that other world. I waited and feared. I felt sure the hundred-per-cent Communist Mark Surov wouldn't want to recognize the prisoner Lena."

"You mustn't think that, Lena," he said. Then he was silent while he listened to her story.

Her brother, an underground worker and an old Bolshevik, had been arrested. "I expect he was shot." Lena had been sent to Siberia. The mine was the fifth stage on her pilgrimage from prison to prison. Life was finished for her; she had no hope. "Unless a miracle happens, I shall die in a concentration camp," she said. She had had no proper trial, and no term of imprisonment had been passed on her. There was talk of an amnesty now, but she didn't believe the rumor. You had to fight for your life in the concentration camp and fight desperately. It was beyond a woman's strength. "All the same, we want to live!" she all but shouted in Mark's face. Then she was quiet again. The women in the camps tried to find protectors among their guards, to become the mistress of one of the officers, or at least a guard, or even a cook. If a woman didn't get herself a lover, she was tortured with heavy labor, tormented with hunger, put to work in the colder spots. And so the women went from one man to another, went humbly wherever they were told to go, and above all were afraid of being left alone. Lena, too, had taken that path; there was nothing else to be done if you wanted to live. "This is my third," she said; and as he started away in horror, in her eyes he caught that challenging, audacious look that at one time had never left them. "I know it's horrible, but am I or the other women to blame for it?" she asked.

Outside the house, a big bay horse harnessed to a very small sleigh drew up. When she saw the horse's head outside the window, Lena started up.

"Razin's come back. He's the head of the local G.P.U.," she said hurriedly. "He mustn't see you with me. But listen, Mark, promise me you'll do one thing. Don't spend the night here or with the director. Go on to the next village. Call at the third house you come to on the left. Ask for Khanin. They'll be waiting for you."

"Who will?"

She hurried out of the room without answering. A heavy tread sounded on the veranda, a door creaked, and someone noisily removed his outdoor clothes in the hall.

"Lena, where are you?" A thick voice reached Mark's ears.

"There's some comrade waiting to see you," she answered.

The door to the room Mark was in was opened noisily, and an enormous fellow appeared. He was about forty, his mouth was hidden beneath drooping whiskers, his thick, tousled hair was sprinkled with gray, and his nose was broad and shapeless. His small, watchful eyes gave Mark a stealthy scrutiny as Mark rose to meet him.

"What are you still in your outdoor clothes for?" the man thundered. He turned and bawled, "Lena, why didn't you ask the guest to remove his clothes?"

Lena appeared at the door and waited silently.

"I'm not a guest," Mark intervened. "I've just dropped in to thank you for sending the truck to the station for me."

"That's nothing to thank me for," Razin thundered. "My friend of the G.P.U. at the lumber camp sent me a note asking me to arrange for you to be met. Your chief, Comrade Bayenko, asked for it."

"Can you tell me how I can get to Comrade Bayenko tomorrow?"

"That's easy; I'll order the director, and he'll manage an automobile for you. But meanwhile get your things off, and we'll have supper."

"Thank you very much, but I'm in a hurry."

"Where on earth are you hurrying to? You can spend the night here; Lena will fix up a princely bed for you. And we'll send you on tomorrow morning. Lena, serve up supper."

"I'm afraid I've simply got to refuse. I've a bit of work to do in the village. If it isn't any trouble, arrange for the automobile to pick me up there early in the morning."

"Where's the trouble in that? It'll come to the village and hoot for you. All the same, I'm sorry you don't want to have supper with us."

"I simply can't," Mark replied, picking up his cap. "Some other time."

"It's a long walk to the village," Razin said. "It's getting dark, and

if you miss your road you're up against it." He went to the door and bawled, "Hey, driver, take this comrade on to the village. And then come back at once."

Mark went out onto the veranda, putting on his cap as he went. The sky was darkening; a gray haze was settling over the earth, blurring all outlines and closing in the prospect. Silent groups of people were making their way to the barbed-wire enclosure, each group sluggishly followed by soldiers armed with rifles.

The horse set off at a sharp trot. The driver urged it on as though he hoped to overtake the darkness, and in quite a short time Mark heard the distant sound of a barking dog. A moment or two later they drove into the village.

"Where to?" the driver asked, reining in his horse on the outskirts. "You can go back," Mark answered as he stepped out of the sleigh. "I'll do the rest on foot."

When the sounds of the horse and sleigh had died away, he walked on slowly into the village street. Now it was completely dark, and lights were burning in some of the windows. The third house on the left proved to be a small hut with two windows, both of them tightly shuttered. Light showed through the chinks. He opened the small squeaking wicket gate that led into the yard. He crossed the yard and went up the two or three steps to the porch. A door creaked quietly, and a voice said, "Come in."

"Is this Khanin's house?" Mark asked.

A man's outline showed vaguely in the dark gap. "Come in!" he repeated, and stepped aside for Mark to pass.

Mark knew he was doing a very risky thing in entering an unknown house in a lonely, unknown village at night. Of late a number of Party and government officials had disappeared. Sometimes, somewhere in the lonely taiga a body was found. But usually not. In their resistance to the government's attempts to enforce its will the peasants took ruthless vengeance on any of its servants who fell into their hands. Mark, too, was a servant of the regime. But he felt perfect confidence in Lena.

He stepped into darkness, and came to a halt. The man behind him closed the door and shot the bolt. Then he cautiously pushed past Mark, felt for the inner door, and opened it. Mark walked into the plain, peasant's room. Wooden benches were set round the walls; a rough, unpolished table was in the left-hand corner; a broad bedMark's further stay on Sakhalin pointless. Late at night the director drove to the dirty little hotel where he was staying, and told him he had received new instructions. Though there was no one else in the room, the man lowered his voice to a whisper as he said the instructions came from the G.P.U. "Comrade Yuzhny himself has arrived by plane," he said, and it was obvious that in his view "Comrade Yuzhny" was an unchallengeable authority, not to be opposed.

Next morning Mark went to Yuzhny. In reply to Mark's question Yuzhny adopted his favorite pose of Eastern satrap, lolled back in his chair, stretched out his legs, and said with contemptuous indifference:

"Yes, I've given the Fisheries Trust fresh instructions. There are to be no negotiations whatever with the fishermen. We'll teach these sea robbers not to argue with state organizations. They've got to become ordinary workers, receive their wage, and enjoy it!"

"But they refuse to. They've always worked in fishermen's cooperatives, not as workers of the canning factories. But in any case, what does it matter how we regard them so long as they catch plenty of fish?"

"We're not interested in the Fisheries Trust plan and we're not responsible for its fulfillment," Yuzhny said in the same indifferent tone. "But we have got to suppress the opposition of the private owner; we must crush the remnants of capitalism. And that's all the fishermen are.... Do you know they've threatened to destroy the canning factories?"

"I've heard so, but I don't believe it's true."

"Please yourself. I don't need your belief. But that's what was about to happen. And you can be sure we shall smash this private-capitalist gang. I tell you frankly, Comrade Surov, Vavilov shouldn't have intervened in this dispute. He's the authority, he's the Party secretary, I know; only, wherever the G.P.U. is operating, the Party interests will be quite adequately looked after."

"I'll be just as frank, Comrade Yuzhny," Mark replied. "Vavilov needn't have intervened at all; but if something like what happened at Kholodny happens again here, he'll be blamed for it. And he's afraid you and Comrade Dorinas will again prove that if the fishermen flee to a foreign country it's the fault not of the G.P.U. but of the Party organization."

Yuzhny gave Mark a fixed stare, and an evil smile slipped across

his face. "The Party knows who is guilty. Comrade Stalin never makes mistakes. Or do you doubt that?"

"In your presence I cannot doubt," Mark calmly parried the question. "But the point now is how to satisfy the fishermen and get the raw materials to the factories."

"You can leave that to me, Comrade Surov. That's precisely what I've come to Sakhalin for. You can be sure it'll be a long time before these people have any further desire to make demands on the state. The Fisheries Trust will be placed under G.P.U. administration, and we'll make the fishermen realize that they've got to work for wages."

"And supposing they're not prepared to catch fish on such terms?"

"How persistent you are, Comrade Surov! If they're not prepared to accept the terms we shall take their boats and gear from them and forbid them to fish. In their place we shall employ prisoners; and, as you know, we can easily reach an agreement with them. But I advise you to take no further interest in the matter, or it may prove a sorry business for you, too."

"Thanks for the advice, but I'm here by Vavilov's instructions, and I carry on with them, at any rate till they're canceled."

"They're already canceled," Yuzhny casually answered. "You'll get a cable to that effect. But to save your time you can book your passage by the next steamer."

Next day Mark received Vavilov's cable instructing him to return by the next boat. So now he was traveling back to Khabarovsk, having achieved nothing.

The vessel changed course and made for the shore. Houses arranged in a semicircle round a small bight appeared in the distance. A couple of dozen people were waiting on the wooden jetty. Leaning over the bridge, the captain shouted to someone, "We've been ordered to pick up a geological expedition." The ship tied up to the jetty, and sailors ran out a gangway. As the crowd of people came on board, Surov's attention was attracted by a tall woman with a severe, but beautiful face. In her arms she was carrying a sleeping baby. Mark could not help staring at her. Her hair was plaited in long braids wound round her head. Her eyes had a startled look; the eyes, the gentle oval of the chin, the fine, thin nose—he was sure he had seen them somewhere before.

She halted at the taffrail, not far from him. She looked around the deck indifferently, her glance passed over him without resting on him,

and she began to talk to an elderly man who had come on board with her. There was not the least suggestion of a smile in her eyes; it was almost as though she were incapable of smiling. The steamer slowly drew away from the shore and danced again from wave to wave. The woman took the baby below deck.

Some time later, a lighthouse crowning a lofty cliff appeared ahead. Mark had not noticed that the woman with the baby had returned to the deck and was standing on the opposite side. The child began to cry, and the sound roused him from his dreary thoughts. As he glanced at the woman, he again felt sure he had met her, and went across the deck. The woman seemed agitated; her eyes, staring into the distance, were dilated. Far ahead of the ship an island had emerged on the horizon; on their present course they would pass between it and the lighthouse. Mark knew that in this vicinity there was a small piece of land lying outside the general administration of the country. On the map it was shown as a vague white patch, and the symbol indicated that it was international territory. An old sailor with whom Mark had grown friendly came up behind him and, as Mark offered him a cigarette, pointed to the island and remarked:

"That's a leper island. They bring lepers there from all over the world, and there they rot. A filthy place! God grant we never get driven onto it in a storm. Every nation in the world is represented on it, even the English. I've heard tell that a Russian who hadn't got the disease went to live there voluntarily. But I don't believe it. Who'd want to go there to rot? I'd rather die."

Mark now recalled how he had emerged from the taiga onto the bank of a river, and espied that white pad on the tree. The diary—addressed to Maria, and signed Peter! And that woman in a boat, the woman with large blue eyes gazing toward the shore. The whole scene came back to him, her call in vain, her finding of the message, and how she rowed away, her face flooded with tears.

Mark stared across at the woman again. Yes, it was the same. Now she was standing with her eyes fixed on the island, tears streaming down her cheeks. She stood gazing until the vessel was well past the island. Then her strength suddenly deserted her. Mark rushed to her and took the child from her arms, or she would have dropped it. Then he took her down to his cabin. She followed him humbly as he carried the child. She was trembling.

He made the woman lie down on his hard bunk, and exhausted,

she fell asleep quickly, with the baby beside her. Mark went back on deck and aimlessly wandered about, oppressed by what he had just witnessed. Peter was on that leper island. That's where you went in search of freedom! he thought. Freedom, and loneliness. A terrible freedom you chose, and terrible is the price you've paid for it. I don't condemn you, but never, never could I agree that your road is a true road to freedom. It isn't enough to desire freedom; you've got to believe in it—believe in it and fight for it. I understand Ostap and Alexander; I understand Lena. But I don't understand you. The only freedom is the one that leads to life; the freedom that leads to death is death.

When Mark went to his cabin some time later, the woman was awake.

"Are we near the port?" she asked.

"Yes, Maria, we're just entering the harbor," he replied, and began to pack.

He accompanied her to the deck. Porters were shouting; ragged Chinese children with shoe-cleaning boxes were ducking through the crowd, occasionally cleaning the passengers' shoes, but more often their pockets. Cranes began to rattle, hauling up goods from the hold.

"And how do you know my name?" she suddenly asked.

The sea breeze was blowing her skirt out like a sail, and for a moment he thought that this rather long-legged woman had a striking resemblance to Katya.

"I know only that your name is Maria. I happened to see you some time ago, that day Peter went off... after he had left you.... You were in a boat...."

"Ah, yes," she murmured. "I don't know how I survived that day. It was like the end of the world.... And it all came back to me when we had to sail past that dreadful island... where he is. It's terrible to think of him there, and that we'll never meet again. But at least I have his son.... Oh, God!"

"The Gods are silent," he said. "They seem to have decided to allow a certain amount of evil and injustice to exist in this world. But your Peter was right. He knew that if he went there he had no right to take you with him. Your Peter took a heroic decision though I think that he was wrong."

She looked away. The elderly man with whom she had come on board came up to her. "We can go now," he said; "the baggage has

been unloaded." He turned to Mark and introduced himself. "Professor Zamkin, head of a geological survey."

"Are you leaving Vladivostok today?" she asked Mark, and he thought he read a timid request in her eyes. To his own surprise, for he had planned to leave immediately, he replied, "No, I'm stopping over the night and going on tomorrow... or the day after."

"If you haven't anywhere to stay already, perhaps you'd like to come to us. Our expedition has its own permanent quarters here, and we could find room for you, couldn't we, Professor?"

Zamkin gave her a keen glance and replied decisively, "Oh, of course, we can always find room for him."

From the quay they went straight to Maria's small room. Zamkin went off to his own quarters, after inviting Mark to spend the night in his place. "We'll get a bed ready for you," he said. When he had gone, Maria swiftly and quietly prepared the child's cot. A truck delivered her two heavy trunks from the ship, and the men put them down at the front door of the apartment house. Mark brought them up, and her eyes expressed gratitude. After attending to the child she made tea, and she and Mark sat down at the table, in the twilight. Her face was sad and troubled.

Here was another lonely, helpless creature, another bird whose wings had been broken, he reflected. He rose from the table and put his hands on her shoulders. As he did so he felt her quiver violently, tensely. She raised her head and looked at him. And as they looked at each other, a smile began to dawn in her eyes, to spread over her face. He lifted her up and took her into his arms, and she nestled against him, began to kiss him on his face, his neck. Overcome by the woman's hunger and by his own longing for happiness, he held her tightly in his arms. He lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bed, while she kissed him passionately, greedily. Avidly clinging to her naked body, he plunged into this new happiness, happiness long untasted, succumbing to the self-delusion that it was Katya he had in his arms. But in that unique, indescribable moment when a man ceases to be conscious of himself, when everything else in the world falls away, he heard her almost delirious cry:

"Peter, my beloved!"

The illusion was shattered, and he realized, that he, too, was no more than an illusion for her. Clinging to him with all her hot, satiated body, she fell asleep. But he lay awake.

What about tomorrow? he thought as he lay beside her. Tomorrow she'll see I'm not Peter; she'll realize that some perfect stranger has stolen that which belonged to him, perhaps only to forget her ever after. Will she understand? Will she forgive?

The child began to stir uneasily in its cot. Mark cautiously freed himself from Maria's arm, from her hair entangled round him, got up, went to the child, and made it comfortable. Then he went back to the bedside. She was sleeping quietly, a happy smile on her lips. Perhaps it would be better if you never woke up, he thought sadly. Moving about very quietly, he dressed. By the light of the moon he wrote a note:

"I feel that I've stolen something I had no right to. All you have given me this night belonged to another. But all the same I am happy and deeply grateful.

"You know my name and where to find me. I dare not make any proposal to you, but if you feel that you can accept me, I promise to be a faithful husband to you and a good father to little Peter. I know I have no right to ask you for love. But we are both lonely. Perhaps if we join each other in our loneliness, together we can drive it away. I shall wait for you...."

He slipped out of the house and caught a train at dawn.

He was back in Khabarovsk next day. Vavilov sent for him promptly to tell him he was being transferred to Moscow immediately.

"But I can't leave at once," Mark exclaimed. "My personal affairs necessitate my remaining here another fortnight."

"A fortnight!" Vavilov said excitedly. "Why, in a fortnight, my dear Mark, you may be turned into pork chops. Don't you know what usually happens when a Party secretary is removed from his post? Don't you know what happens to all his collaborators who remain behind and fail to win the regard of the new authorities?"

During Mark's absence it had become clear that Vavilov's fall was inevitable. Dorinas had won the duel. The secretary's desperate resistance, however, had had one favorable consequence: he had to some extent regained Stalin's confidence. He was being recalled in order to take up another, less important post. But what of all who had worked with him? From past experience he knew that when a Party secretary was replaced the new secretary carried out a ruthless purge of all the old officials. Vavilov had already arranged for several of his closest

collaborators to be transferred to other parts of Russia. It had not been an easy task, as all reshuffling of positions had to be confirmed by the Central Committee in Moscow. But he was energetic and persistent. Some time before, he had been requested to send Mark Surov to work in the central administration at Moscow, but he had not wished to part with his young assistant. Now he had decided that the request provided an excellent chance to get Mark away, but here the young fool was obstinately declaring, "I can't go away so soon."

"You see, Mark, the possibility of leaving this area may be closed at any moment. My successor may decide that you're needed here and may inform Moscow to that effect. You can be quite sure Moscow will cancel its request for you at once, for the Personnel Department there won't want to refuse the new Party secretary here, and Moscow can always manage somehow without Mark Surov! Then you'll be stuck here; the new secretary will start the usual campaign to blacken the reputation of the old secretary; and, as I shan't be here, he'll turn on those who were my assistants. And you won't escape, Mark!"

"I know all that," Mark replied. "I know that as soon as you've gone there'll be a search to expose all your past misdeeds. And what they don't find, Dorinas can always invent. And I know that the minor Party workers, like myself, will have to take the responsibility for them."

"You realize all that, and yet you refuse to go! All right!" Vavilov's face went hard; his voice was dry and official as he said:

"Very well, then, Comrade Surov! At the moment I'm still secretary of the Party organization, so I can insist on a Party member carrying out my orders. I don't know what personal affairs you're referring to, and I'm not going to inquire. In the course of Party discipline I order that you leave the Far East and go to Moscow to place yourself at the disposal of the Personnel Department. I give you permission to remain here one week to settle your personal affairs. But at the end of a week, you leave! Get that?"

"Yes," Mark said. "I accept."

Vavilov thoughtfully stroked his chin, looked at Mark attentively, and said in a warmer tone: "And so we're parting, Mark. I want to thank you; you've always been a good worker and a reliable assistant."

"I've tried to do a good job," Mark replied. "It didn't always turn out well, I know, but..."

"I know. The result didn't always depend on you, but that wasn't your fault. These days you never know what's going to come of the best of work. It's the fault of the times. Take Bayenko; he's a swine if ever there was one. And all his reports to Moscow have been as much good to him as a cold compress to a corpse. He's being dismissed with me, and he's being sent to one of the rottenest posts in the country. And even that's too good for him. But that's the sort of man the times and circumstances produce."

"I always thought man should be master of his circumstances, not submit to them blindly."

"That's pure theory, Surov! It sounds all right, but in practice, especially when political circumstances are concerned, man is their slave. Only someone very bold and determined tries to act in defiance of circumstances. But how many men are there like that?"

He got up and came round his desk to Mark.

"I hope we may meet again," he said, "if circumstances don't crush one or the other of us. I expect you'll be working in the central government administration. Volkov, who's in charge of an administrative department, has been anxious for some time to have you transferred to him. I don't suppose you'll get much joy out of the work, if I know anything about it.... But perhaps we shall meet again and work together again. Only, don't let circumstances crush you...."

He shook Mark's hand.

Mark had no personal affairs that necessitated his remaining in Khabarovsk, except one: he hoped to hear from Maria. He knew she was about to leave Vladivostok, but would she pass through Khabarovsk without seeing him, or would she, at least, telephone him? But he had no word.

He asked Vavilov to permit him to use the government wire for a personal matter. Late at night he sat in the telegraph room, waiting for a reply to his message to Professor Zamkin, asking him where his assistant, Maria Torpova, was.

The answer came back: "She left three days ago for her new post in Turkestan. She is on her way now."

So once more his hopes had deceived him. Maria must have passed through Khabarovsk by train while he was there. The realization that she did not want to see him again oppressed Mark with a crushing loneliness. Two days later he left the city and the Far East.



6. The Kremlin Monastery

THE blue-gray dwarf firs that rise against the background of the Kremlin wall are an unexpected sight in Moscow; they belong in the world of fairy tale. These firs were brought a long distance and planted in a row, as a reminder of a different world that has its beginning at this very wall. Even on hot summer days they convey a threat of the winter that will come, will drive away the sun, and fetter the earth with frost. They remind the living of the chill of death; their avenue extends across an island of death, an island that has arisen in front of the Kremlin wall. Crushing into the earth with the weight of its red marble, a low edifice stands with the one word LENIN across its façade. Inside that tomb, everything is dead. Automobiles hurry across the square as if anxious to pass this realm of death as quickly as possible; those on foot keep to the opposite side of the square from the Kremlin and slip into the hubbub of the Moscow streets that lie beyond.

At one end, beside the road running down to the bridge over the river, the square is closed by the unexpectedly joyous St. Basil's Cathedral. It raises its blue and gold domes to the sky; it delights the eye with its ingenious decoration, carved from stone and timber by forgotten masters many centuries ago. This guard has been posted for many centuries, and it holds death back firmly, enclosing it within the oblong of the square.

Since the day when it was first built by order of Czar Ivan the Terrible, death has beaten against the walls of the cathedral again and again. In the square, not far from its main entrance, stands a large stone circle girdled with rusty chains. The place of execution. On that spot much human blood was shed, but it has been washed away by the rains, and no trace is left on the white stone. Here fell the heads of those who raised rebellion against the czars. Here died Stenka Razin, the wild ataman who shook the czardom of Moscow, leading desperate men in the struggle, only to set his own head under the executioner's ax. During the reign of Peter all the square was turned into a place of execution. The great Peter did not spare his enemies; he hanged them along the Kremlin walls; he cut off their heads with his own hands and forced his intimates to do likewise.

On that side of the square that is bounded by the Kremlin wall passers-by are rare. Here death greets them with those dove-blue, frozen fir trees, the graveyard silence, the motionless sentries guarding the mausoleum. Behind the avenue of dwarf firs black marble plates with gold lettering are set into the red brick of the Kremlin wall. Behind these slabs are urns, containing ashes. The ashes in the urns and the names in gold lettering are the last mortal remains of the third-rank leaders. Closer to the mausoleum, between the firs, are several graves with stones—the graves of the second-rank leaders. Death preserves the order accepted among the living. The first-rank leader is entitled to a mausoleum. At present there is only one. But in due course others will rise beside it.

Mark slowly crossed the square, making for the main gateway into the Kremlin. As he passed the mausoleum he removed his cap. But his thoughts were not occupied with the mausoleum, but with the fir trees rising beyond. In him they stimulated a feeling of something legendary; they carried him back to those distant days when he had dozed off to sleep to his mother's measured story of the Sleeping Princess. He had to make quite an effort to shake off the enchantment of the half-forgotten tales. He hastened his steps and passed through the gateway.

He had arrived in Moscow a month before. As the train approached the platform, he had seen through the window a little woman in black, leaning on a stick. Three years before, this same woman had gazed as the train carried him away. Now she was waiting for him. One might have thought she had been standing there all those three years in expectation of her son's return.

Kornei had arranged for Mark's quarters in Moscow; he exploited his high connections. Their mother took Mark to a house in a quiet side street, led him up to the third floor, and opened the door leading to a small two-room apartment. Even such a small apartment was an entire kingdom in overpopulated Moscow.

Two days later he went to the large office building in the center of the city, where the Party Central Committee was accommodated. After receiving his pass and enduring the insulting but unavoidable procedure of the check, when the guards took close looks at his pockets and thoroughly checked his pass against various documents, he was taken up to the third floor by a guard and conducted to the

door of the department he wanted. He was led through the outer office to the private office of the head of the Personnel Department. His secretary, a man going bald, and with a large, ugly nose, was sitting at a desk; documents were arranged on it in neat piles; the lids of the inkpots were closed; the pens stuck into pen cushions. A perfect, exemplary order. The very expression on the secretary's face indicated his determination not to allow any violation of the long-established rules and regulations; he knew his instructions by heart and would act in strict accordance with them.

When Mark entered, the man did not even look up; he silently extended his long, tapering fingers across the desk. That hand was not held out in a welcoming handshake; it indicated that the secretary wanted something. Mark did not understand.

"What is it you want, comrade?"

"Your pass," the man ordered in a colorless tone. Mark handed over his pass, and the official bent over it, still without a glance at his visitor. He checked the details given in the pass with a letter lying in front of him, held the pass up to the light. Then he stretched out his hand again.

"What do you want next?" Mark asked, feeling a growing exasperation.

"Your Party ticket."

Mark handed it over. Now the pass was checked against the ticket. Each page of the little book was thoroughly examined, even the one that recorded payments of membership contributions.

"Bad!" he said.

"What's bad?" Mark asked in an ominous tone.

"You haven't paid your dues for two months. The Party is strict in regard to nonpayment of membership contributions."

Mark made no comment. He knew the Party view, but he had never been distinguished by regularity in such matters. The secretary bent down to a drawer in his desk and drew out a file with Mark's name and membership number on the front cover. He opened the file and fixed his eyes on the photograph stuck on the first page of the personal report. He compared the photograph with the one on the Party ticket. Now at last he did raise his eyes to Mark, but only in order to assure himself that this man standing before him was the same as the one on the photographs.

Evidently that finished the check. He picked up a telephone and

dialed a number. Mark heard the bell ring in an adjacent room. The secretary mentioned Mark's name, and someone in the next room replied: "Send him in and bring his personal file." The man rose from his seat and picked up the file, remarking, "Comrade Yezhov will see you."

Mark followed him into the small room occupied by the head of the Personnel Department. Yezhov was standing behind a large desk, which was arranged as neatly as that of his secretary. Yezhov had changed very little since Mark had last seen him, in the office of the Rector of the University. The same little man with a bald head and completely expressionless face. He was wearing black boots, a brown jacket, blue breeches, and a shirt with Ukrainian embroidery.

"Sit down, Comrade Surov," he said in a lifeless tone, pointing across the desk to a chair. Yezhov remained standing, looking down at Mark. He glanced through the file, drew out a drawer, and selected a card.

"Have you been given a Party reprimand?"

"Yes."

"What was it exactly, and what was it for?"

"For lack of vigilance."

"What was your lack of vigilance?"

"I formulated the details of a directive calling for the review of the lists of those deprived of electoral rights," Mark replied. (He was thinking: The swine, he knows all about it; it's in the file.) "You see, Comrade Yezhov, the directive was issued by the regional Party committee and executive committee, but I drew up the plan that carried it out, and I reported to the meeting at which it was accepted. After the plan had been carried out, it was discovered that it was all a mistake, and I was censured."

Yezhov was silent for a moment or two, before continuing: "Do you know why I have recalled you from the Far East?"

"No."

"The government secretariat has requested that you should be brought back for work in the Kremlin. We have nothing against you; but that reprimand...for a young member of the Party..."

Yezhov proceeded to give him detailed instructions on how he was to conduct himself as a worker in the Kremlin, and half an hour later he left the office. He went out in a hurry. Moscow was flooded

with sunlight; but he felt cold and shrugged his shoulders as if he had just emerged from an ice cellar.

Now he had been summoned to the Kremlin itself. Once more he had to go through all the complicated procedure of obtaining a pass, having his documents checked, the photographs compared; but at last he was within the holy of holies and making his way along under the wall to the entrance of the government building. As he entered the hall, he came to an involuntary halt. In the far corner was a heap of building rubbish.

"Comrade, please go on to your destination."

The order came from a man in uniform with raspberry frogs. He was standing a little to one side, making a note in a notebook. Mark obediently proceeded up the carpeted stairs. The government secretariat was on the third floor. As he went up that narrow staircase, his pass was checked three times; but at last he reached the third-floor corridor. It was empty. His feet sank into the soft carpet, a subdued light fell from above. Not knowing which way to turn, he turned left. But at once a man in uniform stepped in front of him and pointed in the opposite direction:

"That's your way, Comrade."

From the far end of the corridor a guard came to meet him and conducted him to the room he sought. He did not have to wait long in the reception room. An elderly secretary went to report to Comrade Volkov that Surov had arrived, first gathering all the papers from his desk and thrusting them into a drawer, as though afraid Mark might take the opportunity to look at them in his absence. A moment or two later he returned and asked him to pass into his chief's office. As Mark went in, a small, withered old man jumped up nimbly from an enormous carved desk and trotted to meet him.

"Why, of course it's he!" he exclaimed, joyfully rubbing his hands. "How are you, Mark? How are you, son of the regiment? Why, how you've grown! You're quite a big man now! But why that deep furrow on your forehead?"

Mark smiled with pleasure. It was Victor Emelianovich. Since the day he had returned to Moscow from the Budenny Army, Mark had not heard anything more of him. But now he had turned up, again, in the Kremlin. He shook Mark's hand vigorously and laughed gaily, though with an old man's laugh. He turned Mark to the light, rose on his toes, and tried to stroke him on his head as he had been in the

habit of doing in former days. But he remembered that Mark was no longer a boy, and he drew his hand away with an embarrassed smile.

"Forgive me, Mark," he said; "you remind me of those old times. You're still the cheeky and hotheaded lad we called the son of the regiment. How old are you really, my boy?"

"Oh, I'm very old! Twenty-six! But I never expected to meet you, Victor Emelianovich. I always knew you by the name of Peresvetov, but here you seem to be known as Volkov."

"What's in a name, Mark, my boy? I had someone else's name then, and Volkov isn't my real name, either. We lost our real names when working underground before the war, and we've never been able to find them since. Remember what the poet says: 'May Russia be exalted, may our names perish!'"

"I often thought of you; and I often inquired after you. But nobody knew any Peresvetov."

"That's not surprising, Mark, not surprising. But what are you standing for? Sit down. We'll have a talk, and then you must come home with me."

Mark had to tell Victor Emelianovich all his story: how he had studied, how he had worked, what he had seen, and what he thought. He did not know where to begin; but once he had begun he went on and on, while Volkov only raised his hands to his face, as if to defend himself against the blows of that torrent of words. In all the world Mark had found the one man to whom he could pour out everything in confidence that he would understand. He told of Komsomolsk, of the free collective farmers who were forced to work under armed guards, of the incidents at the Kholodny mine, and much else. He could not conceal the bitter doubts that tormented him, and the old man asked him bluntly:

"Tell me, is your faith still strong in the truth of our cause? Don't hedge! I can see you're filled with doubts, and I'd like to know what you think of all you've told me."

Mark's head sank on his chest. He thought for a long time, but the old man waited patiently. At last he said quietly:

"That question must either be left unanswered, or be answered fully.... Do I still believe? I don't know. Probably I do. If I lose my faith, what can I live by? No other faith has been given to me, any more than to the rest of us. I believe that Communism will bring

people happiness; but whether we shall see that happiness and whether those who come after us will see it, I don't know. At present I see one thing: there is much evil all around us. Senseless, harmful evil that weighs down on our faith and crushes it. And I don't accept that evil; I don't believe it's necessary. I used to believe that when you chop wood splinters fly. But now I see so many splinters that nothing is left of the Communist forest and there's nothing to build with. You can't build with splinters. There's much I can't accept, and I've even thought of dropping out of the Party and thinking over in freedom all that's going on and how we're to defend our great faith from the evil that comes of our own selves. If we don't defend it, and our faith perishes, then we shall have nothing to live by...."

Victor Emelianovich listened closely to all he had to say. At the end he got up and trotted nervously round his desk. His pale, drawn face was blotchy with anger; he whispered something, waving his arms. He dropped his hand on Mark's shoulder and leaned hard on it. He spoke nervously, rapidly, tensely:

"I understand you, Mark; perhaps I understand you better than you understand yourself. My generation is guilty before your generation, and before you, my boy; for we taught you to believe, but we didn't teach you how to defend your faith. Here you stand in your perplexity, standing guard over your faith and ours; you're hurt to see that the faith is declining, and you have no idea how to maintain it. The most terrible thing of all is that we, the old men who believed together with you, we also do not know.... You didn't say, but I can guess that you hold the Party responsible for what you have called the murder of the Communist idea. There you're wrong. The Party cannot be held responsible; for a long time it's been clear that it's become a victim of the same powers that flung the Lena you've mentioned into a concentration camp. But get this into your head and remember it, my boy. Nobody has any right to abandon the Party; otherwise it will be left with only scoundrels as members. I shan't say any more now; I've already said a lot. But you're not to leave the Party. I'm glad you are fundamentally the same as when I first knew you, when everything was clearer and there weren't the doubts that you have now. Very, very glad.... But now I must take you along and introduce you to our chief, Abel Safronovich."

He took Mark to the end of the corridor and through a luxuriously furnished reception room into an equally luxurious office; its walls

were covered with blue stamped leather, while the furniture was upholstered in blue brocade. A fleshy man with a handsome shock of snow-white hair rose to meet them. Yenukidze, secretary to the government, was justly regarded as one of the handsomest of men. Large blue eyes, a big, hooked nose, a broad, expansive forehead. He was dressed in an irreproachably tailored gray suit; his tie was held by a pin with a large stone. He gave Mark a friendly smile and held out his plump, white hand.

"I didn't think you were still so young, Comrade Surov," he said in a pleasant, though rather guttural voice with a perfect Russian accent. "Youth doesn't take kindly to our monastery, but if you find it to your taste here, I shall be very glad."

Mark already knew almost all there was to be known about this handsome, white-headed man, who was regarded as Stalin's closest friend. He came of an affluent Georgian family, had had a very good education, but had devoted himself while a student to underground revolutionary activities. In this work he had fallen in with Stalin, who was much younger. Stalin won the heart of the responsive Yenukidze and became, so to speak, his spiritual son. The friendship had continued after Stalin had become head of the Party. Yenukidze was given the office of government secretary, a prominent position, but more an honor than a job, since Stalin had taken all the governmental functions into his own hands. Yenukidze was perfectly happy in this situation; the time had passed when he could be set on fire by urgent social problems. But he had retained his great personal charm, which was, perhaps, why everybody called him "The Party Uncle."

Mark's introduction was part of a ritual. No matter how small the position he was to occupy, every prospective Central Government official who came to work in the Kremlin had to be introduced to Yenukidze.

"We've invited Mark Timofeevich Surov to join our staff. He's been working in the Far East and is generally considered to have done well." Victor Emelianovich also was observing a ritual in giving this testimonial. One could take for granted that Yenukidze already knew all about Mark.

"Excellent, excellent!" he said in a gracious tone. "We badly need workers who know the lower branches of government activity from the practical aspect."

The ritual had been observed, and they could withdraw. Victor

Emelianovich led Mark from room to room, introducing him to the other workers. Mark was struck by the fact that a large proportion consisted of women, and he asked his old friend, "These offices blossom with women like a flower bed. And every one of them is a beauty. Where have you collected them all from?"

Victor Emelianovich laughed aloud and clapped him on the shoulder:

"I knew you'd notice that. And you're right. It's a long-standing joke in Moscow that Yenukidze's started a salon of beautiful women. That was Stalin's own comment. But don't let it worry you; you won't have any success with any of them. The First Department supervises them all so closely that no frivolous thought could ever enter their heads. A great deal is demanded of our women workers, including modesty of behavior. The First Department, which is responsible for guarding the Kremlin and the Party leaders, sees to that, but I really don't know how it manages it. Some of them get married, but anything worse than that—God forbid!"

"But are they specially chosen for their beauty?"

"I don't suppose it works like that. It's just natural selection. Yenukidze likes all the beautiful things of life, and when he's taking on new workers he prefers beautiful women. Those who're concerned with engaging them know that and act accordingly. But don't believe any yarns you may hear in the town. Yenukidze is no philanderer, and in all the years I've known him I've never heard of his having an amour. So far as he's concerned women are nothing more than statues, and he just prefers his statues to be beautiful."

As they were returning to Victor Emelianovich's room, the corridor suddenly came to life. A dozen guards emerged and swiftly stationed themselves along the corridor, one by each window. Volkov took Mark by the elbow and drew him over to the wall. A crowd of men dressed in military uniform was coming straight toward them, at their head a man in a brown military tunic. He walked with a gentle step, unhurriedly, in soft knee boots, as though he were the only person in the corridor; his sloping shoulders quivered a little; his right hand swung in time with his steps. Mark felt agitated as Stalin's yellowish eyes slipped over him; but the feeling lasted only a second; those eyes had already passed beyond him. As he went by, Stalin thrust out one hand to clasp Volkov's hand and remarked in guttural tones with a faulty pronunciation: "Still alive, old fellow?

But creaking? Don't worry; an old tree creaks a long time before it snaps, doesn't it?"

He went on without waiting for an answer; the crowd of military men followed him. Probably they were officers of the Kremlin guard, as they all had raspberry frogs on their tunics. Mark glanced at Victor Emelianovich, and was amazed at the pallor of his face and his embarrassed, wretched expression. He whispered something, and Mark just caught several words of a familiar phrase from an old legend.

"What did you say?" he asked. The old man hesitated for a moment before replying:

"For some reason the words of an old fairy story came into my head. I couldn't help thinking of Stalin as King Frost making the round of his kingdom.... And it isn't so very far from the truth. I've known Stalin a long time, but I always feel myself inwardly boiling whenever I see him. We just didn't realize that our Party needs a leader who is sinless and a genius, a kind of immaculate conception. Now we do realize it, and we've got him."

Now only the guards were left in the corridor; they went from room to room. Volkov's eyes lit up with amusement. "You see how much trouble Stalin's unexpected arrival has given these young men!" he remarked. A man in a very smart uniform passed them; meeting him in the street, Mark would have judged him to be some foreign diplomat. The officer touched his cap and exchanged courteous greetings with Victor Emelianovich, while giving Mark a close look. He vanished into a room at the end of the corridor.

"Even the head of the First Department has turned up," Volkov remarked. "He always does when Stalin unexpectedly changes his route and appears somewhere unscheduled. It's hard work, defending a beloved leader!"

There was contempt in his tone and contempt in his eye. But Mark could not be sure whom the contempt was for. A guard approached them.

"Comrades, go to your room and remain there until you're informed you can leave it," he ordered.

"Come into my room, Mark," Victor Emelianovich said, "and I'll explain your duties to you."

As he explained them, those duties were very simple. Mark was to report on all problems of government activity in its local aspects. The various republics sent the Central Government monthly reports

on their work, and he was to study these, correlate them, and formulate his conclusions. Apart from this, he would be given special commissions.

A guard looked into the room and notified them that the ban on their movement was lifted. Then he asked Mark to follow him.

"Evidently the head of the First Department wishes to see you," the old man explained, as the guard went out. "Go and receive your first lesson in decorum."

The guard conducted Mark to a small, modestly furnished room, occupied by the smartly dressed officer who had passed them in the corridor. He rose from his chair and shook hands, then politely asked him to sit down and offered him a cigarette.

"You are to listen to the following instructions, and get them by heart," he said. "I know you've had to fill in quite a lot of forms during the last few days, as well as to pass quite a few checks, haven't you?"

"I've filled in more questionnaires during the past fortnight than in all the rest of my life," Mark admitted.

"A necessary precaution!" the man laughed cheerfully. "But don't let it get you down; I'm not going to make you fill out more. My task is different: I have to warn you against taking unwise steps, in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense of the words, as otherwise the consequences might be unfortunate. To begin with, you must clearly understand that on this floor you turn only to the right, never to the left. You've already gone wrong once, but you didn't know the rule then, and it won't be held against you. There's no point in my suppressing what you're bound to find out in any case. To the left is Comrade Stalin's personal office and the Politbureau room. You can go that way only if you're summoned there. And once and for all, you must avoid any meeting with Comrade Stalin such as you've had today. If you see Comrade Stalin coming along the corridor, you must turn into the nearest room and remain there till the guard informs you you can leave. You didn't know this regulation, either, so your mistake just now will not be held against you. In any case you were with Comrade Volkov, who is exempted from the regulation."

From all the officer's ensuing instructions Mark realized that henceforth he was under the complete and comprehensive control of the First Department of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. He was never to talk anywhere or to anyone about the location of

the various rooms and apartments in the Kremlin. He was forbidden to interest himself in the personal life of the leaders, and if he learned anything, he was not to pass it on to anybody, under pain of the severest consequences. He could leave the Kremlin during office hours only after giving advance notice to a certain number on the telephone. He was forbidden to take away any kind of official document or paper. If he had to transfer documents to another organization and had to do it personally, he could go to the other organization only if accompanied by a guard. While at work, he must make use only of the Kremlin private telephone exchange, which connected with all the government and Party organizations and all the leading figures of the state. If he had to telephone someone who was not on a private line, he must ask the operator to get him the number. He was forbidden to talk on official matters over his home telephone, but if it became absolutely necessary to do so, then the conversation had to be carried on through the Kremlin switchboard, which would connect him with the person required.

"You understand everything?" the officer asked.

"Perfectly!" Mark said with relief, thinking that this ended the first lesson.

"Good! Then we'll proceed to the next point of our conversation. You must be very prudent in your personal life. It's a pity you're so young... I mean, I'm not casting any reflection on your youth, but young people find our instructions much more unpleasant than elderly or married people. Woman, my dear Comrade Surov, is the source of many evils. I'll speak to you as man to man. At your age a woman is necessary. The best thing would be for you to get married, but that doesn't depend even on us. Perhaps you have someone in mind?"

"No, nobody," Mark answered.

"Pity!" the officer sighed. "But we could recommend to you a very good-looking girl... several, in fact. You could choose a wife from them."

"Thank you!" Mark laughed. "It really isn't necessary, not at the moment, at any rate." He couldn't help thinking it would be stupid in any case to choose one of the N.K.V.D. agents for his wife.

"All right," the officer replied. "We'll assume that at present you don't wish to get married. But then how do you propose to arrange your relations with women? So far as we know you're not the sort to indulge in light affairs. That affair of yours with the girl the Japs

carried off shows that. But I must say that casual relations have many advantages. I'm not speaking officially now, but simply from experience. A woman you've got no respect for will never find out more than you allow her to. She's only a passing amusement, and you never let her occupy your mind, get control of your thoughts, find out about your work. But perhaps you're not attracted to the pleasures of casual relations. In which case we must regard you as a dangerous character. You may fall in love. Men like you go very far when they're in love. If you fall in love, and we approve your choice, well and good; but if we should happen to think her not suited to you, the affair would take a very undesirable turn. Precisely for that reason I did not recommend accepting you for work in the Kremlin; but Comrade Volkov was very insistent."

"I rather think all this conversation's really unnecessary," Mark said quietly. "I don't anticipate running any risk of falling in love, and so your fears are premature."

"My function, Comrade Surov, is to anticipate everything. I have to anticipate the direction in which your relations with women will develop, and what women they will develop with. I think we can summarize this part of our talk as follows: You will not be interested in casual relations. That's your affair. We simply prefer that if you are, such relations should not be with a woman completely abandoned. I advise you to make acquaintance with the artistic world; you'll find many attractive women there. But if you have a serious affair, you'll give us some anxiety, you understand? We shall have to know the woman you're having it with. That sort of amusement never occurs in a vacuum. And we have to know in advance where you propose to spend your spare time and with whom you spend your evenings, or your days off. You must understand that if you pass your time in other people's company, we must know what is happening in that company. If you have visitors at home, you must notify us, reporting it to the telephone number I've just given you. Among your guests will be one you haven't invited, but you must receive him. I think that will be sufficient for the moment."

A minute or two before nine each morning, individuals and groups of people, workers in the various Kremlin organizations, made their way to the main gate of the Kremlin. Those who had been brought from their homes by automobile alighted on the farther side of the

square and proceeded on foot. The automobile sent from the government car park to fetch Mark arrived for him at 8:45. The spacious Lincoln was already occupied by his regular fellow travelers—a tall. gaunt man wearing a pince-nez and another, gloomy and taciturn, who kept his nose stuck in the morning paper. The man in pince-nez always greeted Mark with the phrase: "Good morning, young generation!" The other snorted something in reply to Mark's greeting and went on reading the editorials. The automobile tore through the streets of Moscow, and the militiamen silently watched it pass: automobiles bearing government numbers could exceed the speed limit. The Kremlin atmosphere extended as far as that luxurious Lincoln. The passengers exchanged insignificant remarks or said nothing. One of the most important of the Kremlin regulations was never to talk about one's work and never to show interest in what others were doing. Mark knew that the man in pince-nez worked in the Protocol Department, while he had seen the other man in a room cut off from the corridor not only by a door but by a heavy grille. The secret department was grilled off even in the Kremlin.

The guards at the Kremlin gate knew all the workers by heart, but their scrutiny when checking the passes was nonetheless searching. Those who worked on the third floor of the government building, in Yenukidze's department, found him waiting for them on the staircase leading from the second floor. He shook hands with the men and gallantly kissed the women's fingers. Mark soon realized that this, too, was part of the established Yenukidze ritual. Yenukidze attached no importance to the official position of any woman; he was as gallant in kissing the hand of the office cleaner as that of his secretary. Every male worker in the secretariat always had to show the utmost courtesy to his women colleagues if he did not wish to incur his chief's anger.

At 9:05 A.M. precisely Yenukidze left his post on the stairs, and the working day began.

It was not long before Mark was plunged into the depths of despondency. The work was not to his taste at all. He likened himself to a man carried to the top of a lofty hill. Below him a great battle of peoples was going on, but on the height where he was standing was silence. Not a sound of the battle, not a breath of wind reached him; that immovable rock rose amid the continually flowing torrent of life; perched on it, Mark could see everything that went on, but

was entirely above the battle, in a kingdom of death. Yet he felt that he did not really belong to that dead world. His world was below, where people were building and destroying, destroying and building, in terrible suffering.

Victor Emelianovich never said much, and only in his kind, piercing eyes did Mark read the command: Look and know!

"I want to get out of the Kremlin," Mark said to him one day. "I'm not suited to this work. Every day I feel just as though I'm committing a crime. I feel so cut off from the world and so... hardened, I simply can't go on. Help me to get out."

"Where to?" Victor Emelianovich asked. "Where d'you want to go, Mark?"

"I want to be among the people. My place is with them."

The old man thoughtfully doodled over the paper. Then he looked at Mark, and Mark felt sorry for him.

"Forgive me, Victor Emelianovich. I didn't mean to insult you."

"You haven't said anything insulting. What you've just said I've known for a long time. We'll talk about that later; now I must tell you that I can't help you to leave the Kremlin, and I wouldn't if I could. You're being given a unique opportunity to get experience you could acquire nowhere else. And that will be of value to you in the future. Among the people you can only see a short distance; and there are certain things that need to be observed from a long way off. Observe, and learn."

Outwardly Mark was calm enough. He arrived at the office punctually; he was precise in the performance of his duties; he talked little; and it was difficult to guess at the seething agitation going on inside him. He was learning a new lesson from life, but he himself had no idea what the lesson was, or where it would lead him. The most disturbing discovery he made while working in the Kremlin was that no real "government" existed. Yenukidze, Kalinin, innumerable other well-known, celebrated people—these were not the government, though they were regarded as such. They held meetings, they received visitors; but they themselves, and their visitors, knew it was all only a convention, since they could decide nothing. What went by the name of government was in reality a paralyzed, will-less body, lacking all power to act independently. Its life, and its death, were in the hands of something more powerful, though that was not called the government.

At first Mark had thought that the activities of the Central Government were such as would call for audacious thought and a clear conception of the existing situation; but he soon realized that the government was only a necessary appendage, obediently functioning within the limits prescribed for it. Never, perhaps, had he realized so fully what power was possessed by Stalin as now, when he worked in the Kremlin, where everything done was in accordance with the leader's wishes and only as he had ordained. It was a strange fact that this power, which Mark had long recognized, and even at times had been ready to recognize as a blessing, found its final and consummate expression in the insignificant fact that not only Stalin, but all those in his entourage, wielded this boundless power. Poskrebishev, Stalin's personal secretary, was of incomparably greater importance than any member of the government and even of the Politbureau. His word was as sacred as Stalin's, for the secretary's voice had an authoritative note conferred by Stalin himself.

"I look for the government, but I can't find it," Mark said to Victor Emelianovich. "Everything's directed from Stalin's office. From that office originate the lists of rewards; to it the ministries, which we call People's Commissariats, make their reports. All the appointments proceed from it; all the government decrees are prepared in it, being sent to us only for drafting; even the death-sentence petitions pass through that office and arrive here with a note from Poskrebishev stating who is to be pardoned and who not. So where is the government that you insisted on my coming and working for?"

As a rule the old man simply smiled enigmatically and did not answer such questions.

Mark saw that the Kremlin lived its own separate life, cut off from the country. Every day he had to pass a high and finely wrought grille, always guarded by sentries. That grille barred off the right wing of the great Kremlin palace, where Stalin lived in solitude. Mark felt sure it must be inconvenient and unpleasant for him to live in that palace, with its many luxurious halls, its sumptuous gilt and stucco decorations. And lonely, even though Stalin had married again. Mark always thought of Stalin as lonely. A wife was only a detail, and not one that would warm his old age or make him any the less lonely.

"Stalin must find life very uncomfortable," he said once to Victor Emelianovich. "In that enormous palace, surrounded by guards, never

daring to go anywhere. Surely he hasn't condemned himself to such a life simply through fear?"

"It's the logic of dictatorship," Volkov replied. "Stalin trusts nobody, so he has barred himself off not only from the world outside the Kremlin wall, but even from the rest of the Kremlin. Dictatorship has its own logic, my boy. And it's very simple: the more a dictator is feared, the more he fears."

"Surely that applies more to the dictators of past ages?" Mark argued. "They were personal dictators, and when they disappeared, everything changed. But Stalin derives his strength from the dictatorship of the Party and the proletariat, and his disappearance wouldn't change anything. I think that should have freed him from all sense of fear. After all, his death will not end the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Party."

This conversation took place in Volkov's home. Of late he was frequently unwell, and then he stayed at home, and his subordinates reported to him there. Mark had long since finished his official business with the old man, but he remained to talk. Now Volkov rose painfully from his chair and went across to the window. It looked out over one of the busiest streets in Moscow.

"Come here, Mark," he called without turning round.

Mark went and stood beside him. Victor Emelianovich nodded to indicate the street. There was nothing unusual to be seen; the sidewalks were crowded; the automobiles slipped past. Mark's attention was drawn to a man walking along the road among the traffic. He was pushing an old pram filled with kindling.

"There goes the dictator," Victor Emelianovich remarked. "And his servants outstrip the dictators in the automobiles."

Mark looked again at the man pushing the pram. He was dressed in an old, ragged jacket and a greasy cap, his back was bowed, and he shuffled along unconcernedly in enormous, clumsy boots. Mark could not see his face but knew it would be the face of a man crushed with want and heavy labor, the face of all the Moscow workers—silent, glum, always leaving something unexpressed.

"There have been many changes in the world since we first believed in the salvation of the proletarian dictatorship and took the burden of that ideal onto our shoulders. It was a great ideal, so it seemed to us then. But the workers remain just as poverty-stricken as before, the little man is still in the power of great forces that crush him, transform him into something of very petty significance. The proclamation of the sounding slogans has changed nothing. The slogans remain, but now they are only words we utter from habit. Only words. You, too, Mark, have the habit of talking about the dictatorship of the proletariat; but when you saw the proletariat, you thought it rather stupid to submit to the hypnotism of words. Didn't you?"

"That's true, Victor Emelianovich," Mark said, as he turned away from the window. "We've absorbed a lot of rigmarole that once conveyed definite conceptions. But then the conceptions vanished, were wiped out of our consciousness, but the words remained, and we go on using them from sheer habit... and because we're unable to formulate the new conceptions in words."

One unpleasant autumn morning Mark was hurriedly dressing. His mother had gone to visit his brother Ivan, several days' journey from Moscow, and that complicated his life. In Moscow he was quite alone; he had many acquaintances, but his life was lonely. He longed to have genuine, faithful friends; but where was he to find them in a country where everybody was beginning to be afraid of everybody else, where informing was spreading everywhere and was astounding in its cynical frankness? That morning he thought of Paul Morozov, a boy who had been transformed into a hero and martyr. Some days previously, Mark had drafted a government decree to raise a memorial to Paul Morozov on the spot where he had been killed. Stalin's secretary had written a tiny penciled note: "It would be desirable to raise a memorial to Paul Morozov." The note had gone to Kalinin, from Kalinin to Yenukidze, and thence to Mark. The note did not indicate who desired to erect a memorial to the boy who had been killed in the forest. But everybody knew it was Stalin's wish. The decree was signed now, and some sculptor was already at work in his studio, carving out the boy's small, thin figure.

Mark was repelled by the idea of this monument. He felt sorry for the boy, who had been bestially killed, but the idea of a monument seemed dictated by the mind, not by the heart. The peasants in Paul's village had resisted collectivization. They had hidden their grain, had driven their cattle off into the forest. Paul's father, himself a peasant, had helped his fellow villagers. But no matter how well they concealed the grain, the authorities found it with suspicious ease.

Paul Morozov was informing them of everything that went on in his village. Then his father was made chairman of the village soviet, and he decided to help the peasants to hide from the Soviet Government's persecutions. He provided them with false documents. Paul reported this, too. His father was arrested and brought to trial. The son was a witness. "As a Pioneer and a foster child of Stalin, I declare that my father is an enemy of the Communist Party and the Soviet regime," he proudly testified. He spoke boldly, fearlessly, staring his father in the eyes, and in answer to the judges' question, declared that his father was deserving of death. "Everyone who fights against Stalin must be killed."

Paul's father and several other peasants were shot. The elders of the village met, and even his own grandmother agreed that her favorite grandson should die. She led him into the forest, where the villagers killed him. For that they paid a high price. Not only his grandmother and those who committed the murder, but all their families, also, were shot.

Mark felt a cold feeling of revulsion as he thought of the incident. He did not condemn Paul, but that boy clearly revealed the features of the new man who was being created by the regime. Paul was not old enough to understand very much, but one thing he saw clearly: Everyone who fights against Stalin must be killed. Of course, Mark thought, Stalin is touched by such devotion. But it's revolting to think that now we're going to have a Paul Morozov cult, a cult of treachery, which will help Stalin to secure his position still more strongly. How many Paul Morozovs will come into being now? Stalin needs them, and he'll create them. And not one man dares to say that the memorial to Paul Morozov is sacrilege, because it exalts treachery. . . .

He felt an irresistible longing to see Victor Emelianovich, who was staying in a sanatorium a couple of hours' journey from Moscow. He picked up his telephone receiver and called up the Kremlin. Yenukidze's secretary answered. "Lydia Lvovna," Mark said, "be so good as to ask permission for me not to come in today."

The woman at the other end was slow in replying; she was obviously wondering how to put the request to Abel Safronovich. She was some thirty years of age, very good-looking, and like a slowly functioning automaton that performs all the operations committed to it with perfect precision. Her clear, southern face was always coldly dispassionate; she was attentive and obliging to everybody; but behind

everything she did one felt a chill that forbade any idea of joking with her or making her smile.

"I'll report your request to Abel Safronovich at once," Mark heard her say. "But he's sure to ask your reason for not coming in."

"No particular reason. It's my birthday, and I'd like to have the day off. And I thought I'd go and visit Victor Emelianovich."

Two or three minutes later he heard her again. "Abel Safronovich asks me to give you his congratulations, and says that of course you can stay at home. If you do go to see Victor Emelianovich, give him Abel Safronovich's best wishes."

"Good! Thank you!"

"And I add my own congratulations, Mark Timofeevich," she went on. "How old are you today?"

"Oh, very old, Lydia Lvovna. I'm ashamed to admit how old. Twenty-seven."

He heard her laugh quietly. "My goodness!" she said. "Such a child! And you look so serious and reserved. All the same, I congratulate you. I hope you'll celebrate your seventieth birthday in due course."

"Thank you, Lydia Lvovna. Especially for your laugh. I didn't think you could laugh."

"Good-by!" he heard her say tartly.

He replaced the receiver.

He phoned several acquaintances and invited them to spend the evening with him. Then he went to the neighbor who was attending to his domestic needs while his mother was away, and warned her that he was expecting guests. He took a taxi and in two hours he was at the sanatorium where Victor Emelianovich was staying. He would not take a government automobile from the Kremlin garage; he objected to having a driver who was also an employee of the secret police.

He and Victor Emelianovich went for a walk. The pine grove in which they strolled was dark with the autumn rains, and an air of tranquil sadness clung to it. The great trees stood motionless, dank and mournful. The autumnal sky hung low overhead, with a light mist of rain cloud scurrying over it.

"I don't like the autumn," the old man said. "It makes me think of death."

He leaned heavily on his stick and was wrapped in a warm over-

coat and thick scarf. His slight infirmity had developed into a prolonged illness; the doctors would not express any opinion as to its cause. His face was pale, almost translucent; his gray beard, gray eyebrows, and hair matched the pallor of his complexion, and his skin was waxy. But the eyes, blue, dilated, still burned with a feverish fire, reflecting an undying, inward flame.

The strain that never left Mark these days was reflected in the unpleasant glint of his eyes, the obstinate set of his mouth, and his deliberate movements. Twenty-seven was not a great age, but he felt that he must hurry and decide something.

The same thoughts went around and around in his mind, eating at his faith. We Communists have brought our country to ruin. Our great idea has proved to be a great void. The poison in it has eaten away the tissues of human souls, has destroyed all their striving for good and justice. Man lives only to eat; a piece of bread is the supreme meaning of existence. We promised that life would flourish as never before, but we have brought a flowerless poverty. We promised peace, but we've brought war. A war of classes, a war of ideas, a war of systems, a war of peoples. We promised equality, but we've already laid the foundations of a monstrous inequality. Before, there was at least equality within social groups; now even that is disappearing. The Stakhanovite worker will be the enemy of other workers; the Stakhanovite peasant will be set in opposition to all the other peasants; the intellectual smiled upon by Stalin will become the enemy of the less favored intellectuals. We are creating a new class of elite, drawn from all the strata of society. How much we promised and how little we have given! We promised freedom, the future, almost a universal happiness; but in reality we've given the people a fraud, a great and cruel fraud.

"Dear Victor Emelianovich," he said aloud, "life is easy only when a man clearly knows what he is living for."

They had been walking for a long time; they ought to be turning back; but neither of them wished to break off the conversation—a conversation begun not that day, but long before. Mark had told all the news. He used no exaggerated language, yet in all he said the old man sensed the anxiety that now continually consumed him.

"That's very true, Mark," Victor Emelianovich answered. "It's easy to live when you know what you're living for. But it's not at all easy to mark out a sound road through life. I, like you, have no idea

what that right road is for me, for you, or for anybody else. For me the worst of all is that autumn has come. The autumn of my life. And now I shall never find the right road. But you must go on looking for it, my boy. You're young, you have a stout heart, and you'll find it." He panted as he spoke; great beads of sweat stood out on his waxen face.

"I don't know about that," Mark said gloomily. "I don't even know whether I ought to search for it, or whether it wouldn't be better to make my peace. Think how good things can be for you if you submit! You have a comfortable life, you attend meetings, you applaud Stalin and the name of Stalin, but in reality you don't care a damn as long as your little world is left whole and nobody threatens it. After all, isn't it true that it's always the petty egotists who're happy, while people of great vision are always unhappy?"

"Yes, that's true. But, like everything else in this world, happiness is relative. After all, your happy petty egotists are simply the dung with which the soil of history is manured. What happiness is there in their petty and unnecessary happiness, if they're predestined to be dung, passing without trace into the soil of history? Those who have greater imagination can't be satisfied with the wretched little happiness of the egotists. And in the generally accepted sense of the word they're unhappy, but in history they're a phenomenon that does not die altogether, but leaves traces for long after. There's great happiness in doing something that won't die with you, or at least in serving some cause capable of changing the world for the better. Surely you don't want to be one of those happy little egotists?"

"But why not?" Mark retorted irritably. "In the last resort I can't change anything in this world, but I have got to get through life somehow or other. So wouldn't it be better to get through it comfortably? To marry and have a lot of children? I'll hold down a good official job, which will bring me not only bread but butter as well. I shall play on the memory of my father and brothers and be counted a faithful son of the Lenin-Stalin Party. I shall cherish my wife, take her to the theater at the proper occasions, love her at the proper occasions. And no risks, no upsets. So I've decided to become a son of a bitch with a Party ticket."

The old man laughed quietly. "No, Mark," he said, "you'll never be that. That's for others; but you're made of different metal. Possibly you yourself don't realize how fundamental to you is your desire to work for the good of others. You believed in Communism because it promised to bring good to everybody.... I often wonder what you'd have been if you'd been born twenty-five years earlier."

"I'd have been a peasant. I'd have spent all my life as an earthworm, and when I came to die, I'd have turned my eyes upward and yielded my soul to God. It would all have been simple and clear."

"I don't believe it. You'd never have stayed on the land. You'd have gone off into the world to seek for truth, and you'd have found it in some revolutionary organization. You'd have fought against czarism; possibly you'd have thrown a bomb at the Czar. And you'd have believed, as we all believed, that there was no finer cause than our struggle. And you'd have died in that struggle, happy and confident that you'd taken the right road. But you were born later, when the cause you could not help serving had triumphed. And now you see that that cause is not the right one; you see it has led us into a gigantic blind alley, from which now there is no way out for me, though you may find one. You'll go on searching. You'll fall, but you'll rise again, and search again. Many generations of simple Russian people have sought truth and freedom; their desires are in your blood and in the blood of the many like you. Your road is predetermined, too, just as winter is predetermined to follow this filthy autumn.

"You often ask yourself that, but you find no answer. I'll answer for you; I'll answer the question I can read in your eyes, in all you say. Shall I?"

Mark was silent.

"We, my boy, are the victims of our own crime. You and I carry in our pockets the membership books of the Communist Party; but that's only because of inertia; it's all that's left to us of our Communist enthusiasm. We hate the regime we've created. We hate and despise Stalin and those who have gathered round him. We know that our idea has been killed and that the idea itself is defective and false. We thought we could establish the kingdom of freedom on this earth with a crime; but a crime can only give birth to crime, nothing more. We don't know what we ought to desire, what we ought to do. All our country is filled with people like us, who don't know what to do or how to save themselves from the evil that crushes us all, or even what to replace that evil with. That's terrible for me to realize; I'm

an old man, and I can't change anything. I can only slam the door as I go out. It's terrible for you, too; but you'll survive it. You're young, and if you've already learned to hate, then you'll go on searching. You have learned to hate, haven't you?"

Mark did not speak; perhaps he found it too terrible to have to admit, even to Victor Emelianovich, that he hated the Stalin regime and Stalin.

"But it's got to be said!" the old man persisted. "I've given forty years to the Party, only now, on the edge of the grave, to say that I've been bitterly and hopelessly mistaken, and I've served a great falsehood, in the belief that it was the greatest truth in the world. It's bitter to have to admit that you've spent your life in vain and now it's too late to put anything right."

"But if we throw over our faith in Communism," Mark cried, "what is there left to us? A void?"

"Nature cannot stand a vacuum," the old man answered gently. "At the moment we can only establish the fact that you and I have been turned from faithful Communists into enemies of Communism. And don't think that's anything exceptional. In that journey we've traveled together with all our nation. It believed in the Communist ideal once; but then it began to have doubts, and now it hates its former faith. That process has been reflected in us too; and now we are what we are: hating and perplexed. Amusing, don't you think? Two officials in the Kremlin, one of them a member of the government, while the other may soon become a member of the government, and here we are walking in a wood outside Moscow and carrying on counterrevolutionary conversations that are punishable with the death sentence. Such is the finale, my dear Mark, the finale to my life and your faith. There's only one thing left for me to say...."

He laid his thin hand on Mark's shoulder, and said quietly, compassionately: "I can't help you in the least, Mark. I know the future will not be kind to you. I've never had a son; but if I had, I'd have wished him to be like you. I don't know what the future will bring for you, but remember: never break your link with the people. Don't kill your desire to serve the people. I don't know how you'll serve them. It's not for old Victor Emelianovich, who all his life has followed the one, albeit false, road, to show you your aim, but for you to find it yourself. I believe in you, Mark."

Mark was deeply moved. "But here you are wandering through a

wood," Victor Emelianovich went on, "when you ought to have been on your way back to Moscow long since. You've got your party tonight, you know. And don't forget to register it first in the records of the First Department, or you may have some unpleasantness."

Mark was still under the heavy mood of their talk, and he burst out: "But supposing one tries to put the situation right all the same? Supposing one tries, Victor Emelianovich?"

"I knew you'd come to that, my boy. And, as always, I tell you: no! Stalin's death would not alter anything. I don't say it's impossible, though it would be terribly difficult. You met him once by chance in the corridor, but you haven't seen him since. And I haven't either. But the point is not even that it's so difficult, but that it's pointless. The system he has created will function without him, and possibly even better without him. The new dictator would have to consolidate his position with fresh torrents of blood. No, I'll never support that idea. The point is not to kill Stalin, but to destroy his system. After all, he himself is only a detail in his system, and life by no means always develops along the course he has laid down for it."

Through the great gates of the sanatorium they passed into the courtyard. Mark said good-by to Victor Emelianovich, and got into the taxi. But as they drove away and turned out of the avenue of old willows on to the highroad, he suddenly felt sick at heart and angrily suppressed a great longing to order the car around so that he could see Victor Emelianovich once more.

Half an hour before the guests were due a young and good-looking woman rang the doorbell. Thinking she had made a mistake, Mark made no attempt to let her enter. But she said in a soft, bantering tone. "You don't seem to want me to come in!"

"I'd be delighted if you would! But I think you've made a mistake. I think you want the artist, Teplukhin; he lives opposite."

"Oh, no!" She was slightly embarrassed. "I'm not allowed to make any mistakes. You are Comrade Surov, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I'm your thirteenth guest."

He had expected anything but that. He had expected the First Department to send him some youngster from the Kremlin guard who would sit in a corner all evening, watching everything that happened. Instead, this beautiful and elegantly dressed woman had turned up.

If he'd known the sort of guest that would be sent to him, he wouldn't have given the party at all; at any rate, he wouldn't have rung up the First Department.

"I'm having a few guests tonight," he had told them on the phone.

"For what reason?"

"My birthday. The guests will be arriving at eight."

"How many will there be?"

"Twelve."

"Then you can expect a thirteenth," the voice commented. "The thirteenth will arrive a little earlier."

As he helped her to take off her expensive blue coat and caught the heavy scent of perfume, he remarked with open irony: "What a luxurious coiffure; straight from the window of one of our leading hairdressers!"

"You know quite well, Comrade Surov," she answered, "that this luxurious coiffure, as you call it, didn't come out of my money. You needn't remind me of the fact; I never forget it, I assure you."

Beneath her coat she was wearing a fashionable, well-cut gown. The frank *décolletage* revealed a beautiful, full bust; a brilliant crimson rose was pinned at her waist; her bare arms were white and softly rounded; she was wearing a ring set with a large ruby.

"To dispose of the matter once and for all," she said, "and in order to forestall your propensity to indulge in irony, I must mention that this gown is my own, but it was made free of charge in the N.K.V.D. workshops; the shoes are mine, the ruby ring belonged to my mother; my underwear is mine, too, though I bought it from the N.K.V.D. special shop. You needn't get the idea that the N.K.V.D. has fitted me out specially for this visit to you."

He felt ashamed. She had guessed his anger and hostility at once, and realized the source of his hesitant welcome. After all, when she left, she would write a report for the N.K.V.D., and God only knew what she might say in it. Nonetheless, he felt ashamed of his resentment as he saw an angry crimson patch on her cheeks.

"Please forgive me. I've no right to insult you. For this evening you're my guest. I don't care who you are; you're my guest now."

She tried to hide her embarrassment with a challenging smile. "I don't feel insulted," she said. "I know my occupation isn't the sort to provoke the respect of those I'm sent to spy on. But I didn't choose my occupation, and I'm not going to explain how I came to take it

up. We'll just accept things as they are; you're under observation; I'm an agent, and we'll try to avoid spoiling each other's mood."

"Not at all!" he protested. "We'll forget both the points you've mentioned. You're my guest, aren't you? You've come to spend the evening with me, and if possible to have a good time. Agreed?"

They went into his main room, and he seated her on the divan which formed his bed at night. "All the same," he went on, "I must warn you that you'll be the only woman present. You may not find that so amusing, but I beg your pardon in advance for the boring company."

She smiled brightly. "But don't you know, Mark Timofeevich, that there's nothing a woman likes so much as to shine in male company? And to be the only woman in a crowd of men—why, there's nothing more pleasant. She can be sure then that she'll have admirers."

"I hope you'll find them," he smiled; "in fact, I'm quite sure you will. Especially as the majority of my guests are married. When they find such a beautiful woman here, they'll forget their wives and children and will fall for you completely."

"I'm hardly likely to be any real threat to them."

She laughed, screwing up her eyes and looking like a gracious kitten. "But I haven't told you my name," she said, "and you can't introduce me if you don't know it. It's Helena Sergeevna. You can call me Helena if you like. I'm twenty-eight, born in Moscow. I live not far from here, which was one of the reasons why I was sent to you. I deduce that you occupy quite a modest position in the Kremlin hierarchy, as they send more experienced women to important officials. What else can I tell you? I've never been a member of the Young Communists or the Party; I'm a merchant's daughter by social origin. I was studying in the Conservatory, but was expelled because I came of a nonproletarian family. Is that enough for you?"

"Rather too much!" he laughed. "But now, in exchange for your confidences I ought to tell you about myself. But I shan't. If you want to know all about me, sit down at the desk and turn over this file. [He picked up a file of documents.] Here you'll find a very detailed autobiography of Mark Timofeevich Surov, which he wrote when he was posted to work in the Kremlin. Would you like to see it?"

"Of course not, Mark Timofeevich. I hate autobiographies. As soon as I come to the social origins I stumble. One might almost say that all my life I've been stumbling over my own social origin."

"But you must call me Mark," he asked. "Otherwise it will be awkward, because I shall be calling you Helena."

There was a ring at the door. "Here come my guests," he added.

The first was Rybin, the fussy director of a publishing company, who was accompanied by his chauffeur, carrying a box of provisions. "I know your mother's away, my dear Mark Timofeevich, and so something's sure to be missing from our banquet. So I collected a few items from our domestic stock and brought them along."

"My dear comrade," Mark laughed, "it wasn't you who brought them, but your chauffeur."

"What difference does that make? As Comrade Stalin teaches us, the worker in the economic field is first and foremost an organizer. And I just did the organizing. . . . But my congratulations. I wish you many years of good health, and please accept this present of half a dozen bottles of champagne from me and my wife." He was still rattling away when they heard several more people on the landing, and they all poured in together. Grachev, the director of an institute, an enormous man with a resonant voice, filled all the hall with his carcass. The small and puny Marov, who worked in the central administration for housing construction, at once made a survey of Mark's apartment. He was clearly dissatisfied with the modest accommodation provided by two rooms, and told him: "It's not fitting for a Kremlin worker to live in such proletarian quarters. Two rooms and no bath, and a tiny kitchen. It simply will not do. What d'you say, Comrade Surov, shall I organize another apartment for you? Say, with four rooms? Or would you like five?"

Mark laughed. He was used to these Moscow acquaintances, men holding down big jobs, allotted their own personal automobiles. These were the people with whom he frequently had official contact. He was bored in their company, but he knew no one else to invite.

Soon all the guests had arrived. As they entered his living room and saw Helena, they goggled with embarrassment.

"But you said it was to be a stag party!" they exclaimed.

"Helena Sergeevna turned up unexpectedly, and was kind enough to join our male company," he explained as he introduced her. Pleasant and attentive to the exact degree required, she shook hands, joked, and gave no indication that she was an agent. Everybody knew that one of Surov's guests was bound to be someone from the N.K.V.D., and they were all suspicious and a little afraid of one

another. Some of them were meeting for the first time, and as they shook hands, they gave one another close scrutinies. They were all in high positions and cherished their official status. And they were all men of the world, knowing that in company one must talk about anything but politics, must avoid expressing violent views, must always remember that someone was listening who would be writing a report on the gathering. And they were all responsible Communists, who knew the price of good living and were ready to do much in order to ensure it. Mark's importance for them was that he was a Kremlin official. They knew he was only a small screw in the machinery of the Kremlin oligarchy, but God knew what he might be in a few years' time!

There was another ring at the door. The postman brought a telegram of birthday greetings from Mark's mother and brother Ivan. So far he had not heard from Kornei or Simon, which was strange, for the brothers regularly sent one another birthday messages.

By virtue of the fact that she was the only woman in the company, Helena took charge of the evening. On her orders Mark wound up the gramophone. A tango was followed by a fox trot, the fox trot by an old-time waltz. The corpulent Grachev took it upon himself to act as her partner. He sweated, he panted; but he went on dancing with her, such a look of determination on his face that one would have thought he was doing something calling for great valor. She changed partners occasionally, but for some reason she greatly preferred to dance with Grachev, though he found it very difficult to survive the test.

Then they noisily sat down at the table.

"Mark Timofeevich! We wish you ten thousand years of health! Here's to you!"

Grachev held out his glass to Mark. They drank a good deal and aimlessly, as is always the way of Russians. They grew more and more tipsy, the conversation more and more noisy. But even when thoroughly drunk these men could retain their self-control, and even in the most friendly atmosphere one sensed their long-trained caution. On politics, not one word. Sport, amours, the latest smutty stories. Grachev, his face flushing, hurled one salty story after another at Helena, and the longer he continued the saltier they became. But she only laughed and gave no indication of her attitude toward them; and this provoked him all the more. Marov hung over Mark's shoulder

and murmured into his ear: "I see it all, Mark Timofeevich, but I shan't breathe a word!"

"What do you see?" Mark asked.

"I see you won't be enjoying your freedom much longer; your wings will be clipped, and you'll be looking out at the world from a cage."

"Why, am I going to be arrested?" Mark laughed.

"Oh, no. Just the reverse. You'll be one of those who can send others to prison. If you feel like sending Marov to prison, the boys will arrive and carry me off. No, I'm not talking of prison. You'll lose your freedom without that. It will be a sort of prison, but the warder will be a beautiful creature like the one who's listening with such stoical calm to Grachev's stories. I'll reserve an apartment for you," Marov whispered. "A luxurious apartment."

Mark laughed. "'Reserve'—that's an extraordinary word. All our life is 'reserved' in one way or another." Marov didn't get the drift of the remark. "These days you can't manage without reservations," he said. And that was true. If Mark was sent out of town on a special commission, he telegraphed to the town he was intending to visit: "Reserve me a room in the hotel." He had to reserve his seat in the train, his ticket for the theater; he even dressed in a reserved suit. All this reservation business was part of their lives as officials, and when they "reserved" something, they really issued orders for it to be set aside for them. When Mark needed a suit, he simply phoned the tailor and said, "Reserve a suit for me," and the tailor would make him a good suit at once. On one occasion he even had to reserve time for himself at the dentist's. He had an intolerable toothache, but several dozen people were already in the waiting room. But the pain was so bad, he left and phoned the dentist. "Please, comrade dentist, reserve me ten minutes of your time. I'll be calling in fifteen minutes." The dentist was not in the least surprised. "Very good," he said. "I'll reserve time for you."

"So bear in mind, Mark Timofeevich, that I'll reserve an apartment for you," Marov said.

"But I don't need it at present," Mark laughed. "I haven't a bride reserved yet."

Marov looked at him cunningly, obviously not believing him. Then he held his glass across the table to Helena and said as he clinked glasses with her, "To the future of Helena and Mark Timofeevich." She laughed and threw Mark a challenging glance.

At that moment there was a desperate ringing on the bell and a furious banging at the door. Mark jumped up in astonishment and went to see who it was.

"Why the devil don't you open and welcome your elder brothers?" Kornei roared, pushing into the hall with Simon. He seized hold of Mark and pressed his own stubbly chin to his brother's face. "And we come in a hurry; we come in great haste. We felt sure our Mark would be waiting for us, but he wouldn't even open the door." Mark embraced Simon and ran his eyes over Kornei.

"How astonishingly handsome you are, Kornei! A perfect picture!"
Kornei laughed happily. He was a lieutenant general now; he was wearing an expensive woolen greatcoat and a handsome gray military cap. There were diamond-shaped insignia of gold on the blue frogs of his collar. He flung his greatcoat over Mark's arm and revealed a magnificent brown tunic with innumerable gleaming buttons, which eclipsed even the glitter of the four orders on his chest; that chest was so broad that he was fond of pointing to it and saying there was still room for further awards. His breeches were resplendent with broad blue stripes; his boots were polished to such a brilliance that they made one's eyes ache. He was obviously delighted with the impression he made on Mark, and he loved to be told how handsome he looked in uniform.

Simon was quite unlike Kornei. Mark had seen him some months before, and even then had felt anxiety and pity for his oldest brother. Simon was dressed in an old coat and badly fitting cap, a very old, cheap suit, a shirt without a tie, and heavy, ugly boots. Yet it was not the wretchedness of his attire that evoked Mark's anxiety, but his look of permanent affliction. His dull, mournful eyes suggested a constant and tormenting strain that could not be eased. He was gray and thin, and his empty sleeve accentuated the impression of a doomed man.

"I'm so glad you've both come. It's such a great treat for me, you can't imagine."

"I knew you'd be glad," Kornei said. "I knew you'd be expecting us, and I hurried to get here in time. I turned aside for Simon on the way, and we came along together. When we reached Rostov-on-Don, I realized we wouldn't make it. Fortunately I remembered an old

friend, commander of an air brigade stationed there. I went to see him, and he sent us on by plane. I desperately wanted to see you." He returned unexpectedly to his usual, bantering tone: "And besides, I thought you might not leave any vodka for your elder brothers. So we hurried over."

"Vodka had nothing to do with it," Simon intervened as he combed his gray hair before a mirror. "Kornei simply wanted to show off his new uniform."

"I'm very glad, Kornei," Mark said. "Take no notice of Simon. I'm glad to see you always so happy and cheerful. I can see that you're satisfied."

"Of course! And why not? I'm living in fine style. I don't have to think; I've got a chief of staff to do that for me. And if he doesn't happen to be handy, I leave it to my horse to think; his head's bigger than mine. I don't even bother to read the papers now. I've got an adjutant, and it's part of his job to read the papers and report to me. And when he reports, everything's as clear as daylight. He ought to be a politician, and I've thought of getting him into it; let him make a career for himself. Only I'd be sorry to lose him.... In a word, I live well, and I expect to live to a good old age."

"You haven't got long to wait," Simon remarked sarcastically.

Kornei had passed his fortieth birthday and thought himself very old. He did not like to be reminded of his age, so Mark tried to soften Simon's blow. "Oh, you've got a long way to go yet, Kornei."

"Not so long now," his brother answered, and an anxious look appeared in his eyes. "In eleven years I shall be fifty and that is very old indeed."

Simon snorted indignantly, and asked with kindly irony: "Eleven years? And how old are you now, my dear brother?"

"Fifty minus eleven, that's thirty-nine, isn't it?" Kornei gave his brothers a challenging look.

"You're a damned liar!" Simon exclaimed. "On your last birthday I sent you a telegram congratulating you on reaching forty-three. And now you've knocked off four years."

"I didn't ask you to congratulate me on that impossible age, Simon! Ask Mark, he'll tell you you're wrong. Isn't he, Mark?"

"Of course! You know very well, Simon, that Kornei is astonishingly consistent in his character. He told us four years ago that he was thirty-nine, and he's stuck to his story ever since."

At first the other guests were reserved in their welcome of the two brothers. Simon hurriedly thrust out his hand in greeting and parked himself in the farthest corner of the room. But Kornei laughed gaily as he was introduced. "Why, you're quite young!" Helena exclaimed, when Mark introduced him to her. "I've read all about your exploits, and I always thought you must be a very solid, middle-aged man, and of course eaten up with rheumatism."

Kornei laughed thunderously and kept her small hand in his. "I assure you you haven't read all about my exploits!" he laughed. "Some of them aren't suitable for print. But I'm solid enough, and I don't suffer from rheumatism."

Kornei was born to be the life and soul of such company and quickly became the center of attention. He danced the latest European dances with Helena, then demonstrated the dances of the Uzbeks, among whom he had spent several years. The previous strain and caution vanished; everybody grew merry, while Kornei, brilliant, quick-witted, readily drinking, and not at all tipsy, was at his best. When they had all grown tired of dancing and began to glance at the door, he demanded that the light be switched off, leaving only one, small, shaded lamp alight on the table. "I like to sit in the twilight," he said, dropping onto the divan. "After good liquor it's pleasant to sit in a circle of friends, talking and recalling the past days."

From the first moment of his arrival he had set his cap at Helena. He had taken a fancy to her, and he never denied himself the pleasure of chasing a pretty woman. After one wild dance he had drawn Mark out into the hall. "Who is this Helena Sergeevna?" he had asked.

"D'you like her?"

"Just what a woman should be. Only, if there's anything between you and her, say so. I don't like interfering."

Mark laughed. "You won't be interfering with anybody," he answered. "Only, bear in mind that she's been sent here by a certain organization."

"An agent?" Kornei asked, and his face flushed with satisfaction. "But that's wonderful! I've never had the luck to meet one of their women before. Mark, my boy, we'll have our revenge on our secret police; we'll spend the night with their agent. So you haven't anything against it?"

Mark shrugged his shoulders; they returned to the room. From

that moment Kornei devoted himself entirely to Helena. He danced with her till they were ready to drop, amused her with his jokes, and even made a bit of a fool of himself.

The others drew up chairs, and a half circle was formed round the divan. Helena sat next to Kornei and gaily played up to him. "Kornei, tell us some of your exploits that have never been written about," she asked.

"Please do, Comrade General, please do," the others echoed.

"Willingly," he answered. "Only I doubt whether some of them can be told in a lady's presence. I tell you what, I'll talk about Central Asia, where I'm stationed now. Agreed?

"My staff headquarters is situated in a small town; I won't tell you its name, in order to avoid betraying military secrets. When I first arrived in the town, I stood on the station platform rejoicing in the sight of it. Picture a solid green sea of orchards, with the little houses of the town outskirts floating in it. The sea is green, but the ships of houses were white, and looked so gay that even a mortician would have to smile. As I stood on the platform, I didn't feel, I saw, the air white-hot with sunlight flowing down over the town, dissolving into the orchards, clinging to the crowns of the poplars and acacias. It was so hot the air seemed ready to burst into flame. I walked along the street from the station. On both sides gulleys were gurgling with water, lofty poplars grew alongside the gulleys, and brilliant flowers were blossoming around the little bridges across them. In the center of the town was a crowd dressed in colorful costumes, bawling and fussing. Through the crowd women in black with thick veils hanging over their faces silently made their way. What a violation of nature, my friends! Womanly beauty, created for the delight of man, hidden behind veiling so you couldn't tell whether it was a young woman or an old, beautiful or ugly. But that's the custom in those parts.

"I don't want to tire you with a long story; suffice it to say that I wandered through that town until I reached its most distant corner. Here there wasn't anybody around, the streets were narrow and framed by high clay walls, and the houses were behind the walls, and not one had a window looking onto the street. That is to make sure strangers do not see the native women when they're unveiled at home. I wandered through the noonday heat and began to feel sorry I'd given way to my romantic impulses and had not advised the staff of my arrival. But I went on wandering about. At the very sight of a

woman my heart began to beat violently. But they all went past. And then, in the most deserted street of all, suddenly a door opened in a clay wall, and a small, devilishly beautiful hand caught hold of my sleeve. I always grow as humble as a calf as soon as a woman's hand touches me; I submitted at once, and she led me into a courtyard. There was nothing special about that courtyard; a carpet was spread in the shade, and the woman went to the carpet. She went like a queen in her palace, tall, with a beautiful walk, and by all the signs she was young. I couldn't be sure about her beauty, because of that horrible black net. She dropped down onto the carpet, and I stood beside her like a kid, not knowing what to do. It was a good thing I was wearing civilian clothes; it would have been absurd for a general to stand in front of a strange woman and not know what to do with himself. Suddenly she said in the purest Russian: 'Sit down, Russian,' and pointed to the carpet beside her. I sat down; but I felt rather ridiculous in a sitting position. No matter how I sat, I felt uncomfortable. I fidgeted and fidgeted until at last I found myself on my knees before her. That was more tolerable than sitting and not knowing what to do with your legs. All the same, this position seemed rather absurd, too. On your knees before an unknown woman—there's something humiliating about that, isn't there? So I turned and rested on one elbow, and there I was in a pose resembling Nero or Emperor Augustus. Not a brilliant position, but at least it saved my self-respect. When she saw I was comfortable, she remarked, 'I watched you a long time from the roof. What are you looking for?' A strange question, to say the least. She could have asked me that without drawing me into the courtyard and inviting me to sit on her carpet.

"'I'm looking for the most beautiful woman in this town, and I think I've found her,' I answered.

"She laughed quietly. 'You may be mistaken, Russian,' she said. 'And instead of a beautiful woman you may find a very jealous husband.'

"That sounded almost like a threat, but I was in such a state that nothing could frighten me. 'Where is this jealous husband?' I cried. 'Let me get at him and I'll make pilaf of him.'

"She laughed again and said in a tender tone, 'I like you, Russian. But now you must go. My husband will be arriving soon.'

"It was not to be endured that I should go without even seeing her face. 'Let him come!' I cried. 'Let a thousand jealous husbands come

with long knives; but I shall stay here until you've shown me your face and told me where and when I can see you again.'

"She really was afraid of her husband, so she didn't force me to waste time in pleading. She put her face close to mine and pulled the veil aside. My friends, I was shaken, overwhelmed, shattered. Have you ever seen the eyes of a dying antelope? Long, mournful, and gleaming with an unearthly light? She had such eyes, only they shone not with the sorrow of a dying antelope, but with a jesting, challenging smile. Have you ever seen a peach and noticed how flushed and delicate its skin is when ripened with the sun? She had such a peach complexion, with the hot blood blushing beneath it. A nose with fine nostrils that quivered with passion or humor, a brilliantly crimson mouth. Oh, my friends, she wasn't a woman; she was a miracle. And, as people do reverence to a miracle, so I did reverence to this native woman. She tried to cover her face, but I kissed her and . . ."

He was silent, running his gaze over his audience. They were all listening intently.

"And what then?" Helena exclaimed.

He remained obstinately silent.

"And what happened then, Comrade General?" Grachev almost groaned the words.

"Two minutes later," Kornei resumed his story, "I was again walking along the street, swallowing the dust. She put me out; she made me leave."

"You know," Grachev said in a disillusioned tone, "I wouldn't have left like that. I can't believe you just walked out."

"And you're right." Kornei laughed. "But listen.... You know how things are when you first take over a new job, how you're overwhelmed with so much work you can't turn round. That's particularly true of the army. Such a lot of urgent matters called for my attention, I had no time to think of anything else. All the same, I couldn't help thinking of the native girl I'd kissed. I began to lose sleep because of her, and with me that's a sure sign that I'm badly shaken. Well, at last I cleared up the work and decided it was time for something more pleasant. I ordered my man to get our horses ready for a long journey, as I'd decided to visit forces stationed on the farther side of the mountains."

"Look here, Comrade General, you can't play that trick on us," Grachev said indignantly. "You started to tell us about your adventure

with a native woman, and now you finish it. We'll hear about your visit to the forces some other time."

"Why, haven't I mentioned that my plans for visiting those troops were connected with my anxiety to see the girl? When I left her, I already knew I'd be seeing her again. 'Go away, Russian,' she said to me. 'But if you want to see me, then get on your horse or ass and take the mountain road to the valley of Fergana. You'll ride a whole day, and next day you'll meet my husband, Ibrahim. Do as he asks, and then ride on. When you reach the next village, ask where Ibrahim lives. But don't go into the house; stand at the gate, and I'll see you. Then ride down to the bank of the river and wait for me there. I shall come.'

"I looked at the staff maps, and saw there wasn't any direct road to the valley of Fergana, only a tiny track. It's quite easy to get there by train, which takes a roundabout route. And although the mountain path was a short cut, it was a very doubtful one. Topographers had recently taken photographs of the area. 'It's a hopeless proposition,' they told me. 'It's a highly dangerous track that runs along the edge of precipices.' But, as you can guess, I wasn't to be deterred by that, and I set off. I was accompanied by an army topographer, a captain, who knew the route, and my man Paul.

"My friends, I shall never forget that road, carved in the cliffs by Timur's army when they marched down out of Asia. The track itself was terrifying; it wound through the mountains of Tien-Shan, hanging over abysses, swaying under our feet. Yes, my friends, at times the track swaved and threatened to go hurtling down into the abvss. For a time it climbed along an almost perpendicular cliff, with a drop of thousands of feet below us. All the same, it was firm ground, and you could move along it. But suddenly the solid ground disappeared from under your feet, and you were hanging over the precipice. The path consisted of a narrow strip of interwoven brushwood, with earth scattered over the top, clinging to the side of the cliff. It was carried on two rows of spikes driven horizontally into the cliff and bound to one another with ropes. The lower row of spikes carried this path of brushwood, which might give way under your feet at any moment. And along that path of brushwood I went, trying to avoid looking down into the yawning gulf below.

"Fortunately, those stretches of woven pathway were not frequent, but I swear they were more than enough. During that journey I came

to love our most faithful four-footed friend, the horse, more than ever before. Our little caravan was headed not by me, the general, or by the captain, or even by the soldier, but by the soldier's horse, an old bay with a belly swollen through eating too much hay. He seemed to watch every step of the road; and when the track began to sway too much, he stopped and let it come to rest before he went on. And so we proceeded: first Paul's bay horse, then my mare Cinderella, then the captain's gray horse; then I, then the captain, and Paul brought up the rear. From time to time the captain took out a whistle and blew on it. That was to warn anyone who might be coming the other way. On such tracks you can only pass at certain spots where niches have been carved in the cliff. But all that day we passed only one traveler. We had turned into one of the niches, and he rode past on an ass, singing to himself, and didn't even notice us.

"We spent that night high among the mountains, and next day we began to descend the farther side. The captain had warned me that during the descent we had another of those flying tracks to negotiate, and a very long one, too; and toward midday we were doing our balancing tricks on it. We had gone a couple of miles along it when we heard someone singing. The captain pulled out his whistle, but it was too late. The muzzle of a scraggy ass appeared round a bend, then its body, wretched and small, with an Uzbek in a green turban sitting on it. The green turban indicated that he had been to Mecca. The Uzbek approached, singing at the top of his voice. At the sight of him the captain, who was following me, cursed frightfully, and I realized why. It was quite impossible for us to pass at this point. Usually, when two Uzbeks meet in such a spot, they pray to Allah and then cast lots. The one who loses has to push his ass over into the abyss, to make way for the other.

"The captain went on swearing, and I gathered from his remarks that he knew this Uzbek already. We stopped only when our leading horse and the ass had their muzzles right up against each other. Then the Uzbek opened his eyes, and his face betrayed his horror. But somehow I felt that that look was put on. The captain shouted across my shoulder:

"'Listen, Ibrahim, aren't you afraid I'll kill you? How dare you meet me here again?'

"Ibrahim! It was the name the woman had given me. I looked at that Uzbek. Stout, tanned with the sun, he was dressed in a dirty

striped gown. Shoes with no heels or backs hung from his toes. His little, greasy eyes seemed cunning and insolent. Could he really be the husband of the gazelle I had kissed in the courtyard?

"The captain's words upset the Uzbek. He sat on his ass and took off his green turban, then put it on again. He smacked his lips; he shook his head unhappily. He addressed the captain, but his cunning little eyes were fixed on me:

"'Comrade Captain, may Allah grant you a thousand years of life. Why do you want to kill a poor Uzbek who only wishes to live?"

"'Because the last time we were here we made an agreement,' the captain roared, 'and now you've turned up again. I paid you fifty rubles, but you haven't kept the agreement. So I'll have to kill you, and that's that!'

"The captain quite seriously took out his pistol and cocked it. But the Uzbek wailed: 'Ai! Ai! What untruths you tell! Ibrahim always keeps his word. I've not come on to the path because of you, but because of the big chief who is with you, may Allah grant him a hundred thousand years of life. For you, captain, I'd readily push my ass over into the abyss; but I can't do it for the big chief and the soldier. Ibrahim is a poor Uzbek, and he has to eat. Ibrahim has hungry children and wives who have to be clothed.' He began to sob with his emotion, and raised his voice to a piercing shriek: 'I see before me a big chief, before whom ordinary mortals should go down on their knees. Big chief, may Allah make you the wisest in all the town where you live; only don't wrong Allah's poor servant, who has got to kill his only ass in order to free the path for you. Poor ass, poor Ibrahim! I fed it with my own hands, and now I have to kill it to let the big chief ride past with his horses.'

"He began to weep real tears. He rubbed his hands over his dirty face, raised them to the sky as though calling on Allah as witness, fell forward on his ass, and reached to its muzzle to kiss it. 'What's it all about?' I asked the captain, beginning to get angry.

"The captain drew close and said, 'This filthy scoundrel has found a fine profession to follow! He meets travelers in this spot and demands money of them. He's a brigand, pure and simple. It's quite impossible to pass here, and by law we ought to throw his ass over the edge. Only you needn't think—'

"He was interrupted by Ibrahim's piercing voice: 'Allah commands me to kill my ass and let you pass. Allah, I submit to thy will.'

He threw up his hands theatrically. 'I see that the big chief won't do poor Ibrahim an injury and will pay well for the ass. In the market such an ass costs not less than two hundred, but I'll give Allah thanks if I get only a hundred rubles for it. Only a hundred rubles, and I'll throw it into the abyss and let you pass.'

"'Give him what he asks.' I recalled the girl's words. And I pulled out a hundred rubles. Seeing the paper in my hand, Ibrahim scrambled along the ass's neck with incredible dexterity and dropped over its head to the track. Greedily snatching at the money, he put it away, repeating: 'I knew you were a good man and wouldn't do Ibrahim an injury.' Then he turned to the ass and whispered something into its ear. And suddenly the ass went into reverse, walking backward swiftly with its twinkling legs. The captain laughed. 'Now you see the trick,' he said. 'He does very well with it, too!'

"So we followed Ibrahim and his ass. We came at last to a niche in the cliff, Ibrahim pushed his ass into it, and we passed. But when we reached the end of the woven track, I ordered my man to remain with his horse at a point where it was impossible for anyone else to pass, and to stay there till I gave him word. Then the captain and I went on to the village, which was not far off. I had no difficulty in finding Ibrahim's house; it was the richest in the place. I violated the girl's order that I wasn't to enter, and went straight in and found her. She was alone. I learned afterward that Ibrahim had three wives, but he worked the two older ones on his rice fields in the valley, and kept only the seventeen-year-old Gulesai in the house. Seeing me in uniform, she was frightened. But then she recognized me.

"'Russian, don't come into the house. Go to the riverbank, and I'll come to you in a minute.'

"'Why should we hide on the riverbank,' I asked, 'when we can be more comfortable in the house?"

"She trembled with fear and clung to me: 'Ibrahim will be back in a minute; he's got a long knife, and he's as bad-tempered as a chained dog.'

"'Don't be afraid, Ibrahim won't come before I let him,' I told her.

"In a word, my friends, I spent the happiest of nights. It was a marvelous night, and Gulesai and I were alone in the house...."

He stopped; but everybody expected him to continue.

"And then?" Grachev asked.

"Oh, nothing," Kornei answered in a tired voice. "Next morning I recalled Paul from his post, and poor Ibrahim was allowed to return home. The captain and I went on. Paul gave me back the hundred rubles; Ibrahim had handed them back in order to buy the right to return. Gulesai remained with Ibrahim. But the memory of that night will remain with me all my life."

"And you never bothered to find out what happened to her?" Helena exclaimed.

"No, why should I? It was quite unnecessary, as she and I talked everything over that night. A week later she turned up at the town where my staff was quartered."

"And you married her?" Helena laughed happily.

"Good lord, no! How could I marry a girl of seventeen? There was too great a difference in our ages to hope for happiness. I arranged for her to go to a school, and now she's studying. But in order to satisfy you completely, Helena Sergeevna, I confess that I haven't spent another night with her since. And quite recently I attended her wedding to a young Uzbek writer and wished her happiness. That's the way it goes. One man is left with happiness, and another with only the memory of it."

Mark switched on the light. Everybody sighed, as though awakened from a dream, and suddenly began to talk loud and all at once.

"Why, you've been talking a whole hour, and it doesn't seem like five minutes," Grachev exclaimed. "Ah, comrades, how good it is to be a general! He just got on his horse and rode off. But here we've got our personal automobiles, our apartments, summer residences outside Moscow; but poetry? Not a bit of it."

It was late in the night when the company began to break up and go home. Kornei went as escort to Helena Sergeevna. Mark was left alone with Simon. They sat in the darkness, talking of unimportant matters.

"But what of the future, Simon?" Mark suddenly asked.

Simon sat thinking over his reply, and if Mark could have seen, he would have noticed that his armless sleeve was quivering feverishly. "I don't know, Mark," he answered quietly. "Everything's in such a mess that you've got to have a very fine mind to understand it all. The one thing clear is that the road we've taken hasn't brought us to where we wanted to go. I've given up Party work because I've stopped believing in the Party cause. I saw that the more sacrifices we make

for our ideal, the farther we get away from it. You can't refashion the world by force, Mark; force only begets force. We've got to find other roads; only, I no longer have the strength. My generation burned itself out in the revolution; all our strength, our desire, our faith was bound up with it; and when we came to see we'd taken a wrong road, we had no strength left."

"But my generation?"

"Your generation will put right what we've done. In blood and agony, but it'll do it. Don't you feel that yourself? Great hopes rest in you, and in such as you. We're only ashes. That's why Stalin can deal with the Party and the country so easily; it's easy enough to scatter ashes. Our only road is to the grave, the political grave."

The telephone rang. In a disillusioned tone Kornei informed Mark that Helena Sergeevna had escaped his clutches, and now he was alone. "I shall go to a hotel," he said. "Good night."

He had hardly stepped away from the instrument when it rang again. A strange voice informed him: "Night telegram for you. It will be confirmed by post in the morning."

"O.K., go ahead," he answered.

"Mark Surov," the operator read clearly, distinctly. "Dear Mark, I am going away. Good-by. Go on seeking. Yours, Peresvetov."

"What's all this?" Mark demanded of the operator. "What did you say it says?"

"I've given you all the text. Shall I repeat?"

Mark felt cold as he replaced the receiver. After a moment he picked it up again and asked to be connected with the sanatorium at which Victor Emelianovich was staying. The director himself came to the phone.

"You want Comrade Volkov? Comrade Volkov shot himself two hours ago." He began to say more, but Mark was not listening.

Victor Emelianovich had shot himself! The thought was so absurd, so monstrous, that he could not grasp it. Simon saw Mark's face as he turned away from the telephone. His lips were bitten desperately; his eyes were dilated.

"Peresvetov has shot himself."

Simon's face crumpled. "That's our generation, the generation of the revolution, on its way out," he whispered.

Mark's face contorted, and he breathed hoarsely into his brother's face.

"But we're not on our way out! No, by God!"

He felt the strength ebbing from him; his legs were cut from under him. He leaned on Simon's shoulder. He felt the convulsive quiver of his brother's armless stump. He heard his quiet words. "I know, Mark; I see it all; only, we've got to understand, too. Understand Peresvetov, and you'll forgive him. He's gone because his generation has been turned to dust, and he had nothing to live by, nothing to live for."

Tears burned in Mark's eyes, and he went to the open window.

"Look, Simon! Outside that window is Moscow, and beyond Moscow lies all our country, flooded with the blood of our fathers, washed with the tears of our mothers. It's worth living, for her sake, Simon."

Outside, dawn was breaking.



7. A Mother

THE big sorrel horse danced with his strong, lean legs over the stones of the snowy highroad. Ahead, the road was smooth and level, and it was good to tear along with all the strength of his legs and lungs, to pour all the joy animating him into an uncurbed gallop. But the cavalry horse had long since learned to submit to his rider, and as long as the heavy horseman remained motionless on his back and did not lean forward and press his burning sides with his knees, the animal went at a walking pace and only tossed his head and snorted nervously.

The man in the saddle smiled. He knew the horse's desire. In his belted, military sheepskin jerkin he was like an ancient Russian hero. The brown jerkin fitted tightly round his vast shoulders, the brown fur cap was pulled down over his eyes. Those widely set gray eyes looked out calmly from under the cap, lighting up all the face with its big nose and large mouth. He sat the horse as if it were the most natural seat in the world, and anyone looking at them would have said that they were inseparable.

The rider was followed by another on a small gray horse, which had to go at a mincing trot in order to keep well up to the sorrel. The second rider was small like his horse, and broad of face; he was dressed in a soldier's greatcoat and had a rifle slung over his shoulder. As he swayed in the saddle, he purred a wordless song. His face, shining as though oiled, and his slanting eyes were expressionless, as if no thoughts or desires could ever be reflected in it, and nothing in the world could disturb its serenity.

They turned into a side street. Here there were fewer houses, and the snowdrifts round them were even bigger; all the habitual tedium of a small, quite undistinguished town was obvious. Only rarely did they pass anyone, but from every yard came a desperate baying. A young, round-faced woman with cheeks burning in the frost threw a glance at the rider and then, abashed at her own shameless curiosity, hurriedly dived into a gateway. But she came out again, and stood following the horseman with her black eyes.

The man on the sorrel leaned forward a little and pressed the horse's sides with his knees. The snow flew up in showers from the horse's hoofs, as he broke into a gallop. The second rider bent over his horse's neck and urged him on in pursuit.

An air of anxiety hung about the small, well-heated house that stood at the far end of the street. A small, bowed woman was going restlessly from room to room. Her aged, deeply lined face was strained and agitated. Her hair broke loose from her kerchief and fell over her eyes, and out of habit she took off the kerchief and let her hair down. White and long, it fell in a heavy wave, covering her bent back. She began to gather it up and twist it into a bun. But the look of anxiety did not leave her face, her eyes, her mournfully pursed lips. In the midst of doing her hair she reached for an envelope on the table, and picked it up. She brought it close to her eyes and quietly read to herself: "To Vera Ivanovna Surova, mother of Ivan Timofeevich Surov, head of the military school. . . . " She took out a sheet of paper but did not read what was on it; she knew already. A stranger had written to her from Moscow to tell her that Mark Surov had been taken off somewhere, his apartment sealed; evidently misfortune had befallen him.

"Lord, what does it mean?" she whispered, as she turned to gather-

ing up her hair again. "Surely not in prison? And Ivan hasn't come back yet."

She flung her kerchief over her head and went into a little side room with a curtained window. In one corner an icon was hanging, a lamp burning before it. She went painfully down on her knees before the icon and crossed herself. She prayed a long time in a quiet murmur. A gray cat began to rub itself against her legs, and purr. But the old woman fixed her eyes on the icon, which was faintly lit by the lamp. Her eyes met two sorrowful eyes. There seemed to be a resemblance between the woman kneeling before the icon and the one whose face expressed her everlasting sorrow for the Crucified.

"I ask for my son," the woman whispered. "Save him and help him." The flickering light seemed to bring the mournful face to life. The mother of the Crucified and the old mother of the Surovs were torn with one anguish: anguish over a son.

There was a furious clatter of horse's hoofs outside the window. Reined in by a strong hand, the sorrel fell back on its hind legs and snorted in protest. Ivan Surov sprang to the ground and threw the reins to his orderly. "Abdulla, stable the horses and then come in. Mother will find something for us to eat." Abdulla led the horses into the yard, while Ivan, who on foot was an awkward giant, clumsily went up the steps of the veranda and pushed at the door.

When his mother came out of the side room, he was standing, still in his sheepskin jerkin and cap, reading the letter.

"Ivan, what's happened to Mark?" she asked in a shaking voice. "I sent for you; you see the letter that's come."

Ivan did not answer; he went on reading. As he read, he felt a tightness in his throat, and his cheekbones stood out more and more. He read the letter a second time, then threw it down on the table. "The swine!" he said in a voice very quiet, choking with fury. He went to his mother and put his enormous hand on her shoulder. They stood thus, silent. She could see the blood flooding his eyes.

"Don't cry, Mamma," he said, shifting away. "We can't say that anything serious has happened as yet."

"But, Ivan, what are we to do? Where is our Mark?"

"They've arrested him; that's clear. The purge has begun. Kirov's been killed in Leningrad, and now we're to have a further dose of infamy."

"But Mark didn't kill him! He may not even have known him."

"That doesn't make any difference. Take it easy, Mother. We'll have somebody by the throat for this."

Abdulla was fussing about in the kitchen. The old woman hurried in to him, and Ivan slowly followed. Abdulla had removed his great-coat and was warming himself at the stove. As she entered, he nodded to her cheerfully and bared his yellow teeth. But noticing the anxious look on her face, he stopped smiling.

"Abdulla, they've put our Mark in prison," she said, with tears in her voice.

Abdulla didn't know Mark, but he was very fond of his commander's mother, and his round face took on a perplexed and unhappy look. "Ai! Ai!" he lamented, clicking his tongue. "What a pity! Why put Mark in prison?"

"Abdulla, my dear, ride to the station quickly, find out when the next train leaves for Moscow, and buy a ticket," she asked. Her voice sounded hurried, but there was a look of resolution on her face. Abdulla turned to put on his greatcoat, but he halted at Ivan's words:

"There's no point in your going to Moscow, Mother. You can't do anything. You must leave it to me, and to Kornei and Simon. We'll get things moving."

"Be quiet, Ivan! I know you'll help Mark, but I must go to Moscow at once, to be near him. Abdulla, what are you standing there for?"

That same day Ivan put his mother on the train to Moscow. It was already moving when Abdulla ran onto the platform with a bundle in his hands. He had bought food for her journey. With a speed surprising for his crooked legs, he overtook the open carriage window at which she was sitting, and flung the bundle through it. Raising his round, glistening face, he cried in his guttural voice, "Mother, don't cry!" For a moment the sad look on her face was replaced by a kindly smile. "Thank you, Abdulla; thank you, little son," she whispered.

At that moment Mark Surov was slowly pacing up and down a small, oblong room with bare brown walls. High up in one wall was a tiny window covered by a heavy grille. If he stood in the middle of the room, through that window he could see the roof of a high building; but if he went right up to the wall and craned his neck back, he could see a tiny scrap of the pale Moscow sky. The room

contained a bed, screwed to the wall during the day, a tiny table, fastened to the floor, and a stool.

An isolation cell in the Lubianka prison.

He paced slowly about the cell. Five paces from the window to the door, five paces from the door to the window. If he walked from window to door and from door to window a thousand times, it would then be time for his dinner to be brought. He persistently counted the paces, as if by doing so he could repulse some threat that was imminent. One, two, three, four, five. A left turn, then one, two, three, four, five. But the threat did not vanish; it followed on his heels.

Is this the end, Mark? And are you afraid of such an end?

No, I'm not afraid. Maybe it's even better to end thus, with nothing resolved.

Who are you now, Mark? Still the same adamant Communist? Do you still justify everything?

No, I'm no longer a Communist. I don't know who or what I am now, but I'm certainly not a Communist. I don't accept what is happening. I hate what I believed in.

But that didn't stop your working in the Kremlin. You did nothing about it; but can you justify your silence? You didn't believe, but you hadn't the guts to throw in your Party ticket. Did you shirk it, Mark?

I don't know; I don't know anything. I went to the Kremlin to get support for my faith, but there I lost it completely. I didn't turn in my Party ticket; I waited for them to take it from me. How could I do anything else, when there was nothing I could be brave about?

And now what, Mark?

I don't know. I've traveled to the end of the old road. I see no new one. Who will give me a new faith? And could I accept it, as I accepted that first faith? Perhaps the best way is not to think about it at all; then nothing is required of me.

He halted, and his face suddenly lit up with a smile, a smile like the one he had worn at the gold mine. "I want to live, but I don't know how to," he muttered. "The simplest way of putting it is that there was a Communist by the name of Mark Surov, and now there is no longer a Communist by the name of Mark Surov. Let it be so. I want to live, but I've got nothing to live for."

The more persistently such thoughts disturbed him, the more persistently he measured the paces up and down the cell. But when they

began to run into thousands he felt that he could not escape the thoughts that were tormenting him. Yesterday he had succeeded; but today he couldn't. He dropped helplessly onto the stool.

He had been arrested the day after Kirov's assassination. He had gone to work at the normal time, not suspecting anything. Yenukidze had not greeted his subordinates on the staircase. But an hour later he had asked them all into the large room set apart for meetings, and had announced Kirov's assassination. "Stalin has gone to Leningrad; that's all I can tell you," he had said. His full, handsome face was paler than usual, and his age showed more clearly.

As Mark returned to his room after the meeting, he saw Yezhov hurrying into the Secret Department. He had the impression that Yezhov had grown even thinner, smaller, more insignificant. A little later the Kremlin employees were summoned one by one to a room in which Yezhov was seated. They returned abashed, with eyes lowered, as though to conceal something from the others. Some of them left the Kremlin at once.

Mark was summoned at noon. Yezhov greeted him with a keen, searching glance. On the desk before him was a file of all the Surov documents. Throwing himself back in his chair, Yezhov fired the question at him:

"What were your relations with Volkov? You know whom I mean?"

As he had not been invited to take a seat, Mark calmly drew up a chair and sat down. They'll turn me out of the Kremlin, he thought, and felt happy at the thought.

"I knew Victor Emelianovich during the civil war, when he was known as Peresyetov."

He went on to tell of their first meeting in the hospital, of the school, of which Victor Emelianovich had been the life and soul. Yezhov listened closely, his head bent forward, fidgeting with his fingers. When Mark had finished, he waited, expecting him to say more. Then he raised his head and said in a quiet, sinister tone:

"You've forgotten to mention that your patron, Volkov, proved to be a counterrevolutionary, and shot himself to escape retribution!"

"Why should I mention it?" Mark calmly answered. "He committed suicide quite recently; the news was reported in the papers; there was no point in my mentioning it."

"Maybe... maybe..." Yezhov drawled, his mind obviously on something else. "The point is not his suicide, but the psychology

underlying your failure to mention it. You understand, Surov? Silence always conceals something, doesn't it?"

He waited, but Mark made no comment.

"Good! You can go," he said curtly.

Ten minutes later Mark was summoned to Yenukidze. Abel Safronovich was sitting at his enormous desk, his head sunk between his shoulders. He raised his tired eyes to Mark and said:

"Believe me, Mark Timofeevich, what I'm about to say to you is not from me, and I'd be glad not to have to say it. Certain of my workers have to be dismissed at once, you among them... I needn't tell you that Kirov's murder... creates a new situation... It's impossible to foresee what will happen... I'm sorry to part with you ... but you understand..."

The unreasoning wisdom of a soulless mechanism, he had thought as he made his way home from the Kremlin. Terror that has become completely mechanical. Now it's my turn to find out what it's like in reality. All the same, objectively speaking, one must admit it's a very sharp-witted instrument that Stalin has devised, in punishing not only the one who is actually guilty, the one actually fighting the regime, but the one who may be guilty, who may fight. Somewhere, mechanical accountants are swiftly turning over the card indexes of human lives and picking out those who are to serve as fodder for the Stalin machine. Now my card is in the accountant's hand, and it automatically reckons up the unknown pluses and minuses. And the result is a sum that says that Mark Surov, a Communist since 1927. Mark Surov, who took part in the civil war and was called the son of the regiment, may be an enemy of the regime and its leader. And this sum, calculated from soulless items entered on a soulless index card, indicates that Mark Surov should be removed. You, Surov, may become an enemy; you do not endure what is going on with equanimity. You have realized that there is no longer any liberty in the country. And you're dangerous because you can't suppress the pride in you, and you still think you're duty bound to defend the cause of your father, your brothers, and all those with whom you went through the fires of the revolution. Isn't it wise to remove you? And afterward will you have any doubt of the wisdom of the machine Stalin's created? Isn't its very soullessness its strength and might?

That night Mark was ready and waiting. Rybin, the director of

the publishing company, had phoned. Unintelligent but cunning, he valued his acquaintance with Mark, who realized that that was only because Rybin overestimated his importance. "A worker in the Kremlin"; for many that was in itself a proof of a person's importance.

"Comrade Surov, have you heard what's happened in Leningrad? What a misfortune! The enemies are still raising their heads; but we'll eliminate them, won't we?"

"I don't know," Mark had replied. "But I can tell you one piece of news."

"I'm listening, Comrade Surov." Mark had almost caught the throb of excitement in Rybin's voice.

"I've been fired from my Kremlin post."

"What? Fired? Ah, I understand."

The receiver was replaced with a bang. Smiling wryly, Mark hung up and seated himself at the table.

At 4:00 A.M. he was awakened by a pounding on his door.

There were three men. Two in leather coats and leather peaked caps, the third in a hat and a black worsted coat with a large, expensive collar. Mark had seen him before, somewhere. They held out a piece of paper—the order for search and arrest. They walked in.

The two took off their leather coats to reveal the familiar green uniform with bright raspberry frogs. The third man sat down and looked at Mark.

"Don't you know me?" he said.

Then Mark recognized him: Bergstein, the official entrusted with the investigation of particularly important matters. Victor Emelianovich had introduced Mark to him during the early days of his work in the Kremlin. Afterward he had seen Bergstein's signature on the charge sheets of men imprisoned for political crimes; in important trials his formulated charges were published in the press.

"I remember you," Mark said. "I met you through Comrade Volkov."

Bergstein's clean-shaven face melted into a smile. "Quite correct," he said. "I remember thinking at the time that we'd meet again."

Then the large automobile, shooting through the streets and turning into the gateway of the Lubianka prison, in the very center of Moscow.

In the corridor along which the guard conducted him the soft felt-

ing on the floor muffled all steps. He was shown into a cell, and the heavy iron door slammed behind him.

A day passed; two days; a week. Five paces from the window to the door; five paces from the door to the window. The hours of solitude passed in slow, ponderous succession. In the distance he caught the sound of streetcars and the vague noise of a large city. It was impossible to analyze that noise: human voices, automobile horns, the vibration of air waves saturated with innumerable sounds. The breathing of a great city, slowly dying down at night, to start up again toward morning.

The cell contained two living things: Mark Surov and the small spy hole through which the guard observed him. On the outside it was closed with a small metal plate. Every ten minutes the plate was silently drawn aside, and a living, attentive eye appeared. Then the plate swung back into place. Every ten minutes.

Dinner arrived. A small window was opened in the door, and a tin plate, a spoon, and a piece of bread were handed through, always in silence. Fifteen minutes later the window was opened again, and a man's voice on the outside of the door ordered the plate and spoon to be returned. Then silence.

Yet even solitude cannot be everlasting. One evening, when the lamps were being lit all over Moscow, the cell door was opened, and the guard told Mark to follow him. They went down to the next floor and along a corridor, Mark in front, the guard behind. At the far end of the corridor two men appeared. Immediately his guard seized Mark by the shoulder and thrust him into a small niche in the wall, ordering him not to turn round. He could not be allowed to see the other prisoner, and similarly the other prisoner must not see him. The two men passed, and Mark's guard pulled him out of the niche. The corridor was closed by a heavy iron door with a sentry guarding it. After checking the prisoner's name, the sentry opened the door, and Mark passed through. On the farther side there were two guards. Walking between them, he continued along the corridor. Now he was outside the prison. From various doors came the clatter of typewriters; men in green uniforms hurried by.

He was led into a small room, obviously a reception room. At the desk was a woman with an unhealthy, hollow-cheeked face. She was smoking. She might be twenty-five or forty. She looked at him through

slightly narrowed eyes. Satisfied with her examination, she ordered in a rather hourse voice:

"Go in."

She pointed to a cupboard standing against a wall.

Mark had had experience of various offices of men with great authority, and he knew that many of them camouflaged the entrances to their offices in perfectly naïve and absurd ways. In the Far East, to reach Yuzhny's room one had to step through the reception-room window onto a balcony, and back again through his office window. So he was not surprised at this queer order. The cupboard door opened slowly and noiselessly. He went in, and at the same moment the back of the cupboard swung open to let him pass into a spacious room with a carpeted floor. At a large writing desk two men were sitting: Bergstein and a stranger with a self-confident expression.

"I've sent for you to inform you that you're not a prisoner, but are being subjected to temporary political isolation on the order of Comrade Yezhov. He himself or one of his plenipotentiaries will talk with you when they consider it necessary," Bergstein said slowly.

"But as far as I know, the Personnel Department, of which Yezhov is the head, is accommodated elsewhere; whereas I'm being kept in a cell and can only regard myself as a prisoner," Mark retorted.

"That is all I can tell you, unfortunately," Bergstein said wearily.

Through the same cupboard (there was no other way out of the room) Mark returned to the reception room and was escorted back to his cell.

Several more days passed. The monotony of his solitary life gradually grew less oppressive. All his life before his arrest now seemed remote and insignificant. He got up each morning, washed, did exercises, drank his unpleasant tea and ate the black bread, and at once began to look forward to dinner. Thus the time dragged past until evening, when a lamp in the ceiling was lit, and left on all night. Nobody entered the cell, the regulations made no provision for exercise in the Lubianka prison, and he could walk only the five paces to the window and five back, until his head began to swim.

Vera Ivanovna had not shed a tear during the train journey to Moscow. She had sat perfectly still in one corner, her face set, the bundle Abdulla had thrown beside her. During the evening some drunk had

entered the compartment, filling it with the stench of vodka, and had remarked to the other passengers:

"I like drinking when on a journey. We'll have one together, grannie, just to cheer us up."

She had simply looked at him, saying nothing; but in that look was something that made him turn away with embarrassment. The other passengers had given him unfriendly glances, and he had dived back into the corridor. Vera Ivanovna had let her head sink again on her breast. And so she had sat till morning.

The train drew up at the platform of the Moscow station; she got out and hurried to the exit. As she went, she thrust Abdulla's bundle into the hands of the first porter she met, a man with an enormous brass medallion on his apron. She went on without looking round, and the porter followed behind her, carrying the bundle, on his face a look of astonishment. There was a long line of taxis in the yard, and the mother, usually thrifty and economical, climbed awkwardly into a tumble-down machine. The porter held out the bundle to her.

"What are you giving me that for?" she asked. "That's something for your children."

"But I thought..." he began. "Well, thank you, grannie."

He himself was quite old, not much younger than she, but he called her grannie all the same. He thrust his gray, unkempt beard through the taxi window and, lowering his voice, said to her:

"Thank you for the present; I'll pray in church for you, grannie. Only, what name shall I mention?"

She nodded agreement, and answered as quietly:

"Pray for the health . . . for the health of soldier Mark."

She held out a five-ruble note to him.

The driver stared contemptuously over his shoulder at the two old people talking about prayers. His youthful mind even thought of saying something rude to these two bigots. He was a Young Communist and quite up-to-date, not recognizing any God and considering Him an invention of the exploiting classes. But he looked again at the old people; he noted the seriousness of their conversation, the old woman's sad face, and was silent, only muttering to himself: "What ignorance! Lenin told us religion's the opium of the people; but they don't see it!"

When she reached Mark's apartment, she stared in astonishment and fear at the two large wax seals on the door. She did not notice the neighbors gathering behind her, sighing sympathetically and wiping their eyes with their hands and aprons. She had not spent much time in Moscow during Mark's stay there, but the neighbors had grown to like her. Possibly it was one of them who had sent her the letter with the absurd address: "Vera Ivanovna Surova, mother of the commander of the military school, Ivan Timofeevich Surov."

"Well, God help them!" she said, and turned round. The neighbors all began to speak at once: "Don't be upset, Vera Ivanovna! Perhaps Mark Timofeevich will be back soon." "But meantime you stay with us." "Or with us if you like." "We'll put you up with pleasure."

Now she had difficult days before her. She visited many government offices and organizations; she spent hours standing in lines. But she could not discover where Mark had been taken. She hung about the office of the Public Prosecutor and at the gate of the Kremlin. The sentries turned her away from the Kremlin, but she succeeded in seeing officials elsewhere. Always she received the stereotyped answer: "We have no information concerning Mark Surov." She hobbled along to see Voroshilov, but in this instance her luck was bad: he would not be back for a week, and no one else could help her, or even wished to listen to her. From early morning till late in the evening she wandered about Moscow in search of her son and found no trace of him. Her anxiety grew from hour to hour, and the whisper came more and more frequently from her lips: "God grant that I'm not too late! May Kornei arrive soon!" Kornei was on his way. But he had seven long days' journey from his army headquarters to Moscow. She knew he would not delay once he received her telegram. She had informed Simon, too, of the trouble that had come upon the Surov family; Simon would do all he could to help. She had already received a telegram from him: "Taking all steps. Look after yourself."

She never had time to think of her sons. They were all living a life that was beyond her comprehension; they were all in a hurry to get somewhere; they were all in a state of agitation and never properly explained why their lives had grown so restless and joyless. Only Kornei was clear and simple to her. He lived to the full, joyously and vigorously. And when she tried to discover the secret of his life, so that she could pass it on to her other sons, Kornei laughed and said, "Don't try, Mamma; nothing will come of it. Simon, Mark, and Ivan are all occupied with world problems and feel for people; but I've long since turned my back on all that. They're educated, but I'm not, and I know nothing about anything except military affairs. I don't

even read the papers now, I've handed that over to my adjutant. I don't have to be a wise man; my chief of staff does all the thinking; that's his job."

She listened and waved her hand. "I'm too old to make head or tail of your jokes."

But now the chief thing in her life was Mark. An unquenchable anxiety drove her from one office to another. She was prepared to wait endlessly, to stand timidly at the door, to curtsy humbly to the elegant young ladies who sat along her road to the important officials—anything so long as they would tell her where her Mark was. But they all had the same reply: "We have no information whatever concerning Mark Surov."

As she climbed the stairs to the Public Prosecutor's office one day, she met a tall, broad-shouldered man with a deeply furrowed face. Once—a very long time ago, truly—this man had arrived at the Surovs' village, accompanying Kornei. They were front-line friends. They had caroused together, had ridden from village to village to visit the soldiers' wives and widows, then had ridden off to the front again. She could even remember his name: Zhloba.

He recognized her, drew her into the corridor; there, by a window, she told him all about Mark.

"It's not so easy to find him once they've got him." He nodded along the corridor toward the Public Prosecutor's office. "They hide them pretty thoroughly. All the same, I don't think you need to go there. You want to try the N.K.V.D."

"I've been there already. They won't see me. They say they know nothing."

Zhloba stood thinking, wriggling his fingers. She gazed up into his face hopefully. In a wheedling tone, she pleaded:

"Help me for God's sake, Comrade Zhloba. Our foolish little lad may be lost to us."

He stared at her, and a bitter smile twisted his mouth. "Your little lad's passed thirty, isn't he?" he said.

"Oh, no; he's only twenty-seven."

"Anyway, his age isn't the point, Vera Ivanovna. I'm ready to help you all I can; only I can't do much, these days. Except for—I've got an old friend in Moscow, a big man in the *Narkomvnudel*. I'll ring him up. He may refuse to remember me; but if he's friendly, I'll ask him to see you."

So now she was walking along that corridor to the N.K.V.D. office in the Lubianka building, convoyed by the woman with a cigarette between her lips. The old friend had remembered Zhloba and had granted his request and agreed to see Mark's mother. But while Zhloba was taking her in his own automobile from the Public Prosecutor's office to the Lubianka, his friend had sent for Mark Surov's papers. When she entered his room, he was already fully apprised of the case.

An air of anxious expectation hung about the Narkomvnudel. Kirov's murder had shown that the terror machine that Stalin had created was failing to function properly. The Narkomvnudel officials felt sure that great changes were impending. The first sign of these coming changes was Yezhov's arrival, entrusted with plenipotentiary powers by Stalin himself. The head of the secret police, Yagoda, who had been regarded as omnipotent, was clearly in a shaky position and might easily go hurtling down from the eminence to which Stalin had raised him. The more farsighted of the officials were already looking for ways of impressing Yezhov, who was obviously going to be their future head. And Zhloba's old friend was one of these prudent officials.

Vera Ivanovna was shown into his office. A small, bowed old woman, she walked with the aid of a stick.

"Sit down, Citizeness Surova," the tall, portly man in a well-tailored uniform said across his desk. He carelessly turned over a file of papers. If her sight had been better, she would have seen her son's name on that file. "Well, what can I do for you?" He raised his voice. "Only I haven't much time, citizeness."

"I've come to you for help, little son," she said quietly.

The words "little son" sounded so strange in that room that he suddenly felt drawn to her. His face lost its grim, dispassionate look. He leaned across and took her graciously by the hand.

"Tell me what you want, mother. I'll do all I can."

"I'm looking for my son, Mark Surov."

"We've got your son, Citizeness Surova."

He said the words coldly; if she had looked up at him, she would have seen that the benevolent smile had gone from his face; it was again cold and inscrutable.

"He's here, but he's at the disposition of the plenipotentiary extraordinary.... There's no sense in trying to do anything for him; such as he can't be allowed to go about our Soviet country...." His voice turned sinister, irritable. As he spoke, her face went paler and paler. She detected a threatening note in his words and broke in, her aged voice quavering.

"He hasn't done anything.... He's been on the side of the Soviet regime ever since he was a child. He's shed his blood."

"I know, I know all that," he said angrily. "All the same, Comrade Yezhov has found it necessary to have him put in prison. Such decisions aren't taken without good reason. If he hasn't been shot yet, it's only because he's one of the Surov family..." Rising from his seat, he added, "You brought many children into the world, citizeness; but your smallest one hasn't been a success. Don't plead for him, and don't come here again; he'll never leave this place."

"What do you mean?" she choked.

"Such as he can't be allowed to live; they've got no right to live."

Slowly, supporting herself on her stick, she rose to her feet. Her white face was distorted with pain. Her old, faded eyes suddenly flamed; she straightened her bowed back and stared at the official fixedly. In her eyes there was no entreaty, only the frenzy of an old mother who was to be deprived of her child. He did not notice the change in her, and continued:

"And tell Zhloba I don't want to have visitors coming to plead on behalf of enemies of the people. There's only one road for such."

"Ah, you soulless degenerate! Every one of my children I've had from God with tears and pain, and you want to kill them! I'll show you, you murderous scoundre!"

She brought the stick down on his head, and he put up his hands to defend himself. Furiously he caught hold of her frail body and flung her to the floor. She tried to get up from the carpet, groaning with pain. People ran into the room.

"Take her away!" he shouted. "Put her in a cell."

She had already struggled to her feet, and now she went toward the door, leaning on her stick, but carrying her head high. Vera Ivanovna went off to prison without saying another word.

Three days later an adjutant showed Kornei Surov into Voroshilov's private office. Standing before the desk, Kornei said in curt, military fashion:

"May I report, Comrade People's Commissar?"

He had arrived in Moscow only that day but had already visited several offices. He had managed to find out what had happened to his mother, but he had been refused his request to see her. Nor was he allowed to see Mark. He had achieved nothing, so now he had come to Voroshilov to ask him to take the Surovs under his protection.

"Sit down, Kornei Timofeevich, and tell me what you want to see me about."

Kornei knew that in thus inviting him to sit down Voroshilov was granting him permission to talk more personally. So the Commissar must know already why he had insistently demanded permission to come to Moscow on personal business.

"Klimenty Yefremovich," he said, dropping into the more familiar form of address. "I've never bothered you with personal matters before, but now I've got to."

He told all he had found out during the day. How Mark had been arrested on Yezhov's orders, how his mother had been arrested and charged with an attempt on the life of a leading official in the *Narkomvnudel*. Voroshilov listened closely, and occasionally a look of annoyance crossed his round, youthful face. With a gesture he interrupted Surov, picked up a telephone, and got through to Yezhov.

"Nikolai Ivanovich," he said, "I ask you as plenipotentiary on Narkomvnudel affairs to take an interest at once in the case of the old woman named Surova. Some perfectly idiotic stupidity has occurred. An old woman of eighty is said to have made an attempt on the life of one of Yagoda's young idiots."

"It's ridiculous." He turned to Kornei as he put the telephone down. "Such things are going on these days you don't know whether to laugh or cry. But don't worry, Kornei Timofeevich. Wait till tomorrow, and if she isn't free by then, come and see me again. I'll find another way.... All my time is taken up with this sort of case. First one then another is combed out and put up against the wall. But we won't let your mother be treated like that."

A tired smile slipped across his face, and it was suddenly obvious that this healthy-looking man with the vivid and humorous eyes was mortally weary. Smiling with embarrassment, he added, "We're not going to let old Surova be put up against a wall. And we'll get the son of the regiment out, too."

Yezhov stood at the desk, reporting in a level, dispassionate tone; it was impossible to tell his own personal attitude toward what he was saying to the man with drooping whiskers and a cold, freckled face who was sitting on the farther side of the desk.

"At Comrade Voroshilov's request I have taken the case of the attempt on Yagoda's assistant into my own hands. The attempt was made by an old woman named Surova, eighty years of age. She struck him on the head with a stick. She had gone to see him to plead for her son."

"Who is she?" Stalin asked.

"The mother of the army commander in Turkestan, Kornei Surov, and of Simon Surov of Leningrad. Simon Surov, I should add, has been removed from Party work."

"Surely none of them has been arrested?"

"No. I've put the youngest Surov into isolation; he was a worker in the Kremlin. Nothing serious against him. I acted in accordance with your directive and put him on the list of central department employees to be subjected to prophylactic isolation. The mother had gone to the N.K.V.D. to plead for him. That was when she made her attack."

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"How old did you say she was?"
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"He's worked in close co-operation with Yagoda. He took part in Yagoda's elimination of his enemies in Siberia."

"Then bear that in mind.... Such incidents as an old woman's attack on a young boar don't happen by chance. Voroshilov has already spoken to me about it. I see through the whole business. You understand?"

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"I understand...."
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[&]quot;Nearly eighty."

[&]quot;How old is the man she attacked?"

[&]quot;Forty-six."

[&]quot;Is he fit?"

[&]quot;Yes, he's all right now."

[&]quot;I meant, is he fit generally?"

[&]quot;Perfectly."

[&]quot;And the old woman?"

[&]quot;She's nearly eighty . . . bowed, walks with a stick."

[&]quot;Was he armed?"

[&]quot;Yes."

[&]quot;And she?"

[&]quot;She had the stick."

[&]quot;What information have you on him?"

[&]quot;You can go."

Day after day passed. It was as if everybody had forgotten Mark Surov, had struck him off the list of the living, but had not entered him on the list of the dead. At last, three weeks after his arrest, he was escorted from his cell, along the corridor to a room situated immediately beyond the iron door. There he found a stranger, a man in civilian dress, with a moody, clouded face. Without asking him to sit down, the man informed him in a weary, indifferent tone:

"Comrade Yezhov has given orders for you to be released...." He paused, then added, "But for the time being you must leave Moscow. Maybe in a few months' time you'll be given permission to return.... In that case you will be notified."

It was obviously useless to try to obtain further explanations; the man had said all he intended to say. He telephoned to someone and curtly notified him that Mark Surov was to be discharged. He instructed Mark's guard to escort him out. Just as Mark was turning to go the man called after him, "By the way, your mother is to be released too. The order's already been issued."

Mark sprang as though someone had struck him. So his mother was in prison, too! That was beyond all endurance, and he turned back to the man. "My mother deserves something better than a prison!" was all he could find to say.

"Probably!" the man agreed unconcernedly. "But I had nothing to do with her arrest. She struck a high *Narkomvnudel* official with a stick, so they put her in prison."

The guard's hand gripped Mark by the shoulder and thrust him toward the door. With a last, furious look at the official he went out and strode swiftly along the corridor. "Not so fast!" the guard ordered. Mark slowed down, but the feelings storming within him drove him on, and he began almost to run. The scum! They dared do that! Poor Mother, poor Mother! To put her in prison! But I shan't forget that.... I shall never forget it! He had no idea what he could do to all these men in green uniform, but he felt a burning hatred for every one of them.

He was conducted from floor to floor, along corridor after corridor. As they went by the doors on either side, he heard the clatter of typewriters and the muffled sound of human voices. They passed men in uniform with raspberry frogs, who ran their eyes indifferently over the prisoner coming toward them, but then, happening to notice his face, stepped aside to let him pass, and stood staring after him. His forehead was beaded with a copious sweat; his teeth were clenched;

his eyes burned with fury and pain. "You curs!" he muttered to himself. "You'll pay dearly for this!" Even as he muttered, he knew the threats were meaningless. He could not stop the clatter of typewriters; he could not destroy the prisons, the concentration camps, the torture chambers. It was a machine, and against it man was impotent. But there must be a way out! his very soul exclaimed, and his face turned pale and miserable.

On the ground floor the guard escorted him into a large room. The moment he entered, a little woman in black flung herself on him. The white hair broke from under her kerchief and fell round her face; her aged, lined cheeks were flooded with tears; her pale lips were parted like a bird's beak, gasping for air.

"Mark, my little son!" she murmured, and her big hand stroked him on the face, the shoulders, the head.

"Forgive us, Mamma," he muttered. "We're the cause of it all!"

She looked into his face and saw something that frightened her. His words fell like heavy stones: "Forgive us, Mamma. For Father's and my brothers' useless deaths... for having built prisons and given power to such men... forgive us for all that has been and will be."

He pressed her head against his chest. She did not understand his words; she only caught the unbearable pain in them; in the very beating of her son's heart she thought she heard a bitter sorrow, and she was filled with anxiety for him. She clung to his sleeve.

"Be quiet," she whispered. "We're all guilty! You've turned God out of your souls, and everything has grown empty."

She looked anxiously into his eyes, trying to read his thoughts. Her fear for her son bowed her back still more. His eyes were ruthless, pitiless; yet out of them sorrow peered into her faded eyes—sorrow and perplexity.

"Be quiet, Mark!" she whispered. "I'm stupid, I can't understand what you're saying; but I see you're bearing a load of sorrow. Be quiet, my dear. We'll go away from here, Mark. Let it go, this Moscow. There's much sorrow for people in this place. We'll go away, won't we, Mark?"

"Yes, Mother; we'll go away. We'll go home . . . to the steppe."

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8. The Purge

On leaving prison, all Mark's thoughts were directed to the question, the one important question of this unhappy world: What is man, and what must he do? He had no answer to that. He felt a bitter sense of loss, of bewilderment, because he had no idea how to replace what he had lost. Yet he felt glad that now he was on the other side of the wall, together with Ostap, Alexander, Lena, and Katya—all those with whom he had entered into life, who had shared his faith and had taken the same road, not knowing that that road led to an abyss.

He held himself aloof, and his old mother was afraid for him. A deep anxiety for her son possessed her heart, and she could not rid herself of it. At times she would go to him and stroke him on the head, gently, timidly, afraid of upsetting him. He would raise his vacant eyes, would try to understand what she wanted of him, and, understanding, would take her old, wrinkled hand in his and kiss it. She wept; in her great pity she wept, and whispered: "I'm stupid, I'm not educated; I don't know how to help you. I only see that you're pining."

A spark was kindled in his eyes, giving her infinite joy, and he said quietly: "Don't worry, Mother; everything'll be all right." But then he was silent, shut up in himself again.

Since his return to his native village he had stayed indoors, seeming to do nothing but think, or, on rare occasions, write. Usually he walked about the room, his hands behind his back, smoking cigarette after cigarette. His brothers wrote to him, but he did not reply. All day he paced up and down the room. Nor did he rest even at night. His mother would go to his door, would peer into the darkness, and would see him standing by the window, gazing into the darkness of the street. He stood thus for hours; he did not hear his mother weeping quietly in the next room. But she was heard in the other part of the house, and a woman's form slipped through the darkness to her. Mark's sister, Tatiana. She would go to her mother's room; but a moment or two later she would slip back to her own bedroom, to whisper anxiously:

"Lazar, my dear! Wake up!"

Tatiana's husband, Lazar, a district engineer, was very busy during the day, and at night he slept soundly. But Tatiana shook him till he woke up, and made him get out of his warm bed. "What's the matter, Tatiana? What d'you want?" he muttered sleepily.

"Wake up, my dear, and go to Mark," she whispered.

"What for?"

"Go on, go on! He's standing at the window again."

"But can't a man stand where he likes?" he asked irritably.

"Be quiet, Lazar; be quiet, my dear," she whispered, helping him to pull on his boots. "Go and talk to him about something. Mother's crying, but he's standing at the window and doesn't hear a thing."

After a time Mark seemed to take himself in hand; he began to wander about the village. He would walk alone through the streets, responding curtly to the greetings of the peasants who knew him, and would turn into the more deserted alleys. The familiar spots of his childhood threw his mind back to those distant years—but only for a moment, the moment necessary for him to rest. They could not make him forget that he was no longer the barefoot boy whose circle of life was closed by the evening, and for whom every new day promised new joys and carefree pleasures. He walked to the outskirts and stood gazing down into the ditch in which Reds had once shot Whites and Whites had shot Reds. There were some who had been condemned to death in that village, but had come away alive, won back to life by his mother's tears. He felt a feeling of tenderness rising within him. Who could determine the strength of a mother's tears and their power to win salvation for men?

His native village had changed greatly; it had grown quieter and seemed to have lost its smile. He understood the gloomy, unsociable anxiety that hung about the place. It matched his own mood and was fed from the same source. There were more inhabitants than ever before, and yet there was a silence about the village, with strange, unknown people moving about it. Not far away an ordnance factory was being built; many thousands of prisoners were engaged in the task, as well as many who were not prisoners. But that was not the only reason for the village's gloomy air; there was another—want. It had arrived with the coming of the collective farms. That steppe village had never been wealthy, but never before had it known such need. The peasants had always been the masters on their own soil; they had had cattle in the yard and sheep in the steppe. Their life had been hard, but they had known that they must gain their bread by their own toil; the harder they worked, the better things would be at home. But with

the coming of the collective farms all this had been changed. The land, the cattle, had been taken from them; the sheep had vanished from the steppe; the peasant had been turned into a collective farmer and resembled a bird that does not know where it will spend the day. The harvest that year had not been bad, truly, but what benefit did the toilers derive from it? They gathered the harvest and had to hand it over to the State; and when they came to share out what was left, each had a few ounces for each working day. And they said: "In the collective you earn nought point nought."

There were three collective farms belonging to the village, and one had been named after Timothy Surov. Mark could not bear the sight of that collective-farm poverty, which shamed his father's memory. Nor could he calmly witness the scenes at the factory. Groups of prisoners, thin, ragged, hardly able to drag their legs, were marched through the streets, along with carts loaded with building materials. The emaciated collective-farm horses were not always able to haul the carts, and then prisoners had to help the horses.

Finally came the long-awaited word. Moscow notified Mark Surov of its decision in his case. He was sentenced to five years' "minus six"; in other words, he was forbidden to live in any of the six largest cities of the Soviet Union for five years. No reason was given for the sentence.

He was not upset by the decision. He had long since resolved that he would remain in the village where his father had lived.

"You wanted me to become a village teacher once, Mother," he said to her one day. "And I will."

She was darning stockings at the time. She looked up and gazed at him attentively. "You're satisfied, Mark; I can see that. And I'm glad. I always wanted you to be a teacher."

He stroked her hand. "Well, that's fine! I want to be among the children and teach them. We won't be at all well off, Mother, but that doesn't matter."

"No, my son; that doesn't matter. The Surovs have always been poor, but we haven't been deprived of happiness. We'll live quite well, Mark; don't think we won't. We don't need much. Only, you know, Mark... I've been wanting to say this to you for some time, but I couldn't bring myself to..."

She turned her eyes away and spoke softly, as though giving voice to her last will and testament. "Get married, Mark. You should have got married long ago. Then you'll have children, my grandchildren." He laughed gaily. He knew his mother was continually thinking of

marrying him off, and had already discussed all the eligible girls in the village with Tatiana.

Two weeks later he entered the building housing the small primary school of the Timothy Surov collective farm. He had had to overcome many difficulties before obtaining permission to become the teacher at the school. At first the authorities were not prepared to trust him, a political exile, with children at all. Then they suggested he should be a teacher in a high school. But all his dreams were of a primary school, of the children just starting life. Now he had found his place. He walked into the poor classroom of the poor school. From the desks, eyes stared at him: gray eyes, blue eyes, black eyes, inquisitively examining the new teacher. A picture of Timothy Surov, drawn by the village artist and locked in a clumsy wooden frame, was hanging on

help them realize how beautiful life could be if man were to change. And so his face was flushed with happiness, his voice was kindly and warm, as at his desk he turned and said: "Good morning, children." As though they had some knowledge of the joy that was filling his breast, they replied in a ragged but cheerful, ringing chorus: "Good

morning, Comrade Surov."

the wall. The school, like the collective farm, was named after Mark's father. Under his father's kindly eyes he would teach these boys and girls the art of living, would pass on his own experience to them, and

Mark's home became a watchtower from which he was able to survey all of storm-tossed Russia. The cycle of the great purges began. He saw continually a man who had a freckled face, smokestained whiskers, and vellow, decayed teeth. Over the terrible dark sea of life that man steered toward an isolated eminence, toward the height of personal power, washed around by tempestuous waves of blood and filth.

Yezhov laid the foundations of a new era—the autocratic government of Stalin, Stalin's rule over the sheep. But how about you? Mark asked himself the bitter question again and again. You're one of the flock. And you haven't the strength to break away. The shepherd will take one sheep after another from the flock, and nothing will stop his dragging you, too, to the sacrifice.

This harsh estimate was unrealized—for Mark. But he was not

present when Ordjonikidze, poisoned at Stalin's order, shouted into the telephone as he lay dying:

"Koba,* I go, but you will follow me."

As Danton was being dragged to the guillotine, he had shouted those same words at Robespierre. And just as Robespierre answered Danton, so now Stalin answered his old friend:

"Sergo, my friend, it's got to be. Understand, it's got to be."

This mystery still remains unexplained, and nobody knows the reason why Stalin decided to eliminate Ordjonikidze, who was devoted to him.

Nor did Mark see the last hours of Abel Yenukidze. At one time Yenukidze had been Stalin's teacher, and now the pupil destroyed his master. Yenukidze departed quietly, without a fight. The N.K.V.D. men laughed: "Yenukidze was so polite," they related among themselves, "that in his last moments he smiled gently at the N.K.V.D. man who shot him in the head." Mark knew it might well have been so, and was disturbed. A smile on Yenukidze's gentle, friendly face seemed terrible to think of. . . .

On Yezhov's desk lay a list of people who had been released from the Lubianka prison. Affected by a fearful disease, his inflamed brain was deeply suspicious of everyone everywhere. He considered himself destined to wipe out the enemies all over the world. He was the incarnation of the old Lenin doctrine: Better a thousand innocent should perish than that one guilty should go free. Yezhov regarded that list of people who had been lucky enough to be released as a slap in his face. Surely there must be some enemies among all that list?

"Put that mistake right! At once!" he ordered. The machine accelerated its drive. More and more blood flowed under its wheels. "The enemy must be exterminated," Stalin ordered. Yezhov exterminated.

As long as it seemed that the blow was being directed against certain Communist leaders who were in Stalin's disfavor, Mark was untroubled and ruthless. When the blow was turned against the Party as a whole, he was still untroubled, but no longer ruthless. But now the violence was directed against all the nation; it extended like rings on a pool after a stone has been thrown in. And the wider the

^{* &}quot;Koba" was Stalin's political pseudonym in his early days of revolutionary activity.

circles extended, the more Mark Surov was tormented with pain, hatred, and fury.

The ninth wave rolled over the land. The newspapers printed a small paragraph: Tukhachevski was appointed commander of the forces in the Volga region. By now Mark had discovered the secret of Stalin's method: before liquidating his opponent he transferred him to a new post. So Tukhachevski's doomed, too, he thought.

It all happened quite simply and normally. A small group of conspirators with Marshal Tukhachevski at their head decided to make away with Stalin and his Politbureau and take the power into their own hands. It was meant as a small court revolution, the aim of which was to give a new dictator to the country. But because of a fatal deadlock, the conspirators fell into Yezhov's hands. Losing his game, Tukhachevski wanted to die with his head high, not dropping on his knees. He refused to answer the examining magistrate's questions. Yezhov, enraged, ordered the Marshal brought to him. Tukhachevski was led into Yezhov's office. By comparison with the Marshal the Commissar seemed a hideous dwarf.

"You've refused to answer the investigating officers' questions," the Commissar shouted. "What do you mean by that?"

The Marshal's clean-shaven face twisted into a contemptuous smile. "I have no wish to talk to scoundrels," he said coldly.

"How dare you insult N.K.V.D. men, you filthy traitor!"

"I'm not thinking of them chiefly, but of you."

"Me?" Yezhov choked with fury, and a look of frenzy came into his eyes. In a fit of rage he fired at the Marshal and wounded him.

The silent N.K.V.D. men carried the groaning Marshal out of the room.

But Mark remained stern. Let him go, too. He has no right to live.... In 1921 he shot down the sailors in the Kronstadt mutiny, men who were not prepared to submit to the Communist dictatorship. With the thoughtlessness of youth and a severity born of contempt for human beings he ordered the rebellious peasants of Tambov to be wiped out.... Let him go, he has no right to life... or pity.

Stalin trembled with fear. The sounds of the shots putting an end to Tukhachevski and his friends had died away, but still he felt afraid. Yezhov quenched his fear in new torrents of blood.

The people desired to live, but they could not. The somber shadow

of the Kremlin wrapped all the land in twilight. In that twilight the Kremlin's slaves hurried to throw the people into the embrace of death, that faithful servant of the cause of Communism. Law was transformed into its converse and engendered lawlessness. Village women went out into the fields with scissors to cut off the ears of corn, to collect a handful of grain for their hungry children. They were declared "embezzlers of public property" and were sentenced to death or to long years in concentration camps. The building workers employed in the erection of an armaments works could not fulfill the official plan, for the plan was based only on what should be done, without regard for what could be. Sabotage! The engineers, the bricklayers, the carpenters were brought to trial. Some were shot; others were driven into concentration camps. In the Artiom coal mine a roof collapsed. Wrecking! Hundreds of people were shot. On the Red Eagle collective farm a horse died. Four stablemen were shot; dozens of the collective farmers were driven off to a concentration camp. Workers protested against a reduction in wages. Anti-Soviet propaganda! The protesters were sent to their death in prisons and concentration camps. The number of prisoners had long since run into millions, yet still it grew.

Out of the enormous accumulation of errors, miscalculations, overstrained plans, planned enthusiasm, and planned slave labor emerged the ponderous, clumsy bulk of the edifice of socialism, cemented together with blood and suffering.

After the discovery of the Tukhachevski conspiracy Yezhov aimed a blow at the heart of the Red Army. Who knew, possibly treachery had its nest there, too, where Tukhachevski and his friends had come from. The conspirators had been shot. But they had held important commands in the army, and they might have heirs whom it would be better to eliminate now. So the prisons were filled with army commanders. The N.K.V.D. investigating officers were ordered to obtain confessions at all costs. An all-Union slaughter of commanders began. Under fearful tortures men were compelled to accuse others as well as themselves.

The monstrous machine of destruction was set in motion at full speed. Although only a few men took part in Tukhachevski's plot, scores of thousands of completely innocent people were exterminated. "The more a dictator is feared, the more he fears," Victor Emelianovich had once said to Mark.

Black days arrived even for those who had seemed inviolable—the heroes of the civil war. Stalin had to trust them. They had always served him as a reliable support in the army. But Stalin was in a paroxysm of rage, having no faith in anybody, and Yezhov directed his blows against them. However loyal a man's whole career had shown him to be, in fact the stronger was his revolutionary record, the more Stalin distrusted him and feared him as a possible focus of opposition. Only too literally did he obey Lenin's injunction that it is better that a thousand innocent should perish than that one guilty should go free.

The legendary Kovtiukh was the first to go. Yezhov's men who went to arrest him found him in a billiard room. At the sight of them the Kovtiukh of former days was aroused in the old man. The heavy ivory balls proved terrible weapons; with them he shattered the heads of two N.K.V.D. men. He was shot through a window, but though wounded and streaming with blood, he went on defending himself. At last he lay still. He was taken to a hospital and given a blood transfusion. The following day he was shot.

The next to perish was Dybenko, a sailor who had been famous during the October Revolution and had commanded revolutionary armies. By his own admission he had given in only once. That was when the aristocratic Bolshevik, Mme. Kollontai, later Soviet ambassadress to Sweden, had dragged him into her bed. He did not resist. "I was sacked," he laughed.

Now the end came for him, too. Yezhov decided to break that gnarled old oak. Dybenko sent his wife and little children out of the house. His elder son, an army company commander, remained with him, and for eighteen hours they held out against the siege. The son was killed by a grenade. His father stood across his body and took over the hand machine gun he had been operating. He loaded it with the last disk of cartridges.

In the end he was carried out on a stretcher. Seeing the bodies of the N.K.V.D. men he had killed, he hoarsely asked:

"How many?"

An N.K.V.D. man bent over the stretcher and said with quivering lips:

"Fourteen."

A look of satisfaction passed over the old sailor's face.

He, too, was shot.

The prisons were filled. Many of the prisoners were killed; many others were driven off to penal servitude. The dictatorship fought the people. The people fought the dictatorship. The information Mark obtained of that struggle between human beings and death quickened an inexplicable feeling of pride within him. He thought at first it was pride for such men as Kovtiukh and Dybenko. "The old guard dies; it never surrenders," he quoted to Lazar. But as he said it, he was no longer thinking of individuals, but of the whole nation, which was now immersed in the struggle.

In his soul there was a conflict. For he believed that the nation could not be destroyed, and that made him proud. Yet he knew well enough that the nation was impotent against this precision machine constructed for violence, and that there was no way by which it could overcome the terrible effects of that machine. And so he despaired.

The ninth wave rolled as far as the distant little town in which Kornei Surov had his headquarters. The N.K.V.D. Special Department attached to his, as to every staff, began to arrest his subordinate officers. The aging, lonely general regarded all his officers and men as members of his own family. The divisional and regimental commanders were his younger brothers, even though some of them were older than he. The battalions, companies, and troops were commanded by his sons, while the rank and file were his grandsons.

At first the arrests astonished him. The Special Department carried off his own chief of staff, with whom he had lived on the closest terms for fifteen years. The same day several of the staff officers were taken off. Kornei rushed like an infuriated wild boar to the Special Department, but the officials flatly refused to give him any reason for the arrests. He returned to the staff. During his absence the adjutant had collected further details from the regiments. Arrests were taking place everywhere. Kornei himself sent a personal telegram to Voroshilov. It elicited no answer, so he summoned the liaison officer and demanded that an attempt should be made to make direct telephonic contact with the Kremlin. He would speak to Stalin himself. He would insist on an investigation.

But he was not given time. He was still grieving over the arrest of his officers, was still sending telephoned greetings to their wives and promising to do all he could for the husbands, when a group of officers of the Special Department entered his room.

[&]quot;Arrest?" Kornei asked hoarsely.

The officer in charge of the group, a sickly little man with shifty eyes, moved the holster and pistol out of the General's reach before answering:

"Yes."

Kornei seized a heavy inkpot and flung it at the officer, who just managed to strike Kornei in the face with his pistol butt before he fell. The adjutant struggled in the grip of N.K.V.D. men; two pistols were set against Surov's chest. He recovered his self-control and felt a wave of revulsion against all that had occurred. "Let him go!" he ordered the N.K.V.D. men, and pointed to the adjutant. They moved away obediently. Kornei stepped over the body of the officer in charge of the Special Department and walked silently out of the room. His face was spattered with the blood that streamed from the pistol-butt wound, dripped over his tunic, sprinkled on his decorations. Somebody held out a handkerchief to him, and he wiped his face.

Two days later the local newspaper carried the announcement that the army commander Kornei Surov had proved to be an enemy of the people, had been unmasked, and would suffer stern retribution. Meetings were held in all the branches of his army. Resolutions demanding his death were passed.

At the close of the winter Lazar's house was plunged into anxiety. Kornei was not fond of writing letters, but it had become an established rule that he would write once every three months. Now nothing had come from him for six months. His mother waited every day for the postman to arrive, and at her request Mark sent several letters to Kornei's address. But no answer came. Ivan in distant Mongolia and Simon on the Caspian coast wrote anxiously asking what had happened, for they, too, had not heard from him.

One day the postman brought a letter from the town where Kornei had been quartered, telling of his arrest and containing a newspaper, three months old, with a banner heading: "Death to the enemy of the people, K. Surov!" Seeing it, Mark involuntarily trembled, but he did not tell his mother what had happened. A week later he was in Moscow.

Ten days passed. In a spacious room with lofty, old-fashioned windows a marshal and a high-ranking general were closeted. Voroshilov and Apanasenko. They were not confronting each other across the desk, but were sitting together on a low leather settee in

one corner. That indicated that the conversation was unofficial, and the tone of their talk suggested that they were good friends.

"Well, Joseph Rodionovich, what do you propose we should do? Stalin has forbidden me to interfere in the affairs of the N.K.V.D., and my word would have little influence on Yezhov. How can we help Surov?"

"You know better than I how we can help him.... Something irredeemable is happening. We're losing our finest commanders. In my region alone fifteen hundred have been arrested. And how many throughout the entire army?"

"Thirty thousand." As he said the words Voroshilov frowned as though he had a spasm of toothache. Apanasenko jumped to his feet, and his square-cut face went more crimson than ever.

"But that idiot Yezhov's destroying the whole army. Where are we going, Klimenty Yefremovich?"

"D'you think I know where we're going?" Voroshilov exclaimed irritably, rising from the settee. "Yezhov's knocking out all the teeth in the Soviet Union. The N.K.V.D. investigating officers are killing off all the senior commanders. They beat up Rokossovski till he was half dead, and left him without a tooth in his head. They've made as much mess of Corps Commander Uvarov as God has of the tortoise."

Lost in thought, he kneaded his cigarette with his fingers until the paper burst and the tobacco scattered over the carpet. He flung away the cardboard mouthpiece and said without looking at Apanasenko: "Don't go back to your district for the time being, Joseph Rodionovich. Stay on in Moscow."

Apanasenko started back in fury. "Surely you don't think? Me?"

Voroshilov said nothing, kneading another cigarette between his fingers.

"Well, get this clear. If it comes to that, I'll do the same as Dybenko."

"And what good will that do?" Voroshilov strode up and down the room. "You'll only kill off a few of Yezhov's louts. They're only carrying out orders. And when you've done it, we'll sign a decree to decorate them posthumously for their exemplary accomplishment of the task the government has entrusted to them. Yezhov has already drawn up the wording. There'll be an explanatory note attached to the decree—but not intended for the press, of course—stating that those receiving the awards perished at the hands of the enemy of the people Apanasenko. . . . No, Joseph Rodionovich, you'd better not.

It would be difficult for me to sign such a decree, and you know I'd sign.... But what are we to do about Surov? I think it'd be better not to interfere."

Apanasenko himself knew it would be better not to interfere. Voroshilov could not be expected to make any resolute protest; the days had passed when he could risk his position. And even Apanasenko was afraid, for now he attached great value to his position. If he interfered, he might lose not only his position, but his head. All the same he could not leave Kornei Surov to his fate. There were too many threads binding them together.

"You can do as you like, Klimenty Yefremovich, but we can't leave Kornei Surov in their hands. We went side by side into battle; we shared our joys and sorrows. We've got to help him; we've simply got to."

"I know we've got to," Voroshilov answered with rising exasperation. "If it depended on me, Surov wouldn't be in prison at all.... But he's making things all the worse for himself. He all but killed the chief of the Special Department with an inkpot, and in the Lubianka he started such a fight that they've kept him in fetters for a couple of weeks."

Apanasenko frowned as he thought of his old friend in fetters.

"You've got to see Kornei's point of view. His chest loaded with decorations, all his body a mass of scars, and then a lot of rats make game of him. It isn't true that he started the fight in the Lubianka. The investigating officer went to hit him, and he lost his temper. And there was a bit of a scrap. If men like Kornei Surov are going to be beaten up under the Soviet regime, that's the end of all things."

Evidently Voroshilov thought of something, for he went to his desk and picked up the list of visitors waiting to see him in the reception room.

"The younger Surov's outside again and asking me to see him. He's as pigheaded as the rest of the Surovs. This is the eighth day he's been here. And what can I say to him?"

"It's Mark. Some years ago when he was in the Lubianka, Kornei came and pleaded for him, and you helped to get him out. That was after Kirov's assassination. Now he's come in his turn to ask you to defend his brother. And I, too, ask you to defend Kornei, Klimenty Yefremovich."

"I'd like to, Joseph Rodionovich," Voroshilov said wearily, sinking into a chair. "But, after all, you know as well as I do that People's

Commissar and Politbureau member Voroshilov can't do everything. Surov's fate, and the fate of all the others, is in Stalin's and Yezhov's hands." His face went livid with anger, as he recalled that during the civil war, outside Tsaritsyn, Kornei Surov had led his regiment out to rescue a military train from the hands of the Whites. Voroshilov himself had been in that train. Afterward Surov had ridden up to his car and introduced himself.

Voroshilov closed his eyes and saw the handsome, impudent features of the Red commander, Kornei Surov, one leg streaming with blood, reining in his excited horse at the side of the car.

"Come along!" he jumped up from his chair. "The master will order us both to put our necks in the noose, but come on all the same."

Apanasenko could hardly keep pace with the Commissar. As they went out through the reception room everybody rose and stood to attention. Mark, white-faced and hollow-eyed, stood among the generals and staff officers. Voroshilov strode past without a glance at him; but Apanasenko said as he went by, "Come along to my place this evening."

The Commissar's blue Mercedes drove away from the People's Commissariat for War and, tooting furiously, tore across Arbat Square. The militiamen at the crossing points halted all other traffic to let the car pass. Two large black cars loaded with bodyguards tore along behind it.

Mark left Apanasenko at midnight. "We've pulled Kornei out of the pit by his ears," the General had said to him. And as Mark watched the square-cut, aging face of this old friend of the Surovs, and listened to his words, he felt sure his brother was saved. But as soon as he found himself in the street, his anxiety for Kornei returned.

How could he feel at ease, when he knew that in the Soviet Union a man's word had lost all meaning? Stalin could promise yet not keep his promise. Others might persuade him differently. Who knows what invincible obstacles lay in the path of Kornei's road to freedom? Today a new truth was being proclaimed throughout the country: "If you're arrested, you're guilty." The very fact of being arrested was taken as proof of guilt. And there was a second truth: "The N.K.V.D. never makes a mistake."

His mind reverted again and again to what Apanasenko had told him. "At first Stalin wouldn't even listen to us," he had said, "He

simply answered, 'Yezhov will get to the bottom of it.' So then I threw in my last card. 'Joseph Vissarionovich,' I said, 'in 1920 Kornei Surov, acting on your instructions, carried on negotiations with Tukhachevski, That was in Poland. He carried out your orders, and in doing so he quarreled violently with Tukhachevski. And you remember you told us: "Surov did right in not submitting to Tukhachevski's orders and in resorting to his weapons when they tried to arrest him." He's never spoken another word to Tukhachevski since, and they hated each other like poison. How can Kornei Surov have been a member of the Tukhachevski conspiracy when neither of them could stand the other?' Stalin was thoughtful for a moment, as he recalled the incident. 'I remember,' he said: 'that was when he led a mounted attack on some farmstead in Poland, and when I asked him what the devil he wanted to capture it for, he answered that it had a wine cellar and he wanted to give his men the chance to taste some old wine!' He laughed and added: 'Surov's got to be helped.' Those were his exact words: 'Got to be helped.' Then he turned us out; but we could tell he'd do what's necessary. Voroshilov's quite convinced of that."

Sick with anxiety for his brother, Mark roved about the Moscow streets. But Kornei's fate had already been decided. That same evening Yezhov had reported to Stalin on his case:

"He won't admit his guilt. He was raging mad. When arrested, he wounded my officer."

"What's his attitude?" Stalin asked. He was afraid to release a man who felt hostility to him. Surov might not have been an enemy before his arrest, but who knew how he might react as the result of his imprisonment?

"Pretty bad!" Yezhov replied. "He swears he'll tear the heads off all the N.K.V.D. men and throw them to the dogs to eat."

Stalin laughed. He knew these Budenny men with their turbulent tempers. They were childishly uncalculating. If he was threatening that sort of thing, he couldn't have any feeling of guilt. There was no attempt to defend himself by cunning, only a savage, furious fight.

"I think he can be released," Stalin pronounced.

"But he seriously wounded one of my responsible officers. And here in Moscow he beat up an investigating officer."

Now Stalin had no doubt that Kornei Surov could safely be released.

"We'll decorate the wounded officer. You can sack the investigator.

A fine investigator, if a prisoner can beat him up. Release Surov and do everything possible to eliminate the consequences of his arrest. Understand?"

The investigator had functioned purely in accordance with Yezhov's methods. He had been determined to extract a confession from Surov, and when the General was brought into his office, he gave orders that the two of them were to be left alone together. He was a husky, athletic fellow with hefty fists; he went up to the prisoner and thrust his fist into his face. Snorting with fury, Kornei punched the officer on the chin, and the man went flying across the room. The officer had had training in boxing, and he was only half Surov's age. He gave Kornei two or three blows, and in return he received just one, which again sent him flying across the room. He snatched up a chair, but it broke in his hands. Clutching one of its legs, he rushed at Kornei, who stood pressed against the wall. Furious at sight of the chair leg, Kornei lowered his gray head and butted the man in the guts with all the force of his body. The officer groaned and collapsed, and blood spurted from his lips.

Surov himself called assistants to help the man. They carried him out, beat up Kornei, put him in irons, and flung him on his cell pallet.

When Stalin rang off, Yezhov phoned the head of the investigating branch, and told him angrily:

"You work like a lot of louse-killers, not like real N.K.V.D. men. You're too slow in getting confessions from the prisoners. Sheer liberalism! You're to release that damned Surov."

"But, Comrade People's Commissar, Surov has knocked out all my assistant's teeth," the officer tried to argue. At that Yezhov turned mad; foam appeared at the corners of his mouth. His voice squealed and panted as he retorted:

"Shut up, damn you! You've had Surov in your hands for six months, and still you can't provide material that would put him up against a wall. He was quite right to bash in all your mugs. You're not N.K.V.D. men; you're a lot of angels. I won't have any angels in the N.K.V.D.; heaven's their place, not earth. Six months and you still can't get a confession from him! Disgraceful!"

"Surov can't be broken. We've tried."

"Tried!" the Commissar drawled contemptuously. "All right, but now we have orders to release him at once. The Budenny brethren have been pulling strings with the master. One other thing. You've got to think something up so that he doesn't feel offended. That's the master's orders. The parting has got to be more friendly than the meeting."

During the evening Kornei was taken from his cell and escorted to a luxurious office. He halted just inside the door and rested his shoulders against the wall. His filthy, crumpled uniform, shorn of its decorations and insignia, was now too capacious for his thin body. His face was distorted with a bloody scar and was crowned with a shock of filthy gray hair. A gray scrub covered his chin and cheeks.

"Going to knock me about again?" he said hoarsely, hatefully, to the man in a beautifully pressed civilian suit who was waiting in the room. Kornei had never seen him before, but he threw out his short, fat arms and trotted across to Surov. Taking him by the arm, he led him to a chair, remarking indignantly as they went:

"It's a shocking misunderstanding, Comrade Surov. Sit down in this chair, please do, it's the most comfortable..." Seating Kornei in the chair, he theatrically raised his hands and said in a hurried tone, fixing a warm gaze on Kornei's face: "Comrade Yezhov is highly indignant... I might say, deeply upset. He only learned today that you'd been arrested... and knocked about. I wouldn't like to be in the shoes of those who dared to raise their hands against such a famous hero of the revolution as Kornei Surov. They've already been arrested. On Comrade Yezhov's orders." He bent right over Kornei and whispered: "You know, we, too, are not entirely free from the class enemy; he's penetrated even into our ranks. He's cunning and artful." He straightened up and said almost solemnly: "Comrade Yezhov regrets, he sincerely regrets, what has happened to you.... Your services to the revolution, your profound Party attitude are well known to him."

Kornei wheezed, breathing heavily, staring with tense gray eyes at the amiable N.K.V.D. man; and the more the man talked, the more Surov's eyes changed expression. At first they had been vigilant, on guard against an attack; then they had expressed surprise; but at last, when he began to understand the way things were going, they acquired a humorous and wicked look. He interrupted the man:

"Regrets, did you say? He remembered my services? Well, that's good; someday we'll talk more about that. Your bandits didn't think of my services when they flung themselves on me and beat me up. You're all lying, and you know you're liars, only you don't know when to stop. Yezhov has sent many of my friends to the next world; why should he feel any regret about me? Their services were no

smaller than mine, rather the reverse. As for my Party attitude and all the rest, you could have said it of them, but I doubt whether it applies to me. Of recent years I haven't even read the papers.... Tell Yezhov not to be upset but to twist the necks of his bandits; that's what I say to you. I suppose you reckon that Surov, with all his 'profound Party attitude,' as you put it, is a fool who can be twisted round your little finger."

The man trotted about the room, waving his hands in a pretense of agitation:

"Comrade Surov, don't be so harsh in your judgments. We're your friends, believe me, believe me."

Surov raised his eyebrows. "God save me from my friends; I can deal with my enemies myself. Let's get down to business.... You've been ordered to set me free. I felt sure my friends wouldn't desert me. You needn't bother to swarm all over me. I shan't become an enemy of the Soviet regime, whatever happens. I've lived my life under this regime, and it's difficult to change your bedfellow in your declining years."

The man realized that the carefully planned act he had put on was unnecessary. "Good, have it your own way!" he said; and he stopped trotting about the room.

Mark returned to his room late in the night. Without switching on the light, he sat down in one corner of the settee and lit a cigarette. The match cast its light over the bare table.

He had hardly finished smoking when he heard someone groping at the door of the lobby. He opened the door and switched on the light. Outside, Kornei was standing—thin, disfigured with a scar across one cheek, but clean-shaven. His tunic was bare of decorations, the insignia of rank were gone from the collar, but his tunic and breeches were well pressed, and his boots shone with polish. Hardly realizing what he was doing, Mark ran his fingers over the crimson wound on his brother's cheek.

"Steady, Mark, steady!" Kornei said. "It'll pass, it'll heal." He obviously did not know what to say to his younger brother, who stood staring at him, not saying a word. But then the old Kornei took charge; with a show of gaiety he pushed Mark in the chest and shouted into his heavy, leaden, Surov eyes:

"A fat lot to grieve over! Don't you know that a man couldn't have a finer decoration than scars?"

Russia was shrouded in gloom. The gloom engulfed everything: sorrows and joys, life and death, love and hate. At rare intervals the gloom was pierced by lightning, and then the people grew even more taciturn and wandered through the gloom with even greater doubt and fear.

The lightning struck in the East, and on the shores of Lake Hosan cannon thundered, machine guns rattled, men shouted as they went into the attack. The Japs wished to test the strength of the Red Army, and the Red Army threw them back from Russian soil, would not let them consolidate their positions on the shores of Lake Hosan. But before long lightning flashed again in the East. In Mongolia, along a lonely river there was a clash between the Japanese Kwantung Army and the Red Army. Here greater forces were engaged; the resistance was stronger; the bloodshed was more abundant. Ivan Surov's regiment was thrown into the battle, and in due course the newspapers announced a government decree awarding decorations to Ivan Surov and a dozen of his officers and men for breaking through the enemy's defensive positions. The Surovs were destined to take part in every war.

Among the people the Soviet eastern armies were called "Blucher's armies," but Marshal Blucher no longer commanded them. Rumors circulated in Moscow and found their way to other parts that the commander-in-chief of the eastern armies had been killed.

He had been summoned to Moscow to report. At a session of the Politbureau Zhdanov flung the accusation in his face:

"In his conspiratorial plans Tukhachevski had assigned you to a high position. Did you give him your assent?"

Blucher felt that he must concentrate all his powers to repulse the threat of death. He had great inward strength. He listened calmly to Zhdanov's charges, and then laughed:

"How am I to know what plans Tukhachevski made? If he counted on me, that was his affair. He never asked me about it."

"But how about Vavilov? Didn't he ever ask you about anything?" Malenkov quietly asked. "You and he were close friends."

This was an even more serious charge, for Vavilov had been killed not long before, without trial or investigation, after making an attempt to assassinate Stalin. Still trying to retain his self-control, Blucher answered:

"Vavilov was appointed regional Party secretary by the Party

Personnel Department, which is headed by Comrade Malenkov. In my capacity as commander of the Far Eastern Army I was bound to have contact with him. We were never friends. Does Comrade Malenkov really think that the devoted Communist Blucher—"

"I think nothing, I only ask," Malenkov said as quietly.

Stalin sat silent, hardly listening. He was sure that Blucher was innocent. But in his case there was another aspect overlooked by the others. Blucher was growing too popular. Even the papers wrote: "Fight in the Blucher fashion!" "Blucher tactics," "Blucher's army"; such phrases exasperated Stalin. The devil knew what it might lead to. And worst of all, this Marshal was fond of his popularity. He took no steps to see that less was written and said about him. Was he thinking of becoming Stalin's rival?

As Stalin filled his pipe, he took a final decision. The last test. He rose and walked round the table at which the twelve members of the Politbureau were sitting. Blucher was at the far end.

"You know, comrades," Stalin said in the quiet tone that always brought the others to silence, "you're wrong in attacking Marshal Blucher. We owe the creation of our strongest army to him." He glanced at Blucher. "Really we must recognize that he is the best army commander we have."

Blucher's face expressed his pleasure; he was delighted with Stalin's praise. Stalin's eyes were fixed on the Marshal's full, handsome face. A yellowish film covered not only the pupils but the whites of his eyes, and through that film there shone a cold bluishness like that which is formed on brand-new metal. The blend of the yellow and cold blue gave them a heavy and unpleasant look, and Stalin's habit of knitting his brows made them inscrutable. Under his knitted brows, he attempted a smile; the eyes lost their alertness, and the bluishness hidden behind the yellow film was intensified.

"I'd go even further," he continued. "Blucher displays every sign of genius as a commander."

The Marshal's face beamed with joy, and he gave Stalin a grateful look. Voroshilov had an inkling of what was happening, and he hunched over the table. He sent Blucher just one look, and if the Marshal had been able to understand it, he would have known that it meant: "Deny it. Say you haven't any genius, or talent. Stalin's the only one with genius among us, don't you know that?" But Blucher did not understand. He smiled broadly. Stalin gave him a searching glance, noted the happy smile, wriggled his grizzled whiskers, and

narrowed his eyes. Now the situation was lost beyond recovery for Blucher. Stalin had made his decision. But Stalin went up to Blucher, laid one hand on his shoulder, and said in a cheerful, friendly tone:

"I'm entirely on your side, Vassily Konstantinovich. I trust you. Go back to the Far East, command in your Blucher fashion, and remember that you will always have my support."

As Blucher left the Kremlin, he was treading on air. He went back to the Hotel Metropole, where his adjutant was waiting for him, and ordered supper and champagne. A waiter came up from the hotel restaurant to wait on him in his private apartment. Meanwhile, four men in identical leather greatcoats had entered Stalin's private office. A little later a large black car with the Kremlin number on its radiator came to a stop outside the hotel. Four men in leather greatcoats stepped out of it. They went up to the third floor and entered Blucher's apartment without knocking.

Their pistols were fitted with silencers. The hotel staff did not hear the shots. They saw the four men in leather greatcoats walk downstairs, coolly get into their car, and drive off. At the same moment N.K.V.D. men with stretchers went up the back stairs of the hotel and came down again with their stretchers loaded. In the yard a covered van was waiting for the two bodies carefully wrapped in canvas.

Next morning the hotel staff found the waiter dead in the Marshal's apartment. Blucher and his adjutant had vanished without a trace. Not a word was said in any of the newspapers. But everybody knew that the four men were Stalin's secret operational group, who always went into action when someone had to be eliminated without fuss. Nobody knew the identity of the four men; the People's Commissars, the members of the Politbureau, the high-ranking government leaders blenched at the mention of them. Only those condemned to death ever saw the four. Blucher had seen them, and died. The adjutant had seen them; he, too, was dead. The waiter was dead. The Stalin operational group does not like witnesses.

Blucher's death became one of those mysteries that provoke a good deal of thought but are not talked about for fear of the consequences. A similar silence surrounded deaths in the court of Cesare Borgia. The same silence surrounded an event that occurred soon after Ribbentrop's visit to the Kremlin in 1939, when Stalin was seen with his arms behind his back, a smile on his face. The four men in leather coats appeared again, and Yezhov vanished. He was replaced by

Beria, a man with cold, intelligent features, wearing pince-nez, who had the vicious look and the frenzy of an idealistic murderer.

The myth that Communism and National Socialism were irreconcilable was killed. The two dictators signed a pact of friendship and prepared to consolidate it with new torrents of blood. The wind blowing from the war in Finland dissipated another myth—that the Red Army was invincible. After several months of bitter struggle Finland was forced to yield, but in the Russian people she left an ineradicable respect for herself. She had found the strength and valor to defend herself against an incomparably stronger enemy.

A year after his release from jail, Kornei Surov went to the Far East, in the footsteps of Apanasenko, who had taken over Blucher's position. Kornei wrote his brother a long and rapturous letter. He had been appointed commander of a tank army. "If only you knew what fine fellows they all are, Mark," he wrote.

A presentiment of coming disaster hung over Russia. The friend-ship between the two dictators had already led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands. German tanks burning Soviet fuel tore on their way to Paris. Hitler's armies, fed with Russian grain, advanced in the West. An endless stream of trains loaded with grain, oil, benzine, and ore dragged from Russia to Germany.

It is possible for many nations to live side by side in amity, but not two dictators. Mark could not but feel anxious about the future. Occasionally he and Lazar walked out into the steppe and roamed about its pathless wilderness. They would climb to the top of a mound, and Mark would say quietly, apprehensively:

"It's drawing near, Lazar. There's no way of avoiding it."

In the last days of the spring of 1941 the press published a note:

"Rumors are being spread that there has been a worsening of relations between the Soviet Union and Germany. These rumors are at variance with the facts. Our relations with Germany are developing normally."

After this official assurance the people anticipated the worst.

III The Black Cat



z. War

THE world was deep in silence. The moon peered surreptitiously between the clouds, groping over the earth with its silvery rays.

Far to the east, in the direction of Moscow, the sky turned a lusterless blue, heralding the dawn. As though afraid of morning, the earth buried itself more deeply in sleep.

In the west, along the borders of Soviet Russia, the frontier guards were at their posts. They were surrounded by the same silence that they had known the previous night, two nights before, ten nights before. Yet they felt uneasy that night; their dogs whined mournfully and crouched at their feet. They stared into the darkness till their eyes were sore, as though if they stared hard enough they would be able to discern what was happening beyond the low rises and the forests of the foreign soil stretching away ahead of them, and would be able to tell whether this incomprehensible apprehension had its origins over there.

On that foreign soil, behind the rises, behind the copses and woods, a hurried, feverish life was pulsing. A large bush swayed and fell noiselessly to the earth, to disclose a great tank with the muzzle of its gun poking in the direction of Russia. Bush after bush fell away, revealing rows of tanks; in front of them assembled ranks of men as silent as the tanks.

A little farther back, out of small tents camouflaged with greenery, soldiers ran, fastening their belts as they went. On the buckles were the words Gott mit uns.

Still farther back, on the airfields, men in black leather helmets, the German eagle on their tunic sleeves, were readying for attack. The silent propeller blades pointed vertically to the sky; the motionless planes were weighted down with their bomb loads.

At a word, a word from Berlin, all over that vast extent of frontier men came into movement; engines started up; the silence of that early morning in June, 1941, was disturbed by a great roar. The tanks tore forward, followed by torrents of men in helmets and green uniforms. A few feeble, useless shots from the Soviet frontier guards; a desperate baying from their dogs. In smoke and thunder Hitler's soldiers rushed onto Soviet soil. The squadrons sped up from the landing grounds and set course for the east. Within the hour Soviet

planes, caught on the ground, were going up in flames, and Soviet tanks were burning before they had left their quarters. The Soviet Western armies were annihilated under the caterpillars of the German tanks, under the fire from heaven and earth; before long their miserable remnants were fleeing eastward.

The German-Soviet war had begun.

The thunder born on the frontier did not reach the sleeping cities. The calm, tranquil sky hung above them. But the peace and tranquillity were a delusion. Already engines were roaring through that sky. Searchlights began to grope with their antennae, picking out the silhouettes of planes with white crosses on their wings. The antiaircraft guns opened a ragged fire; too late. A hail of bombs fell over the earth. Fires started. In the thunder of that disintegrating world half-dressed, fear-maddened people rushed aimlessly about.

The morning broke sunny and cheerful over Moscow, flooding its streets with light, sending merry sparkles dancing over the river, reflecting in amber gleams from the shop windows.

Suddenly, through the loud-speakers fixed in every part of Moscow, in every part of the country, the people heard the stammering voice of Molotov: "Brothers and sisters, a crafty enemy has set foot on our soil!"

The people stopped dead in their alarm; the sunlight seemed to fade. Without waiting for Molotov to finish, the Moscow crowds rushed to storm the provision shops, buying up flour, sugar, butter, storing kerosene in bathtubs. Then Molotov was heard speaking again: "There will be no food shortages. Comrade Stalin has taken steps to ensure that there shall be food for everyone." The crowds made another rush for the shops.

The war machine accelerated in tempo. From the west avalanches of green-uniformed men swept eastward. With clatter and thunder their tanks threshed the hordes of men in gray uniforms hurrying from the east; they shattered them with bombs; they raked them with artillery shells; they ripped them to pieces with machine-gun fire.

From the west moved an army of trained soldiers, skilled in all the techniques of warfare. To meet them moved Soviet armies of human meat, destined to clog the German military machine. The flood of men in gray uniforms was endless. But the enemy pushed deeper and deeper into Russian territory.

In the south of Russia, a cavalry corps commanded by General Krymov was being assembled in a forest encampment. A strange

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sort of corps, not made up of divisions and regiments or equipped with heavy artillery, but consisting of cavalry, together with tiny cannon and machine guns on heavy wagons. The corps was composed of sixteen "task forces," each of two hundred horse.

Mark had been called up on the first day of war. On the military rolls a government department had made a secret classification of man power and against Mark's name had set the curt: "To troops assigned for operations in the enemy rear." From the assembly point he was sent straight to the forest encampment. The parting from his sister and Lazar had been brief and depressing. "But Mother; how about Mother?" Tatiana had exclaimed bitterly. To Mark the thought of his mother had been a heavy burden. Only a month previously she had gone to visit Ivan, who had been transferred to the western frontier. The little town in which his regiment was garrisoned had been mentioned in the communiqué issued on the first day of the war. The Germans had occupied it one hour after the beginning of their invasion. What had happened to Mother, to Ivan and his wife and children?

Now he stood facing General Krymov, a cheerful man of forty with impudent eyes.

"Major Surov, do you happen to know why you are here?" the General asked.

"No."

"Under the mobilization plan you have been appointed commander of a task force in this corps, which has been assigned for operations in the enemy rear. You will take command of the thirteenth force."

The pain, the doubts, the search for the vital truth that he had lost, his anxiety—all fell away. The enemy had set foot on Russian soil, and that was all that mattered now. The Germans must be driven off. That was not something to debate. In the depths of his being he felt that the enemy must be driven out.



2. The Road to the West

THE sixteen trains carrying Krymov's corps moved rapidly, Major Mark Surov's thirteenth force at their head.

Moscow had given orders that the corps was to be given top priority, and the railroad was cleared for its passage. The cars were packed with men, horses, and small cannon. The horses were tethered to the walls, four to each side, and railed off with heavy wooden hurdles. Very little room was left in the center for the men. The cars rocked and swayed with the speed of the train. From time to time the locomotive hooted a warning, and the words passed from car to car: "Air attack!" The endless columns of infantry, in old tunics, greasy trousers, and patched boots, marching along beside the embankment began to melt; the men broke formation and scattered over the fields. The train accelerated, as though hoping to get away from the German fighters already overhead. The antiaircraft gun posted on the tender fired furiously; there was a rattle of rifles and automatics as the men took aim from the open car doors. The German machine guns drummed with a deeper note. Then they vanished into the sky; the columns of infantry reformed and marched on, leaving a few gray hummocks on the field.

West of Moscow the flood of men marching in gray greatcoats grew even heavier. All Russia seemed to have taken to the road and was advancing to meet the enemy invasion.

At a wayside station a staff car was coupled to Mark's train. At one of its windows he saw a face he recognized—handsome, with rather a long nose and clipped mustaches. The officer—he was wearing a general's tunic—saw Mark and leaned out of the window to call to him:

"Hello, Surov! So we've met again!"

"Congratulations, Comrade Lieutenant General!" he replied, shaking the hand stretched down to him. "So the war has brought a change for you, too."

The locomotive hooted to indicate that it was about to start. Surov climbed into the staff carriage. It was noisy and thick with smoke, crowded with officers arguing fiercely about something or other. The General drew Mark into a spacious compartment. "Very glad to see you," he said as they went. "We can have a little chat. We'll be un-

coupled at the next station. You know, I've been thinking a lot about you, Mark." His voice was warm and friendly.

"I've thought a great deal about you, too, Leonid Semionovich. But I couldn't find out where you were and how you were getting on."

"Where I've been," the General said, "I am no longer; and I hope I shall never get there again. You know, of course, what happened?"

Yes, Mark did know. At one time Leonid Provsky had been regarded as one of the most able generals in the Soviet army. His father, Simon Provsky, was close to Stalin, and that opened brilliant prospects for the young general. Old Provsky had two sons, the younger, Leonid, and the older, Taras. But Taras was arrested on a charge of complicity in a conspiracy against Stalin and was sentenced to be shot. Wishing to test Simon Provsky's fidelity, Stalin ordered the condemned man's petition for a reprieve to be passed to his father for decision. All night the light burned in Provsky's Kremlin office. The sentence was to be carried out next morning, and it was in the father's power alone to cancel it. But he was devoted to Stalin. He tried more than once to speak to Stalin on the telephone, but could not get through. Meanwhile the younger son, General Leonid Provsky, was pacing anxiously up and down outside the Kremlin gate, trying to get to see his father, to persuade him to reprieve his son. But someone had given orders that Leonid was not to be allowed into the Kremlin or to make contact with his father.

The hours passed. Provsky's secretary brought the file of Taras Provsky's case out from the old man's room. The top paper on the file carried the decision, written in a trembling hand: "Sentence to be carried out."

Three black automobiles, one carrying Provsky, the other two his guards, sped through Moscow and turned into the side street in which Leonid Provsky lived. The son went out to meet his father and said curtly: "Get out! Taras' blood is on your hands."

"Leonid, you must know. . . ." the old man pleaded.

"I know everything, and there's no need to talk. Get out!"

Simon looked miserably into his son's pitiless eyes. "I want to see my grandchildren," he said at last. Leonid's eyes flamed with hatred. "My children will not be your grandchildren, any more than Taras' children will be. Get out!"

The government automobiles drove away, taking the old man who had killed his son: the Abraham, whose god had not stayed his hand, but had accepted the terrible sacrifice to fidelity.

The chauffeur denounced Leonid, and he was arrested. The father crawled on his knees before Stalin, pleading for the life of his younger son. Leonid was imprisoned.

"Everything comes to an end sooner or later," Mark said. "So the war has brought you out of your . . . hotel."

"Yes, Mark. And our dear papa Stalin had quite a few hotels built. If it hadn't been for the war, we'd have achieved even greater successes in that construction plan. Half the people would have been temporarily free, and the other half in prisons and concentration camps. No classes, no estates. So simple and convenient."

His tone was sarcastic, but his eyes expressed his sorrow. He bent down and took a bottle of cognac from under the couch. "To freedom!" he said as he raised his glass.

"To freedom!" Mark echoed him.

The locomotive hooted; they were approaching a station. Provsky accompanied Mark from the carriage. "I hope we'll meet again, and not in the next world, but in this. Life may not be very cheerful, but one has a terrible desire to live," he said. "I happen to know your Krymov corps has been assigned to operations in the enemy rear. Take care of yourself, Mark; be as wise as a serpent. Where you're going, you'll need all the cold-blooded calculation you can command."

He shook Mark's hand, and they parted.

A few minutes later the train carrying the thirteenth task force was speeding westward again. One after another all the trains of the Krymov corps followed it through the station. Fifteen trains altogether. The train carrying the eighth force had been wiped out by German fighters and bombers.

There was no front in the military sense of the word, and nobody could have traced it on a map. There was universal chaos, through which the German columns forced their way to occupy town after town. The trains of the Krymov corps desperately tore through the chaos in the opposite direction. At any moment the fighting might shift to the railroad along which they were scheduled to travel. Wounded men were walking along below the embankment; they shouted something to the trains and pointed toward the forest. Mark's train pulled up at a small station. It was deserted; the place had been bombed, and only the shells of buildings were left; the rails had been flung into the air and twisted into monstrous shapes. The tracks were marked by lines of wrecked cars and locomotives. Only one track could be used, and along it the train crept slowly

through this graveyard, while the old switchman stood by his hut, mournfully watching the cars packed with soldiers, horses, and cannon. The platform was now a mass of splintered planking and beams; in the midst of it stood a military station commandant. He had been ordered to remain at his post until the trains of the Krymov corps had passed through. In his hand he held a green flag, the all-clear signal. As the train crawled past him, Mark jumped out, landing on a heap of splintered timbers. The locomotive braked and slowly came to a stop. The commandant, an elderly officer, made his way to Mark. "The Germans have cut the track three miles farther on," he reported. "Did you hear, Comrade Major?"

Mark had heard; but his attention was fixed on something else. Some dead bodies, a score or so, were lying just beyond a heap of rubble. They were all dressed in railway workers' uniforms. Probably they had been killed when the station was bombed, and had been carried to that spot behind the rubble. But he was not staring at the railwaymen; among them a girl was lying: a little girl of about six years huddled awkwardly on her side. One thin arm was flung out, and her white dress was pulled up, revealing a thin leg in a patched shoe. Mark went up to her as though hypnotized, bent over her, and turned her face so that he could see it. A child's face, with the lips parted, the teeth gleaming between them. The blue eyes fixed and staring, as though astonished at something. On the right temple a small wound, with the blood caked on it. As he stared into the glassy eyes, his mind wandered back to distant, half-forgotten days. How he had wanted to have a little daughter! At one time he had had a very clear picture of what she would be like, so clear that he could even catch the scent of her hair, the expression of her eyes, Katya's slanting eyes.

As he stood gazing at the child, a shell flew over the station and burst at the far end of the platform. "That's the end!" the commandant said, sighing with relief. "You can't go on any farther; that's the last track gone. Did you hear, Comrade Major?" he asked again. Mark had heard, but at that moment this dead child was the most important thing in the world. He laid her on her back, folded her arms across her chest, for some reason tightened her shoelaces, then rose and looked at the commandant. "I heard you," he said. "We can't go any farther."

The men poured out of the cars and stared expectantly at their commander. He ordered the radio operator to report to the corps staff that the thirteenth force was detraining, as the track was wrecked.

To his chief of staff, an elderly captain named Bezborodov, he gave the order: "Detrain! We'll move off in troop formation beyond the station in the direction of the forest, three miles to the northeast."

The station area was filled with the sounds of human voices, the whinnying of horses, the creak of wheels. Behind them to the east the other forces were detraining, each at the point where Krymov's order reached them.

Mark's force drew up under the trees on the fringe of the forest. Two hundred horsemen, with four small antitank guns and six heavy machine guns. His orderly led up his horse, a high-standing, rawboned animal called Savage because of his temper. Mark had taken a fancy to him from the first day he saw him, delighting in waging a tense struggle with the self-willed animal. Now, as he attempted to mount him, the horse reared with the clear intention of lashing out at him with his hoofs. Mark hung round his neck, tugging hard with the other hand at the reins, making the horse snort and dance with pain. Mark rode along the line of men, studying their faces. The objective and tasks of the Krymov force had been kept secret from all but the force commanders. The point for which they were to make was far in the rear of the enemy, and each force was to act independently, having no contact with the others. Any who failed to make their way through the front would be lost. That was allowed for in the plan, and even General Krymov himself mentally reckoned that he would be able to assemble only half his corps in the appointed district.

In the eyes of his men Mark thought he discerned a sullen expectation; suddenly he felt an overwhelming urge to tell them where they were going. For a moment he could not help feeling that in front of him were the gray-coated men of the civil-war period, men who would understand him and would agree that there was only one road they could take—to the west.

"Friends!" he began. But even as he said the word, he caught himself, wondering whether they really would understand. Would they trust him? Or would they simply regard him as an enemy who was dragging them off to their death? He went on in a less confident tone:

"The supreme command has entrusted us with the execution of a particularly important task. Our force has been assigned to operations in the enemy rear; that much at least I can tell you. Comrades, the enemy has set foot on Russian soil, and the enemy must be driven off. That is the order of our government, the order of Stalin himself."

He had the feeling that he had said the wrong thing, and he again felt a strong impulse to speak frankly, as man to man, to these silent men whose fate was now bound up with his.

"Friends...brothers!" he began again. "I'm not going to tell you that we shall fight for Stalin, for the Party, and all the rest of it. That's the sort of thing they're writing in the papers. But our aim is clear and simple: we're going to fight for our country, for our people. Nobody knows where this war will lead us, but there's only one way ahead of us: the way of struggle. We shall fight all who wish to conquer our land and prevent our nation from achieving freedom. If we fail to save Russia, our native country will be wiped off the face of the earth. Our children will be scattered over the world, the mothers will weep their loss. If we don't hold on to our country, we shall be ashamed to look our children in the eyes; they'll become a people without a heritage."

"But the German isn't our only enemy; the enemy is nesting in Russia itself and won't let the people live," somebody shouted from the rear.

"I know!" Mark replied. "We've grown many weeds on our native soil; but after all, it is our soil, my friends, and we can always pull up the weeds. The war itself will burn down many of them, and those that are left we'll pull up ourselves afterward. Isn't that so, comrades?"

There was an oppressive silence in the ranks. His words evoked no response. But then a single, hoarse voice called from the left flank. Mark knew it as the voice of Sergeant Demin, a great fair-haired giant who could hardly get into an outsize military uniform.

"You're right; there's no denying it. We'll clear the Germans out, and then we'll deal with our own and treat them in the same fashion. And we'll give our own a double dose, till they shiver in their boots, and the Kremlin will be too small for them!"

A quiet snigger ran through the ranks. So the men did not misunderstand what their commander had told them. On his order, the force reformed into platoons.

The forest threw its arms wide open to the horsemen; it silently engulfed Major Surov's thirteenth force.

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3. Men of the Woods

BEFORE the outbreak of war all the finest of the Soviet armies, equipped with powerful weapons, were assembled in the west. Garrisons were stationed in the villages and towns of the frontier zone, and the numbers of the men in garrisons exceeded that of the population. New airfields and tank parks were built with extraordinary speed. The western borderlands lived in the continual roar of machines, and this created a feeling of security, instilling confidence that Russia had a reliable defense.

Yet all this collapsed overnight. The Soviet corps and divisions were transformed into columns of prisoners of war marching along the roads to the west, escorted by German soldiers. The legend of the invincibility of the Soviet Army did not survive the first day of battle. German airmen took over the Russian airfields; German planes made use of them. Around the edges of the fields were heaps of twisted, half-molten metal—all that was left of the Soviet planes caught on the ground. Along the roadsides the skeletons of the shot-up and burned-out tanks were a reminder of the ghostly might of the Soviet armies. The military supply bases, the military stores and gasoline tanks, the trains of military supplies—all fell into enemy hands.

The rear of the German armics was crowded with reserves, with supply bases, with landing fields, all slowly shifting forward from point to point behind the armies.

Quiet and safe was the German rear. The Russian towns and villages were silent; the population humbly carried out the orders of the military command; the conquerors in green strode self-confidently about the Russian soil. But suddenly rumors began to spread of strange men who had turned up in the rear of the Germans. Here and there attacks were made on German garrisons and army reserves; German planes went up in flames on landing grounds; tanks were blown up by mines. The rear began to resemble a shifting, restless front. The German staff officers began to talk about the Waldmänner, the men of the woods; the German soldiers' stories gave an unearthly interpretation to the deeds of these men, suggesting that they were monsters who could have been born only in this incomprehensible and gloomy land.

However, the German staff soon realized what had happened: a

Soviet corps had made its way through the front with the special object of undermining the German rear.

The order went forth: the corps must be destroyed. But how could it be destroyed, when it could not be caught, when it had its head-quarters in the forests, into which the German command would not risk sending troops? Besides, this corps was behaving in a manner that violated all the German generals' normal military conceptions. It was not concentrated in one spot, but was scattered over a wide area. It did not seek battle, but attacked unexpectedly, delivered a rapid blow, then disappeared as though it had never been. The greatest of the German staff's difficulties arose from the fact that they never knew where the next blow would fall, and they had to keep all their reserves in constant readiness.

At last German forces succeeded in surrounding some of these men of the woods, throwing a ring of tanks round them. They put up a desperate resistance; they perished under the tank tracks, under the hurricane fire. The five men left alive were taken to the German staff and made to tell who they were: "The fifth task force of General Krymov's corps."

"Where are the other forces?" the Germans asked.

"We don't know. We've never met any of the other forces."

"How many of these forces are there?"

"We don't know. We've heard there are sixteen."

"Where is General Krymov himself?"

"We don't know. We've never seen him."

The five men were shot on the spot. All who belonged to General Krymov's corps were to be summarily executed. The ordinary military laws were not extended to them.

Somewhere in the Pripet Marshes near Pinsk another force perished. Now there were only thirteen, including that of Major Surov.

The autumn of 1941 was warm, unusually gracious, promising to hold out for long against the onset of winter. One still autumn night, in a forest that by rights should have been the preserve solely of animals, the quiet clip-clop of hoofs was heard. Horsemen, silent, strained with expectation, flickered among the trees, hardly discernible in the darkness. There were only a few dozen of them, and they slipped past like nocturnal phantoms. The sound of hoofs died away; the forest sank into a drowsy silence.

There are nights when the air steams like new milk, and the earth gives off an inexpressible scent. On such nights the leaves do

not rustle on the trees, and the silence seems so dense, so palpable, that a man feels like making a noise just to disturb it. Perhaps that was why the German sentry pacing the wooden planking of the pontoon bridge brought his steel-shod heels down rather heavily. He was driving away the silence.

The still surface of the river was steaming with a whitish mist, which stretched and curled in mistily milky threads. Even the moon had turned a milky brown and looked like a bladder of cheese hung up to ripen.

The banks of the river were overgrown with bushes; they sloped gently down to the water. One felt like going down to the river and plunging one's hand into it, to discover whether the steamy warmth that was so disturbing was engendered in its depths.

The wooden bridge swung on its pontoons; their greased black sides were low in the water. The retreating Soviet Army had built this bridge three months before, in search of safety on the eastern side. But the front had shifted much farther eastward; the riverbanks had grown quiet and still; the bridge was of no great value now. If it was left till the heavy autumn rains, the swollen river would sweep it away. However, a German company had been stationed near the bridge, to guard warehouses consisting of a score or so of low wooden buildings. They contained inestimable treasure: several Soviet divisions were to have been supplied from this base. Piles of food, stacks of military clothing were stored in it, under the guard of German soldiers. They were satisfied with their life; during these three months they had grown fat on food outside their normal rations. And what the stores could not provide they could obtain from the local villagers in exchange for a pair of boots or a gray greatcoat.

The young soldier paced up and down the bridge, and thought his soldier's thoughts.

Meanwhile, through the forest darkness, riders were approaching the depot. Their experienced horses trotted along the paths; the soft hoofbeats could be heard only over a short distance and died away at once. The thickly grown forest track led into a large glade flooded with moonlight. The leading rider halted his horse for a moment and cautiously surveyed the glade, as though the very possibility of breaking out of the thick forest shadows into the light made him pause. At a sharp tug on the reins, the horse snorted and fell back on his hind legs; but the next moment he felt the silent order forward! He passed the bounds of the forest shadows and went across the glade at

a long trot, snorting timorously, clashing his teeth on the bit. By the uncertain moonlight it was impossible to distinguish Mark's features, but the dark patches under the eyes, and the protruding cheekbones, indicated that Major Surov did not find the forest life easy. He had grown thin and had a thick growth of beard. All the men who followed him were thin, ragged, bearded. Men of the woods.

In the distance a cock crowed. That was a signal for the horsemen to make their way down to the river and pass noiselessly into the fringe of bushes. They followed Mark cautiously, picking every step. At his sign they halted and slipped off their horses, leaving them in the care of a few men and continuing on foot without a word, trained to do whatever was necessary in silence. Mark halted his companions and went off alone. He came out on the shelving bank and stood lurking in the shadow of a bush. A moment or two later the prolonged call of a night bird came from the opposite bank. It was repeated twice. Mark grunted with satisfaction: the timetable was being kept. Setting his hand to his mouth, he gave the same call three times and stepped out into the full light of the moon on the bank. A boat slipped away from the opposite bank and crossed the river swiftly, rowed with powerful strokes by two men. It thrust its flat bottom onto the shingle, and the men jumped out. One was a big fellow with a heavy, clumsy gait. The peaked cap on his large and perfectly round head was perched right on the back. His enormous hands stuck out from the short sleeves of his tunic, which clung tightly to his barrel-shaped body. The other man was quite small and looked like a boy.

They went up to Mark. "Everything's in order, Comrade Major," the big man said. "Korovin will report in detail." Mark knew that Sergeant Demin was not fond of talk, and whenever there was much to be said, he always left it to his close friend Korovin.

Korovin stepped out from behind Demin's back. "Sixty-six men in the barracks, and three officers," he said in a high falsetto voice. "And six soldiers on guard. One at the crossing, four at the warehouses, and one outside the barracks. The company has no guns or mortars, but machine guns. How many, we couldn't find out. The Fritzes live well and are in the habit of sleeping heavily. But it'll be difficult to approach unobserved. Now if the devil would pull the sentry on the bridge into the river it would be much easier."

Surov stopped his garrulity with a gesture. He had heard enough to realize how difficult was the task he had been given. He had been ordered to destroy the military base. But he had only one troop of sixty men with him; the rest of the force had been left behind in the forest. Against him was a German company of sixty-six men, with machine guns. "We must take them by cunning, Comrade Major," Korovin said.

Demin tugged at his sleeve. "What are you teaching the Major for, you filthy whelp?"

"You're quite right, Korovin," Mark said. "We've got to take them by cunning. Comrade Demin, you'll go alone to the bridge. Everything will depend on you. Not far from the bridge you'll slip into the water and make your way along below the riverside bushes till you're right under the bridge. There you'll wait. And you, Comrade Korovin, make your way through the bushes right up to the bridge. Select a convenient position and watch the sentry closely. If Demin is discovered, shoot at once. But don't miss; the first shot must do for the sentry; otherwise Demin will be done for. Get that? If you have to shoot, we shall have failed in our task. But that is preferable to losing you and Demin. I know you're the best sniper in the force," he added, as Korovin shook his head indignantly. "All the same, I must warn you that if you miss, the German will get Demin. Off with you both, and good luck."

The two men vanished into the bushes. Mark stood listening, but he could not hear a sound. He strode away from the bank back to his men. Then, slowly, step by step, he led them down to the river crossing.

As he drummed his feet hollowly on the wooden planks, the sentry hummed a song. He stopped humming and came to a halt. He felt reassured by the rifle pressing against his side, by his finger caressing the trigger. His attention was drawn to the last pontoon, which seemed to be rocking a little. Or was he only imagining it? He went to the edge and stared down into the black, oily depths. The moonbeams slipped over the surface of the pontoons, but could not dispel the mist that lurked between them. He felt completely reassured. Of course it was imagination; moonlight can play that sort of trick. He took out a cigarette and lit it, smoking as he stood at the edge of the planks.

Behind him two enormous hands rose from the darkness and rested on the farther edge of the planks; then a round head with a cap perched at the back, and a wet beard, rose into sight. The hands slowly crept across to the sentry's feet. Just as they were about to clutch the ankles, the German moved. At once the hands slipped back to the edge; then the hands and head vanished. The German was thinking of a dance he had attended in his native town in Bavaria, and he quietly did a step or two of the dance. One step forward, two steps back; one step forward, two steps back. Then a turn. He was just on the point of swinging around in the turn when he felt something seize him by the ankles. . . .

The pontoons began to rock violently, the planking quietly creaked. A minute passed; two minutes... three minutes; but the pontoons went on rocking, the planks creaked louder. Then everything was still and silent. Demin's head appeared between the third and the fourth pontoons; he hung supported by his enormous hands resting on top of a float. He was breathing heavily; his face was twisted into a grimace of aversion. Half submerged, he clung to the pontoon with the sentry's head firmly gripped between his knees below the surface. The German had stopped struggling, and all his dead weight was pulling on Demin. The sergeant waited a little longer, then thrust one hand down into the water. Groping for the cold face, he found the man's tunic collar and drew him up. A white, distorted face emerged.

"Float away, my boy!" Demin muttered. "Float all the way to Berlin."

But as he was about to push the dead body downstream, he heard it say in a quiet hiss, "I won't float away! What the hell should I float for?"

All Demin's huge body began to tremble. Stammering in his fear, he thrust the body away. "Can the dead speak after all? You float off, Fritz; don't blame me. Major Surov ordered me to drown you."

The body swayed and slowly sank beneath the surface. Demin fearfully crossed himself; his eyes goggled with terror.

A stifled laugh came from a bush close by. He recognized Korovin's voice.

Demin sighed with relief. "You colossal fool!" he said almost gladly. "Do you really think I believed he could speak? Anyway, I don't suppose he could say one word of Russian." He quietly made his way to the bank; but Korovin was already on the bridge, drumming his heels on the planks in imitation of the sentry.

Somewhere not far off a night bird called. Men emerged from under the trees but remained in the shadows. A few yards from the crossing they lay down and began to crawl. Korovin paced up and down the bridge and stared quizzically into the water. One by one the men slipped into the river, holding their rifles, automatics, and

grenades above their heads with one hand, clinging to the pontoons with the other.

The German sentry posted outside the barracks yawned as he walked to and fro beneath the windows, feeling happy at the thought that in another half hour he would be relieved. Suddenly he halted and gaped in terror. Three men, bearded, fearful, inexorable, had crept round the corner of the barracks. "Waldmänner!" the sentry screamed, dropping his rifle and rushing into the building. The three men rushed after him, but took the wrong door and found themselves in a small storeroom. Running up to the bed occupied by his sergeant major, the sentry shouted into his ear, "Herr sergeant major! Waldmänner!" The other soldiers were already starting up and rushing to the rifle racks, but they were too late. Grenades flew through the open windows; bullets started to buzz like furious wasps. The sergeant major jumped up, sending the sentry flying, and ran to the window, where a machine gun was posted to cover the forest. Without taking aim, for he was unable to see anything as yet, he pressed the trigger; the gun began to bark madly. But hand-to-hand fighting was already going on behind him inside the barracks. A nimble little soldier with a boy's face, his lips bitten through with frenzy, avoided a jab with a bayonet and ran to the machine gun. He brought the butt of his automatic down on the sergeant major's head. He fell across his machine gun, his brains spattering the steel barrel.

The struggle was soon over. Major Surov stood on the porch of the barracks. Fifteen of his men were killed and a score wounded, most of them lightly. Lieutenant Kozhevnikov, a tall, taciturn fellow, had his arm awkwardly bandaged above the elbow and carried it in a sling. "Only a scratch," he answered Mark's question. The dead Russians were carried up to the porch; the moon shone brightly on their faces. Mark knew every one of them: he had been leading them for two months through the forests. But now he had failed to save them. They lay with their pale, contorted faces turned to the sky, as though reproaching him for letting them fall that warm autumn night.

"Lieutenant Kozhevnikov," he said quietly, "today's operation has been our least successful so far. We've suffered grievous losses, and they wouldn't have occurred if the sentry at the barracks had been dealt with satisfactorily."

"But, Comrade Major," Kozhevnikov replied, "we've killed fiftyeight Germans and taken the others prisoner. Five Germans for every one of our men can hardly be regarded as a failure." "That makes no difference, Kozhevnikov. Every one of our men is incomparably more valuable to us than five Germans. We haven't anything else when our men are gone. I want to know how it happened that the German sentry wasn't disposed of."

"I sent the three best men of my troop, with Sergeant Yakovlev in charge. Every man tested and tried in previous operations. They were unable to take the sentry by stealth, and he dashed into the barracks, shouting the alarm. They followed him in. Two of them were killed; Yakovlev is wounded. He says they simply couldn't get the sentry.... But what are we to do with the prisoners, Comrade Major? You're not going to let them—" he stopped, silenced by a vigorous gesture from Mark.

"Of course, my dear Lieutenant. As before, they're to be released." Kozhevnikov hesitated but said no more. Mark guessed what he was thinking. "No, a thousand times no," he said resolutely. "I'm not going to allow prisoners to be killed. I know the Germans would kill our men if they took them prisoner. But surely that's not an example worthy of our imitating?" He went down the steps of the porch and faced the lieutenant.

"I know how you feel," he said gently, "but not even oceans of German blood will wash away that pain."

"I hate them!" Kozhevnikov said quietly. "I'd strangle every one of them with my own hands."

The Lieutenant had joined Surov's force only recently. The town in which he had been quartered, living with his wife and little daughter, had been overrun on the very first day of the war; he had seen his wife killed by a piece of shrapnel in the breast, and his daughter decapitated by another piece.

With Mark at their head, the men rode off slowly into the forest, carrying their wounded with them, but leaving their dead buried beside the river. The world turned a bluish, disturbing hue; in that azure light the trees seemed to be woven of the finest threads. A column of bluish smoke rose in the distance behind the force. In the light of a great conflagration, the men's faces acquired a transparent look; the horses snorted fearfully and tried to break into a trot. But they had to go at a walking pace for the sake of the wounded, who groaned with every jostle. Behind them there was a heavy explosion, then a rapid series of lighter bursts. Kozhevnikov was destroying the bridge.

"All's well, Comrade Major," he reported when he rode up a little later. "Nothing has been left standing."

Major Surov made no comment for a moment, in case the Lieutenant had more to report. Then he said: "What is done, is done. But think of the many millions of people whose property we've destroyed today because we were unable to defend it from the enemy. How many children we could have fed, how many ragged we could have clothed!"

"It's nothing, Mark Timofeevich," Kozhevnikov remarked. "Better to destroy it than let the enemy have it. Nichevo!"

"'Nichevo,'" Mark sneered. "The worse things get for us, the more we say nichevo. Our forefathers said nichevo when the Tartars swept over Russia, and the people suffered under their yoke for three hundred years."

"But what else can we do?" Kozhevnikov asked. "Let's finish the war, and then we'll put everything right. The people are armed now, and it won't be so easy to make them bow their necks before fools like us. I'm a Communist myself, but I realize that we've done the people a lot of harm. But it wasn't because we wanted to; somehow it happened that way. We wanted to do good, but we achieved the opposite. But we shall atone for our guilt, if only we have the time."

"Atonement, my dear Volodya, is a matter of wisdom. It's much more difficult to atone for a crime than to commit it. But now we're getting into deep waters."

After two or three hours' ride, at dawn the force reached a small stream flowing between clayey banks. The horses took long and greedy drinks. Mark held Savage by the rein, looking about him. Dawn was breaking, drawing the glade out of the mist; the feeble light gathered in strength, then slowly seeped into the woods. Scattered in disorder, mutilated with withered trees, the forest rather reminded him of the taiga in the Far East. There, too, man had the same feeling of helplessness in face of the power of nature as he felt in this forest in western Russia—the Dead Forest, as it had long been known. He knew that the area had a bad reputation among the local people. At one time they had believed that the kingdom of the dead was in this region and that if a living man happened to wander into it he would never come out again. Even now they believed that it concealed all kinds of dangers, and they kept away from it. That was the reason he had chosen it for his headquarters.

After watering the horses, the riders moved off slowly through the trees. Just as the sun was beginning to pierce fitfully through the branches, they came to a small lake, from which ran a deep ravine,

overgrown with bushes, invisible from a distance. When the rains filled the lake to overflowing, the flood water ran off down the ravine into a forest stream, and thence into the distant river. But that happened only in the spring and autumn. In summertime the ravine was dry, extending like a green scar through the forest. Some miles from the lake it widened out and became quite spacious. The thirteenth force had its headquarters in that spot. The bottom of the ravine was churned with human feet and horses' hoofs and was as populous as a village street. The slopes were blackened with the smoke rising from many holes. The men were quartered in caves; beside each cave was a shed camouflaged with greenery; under each shed were horses.

In the distance cheerful birdcalls were sounding. Perhaps it was they or possibly simply the oncoming morning that brought Captain Bezborodov out of his cave, to stand with his beard down on his chest, listening closely to the sounds reaching the ravine. The more he listened, the more his face lit up. The birdcalls told him that Mark was returning. The outposts concealed in secluded parts of the forest were warning Bezborodov. Each post had its own call, and an ornithologist listening to the concert would have been amazed at the variety of the birdlife in that forest.

From above him came the sound of hoofs approaching the spot where the men had made a gentle sloping road down into the ravine, camouflaging it with bushes. Falling back on his hind legs, Savage slipped down the path, followed by the horses of the other riders. Bezborodov looked into Mark's tired, sunken face and briefly reported that everything was well. He was about to add something, but he took another look at his commander's face and decided to postpone further talk. "Report to the corps commander that the order has been carried out and the base destroyed," Mark said in an indifferent tone. "But we've lost a lot of men." Bezborodov went off without a word to the staff cave. Basil, Mark's orderly, was already at his side. Nodding to him, the Major dismounted and vanished into the cave.

Savage was comparatively docile; he allowed Basil to take him by the bit. "Aha, so you don't feel like biting!" Basil said amiably. "Then you must have been ridden hard, you poor creature!" With his hand he wiped the dried sweat from the horse's flank.

The cave was dark and damp. Basil's pallet, made of woven twigs, was at the entrance; there was another, farther in, for the commander. On one wall pegs supported a hand basin; Basil had brought

it back from one of the raids. Throwing off his belt and tunic, Mark washed in the cold, stinging water. Above the basin a mirror was fastened; to be exact, it was a large piece of broken mirror, another of Basil's trophies of war. Mark stared at himself in the mirror. Broad in the cheekbones, gray-eyed, a clouded face, a shock of hair sprinkled with a treacherous gray, an unkempt beard. His eyes fell on a razor that had long lain unused. Plentifully soaping his beard, he shaved it off, grimacing with pain. Now his chin and cheeks showed up white against the rest of his deeply sunburned face; he at once looked younger, the gray did not seem so noticeable. Even so, it was not a young face. Deep furrows lined his forehead; one of them, running vertically, made him think of the girl whose eyes had shone like stars for him. Where are you now, hummingbird? he thought as he gazed at that deep fold in his brow. It had first appeared during those nights when, crushed with grief, he had tossed on his hot bed or had sat till late at night in his office. And it had remained as the last reminder of the one who had been snatched out of his life.

How old am I? he thought. Thirty-four? But I look more than forty. You're getting old, Mark. You've been ridden too hard, old man.

The radio operator came into the cave. His face wore a perpetual, rather embarrassed, but challenging smile. Mark always felt like smiling himself whenever he saw him. Now the operator smiled as he threw up his hand to the peak of his cap and said: "So you've returned safely, Comrade Major." His chin was covered with a thin, quite youthful beard, and so he looked like a youngster making himself up for a school play.

"Not so safely for all of us," Mark said as he put on his tunic and belt. "We've lost a lot of men."

"You have to get used to that in war, Comrade Major; that's the war..." He suddenly felt all the ineptness of his remark, felt abashed, and looked at his commander somewhat anxiously. But the Major's expression was friendly, there was no sneer in his eyes.

"I've already transmitted the report to the staff," the operator went on. "They sent you General Krymov's congratulations. They asked what losses we'd had and how many Germans were destroyed. I've told them."

"What did you tell them?"

"Captain Bezborodov questioned the men who went on the expedition, and ordered me to transmit that two hundred Germans were killed." "But that's a lie. There weren't two hundred there altogether."

"Don't worry, Comrade Major. Who counted them? The staff likes the figures to sound big."

"O.K., as you've already transmitted that figure we shan't change it. In any case, Krymov know's its an exaggeration."

That same night an outpost captured three men dressed in civilian clothes. The men of the force were rather concerned about the rumor that Russians were collaborating with the Germans, and became excited when they discussed it, thinking it unnatural. But Mark realized that it was only to be expected. The people hated Stalin and the Soviet regime and were ready to help anyone attempting to get rid of them. But the men of the thirteenth force reasoned that such collaborators would be used by the Germans to discover the quarters of the *Waldmänner*, and it was not surprising that the outpost that captured the three men jumped to the conclusion that they were spies.

Demin, who was with his inseparable friend Korovin at this particular outpost, lurked behind a tree and watched the three approaching men. His reasoning was simple: any civilians wandering at daybreak through a forest that the local villagers held in holy horror couldn't be anything but spies. When they drew level with the tree, he leaped out and roared: "Hands up, you reptiles!"

The attack was so unexpected that two of the men raised their hands at once. But the third man's reaction was different: he pulled out a pistol. That was all he had time for; Korovin leaped on him from behind and brought a rifle butt down on his head. The man fell headlong, like a scythed sheaf. The two men standing with upraised hands tried to say something. But Demin was not a sociable sort, least of all with spies. "Shall we settle with them on the spot, or take them to the commander?" he asked Korovin, who was bent over the third man, searching his pockets. Korovin picked up the man's pistol and put it in his pocket, then turned to searching the other prisoners. He relieved them of documents, matches, a map, and pistols. For Korovin, too, the map clinched the matter; civilians with a map must be spies.

"Of course we could finish them off," he answered. "But I expect the Major would be mad. We'd better take them in to the staff."

Demin remained at the post, while Korovin escorted the prisoners to the ravine. "If they so much as open their mouths," Demin instructed Korovin before he went, "finish them off and be done with them. Get that?"

"Of course!" Korovin answered, noisily cocking his pistol. "What you know now I knew before you were born, Demin my lad!"

The two unwounded men picked up the third and carried him; he groaned from time to time. On reaching the ravine, Korovin drove them into the Major's cave. Basil lit the kerosene lamp. Mark, unkempt, half asleep, stood with his greatcoat round his shoulders, waiting while the prisoners laid their fellow on the ground. Then one of the two, a tall, thin man, straightened up sharply and strode across to the commander. The expression of fear he had worn was replaced by one of irritation and anger.

"Are you Major Surov?" he asked in an unpleasantly high, thin voice.

"Yes. And who are you?"

Instead of answering the question, the man raised his voice to a shout: "You've let your men get right out of hand; they're not soldiers, they're brigands...attacking anybody without observing military regulations. They didn't challenge us, or ask for our pass. They flung themselves on us like mad dogs, and look at the result." He pointed to the man lying on the ground. "Broken his head with a rifle butt. What d'you call all this, I'd like to know?"

"Here it's not for you but for me to ask questions," Mark said in a low, but trembling voice. "Who are you?"

"Haven't you received instructions to await three men?"

Mark remembered that some ten days before there had been an instruction along these lines from corps headquarters, but at the time neither he nor Captain Bezborodov had had any idea what it meant. So they had decided to wait.

"I'm Battalion Commissar Levashev; I've been appointed commissar to your force. And these men are my assistants." Levashev's voice rose again. "It's absolutely unheard of, Major Surov, to allow your men to behave like this. They could kill anyone they liked."

To be on the safe side, feeling sure he was in for a good cursing from the Major, Korovin had already slipped out of the cave. So he did not hear Mark's quiet retort:

"You will do well, Comrade Commissar, to learn to have respect for the soldiers. This place is not a school for political workers in our rear, but war in the enemy rear. I will not have soldiers being called brigands in my hearing."

Levashev was about to answer, but he thought better of it. He had detected a menacing note in the commander's voice.

"Lieutenant Kozhevnikov," Surov turned to the Lieutenant, who was orderly officer for the day, "arrange food and quarters for two men for the night and have the wounded man sent to the hospital." Turning back to the Commissar, he added, "Everything else can wait till tomorrow."

Levashev was about to say something, but Mark resolutely broke in: "Tomorrow!" and went back to his pallet.

He pulled his greatcoat over his head. Basil put out the lamp, and muttering something, lay down on his pallet. In a moment he was quietly snoring, whistling through his nose. But Mark did not find it so easy to get to sleep again. He was troubled by oppressive thoughts, which would not let him rest. All through the countryside, something was happening that made him pause again and again to reflect on the outcome of the war. The people had no desire to fight. These same people who had endured so many wars and had held on through all to their land had suddenly lost their strength and were running helplessly before the advancing enemy. And not even running; simply disintegrating into innumerable individuals seeking personal safety. There was no Russian nation now, only terrified people tossing about in the deadly encirclement, not knowing what to do, which way to turn.

Recently, on Krymov's orders, he had rounded up remnants of the disintegrated forces whom he found in the forest villages, in the forest lairs, in the wild, lonely marshes. He had collected fifteen hundred men—the complement of a regiment. But as soon as he informed them they would be sent up to the front line to cross the front and rejoin the Soviet army, they began to slip off again. Within a week almost all of them had vanished; less than a hundred were left.

He remembered, too, the incident of the prisoners he had freed from a German escort. They had been under convoy going in a westward direction; his force had had to kill thirty German guards and had lost eight of its own men, but had brought 2,500 freed prisoners into the forest. Instead of rejoicing at their escape they had eyed Mark and his men distrustfully and had begun to slip away at every opportunity. They had no desire to fight any more. They would scatter into the forest villages, become the temporary husbands of soldiers' wives, but would not take up arms against the Germans again if they could help it.

Was all this happening only in his own immediate region, or had something set in all over Russia that made it hopeless to think of

carrying on the war? He had no idea; he received little news from the farther side of the front. But he knew that the German advance was slowing up, so it must be getting more difficult for them; the Soviet resistance must be stiffening. If the nation came to realize that the Germans were the main enemy, it could win the war. But would it come to realize that? It seemed to Mark that now everything depended on the Germans and the way they behaved. At present they had no understanding of what was at stake. They simply starved the prisoners they captured. Apparently they weren't doing any particular harm to the civilian population in the occupied areas, but neither were they making any special effort to win its support. So at present the situation wasn't at all clear.

He gradually grew more sleepy. His thoughts turned to a little old woman in black. Where was she now? What was happening to her? Was she still alive, or had fate condemned her, too, like so many others, to death without confession and absolution?

He heard steps outside the cave; someone entered. A match was struck; a hand gently shook his shoulder. "The Commissar's brought a letter for you," he heard Kozhevnikov's voice say.

He jumped up at once. "A letter? Volodya, light the lamp, will you?" he asked. Kozhevnikov gave him a small packet, then turned to the lamp. You idiot! Mark told himself. It's only a letter from someone at the corps staff, writing about some absurd trifle, and here I am getting all excited. It can't be... He suppressed the thought. It was altogether too improbable that it would contain any news of his mother.

He examined the letter by the lamplight, and a look of disillusionment crossed his face. The white envelope was addressed to him in the familiar hand of one of Krymov's staff officers. Nonetheless, he opened it. Inside was a note from this staff officer and another envelope. This envelope was addressed to "Mark Surov, care of General Kornei Surov," and in one corner was the request, "Please forward." His fingers seemed hardly to have the strength to tear open the envelope. He drew out a thin sheet of paper containing only a few lines:

MARK,

Perhaps I have no right, now, to answer that letter you wrote me so many years ago. At that time—and until now—I felt I could not respond to you. I loved Peter, and as long as he lived, I felt, for his sake and for his son's, I must

be true to him. Now Peter is dead. He died on that island. I heard just a few days ago.

Mark, do you even remember me? I have thought of you all these years, but now I don't even know where you are or if you're still alive. I remembered that Kornei Surov was your brother, and I'm sending this letter to him.

My dear, if this ever reaches you, I ask you to live for my sake. And, if you wish, I ask you if you are ever near the town of Borovichi to come to me. I shall be waiting.

Maria

Maria! A letter from Maria. In Moscow—and in all those years in the steppes—he had never forgotten her. He had wondered about her. He had been disappointed and sad, and finally bitter that she had never answered his letter, had left him alone with his loneliness. And gradually he had buried her in the deep parts of his mind. And now a letter. Mark smiled. Then he smiled more broadly, to the corners of his eyes. He would live, he knew it. And someday he would go to Maria.



4. Scorched Earth

UNEXPECTED news disturbed the men of the force: their commander had vanished. They were accustomed to regarding him as inseparable from all their activities, and the news greatly troubled them. How would things go now? Captain Bezborodov and the other officers appeared to know something, but they kept their own counsel. As for Commissar Levashev, you couldn't say one word to him. "What are you bothering me for about your major? You've been told that Captain Bezborodov's the force commander now, and that's that."

"Yes, but the Captain's not been on any operational tasks with us, and we don't know him; Comrade Major Surov always led us himself." After that sort of talk Levashev grew even more ill-tempered, and the soldiers in turn felt even greater dislike for him. Captain Bezborodov did his best to evade the questions, but at last he could

hold out no longer and admitted that Major Surov had gone on a particularly important assignment from the corps commander.

"Alone?" the men asked in amazement.

"No, there's two of them. That's all that are needed for this job." The men began to look around to see who else was missing besides the Major. Recently a man in civilian dress had enrolled in the fourth troop. He was taciturn, morose, and evidently not too well acquainted with military matters. The other men had learned that he was a local man, named Pavlukhin, formerly secretary of a village Communist group; when the Germans swept over the country, he had not evacuated to the east but had remained behind, and at last had turned up to join the thirteenth force. As he was the only man missing in the whole outfit, it was obvious that he and Major Surov had gone off together. The men talked and argued and discussed this mysterious event for some days, then gave it up.

Meanwhile, Mark, with the former Communist secretary as his companion and guide, had made his way eastward through some of the most inaccessible reaches of the forest. Now they had emerged onto a hummocky field. They were very near to the marshes. Mark was wearing a railway worker's greasy coat and stout, patched boots. They had left the force six days before; now they were coming to the end of their journey. Somewhere not far away, in the heart of the marshes, was a spot known as the "Snakes' Bound"; this spot had been specified in Krymov's radioed instructions. Mark's companion walked along a little behind, saying nothing and unconcernedly looking about him. He had shown the same unconcern when passing German guards posted on the road, or walking through villages occupied by German garrisons. Nothing seemed to disturb him. Mark had been badly shaken by the sight of the razed villages, the charred buildings of factories, the frightened people despondently wandering among the rnins.

Scorched-earth tactics, he thought as he looked about. But was it really necessary? Stalin had given the order; and as the Soviet army retreated, the villages were being burned down, the harvest was being destroyed in the fields, the cattle were being driven off or slaughtered. The beggars had grown still more beggarly, and were wandering about the land in search of bread for themselves and their children. He knew that Stalin's scorched-earth policy had been thought of not recently at all, but long before, when he had begun the stern struggle against the Russian peasants. During the collectivization drives entire

villages had been uprooted, their inhabitants sent to Siberia. The places had ceased to be, their streets had grown over with scrub; in that scrub the old people left behind had lain down and died, and the cats had grown savage in the hunt for food. There had not been a war then, but the tactic had been the same.

Pavlukhin leaped from hummock to hummock across the field, with Mark following him. Brown marsh water rose round the hummocks, which sank underfoot. They continued in this way for a whole hour, until they came to firm ground again. In the very middle of the marsh was a small rise that had not succumbed to its attack but was solid ground, covered with trees. This was the Snakes' Bound. Krymov's radioed instructions indicated that it was here that he would probably find the small group of men he had been ordered to seek out. When he found them, if possible he was to escort them to the other, Soviet, side of the front; but if that was out of the question, they were to join his force. The instructions ended: "The utmost caution must be observed. These men must not be allowed to perish, especially the oldest of them."

As they approached the firm ground, they noticed that they were being watched by several men lurking nearby. They were elderly, thin, with heavy growths of beard; the rags of military uniforms, now much too big for them, hung on their bodies. As Mark and Pavlukhin came closer, one of the watchers, a short man with unusually broad shoulders, muttered to his companions: "Only casuals, I think. Possibly men broken out of the encirclement. But we must check up on them." His companion, a tall, rawboned man with a yellow, sickly face and deeply furrowed cheeks, stepped out from behind the bush and went toward Mark and his guide. They met at the very edge of the trees.

"Who are you?" the tall man asked.

Mark noticed that his tunic had the stars indicating general's rank, and raised his hand to his cap. But he remembered he was dressed as a worker, let his hand fall, and answered: "I'm Major Surov, commander of a task force. I've been instructed by General Krymov to find certain men believed to be in this spot."

The tall man stared at him. "Kornei Surov's brother?" he asked. Mark nodded. "Good, Major Surov! You've found the right spot. The Marshal is under that tree." He pointed behind him.

Marshal? Mark thought. Which of the marshals could be here? Budenny? No; according to the radio he's in southern Russia, losing

battle after battle. Timoshenko? Voroshilov? The broad-shouldered, gray-bearded old man stepped out from behind a tree. Mark recognized him at once: Marshal Kulik.

When Mark had ended his report, the Marshal pursed up his lips. "Fine fellow, Krymov! I didn't think he'd find us. All the same, what do we do next? Have you any tobacco, any food?" Mark handed over all the tobacco he had, while Pavlukhin took some bread and a piece of fat bacon from the bag hanging over his shoulder. The two men's eyes glittered greedily, but they said nothing. The Marshal squatted down and divided the bread and bacon into five portions, taking one for himself. Meanwhile two more men had come up, walking with difficulty, and holding on to the bushes and trees for support. By their uniforms Mark saw that one was a general, the other a colonel. They silently picked up their ration of food and turned away, as though wishing to conceal their hunger. Pointing to the fifth portion, the Marshal said: "Take charge of that for General Shylov, Major. He's ill. We're not leaving anything for you; you're younger and in better shape than we are."

These five men were all that remained of the staff headquarters of the Soviet armies that had been swept away during the first few days of the war. By some chance Marshal Kulik, who as supreme commander of the Soviet artillery should have been in Moscow, had been caught with the staff. The Marshal, three generals, and one colonel had got away from the encirclement and had made their way eastward through the forest. But they had had to take refuge on Snakes' Bound, for they were exhausted with the long trek and lack of food, and General Shylov had fallen ill. Now he was lying in a clumsily built shack, indifferent even to the food Mark brought him.

It was not for the Major to question these high-ranking officers. His orders were to lead them to the Soviet side of the front or to attach them to his own force. It was a good seventy or eighty miles eastward to the front, and just as far, or even farther, westward to his force. The westward route was relatively safe, and it would be easy to make it. But the eastward route? He had no idea what it would be like, and shrugged his shoulders when the Marshal asked if he thought they would get through. Late in the afternoon Kulik decided: "Major Surov will conduct me to the east, the others will go with Pavlukhin to the force." The Marshal reckoned on getting through. Two weeks previously he had sent his one adjutant to make his way across the front. The move had proved to be justified; the adjutant had reached

Soviet forces, had made his report, and Moscow had sent General Krymov instructions to save the Marshal. If the adjutant had managed it, why shouldn't he?

Pavlukhin had gone off in search of food; he returned in the early evening, his bag filled with dried meat and hardtack. He gave General Shylov a potion of curative herbs to drink, and later in the evening Shylov tried to walk. He had expressed the wish to be left behind, to finish his days there; but he knew the others would not abandon him, so he decided to make the attempt. Mark took charge of him; as they walked about, Mark wondered whether the General knew that in a recent order of the day Stalin had proclaimed him outside the law. In this order Stalin had listed a number of generals who were to be shot, as being responsible for the disasters that had occurred to the Soviet armies. Mark felt rather glad that this sick and mortally weary general was to go to his task force, and not to the east, where, if he were successful in getting through the front, he would be shot at once.

The General was silent for a long time, as though waiting for the Major to speak first. But suddenly he turned to Mark and asked: "Have you anything special to communicate to me? You're in radio contact with Moscow and the corps; perhaps you have some news..." He did not finish, but Mark realized that somehow or other the news of Stalin's order had reached him. Or possibly he had a presentiment.

"Yes, Comrade General," he said. "An order has been issued in which Stalin has proclaimed a group of generals outside the law. You are among them."

"I knew Stalin would do something like that," Shylov remarked, dropping wearily onto a huge tree root rising above the ground. After a moment or two he rose and went on, leaning on Mark's shoulder. It was dark by now and they walked into trees, stumbled over roots. Suddenly Mark heard a quiet laugh. Shylov stopped short; he was too weak to laugh and walk also.

"Here you have a perfectly idiotic trifle," he said. "Torches are the simplest of things, and the army could well have been supplied with them. But we didn't bother about such details; we didn't think of torches. We had the world revolution all planned out, but somehow we forgot the torches. And how are you going to get to the world revolution through such darkness?"

They all snatched a few hours' sleep that night, and next morning

the group broke up. The Marshal and Mark were the first to leave, turning their faces eastward. The others stood gazing after them till they were lost to sight; then they, too, left the little island of solid ground, going off in the opposite direction, led by Pavlukhin.

The forest seemed to be listening to the distant artillery fire. The low autumnal sky hung right above the trees, continually threatening, but never bringing rain. Mark and Kulik made their way along an almost obliterated forest track. The Major was still in his railwayman's clothes, but the Marshal had discarded his uniform for a ragged sheepskin jacket and an ancient peaked cap, such as the old men of a village wear. Now there was nothing about him to suggest that he was of any military importance. Just a little peasant from a poverty-stricken village, inured to life, accustomed to bow and scrape, and to cling to his wretched little hut.

Mark had been assigned no easy task. Somehow the Germans had found out that Marshal Kulik was in hiding in their rear. They had captured plenty of Soviet generals, but no marshals so far. The German commanders in the zone immediately behind the front began to compete with one another in the hunt for the Marshal. When Mark heard this, he decided to keep entirely to the forest, going alone to the villages and little towns to forage for food, and leaving Kulik always in hiding. They spent the night in haystacks, in lonely forest shacks, in bushes. At night they were bitterly cold.

As they gradually drew nearer to the front, Mark grew more and more cautious and took very winding routes. Two days before, they had been joined by a young tank officer, a lieutenant named Kotov, who took them for local people. His regiment had been shattered, and he was hoping to get across the front. Snub-nosed, impudent-looking, he walked along with Mark and Kulik for an hour or two, then decided that they were unsatisfactory company; they walked slowly and continually went round in circles, though the front was quite close if you made straight for it.

"I'll never get there with you two old duffers," he said. "I'm going on by myself; you hobble along at your own sweet will."

Before he strode on, Mark drew him aside, took out a piece of paper and a stump of pencil, and wrote a few words: "Put in your military report that the man Krymov was seeking has escaped encirclement."

Kotov twisted the paper in his hands, and asked suspiciously, "What does this mean?" But Mark would not explain.

"If you get through the front, simply hand it in at the first staff you reach and ask them to transmit it to the staff of the commander-inchief, by personal communication." Kotov thought for a moment, glanced at Mark, and concealed the note. "If I get through, I'll hand it in. It can't hurt."

Now Mark and Kulik went on alone again, usually in silence. Sometimes Mark felt that he must break that silence, and he began to say something. But he felt at once that the Marshal was annoyed. On one occasion Kulik broke in with: "Talk, my dear comrade, is silver; but silence is golden. Can you tell me the difference between speech and silence?"

"Well, what is it?" Mark countered.

"Why, nobody can talk about everything; but everybody can be silent about everything. And I'm silent. I've been silent a long time now. I don't understand the people who like a lot of talk. Man talks chiefly for his own benefit, and in that respect he's like a grouse."

Mark had to laugh at this unusually long speech. "Why like a grouse? The grouse is a stupid bird, but man is in a sense the lord of nature."

"I don't know anything about that, but it's perfectly true that the grouse is a stupid bird. And that's precisely how man is like it. Do you know how hunters catch the grouse? The bird sits singing, and the hunter creeps up, knowing that when it's singing it doesn't see or hear a thing, it's so absorbed in its song. So the hunter creeps up and sits and waits. He waits until the bird sings, and then he takes a shot at it. If he misses, it doesn't matter very much; the bird hasn't heard the shot or seen the small shot flying past. The hunter waits till it starts singing again, and has another try. And we're exactly like that. We sang away and didn't even notice that the hunter was quite close, taking aim at us but missing. Like the grouse, we thought our song was the most important thing in the world and had power over everything. But when it came to the test, we found it had power only over us."

They reached the zone immediately behind the front. Here there were even more signs of war; the scorched earth laid bare its wounds. The ash from burning grain hung in the air; it covered all faces with a black veneer. At night the glare of the conflagrations swept across the sky, all the world seemed to be going up in flame, and there seemed no road for man except through the midst of that fiery sea. Yet in that sea people continued to go about their terrible tasks. The artillery

thundered; the planes sped through the sky; field kitchens smoked and bubbled in secluded spots. Mark was now as tense as a taut string. There was no clearly defined front, but only a zone of stratified fighting, sometimes as much as twenty-five to thirty miles in depth. The Soviet and German forces were interlocked within this zone, in some places leaving a void where there were no troops whatever; in other places the respective positions of German and Russian forces were reversed; Germans behind Russians, Russians behind Germans. Mark and Kulik had to exploit this peculiarity of the fighting to the full, but luck was by far the most important factor. Now the Marshal frankly disbelieved the possibility of getting through; he laughed ironically when Mark explained his plan, but he left it to the Major to lead, and followed his instructions. The Marshal was completely exhausted and had reached the stage where he didn't care a damn what happened. Only habit made him resist the desire to sit down where he was and let all this fighting, shooting, brawling world go to hell.

Close up behind the front, Mark conducted the Marshal over earth newly scorched. They made their way across smoking fields where the grain was burned to the ground; or they turned into a cattle shed that had escaped by a miracle, and, burying themselves in the dung, waited for some military formation to pass in the distance. In a grove consisting of only charred trunks they ran into a German soldier who had got separated from his company. At the sight of the two Russians the soldier raised a desperate shout, but Mark brought his heavy pistol butt down on his head, and he stopped at once. Mark went on without a glance at him. They came to a river and had to cross it by boat. Once more Mark had to resort to his pistol butt. At night he crawled along the bank to the spot where boats were tied up; choosing his moment, he sent the sentry down with a crack on the head. Then he untied a boat and let it drift down the river to the reeds where Kulik was hiding.

"You've taken many sins on your soul, Major," Kulik remarked when they halted to rest in a quiet spot. "And possibly all for nothing."

Mark shook his head. "It doesn't matter a damn now," he said. "If we're caught, we'll be shot out of hand.... But they won't catch us!" Kulik caught the threatening note in his voice and laughed. He had no doubt that they would.

Slowly maneuvering across country, they came to a small town near the active fighting. And, as was often the case, the town was

empty of troops; neither Soviet nor German forces were in possession of it. The streets were lit up with the flames of great fires, which cast velvety gleams over the houses. Mark stood listening to the gunfire, in order to determine the respective positions of the opposing forces. A feeble fire was coming from his right; on the left the guns were firing a heavy cannonade. He felt convinced that the Soviet forces must be to the right, and Kulik unconcernedly agreed. "All the same," he said, "there's no sense in our going on. They'll be ten miles away, and all the terrain between us and them is in German hands. We've got to stop here."

The town seemed lifeless; only the brilliant tongues of flames starting up from the ruins of burned-out factories flung a flickering pattern over it. Yet Mark felt confident that there were living human beings in the place—only they had gone into hiding. He banged on the closed shutters of a house. No answer. So he and Kulik went into the yard, up the back steps, and hammered at the back door. Behind them in the yard they heard a vague hum of talk, coming from a heap of earth in the middle. Evidently there was a cellar there. They found a small door, and bending over it, Mark shouted:

"Is there anybody alive down there?"

There was a noise as of someone stirring inside, then an aged, quavering voice sounded just on the other side of the door:

"Comrades, don't throw a bomb; there are only women and children here."

"We haven't got any bombs," he shouted back.

An old man opened the door and crawled out of the hole. When he saw Mark and Kulik, he felt reassured and told them what had happened in the town the previous evening. Some Soviet military formation had gone to pieces; the men had deserted. They had taken to the cellars, hiding among the town's inhabitants. But then another Soviet formation had been brought up in trucks, and they had started to hunt out the Red Army men and shoot them on the spot. In some places they had flung grenades into the cellars, killing soldiers and civilians indiscriminately. "It's fearful to think how many were killed," the old fellow said. "They burned down the power station and a furniture factory, too. And they might have burned down the whole town, only two German tanks arrived on the outskirts, and they cleared out."

Mark asked the old man a number of questions about the town. "We've got to find a place where we can hide," he explained; "just

for a day or two, until the front is more stable." The man assumed that they were really deserters who had got hold of civilian clothes, and he was very ready to help. But he stared in astonishment at Kulik, for even in the uncertain light cast by the flames he could see that he was not a young man. So why should he need to hide? "A volunteer, I suppose?" he queried. Kulik nodded. "I could see you're rather old for a regular. You couldn't carry a rifle, and they'd never send such an old man into an attack or on reconnaissance. You don't happen to be the Marshal, by any chance?" He sniggered with an old man's high-pitched laugh.

The question was so unexpected that for a moment Mark was taken aback; but he recovered himself and asked good-naturedly, "What marshal?"

"Why, there's been some talk of a marshal having come through here. Moscow says he's already back with them. The Germans are ready to kick themselves for letting him get away, but they can't do anything about it now. So you want to hide?" He shook his head and tugged his thin beard. "I tell you what, my boys. Go to the power station. Go through the gates and turn to the right, and there beyond the buildings, at the far end of the yard, look for a hole in the ground. When you find it, go down and crawl along a passage at the bottom. Crawl about fifteen paces and you'll come to a large concrete chamber. They used to keep crude oil in it at one time, but it's been empty these many years, and it's dried right out. The workers at the station used to go down there to play cards. It's the safest place in the town, is that hole."

They found the chamber without much difficulty; it contained everything they needed—a kerosene lamp, a heap of straw, and a bucket for water. The old man had given them a packet of food; Mark put it down and went to get water. Kulik had already guessed his plan: he proposed to try to get across to the Soviet side alone and come back with a rescue party. Just as he was about to crawl into the passage leading to the outer world and that desperate journey, Kulik called him back. The small kerosene lamp lit up the Marshal's tangled beard, leaving the rest of his face in shadow. "If you meet your brother give him my greetings," he said. Mark waited; he knew that was not all the Marshal had called him back for. "My family's in Moscow; if anything happens, tell them the government will care for them. . . . And one other thing; I owe you a great debt of gratitude,

Major; you've had a lot of trouble on my account, and now you're going off to almost certain death."

"That's all right, Comrade Marshal; that's our job as soldiers. I'll try to avoid death. But if anything does happen, don't blame me. If you don't hear within two or three days, try to make your own way across, or go back to the rear."

The Marshal gripped Mark's hand tightly.

A Russian volunteer had been sent out into the no man's land in front of the position occupied by his regiment. Crouching in a little hollow, he was keeping watch for any sign of enemy movement during the night. He had been ordered to raise the alarm at once if necessary. He squatted down in his hole, trembling all over. Every little bush ahead of him seemed to be a German soldier; the rustle of trees sounded like stealthy footsteps; every chance noise was magnified into the beginning of a night attack. He had not felt so afraid while among his comrades; but now, alone, at night, he could not stop his teeth chattering; they seemed to have acquired an amazing ability to live an independent existence of their own.

Late in the night, as he squatted down, paralyzed with fear, he heard shots and shouts away in front of him. He huddled still closer to the ground and held his breath. He should have fired a warning shot, but he was in such a funk that he could only cross himself and hurriedly mutter the words of a prayer remembered from his childhood days: "Remember, O Lord, King David and all his meekness." But now more shots were sounding in front of him; they drew nearer, and he could hear someone running through the bushes, coming straight toward his foxhole. He saw a bush suddenly sway violently, and a man came running round it. The volunteer started from his hole and ran fearfully back to camp in front of the other man. "Help!" he shouted, and again, in the conviction that the Germans were almost on top of him, he shouted still louder: "Help!"

His comrades in the trenches heard him shout, and opened up with ragged fire. Bullets whistled past him, terrifying him so completely that he began to whine like a puppy. He ran faster and tumbled down into the trench, while behind him the other man followed without a word, only panting violently. When he, too, dropped down into the Russian trenches, he lay for a long time, unable to get his breath.

Everything had gone marvelously well for Mark's attempt to get through the German lines. He had crawled right past their artillery

positions without being observed. Then he had begun to take short runs from bush to bush. In one spot he was seen by a soldier keeping guard over an automobile. He took cover in the bushes; the guard stood listening for a moment or two, then resumed his measured pacing up and down. Mark went on a little farther, then had to lie flat on the ground to let several soldiers with automatics move past. A reconnaissance going up. He altered his direction a little, to avoid running into them as they returned. From time to time he noticed flashes of rifle fire, and this helped him to get his bearings and avoid danger spots. All went well until he slipped and fell into a shallow ditch, just as he was trying to pass a German listening post of three men under a tree. The noise attracted their attention, and they came toward him in Indian file. He lay perfectly still in the middle of a thick patch of scrub; they went right by him without spotting him. Then they halted, held a whispered conference, and returned in extended order, some ten paces from one another. The man in the middle all but trod on him, but he had no time to shout or fire; the shot from Mark's pistol caught him in the face, and he dropped headlong. Mark started up and ran, dodging from bush to bush. Behind him shots rang out, men shouted; but he ran on, expecting each moment to be his last. Ahead of him he saw a man start up from the ground and flee, desperately shouting for help. He ran on behind that shouting figure.

"Who the hell are you?" The lieutenant in charge of the volunteer group shook Mark by the shoulder.

"Wait a bit, Lieutenant!" he panted, struggling for breath.

"Broken out of encirclement?" the officer asked.

"Not quite that. But, my dear Lieutenant, have me escorted to your staff. Or the divisional staff would be even better."

Two hours later Mark was in the presence of the divisional commander, and asking him to make telephone contact with the staff of the supreme command at Moscow. The divisional comander was a little man, and quite old; his uniform hung on him as if he were a coat hanger.

"But where have you come from, my boy?" the general asked. "And what's your reason for wanting to make contact with the staff of the supreme command?"

He briefly explained who he was, but did not say a word about the Marshal. When the old general heard that the man in front of him was the commander of a task force in Krymov's corps, he took heart and turned to his field telephone. He went into a long explanatory conversation with the army commander, argued with someone or other, and at last handed Mark the receiver:

"Wait! You'll be put through in a minute."

Mark sat for several minutes with the receiver to his ear. A treacherous drowsiness was stealing over him; he began to see two kerosene lamps; the old man in general's uniform grew misty. At last, very distant and faint, a voice reached his ears: "Who's speaking?"

"Major Surov, commander of the thirteenth force of Krymov's corps."

"Krymov?" the voice queried. "How did you get to where you are now?"

"Who's speaking?" Mark shouted back.

"The officer in charge, Major General ———." He did not catch the name.

"Report to your superiors that I'm here in connection with the special order issued to General Krymov in regard to a certain man...."

"What man?"

"The supreme command knows."

The officer at the other end was silent for a moment. "Good, wait!" he ordered. The telephone was silent for a long time. Then there were several clicks, and suddenly a voice said, seemingly quite close: "Hold on, I'm switching you over to the government line. Don't go away."

Then another long silence. At last another voice said, "Who's speaking?" He repeated his story. "Wait!" Suddenly yet another voice reached his ears; it seemed astonishingly familiar, it had a foreign accent, and the words were interrupted by heavy, asthmatic breathing.

"What have you to report?" the voice asked. Now he knew he was speaking to Stalin himself. Briefly and precisely, despite his weariness, he reported that he had brought Marshal Kulik right up to the front, but had not risked bringing him across. "You have done right," Stalin said. "But have you got him safely concealed?"

"I can't guarantee that. I've hidden him to the best of my ability." Another silence. Then the voice said in a different tone:

"Krymov did not understand my order properly. We cannot allow a Soviet marshal to fall into German hands alive. You understand—alive! You and Krymov have created a situation in which that has become a very real danger. What do you propose to do now?"

Stalin's words and the tone in which they were uttered startled Mark. Or was he mistaken? But in that case, why had he put so much emphasis on "alive"? Mark himself had decided days before that if the situation grew quite hopeless he would act as Stalin had just hinted. "They won't catch us!" he had said to Kulik. But in such circumstances that step would have been a perfectly natural one.

"I think, Comrade Stalin, that with quite small forces we could attack the town where I've left the Marshal."

Stalin was silent; evidently he was thinking it over. "That's complicated," he said. "A safer method would be to send a small group there, to . . . get Kulik. Could you lead such a group?"

Mark sat tense, his face showing the strain. Now he did understand. Stalin would take no chances of Kulik's falling alive into German hands. Stalin would send him to lead a group with orders to kill Kulik. And he himself would probably be killed, too, in order to cover up the secret of the Marshal. Dead, Mark could tell nothing. He might even be turned into a national hero who had fallen at the hands of the enemy. Drops of sweat stood out on his forehead.

"No; it would be impossible for a group to get through," he said. "It would have not one chance in a hundred."

Through the earpiece he heard the irregular breathing of a man deciding an important problem. His own mind worked feverishly; he knew exactly what Stalin was thinking. If the group were to perish, Kulik would inevitably fall into German hands. This factor turned the scales in favor of Mark's proposal.

"How large a force would be needed to effect the break-through?" Stalin asked.

"Not a large one. An infantry regiment and a few tanks. The German forces are not in dense concentration in the area."

"Good!" The voice sounded irritable. "I'll give orders for a regiment to be assigned. You will take charge of the operation. But bear in mind what I said: Kulik is not to be surrendered alive. Understand?"

"I understand."

"You will answer for this with your head!"

Mark heard the receiver replaced. He waited a moment or two longer, but the line remained silent.

Mark's expectation was justified: the Soviet regiment broke through the German lines easily. The weak enemy outposts were withdrawn without a fight; the German artillery fired a few shells and retired. The road was opened for a tank, which tore through the streets. It halted outside the demolished power station. Mark brought Kulik out of the underground chamber and helped him to squeeze into the narrow seat of the tank.

When the pale dawn broke at last, German motorcyclists entered the little town; they were followed by a stream of tanks, armored trucks loaded with infantry, and then infantry columns. The German staff had been alarmed at the break-through of a Soviet regiment at a point where it was not to be expected and could yield no positive results. The noise of the brief battle was dying away in the distance. The Russian regiment had carried through its task and was now retiring to its own lines.

Mark had remained behind in the town. He stood at a window, gazing out at the German troops passing along the street. It was the first time he had seen Hitler's army on the march; he had had no idea of the dimensions of the German military machine.

The inhabitants of the town began to venture out cautiously. They stood at their wicket gates and silently watched the German soldiers. It was their first sight of German troops, for fighting had gone on all round the town, but not actually in the streets. For several days the people had not known on which side of the front they were. Now the arrival of the German troops indicated that they were in the hands of the Germans. That was disturbing, yet somehow it was also reassuring.

From his window, Mark could see a square, with a church in the center. Above the entrance was a large sign, of Soviet origin: "Grain warehouse." Gradually a crowd gathered outside the main doors. At last someone broke the doors open, and they flocked in. A minute or two later the sound of the church bell beat over the town, ringing clearly in the still air, for the artillery fire had died down, and there was only an occasional gunshot.

The sound of the bell seemed to bring the place to life. The owners of the house in which Mark was sheltering came in from the cellar where they had spent the night. They were not even surprised to find a stranger in their room; people had grown used to anything. There was a large crowd gathered outside the church, and Mark mingled with it. Men with a metallic dust eating into their skin, poorly dressed women. Among them he noticed several Jews. An old man dressed in a military tunic was haranguing the crowd. Crossing himself with a great sweep of his hand, he declared: "Well, citizens, the Bolsheviks

have fled from our town. They burned down half our houses before they left, but not all, thank God! God grant that they forget the way back to us!" Many of the people in the crowd followed his example and crossed themselves, while he continued: "The Germans have driven out the Bolshevik murderers. We must thank them for coming and liberating us from Stalin. Let's give them a good welcome."

In his hands was a dish with a loaf of bread, the traditional sign of hospitality; an embroidered towel was draped over the loaf. But this is treason, Mark thought. Is that the way to greet the enemy? He felt a strong desire to intervene and warn the people of what they were doing; but then he thought, Treason? The people have been longing for freedom, and they think the Germans have brought it. And he said nothing.

The crowd was steadily growing. A little man with a strand of dank hair hanging over his forehead bustled around, trying to reduce the multitude to some sort of order. He made the people fall in in rows, telling them in a snuffly voice: "Get into ranks, citizens; the Germans like good order." An elderly workman was standing next to Mark. Nodding at the would-be lover of order, he said, "That fellow was a Communist. I know him. And look at the way he's carrying on now."

A large automobile on caterpillar tracks drove up and halted on the edge of the crowd. An elderly, tired-looking colonel was sitting beside the driver. The fussy little man snatched the dish from the older man's hands and went up to the automobile, making a low bow. He attempted to say something in German, but an officer sitting in the rear seat broke in: "Speak Russian; I'll translate to the colonel." The man began to speak but felt some embarrassment in talking Russian. The colonel said a few words to the crowd; the interpreter translated:

"The colonel thanks you for your welcome in your Slavonic fashion. The Communist Bolsheviks will never come back to your land, and in future you'll work for your own benefit. The colonel hopes you understand what great sacrifices Germany has made to achieve your liberation."

The old man bowed with great dignity and replied, "Mister officer, we ask that there shall be no pillaging of the people."

When the interpreter translated these words to him, the colonel laughed heartily and spoke again. "You can rest assured," his interpreter translated; "the colonel says that you've been pillaged so thoroughly by your own government that nobody could strip you of anything more."

An officer rode up on a motorcycle and briskly reported to the colonel. "Captain Hoffman will be the town major," the interpreter told the crowd. "And the colonel will inform the higher command of the friendly welcome you've given the German army." The automobile drove off.

"We'd like to have our church back," an old woman screamed with desperate resolution. The town major could not understand what she meant; it took him some time to realize that the Soviet government had closed the church, and that now the people would like to have it opened again for services and prayer. "Oh, that's shocking barbarism, to turn a church into a grain warehouse," the Captain observed. "That's something we Germans could never understand. You can do as you like with your church."

"But what are we to do with the grain?"

"Whose is it?"

"The government's."

"I think it could be distributed to the people, provided we don't want it for our military needs."

Like all the towns in the western districts of Russia, the place had a large Jewish population; and Mark could not help wondering why they had remained behind, instead of going off with the retreating Soviet forces. He stopped one young Jew and asked him:

"You're Jewish, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," the lad readily answered. "I'm studying in Moscow, and I came here for the vacation period. I got stranded."

"But don't you know what the Germans do to the Jews? There's been plenty about it in the press."

The youngster indignantly shook his head. "Who believes what our papers say? The Germans are a highly civilized nation."

He looked so confident and was so sure that nothing would happen to him or to any Jews that Mark himself began to wonder whether the stories of German atrocities were really true.

After thinking over the problem of getting back to his force, he decided to try to get the German town major to give him a pass allowing him to move openly along the main roads. The commanding officer had taken up his quarters in the building of the former Party committee. When Mark arrived, he found many Russians already there; a number of civic positions needed to be filled, and the town commandant had invited various prominent citizens to accept the

appointments. It appeared that certain of the citizens who had been invited to accept appointments were refusing to do so.

In due course Mark's turn came. He entered the office. Over Captain Hoffman's head was an enormous picture of Stalin, and a marble bust of Stalin was still standing by the right-hand wall; the Captain was using it as a hatstand.

Something in Mark's bearing caught his attention. "Military?" he curtly asked.

"No; a railway worker." He went on to explain why he wanted a pass. Meanwhile, the Captain was watching him closely. When Mark had finished, he said:

"Of course, you can return to the station where your work is. But if you'd like to remain here, we'd give you a good job. With good pay. For instance, we want someone to organize the repair of buildings needed by our army."

"I'm afraid I can't," Mark answered.

"Why not?" the town commandant asked in astonishment.

For a moment he had to think hard. At all costs he must avoid confirming the Captain's suspicion that he was from the Soviet army.

"I'm not literate, and I can't do the job," he said at last. The officer turned to his interpreter and said something to him. A soldier working a typewriter typed out a document. Greatly to Mark's surprise, without further question, the Captain handed him a paper, headed by a German eagle with the swastika in its talons, stating that the bearer was returning to his place of work, and specifying a station not far from the forest where his force was quartered.

When he went out, he found in the square an enormous crowd gathered round a statue of Stalin. The concrete figure was standing on a lofty pedestal, gazing over the ruins and ashes of the town. To an accompaniment of catcalls and boos a rope was flung round its neck. The rope was a good fifty yards long; there was a rush of people to take part in pulling on it. Laughing, joking, shouting, they tugged at it. But Stalin stood firm, only swaying a little. Thus great empires fall; thus the ancient gods die, Mark thought. A little girl ran up to him and pulled at his sleeve. "Daddy, come and help," she squealed in her child's voice. Instinctively he pulled himself away. "What's the matter, daddy?" she asked, and her blue eyes openly demanded that he should comply. He looked at her; her ragged dress revealed thin shoulders, prickly with the cold; her pigtail was tied with a yellow ribbon.

"What's the matter, daddy?" she asked again. But now he was smiling. In all the world perhaps this little girl was the only creature whom he would have obeyed at that moment. He pushed into the crowd, took hold of the rope, and pulled with all his might. The great block swayed to and fro, then toppled over, smashing to pieces on the ground. A sigh of relief passed through the square.



5. Golgotha

As he made the long trek back to his force, Mark was troubled with a vague apprehension that increased when he arrived at the little railway workers' settlement indicated on his German pass. German troops were moving in force toward the Dead Forest. "They're concentrating a terrific power in that direction," one old railwayman told him, his eyes goggling. "They say they've discovered a Russian force there and they're going to destroy it."

Hurrying toward the forest, he saw with his own eyes masses of German soldiers going in that direction, and as he drew nearer, he heard firing. That night he slipped like a shadow past the German outposts, then, after penetrating a little farther, quietly gave a birdcall. He waited, leaning against a tree. In the distance he heard the call of a night bird. The force still existed. He slowly moved forward, calling from time to time. Each time he heard the answering call, and each time a little closer. It came from the direction of the marshes. So the worst had happened; the force had been driven back against the swamps, and there was no way of retreat.

He found Bezborodov in a shack made of fir boughs, and as they gripped hands in the darkness, the Major felt the Captain's hand trembling. "There's no hope," Bezborodov said. "We've got two shells per gun and very few bullets left. Seventy-three men fit, the rest killed or wounded. Kozhevnikov and General Krylov are the only officers left, besides me. Not more than a score of horses, and they're in even worse condition than the men."

"We must find a way out," Mark declared.

"There is no way out," Bezborodov calmly answered.

Mark knew that well enough, but he felt an invincible desire to save himself and the men lying in the slit trenches outside. He had seen German artillery coming up; it would be here by morning. It was still some hours to dawn; but what could be done? His mind worked feverishly. If a group of his men, with one or two machine guns, were to strike at the German positions in such a manner as to create the impression that the whole force had made an attempt to break through, how would the Germans react? In the darkness it would take them some time to realize what was happening, and, rather than allow the force to get through, surely they would concentrate on the sector immediately under attack? If enough German forces could be drawn off, there might be sufficient weakness on their flank for the rest of the force to break through. Those who made the diversion would no doubt perish; yet that was better than that the whole force should be wiped out.

Mark hurriedly changed into his military uniform. Then he stepped out in front of his men. His heart ached as he realized how small a force was left.

"Comrades, I'm handing over command of the force to Lieutenant Kozhevnikov. [Why not to Bezborodov? he thought, but the answer was clear; he failed to get the force away from the threat of encirclement.] I'm not going to try to pull the wool over your eyes, comrades. The situation is pretty hopeless. But there is just one tiny possibility of a break-through. So I'm calling for volunteers to do a pretty dangerous job with me, in order to save the majority. Those of you who are ready to follow me, step to my side."

General Shylov stepped over to him at once. "I'm with you, Major," he said calmly. Demin stepped forward and halted beside the General. Korovin ran up and several others. Bezborodov was the last to volunteer.

A machine gun and wagon were brought up, and four horses were harnessed to it. Basil led up Savage. The little group of horsemen mounted and set off, the machine gun following. Mark's unit consisted of ten horsemen and two men for the machine gun.

Kozhevnikov stood by the two cannon, watching the luminous dial of his watch. "Fire!" The two small cannon cracked wickedly, spitting flame from the barrels. They cracked a second time. Then they were silent; they had fired all their ammunition. At the signal given by the cannon in their rear, General Shylov pressed the trigger of the

machine gun. It stuttered hysterically. The mounted men tore in the direction of the Germans, shouting and firing. The enemy opened up with a ragged fire, but the horses were already among them; the Russians were cutting down the German soldiers with sabers where they stood.

Mark turned sharply to the right; behind him his men stopped shouting. Now the Germans were waiting tensely for the next move. There was a burst of fire here and there, but it died away at once. Meanwhile the Russians galloped swiftly to the right, where they ran into another German company. Once more they sowed the seeds of panic and vanished. A moment or two later it became obvious to Mark that the Germans had started to execute an encircling movement and were drawing round the little group of horsemen in a steadily constricting ring. But in doing so they were withdrawing from their prepared positions. Now all depended on Kozhevnikov; he had his chance.

Now for the end, Mark thought. He was left with only four men, and one riderless horse-Demin's. The machine gun had lost two of its four horses, but the gun was still good for service, and General Shylov was manning it expertly. By the slow light of the dawn the Germans discovered that they were being harassed by an absurdly small force. Mark tried to retire so that his men could again have their backs to the marsh, but his retreat was cut off. So he turned again, to ride straight ahead. Behind him another man fell; but it made no difference now, in any case. The bullets sang their deadly song over their heads, like frenzied mosquitoes. In front of them lay a gully, and instinctively he galloped toward it. On its very edge Savage was struck by a bullet, reared on his hind legs, and hurtled down into the gully, dragging his rider with him. The machine gun crashed down after them. Shylov fell off the carriage, and Mark crawled across to him. "But I'm one up on Stalin," the General whispered with his dying breath.

At the edge of the gully German soldiers appeared. The last bullet for yourself—Mark remembered an old order of Stalin's. "No," he muttered, "that's not my way." His wounded horse was groaning deeply, his velvety skin quivering. He crawled over to him, leaving a trail of blood as he went, and shot Savage in the ear with his last bullet. The Germans ran down the slope. Korovin turned up from somewhere—Major Surov's one-man force.

The soldiers bearing the stretcher were completely exhausted, but the guard walking behind them angrily shouted unintelligible German curses, and they struggled on. The man on the stretcher was Mark Surov. He rested his elbow on the pole and raised his head, as though to take a last look at this joyless world, which today would come to an end as far as he was concerned. His scraggy brown neck, jutting out from the unbuttoned collar, seemed to have difficulty in holding up his big head with its unkempt shock of graying hair. His sunken eyes were feverish, but his firmly pressed lips preserved an inviolable tranquillity. The wound in his leg was sending the prick of red-hot needles all over his body, and his only way of avoiding a cry of pain or a groan of despair was to concentrate on keeping his lips tightly closed.

The rear end of the stretcher was being carried by a prisoner wearing spectacles. He was one of the many elderly Russians who should never have been in the army at all, but whom the government had gathered up from towns and villages, thrusting rifles into their hands and putting them into uniform, only for them to fill the German prisoner-of-war camps after their first battle. Everything about the man was expressive of his fear; even the dirty white bag tied across his shoulder shook, and his eyes blinked wretchedly behind his spectacles.

Each time the man at the back, terrified by the German guard's shouts, tried to move faster, the man at the front turned his head and roared at him:

"Keep in step, you feeble devil! What are you in a hurry for? You're not going to a wedding. You needn't be afraid of Fritz; he's just swearing for the sake of swearing, the dog."

Mark could see the back of the man in front—Korovin's child-ishly thin back—and his head, bent obstinately. Perhaps Korovin was the last surviving soldier of the thirteenth force, though there was just the possibility that Kozhevnikov had got away the remnants of the force and now was hiding in some secluded part of the forest not yet overrun by the Germans. Korovin knew quite well where he was taking his commander, and he had no intention of hurrying. Mark knew, too; but the thought of death was always with him, these days, and it no longer troubled him. Death simply meant that everything would be settled. His unnecessary, racking pain would go, the sense of fatality he had long borne would fall away, and there would be nothing left. Only a great void. But beyond that void he

would leave much that was near and dear to him. This low, autumnal sky, covered with rust-colored clouds—an unfriendly sky, yet dear to him, his own sky. His brothers, Kornei, Ivan, and Simon; his mother—the very thought of her quickened a feeling of pity and pain within him. And Maria, too, she would be left in that land to which for him there would be no return. On his way back to the force he had passed through her native town, hoping to see her and tell her how he felt. He had seen her son, but she was not there. She had volunteered as a nurse in the early days of the war. Maria, Katva, Lena; each of them had taken her own road through his life, had brought him her own distinctive, unique love; and out of the love of these women something had been born that he called love, but which had no definite features. To each individual human being is allotted his measure of love, and he could not complain that his measure had been too small. But that, too, would go, just as he would go—he, who even now was finding strength in the feeling that he was not entirely alone, and that he would leave behind a few people for whom he was not simply an impersonal pinch of dust.

He wondered how much longer he had to live. "An hour or two?" Quite soon, now, he would be carried into the German commandant's office, the stretcher would be set down before a desk at which officers in German uniforms would be sitting—a field court-martial. "Are you an officer of General Krymov's corps?"

"Yes"

"Do you know that by order of the Fuehrer the officers of that corps have been proclaimed outside military law, on the grounds that they are conducting illegal warfare in the German rear, by methods unrecognized in military regulations?"

"Yes, I know." There would be no further questions. And only one sentence: death by shooting. The field court-martial was simply a formality, one that needn't be observed at all.

He looked about him with curiosity. They were approaching a vast P.O.W. transit camp. Men in filthy gray greatcoats were wandering about the many little rises enclosed by barbed wire and watchtowers. There were no buildings, no kitchens, nothing to suggest that human beings were living there. There were only rabbit warrens in the hill-sides, holes that the men had dug to shelter from the elements. Starving, half-savage men wandered about; some of them stopped to watch the stretcher go past along the road, but there was no compassion, no sympathy, no condemnation, in their eyes. How many were there

of these doomed beings? Ten thousand? A hundred thousand? Nobody had counted, or ever would count them. The Soviet armies were still disintegrating, powerless to hold up the enemy advance; hundreds of thousands of men in gray greatcoats were pouring into the German P.O.W. camps.

But Major Surov would not be included among their untold number. He was outside the law, because, in pursuance of his orders, he had been fighting in the German rear. Yet, after all, that German rear was Russian soil, too, and could he have refused to defend it? That was something the Germans didn't understand; that was simply an accident; it was no justification. It was rather strange that the German colonel who had led the troops that smashed the thirteenth force had not shot him on the spot, but had sent him to this P.O.W. camp. "You'll be tried by field court-martial," he had said coldly. Since then the stretcher bearing Major Surov had been on the road for three days. Possibly those three unnecessary extra days had been granted him so that he might know all the terrible, intolerable bitterness of defeat.

The stretcher drew near to a spot where all the hillocks were embroidered with strings of barbed wire. Guards were pacing up and down between the lanes of wire, and on the outside a crowd of men and women peasants had gathered, to see if any of their own people were among the prisoners.

As the stretcher made its way up a slope, Mark caught sight of a small town lying a little to one side. An ancient town, standing on the highway from the west to Moscow; all the western invaders marching on Moscow all down the centuries had passed through it. Polish troops had held the town more than once; Napoleon and his marshals had rested in it; and now the Nazi forces were marching through on their way to the east.

The peasants standing at the roadside watched glumly as the stretcher with Mark on it went past. One woman ran into the road and thrust an apple and a piece of bread into his hand. He was about to thank her, but at that moment his attention was distracted by the sound of airplanes. Squadrons appeared one after another, flying from the east. Soviet squadrons. Somewhere on the farther side of the rise an alarm was rung. But the prisoners of war showed no interest in the appearance of the Soviet planes. What had the planes to do with them? They had finished their fighting.

Maintaining formation, the squadrons flew one after another over

the solid mass of human bodies, the hungry, stinking, soldiers' bodies. Suddenly a fearful cry arose from thousands of throats:

"Bombs!"

Black specks had fallen away from the machines.

The elderly soldier who was carrying the rear end of the stretcher dropped the handles and fell to the ground. The whistle of the bombs grew higher and higher. Swearing vigorously, Korovin dragged Mark into a ditch and rolled down beside him. The human howl rose to such a pitch of intensity that for one moment it drowned the whistle and roar of the bombs.

A violent, stifling wind snatched Mark up and flung him out of the ditch. As he looked about him, five paces away he saw the woman who had given him the apple, the apple that was still gripped in his hand. Her mouth was gaping; from it came an even stream of sound, neither rising nor falling, half shriek, half groan. Her left leg had been torn off at the knee, and he saw the jagged white bone in the rose and crimson flesh. Her body was writhing and knocking against the ground.

A second stick of bombs shook the earth. Everything was enveloped in a black spurting mushroom of soil. Mark raised his fists toward the sky and screamed up at the planes, the bombs, the whirlwind of death: "You swine! You scoundrels, what are you doing?"

The whirlwind dropped to the ground, scattering fragments of human bodies, clumps of earth, stones. In the valley everything was smoking, and a gray carpet of soldiers' greatcoats extended as far as the eye could reach. The groans and howls rose to heaven, all the world seemed to be echoing with them.

Mark's distorted, blackened face was flooded with tears; his fists were clenched, his eyes delirious with fury. He saw only one face, with a low brow and brown, smoke-stained whiskers. And into that face he hurled his curse, quivering with pain and hate. "Why have you sent bombers to bomb prisoners?"

Then he raised his eyes, and to highest heaven he shouted, "Why are you silent?"

But the gods had nothing to say.

The people living along the westward roads saw endless columns of prisoners moving along under German military escorts. Those sluggish ribbons of gray human bodies and gray human faces extended for many miles. They crawled slowly through forests and fields, past

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towns and villages. As they crawled along, they left dark patches behind in their tracks. The prisoners who were too exhausted to go any farther were shot where they dropped. The farther west those columns advanced, the more frequently were bloodstained patches left behind on the road.

The people living in the towns and villages along the way brought out bread, potatoes, and cabbage for the prisoners; it was all devoured by the foremost ranks. Maddened with hunger, the men fought desperately for potato skins, for the outside leaves of cabbage. The Germans fired into the heaps of struggling bodies, even at those who brought the food. Then the column crawled on, leaving bodies hummocked on the road—prisoners and village women mingled together.

Some days after the bombing of the P.O.W. camp, Mark took his place in one of the columns. The Soviet bombs had wrecked the barracks and offices of the German camp administration, the German escort who had brought him to the camp had been killed, and all record of his activities had been destroyed. Now the Germans knew him only as an officer prisoner of war, and he was included in a batch of prisoners who were to be marched to the west. The wounded prisoners, such as he, were carried in carts that dragged along at the tail of the column of marching men. In the first cart there were five men, including Mark. He sat on the edge of the vehicle, dangling his sound leg. They rode along without talking; but whenever a shot rang out ahead of them, they turned their heads and glanced at the latest victim as they passed. The peasant owner of the cart, who was leading his horses by the bit, carefully guided his animals round the shot prisoner. Sometimes he would be still alive, writhing in his death agony. Then all the prisoners in the carts turned and waited. In due course a single shot came from the rear, finishing off the prisoner who had already survived one bullet.

"Thirty-five," Mark muttered to himself.

Thirty-five prisoners had been shot since they had set out that morning. As the day wore on, the number would increase rapidly, for with every mile they marched, the prisoners grew more and more exhausted, and more and more of them fell out, to be shot by the guards.

It's extraordinary, Mark reflected, that the Germans are shooting those who fall out, and yet they're requisitioning carts for us wounded who can't even walk. Where's the logic of it? Of course, it doesn't cost them anything; they force the peasants to provide carts and

horses. But what will happen if they can't get hold of carts? Then I suppose they'll shoot us. We can't hope to find men like our driver all the way to the west, through Poland, for instance.

He gave a grateful smile to the old peasant who was leading the horses. For three days now this rather bowed old fellow, in patched and ragged clothes, had been carrying the prisoners in his cart, though he could have returned home at the end of the first day. The old man felt that someone was looking at him, and turned round. His scared eyes stared at Mark's moody face. "My God!" he sighed. "The things men do in this world! That's the thirty-fifth."

He, too, had been counting; at each shot he muttered a prayer for the victim. Mark turned his eyes away and said half aloud: "When old Jeremy turns back, there'll be no cart for us, and the Germans will shoot us, too."

"What makes you think that?" The old man caught his words, and waved his hand in alarm. "You're our own flesh and blood, aren't you? The people are washing your road with their bitter tears. And I'll carry you as far as Berlin if necessary. If they kill you, they can kill me, too." He hastily pulled a dirty rag out of the hole that served as a pocket in his coat, and blew his nose violently. Another shot rang out ahead of them. The old man began to lead his horses to one side; the cart wheels passed round a man lying face downward.

"Thirty-six," Mark muttered.

"Thirty-six," Jeremy half sobbed. "Lord, accept the soul of thy slave, the thirty-sixth; O Lord, Thou knowest his name."

He sank his head on his chest; his unkempt beard stirred gently as he prayed for the unknown soldier lying in the road. He went on praying until another shot sounded. Then he groaned and returned to the beginning of his prayer:

"Lord, accept the soul of thy slave, the thirty-seventh; O Lord, Thou knowest his name."

And so the old man prayed along all that way of the cross, and his prayers accompanied the souls of all the growing number who left their bodies on that golgotha road.



6. The Uttermost Depths

COLONEL Kisiliev, a man in his sixties with a thatch of gray hair and a lined face pitted with dirt and soot, waved his sound hand and said: "Before dying, we should try living."

The small building was lighted by a tiny window above the entrance door. At one time the place had been a storeroom, and wooden shelves still extended round the walls. Now it was the prison accommodation of Soviet staff officers, who were distributed round the shelves like commodities. Mark felt that he had been living here an age, though he had been brought in from the hospital only a week before. The camp was situated in a small western Russian town. The column of prisoners with its baggage train of wounded had dragged as far as that town, but, with the onset of winter, had come to a halt. Snowstorms had started, and the German authorities had hurriedly organized a P.O.W. camp in an old fortress. Now that camp accommodated many tens of thousands of men in gray greatcoats. With German precision the prisoners were allocated to barracks by rank, a barrack for officers, while the staff officers were consigned to the storeroom. One great barrack was packed with privates, but even then it could not accommodate all of them, and the overflow was relegated to garages.

Colonel Kisiliev walked up and down between the bunks. A crowd of officers was huddled round the stove, which had been made from an old benzine barrel. "All the same, we ought to try," the Colonel declared resolutely. "If we don't protest, the Germans will starve us to death."

"Even if we do protest, they'll starve us to death just the same, or think up some other way of killing us off," a glum voice said from one corner. The officer who had spoken turned to the wall, to indicate that he was no longer interested in the conversation. On the shelf above him yet another inhabitant of the storeroom showed signs of life. Mark poked out his head and touched the shoulder of the man below. "You may be right," he said. "But we ought to try everything we can. After all, there are thousands of men in this camp; they're all howling for bread. And we are responsible for them."

"How are we?" the other man retorted. "Let Stalin be responsible for them and for us."

"Stalin isn't going to worry about us," Mark persisted. "I reckon that as far as he's concerned, the more of us die the better. You asked how we're responsible for them. Simply because they followed us, and we led them into this mess."

"But we're in the same mess!"

"That doesn't make any difference. We shall perish for the crime we've committed. We began it a long time ago, and we can't put it right now. After all, we're the Stalinist elite. We supported him, we received our commissions from him, we occupied high positions; but meanwhile the people were utterly lost and were seeking a way out. And we didn't show them any way. You'll say not we but Stalin was guilty of that crime; but I reply that without us Stalin would not have counted for anything, if we had realized that we had to keep our eyes fixed on the people, not on Stalin. Because we were fools, or possibly cowards, or scoundrels, we supported Stalin. And you say we're not responsible! You can count on me, Colonel Kisiliev," he called to the Colonel, who was still striding up and down.

"Excellent!" he replied. "Two of us will be quite enough."

"What's the good of two of you!" the same man in the lower bunk snorted angrily. "Surov's been spouting a hell of a lot of high-flown talk. But I'll join you. Not because of what he's said but because I'm hungry."

For a minute or two there was silence; then the talk took a different turn. A rumor was spreading through the camp that the Soviet Government was intending to ask the International Red Cross to exercise supervision over the German camps for Soviet prisoners of war.

"Perhaps Stalin has got some conscience left," Kisiliev said quietly, stroking his shoulder, which he had injured in a fall.

A tall, bald-headed man with an ugly but intelligent face slipped out from a lower bunk. "You can put that right out of your heads, comrades," he said. "Stalin's got about as much conscience as I've got hair on my head." He slapped himself expressively on his bald pate. Certain of the inhabitants of the storeroom knew he was not really a colonel, as he had been entered in the German records, but a high-ranking commissar, who had held rank equivalent to a general. But they kept their knowledge to themselves, for they knew that if the Germans found out he would be shot at once. They had no mercy on commissars.

"But perhaps the Americans or the British..." someone said irresolutely.

"You can drop that idea, too," the bald-headed man said confidently. "Don't kid yourselves. They're in a jam, and they haven't got time for us. They're sending Stalin guns, planes, automobiles; and, if necessary, they'll send food. But they won't even think of us."

Mark lay on his shelf, his hands beneath his head. A small board, with his cap on it, served as pillow. His leg wound had almost healed, and he had left the hospital; he had found it too painful to remain there, continually surrounded by dying men. If his leg had been completely fit, he would have tried to escape; but he still had to use a stick.

The sound of military steps was heard outside. The door opened, and the camp commandant, a squat little old man in colonel's uniform, entered through a billow of steam. In his enormous officer's cap he looked like a great fungus. Accompanied by a large retinue, he was making his normal daily round, and all the Soviet officers remained in their places. Other prisoners had to stand at attention when he passed, but an exception had been made for the staff officers, among whom were men of rank equal to his own. He saluted as he entered, and he invariably remarked that the gentlemen staff officers could remain where they were, though none of them ever showed any sign of moving.

Today they were waiting for this visit. Colonel Kisiliev was standing at the stove. Mark dropped down from his upper bunk. All the others left their places and crowded behind Kisiliev and Mark. The commandant was astonished; hitherto the Soviet officers had greeted him with an indifferent silence. With one gloved hand he beckoned to a young German officer behind him, and said something. "Gentlemen," the interpreter said, "the commandant asks whether you wish to say anything to him."

"Yes, we want to tell him and the German authorities-"

With a gesture the commandant halted Mark in the middle of his sentence. A look of indignation appeared on his face. "The colonel does not wish to hear Major Surov," the interpreter hastily said. "The officer senior in rank must speak on behalf of you all. That is the regulation in the German army."

Mark gripped his stick till it hurt his hand. He felt like telling the commandant that none of the officers in that storeroom belonged to the German army, and so they were not bound to observe German army regulations. But Kisiliev had already stepped forward.

"We wish to draw your attention to the fact that the prisoners in

this camp are swelling and dying of starvation. If the diet isn't improved, they're all doomed to death. We know the international regulations concerning prisoners of war, and we ask that our condition be changed to comply with those regulations."

As the interpreter translated, something approaching a smile appeared in the commandant's dull eyes; when he spoke again, there was a sadistic note in his voice.

"You mentioned your condition," he said, almost purring. "Are you thinking of your own situation as staff officers?"

"No," Kisiliev replied. "We're thinking of all the prisoners in this camp."

"In other words, all the officers, not only the staff officers?"

"No; I said all the prisoners," Kisiliev said obstinately. "The other ranks, the officers, and the staff officers."

"And you insist on the observance of the International Convention on Prisoners of War?" the commandant continued in his purring tone.

"Yes!"

The commandant took a German newspaper out of his greatcoat pocket and unfolded it, slowly, enjoyably. Then just as slowly he took out his spectacles and adjusted them on his nose. With a quiet, feline movement he drew close to the prisoners.

"I'll read you a brief official communication of the International Red Cross," he said. "You can take my word for it that everything it says is correct, especially as it has been reprinted from Swiss newspapers and is in the nature of an official communication." There was not much light in the storeroom, and his attendant officers turned torches onto the paper as he read. He read slowly, rolling every word round his tongue; the young officer translated it just as slowly and pleasurably. The statement said that the International Red Cross had invited the Soviet Government to sign the International Convention on Prisoners of War, whereby the Red Cross would be enabled to undertake the supervision of Soviet prisoners in German hands. To this offer Molotov had replied in the name of the Soviet Government, stating that there were no Soviet soldiers or officers in German hands, as all those who had been taken prisoner were traitors to their country and enemies of the Soviet Government, which had no intention of doing anything for them. When he had finished, the commandant as deliberately refolded the paper.

"I hope that now everything is quite clear to you, gentlemen," he

said. "We have to draw up the statute regulating the position of Soviet prisoners ourselves, and you'll have to reconcile yourselves to it. As for the rations, they are issued in the proportions possible at present. I have no intention of trying to convince you that thin soup once a day is the height of luxury; but you will not get anything else. I assure you that Germany will not bring her own food here for you, and you know quite well why she won't." He stared into the Soviet officers' faces. "I agree with you that the diet is inadequate, but there is no more, and no more can be expected. I wouldn't like you to get too thin, gentlemen, so I shall give orders that you are to receive a double ration from the camp stores. Only for staff officers...."

"You needn't bother," Mark answered morosely. "We shall have only what the other prisoners have."

"Is that your view, too?" the commandant asked, pointing to Kisiliev.

"Yes, I agree with Surov," the Colonel answered hoarsely, his face flushing.

"And you?" "And you?" He pointed to each of the prisoners in turn. Each man curtly answered, "Yes."

He came to a Georgian officer. "And you?" he asked.

The Georgian was furious; his head was thrust out and his nostrils dilated like those of a horse after a long and arduous gallop.

"Of course, we'll have only what the men have," he shouted. "And d'you know what, you filthy mushroom, you can go to hell!"

"What did he say?" the commandant asked his interpreter.

But the Georgian's thick accent had been too much for the interpreter. He contented himself with explaining that the dark officer would like to have some mushrooms.

The commandant went out, and the officers returned to their bunks. For a moment or two there was a heavy, oppressive silence. It was broken by the bald-headed man calling to Mark.

"Major Surov, what do you think of all this?"

"I think he's a filthy swine."

"Who? Stalin or the commandant?"

"Both!"

The short winter day seemed endlessly long. From early morning they began to wait for midday, when the ration of soup was doled out. After it was gone, the wait grew exhausting and burdensome. Night fell at last. They sat around the stove, talking; but although

they had many things to talk about, all their thoughts were one—to forget their hunger, if only for a minute; to forget the griping pains in their entrails, which made them think and talk of nothing but food, of all the wonderful food of past days, now only a memory. Then they lifelessly crawled to their bunks; the fire died down; a chill stole into the storeroom, making them toss and turn restlessly.

As the night was drawing to its end, Mark lowered himself from his upper shelf cautiously, so as not to disturb the others. He groped through the darkness to the stove, put on some kindling, and struck a match. The flame slowly came up, lighting the room with an uncertain, flickering light. He drew on his greatcoat and picked up a stick.

"Where are you off to?" someone quietly asked; the bald-headed man put his head out from his lower shelf.

"I'm going for a walk," Mark answered. "To get an appetite."

"Take a look at the far end of the camp, by the rear gate," the bald-headed man muttered to him.

He catches on to everything! Mark thought as he went out. How the devil did he guess?

The extensive area of the camp was swept with the beams of search-lights from the turrets. There was nobody about. Groans and drowsy exclamations came from the large barrack, in which eight thousand prisoners were packed. He slowly wandered along to the far end of the camp. The guards on the turrets noticed him, but did nothing about it, for movement in the open area of the camp was allowed as soon as dawn came.

Like the rest of the camp, the far end was closed with several rows of barbed wire, and between the rows more wire was lying in loose and irregular festoons. He could see it would be sheer madness to try to escape across these festoons of wire, which were always picked out by searchlights at night. The wire was adorned with the frozen bodies of men who had tried. The Germans would not allow them to be removed.

The beams of the searchlights faded in the light of the oncoming day and turned dead and ghastly. The snow was tinged with blue. Mark halted for a moment or two opposite a spot where a body was lying. The majority of the would-be escapers had been caught on or beside the first or second row of wire; but this one was beyond the fourth row. Only one more row, and he might have gained his freedom. But how had he got through four rows of wire? The face was

a bloody mask; a bullet had caught him in the head. His greatcoat lay beside him, and the wooden handle of a trenching tool stuck out of the snow. Mark realized that instead of attempting to crawl through the rows of wire, like many another, this man had used the trenching tool to dig under them, and had crawled along the hollows thus made. The guards were usually quick to pick out anyone getting through the wire; but a man crawling along the ground had more hope of remaining unseen. And he laid his greatcoat over the festoons of wire and crawled over on it, he thought. The poor devil had figured it all out very thoroughly. Yet, there he was, lying dead. Possibly he had made the wire quiver; the guards had noticed it, had found him with their searchlights, and then had calmly machine-gunned him.

No, Mark thought, you won't get out this way.

At one point in the wire fence there was a gate that was opened every morning. This was the way out for the dead. The camp cemetery lay on the other side of the rows of wire. Those who had died during the night were already being brought out from the barracks and other buildings. Each body was stripped naked; the clothes were needed by the living, not the dead. The row of corpses grew longer and longer. On the farther side a line of low mounds already stretched for some distance. On the commandant's instructions, each grave was to contain one hundred bodies—no more and no less. Amazing precision, Mark thought. From where he was standing he could count seventeen graves, containing 1,700 bodies.

He turned and walked slowly away, leaning on his stick. The morning had already brought many prisoners out into the open air, to wander about with their bowels yearning in expectation of their ration of soup. Some were cleaning their mess kits with snow, others picking the lice out of their greatcoats. As he walked along, passing hundreds of men with faces swollen with hunger, he felt some of them give him unpleasant looks. The rumor was being spread about the camp that the officers were being issued a special ration. Some of the men had gone so far as to declare that they themselves had seen the officers being given bread, fat bacon, and jam.

He came to the camp latrines and stopped to contemplate them. He walked past the wooden shed and took a good look across the barbed wire, which ran right up to it on either side. That one wooden shed served both for the prisoners inside the camp and, on the farther side of a partition down the middle, for the German guards.

Then he went down to the officers' barrack and had a talk with

Kotov, the lieutenant whom he had met while escorting Marshal Kulik to the front. Kotov had succeeded in crossing the front line and had delivered Mark's message. But the tank formation to which he was sent was soon defeated, and the young lieutenant was captured. In the P.O.W. camp he again met Mark. Now he thought only of escape. Mark had taken a great liking to this sturdy, stocky lieutenant because of his definite mind and his persistency, which indicated great strength of character. He had made Kotov give him his promise that he would not attempt to escape without Mark's assent.

"But I'm going to, all the same," Kotov said resolutely, when Mark once more declared that escape was impossible.

"Many others have tried," Mark replied.

"I don't care if I go under," the Lieutenant answered. "Stay here waiting for the Germans to starve us to death? No, thank you! I'd rather get it over and done with. I was born by way of a joke, I got married by way of a joke, and I'll die by way of a joke."

He laughed so infectiously that Mark involuntarily smiled. But as he glanced at the other man, the smile faded. Kotov's face was distended with a yellowish, unhealthy puffiness. If he were to stay in this place much longer, he wouldn't be thinking of breaking out! He stepped closer to Kotov and muttered, "There's one way; but I can't say it would be pleasant, or easy."

"Nobody expects it to be easy," Kotov answered.

"Well, have you thought of the latrines?"

The Lieutenant stared at the long wooden shed but failed to see what Mark was driving at.

"The latrines for the prisoners are on one side; those for the German guards are on the other side. There's a single cesspool for both sides. Once you're through to the other side, you've got a clear road. Get me?"

"But, Comrade Major, that means-"

"Now listen, Kotov! Get out of your head any idea that heroism is always accompanied by a blaze of glory. The most heroic deeds I've known of were done in far from heroic circumstances. The result's what matters. I knew of one old revolutionary who ate his own filth to prove he was mad and to escape being sentenced to death. But he has gone down in history. I knew of another man who went to live and die on a leper island in order to be free..."

Late that afternoon Kotov came to the storeroom. Quietly he reported that he and his friends had agreed to try the method sug-

gested. They were making the attempt that very night. He had come to ask whether Mark would go with them.

"No, with this wounded leg of mine I couldn't keep up with you; I'd only be a burden. Everything might depend on your speed in getting away once you're through."

Night came on, and the searchlights lit up the camp as usual. But a fine, dry snow had started to sift down, and their light was dissipated and indirect. Mark quietly left the storeroom and lurked between it and the officers' barrack. During the hours of darkness all prisoners were forbidden to leave their quarters; the guards opened fire at once if they spotted any movement. But Mark soon discerned figures slipping out of the barrack one by one, crawling across the open ground, picking their way along a route outside the range of the searchlights, and disappearing into the latrines. Mark stood like a statue, silent, still. There was not a sound to be heard. Half an hour passed; the silence was still unbroken. Slowly he went back to the storeroom. As he groped through the darkness, he felt a hand touch his knee.

"Well?" the bald-headed man whispered.

"I think they've made it!" he replied, as he climbed onto his bunk.

There was a crowd of prisoners surrounding three men. All eyes were fixed on those three, fixed with a painful, almost morbid curiosity. During the previous night they had killed one of their comrades and had eaten his flesh. One of them, a tall, black-bearded fellow, was terrible in his impenitence. Baring his yellow teeth, he spat out: "Yes, we did kill him; yes, we did eat him. . . . And you'll all be doing the same before long."

Someone in the crowd shouted: "But it was a man you killed—a man like yourself."

The black-bearded man turned to look at the one who had shouted, and said hoarsely: "Yes, a man, a man like the rest of us. And I suppose you're jealous?"

The crowd was silent. The cannibal had expressed the very thought that was tormenting Mark. These others, whom hunger had reduced to despair, were not so much indignant at the cannibalism as astonished. So you could avoid starvation so simply as that. All you had to do was to cross a certain bound.

The Germans ordered the prisoners to fall in for assembly. Then the commandant arrived. He was followed by a German escort guarding the cannibals. The commandant hurled a torrent of words at the prisoners, and the interpreter had difficulty in keeping up with him. "They have eaten human flesh," he shouted in a tragic tone, pointing to the cannibals. "Only Russians could sink as low as that." He strode up and down in front of the rows of silent men, his voice rose to a squeal: "Only we Germans can save you from perishing. Your nation is a nation of born slaves. If you don't practice cannibalism on one another more often, it's only because you've got too much to eat."

Mark stood clenching his teeth. Beside him the Georgian muttered in his guttural tones: "What's he telling those lies for, the dog? I'll kill him!"

"Shut up!" Mark ordered. "Shut up, or I'll make you!"

"In future I forbid you to eat one another," the commandant ended. "And anyone caught doing so will be put to the heaviest labor." Mark gasped. Every man in the camp dreamed of being put to work. If they worked, they were fed.

"What do you think of it, Major Surov?" the commandant asked, halting in front of him. "I think...I think..." Mark panted. "I think you're very kind, mister commandant. What could be more humane than to leave cannibalism unpunished, considering that thousands of men are dying of hunger? Your goodness is really touching."

The commandant fixed his aged, pale-blue eyes on Mark's furious face. Then he turned and walked away.

That same day Mark had a long talk with the Georgian officer, and called Korovin, who had arrived at the camp with him, out of the men's barrack. The next day three more men had been killed. Mark lay all that day on his bunk; but when darkness came, he limped out of the storeroom, followed by the Georgian.

The next morning, the violent ringing of the bell summoned all the prisoners to assembly on the parade ground. When the men had fallen in, the commandant arrived. His face was black with fury. Behind him, prisoners carried three stretchers covered with tarpaulins. They set the stretchers down and removed the tarpaulins, to reveal the bodies of three prisoners with bluish-black faces. From each of their necks hung a scrap of cardboard on which were the words: "Strangled in the act of killing a comrade. A cannibal."

The commandant pointed to the bodies and roared: "What does this mean? Who has dared to judge and punish these men?" Then he ordered several of the prisoners to be shot in sight of all the others, on suspicion of being involved in the summary executions.

Nonetheless, the following nights there were no more cases of cannibalism.

In contrast to this horror was the church that had been set up in one of the garages. That garage was the living quarters of thousands of men, and the bunks were ranged in six tiers in it. But in one corner was a wooden platform; above it hung a Christ drawn with charcoal on a large sheet of beaverboard. The Christ's face was racked with suffering. A mass of men stood jammed immovably in the gangways between the tiers of bunks. At the left side of the platform was a group of Kalmuks. They were Buddhists; but surely there was only one God, who was given different names by different men. The front of the platform was decorated with crude pictures of the Christ. And in every one of these homemade icons He looked like a Soviet prisoner of war.

On the platform was a man in a military tunic; on his frogs were air-force insignia. He was an airman who had been taken prisoner, and then, by some mysterious road, had become a priest. Out of small scraps of wrapping material taken from medical packs the nurses at the local hospital had made him the semblance of a black cassock. On its front was sewn a red cross from a medical bag. Black and red.

"Brothers, let us pray," the priest said.

They all removed their caps. The men were turning back to God, to the silent God Whom they themselves had driven out of their souls, Whose temples they themselves had destroyed. Mark found himself at one with these men. In that country of his dreams there had been no place for God. The choir knew very few of the church tunes, and so "Our Father" was repeated frequently. A high tenor voice, singing with intense passion, soared over all the rest of the choir. Mark knew the singer—a youngster who had been a student in one of the conservatories. He had only a brief life left to him; he was suffering from tuberculosis. He spent all his time in the church, and his voice flowed on below the garage roof, floated out through the door and over the camp.

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7. The Man and the Animal

SOME unusual noise disturbed the forest silence. At first it was like the thin, furious buzzing of an angry mosquito; then it grew heavier and sounded like wind howling in a chimney, until it began to roar tediously and persistently, as though arguing with the silence, which was majestically indifferent to all the sounds of the world.

In a small glade, not a hundred yards from the road, a brown patch stirred, bellowed angrily, and slowly rose to its feet. A thin, ungainly bear with baggy haunches, driven out of its lair by the war, raised its head and sniffed at the forest scents. At its feet an outline emerged in the snow: at first as a mound, then more clearly as a human body, lying face downward. Other, similar mounds were scattered about the glade. The snowy pall was thin, and it was possible to discern that in this glade there were many men in greatcoats, with their arms flung out, their faces staring to the sky or buried in the earth.

Where the bear had been lying was a yellow pool; its animal warmth had melted the snow and left that yellowish hollow. The animal stood a long time sniffing, translating the scents into information decipherable only by inhabitants of the forest. That tedious roar, so strange and unwanted in this place, drew nearer and nearer; the bear's nostrils caught the pungent scent of gasoline. Gathering its baggy buttocks together, it shambled off into the forest. Not far away an elk came to a stand among the bushes, stretching its neck tensely; its thin, strong legs quivered; its gray, moist nostrils dilated as it sniffed. Suddenly it turned in its tracks and dashed off through the trees. A fox poked its muzzle inquisitively out from behind a snowy hillock, waiting fearlessly. Only when the roar was quite close and the pungent scent filled all the air did it start off, dragging its brush along the snow, and it vanished among the bushes, leaving its distinctive trail of footmarks and brush.

As soon as the bear had disappeared, a dog sprang out from behind a bush. Very thin, its hair hanging in tufts, a genuine yard dog, exhausted with hunger and loneliness. Evidently it had been hiding under the bushes at the edge of the glade, not daring to go up to the snowy mounds; or possibly it had tried to, but the bear's arrival had frightened it off. Its belly pressed close to the ground,

the dog crawled across the glade, through the deep snow. It reached the first mound, sniffed at it; the scent of frozen meat made its lower jaw quiver. It bared its fangs and was about to bury them in the dead body; but some long-forgotten reflex was aroused within it; an instinct developed through the centuries of living with man was quickened, and it only bared its teeth and whined quietly, miserably.

Now the roar was very close. But the dog was not afraid of it. Nor was it afraid of the smell of gasoline. These things were not unknown or strange to the dog; they were part of its past life, when it had lived with men in a village. It stood whimpering mournfully. A heavy truck, painted gray, turned off the road and carved its way across the virgin soil to the glade, its engine sputtering unevenly. The dog waited. Now the truck's blunt nose came round a bush. It had a tarpaulin roof, which swayed with every jolt. It stopped. Three men in green uniforms climbed out of its cabin. They stood smoking, exchanging brief remarks. The dog stood a hundred yards away, whimpering softly.

One of the men took a rifle out of the cabin. The dog bared its teeth; it knew that instrument, too. The shot went echoing through the trees; the bullet sent up a fountain of snow at the dog's feet; howling savagely, it fled into the bushes, dragging one leg and leaving a crimson trail. The men stood by the truck until the dog had crawled into the bushes, then went to the rear. They climbed into the truck and began to throw out human bodies, picking them up by the arms and legs and dropping them into the snow. Then they returned to the cabin; the truck set off slowly, turned round, and crawled back to the road.

Four men were left lying in the snow. Two of them were perfectly still, remaining as they had fallen. But two were groaning quietly, and they both tried to get up. One of the two did struggle up, to look around him with delirious eyes. He was wearing a greatcoat tightly belted with a thong; on his head was an earlapped cap; a thick woolen scarf was wrapped round his neck. There was a boot on his right foot; his left was wrapped in scraps of blanket and was thrust into a large galosh. He was still wearing the clothes he had worn in the camp. But the watch had gone from his wrist; one of the German soldiers had unstrapped and pocketed it.

He managed to sit up; supporting himself by his hands, he looked about the glade. He noticed the outlines of human bodies under the

snow, and despite his fever, his brain took in a new thought that robbed him of strength and threw him down on his back again.

So this was the isolation hospital.

The thought was so shattering that he closed his eyes. Was he in a delirium? But when he opened his eyes again, he saw the glade, the bodies under the snow, the two men lying beside him, the baldheaded officer muttering in his fever. So the stories told in the camp were true... those sick with typhus were left in the forest to die.

He slowly raised himself and sat up once more. The sounds of the truck died away in the distance. Now the bald-headed officer had stopped muttering, but was still breathing stertorously. Mark passed his bare hand over the other man's face. It was hot, wet with sweat. Opening his mouth wide, he tried to say something. Mark thought he was asking for a drink, so he gathered some snow in his palm and poured it into the wide-open mouth.

He had one clear thought, and one only, in his mind: This is the end. Yet a horrible confusion of incidents, ideas, and experiences, both real and fanciful, born of a sick imagination, jostled through his brain. He felt tears stinging his eyes; but they were not for himself; they were for his companion.

In his fear that Mark would be carted off to "quarantine," the bald-headed officer had concealed Mark's illness from the rest of the inmates of the storeroom. He had transferred Mark to his own bunk, on the bottom shelf. And whenever the sick man in his fever began to cry out, a broad, dry hand was laid over his mouth. Mark suffered from horrible nightmares, but there was always one part of his brain in which his consciousness functioned clearly. And with that little part of his being he realized that the bald-headed officer was trying to save him.

The days and nights blended into a single flood of feverish, chaotic struggle with unknown enemies, enemies whom he must fight ruth-lessly, with clenched teeth, exerting all his strength. At the very height of that struggle someone's hand touched him and his body suddenly felt a wave of cold air. Grinding his teeth, he opened his eyes; through a veil of haze he saw the bald-headed officer bent over him, examining his belly. Then Kuzma Shepelev, an army doctor who had been taken prisoner, and a friend of his, came into his range of vision. With a silent nod he confirmed the bald-headed officer's diagnosis: typhus. Mark should be sent to quarantine. But the bald-headed

officer kept the nature of the illness secret from his companions. He forced the thin camp soup down Mark's throat. Now from time to time a new face, the thin, spiteful face of Major Igoliev, bent over Mark, while the bald-headed officer said in an unconcerned tone, "Surov's got a bit of a feverish cold. He'll be O.K. in a day or two." Mark had sufficient strength of will to keep his delirium at bay until Igoliev had gone; but then he struggled in his friend's strong hands, and he did not know that the other man's own hands, his face, his bald head, were burning with fever.

Then the bald head vanished. As though in a dream he heard Igoliev telling someone, "They've both gone down with typhus." In a brief moment of clarity he saw Colonel Kisiliev bent over him carefully drawing his greatcoat round him and fastening the belt. Then the Colonel took the scarf from his own neck and wrapped it around Mark's.

Mark heard the Georgian's strained, tense voice: "What the hell did you tell the Germans we'd got sick men here for? D'you call yourself a man? Making up to the bastards?"

And Igoliev's embarrassed tones: "But we'd all get it in the neck. The commandant ordered—"

The storeroom rang with angry voices: "Blast your commandant! If you want to make up to him, go and lick his arse! There's only one infectious disease here, and that's you!"

Then the truck was bumping over the ruts of the road. Mark had no idea how long that journey lasted. He was aroused by the shot at the dog. He felt the Germans pick him up and fling him into the snow. Now they were left in the glade—the bald-headed officer and himself. The other two were dead; they had died on the road. And death stared into Mark's eyes. It was all over, and there was nothing to be done. The thought calmed him, and he lay down in the snow.

The bear had not gone far; it, too, was lying down among the bushes, waiting. When the roar of the truck died away and the smell of gasoline cleared from the air, it rose onto its hind legs and, shuffling sideways, waddled back to the glade. It halted at the edge and looked suspiciously about the open space. It saw at once that fresh bodies had arrived; they were lying blackly, uncovered by snow. And it lumbered clumsily toward them.

The trees, the glade, the sky swayed before Mark's eyes, and with them swayed something brown, something very close, which started back from him with a grunt. He summoned up all his will power to compel the trees, the sky, the glade to stop dancing round and round him. The brown patch stopped, too, and now he saw it as a shaggy, but thin bear with hanging buttocks. They remained perfectly still, the man and the bear, staring at each other. Mark put his hand out and felt for the bald-headed officer's face; he snatched it away in alarm as he touched the cold skin. He could not see, but he felt that his friend was dead. And now his loneliness was more terrible than the threat from that bear, with its rheumy eyes, staring into his own. But his sense of danger took possession of him and forced him to his feet. His eyes dilated with fear; he took a step toward the animal. It turned its eyes from him and shambled away.

He went on without looking round. It was terribly hard going through the deep snow; his feet clung to it; but he struggled on, away from that glade.

The bear watched him go; then it went up to the bald-headed officer. It had been disturbed prematurely from its lair, and it was hungry. But its innate revulsion against dead flesh still functioned. It went from one body to another but could not bring itself to plunge its teeth into any. It grumbled miserably. Then it began to shamble after this man who was still alive.

He came to the road. His wounded leg was nagging unbearably. The sheet of ice that covered the road was hard; the uneven surface made all his body quiver with pain. But he went on without stopping. And without looking round. After a time he heard a hoarse breathing behind him; then he thought he smelled the stench of the animal. The bear waddled along with its eyes fixed on his back. It was hungry, but its fear of the man mastered its hunger; it did not dare to draw any closer. Thus they went on, on, for an hour, for two hours. On reaching the road Mark had turned in the opposite direction from the camp. He did not stop to think why he had turned that way; he knew nothing, except that he was going eastward. Somewhere in that direction, over a hundred kilometers away, was the little town of Borovichi and in it a little house-Maria's house. Perhaps the one spot in all the world that he might be able to reach. But death was on his heels—his own death, waiting for him to drop. Yet he did not drop. It was so simple, really; whenever it seemed that he must collapse, he struck the ground hard with his injured leg, and then the pain gave him the needed stimulus to go on.

Two big horses pulling a sleigh tore out of the town in which the fortress and the prisoner-of-war camp were situated. A black-bearded man dressed in a peasant's sheepskin jerkin stood in the sleigh, urging them on with shout and whip. In the rear seat were two people. A woman, in a fur coat with a warm black skirt showing below it, sat leaning all her body forward. She had large eyes, bright with strain; her full lips were set in an expression of hopelessness; occasionally she cried. Sitting beside her was a lad in a soldier's cap, wrapped to his ears in a scarf. But that lad had a face far too old for his age, a face like parchment, dried by sunlight.

The day that Kotov made his successful breakout, Mark had given him Maria's name and address. And two weeks later he had arrived at Borovichi and found her at home. Her hospital had been captured by the Germans, and they had discharged all the nurses.

As soon as Kotov told her that Mark was in a P.O.W. camp, she borrowed some gold coins her mother had saved, and three days later drove with Kotov in a hired sleigh to the P.O.W. town. It took the Lieutenant a whole day to strike up an acquaintance with one of the camp guards—a present of several plump chickens finally did the trick. When the German realized that these two Russians wanted to save a prisoner from the camp and were offering several gold coins for his services, he agreed with the greatest of pleasure. Nobody counted the prisoners, and it didn't matter whether there was one more or less. But when Maria told him the man they wanted was an officer, he shook his head and flatly refused. The officers were listed, and there was no hope of getting any of them out. If he tried, he was afraid he might be caught, in which case he would be sent to the front. And that he feared above all else. "Not an officer," he declared, his eyes fixed on the gold coins Maria had put on the table.

Expressing herself with difficulty in German, she replied:

"If you can't manage the officer, bring us a soldier named Korovin."

The German hurriedly picked up the coins and put them in his pocket. He took note of the soldier's name and went off.

An hour later he went to the door of the garage and shouted for Korovin. The lad jumped down from his bunk and stood to attention—a tiny figure, huddled like an old man, his face yellow with hunger. Driving the Russian before him with jabs of his rifle butt, the German took him to the gate, where a score of other prisoners were waiting to unload a railway car. He escorted them to the station, locked the others in an empty car, and took Korovin to the small house where

Kotov and Maria were waiting. He handed him over and went back to the car. But before opening it, he fired his rifle in the air. The prisoners assumed he had killed the little soldier: an impression the guard confirmed by rolling his eyes angrily, slapping his rifle, and announcing to his wards: "Kaputt!"

Korovin told Maria and Kotov that Mark had been taken that very morning to quarantine. They at once drove off to the various hospitals in the hope of finding out where the "isolation hospital" was situated. But nobody could tell them. They decided to ask the German guard who had released Korovin. For a long time he failed to understand what it was these two Russians wanted now. Then, at last, he broke into a torrent of words. There was an angry note in his voice; he was indignant at the fact that the sick men were carried off to the forest and left to die. That treatment seemed too savage, even to him. But Maria was no longer listening. She turned away without speaking. Her eyes were dilated, but there were no tears in them. The tears were deep within her, and they made her carry herself upright as though someone had struck her between the shoulders and she could not bend. "Where?" Kotov asked the German. The guard picked up a piece of stick and drew a simple sketch in the snow. The Lieutenant watched it; the stick drew what was obviously a road. Then the man wrote 10. Kotov guessed that meant ten kilometers along the road. The man went on to draw the rough figures of trees, and in them a circle. Straightening up, he pointed eastward.

In great haste Kotov harnessed the horses to the sleigh and, with Maria and Korovin, drove madly eastward along a little forest road. They all knew that the haste was absurd. Nearly a day had passed since Mark had been taken away in the truck, and although the frost was not deep, a man ill with typhus could hardly be expected to survive for long exposed to the open air. Nonetheless, Kotov whipped up the horses ruthlessly, and Maria touched him on the back from time to time and whispered in an agonized tone: "Hurry! Hurry!"

The tracks made by the truck when it turned off the road led them to the glade. They saw the heaps in the rough shape of human bodies scattered about it. They all got out of the sleigh and hurried through the glade, turning over the bodies, brushing the snow from their faces. The dead men seemed to be protesting at having their peace disturbed: they revealed faces with dropped lower jaws, grinning teeth, swollen tongues. At one end Kotov saw three more bodies and waded through the snow toward them. Suddenly something stirred, and he

halted in alarm. A half-savage dog rose on three paws and bared its teeth at him in a snarl. He shouted at it; it tucked its tail between its legs and hobbled off, dragging one paw through the snow.

These three bodies had been brought recently; there was only a fine sprinkle of snow, blown by the wind, over them. He went up to them, turning them over one by one. When he came to the third he saw an arm gnawed almost to the elbow. Where a head should have been a large vellow ball gleamed in the snow. He brushed the snow away and recognized the bald-headed officer at once. He had frequently seen him with Mark in the camp. Korovin had told him the two officers were carted off together. But in that case, where was Mark? He rose and wiped the sweat from his face, looking about him in bewilderment. Suddenly his eyes fell on some small depressions in the snow; they extended in a double line toward the edge of the forest. He followed the trail. As he went, he grew more and more confident that they were the tracks of a man who had waded through the snow. A few paces farther on he had to cross a fallen pine; it was covered with a fine layer of snow, and in that snow was the clear impression of a crisscross pattern. But army boots didn't have that pattern on their soles. He halted again in perplexity. Then he remembered-Mark was wearing a galosh on his left foot. He followed the trail farther; suddenly he noticed that beyond the bushes the tracks were joined by a new line of footprints-not human, but animal. He knew of only one animal that could have left such a trail. At the thought he went cold with fear.

The human and the animal tracks turned sharply, then were lost on the icy surface of the road. He stood baffled, unable to tell which way Mark had gone. He concentrated all his mind in the attempt to penetrate the secret of Mark's decision. Suddenly he thought of Maria. That's the way he'd go, he decided, and turned confidently eastward. He hurried along the road, looking for any sign that would confirm his theory. It was not long before he found one—a clot of brown fur clinging to a bramble shoot hanging over the road. The bear had come this way—and the bear had been following Mark.

A minute or two later they were once more driving along that eastward road. Maria did not know why Kotov drove the horses so hard, or even why he had turned eastward; but when she glanced up at the profile of his face, she realized that he was moved by a burning desperation. Korovin sat very still, huddled against the side of the sleigh, his head on his chest. He had no doubt that Major Surov was

dead. Of all that thirteenth force only he, Private Korovin, was left, and at the thought he began to sob like a child.

The day began to wane. The forest shadows turned a deep violet. With all the strength of a terrible desperation Mark forced himself to remain on this side of the black pit into which he knew he would fall the moment he lost consciousness. His head echoed with groans, with rushing noises; sparks and flashes burst up in front of his eyes. His sick mind was living only on its very edge, but that slim edge of consciousness drove him on. At times he felt that in a moment or two his eyes would lose sight altogether of the darkening forest, the sky, the road—that he would be enveloped in a thick mist. At such moments he jabbed his injured leg down hard on the icy crust, and the pain clarified his mind once more. Now the stars began to come out. He was bathed in sweat and unfastened his greatcoat. As the darkness deepened, he felt sure that the bear drew closer to him, that now it was only a few paces behind. His feet were as heavy as lead, and he could hardly shift them. But he must! He must! Yet even as he went, with every moment he felt his resolution ebbing from him together with his strength. Tormented with hunger, racked with sickness, his body sagged lower and lower. But behind him was death; and that conscious edge of his mind forced him to pull himself up again and go on with firmer pace, step after step.

He felt a terrible longing to moisten his mouth, and he opened his lips to allow the cold air to cool his tongue. He could have picked up a handful of snow and stuffed it into his mouth; but if he bent down, would he be able to straighten up again? His very fear that he would be unable to go on once he stopped forced him to keep his trembling legs moving. The stars seemed to be unusually bright; they burned his eyes with their sparkle; the trees were motionless beneath their burden of snow. The stars, or the forest, or perhaps that brown shape moving inexorably behind him, enlarged that tiny scrap of brain that refused to succumb to his sickness and worked clearly and uninterruptedly. Within that scrap of mind lurked the thought that the moment was very close when he would not be able to go on any longer and would drop on the icy road. But within that same scrap of mind functioned some other element that flowed through all his body and filled him with the desperate, invincible desire to live. I'll come through! he told himself; and once he even turned and shook his fist at the bear. The animal huddled down and half turned away as

though about to flee into the forest. But when he went on, the bear shambled on behind him.

There came one moment when the pain in his wounded leg became so unbearable that he had to sit down on the road. He took off the galosh, and saw that his foot had become one mass of blue. He could not get the galosh on again; he left it lying, wrapped his foot in his scarf-Colonel Kisiliev's scarf-and tried to go on. But now he had to pause at every step, to give his foot some ease. He found a trimmed fir branch someone had left at the roadside, and used it as a crutch. It helped for a time, but then the effort of using it seemed too great. He dropped again and tried crawling on all fours, tears of despair in his eyes. Now the road was running through marshes, the forest had fallen back, and by the light of the rising moon he could see for some distance. An empty world, not a soul in it. The stick was proving helpful again now, for he pushed it out in front of him, then dragged his body up to it. Whenever the bear came very close, he turned onto his knees and waved the stick; then the animal fell back. But for how long?

He was finding it more and more difficult to cling to that remnant of consciousness. If he could only halt-just for a moment-and stretch himself out on the road! But behind him he could hear the quiet padding of death, and he must keep ahead of it. Once or twice he tried to scramble to his feet, but each time he dropped back on his knees, groaning. His legs would not hold him; his blackened and swollen foot felt like a block fastened to him. His hands were bleeding with the jagged ice of the road, and he left a crimson trail from his hands and knees. The stick had grown too heavy to shift, and he left it behind. Now he took off his cap and wrapped his right hand with it, so managing to haul himself along a few more paces. Then he wrapped it round his left hand, again achieving a few paces. Sobbing, muttering, swaying, driven more by instinct than by will, he shuffled his knees over the frozen road. In his rising delirium only one desire still glowed within him: to keep moving. When his hands refused to support him any longer, he lay on his side and wriggled along the road, rolling his body from side to side. And so, as he went, he came to a hump in the road. Without changing his position, he tried to get over it; but he slipped back. Then he slowly worked himself up on to all fours again. But still that little hump was too much for him. With a bitter groan he collapsed face downward.

The bear stood for a moment or two, waiting. But the human body

did not stir. So it slowly went up to the body, spittle dribbling from its jaws. Mark felt a warm stench breathe over his head. Gritting his teeth, he struggled round and managed to sit up. The animal's muzzle was just above him; yellow spittle was dripping onto the road. The bear was desperately tired. It emitted a hollow roar. But the vital spark of life still left in the man functioned of itself, independently of his will. Gripping his fur cap in his right hand, he waited for the bear to bring its muzzle down close to him, then thrust the cap into those jaws. The bear bit on it, but could not bite through the fur, and Mark's arm was unhurt by the pressure. The animal raised its paw and struck him on the chest, but the blow was feeble. Meanwhile he had seized it by the head, and the blow sent them both rolling over. Panting with his exertions, Mark lay with one hand holding the bear's head down to the road. It shook off his hand and slowly scrambled up, dragging him up, too. Thus they stood for a few moments, like two boxers in a clinch. Then Mark's eyes slowly filmed over and closed; he crumpled to his knees, rolled over on his side. The bear dropped down beside him; the claws of its shaggy paws began to pull at his body.

But before it could bury its teeth in the body a pair of wildly snorting horses tore past it, and a man in a fur coat jumped down right at its feet. The bear grunted with surprise and raised its paws to its head, as though to ward off a blow. But the blow had already come; the man had swung his hand and plunged a long hunter's knife into the flesh below the animal's shoulder. It fell back on its hind paws, shook its head, and crumpled down beside Mark. It quivered once or twice, as though settling down more comfortably, then was still.



8. Between Two Worlds

In a small house on the outskirts of a town the long, thin body of a man was stretched out on a bed. He lay motionless; only his hands and his face lived a tense, exhausting life. All that was going on within him found its reflex in his trembling fingers, which feverishly seized the

end of the sheet; in his mouth, which twisted into a soundless cry; in his eyes, vacant with delirium....

The earth shook with explosions. Planes fell in flames from the sky. The sun shone with a bloodily crimson light. Shells sent up fountains of earth, but Mark Surov had to run across that field of death. His mouth burned unbearably; in it he was carrying white-hot coals; he had to carry them to the end. The shells changed the direction of their flight and began to fall in the hollow through which he had to pass. He knew that hollow, but he could not remember where it was. His mother was standing at the entrance to it; her gray hair flying in the wind. Behind her broad skirt little children were hiding—lots of children. They were all calling to Mark to go to them. In the distance he saw a little girl with thin shoulders; her shoes were unlaced, her temple clotted with blood. His mother stretched out her hands and cried out in a feeble, miserable voice: "Stop! My children are here!"

He struggled desperately to reach his mother, but a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder. The bald-headed man's hand. His bald head reflected the crimson sun. He gripped Mark's shoulder as though with pincers and said: "Your road is straight ahead." He pointed across the hollow, past the spot where Mark's mother was standing.

Mark did not know why, but he obeyed the order and ran past his mother, toward the crimson sun. He heard his mother call to the bald-headed man: "Leave Mark alone, he knows the road."

She says I know the road, he thought; but where am I running? And what are these hot coals in my mouth for? They'r burning me. But I've got to carry them to the river. A brown patch leaped across in front of him. It roared; a yellow spittle dribbled from its jaws. He could smell its foul breath. . . .

In that small room the light was dim. The lamp was shaded, and above the shade a dark kerchief was draped; but the light fell on a woman with her head in her hands, leaning on the table. The sick man's incoherent raving went on and on; but suddenly from time to time he began to talk connectedly. Then she would raise her head and listen.

Daylight came. The woman who had sat all night by the bed went out into the yard. She milked a cow, brought water into the house. Now Maria took her place by the bed; she was thinner, her face was peaked, yet deeply beautiful. For two weeks she had been living in this house, where Kotov had drawn up the sleigh the night they had

rescued Mark. A woman had opened the gate for them and let the sleigh into the yard. She had helped to carry Mark into the kitchen, had heated a great pot of water. Then the two women had undressed him. The sweaty shirt had fallen away, the room had been flooded with the stench of a long-unwashed body. Seeing that bare body, Maria had flung out her hands and covered her eyes. The other woman had hurriedly crossed herself. Before them lay a skeleton with dark skin drawn tightly over it. The knees were swollen and bloody, but the legs seemed to have no muscle or flesh at all, they were two thin, useless sticks. The long scrawny arms ended in enormous, swollen hands plastered with congealed blood.

"My God!" the woman exclaimed. "Where's he been to get like that?"

Maria did not reply. But she knew now what he had suffered in the camp and along that forest road. His body was very light, and the two women had no difficulty in carrying him to the bed.

Every day, sometimes several times a day, an absurd little man with a big head and gray hair, which he never covered even in the deepest frost, visited the house. He took off his overcoat, warmed his hands at the stove, then examined the patient. Taking a box from his pocket, he fitted up a hypodermic syringe and thrust the needle into a vein.

"Will he die?" Maria asked, with painful anxiety.

"Of course!" the doctor replied, a kindly smile twisting his thin lips. "We all do. But this one," he nodded at Mark, "may leave that till later. In his way he's a miracle of nature. To resist typhus when he's in such a state, and after crawling along a road for hours, as you say. He must have a very strong desire to live, and that sort can stand a great deal. Who knows where the impossible stops for a man who wants to live?"

"Water!" a feeble voice called from the bed. Mark was recovering consciousness. He saw a woman's face bent over him; the look of tense strain in her face gave way to a timid happiness. He knew the woman's face was familiar, but he knew it belonged to that other world, where his mother was standing in defense of her children. A mist veiled his eyes again, and he saw the crimson disk of the sun rush toward him. Then the sun faded, but a spark flew out of it and fell right on him. He tried to defend himself, raising his hands to his face. The spark jabbed into his hand with a sharp, sudden prick. "So it burned me after all," he murmured, shuddering with pain.

"It's nothing," he heard a man's voice say. "Things are going better than I expected."

Something shaggy lay down on Mark's chest. He thought it was a cat, and tried to stroke it. But it was the gray hair of some stranger who had put his head down to the patient's chest and was listening. The head was raised, and a rather angular, thin-nosed face with black eyes hovered above him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm Doctor Zalkind. In a sense I'm a miracle of nature like you. But you're not to talk."

The ban was really unnecessary. Mark had already sunk back into oblivion, and he babbled away incoherently.

Dr. Zalkind called again the following day. The patient was lying very still and quiet, and the women went across to him frequently to make sure he was still breathing. Standing by the head of the bed, the doctor listened to that breathing, and silently put away his hypodermic syringe.

"You know," he turned to the women, "this case deserves to be written about. The crisis is past, and the patient is asleep. That means he'll live . . . unless something else happens."

At the end of another two weeks Mark was well on the way to recovery. Meanwhile, under German occupation the small town in which he was being nursed was living in a state of semistarvation. Maria had to take work in the German hospital in order to get food for herself and Mark. She washed dishes, cleaned the wards. But the thrifty Germans did not pamper the Russians who worked for them, and the specter of hunger threatened the little house constantly. They would have fared still worse; but someone, they didn't know who, began to pay nocturnal visits to the house yard; and when the elderly woman went out to milk the cow next morning, she would find a basket of eggs, a newly killed chicken, or a piece of fat bacon.

Mark was still unable to leave his bed, but he was beginning to look more normal again. His knees and hands had healed, he was gradually putting on flesh, and he was thinking of getting out of bed and ceasing to be a burden upon these two women. From the moment he had recovered consciousness and had begun to get better, Maria had held herself at a distance. She went to great trouble on his behalf, denied herself food and drink so that he should have enough. But she went no further. He would not risk opening the conversation he was desperately longing for, and he began to think that even the letter

that had crossed the front to reach him in the German rear was only a figment of his imagination. Maria felt sorry for him; that was all. The elderly woman, Vera Pavlovna, was sorry for him, too; and there was nothing to differentiate their womanly pity. As long as he was unable to do things for himself, Maria shaved him, cut his hair; but she did these little services as she would have done them for her own son, Peter. So he thought, not noticing the mist of tears filling her eyes as she touched his gray hair.

One morning he finally decided it was time he got up. He had thought it all out, down to the smallest detail. Maria went off to work each morning, and Vera Pavlovna would be doing chores in the yard. So he would get up, and, holding on to the bed, would go as far as the wall, then from the wall to the settee. And there he would sit down. If he succeeded, it meant that he was well again, and Zalkind was wrong in saying he must stay in bed at least another week.

Wrapping her head in a kerchief, Vera Pavlovna went with her clattering empty buckets to the well. A chilly, wintry sun was climbing the sky. Spring would be coming soon, but it was still very cold. She returned with full buckets. As she drew near the veranda, she heard something heavy fall to the flow. When she ran in, she saw Mark lying on the floor, smiling at her rather nervously. He had covered half his projected journey when his legs gave way beneath him and he fell, pulling over the small table on which he was leaning. Snorting angrily, Vera Pavlovna stooped down and tried to lift him up. But he was much heavier now, and so, going down on her knees beside him, she said in a glad tone, "You've put on weight, Mark Timofeevich!" He tried to get up, but nothing came of the attempt. So they crawled together over the floor, making for the bed. Just as they reached it, there was a loud impatient banging on the wicket gate.

"The Germans!" she whispered.

Vera Pavlovna rushed to the window, leaving him on the floor. He was beside himself with anger at the thought that they would see him on the floor, and would conclude that he had been trying to hide under the bed. Clinging to the bedstead, he gathered all his strength and hoisted himself onto it.

"It's all right; it's one of our people," Vera Pavlovna cried out joyfully.

A stocky man in a sheepskin coat entered the house. The sheepskin covered him right to the eyes, so she did not recognize him at once

as the young black-bearded man who had brought Surov to her that night.

"How is he?" Kotov asked anxiously.

"He's alive, alive!" She hurried to assure him. "I haven't said anything to him yet about you." Some memory brought a laugh to her lips, and she gently pushed him toward the door of Mark's room. "Go in, go in, you great ruffian. Only take your coat off first, or you'll carry all the cold into the house."

Mark recognized the face of the man who entered, the small eyes, rather snub nose, black, bushy eyebrows, but could not remember where he had seen him before.

"Don't you recognize me, Comrade Major?" Kotov asked.

Mark guessed that this was the Kotov Maria had already told him about. But his illness had caused him to lose his memory, and he frequently forgot faces, events, and names.

"No," he said confidently. "I don't know you."

"I'm the sailor you sent off on a voyage," Kotov laughed.

"But I've never had anything to do with sailors," Mark answered in bewilderment.

Kotov laughed heartily and infectiously. "Don't you remember sending me to sail across the Filthy Sea? It's horrible even to think of now."

And then Mark remembered. This was the man who had led Maria to him. His voice was happy and cheerful as he stretched out his hand:

"Forgive me, dear Kotov, for not remembering you at once. My illness has made a mess of my memory. I'm delighted to see you."

"And I don't stink?"

"No," Mark laughed. "But how did things go that time?"

"We all got through safely, but in such a state that I'm ashamed to talk about it. I must admit we didn't exactly look like heroes."

Vera Pavlovna brought in Mark's breakfast: one egg, two small pieces of bread, and a large mug of milk. Mark hated himself for his constant feeling of hunger. He fought an obstinate battle against hunger and against the women who miraculously provided him with his daily food. He knew that every morning they had a talk in the kitchen about his meals for the day. He had a hard job trying to convince them that he hated eggs, butter, and bread, and preferred milk to all other kinds of food. But they knew as well as he that after typhus a man is tormented with hunger, and they were merciless. When Vera Pavlovna brought in his breakfast, he would turn his face to the

wall, to conceal the spasms of hunger that rose in his throat. But today she hurried with the breakfast, soundly calculating that he would not turn from it when he had a guest. She set the tray down on the bedside table, and waited, glaring at him sternly. He reached to take the mug of milk, but she stopped him. "Eat first!" she ordered.

"I don't want an egg; I just want a drink."

"Look at him!" she turned to Kotov, looking really stern. "We have to force him to eat. I've never known such an obstinate patient. He doesn't realize that God Himself helps us. We're always finding food in the shed. . . ."

Kotov turned and went out hurriedly, as though he had suddenly remembered something. A moment or two later he returned with a basket, and took out a large piece of meat, bread, and eggs. Vera Pavlovna was flabbergasted at the sight. "That's for you, auntie," Kotov said. "Gifts of the soil occupied by the Germans but not belonging to them."

"So it's you who have been bringing things and putting them in the shed. . . ."

"Yes. Korovin crawled through a hole in your shed. We were afraid to come into the house in case we gave the Major away. The Germans might have noticed you were having visitors, and it might have aroused their suspicions."

After Mark had had breakfast, Kotov sat beside the bed and slowly and calmly told the story of his escape from the camp. Vera picked up the tray and made to go out; but she remained standing, listening to him and sighing as she thought of her own son, who had been called up at the beginning of the war. She had had no news from him for months.

"We had a hard job bringing ourselves to do it. You were right, Major, in thinking that it wasn't the danger of being shot, or the dangers and difficulties of the escape that troubled us most, but the actual route you'd suggested. All the same, we did it. There were eight of us. We found Korovin, too, as you'd asked us, and told him of your order that he was to go with us. But he refused. 'So long as Major Surov remains in the camp, I'm staying here,' he said. 'I'm not going to leave the commander on his own, so that's that.' We could see he was a pigheaded sort; we didn't try arguing with him. Well, at the time fixed we crawled through the dark patches to the latrines. I tell you candidly that I couldn't help hoping the Germans would notice us and open fire. I felt sick at the very thought of the way you'd

suggested. But they didn't, and we all got inside safely. I was the first to jump in. I sank right into the muck; it took my breath away. I almost fainted, but I whispered to the others: 'There's nothing to be afraid of; jump down after me.' In a word, we all waded through that Filthy Sea to the other side, dragging one out after another by the collar.

"Well, and so we climbed out on the other side. It was bitterly cold, and what we looked like—I can tell you we didn't dare look at one another. Our clothes quickly froze on us and went as hard as iron. That was both bad and good. Bad, because in that state we couldn't survive the cold for long; but good because we didn't stink so much. The more our clothes froze on us the easier it was to breathe.

"We managed to get out of the fortress without any particular adventures. Guards were only posted at the gate; the walls are patrolled. We waited for the patrol to pass, then slipped over the wall. And then we were in the town. We succeeded in dodging more than one German patrol, but there was no sense in going on. Even if we didn't run into a patrol, which would have shot us on the spot, we couldn't think of going anywhere outside the town in our frozen clothes. So we decided to follow your advice again. We knocked at the door of a house. The people talked to us through the door, but wouldn't let us in. Then one of us began to push some straw under the door, and I shouted to the man on the other side: 'If you let us in, we won't do you any harm; but if you don't, we'll burn the house down.' We heard whispering on the inside of the door, then an old man came out to us, poking his beard up to the sky and not looking at us. 'Kill me,' he said; 'I'm all on my own, but don't touch the children.' I shouted at him; I was shivering with cold and my body felt as though it had been scalded, 'Stop it, daddy. All we want is to keep our own souls in our bodies, not to release yours.'

"The old fellow looked at us, saw he had nothing to be afraid of, and asked: 'But who are you?' We were standing in the porch, huddled together and shivering. Every second seemed like eternity; and if he hadn't let us in, I really might have killed him. 'We've escaped from the P.O.W. camp,' I told him. At that the old boy started to behave just like a young horse. He pushed us all into the house; and as one of us had got frozen completely stiff and couldn't climb the steps, he picked him up in his arms and carried him in as if he were a little child. When we got inside, we found the place full of people. There were some girls, giving us fearful looks; and lads with

cropped heads, so evidently they'd been in the army. When the kids saw us, they burst into a yell, they were so frightened. I remember as if in a dream that one old woman caught hold of my tunic and tried to tear it off me, while one of the lads pulled my boots off. 'They'll freeze to death; all their clothes are frozen on them,' the old boy shouted. 'Save them!' I tell you, there was bedlam in that house!

"I came to in a sort of hell. There was smoke and steam all round me, and I was lying naked on a wooden bench, and beside me some devil with a beard was lashing away at me with a bunch of twigs. And he wasn't just whisking the flies off, I can tell you; he really was letting it rip. It was the pain of his lashing that brought me round. I tried to jump down from the bench and flee from that unclean spirit, but he wasn't having any of that; he seized me around the waist and flung me back on the bench and lashed away with his twigs even worse than before. 'Stop it!' I shouted, 'what d'you think you're playing at?' But he only coughed and lashed away with his twigs, and every time I tried to jump down he picked me up and flung me back. I began to howl at the top of my voice, for it really was getting more than I could stand. So my tormentor stopped and asked, 'All right now?' 'All right?' I shouted, 'not with you lashing away like that.' He turned around, and I saw it was the same old boy who had let us in. Outside the door I heard my friends asking how I was. 'O.K.,' I answered, and got down off that bench mighty quickly. The old fellow had been lashing away at me for something like an hour.

"We put on sheepskins and trooped back into the house. Some old woman was already fussing at the table, getting the samovar going, setting out bread and bacon. I was just going to take off my sheepskin when I remembered that I'd got nothing on underneath. And now the old boy thought of a new way of tormenting us. 'Don't let them eat much,' he said. 'It isn't good for them when they've been starved.' And every time I reached out for some bread or bacon, he gave me a small piece and wouldn't let me have any more. 'Daddy!' I cried. 'Let's have something to eat; it won't upset me, I give you my word.' But he was an obstinate old devil; he was half crying himself, but he raised his fist to the old woman when she said that perhaps God wouldn't let us be upset by the food. He let us eat a little, then sent us off to sleep. An hour later he woke us up and gave us a little more to eat; and then some more an hour after that. So we managed without any upset, though possibly that was because he was so pigheaded.

"Well, and that's the story," he ended. "They sent us off to a village, where we lived and fed with some peasants; but all our thoughts were of getting back to the town. When we'd been in the camp, we'd been desperately anxious to get away; but as soon as we were outside, the camp was all we could think of. I set out to find Maria, but I'd already decided that I'd come back, in case there was anything I could do for my comrades left inside. You know the rest: Maria and I came back, got Korovin out, and he told us what had happened to you. Then we went chasing after you and brought you back to town, to Vera Pavlovna. As we were carrying you into the house, I was thinking: Have we fallen in with decent people? Will they give the Major away? And before leaving I discussed the question with Vera Pavlovna. . . ."

"And he shook his fist at me," she intervened from the door, where she had been standing and listening.

"Well, I may have done so. I said to her, 'If this man is betrayed to the Germans, we won't spare your house, or you.'"

"And you were a stupid fool!" she said reproachfully. "To suggest that I'd betray a sick man!"

"And then she slapped my face for me, on both sides, too! So I retired from the field of battle, and we cleared right out of town."

Soon after Kotov had left, Maria came back from work. One glance at her sunken cheeks and peaked nose made Mark feel furious. As always on returning from work, she went to see him at once. She put her small, rough hand on his forehead.

"I'm feeling fine, Maria!" he said hastily. "It's long since time I got up, and here I am lying and behaving in a perfectly disgusting way."

"He got up today, only his legs wouldn't bear him," Vera Pavlovna called from the other room. "You be more strict with him, Maria; he's always trying to get up."

"You shouldn't, Mark," Maria quietly chided him. "You only make matters worse for yourself... and for us. Dr. Zalkind gave strict orders that you weren't to be allowed to get up till you were stronger."

Her voice was gently caressing. Then, sitting by his bed, she told him the latest news of the world. In the east the front had come to a standstill, held fast by the winter, and little news came from that quarter. But on this side of the front a new life was beginning. The Germans weren't greatly interested in what the Russian inhabitants were doing. The peasants had abolished the collective farms and shared out the land among themselves. The workers were returning to their factories. Somehow the people had to obtain food for themselves, especially as the Germans did nothing whatever to provide for the needs of the civilian population. It was said that farther to the west the Germans had set up civil administrations for the occupied areas; but the district in which she and Mark were living was still under military control, and no order whatever had been established for towns or villages. So the people were beginning to set up their own order. Self-defense forces were being organized among the Russians, to protect the people from thieves and bandits. One or two shops had opened; markets were coming into being and were held regularly.

"It's a strange thing," she said. "Under the Soviet regime everybody felt that he was a hired laborer. People worked as they would for a master. But now they've changed. They've all been seized by a spirit of enterprise. In the villages poultry is being raised in huge quantities; the peasants are buying from the Germans horses that are no further use for military service. What is behind it all, Mark?"

He lay a long time silent; then he answered, "The people have found a new hope. They hope the end has come to Stalin's Communist regime. They don't know yet what the Germans want; nobody knows. But they'd like to believe that the Germans will go just as they've come and that then it will be possible to live without them and without the Communists, too. And so they're beginning to work for their own betterment. Only, you know, I can't help thinking it's all a mirage."

She sat with her hands resting on her knees; her body was wearily still. Her high, swelling breasts gently raised her simple blouse, but that was the only perceptible movement in all her rather long-legged and girlishly slender form. But her face was alive. The drawn corners of the full-lipped mouth, the eyes dilating and contracting, converging and parting, showed that she was living a tense, complex life that was not to be suppressed by all the weariness of her body.

"That German cook's again demanding that I should spend the night with him," she quietly remarked.

Mark paused a moment, before he forced out the words:

"You ought to go back home, Maria. Kotov will get you back."

She fixed her large, unsmiling eyes on him as though astonished by his remark.

"No," she said, "I won't go back home. I can't . . . "

Instead of finishing the sentence, she got up to leave him. But he took her by the hand and held her back. He felt that she had something further to say. And she said it. Sinking back into her chair, she sighed and calmly declared:

"You shouldn't talk of my going away. You know very well that I love you, Mark."

He had long known that it was in some such simple manner, as though it were an ordinary matter and long since understood, that she would say those words, though he could not have told how he knew.

"I'm thirty now," she went on. "No, I mustn't tell lies: I'm thirty-one. And at that age a woman is entitled to talk of love without getting agitated."

She stretched out her hand and buried her fingers in his thick crop of grizzled hair. "You're quite gray, Mark," she said mournfully. "Thirty-five and gray."

She had said what he was waiting to hear. He had lain in her arms, helpless, sick, naked, and terrifying. She had found her way to him in the forest and had breathed life into him, had compelled him to live. A mighty current of life had come from her, and he, who by all normal standards should have died, had submitted to it and lived. He thought of all the many unpleasant tasks she had had to perform for him, sick and helpless as he had been. And after all that, still she had said the words he had been waiting for.

Softly, in a voice hoarse with his agitation, he pressed her hand to his cheek, and said:

"The measure of love to be allowed a man is fixed at his birth. To one a larger measure, to another a smaller. I have been granted the very largest of measures. I love you, Maria," he added, his voice quivering.

She rested on his shoulder, and her hot breath burned his cheek. A pained look crossed his face, and he started to speak. "Don't say any more, Mark. I understand...it's not easy to love when our souls are torn and lacerated. You know that. That's why the pain within you is so great, and you'll suffer that pain all your life. Do you remember that night? We were younger then; so young that we succeeded in deceiving ourselves for a few moments at least. And it was then that I took on a little part of your pain, and I have borne it within me ever since. We mustn't think that we have no right to love,

Mark. An evil fate has set us in a terrible time when what is needed is hate, not love. But we'll love, too. We have every right to. And we'll hate; for perhaps just love alone would be too little for us in these times."



9. Squaring the Circle

THE meeting took place in the municipal offices. Drobnin, whom the Russian inhabitants of the town called the municipal head, while the Germans called him the burgomaster, had invited Mark to be present. But first he had obtained a document from the German military authorities, which stated that Mark Surov was an inhabitant of the town. At one stroke Mark was transformed from an escaped prisoner of war into a civilian.

Drobnin was overwhelmed with cares, both great and small. He had all the burden of arranging for fuel to be brought into the town for its inhabitants, of securing food for the people, maintaining the children's orphanages, the homes for the aged, and a large psychiatric hospital. However, he had recently been relieved of responsibility for the psychiatric hospital. German trucks had driven up to the place one day and carried off all the patients, many of whom had spent years in the hospital. The Germans fettered them, but as they passed through the town, they filled it with cheerful hubbub and shouting. Drobnin rushed to the German town major's office to find out why they had carried off the inmates, and where to. He saw the stout military doctor, who calmly replied:

"We've decided to save the town the necessity of feeding three hundred useless persons. Our psychiatrists have established that all the patients in that hospital were incurable."

That was true enough; indeed, the hospital accommodated only incurable cases.

"But where have you taken them to?" Drobnin asked.

The doctor looked at him and said in an indifferent tone, "They've been taken away to be exterminated. What do you need them for? They were only a lot of extra bother."

Drobnin took a different view of the matter. He hurried to the staff to obtain an interview with the general commanding in the area.

"Well, if the town undertakes to maintain them, that's your business," the general said. "I'll issue orders that they're not to be shot. Only, bear in mind that the moment you apply for assistance for them the order will be reinstated."

But while the general was canceling the order, the patients were all shot outside the town.

Fuel, food, schools, supplies for the Germans-all these things laid an intolerable burden on Drobnin's shoulders and called for the utmost ingenuity to keep town life going. But even on the most harassing days he was haunted by one thought: was the road he was treading the right one? Deep in his heart he was troubled. The town was in territory under German occupation, and he was helping the invaders to maintain the order they needed in that territory. But I'm not working for the Germans, he frequently reminded himself, I'm working for my own people. Someone has got to see that the town is supplied with fuel and food; someone has got to maintain some sort of order. But he was still troubled by doubts, and he sought people who could help him to decide the problem: what was the duty of a Russian who loved his country and was devoted to his people, but who hated Stalin's Communistic regime? In search of such men he had been brought into contact with Mark Surov. Vera Pavlovna was an old friend of Drobnin's and had told him in confidence about her guest.

The day of the meeting was glorious; it seemed to be proclaiming that spring was on its way, winter was coming to an end. As Mark walked along the street, he, too, was thinking of the spring, and of his fellow countrymen far to the east. Are they ready? he asked himself. The winter had provided a breathing space that might lead to a change in the situation at the front. The Germans were preparing for a new offensive. Drobnin, who of recent days had paid frequent visits to Vera Pavlovna's house, was able to tell Mark a great deal. He knew that the Soviet front had been stabilized, and it would not be so easy for the enemy to advance as in the previous year. The Germans were still bringing back great numbers of prisoners, and Drobnin had found means of questioning them on what was happening. Help from overseas had enabled the Soviet armies to survive the winter and consolidate their positions. Now they were fighting with Allied guns, Allied planes, were being fed with American food. The Stalin cult

had largely died out, and Drobnin thought it was dead forever; on the other hand, strong feelings of friendship for the Americans had developed, especially among the ordinary people, who were more directly conscious of what help from America meant for them. The Russian people on the other side of the front were inspired by a new idea: after the war the Americans would help them throw off Stalin and Communism.

"And perhaps it will be so?" Drobnin questioned, and Mark realized why he asked. For if there really was some possibility of driving out the Germans and getting rid of Communism in the bargain, then everybody ought to work for that and not remain on occupied soil, but return to help in throwing back the invader.

But Mark had no answer to that question. His ears rang with the convincing arguments of the bald-headed officer, who had once told them all in the storeroom: "Don't put your hopes in the Americans and English. They'll help Stalin to win the war, but they won't stop to think that victory will bring Communism innumerable advantages and themselves innumerable disasters. In those countries men are in charge who're like the one-day flies of history; they live their day, and that's the end. For them Russia is another world, and it'll be a long time before they realize that that world may be very close to them if they will only hold out their hand to it. But meanwhile they're holding out their hand to Stalin, so that he can grip Russia still more firmly by the throat."

The war had not touched the outskirts of the town; but along the main street the shops were gaping, windowless. Swastika flags were flying from the larger buildings. German soldiers and officers with an air of importance hurried officiously along the street. The town inhabitants kept close to the house walls, but people with large yellow stars sewn on their backs and chests were walking in the road. Mark felt a bitter shame as he saw them, as though he himself were responsible for their being compelled to stay off the sidewalks, to use the roadways, and to be branded by those badges. In Vera Pavlovna's house the talk frequently turned to the condition of the Jews. Quite a large number, most of them craftsmen and poor families living in the outskirts, had remained in the town. The richer people and those who had worked for the Soviet regime had all gone; but the poor had not believed, and still refused to believe, that the Germans were capable of treating them inhumanly. Dr. Zalkind, who was also compelled to wear the star, was ironical in his attitude. "Let the

Germans amuse themselves if they want to," he said. "You'll see; they'll soon get tired of worrying about us." The Jews were just as indifferent to the rumors that the Germans were preparing to shut them up in a ghetto. "That's nothing new for us," they said. "We lived in the ghetto under the czars and we didn't do too badly."

Mark found several people gathered in Drobnin's well-heated office. Right by the door, a gray-bearded man with translucent, childlike blue eyes was sitting on a chair, his feet planted firmly on the floor. He bore some resemblance to the well-known picture of Leo Tolstoy standing with one hand thrust into the thong that served him as a belt. Next to the old man was a thickset man in horn-rimmed spectacles, named Nikiforov. Frozen fear lurked in his eyes behind his glasses, as though he had been born with it and had never been able to rid himself of it. A third man was younger, perhaps in his middle forties. His cheek twitched incessantly. "Doctor Vladimirov," Drobnin said as he introduced him to Mark.

There were several others in the room, but he did not catch their names: he was preoccupied with a man who rose from the settee to meet him, and who had all the features and mannerisms of Leonid Provsky. Mark had to restrain himself from exclaiming. His caution was justified, for Drobnin introduced him by the name of Vysokov. So he and the others were not aware that one of their number was Lieutenant General Leonid Provsky, whose name had been listed in a Stalin order placing another group of generals outside the law for losing their troops and allowing themselves to be encircled.

Vysokov squeezed Mark's hand and gave him a friendly nod, inviting him to sit down beside him. When the room settled down after Mark's arrival and general introduction, Vysokov began to speak.

"We can break with Stalin, and that won't be any crime; on the contrary, it will be a deed worth recording in history. But we can't break with our nation. The man who always remains with his nation cannot go wrong. In the areas under German occupation there are millions of Russians. We mustn't lose sight of that when we attempt to determine whether our place is here, behind the lines."

"We've got to decide where the nation is," Nikiforov interrupted agitatedly. "There are millions here under occupation, but there are just as many there, under Stalin."

"Perfectly true," Vysokov replied at once. "Our nation is not only here, but there, too. And what it is doing there is different from

what it is doing here. There it is fighting the Germans and thus helping Stalin to sit tighter, though that's the last thing the people desire, as you know. But here the people have got a scent, possibly a false, possibly a delusive scent, but nonetheless a scent of the breath of freedom. And here these millions of people are saying: 'We don't want Stalin and Communism. Down with them!' They're not saying as yet that they don't want Hitler, either, but they'll come to that without a doubt. Now consider: Are they speaking only for themselves, or are they speaking just as much for those who're still defending Stalin? Then you will realize that both here and there the people's reactions are expressing their most secret desire: to get rid of Communism, and not to have foreign conquerors on their soil. Over there they have only one possibility: to fight the invaders. Here they have another possibility: to smash Communism and proclaim a Russia without Communists and without the Stalinist whip."

"But by remaining here we help the Germans," Drobnin said, his full, aged face expressing his tension.

"Perfectly true, we are. But if you, Drobnin, resign your position as municipal head, do you think it won't be taken over by someone else? Some Russian will be found to take your place, the only difference being that you're trying to serve the town and the people, whereas your successor may turn out very different, and may do much harm to the town and the people in order to please the Germans."

Vysokov took great strides about the room, and his voice acquired a new note:

"My friends, I have no desire to deceive you. The situation is abnormal. The Germans have only one chance of winning the war: by turning it into a war of liberation from Communism. But it's difficult, almost impossible for them to do that. They've cultivated the idea of living space in the east, and that idea will bring them to their doom. They're already doing much, and will do more, to put an impassable barrier between themselves and the Russians. Their attitude to prisoners of war and to the Jews is arousing a feeling of hostility among our people. But war, my friends, is a very powerful straightener of political lines. In the last resort even the Germans may come to realize that in this war the issue isn't one of living space and conquests in the east, but of saving themselves and preventing Germany from being turned into living space for someone else. So far everything has fallen too easily to them, and that has strengthened them in their

delusions. But every fresh defeat will have a sobering effect, will teach them wisdom. That is the logic of events to which we must adapt our own conduct. The worse, the better."

He spoke fierily, persuasively. At first Mark had had a feeling of hostility toward him; for a moment he had been unable to resist the thought that Vysokov spoke like this because he knew he could not return to the other part of Russia. But he spoke with such inspiration that Mark began to believe that here was the true road he himself had long been seeking.

Yet the ideas Vysokov was expressing were so new to him that he looked about him in utter perplexity. Hitherto everything had been clear and straightforward; in a little while he would set out on his way back to the east, to take part in the fight the nation was waging. But Vysokov was right. The nation was there, but the nation was here, too.

Vysokov returned to his seat beside Mark. Others began to contribute to the discussion, all talking together, interrupting one another.

"What we've got to decide is: Who is the Russian nation's main enemy?" Drobnin exclaimed. "Stalin or Hitler? I spent twelve years in prison because I decided to protest against the violence being done to the peasants. I was freed from prison by the Germans. But all the same I refuse to believe that the Germans have come to free us from Communism. But I'm not prepared to stand the Stalin regime any longer, either. So what?"

His voice expressed his puzzlement. Vladimirov broke the silence. "You're wrong. The Germans will have to help us. And not only because they'll be in a bad way at the front before long, but because Germany is a cultured country and won't attempt to return to medievalism by seizing fresh territory. We've got to seek the support of the Germans, to create mutual understanding between us and them. It's quite obvious that the Germans are fighting Communism—"

"How is it?" Mark quietly asked.

"Why, we know that Germany's the only country fighting Communism. England, France, America—they're all supporting Communism; they're all helping Stalin to retain power."

"That's no argument," Mark said, quietly but obstinately. "So far Germany hasn't said what she's fighting the war for. Or rather, she has, but we don't hear what she said. Vysokov's right; for ten years the Germans have been cultivating the idea of seizing living space in the east, and it's difficult for them to get over it; a good deal will

have to happen before they change their war aims. As for England and America supporting Communism, it seems to me that's due to the necessities of war. I mean that they're supporting it just as a rope supports a man hanging by it. But we're not in quite the same boat. What we're faced with is a kind of squaring of the circle, and I don't know whether the question raised today can be decided at all, or whether we can find a right road for ourselves. In one thing Vysokov's absolutely sound—nobody has any right to break with the nation."

Mark's meeting with Vysokov opened up new prospects; he went with him on a tour of the neighboring countryside. In carts and on foot they covered a large part of the enormous area under German occupation. During the journey they had plenty of time to talk over everything. Provsky, for it was he, told Mark what had happened in the early days of the war. His corps had fought bravely on the approaches to Moscow, and by Stalin's order it had been raised to the status of a guards' corps. Provsky himself was twice proclaimed a hero of the Soviet Union. But the anarchy and confusion in the rear increased with every day. Equipment and supplies had come up haphazardly; the artillery had been left without shells; the men had frozen in the slit trenches and dugouts. The anti-Stalin feeling had grown by leaps and bounds. By an unexpected maneuver the German tanks had surrounded the army of which Provsky's corps was a part. The message came from Moscow that he was to abandon the corps to its fate and escape from the encirclement by plane. But he would not do that. For two weeks the corps had resisted the German forces, its numbers diminishing with every hour. Provsky's request for air cover had gone unanswered, and one division had been smashed chiefly by German planes. The situation had become completely hopeless when the remnants of the corps were attacked by specially picked S.S. forces. A few days had brought the end; the rest of the corps had dissolved into the enemy rear. Provsky and a group of staff officers had broken through to the German rear and had been lost in the raging sea of Russians behind the lines.

Mark soon realized that Provsky had been over all this Germanoccupied territory more than once before. He had acquaintances in every little town, in every village. It seemed as though he had decided to show Mark all that was going on in the countryside. The peasants had suddenly felt that it was their own land they were treading. With almost painful audacity they had begun to reorganize their husbandries. The collective farms were being distributed; sometimes disputes broke out and one village attacked another with sticks and cudgels; but in the end the land was parceled out, even though the Germans had forbidden any such steps. The peasants were scratching the soil with roughly fashioned wooden plows, with spades; they were harnessing themselves to the plows and tickling the earth with them; if they hadn't had plows or spades they would have gnawed the soil with their teeth, but they would have compelled it to grow grain. The phantom of freedom was creating a phantom peasant happiness. But the people had no thought of phantoms; all they wanted was to live.

In the towns the chimneys of factories and mills were smoking. The Germans unconcernedly agreed to let them smoke, taking over only those enterprises that could serve military needs, and leaving the others to the people. But there were no raw materials in stock, so carts were sent across the fields and through the forests. There they searched for the wrecks of airplanes, German and Soviet; and out of this scrap the factories fashioned pots, plates, spoons. One plane wreck supplied sufficient material for thousands of plates and pitchers. Now the light and strong duralumin was to be found in the markets in the shape of wares; women of the towns and villages carried home utensils they had never seen before, utensils that did not crack with the heat, were easily cleaned, and would last a lifetime.

The markets were tumultuous with people acquiring goods that were growing more and more plentiful, as well as poultry, meat, and flour.

The Germans did not realize that the Russians were moved by a desperate desire to work for themselves. They had always worked for someone else: under the czars, for the landowners and wealthy; under Communism, for a voracious state that resembled the Biblical cow, which always remained thin and feeble no matter how much of the people's labor it consumed. But what the Germans did not understand, Mark did, and he himself experienced a complex struggle of feelings and desires. In all his thought and outlook he was with the people who were building up this illusory well-being. He understood them; he himself was boiling with feelings born of his own closeness to the soil; he himself had come from such people. But in him these feelings conflicted with his ideas of what was best, and he still did not accept the road Provsky had chosen as the right one. Nor did his companion try to hurry him; he simply took him through the towns and villages and let him observe for himself. Provsky was

engaged in feverish activity, the purpose of which was not yet clear to Mark. He could only vaguely surmise that his friend was organizing groups of like-minded people who believed that the nation on this side of the front had to be organized and turned into a force that could play a significant part in the clash of the two worlds.

One day, as they went along, they were suddenly struck by the sight of crowds of people who obviously had come a long distance. The Soviet armies had unexpectedly opened an offensive. The Germans had had to fall back; but within a week they had restored the former line of the front. And when they went back, in every village they found hanging bodies, while many of the villages had been burned to the ground. There were crowds of people wandering along the roads, homeless, their families broken up and scattered. Punitive forces of the Soviet secret police had entered the villages with the advancing army and had carried out summary executions among the people. And so, as soon as the Germans returned, the terrified people took the opportunity to pour westward. Their stories came as a shock to the life that was being organized on the German side of the front. To Mark they revealed that for the millions of Russians on this side Stalin was a real menace. The decision formulated itself; preparations must be made to meet that menace. If the nation desired freedom, then it had to be strong; it had to be consolidated, organized, prepared for what was coming. It was a hard decision, but no other seemed possible.

He returned to the town a fortnight later. On the outskirts he dropped off the cart on which he had been traveling, and continued on foot. His route lay past the garden that extended in front of the church in the town center. The Germans had turned the garden into a military cemetery. Monotonous wooden crosses with monotonous inscriptions stood in strict, official rows. He passed along the rows, reading the names of the Karls, the Fritzes, and the Ottos. As he went, he fumed. All the Russian soil was turned into one vast cemetery. Graves along all the waysides, graves in the forests, graves around the wells in the villages.

Unreflecting, he went into the church. A service was going on, and there were many worshipers. His eyes were dazzled by the innumerable candles burning on and around the altar. A current of powerful feeling turned his thoughts back to his childhood, when he had thought of his village church as the home of an omnipotent, omniscient, all-seeing God. Nothing could be concealed from Him, nor was there

any need to conceal anything, for He was all-forgiving. In those days as he entered the church, he raised his eyes to the dome, which to his young eyes seemed infinitely distant; and on it, in the midst of clouds and angels, he saw a bearded God who looked rather like his own father. God had always smiled down benevolently at Mark, even though He knew all the tricks and mischief the boy got himself into.

But that was long ago. Later on he had driven God right out of his life. He had seen churches pulled down by government orders, and had felt a tinge of regret; but that feeling had slipped over the surface of his consciousness and had left no mark. After many years of life without God, he had entered that strange church in the P.O.W. camp, where the Christ looked like a Soviet prisoner of war. In that little temple some queer, half-forgotten feeling had revived within him, and one day he had dropped to his knees and had intoned an "Our Father" with the choir.

A frail, old priest, his head almost lost amid his ample purple robes, came through the center gate from the altar. His weak, hardly audible voice went whispering through the church:

"For the greatly suffering Russian people we plead with Thee, O Lord; save and have mercy on them by Thy great mercy."

The choir burst into a thunderous response, but it did not drown the priest's feeble voice; rather it seemed to raise that voice and bear it through the church, exalting it to the God who was looking down in grievous perplexity from the dome.

"For all who are journeying by water, for all who are ailing, who are suffering, for all who are captive, we plead for their salvation, O Lord."

Mark stood in a far corner of the church. His face, fixed like a mask, was turned to the altar. He did not do reverence, he did not cross himself; he was deep in thought. He was raising his own silent prayer, his own private confession:

"Lord, if You really do exist, You must understand that I cannot but doubt You. You have never reminded me of Yourself, though I departed from You long ago. If You are a living God, and not a legend born in antiquity, what have You done to confirm weak people in their faith in You? If You are a living God, and not an invention, why do You allow the world to travel a road that leads to the abyss? They say You are good and all-powerful, but why then do You not in Your goodness diminish the suffering of the people? Nothing in

this world came into being without Your willing it; so evil, too, must have been born of You. And would it not be just to set right that evil? You know man alone cannot solve the problem that is his life, and his feeble reason cannot lead him to the shining road of truth. My father believed in You, and he died on the gallows; but those who govern the world today have long since rejected You, yet You do not punish them. Or are they only instruments of Your anger? But if anger lasts forever, there is no room for good. They say You are eternal; but man is not eternal, his life is brief, and if it has been passed in sorrow and suffering, nobody, not even You, can restore to him what he has lost. If You are not a Nothing, You cannot remain silent and allow all these things to happen on this earth, for then people would be right not to believe in You. . . . Speak to us. . . ."

The church had emptied; many of the candles had been extinguished; but he remained standing, making more and more resolute and insistent demands of God. Drawn by the look of strain on the face of this worshiper, whom he had not seen in the church before, the priest halted behind him. Now the father was dressed in black, and stood with his hands resting on a staff. At last he raised one hand and quietly laid it on Mark's shoulder. Mark started with surprise.

"A great sorrow has brought you here," the priest murmured, not questioning, but affirming.

"No, father," he replied, a little embarrassed. "Not sorrow but doubt has brought me here. Great doubt."

"What do you doubt?"

"I doubt God. If He exists, why doesn't He reveal His works to us?"

"Stop!" The old man's feeble voice sounded imperative. Mark stopped. The priest, too, was long silent.

"I could say much to you," he said at last. "It is not for us to judge God. He judges us. God is illimitable, and the man who tries to fix the limits of the divine can never attain his end. In mercy, in anger, in goodness, in all things He is boundless. Man thinks he has got away from God when he forgets Him, but that is a delusion. I do not tell you to cast out your doubts; but, my son, seek God within yourself, within your own works. And if you follow that advice, you will find Him."

He turned and walked slowly toward the entrance.

In myself, in my works, Mark thought as he watched him go.

But my works are not from Him, but from me; and the evil and the good in them are from me, too. So what is from Him?

Two days later Mark paid a visit to the German staff headquarters. Escorted by an officer, he walked along the soft carpeting of the corridor and entered the commanding officer's waiting room. A thin, elderly officer with a captain's tabs, who spoke excellent Russian, had met him at the door and introduced himself with unusual amiability: "Berger. Captain Berger."

The waiting room to which Berger conducted Mark was furnished with great luxury. The general was an expert on furniture of the classic period, on fine pictures and carpets, and he had been not a little surprised to be able to arrange his staff headquarters in this barbaric country of Russia so luxuriously that all who came from Berlin were envious of him. The general felt that he was sitting pretty in his role of area commander. He was in his seventies, and he thought it was time he had an easier life. Now, especially since he had come under the command of a corporal, the service had lost all interest for him. He had no liking for the little Austrian who had never achieved anything higher than corporal's rank. He had many thoughts on this subject, but he shared them with only a very small circle of intimates. The corporal had raised many of the general's equals in the service to the rank of field marshal, but had overlooked this old and deserving officer. The general always sent his congratulations to the new field marshals, but he couched his letters in strange terms: "I congratulate you on the high rank you have received from the Reichsfuehrer Corporal Adolf Hitler." And he always signed his name with the additional: "Raised to the rank of general by His Majesty, Kaiser Wilhelm."

Mark dropped into a deep, soft armchair and waited. His thin face was clean-shaven; he was wearing a worn but carefully pressed suit and a white shirt. His unsmiling eyes watched everything closely. He had come here not of his own choice, but at the wish of his friends. Influenced by Provsky, everybody was thinking of the necessity of organizing the Russians, of separating them from the Germans with a wall of their own, a Russian organization, and to make of them a power capable of self-defense. It had been decided to set up a committee of liberation and to attempt to obtain the Germans' agreement, at least temporarily, to the committee's activities, offering in exchange something that would be of real value to them. Mark had

been drawn into this enterprise. He had many doubts, but his active nature prevented them from overwhelming him. He saw only two possibilities: either to help Provsky, or to go back to the east and share in the great battles the other part of the nation was waging against the Germans. He had not finally decided this issue for himself, but Provsky's plan attracted him by its audacity and novelty. So now he had come to the German staff headquarters to get the commander's consent to the plan to organize the Russians. Drobnin had already handed in a scheme for such an organization.

After a moment or two Berger came out and asked him to go in to the general's room. The army officer, a stout old man with gray hair, close-cropped, was sitting at a large desk. A tall, black-haired man with black epaulets and black, inquisitive, suspicious eyes was sitting a little to one side. Mark recognized him as the head of the local Gestapo. The general courteously waved to a chair: "Please take a seat." Berger swiftly translated his remarks: "We have studied your proposal, and the general is glad to tell you that it is acceptable as a basis. We want the Russians to understand what our mission is in Russia. We have come to free the Russians from Communism. We know that the men who have put forward this plan are enemies of Communism. And so we can approach the proposal with a certain degree of confidence. You must educate the Russians in a spirit of understanding Germany. Together with us, it will always go well for you; without us, it will always be bad."

The general wiped his crimson face with a handkerchief; he was obviously waiting for Mark to reply.

"The general can be perfectly sure that that is precisely the principle by which we are guided," Mark said, smiling politely. "If a new, free Russia arises as the result of this war, it will always feel gratitude for those who helped to rid it of Communism. I believe that a mutual understanding will follow very quickly."

"If I may be allowed, general, I should like to make one observation to Mr. Surov." The head of the Gestapo intervened, rising from the desk. The general courteously assented. "The Russians would have to take a clear and positive stand on the Jewish question. You must realize that the Jews are your worst enemies; it was they who created Communism. Marx was a Jew. So far the Russians have not displayed a clear attitude toward this question of the Jews."

"We've got so many problems to tackle," Mark replied. But the Gestapo chief saw he was evading the question.

"The Jewish question is the most important of all," he insisted. "You must be quite definite in regard to it and must clearly understand what Jewry means for Russia and the world."

"I must admit," Mark answered, "that this question simply doesn't exist for us Russians, and we don't understand the German attitude toward it. I shall venture to express only my personal opinion. It seems to me that in Russia the Jewish question has long since lost all reality. We've got out of the habit of dividing our nation into Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians, and Jews. It seems to me that the Jews themselves have long since lost their feeling of being distinct from us, especially the working-class Jews who remained in the occupied areas. The Jewish workers, employees, and craftsmen live among us Russians; they've become part of us; so how can we separate them from us? You say they're a menace, but we haven't found them so; on the contrary, they're as badly off as we are. Look how many of them have stayed behind. And so, when you ordered the Jews to be concentrated in ghettos, we Russians took it very badly. You see, you pose a very difficult problem for us, gentlemen; but we hope that the ghetto system you've set up is only a temporary measure."

Mark watched the Gestapo man closely while he spoke. Berger translated his words without hesitation. The German's thin, plain face grew longer and longer, more and more annoyed. Mark could see that, but he could not rest till he had given expression to something that was troubling nearly all of his associates.

"Oh, yes," the Gestapo man said, "I assure you it's only a temporary measure. We prefer that each should have his own permanent place." Mark caught the barely concealed irony in his tone.

"Herr Surov will convey our desires to the Russians," the general said, and rose from his chair to indicate that the interview was ended.

Mark had taken up his quarters with Kotov, in a half-ruined brick house. On his return from the German commander he found Kotov there. The Lieutenant was clean-shaven now and dressed in a strange mixture of civilian and military clothes. But his eyes still had their cold gleam, which frequently melted into a gay, youthful look. When Mark entered, Kotov raised his head from the bed on which he spent a large part of the day, and stared at him. He noticed the look of irritation on Mark's face and unconcernedly fell back on the straw pillow.

"Listen, you freak of nature!" Mark said. "What happened to that

carpet you pinched from the German warehouse—I haven't seen it around here lately?"

A week previously Kotov had negotiated a transaction with the soldiers guarding the warehouse where the Germans held their war loot. As a result, he had obtained several rifles of Russian pattern. In the cellar of the house where he and Mark were living there was now quite a little arsenal. Kotov's attitude was simple; he knew he had need of these weapons. He had no idea whom he would be using them against, but as a professional soldier he had respect only for armed men. Now that he had these rifles in the cellar, he felt more sure of himself, and he was beginning to dream of acquiring a real machine gun, which he had noticed in the warehouse.

"It's difficult to get the guards to understand," he had told Mark, when discussing the question. "I used my fingers mostly. At last they got it into their heads that the rifles were needed for our Russian guard. Then I explained that we'd pay them well. 'Chickens, or a brace of geese,' I told them. They didn't understand, so I flapped my arms and cackled like a hen, and wrote 5 on the ground. Then, of course, they jumped at it. The generals have poultry for their table, so why shouldn't the rank and file? That's how they see it. They went off to tell their sergeant major, leaving me alone in the warehouse. I looked around and saw all sorts of stuff piled up. I took a particular fancy to a marble woman; I'd seen one like her in a museum; Venus, she's called. Only she hadn't any arms. And there was that Venus standing and shamelessly showing me all she had. She'd be worth pinching, I thought. But if I threw her over the wall, she'd only smash to pieces. So I had to take something softer. There was a carpet lying rolled up, and I threw that over the wall, and our lads waiting on the other side collected it."

Mark had shouted at him: "This isn't the time for that sort of game. If the Germans had caught you, they'd have twisted your neck."

Mark repeated the question, and Kotov looked blank. Mark then added:

"That carpet's on the floor of the general's waiting room now. How did it get there?"

"Quite simply," Kotov replied. "I heard you were going to the German general for a talk. So I decided to make your task easier. I took the carpet to the staff and asked for the adjutant. Through an interpreter I explained that the Russians had sent the carpet for the

general to accept; 'the Russians who're going to see the general tomorrow,' I told him."

"You're a fool, Kotov!" Mark said with a laugh. "Supposing they'd realized where you'd got it from? But in any case you can stop all your barter transactions; we shall be getting arms by other means. You must have taken hundreds of chickens and geese from the peasants in order to give them to the Germans."

"Cut that out, Mark Timofeevich!" Kotov exclaimed indignantly. "Why, for a hundred chickens the Germans would hand Hitler over to me, and they'd pack him beautifully in paper and tie him up with string to make him easier to carry."

People began to gather in Mark's room. Drobnin, Nikiforov, and Vladimirov were the first to arrive. Then came gray-haired Kuleshov, a powerfully built man with blue eyes, a great beard, and a broad, bony body. Though the room was large, it was crowded. They had been summoned to the meeting by Drobnin. When all were assembled, Kotov shut the door and mounted guard outside.

Mark briefly reported on his visit to the German headquarters. He saw that many of those present were satisfied, and he wished he could have felt the same. But within him an unresolved conflict was going on. Outwardly he was with these men, ready to travel with them along their chosen road; but inwardly he was not at all sure that that road was sound, and if he had seen a better one, he would have taken it. At times he felt that his place was in the east, where the front was flaring up. Yet, he told himself, the nation was one, both there and here, and in serving the nation here he was serving those who were defending their land against the invader. This terrible bloodshed must not be in vain; let it be our price for freedom, he thought. But freedom must be fought for everywhere on Russian soil, and you would be a coward and traitor if you left here to go and help Stalin.

When he finished his report, there was a hum of excited discussion. As he listened, he realized that for these others there was only one question now: how to organize themselves. But he was not so sure of his ground and felt that he must put himself once more to the test. He rose and compelled silence with his words:

"Friends! Before we take our first step along the road opening before us, let us calmly, coldly, and above all honestly test ourselves. Russia has been attacked by an enemy from the west. Every man who loves Russia must defend her, and if necessary die for her. However, we've got to face the fact that tens of millions of people living

in the area occupied by the foreign enemy have no desire to fight that enemy. We are among these people, and their secret desire is wresting us away from the struggle and forcing us to seek other ways. And yet we have the simple, merciless fact: a foreign conquerer is on Russian soil. Everybody is desperately anxious to regard that enemy as a liberator, but nobody can show that he is. It's simply that we'd like it to be so; but whether it will be so is a very big question, friends. The people are longing for freedom, and so they're throwing themselves into the enemy's arms as if he were a friend. The result of the war depends on how millions of Russians will react. If under satisfactory conditions they throw in their lot with Germany, Stalin has lost. If they go against Germany, Germany will be finished quite soon." He paused for a moment in thought, then went on: "But what will the victory of one side or the other bring our nation? If Stalin wins, the Russian people will be deprived of freedom for many decades, if not for centuries. After his victory he will turn to his fundamental task: the Communist conquest of the world. And then our nation will be turned into the instrument of that conquest, something that it doesn't want, something that is inimical, loathsome to it. But if Hitler wins? They say Germany is bringing Russia liberation from Communism. But who is saying it? The petty military officials, and possibly they believe in it; but above all, it's we Russians who're saying it. So far Hitler has not announced his war aims, and we have to take that fact into account."

He wiped the sweat from his forehead. There was a tense silence. He waved his hand as though to dispel the silence. "We're surrounded by enemies," he said bitterly. "Let's start from that fact: we're surrounded by enemies. We see clearly what the people are aiming at: freedom. But how to achieve it? And with whom to go? With Stalin? Impossible. With Hitler? Equally impossible. What can we count on? Only on ourselves, on the strength of our people. And we have got to withdraw part of the forces of the nation from the struggle in order to preserve it for the future decisive struggle. We must organize these forces, though we cannot close our eyes to the fact that that is an almost impossible task. Stalin will fight against our organizing the people, for it will be an anti-Stalin organization. And Hitlerite Germany will fight against us. Friends, I've never heard of any war that was waged solely for benevolent objects, and this war is no exception. We don't know all the extent of Germany's aims in Russia, but we can be sure they are not simple, seeking not so much to destroy

Bolshevism as to get hold of the oil, the land, the grain, and the sweat of a nation condemned to become a colonial people. But war changes many things; it is capable of changing Germany's plans. It may. But nobody can say it will. So I ask you: Under these conditions have we any right to set up an anti-Bolshevist organization of our people now, and do we fully realize what it means?"

"Yes, we have the right; and we do realize what it means!" Drobnin exclaimed, starting to his feet. "I myself have known all the doubts Surov has just expressed. I've lain awake at night; I've talked with hundreds of people, and in every one of them I've found faith in the necessity for struggle, faith to overcome my doubts. Twelve years I spent in Communist prisons, and all that time I dreamed that some time or other the hour would come when I would call to the people: Overthrow Bolshevism. And I'd be a criminal if I didn't call to them now. I'm not prepared to calculate, to weigh, to measure my conduct against circumstances. Circumstances change, but our people's dreams of freedom remains; and in all circumstances I would shout: 'Down with Bolshevism, destroy Communism, for it is the most dangerous disease in our land.' I'm confident that those who're fighting the Germans today think the same way; they're not fighting for Stalin, but because they've seen the enemy on their soil. That hasn't led to any increase of love for Stalin, as you know. Whether Germany wins the war or loses it, our call to the fight for freedom will remain. If Germany wins, which I don't believe will happen, we shall have to throw her out of Russia; but that will be a hundred times easier than to get rid of Communism."

The speech won general approval. Even Kuleshov, who very rarely said anything, called out, "Drobnin's right. We've got to fight without stopping to calculate or consider."

"One minute!" Mark rose to his feet again. "I want everyone to see our situation clearly. Is it clear to every one of you that if Germany loses the war, all who have taken up the struggle against Stalin will be proclaimed traitors and ruthlessly wiped out?"

"Yes," everybody shouted.

"Is it clear to every one of you that the Germans will attempt to exploit us for their own purposes, and that when we refuse to go with them, they'll destroy us, just as Stalin would?"

"Yes."

"And is it clear to every one of you that we have very few chances

of winning and very many of losing? Is it realized that to lose means certain death for us and for all who go with us?"

"Yes."

"And, finally, do we realize that even if we lose and perish, we shall have rendered our people an inestimable service? They will realize and remember that we were the first to show the world that Communism and Russia are two different things, and that Communism has no more terrible enemy than the Russian people itself."

"Of course; why talk about it?"

Mark drew himself up; his gray eyes were smiling happily. Now for the first time he had found a key that could unlock his own soul. He was serving not today, but the future; he belonged to the future, and all that he did today must be directed to the morrow. A great weight fell from his soul. Happily, gaily, he cried through the smokeladen air:

"Well, then, if it's all clear, let's begin. We'll enlarge our circle and take in all who wish to fight for our people and the people's freedom."



10. The Conspiracy of the Daring

An anxious summons from Vera Pavlovna had brought Mark back to the town from a nearby village where he had been working. He climbed the steps of the little house, which had grown as dear to him as that other with a straw thatch, in the distant steppe village that had been his birthplace, to find Maria tossing in delirium. Her head, bound with a white kerchief, was lying helpless on the pillow. As he entered, Vera Pavlovna was taking off the kerchief to replace it with another, dry one. The hair had been cut off, and Maria's head seemed so small and childishly wretched. The peaked nose, the parted, burning lips, the thin neck emerging from the shirt pained and alarmed him.

Dr. Zalkind arrived and silently bent over his patient, then set his large, ugly ear against her bare chest. He never used a stethoscope.

He gave Mark a cold look, though they were friends, for he would have preferred Mark not to be present, as Maria was so seriously ill. He thrust the needle of his hypodermic syringe into her arm, then turned to Mark: "The crisis; and her heart's not too good. Lend her some of your strength."

Mark was too depressed to notice him when he left, hurrying off to other patients. He sat very still beside the bed. Among the babble of words that came from her lips he caught his own name. "She often mentions you," Vera Pavlovna said, and broke off. Has he gone out of his mind? she wondered as she saw a broad, happy smile on his face. "What's the matter, Mark Timofeevich?" she asked aloud.

"She'll come through," he said confidently. "She's got to come through."

"How do you know?" she asked in astonishment. "Dr. Zalkind said—"

"Dr. Zalkind doesn't know a thing. Maria's going to live. I know that if you wish for something very much, invincibly and bound-lessly, it always comes true."

Later in the day Dr. Zalkind came back to take another look at Maria. After his inspection he could hardly restrain his smile as he turned to Vera Pavlovna: "Your house seems to be lucky for patients. She's passed her crisis, and she'll pull through."

A week passed, and Mark sat beside Maria's bed as she had sat beside him. All their anxiety was in the past, and Maria was on the road to recovery. She reclined on her pillows and held Mark's hand in a firm grip.

"So you've made up your mind, Mark?" she asked.

"Yes, Maria. There's no other way. It's a very simple plan, after all. The Germans are prepared to turn over to us the forest areas, which they can't control anyway because they haven't the men. And we shall assemble our forces there. We'll form detachments. If we grow powerful, the Germans will have to reckon with us, and there will be no threat whatever to the people in the occupied areas. But now think a little further, Maria. The moment Germany begins to lose the war—and that isn't such a long way off—she'll be forced to turn to our people and give them what we're demanding now. And then we shall declare a national war against Communism...." He sank his head thoughtfully on his chest. "I know it's daring, Maria, and questionable. But is there any other way?"

Her hand trembled in his. She lay a long time thinking, then said

simply, as though it were something that really went without saying: "It's daring, Mark, but it's only those who dare who achieve. We shall be daring, Mark, since we can't be otherwise."

"Did you say 'we'?" he queried.

"Of course. You don't think I'd leave you, do you? I can be daring, too, you know. I shall go with you, Mark. Right to the end. . . . And don't say that I'm a woman and there's no place for me among you. . . . Man can do much, if he wants to; and we want a little happiness for ourselves and others so terribly, so invincibly."

He kissed Maria's burning hand while her other arm coiled itself around his neck and pressed his head to her soft caressing breast. She drew Mark close to herself with a passion that drowned out his consciousness and made his blood race ever faster. "Oh, I'm so happy, Mark," she whispered. Mark was happy, too, for he knew that Maria's heart beat for him.

Rumors began to pass from mouth to mouth that a Russian regime had been set up in the forest districts. The Germans had withdrawn their guards from those areas. The story grew and grew with further details. There was talk of the emergence of a provisional Russian government. Soldiers, strangely attired in German and Russian military and civilian dress, began to be seen in the streets of the towns and villages. They were armed with Russian weapons: members of Russian self-defense forces. Every day it grew more obvious that Russian military groups were being assembled in the forests and in other remote spots. A certain order was being established. Names were mentioned. Vysokov was said to be organizing the self-defense forces; Surov, Drobnin, and Nikiforov were setting up local administrations. Russian newspapers began to appear, at first with vague, and then with unmistakable references to the Russians' having to take their destiny into their own hands.

Mark was completely absorbed in feverish activity. He was rarely in town. Maria remained with Vera Pavlovna, and Kotov was completing the formation of a small detachment. The Germans were releasing prisoners from the P.O.W. camp, and these men were being drafted in small groups into Kotov's force. The youngsters of the towns and villages presented themselves at the barracks where the force was quartered, and joined up. Nobody knew how many such detachments were being formed; Vysokov and Mark remained obstinately silent. But rumor spread fantastic figures; it was said that a

whole Russian army had been created, with regiments, divisions, corps. Mark had grown thin; he hurried about the countryside from the front line deep to the rear. Whenever he saw Maria, he would start up from his chair, unable to sit quietly and suppress the agitation that racked him:

"We've got to hurry, Maria!"

She was infected by his excitement; she hastily caressed him and would nervously make the sign of the cross over him when they parted. Then he vanished, to turn up after many days still thinner and still more exhausted.

"We've got to hurry!" The thought never left him. Captain Berger took the trouble to search out Mark for a long confidential talk with him, after which many things that he had only vaguely understood now grew clear. As he listened to Berger, doubting all the while whether he could trust this German, Mark was astonished to note that the Captain was answering precisely the questions that troubled him most. The German told him that the area commander's agreement to the Russians' proposals had been purely fortuitous. The general had acted only from military considerations. His decision might be revoked at any moment. It was in flat contradiction to the political directives. The military rear of the German army was to be reduced in extent shortly, and a German civil administration would be set up, which would not on any account agree to continue the course that the area commander had initiated. "I shall be sorry if you get a wrong idea, Mr. Surov. I don't offer you any advice; I only warn you that everything may be changed in a single day," Berger said calmly. His words made it clear that a serious conflict was occurring between the military command of the German army and the political authorities. Whereas the military command was seeking to win the Russians over, Hitler's own policy aimed at suppressing the Russians, at subjugating them without the least regard for their wishes.

"Difficult times are coming," Berger said. "Political control in the occupied areas will pass into other hands; the army will have no influence on this issue. I'm seriously afraid of those days, Mr. Surov, for I know what Germany is, and what our Fuehrer is aiming at."

Mark was impressed by Berger's sincerity, though he had no idea why this German officer had risked saying so much to a Russian, and a stranger at that. Mark and Vysokov had both received information that farther to the west a German civil administration had already been set up and was treating the Russian population ruthlessly. The news drove Mark and his friends to even greater haste to create a Russian force that would not be easy to shatter.

But events advanced at catastrophic speed. The Gestapo already had its finger on the pulse of this strange organization that had arisen in the German rear. It was not long before every step taken by Vysokov, Drobnin, Mark, and all the others was watched closely by the men with black tabs and with death's-heads on their buttons and caps.

A night arrived when Mark and his associates realized that the breaking point had come. The Russians had their own road to travel, and must take it no matter how hard it was. That night Mark and Kotov were awakened by a dry, reiterated, distant cracking sound, which at first they could not identify. Mark went to the window and pulled aside the blanket they used as a curtain. At once the room was lit up with a livid crimson glow, which deepened the shadows on Mark's face, and was reflected in his astonished and puzzled eyes.

A pillar of fire was flickering in the direction of the P.O.W camp. The dry cracking sound was coming from the same quarter.

"They're shooting them!" Kotov said hoarsely, as he stood at Mark's side. Mark fell back from the window and spat out the curt words:

"Call out your men!"



11. The Execution of the Crucified

THE prisoners of war paid a monstrous price for the Germans' discovery of a truth to them so simple. Some terrible process of thought, which had its beginning in their own bestial nature, led the Germans to the conclusion: the P.O.W.'s must die.

Tongues of flame shot up in several places at once from the great P.O.W. barracks. Panic-stricken, the prisoners poured out into the yard in a solid, heavy flood. The guards on the turrets stood to their machine guns and opened up unbroken fire. The company of guards in charge of the camp fell in quickly, so quickly that one might have

thought they had been waiting for that inhuman bellow, those tongues of fire, without undressing and with rifles in their hands. The flood of men poured out of the burning building; the machine guns rattled incessantly. Six turrets and six guns. But the Germans were not firing at the prisoners, of course not! Only along the barbed-wire barriers, to prevent the prisoners escaping. There were eight thousand prisoners in the barracks, but there was room for only four thousand in the yard. Where were the others to go? Those who were late in getting out of the buildings pressed their comrades close up against the barbed wire. But the Germans did not fire at the men, only along the rows of barbed wire. Along that wire rose a rampart of bodies, it reached to the top of the barrier, and the prisoners for whom there was no room in the yard attempted to clamber up that rampart to reach the other side. Some of them succeeded. But guards were already posted, and they shot down every prisoner who got across the wire. Some prisoners even managed to evade those posts; but patrols were ranging through the streets of the town, and they shot at sight any Russian they found on the streets.

However, the Germans were not the only patrols in the streets that night; members of Kotov's force were also active. It was part of their official duty to keep order in the town. The German patrols knew that Russians with white armbands and rifles were the local police, who were not to be touched. But why were there so many of them in the streets that night?

A roar and howl came from the fortress, but the houses and streets of the town crouched in a terrible, tense silence. The men of Kotov's force ranged the streets, straining their eyes into the darkness. The moment they saw a shadow attempting to merge with the ground, several men broke away from the patrol and surrounded that shadow. Sometimes there was a brief struggle; sometimes it was all done without a sound. The prisoner who had broken out of the camp was given a white armband and thrust into a crowd of men like himself, surrounded by Kotov's soldiers. In the town an unseen struggle for the life of the prisoners went on. But down on the riverbanks there was feverish activity. As they collected the prisoners, Kotov's men brought them down to the bank, and boats crossed and recrossed the river, taking them to the other side. Drobnin, Surov, and Nikiforov were there to see that they got across. That was all they could do for them that night. Organized by Kuleshov, the peasants of the neighboring villages rowed the boats to and fro. On the farther bank stood a silent

crowd of women. They gave the prisoners bread, eggs, apples; but these men, who had escaped a terrible death, only rolled their eyes senselessly and tried to sob out their stories. The softhearted women couldn't always endure those stories and raised a cry of lamentation. Then their peasant husbands swore at them vigorously and shook their oars at them. The prisoners were led off into the forest. But the boats crossed and recrossed again and again, and the number of terrified, exhausted men, all but crazy with fear, increased steadily.

Toward daybreak the howl from the fortress died away; the machine guns ceased their incessant chatter and only broke into a short burst from time to time. The people on the riverbank slipped off, leaving behind a score of bodies, men who had died in their escape. The opposite bank was deserted; the boats were drawn up so that they looked as if they had not been shifted for months. Dawn was already coming when Surov, Nikiforov, and Kuleshov withdrew from the river. The gray light revealed Nikiforov's thin features twisted into a look of loathing, and Mark knew what he was thinking. The events of this night had finally forced him into the necessity of open war against the Germans. A timid sort of man, who hated himself for his timidity, he was changed completely now. He had turned up at the bank of his own free will to lend Mark a hand.

The dawn crept over the fortress and slowly dispelled the shadows. The fortress was large, it contained many buildings, the buildings formed streets and alleys; and everywhere in those streets and alleys gray, ragged heaps were lying, sometimes in pools of blood. Outside the great barrack, the yard was thickly littered with the gray heaps. Along the barbed wire were ramparts of bodies. But in the middle of the yard the prisoners were spread like a carpet, their faces pressed to the ground. Occasionally a machine gun rattled from a turret, and then a terrible, almost delirious shout arose: "Don't move!"

The guards on the turrets watched the gray carpet closely, and the moment any part of it moved, they sent a short burst at the spot. The prisoners were to lie perfectly still; so the commandant had ordered. Each burst killed not only the one who had moved but all those in his vicinity.

Sergeant Major Schmutze and Corporal Hoffner counted the dead. They started at opposite ends of the yard and worked toward each other. Each of them had several privates to assist him. Schmutze counted the heads, by fifties, making a mark in his notebook for each fifty. His men turned the dead over with their faces to the sergeant

major. He finished counting one pile of bodies and went to another. When they had finished counting, he added his total to Hoffner's and reported to the commandant: "Three thousand seven hundred and twenty-four."

The officers occupying the storeroom were brought out to the commandant. They had been forbidden to go out during the night, on pain of death, but through the little window above the door they had been able to see all that happened. Roaring out a torrent of curses, the Georgian had struggled to break away from his comrades' restraining hands; Kisiliev had ground his teeth with helpless fury; Igoliev sat huddled in one corner, clutching his head. Now they were led out, in couples. They strode along without a word, their eyes blazing. They were all emaciated, all bearded. The commandant had forbidden them to have razors; the officers must not violate the "Russian style," and in his opinion that style included beards. They walked with heads hanging; only the Georgian looked about him with his black, infuriated eyes. At times a furious snarl rose in his throat, and Colonel Kisiliev, walking at his side, put one hand on his shoulder and whispered through his blanched lips, "Steady, friend, steady!"

"I am glad," the commandant addressed the officers, "that the fire didn't affect the officers' quarters and that not one officer has suffered. A misfortune has occurred, and you see the results. The fire was caused by the prisoners themselves. Russians don't know how to be careful or obey orders. And, you see, these bodies are the result. I've invited you to come so that you can convince yourselves that the German guards did not shoot at the prisoners. The guards did their duty and fired only along the barbed wire to prevent the prisoners escaping. If the prisoners had kept ten yards away from the wire, they would all have survived. You can see that for yourselves, by the way the bodies are disposed. I hope the Russian staff officers will not refuse to confirm that this was so. Perhaps it isn't necessary, but you never know. We may have to draw up a full report of what happened, and then your confirmation will be necessary."

At the commandant's side was a dark, thin officer with black tabs, a death's-head on his buttons—the head of the local Gestapo. Schmutze stood beside him, an automatic across his shoulder. Now he brought it round under his elbow, with the muzzle pointed at the officers, his finger on the trigger. An interpreter read out the document the Soviet officers were to sign. It stated that the German guards had not fired at the prisoners but had only prevented their escape. A soldier brought

up a table and put an inkwell on it. The interpreter laid the document on the table beside the inkwell.

"Well, gentlemen," the commandant said, a note of contemptuous indifference in his voice. "Major Igoliev will sign first."

Igoliev hurriedly stepped forward and signed. A heavy sweat larded his forehead and cheeks. The commandant looked at him disdainfully. "Colonel Kisiliev," he called.

Kisiliev raised his head; his cheeks were flushed. He stared at the commandant with hate-filled eyes and, opening his parched lips with difficulty, quietly said: "I shall not sign."

"What did he say?" the commandant asked his interpreter. But he did not need to know the answer; he knew the Russian colonel had refused to sign the document. "The Georgian officer, please sign."

The Georgian rolled his eyes furiously; his mouth twisted into a sneer of hatred behind its prickly brush. The commandant fell back a step or two in alarm; Schmutze slipped between him and the Georgian. But the Soviet officer had completely lost his self-command, and now nothing could have stopped him. In a mixture of Russian and Georgian he shouted across Schmutze's shoulder:

"You curs! You've slaughtered these human beings like a lot of butchers. You rotting syphilitics with machine guns! You filthy fungus, trying to make us sign that you're a man not a jackal! You can write that you're a swine and a bandit, and then I'll sign it. I'll sign that at once. And you can add that your mother was a bitch, since she gave birth to such a filthy swine as you...."

Out of the corner of his eye Schmutze saw the head of the Gestapo beckon with his hand, and he pressed the trigger. A short burst drowned the Georgian's words; he fell with a last hoarse curse on his lips.

The Gestapo chief gave an order in a sharp screaming voice.

"Colonel Kisiliev, will you sign the document?" the interpreter shouted, imitating the Gestapo man's tone.

Kisiliev slowly looked round at his comrades, ran his eyes over the yard with its carpet of gray, glanced up at the sky, then at a belfry some distance away. His keen eyes caught sight of people in that belfry. Then he looked at Schmutze and, as though answering him and not the interpreter, grimly muttered: "No!"

Schmutze was watching the Gestapo man's hand closely. The hand was raised belt high; the thumb was turned down. Schmutze pressed the trigger. Colonel Kisiliev fell beside the Georgian.

"Major Igoliev," the commandant said, "explain to your colleagues...."

But Igoliev's aid was not required. They all went up to the table and signed furiously, malevolently.

They were escorted back to the storeroom. Schmutze entered two more marks in his list and altered the total. The prisoners in the yard were allowed to rise and were led off in pairs, leaving behind the bodies of the dead.

Just outside the fortress was a small Russian church, old and tumble-down. Its belfry overlooked the yard. When the prisoners began to march off in twos, three men went down the creaking stairs of that belfry: Mark, Kuleshov, Nikiforov. They had seen all that had occurred. They walked without a word through the streets, without looking round once. Mark led the way.



12. The Fall

A GREAT battle was going on for Stalingrad. The German army was trying to break through to the Volga, and held the city in a gigantic vise. Hitler's Field Marshal Paulus was preparing for the decisive attack on Stalingrad and the Volga. The Stalingrad garrison, reinforced by the army of General Chuikov, was putting up a fierce defense. The whole Stalingrad front, under the command of General Andrei Yeremenko, was being feverishly bolstered with fresh reinforcements. The army of Marshal Rokossovski was approaching the banks of the Volga. And from the Far East three elite armies under General Apanasenko were on the way; among them was the Third Tank Army of General Kornei Surov.

A single railroad links the Far Eastern borderlands with Russia. This iron artery was clogged to a standstill. The columns moving westward were jammed up all the way back so that it was estimated that they could not reach the front before spring.

From Stalin's supreme headquarters came orders to General Apanasenko: "Surov's tank army must get through to the Volga at all

costs." The railroads were ordered to push through Surov's forces on a priority basis.

Stalin spoke to Kornei on the long-distance telephone for quite a while. In conclusion, he asked:

"Will you break through?"

Kornei stopped to think, and answered:

"I will break through, if all my columns get here and if the fuel supplies are delivered in time. I have faith in my men, also in my machines, but I have no faith in our supply system, and little in our railroads."

Stalin muttered:

"Too much 'if.' A Bolshevik must forget that word."

"I am, to be sure, Comrade Stalin, a bad Bolshevik," Surov retorted, without yielding. "I did receive a supplementary education from Yezhov, but apparently it didn't help much."

"Don't let's talk about it, Surov," Stalin replied. "We will thrash it out after the war. But now we must break through the German front on the date fixed. And we must break through regardless of cost. Understand?"

"Right!" When Stalin got off the phone, Kornei knitted his brow, felt the scar on his face, and burst out laughing. "I have no desire, Comrade Stalin, to thrash it out after the war."

The day of decision was approaching, and Surov's army was still far from the Stalingrad front. Only one division of light tanks had reached the destination. The medium and heavy tanks were still stuck somewhere on the way. Kornei was resorting to every device to hasten the transportation of his columns. He hurled threats at the commissar of railroads, swearing that he would blow his head off. The officers in charge of supplies were shaking at the mere mention of the name of savage Kornei Surov. But it was all to no avail. The armored columns were crawling along at a snail's pace. The fuel transports were bringing in driblets. It required about half a million gallons of fuel to move Surov's tank army a distance of one hundred kilometers. The supply on hand was about fifty thousand gallons.

"You understand what it means," Surov stormed at the supply officers. "Do you want my tanks to break through, and then become immobilized so that the German artillery can pick us off like sitting ducks? No, you'd better get us enough fuel; otherwise I'll chain you all to the tanks so that when we go into battle you'll have a chance to see what happens to tanks that can't move for lack of gasoline."

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But all this did not produce the required supplies. And Kornei Surov knew that the Germans were bringing up huge reserves of artillery. The only thing that could upset the German plans for a grand offensive would be a sudden stroke by his armored columns to allow time for Apanasenko's Siberian forces to reach the front.

There were only two days left for the operation assigned to Kornei Surov. Although he had anticipated the impasse, yet it had always seemed to him that there was nothing that is impossible in war. He was sure there must be a way out, and now was the time for drastic decision. He had been nursing a scheme that he resolved to unfold to his chief of staff. The latter groaned when he heard it. It now became clear to him why his commanding general had been requesting the most accurate data on the disposition and make-up of the Italian troops, and why he had upon the receipt of such information disappeared to spend a few days with the troops that had fought the Italians.

"But, Comrade General Surov," protested the chief of staff, "what you are planning is not war but adventure."

Kornei smiled at the aged general who was chief of staff, and answered:

"All war is adventure. But what I am planning is a bit of psychology. I know that, with one division of light tanks, to attack an entire corps of Italians when behind them stands a division of heavy German armor is a violation of all the rules of military science. But this war has already made garbage of all those rules. Let me explain why I chose this sector for the break-through. There are two reasons. Psy-cho-lo-gi-cal," Kornei emphasized. "First, because I have respect for the German soldier. How then can I go into attack against him with a single division of light tanks? You know what Fritz will do with them. It would be a different story if all my three divisions were here. And second, the nature of the Italians. I still remember what Maxim Gorky, a great writer, said about Italy. What a beautiful country, he said, and what a gay people—a people that love life. Now a good soldier is he who disdains death, but the Italian wants to live, not to die. Besides, what do the Italians want from Russia? Nothing. Not like the Germans. I reckon that I can smash through their line with one division."

"As long as you don't reckon wrong, Kornei Timofeevich," the chief of staff observed. "Just the same, they have enough artillery to knock all your tanks out."

Kornei agreed. "But there is always luck, too. Besides, I also have a surprise up my sleeve. Did those aerial coffins arrive?"

"Yes, six junky airplanes, unfit for flying. Ancient motors. What are you proposing to use those coffins for?"

"Ah, that's my secret," laughed Kornei.

Two days later the right flank of the Italian sector was thrown into turmoil. Before dawn, the air began to vibrate with a terrific din of roaring motors, coming from behind the Soviet lines. The roar grew and filled the atmosphere with fear. In all likelihood, the Russians were concentrating enormous quantities of tanks on the eve of launching an advance. The Italian artillery opened haphazard fire in the direction of the din. The entire corps was alerted, but the growing noise increased the nervousness of the Italians, who expected the Russians to attack any minute. When the Italian command passed on to the German headquarters the reports from the front lines, the Germans decided that facing them must be at least two divisions of heavy Soviet armor. It was now their turn to become alarmed. They had but one tank division in that sector, and they feared its annihilation. Orders were issued to it to retreat, in the event of a Soviet attack, without engaging the enemy.

While the Italians on the right flank of their sector were in a state of alarm, the Soviet armored force went into action on the left flank. Spread out in a semicircle, the light tanks moved forward, threatening to surround and cut off several Italian regiments. The alarm on the right flank had broken the will to resist of the troops on the left. The Italians began to desert their positions, abandon their arms, and flee. The confusion communicated itself to the right sector, and a gap was opened there. In one of the advance tanks was Kornei Surov, standing in the turret, grinning happily, and shouting into the speaker of the radio phone:

"Forward, comrade tankists. Forward! As far as Italy itself, where, they say, life is gay."

The terrified Italians were unable to halt their disorderly retreat. The Germans tried to stem the flight of their allies, but the latter showed an inclination to move westward only. The Germans had several Italian commanders shot on the spot, but this provoked a fresh wave of embittered hate among the Italians for the Germans.

Kornei turned out to be an uncommon psychologist. With his single armored division he stuck in the rear of the German forces until

his other two tank divisions arrived from the endless journey across Siberia.

Stalin awarded to General Kornei Surov the Order of Hero of the Soviet Union. All the crews of the light tanks in his force received decorations, too.

When the battle was over, Kornei teased his chief of staff.

"And yet, Kornei Timofeevich, it was not military science but an adventure on your part," his chief of staff insisted, embracing him affectionately. They were fast friends—the one, an old graduate from the military academy—the other, a self-made peasant who rose to become a general.

A small, bowlegged man stood talking to Mark. The man had a round, clean-shaven head, brown eyes set wide apart, protruding cheekbones with the dark skin drawn tightly over them, and an absurd little button nose. He was dressed in a simple shirt of coarse linen, trousers made of sacking, and something vaguely resembling boots on his feet. Mark had told him to sit down, but the man found it more convenient to talk standing up. He crumpled his old cap in his hand and chose his words with difficulty, speaking with a non-Russian accent:

"Comrade commander lived in house, a little house, and Mamma was with him. What a good mamma! Abdulla was very sorry for Mamma. Abdulla lived in barracks. Sudden we hear: Satan had attacked. He fired from guns, he fired from heaven. Ai, it was bad. Abdulla wasn't frightened, no. Abdulla ran to his commander, but commander was already dead at his house. Ai, ai, what a hero they killed! Your Ivan lay on the ground, and Mamma beside him on her knees, crying, pressing Ivan's children to her. And Ivan's little wife was lying dead, too. Tanks going through the streets, shooting. I dragged Mamma into the house. She was old, but strong; she tried to go back to Ivan. Through the window Abdulla saw a German take your Ivan, put him on a tank, and drive off. Abdulla wanted to run after comrade commander, but there was Mother. She sat down on the floor in a corner and couldn't speak. She opened her mouth. Abdulla was crying. Your mother died, ai, what a mother she was! I dug a hole outside the house, I said a prayer to Mohammed and buried Mother and Ivan's wife. Ai. ai. what sorrow!"

Mark walked across to the wall and turned his face to it. From Abdulla's disconnected story he gathered that Ivan had been killed

on the first day of the war, and his mother had not survived that terrible shock. Tears started to his eyes; Abdulla stood shifting from foot to foot and began to sob.

"Ai, what a mamma she was!" he said through his tears. "Don't you cry, Mark, don't sorrow much. Satan killed many people then. And he killed Ivan, our comrade commander. Don't cry, Mark."

Mark turned back to Abdulla and stared at him with dry eyes. He seated the Tatar beside him and questioned him about Ivan's children. Abdulla had carried them in his arms to a distant town not yet occupied by the Germans. He had carried them for two weeks along forest byways, had left them in the forest at night while he went to the nearby villages and obtained food for them. "Boris cried a lot, but the girl not; only she was silent, oh, she was silent," he said. When they reached safety, the children were taken from him, and he was sent to a regiment. He was told they would be put in a children's home.

Abdulla was one of the prisoners who had been taken across the river the night of the fire in the camp. He had been carried half dead to a distant village, and there he had heard the name of Surov. "I knew at once Mark was here," he said. When spring arrived and he grew stronger, he had come to find Mark.

"And what are you going to do now, Abdulla?" Surov asked him.

"Abdulla will stay with you," he answered, and he seemed so confident that he would be allowed to stay that Mark felt a great surge of warmth for him and agreed. It was not long before the Tatar became as attached to him as he had been to Ivan. And Maria helped to take the place of the mamma whom he would never forget.

The news of Ivan's and his mother's death was a shock to Mark. But the human soul has room for an infinity of sorrow; and the more sorrow it contains, the greater grows its capacity. From that day when Abdulla brought the news Mark was a different being; it was as if his soul had melted, the clouds that had gathered over the years had grown thinner; and so outwardly he grew more cheerful. He had the feeling that his mother was with him, and that it was her sorrow speaking within him when he had decided that they must fight. Fight for what, and in the name of what? The mother country, the nation, the soil with which he was so closely linked—all these were concentrated in the one conception: mother. To fight so that tears should not gather in the souls of mothers, so that evil should not be so fruitful on the earth, so that the people might have the right to smile and rejoice.

Maria felt at once that he had changed. Previously he had been

unsociable, rude, filled with yearning; but after Abdulla's arrival he would come back from his expeditions obviously happy, greedy for her caresses, trustfully confiding everything to her. Maria knew he loved her, and she loved him. During those days she saw him only rarely; he was away for long periods; and she knew she must not hinder him. He had taken on an almost intolerable burden and must carry it to the end.

Daily that burden grew more oppressive. The rumors that had been circulating about the mass exterminations of the Jews were being confirmed. Towns were named, and the numbers of Jews exterminated in those communities were specified. The tide of wholesale executions was rolling on from the west, and there was no way of stopping it. To be sure, the Germans were slaughtering Russian Christians in cold blood, but there was some pattern of selectivity in their acts. Not so in their treatment of the Jews. They were killing off Jews simply because they were Jews. At first the people refused to believe the reports, although the common folk had long entertained prejudices against, often hostility toward, the Jews. But this friction would express itself only in minor outbursts. The very fishwife in the market place who but yesterday blamed the Jews for all her woes, for Stalin himself, now reacted to the news about the extermination campaign undertaken by the Germans:

"Can it really be that those sons of Cain mean to kill off all our Jews?"

And the Jews who had refused to believe the stories about the Germans now began to show their terrible perplexity. The towns grew still, as if on the eve of some fearful happenings. The youths disappeared from the ghettos, making for the forests. Yet even so, many remained, as if unconvinced of the inevitable. In the half-ruined house where Mark had his quarters, many of those fleeing called on him for hurried consultations, just before they disappeared altogether. Dr. Zalkind was one of those who dropped in from time to time.

One cheerful, sunny morning the doctor knocked at the door and stood waiting, thin and wretched-looking, his gray hair falling about his face. Mark let him in.

"Well?" he asked, leading him to the table. The doctor sank into a chair and threw out his hands bitterly:

"They don't believe it."

"But that's mass insanity," Mark cried out.

The doctor sat with his head drooping. The sight of him aroused

Mark. He seized Zalkind by his jacket and shook him, shouting furiously:

"You at least must wake up, Zalkind! Get it clearly in your head that the Germans are preparing to wipe out the Jews altogether. I know what they have done in Minsk, in Zhitomir, in Kiev."

"Don't shake me, Surov," the doctor quietly answered, pushing Mark's hands away. "I know you're right. But the Jews in the ghetto still want to live in hope."

Mark clutched his head.

"It's predestined retribution, for all, for yours and mine, and there is no avoiding it," Zalkind pronounced. The remark drove Mark to frenzy, and he sneered.

"Predestined retribution! By whom and by what right? Fight, damn it! Fight till you drop, bury your teeth in the enemy's throat before he bites through yours!"

He stopped and wiped the sweat from his face. In a weary tone, as if he had expended all his strength in that shout, he added, "Forgive me, Zalkind. But what can we do?"

The German guards posted at the bridge allowed the trains of carts to pass over. Dozens of carts packed with children, gazing with terrified eyes over the sides. The trains of carts crossed the bridge by night. They were escorted by Russian police from Kotov's force. The guards closely examined the passes issued by the German town major's office; they stated that the children were from a children's home that was being transferred to another district.

Boats slipped across the river by night. The rowers waited for passengers and, when they arrived, noiselessly transferred them to the other bank. Not a word was spoken by rowers or passengers.

In one of the side streets of the town was a long, white, three-storied building. Several of the windows of the second floor were always shuttered fast with wooden boards. The town's inhabitants tried to avoid that street; they were frightened by that white house, by those wooden boards, over windows behind which— Nobody knew what really lay behind those wooden boards, but it was rumored that those rooms were set apart for condemned prisoners. The house was the headquarters of the local Gestapo. Automobiles drove in and out of the yard; sentries paced up and down outside the building; the boarded windows stared gloomily into the street.

One sunny summer day a German detachment went to the ghetto.

Well-fed youngsters in S.S. guards uniform were posted all round it, and the Jews were forbidden to leave. Now the air of anxiety in the town grew heavier; the people avoided going out more than they could help. Word went around that only old people had been left in the ghetto, for all the younger Jews had gone off, nobody knew where.

Then another rumor spread through the town: Surov, Nikiforov, Drobnin, and many others had been arrested and flung into those rooms behind the wooden boards. Soon that rumor was followed by another: they had all been shot.

Nikiforov's family was in tears; Maria rushed from office to office in the town; but she could learn nothing about Mark and his friends. But the rumor grew more and more persistent, until everybody believed they were dead. The old priest held a requiem mass in the church for the peace of their souls. The choir chanted mournfully; the priest's voice was hardly audible as he thought of that strange man who had come to the church not as a humble petitioner, but demanding and insistent. Every man goes his own way to God, the old priest was thinking. God is too great for Him to be offended by the doubts of His little ones, and He is too wise not to forgive those who demand rather than petition. The choir chanted mournfully; in one corner stood a woman in black. It was Vera Pavlovna, and she had arranged for the mass. Maria still went on hoping that Mark was alive, but Vera Pavlovna knew he was dead. And she bowed her forehead low, down to the cold paving, as she sent up a wordless prayer for the peace of Mark Surov's soul.

One night the crack of rifleshots sounded through the streets. The German patrols made their rounds; the people held their breath in their houses. Toward morning the sound of shooting died down, and all was quiet.

When the shooting broke out that night, a man got up from the floor of one of the rooms behind the boarded windows. He stood in the darkness, tensely listening to the firing, then dropped with a groan to the floor. "They're shooting," the others heard Drobnin say. The darkness responded with the tense, heavy breathing of many men, but no voice spoke. Then the one who had got up from the floor said quietly, distinctly enunciating each word: "It's in the ghetto." The darkness throbbed with the silence; no one said another word till morning.

In the daytime only two slender rays penetrated into the darkened room through chinks in the boards. There were twelve men in the one small room. But there was space enough for them to lie down with their heads to the walls. Their feet met in the middle: six pairs against six pairs.

They had grown used to the darkness and could see in it. Mark Surov lay in one corner, with his face to the wall, sleeping or pretending to sleep. All the prisoners had been arrested on one day, at the same hour. They had been rounded up at dawn and brought to the dark room, from which there was only one exit—through death. But none of them talked of death, though they thought about it. Mark had been expecting something of this kind to happen, and yet it had come unexpectedly. After paying a visit to Maria he had returned to his quarters and had sat a long time at the table, worn out from his exertions. Abdulla was not there; he frequently spent the night in the barrack assigned to Kotov's force.

It was late in the night when Mark went to his bed, a hard, soldier's bed, covered with a thick gray blanket. He didn't bother to undress; he fell asleep at once, and all the world with its anxieties, its pain, its doubts, fell away. . . . Suddenly he felt someone standing over him. He opened his eyes. Staring at him was a harsh and evil German face. Mark looked about him and saw several other soldiers, with automatics. I forgot to fasten the door! he thought, incomprehensibly annoyed with himself. The German searched him but found no weapons. "Get up!" the officer in charge ordered, and he obediently got up.

I can't do anything now! he thought with a queer feeling of tranquillity.

He was the first to be brought in to the Gestapo headquarters, but Drobnin and Nikiforov followed almost at once. Later eight young Russians in uniform were brought in. They were members of a Russian detachment; the Germans had arrested them in the street. Their detachment was stationed in a distant forest area; they had been sent to the town on official business and had been captured. Several hours later Abdulla was flung into the room. As the door closed behind him he halted, unable to see, and asked: "Is Mark Surov here?"

He was delighted when he heard Mark call to him from the corner; stumbling over the others' legs, he went across to him, felt to make sure it was he, and silently sat down at his side. He was silent a long time; then he told Mark that Kotov had led his force out of the town. One of his patrols had seen the Germans put Mark into an automobile,

and had reported the news at once. The Lieutenant saw that the time had come about which he had frequently talked with Mark. He swiftly assembled his small force in the back yard of the barrack, and led it through side streets into the country. He ordered Abdulla to go with them, but the Tatar had quietly fallen out and returned to the town. He had been taken in the street.

The time passed slowly, oppressively. In that dark room the only point of light each morning was Abdulla's ball-shaped head. At a certain moment, as the sun pierced the chinks, its rays fell on that head, and Mark knew that when they slipped off it was dinnertime. They had no other means of telling the time; the Germans had relieved them of their watches. Abdulla sat humming his wordless song all day.

A sentry paced up and down outside the window; a sentry was on guard outside the door. Each morning the prisoners were led into the yard for ten minutes' exercise; during those ten minutes the yard was crowded with guards, and a machine gun poked its muzzle out of the window, following them as they walked round the yard.

One bright, sunny morning, one of those mornings when it is good to stride across the fields and to take deep breaths of the healing scents of the earth, they went out for their exercise as usual. Suddenly, when the ten minutes were almost up, a wind began to blow. Everything around them turned gray; the sun was transformed into a glowing crimson sphere; the dust rose from the ground. The wind grew stronger and stronger; it started to howl evilly, furiously. The prisoners were ordered back to their room. The wind blew against them, threatening to bowl them over. The trees growing in the yard seemed to be quivering with the ague. All their branches were turned in one direction in submission to the wind; their leaves began to snap off, to fly into the men's faces before being carried away in a whirlwind of dust.

The early fall seemed to come as a gloomy presentiment. Mark did not realize at once what it meant; it took possession not of his consciousness, but of the deeper reaches of his mind, and it was difficult to define. After all, what presentiment could he have? Like Drobnin and Nikiforov, he knew that there was only one way of release from that dark room. He felt that the leaves flying in the yard that morning were a sign that a great fall of the leaf had started all over the world, a fall in which every leaf was a human destiny.

The prisoners were not taken out to be questioned, and Drobnin felt sure they would not be. "They'll send us to the next world without

any bureaucratism," he jested moodily. But Mark thought otherwise. The Germans would need to have some documentary evidence of the end of Surov, Drobnin, Nikiforov, Abdulla, and the eight young Russians. Mark felt especially anxious about those eight. They had no idea why they had been arrested; with all their youthful virility they believed that they would live. They were members of a force that had recently wiped out a German local command. Possibly they did not know that, for only a score of men had taken part in the operation. But probably the Germans had identified the force responsible for the attack, in which the German commander, a man notorious for his brutality, had been killed. And in that case, Mark knew that the eight men were doomed.

It was hardest of all for Nikiforov; yet Mark felt no anxiety for him. He would hold out. All his life he had regarded himself as a nervous sort of man; he had always been afraid of something or other and hated himself for it. But now he had become a fighter. He had taken part in several dangerous enterprises and had never trembled. Life refashions men. So now he had no fear of death, only a deep longing and anxiety for his wife and children and a fear lest he would not be able to endure to the end.

Twenty days passed thus; the twenty-first arrived. As on every other day, after their ten minutes' exercise the German guards brought them a can of hot water, three mugs for the twelve of them, twelve pieces of bread, and twelve tiny scoops of jam. Some time later the key turned in the lock. The door opened; the guard and two other men with automatics were standing outside.

"Mark Surov!" the guard shouted.

Mark silently rose; he was taken to another part of the building. Beyond an iron door the corridor was carpeted. At the end of that corridor he was escorted into a large room with exaggeratedly simple furnishings; a heavy, roughly made table, primitive chairs. The head of the Gestapo was at the table. His tunic was buttoned up; his fresh, clean-shaven face turned to greet Mark frigidly. The escort clicked their heels and went out, leaving the prisoner at the door.

"D'you speak German?" the Gestapo officer asked.

"No."

"Then we'll talk in Russian. Please sit down."

Mark was not expecting that. He had met this man a number of times and had never guessed that he knew Russian. Why had he decided to hide the fact no longer? Surely because Mark was now a pris-

oner, and nobody would ever learn that piece of information from him. "So our inevitable meeting has taken place, Major Surov," the Gestapo man said, and a smile played on his lips. "Really there was no necessity for it even at this stage, but we have shown so much interest in each other that it would have been discourteous for us to go our separate ways without a talk. Don't you think so? As we have met, we'll be quite frank. You see, we've known for a long time that you're an officer who escaped from the P.O.W. camp. It was a little imprudent of you to remain in the town where you'd been a prisoner, but we'd have known all about you just the same if you'd been in any other town. For certain reasons we left you free for the time being. But now we have taken charge of you, I've no intention of forcing you to talk. You see, I can tell you more about yourself than you can. You may be surprised to hear me say that we divined your game. We grant that it was ingenious. Really, planned rather wellorganize a Soviet republic in our rear, to assemble forces with our help, in order to cut our communications later. Bold, intelligent, well calculated. So subtle that the German military command didn't even catch on to your game and began to help you. You obtained permission to set up an autonomous region in a forested area that was beyond control by the German army; you put Vysokov at its head.... By the way, what can you tell us about Vysokov's past?"

"Nothing," Mark said morosely. "I came to know him here."

"We have just a suspicion that he is not really Vysokov, but..." He shifted a pencil thoughtfully from one spot to another. "He played some part in the Soviet army....But it's too late to clear that up now."

Mark thought so, too. He knew that Vysokov had perished quite recently—in a fight, so it was said, with a parachute force sent from Moscow. His regional organization had been liquidated, and a German garrison was stationed there now. Mark had grounds for thinking that Vysokov had not fallen in a fight, but had been treacherously murdered by the Germans. But he hadn't been able to find out definitely before he was arrested.

"Vysokov armed the population, formed detachments," the Gestapo man continued. "You and your friends organized a steady flow of youths to his district, and there they became soldiers. That was the first point of concentration of your forces. Next, you secured the temporary release of several thousand prisoners of war and formed them into volunteer battalions. That was your second concentration

point. In a certain case, which you know of, you were even able to influence us. You personally persuaded our military to form a Russian battalion, and then you organized a flow of volunteers into it, and we agreed to take them into the German service. But instead of a small detachment, we found ourselves saddled with a force of two thousand men, with tanks and artillery, which proved insubordinate from the very beginning. And when recently we tried to disarm these men, they revolted. But that's not important...."

To Mark it was very important. So the Germans had tried to disarm that force, which was stationed far from that town, in the Pripet Marshes near Pinsk. Had they succeeded?

"And so you disarmed them?" he asked quietly. The Gestapo man stared at him, and the smile played again round his lips.

"Our respective positions are such that I can tell you. The force revolted, killed a score of our men attached to it, and made off into the forest. But that doesn't matter; it will be wiped out in any case. The important thing is that that force constituted your third point of concentration. Meanwhile you were forming small detachments for local defense. Like the Kotov force, which was stationed here. These detachments were your operational reserve.

"I could tell you a great deal more about your activities; but I've said enough. For instance, that on your orders Kotov got Jews out of the ghetto, and that someone organized their crossing of the river; and also about your help to the prisoners who escaped from the camp during the fire. But these are details not worth mentioning in comparison with the piquant fact that there was a whole network of armed Russian forces existing in our rear. We've seen through you pretty well, haven't we, Major Surov?"

"You've seen nothing," Mark replied firmly.

"Of course, if you're going to talk like that this conversation is quite unnecessary. I realize that you're an officer and can't violate your oath. I'm an officer myself, and I quite understand. That is precisely why I've told you so much, to save you the necessity of violating your oath. I can assure you we don't need your confirmation."

"All the same you haven't understood a thing," Mark answered. "All you've said is pure fairy tale, the cheap fabrication of a pretty poor sort of intelligence service."

He was beginning to get mad; he felt like seizing this German by the throat and choking the life out of him. His eyes blazing with hate, he leaned across the table and said: "All you've done is to think up a pretty poor sort of yarn. Hitler's wasting his money on you; you deserve to be whipped for such work. And another thing—get on with your filthy job but don't talk about an officer's honor. You've got as much honor as a streetwalker has innocence."

The German rose to his feet; his face went ashen. He stood for a moment, gasping for air. Then his eyes, momentarily bewildered, turned cold and ruthless:

"Good!" he said. He pressed a button on his table.

Mark was escorted back to the cell. He stood just inside the door and told the others all that had happened during the interview. "I don't think what I said at the end will make any difference to us," he said in conclusion.

He went to his corner and dropped down beside Abdulla. The Tatar laid his hand on Mark's shoulder and said quietly:

"Don't worry, Mark; everything will be all right."

Abdulla struck up his song again. Now he sang of the tree the wind stripped of leaves, to carry them about the earth. He made up the song as he went, and Mark imagined he could see those driven leaves. Autumn had come.



13. The Inevitable

A GERMAN automobile halted outside Vera Pavlovna's house. Maria conducted an elderly German in military uniform into her room, where a civilian with a gray pointed beard and old-fashioned gold-rimmed spectacles rose to meet him.

The Russian and the German were old friends from their student days in a German university, where they had both studied medicine. In those days the Russian was wealthy, and it was not surprising that he had paid the poor German student's fees more than once. In 1941 Hans Vieber had arrived in the Russian area, a stout and important staff surgeon. Here he met his old friend Simonov, now a poor and lonely doctor attached to the local hospital.

When Mark was arrested, Maria had gone to Simonov, a good

friend of Zalkind's, for help. Something in her terrified eyes made him go to see Vieber, who, sorry for his old friend, agreed to help.

"Surov's still alive," Vieber said slowly. "They would have been shot already, but an order has unexpectedly arrived from the *Reichscommissariat* at Minsk; they are to be transferred to Minsk, where they will be hanged together with other criminals."

Simonov thanked Vieber warmly for the information and shook his plump hand. Summoning up his half-forgotten German he promised to prove his gratitude if the occasion arose. Vieber purred with satisfaction, happy to be able to render his old friend such an insignificant service.

A motorcycle and sidecar drove out of the town. From time to time they were halted by German posts, who checked their pass, which stated that the Russian doctor had been given permission to visit patients in nearby towns. Two hours later the motorcycle halted at a building occupied by the municipal administration in a small town. Here Simonov was met by a stocky, very broad-shouldered, clean-shaven man with translucent blue eyes in an aged, weather-beaten face. Kuleshov was changed almost beyond recognition. His great beard had gone; he had replaced his peasant's dress by town clothes, rather small for his huge body. And now his name was not Kuleshov, but Voronov.

Simonov hurriedly told him Bieber's news. The prisoners were to be taken to Minsk the next day. Without saying a word Kuleshov left the room. A moment or two later a horseman rode past the window at a desperate gallop.

Early the following morning the door of the prisoners' room was opened, and quite a large force of soldiers armed with automatics appeared outside. One of them carried ropes. The prisoners scrambled to their feet and waited. Such a stale, foul smell came from the room that the German in front started back. He turned over the documents in his hand and shouted:

"Surov!"

It's come at last, Mark thought. He replied calmly, almost indifferently: "I'm Surov."

"Drobnin."

Drobnin was already at Mark's side; he clutched Mark's hand and said almost with a sob: "I'm Drobnin."

The two men were led out into the corridor; the door was shut and

locked. The others dropped to the floor. Abdulla was panting hoarsely. The rest were silent. So only two of them had been taken. But the respite for the others might be only for an hour, or a day. Or it might be permanent? Nikiforov hated himself for the thought, yet that loath-some hope of life would not be stifled; he clutched his head; he hated himself and went on hoping.

Meanwhile the German took two ropes from the bunch. Mark put his hands behind his back. Resist, shout, fight? To what purpose? What was happening was inevitable; let it happen. Only, the sooner the better. The man bound Mark's hands behind him, then Drobnin's.

They were taken out into the yard and put into a truck. Those condemned to be shot were always taken in a truck to a spot outside the town. Mark and Drobnin were made to sit on the front bench, right against the driver's cabin. The rear bench was occupied by guards. Mark looked at them. The faces of murderers. The S.S. had trained them.

Abdulla, Nikiforov, and the eight soldiers were brought out. The hope of life had proved illusory. Nikiforov walked with his head hanging; Abdulla trotted along beside him on his absurd bowlegs. The Russian youngsters were also escorted to the truck. They were bewildered. The idea of death had not occurred to them before, but now it overwhelmed them. As they were brought up, one of them cried out hysterically and rushed away. "I don't want to, I don't want to," he wailed. But the German soldiers caught him, knocked him to the ground, beat him with their rifle butts. The other seven scattered and ran; but can a man run away from death? They were beaten up and flung into the truck, the guards took their places, and the truck set off. At the gate an automobile with a machine gun poking through the windshield fell in behind them.

When it drove out of the yard, the truck turned to the left. That was as the prisoners had expected. It would turn left, drive to the main street, and there turn right, out of the town, toward a grove that was the usual place of execution. When the truck entered the main street, a woman rose from a bench on the opposite side of the road. She waved to the truck. Mark recognized her and bit his lips till it hurt: What did you do that for, Maria? Good-by! I know you're with me, my dear. But you must go on living, and you will.

The familiar streets slowly rolled past and away from them. Soon they should be turning to the right; then another turn into the grove, and there would be no more turns to negotiate in this life. The young soldier who had tried to escape suddenly raised his voice in an animal howl: "I don't want to die! Save me!"

His shout burst from the truck, fled over the streets, over the houses. A young German guard raised his automatic and beat the youngster on the head. He slipped from the bench; the cry died away. That's just as well, Mark thought. He'll arrive unconscious. It'll be easier for him. He shuddered as he thought how terrible death must seem to this lad. And not to you? he asked himself. He felt that within him, too, was growing a terrible desire to cry out like the youngster. But he pressed his lips together and thrust his back against the cabin.

In a moment now they should be turning to the right. But just as the truck approached the turn, a military column went across, and it had to stop. Every second seemed eternity, but the truck stood dead while the grating of caterpillar tracks and orders shouted in German barred its way. The waiting grew so oppressive that Nikiforov said with a groan: "Hurry, for God's sake, faster!" And Drobnin answered, "I can't stand it much longer."

The clatter and shouting died away; the truck started off again. In a moment... the truck did not turn to the right! It turned to the left and began to bounce over the potholes of the cobbled highroad. Why had it turned left? Their eyes lit up, but still they did not dare to believe. The driver drove out of the town, and they sped along through open country. Soon they would be passing through forest, with trees running down to the road on both sides. Perhaps there? But when the truck had traveled some miles, the hope of life began to return. The Germans would never have brought them so far simply to shoot them. The youngster came round, and his companions called to him: "We're not being taken to be shot." He slowly raised his head and began to cry, sobbing like a child. The German guards unconcernedly eyed these Russians, who seemed to be so pleased about something. The guards knew where they were going.

The truck sped deeper and deeper into the forest; now the trees hung their branches overhead on both sides. The tarpaulin at the rear of the truck was drawn aside, and Mark could see the forest road and the automobile with its machine gun. Suddenly the truck driver applied his brakes sharply, so sharply that the machine jolted back like a horse reined in on its haunches. Those inside could hear the driver cursing as he climbed down. Mark guessed that the road was blocked by a fallen tree. Someone walked along at the side of the

truck, and over the tailboard Korovin's old-fashioned little face peered inside. He caught sight of Mark and at once gave a long, shrill whistle, at the same time dropping to the ground. A rapid burst of rifle fire rang out; a machine gun barked. The bullets hummed like bees. The German guards sprang one after another out of the truck and dropped down beside Korovin; but as they fell he finished them off with pistol shots. Gazing across the tailboard, Mark saw the Germans tumbling out of the automobile. But they did not get up from the road where they dropped. The machine gun whined as if the forest were infuriated.

It was all over in a moment or two. The machine gun stopped. Mark was the first to jump out of the truck into the arms of Kuleshov and Kotov. Korovin hung round Abdulla's neck, then cut the rope binding his hands. The men of Kotov's force dragged out one German who had taken shelter under a bench in the truck. He stared with terror-stricken eyes at the men in German uniforms and tried to say something. Korovin raised his automatic:

"You get no mercy from us, you cur!" He fired point-blank at the German.

The force withdrew into the forest. Over their heads was a canopy of green branches. Suddenly Drobnin began to laugh aloud hysterically. Mark took him by the shoulder and shook him:

"Shut up, old fellow; you mustn't laugh like that! We've got a little longer to live!" A hysterical laugh burst from his own throat. "We've got a little longer to live!" he repeated, wiping the tears from his eyes.

Behind them rose columns of fire and smoke. The German machines with the German bodies in them had been set on fire. "We've got a little longer to live," Mark said once more. With the Kotov force he retired rapidly into the forest.



Another year had gone by, and with it was gone the time of Hitler's easy victories. The German armies were falling back more and more openly. Their communiqués spoke of "shortening the fronts," but

everybody knew that was the synonym for retreat. Even so, the Germans still believed in their stars. The Fuehrer had ordered them to believe. He promised a new weapon with which Germany would bring the whole world to its knees. At the front faith evaporated quickly. But behind the line it still existed.

The rear of the eastern front was flooded with officials in uniforms of every hue. Red caps, brown chevrons, gold-brown uniforms, silver and gold epaulets, buttons, badges, belts. The uninitiated could not make head or tail of it all. The officials were given the nickname "Golden Pheasants." They had come to Russia to administer the country. The Germans did not have sufficient soldiers for the front; but instead of regiments of soldiers, Berlin sent regiments of officials. They were under the control of the Minister for the Eastern Areas, Herr Alfred Rosenberg, who had been raised and educated in Russia, but who had come to hate everything Russian with a savage hatred.

By the will of Hitler, Rosenberg was made ruler of the Russians. By his order the Russian people were subjected to ruthless pillage. The grain, the cattle, everything that was Russian became in effect German property. Hordes of Golden Pheasants swarmed like locusts through the villages, taking everything they found. Trainloads of goods and treasures moved to Germany. Other trains carried Russians off to slave labor.

The Golden Pheasants were well trained. They had been initiated into the secret of the knout and the gingerbread. Both the one and the other were applied in the task of administering the slaves. Show them the gingerbread; beat them with the knout. The towns and villages were smothered with posters. Against a blood-red background stood a man in brown, his head raised arrogantly, a strand of hair falling over his brow. In yard-high letters the placards screamed:

"Hitler is bringing you liberation from Communism."

"Hitler will give you land and freedom."

But the days of naïve belief in the Germans had passed. The villages did not obey the orders to turn in their food stocks. The villagers themselves were starving. So the Germans took to the knout. Punitive detachments arrived, to shoot the inhabitants, to burn down the houses. On the house walls the placards with the man in brown also went up in flames.

The towns were silent; they seemed to be watching and waiting. From time to time they were seized with a fever. The Germans hanged partisans in the streets, and their bodies swayed from the balconies and the posts for days. The towns did not obey the order to supply Russians for work in Germany. So the Germans would surround the theaters during performances, raid the markets on market days. They rounded up all they could catch and dispatched them to the station, where the human freight was shipped westward.

Now the German rear was like a boiling caldron. Soviet planes flew over it, dropping their consignments in the forests for the partisans. German trains loaded with precious military material went rolling down embankments. Adolf Hitler's officers and soldiers perished in railway catastrophes. Resistance to the Germans grew with every day, every hour. Now there were no safe places for Germans anywhere on Russian soil. And in the German occupation offices one heard discreet talk of a new outfit: "Die Schwarze Katze."

The Black Cat. The terrible marks of its claws were to be seen everywhere. It attacked German posts at night. It killed German officials. It destroyed the force commanded by Major Renkwer, who was notorious for his ruthless treatment of the Russians. The train carrying his detachment went down an embankment. Those who escaped were shot as they crawled out.

After every demonstration of its power the Black Cat left behind this warning:

"The Black Cat is defending the people. For every Russian killed a German will be killed."

One day a red-bearded, rawboned peasant, with a peasant's bag across his shoulder, made his way into the little town where Kuleshov had lived for some time under the name of Voronov. The peasant was dressed as a peasant should be, in patched boots, with dirty rags peering through the holes, in a coarse jacket cut from military cloth, and under it a simple linen shirt. The only unusual feature of his dress was his headgear, a winter fur cap, which had obviously seen many years of service and looked like a filthy clump of wool. It was drawn down close over his head. Yet even that cap was not so unusual after all; obviously the man had no summer clothing and had to go on wearing his winter cap, though the air was warm with the sunlight of a mild autumn day.

The red beard made his way not by the road, which ran over a hill into the town, but along the riverbank. That, too, was not unusual. In troubled times people prefer to make their way by quiet routes, avoiding possible meetings. The man walked along boldly, swinging

his stick, limping a little on his left leg. He crossed a plank that formed a narrow bridge over the little stream, and entered the town.

It was unusually quiet in the streets; nobody was to be seen; no children were playing; even the pigs, cats, and dogs, usually so plentiful on the outskirts of a Russian town, had vanished. As he noticed how empty the streets were, the wayfarer hurried still more. Occasionally he glanced sidelong at the houses, the gardens, the people to be seen lurking behind the windowpanes. A notice stood out on a fence, and he turned to read it. The German Commissar Bido was announcing a further execution of Russians who had dared to resist the Germans. Sixteen names, and the first name on the list was Kuleshov. At the bottom of the notice the town major ordered the inhabitants to be present at the execution.

The red-bearded man went on his way; but suddenly he stopped and waited. At the far end of the street green-uniformed men armed with rifles had appeared. The German troops were driving the people out of their houses. The Russians came out and slowly wandered toward the center of the town, a look of mute submission on their faces. The streets gradually filled with people, all moving slowly in the same direction. The red-bearded man went with them. Of them all, he alone seemed to be in a hurry.

In countless little streams people flowed along the streets toward the town square. The square was filled with an oppressive silence. The populace gazed fearfully at the German police surrounding the square, and at a three-story building at one end. A balcony ran along the entire front of this building, and German soldiers were doing something on the balcony.

A movement set in at the back of the crowd at one point, and the square sighed with voices: "Here they come!"

The people fell back, turned their eyes away. A procession walked across the square. The condemned were tied together in pairs and were surrounded by a German escort. The first couple consisted of a youthful giant and a thin young girl. The giant walked barefoot through the dust, his shoulders swelling with muscles, his shirt torn open and revealing a powerful chest. Before the German guards could stop her, a little old woman in black started out of the crowd and flung herself at the girl's feet; clutching her knees, she hung on to her. The prisoners came to a halt, the escort shouted, but the old woman heard nothing. The girl dropped to her knees; the giant tied to her side bent down to enable her to reach her mother. Hysterical cries rose

from the watching women, but the German escort pulled the old woman up by her arms and flung her into the crowd. Many hands were stretched out to catch her, and she did not fall to the ground, but was passed slowly from hand to hand over the people's heads. She was very still, perhaps dead already. The girl remained on her knees, with her head bowed almost to the ground. Her tears fell into the dust, and the dust turned them into small gray pearls. A German guard seized her furiously by the arm, dragged her to her feet, and struck her between the shoulder blades. She staggered forward, dragging the giant behind her. But as he went on, the young giant raised his bare foot and kicked the German. The blow hardly made a sound; but the man flew some distance and fell on his knees, letting his rifle drop. The crowd held its breath. Now raging mad, the guard rushed with raised rifle butt at the prisoner; but someone shouted an order, and he let it fall.

The gloomy procession moved on. Kuleshov was in the third pair. Like the others, he had his hands tied behind him. At his side was a tall, bowed man, who walked with his head drooping. Tears were rolling down his cheeks, over his chin. He walked calmly enough, yet he was weeping. Kuleshov, too, walked calmly; he was no longer of this world. He was breathing heavily; the beating he had suffered had left him with little strength. One of his eyes was closed with a deep purple swelling, the other gazed sternly and calmly. His mouth was open as he gasped for air, revealing a toothless gap.

Behind Kuleshov was an old man with a white, bloodstained beard. At his side was a pale, thin youngster, shivering with fear. Father and son. The father walked along with his face turned to his son, saying something softly, a smile on his swollen lips.

Under the balcony was a crowd of Germans. Golden Pheasants and green uniforms. Among them was Major Igoliev, pale, but resolute, in a new German uniform. The Germans were still trying to organize Russian forces to make up for the glaring shortage of their own troops, and Igoliev was in command of one such force. But he performed other functions, too. A stout German with icy eyes beckoned to him and presented him to a high-ranking Golden Pheasant. "Major Igoliev is one of our most valued collaborators," he said. "It was through him that we succeeded in unmasking this Kuleshov group."

The condemned Russians were led under the balcony. Ropes hung from it, and below each rope was a plain wooden stool. The lad following Kuleshov cried out heart-rendingly; his father spoke to him sternly, then bent across and kissed him on his bloodstained cheek. As the prisoners stood on the stools, they rose above the heads of the Germans round them. Some were too weak to stand; they were supported by their guards. The nooses were placed round their necks. A German officer read something from a document. Kuleshov stood swaying on the stool, gazing with his one sound eye at the people's faces. He was reconciled to death and had no further desire, except, perhaps, that it might come quickly. Suddenly his eye rested on a pair of eyes fixed on him—broadly set, gray eyes burning with pain. The red-bearded peasant was standing among the crowd, leaning on his stick. He had a broad brow cleft by a deep vertical furrow. The German official monotonously read out the sentences, while Kuleshov and the red-bearded peasant stared at each other as though carrying on a wordless conversation:

"Don't worry, Mark; everyone comes to his own end. But why have you come here? To see me off on my long journey?"

"Hold on, old man!" the red-bearded peasant telegraphed back with his eyes. "It's the end, I know. There's nothing we can do. So go on your long journey, old fellow. We'll hold a sumptuous funeral banquet for you, for you and your friends. Men like you are immortal; through men like you our land goes on living. And so farewell, old fellow. Farewell."

The answer was to be read in Kuleshov's gleaming, fully conscious eye and his mournful smile:

"You needn't say any more, Mark. I understand. It is inevitable, Mark, and we must reconcile ourselves to it. Farewell, don't let death get you, and go on fighting."

The German shouted something. Sixteen nooses tightened round sixteen necks. A hysterical wail rose all around the square. People turned away to avoid seeing the prisoners struggling in the nooses. Mothers covered their children's eyes. The red-bearded peasant fixed his eyes on the hanging faces. His face was rigid, stony. He must see it all. And remember it all.

As Major Igoliev was entering the barracks of his regiment after the execution, he felt someone's eyes following him. He turned sharply, and his eyes met an indifferent, sleepy gaze coming from a redbearded peasant on the other side of the street. It's my nerves, the Major thought. The red-bearded man remained standing for a moment, then slowly walked on. Two soldiers came out of the barracks and ambled along, keeping at a respectful distance. The red-bearded man went to a house on the outskirts of the town, opened the wicket gate, and entered the yard. A moment later the two soldiers darted through the same gate and fastened it firmly on the inside.

Later on that day of the execution Igoliev was handed a letter by a soldier in his regiment. The long sheet of paper was covered with small, feminine writing. The confused love missive with its complaints of his infidelity and garrulous declarations of everlasting devotion evidently did not arouse his interest in the least; after glancing at it, he spread the sheet on his desk, then took a sheet of cardboard with numerous small holes in it from under a file. He laid the cardboard over the letter, its top edge level with the first line of the writing. Letters showing through the opening in the cardboard spelled out:

t o morrow n in ea minth e sa me plac e

He sat for a long time contemplating the message. Tomorrow morning at nine he would have another meeting with the men who were arranging for his return to Moscow with honor, possibly with glory. The letter had been brought by a man whom he had recently taken into his regiment on German recommendation. That made him rub his hands cheerfully. The Germans had sent him this soldier with the recommendation that he was very reliable; yet the man had brought a letter from those whom Igoliev would be seeing tomorrow. "They" were good at choosing their men. "They" were the people from Moscow. Igoliev had for some time concluded that the Germans would inevitably lose the war, and so he had made contact with "them." He had been promised not only full pardon for all his past sins, but a brilliant return after he had carried out an "especially important governmental task." The task was very simple. He enjoyed the confidence of the Germans, and that facilitated it. He was to help the Germans catch the people whom "they" indicated. Moscow was seeking to eliminate the same people, the sturdy independents, that the Germans wanted to eliminate. His activities had already led to many deaths: even more than "they" asked for. He had gradually got rid of all who knew him too well. The Germans were always ready to execute Russians, and they did not need much evidence.

He was sure that after today's execution his affairs were in splendid shape. He had unmasked the Kuleshov group, which had given the Germans quite a lot of bother. Now that group was hanging in a row, and on the chest of each of the sixteen lay a dead black cat. The Germans must have gone to a great deal of trouble to collect black cats in order to brand those who had belonged to the Black Cat organization. Igoliev had unmasked the Kuleshov group, as "they" had ordered, though the order had rather astonished him. He had heard that Surov was with "them" and that his Black Cat was carrying out Moscow's orders. But in that case, why had it been necessary to betray Kuleshov and his friends? For they were with Surov. It was all rather incomprehensible. But why should he worry? He was carrying out orders, and he knew that that was the only way for him to earn any future. In Moscow he was entered on the list of men carrying out particularly important government tasks.

Next morning Igoliev rode on horseback to a village he had already visited more than once. It was only a few miles from the town, and the ride was perfectly safe. He took with him the soldier who had brought the letter. The man rode behind, and maintained a persistent silence. The morning was beautiful, prodigal with sunlight and fresh air.

Igoliev entered the house he had visited once before. Stooping to avoid knocking his head on the low lintel, he stepped into the room. He straightened up and was about to remove his cap when two automatics were thrust into his chest:

"Put them up, my friend!"

Kotov's voice sounded as if he were sneering, but his eyes were tensely watching Igoliev's every movement. The Major instinctively fell back; the soldier who had ridden here with him gave him an unceremonious push in the back. His teeth began to chatter. He did not know who these men were, but they were treating him as an enemy, and the man who had brought him the letter was obviously with them. It suddenly occurred to him that "they" must have given orders for him to be wiped out. The thought seemed so horrible, and so inexorable, that he cried out: "But what for?"

A thin soldier, dressed, like Kotov, in German uniform, swiftly went through Igoliev's pockets and took the pistol from the Major's belt. Feeling that the prisoner was trembling violently, he flung into his face:

"Trembling, you son of a bitch? Wait a bit and you'll stop chattering away like a finch!"

"Leave him alone, Korovin," Kotov ordered, "or he'll be having a stroke...."

He rushed to the window; he had heard the quiet purr of an automobile engine in the street. A military limousine went past. Hope

flamed up in Igoliev's eyes; he took a step toward the window. Korovin was watching him closely; he sent him back with a blow of his fist. Kotov released the safety catch of his automatic, and stood waiting tensely. But the automobile drove on, and it was not followed by others. He sighed with relief.

"You can take it from me," he turned back to Igoliev, "that if we run into Germans my first bullet will be for you. So don't hope they'll save you; you won't get away."

The soldier who had accompanied Igoliev had slipped out at the sound of the automobile. He returned and reported:

"All right. It's some German come to visit the local teacher."

Kotov stood thinking. Mark hadn't said anything about the German, but it would be a pity to miss the opportunity to get rid of one more. . . .

The black staff car held the four passengers comfortably. Captain Berger, interpreter for the German staff, was driving. They had seized him in the schoolteacher's house, while he was going over a portfolio of old German lithographs. Beside him sat Korovin, an automatic across his knees. Behind sat Igoliev and Kotov. The soldier who had come with Igoliev took charge of their horses. Kotov did not take any notice of Igoliev, but the Major knew that if he made the least movement the automatic lying across the Russian partisan's knees would be emptied into him. They passed several German automobiles, but none of them showed any interest in the staff car filled with men in German uniform. By midday the automobile was bouncing over an uneven forest road. They ran out of gas, left the car, and made their way on foot to a lonely, deserted, forest village.

Toward evening two foot travelers approached from the other end of the village. Mark led the way; Abdulla with a rifle across his shoulder danced along behind. All the houses were empty; the village had been abandoned. Many of its men had been executed by a German punitive detachment for harboring partisans, and the rest of the inhabitants had left the place of ill omen. The streets were overgrown with scrub, and the cats of the village, masterless and savage, lived and hunted in the weeds.

Mark bent and entered the chilly little house from which Korovin had called to him. For a moment or two he blinked in the unaccustomed light, then caught sight of Igoliev and Berger sitting with their hands tied behind them. Kotov was snoring on a bed, his automatic tucked against his side.

Mark frowned with annoyance. What were the men bound for? He had already been notified that not only Igoliev but a German officer named Berger had been captured, and had guessed that Berger was the interpreter of the German staff. He told Abdulla to untie them; but Korovin stepped across and swiftly unfastened the ropes. "We tied them up for the peace and quiet of our souls," he said.

Igoliev rose and went to meet Mark, holding out his hand. But Mark took no notice of that hand. Kotov woke up and slipped off the bed, yawning noisily.

"I've wanted to see you for a long time, Surov," Igoliev said, trying to avoid showing his agitation.

But Mark walked past him without a word and halted in front of Berger, who had remained seated. The German officer slowly rose and looked calmly into his face.

"A strange and unexpected meeting," Mark said. "You know me, Captain Berger?"

Yes, Berger had recognized him. He had had more than one contact with Mark in the days when the Russian group were trying to work out their relations with the German staff.

"Yes, I recognized you, Mr. Surov," Berger said. "But I didn't intend to remind you...in case..."

"I understand. I felt sure that was just how you would react. And I like you for it." Mark smiled.

He turned to Igoliev, and the smile vanished.

"And I have been wanting to see you, Major Igoliev," he said coldly. "Only evidently I wanted it much more than you did, for I went so far as to take steps to ensure our meeting. I may add that my desire to see you became even stronger after I saw Kuleshov and his friends executed."

Igoliev stared searchingly at Mark, and could not understand why he was speaking like that. For he was sure Surov was working under "their" instructions; "they" had ordered Igoliev to betray the Kuleshov group, and he had carried out the order just as Surov would have done. So why had he referred to that?

"Kuleshov's fate was decided by others than you or me," he replied in deliberately vague terms.

"I know that. You received the order from Moscow, and you carried it out. Wasn't that so?"

Igoliev was silent. He still did not understand what game Surov was playing. Mark went up to him, feeling a bitter hatred for this

man who had betrayed other Russians in order to save his own petty skin. Igoliev instinctively felt that hatred, and his eyes expressed his fear and bewilderment.

"But aren't you...?" he muttered. But he stopped; he must not reveal all his cards.

"Why don't you go on?" Mark said, stepping away. "You were going to ask, aren't I with those who gave you your instructions? They assured you so confidently that Surov was with them, and Kotov, and Drobnin. All the world is with them. And so you, too, hurried to join them. You were afraid of being late.... I know you'll say nothing and weigh everything," he went on calmly. "So to make things plain, I tell you I'm not with them and we're not with them.

"What do you think, Igoliev, we should do with you?" he asked. "You're a Russian, and yet you're our enemy. You've betrayed so many Russians, you've bought your life with such infamous conduct, that it's hateful to think of you as a Russian. Well, Major Igoliev, you have to be called to account sooner or later, haven't you?"

Igoliev knew the meaning of that sentence. But he wanted to live. Every tiny cell in his body rejected the idea of death. And an almost animal desire for life was aroused within him. Abdulla came up to him, stared hatefully into his face, and shouted:

"We'll shoot you. You're not a man, you're a devil." He danced away and turned to Surov. "Mark, let me shoot him."

He pushed Igoliev toward the door. A cry burst from the Major's throat, followed by a torrent of words.

"I want to live.... Everybody has always wanted my death, but I want to live. All I've done was simply in order to live. I wanted to be decent, but it wasn't possible...."

He struggled to regain his self-control and to speak calmly.

"When it comes to it," he said almost calmly, "what am I guilty of? You've mentioned Kuleshov, but what had that to do with me? The Germans hanged him, not I."

"What a reptile!" Kotov said almost solemnly. "He'll be telling us next—"

He stopped short, but Mark knew what he had been intending to say. They had had Igoliev under observation for a long time. They knew of his activities in the P.O.W. camp, his betrayal of the Jewish officers and men there, of the political workers, the Communists. They knew he had taken work in the German staff and had finished by organizing Russian forces for them. They knew he had betrayed

Kuleshov and his group and had even taken part in their examination, with the clear determination to force a death sentence on them.

"After all you've done," Mark replied, "you've got no right to life. Kuleshov wanted to live, too, but you killed him. The girl whose mother ran to fall at her feet wanted to live, but you had her hanged. The Poznakovs, father and son, wanted to live, but you killed them. . . . Creatures like you can't be allowed to live."

Igoliev slipped to the floor and crawled to Mark's feet. His face expressed such an agony of despair that Mark felt really sorry for the doomed man. Kotov and Korovin rushed to drag him up, but he clung to Mark's leg and pressed his face to the rough cloth of his trousers. They tore him away, but he went on screaming:

"Spare me! I want to live! Surov, I want to live!"

Kotov's face was distorted with fury; he raised one foot and kicked Igoliev's tear-stained face; his tears were mingled with the blood from his cheek.

"Stop that!" Mark sternly ordered. At the sight of that face distorted with suffering, at the sound of those desperate pleas for mercy, those sobs, he began to feel pity for this man who had lost all right to life, but who protested against death with all his being.

Abdulla and Korovin yanked Igoliev up and dragged him to the door. He resisted with energy born of desperation. The thought of death completely overwhelmed him, and he screamed his desire to live again and again. He tried to say something more, but the others dragged him out; he fell headlong in the grass. At once there was a fearful hissing and spitting; an infuriated black cat flew at him and dug its claws into his face. He leaped to his feet with a wild cry. "Don't kill me!... Surov, stop them! I'll do anything.... Don't!..."

One brief burst from an automatic.

Mark stood in the middle of the room, thinking. He seemed to have forgotten that Berger was there. During the scene with Igoliev the German had not said a word. Mark ran his palm over his gray hair and looked at Berger.

"Now we'll talk of another matter, more pleasant.... Did it ever occur to you that we'd happen to meet in a lonely forest village, and that a traitor's fate would be decided in your presence? A painful but inevitable necessity, in such times as these."

He went to the window and looked out. While Mark was occupied with Igoliev, Berger had been thinking hard. He had noticed the Russian's momentary pity, and he was struck by that pity; for the

first time he realized the tragedy of such men as Surov. There was no way out for them, and they could not count on any pity being shown them. The German staff had thought of the Black Cat organization as a group absolutely ruthless, savagely cruel. Yet here was its leader feeling sorry for a traitor, who, in Berger's opinion, fully deserved to be shot. Could it be that he did not know the Russians and their strange mixture of feelings so very well after all? As he answered Mark, his voice had a note of restrained warmth: "No, I never expected to meet you here."

"When we first met, I was a sincere friend of yours, Captain Berger," Mark said quietly. "We wanted to believe in you then, and we linked our future with yours.... Then we saw we were wrong. We have to create our own future with our own efforts and our own blood. And so... now we are ruthless enemies."

"I know that, Mr. Surov," Berger calmly answered. "We killed the faith your nation felt in us. We have brought you very much evil... and ourselves, too. For God's sake, don't think there's any special idea in my head now in talking as I am of the German authorities, who by their behavior have lost the sympathy the Russian people felt for Germany. There are many Germans who see that now, but what can they do? It is not they who form policy, but men who've lost their reason. And now we shall lose the war, which we could have won without much bloodshed; we've lost a victory that would have bound our two mighty nations together forever. And then all the other nations of the world would have had to bow their heads before us."

"We don't want any bowing of heads," Mark retorted. He sat down beside Berger on the bench. "If a man is forced to live with bowed head, he is deprived of happiness and cannot see the sky. And that applies just as much to nations. They should live with their heads raised, not continually afraid that their neighbors will come and say, 'Don't you dare to raise your heads! Don't dare to gaze up at the sky.' Our people have lived for a very long time with bowed head. In fact, it has raised its head only for brief moments, and those moments have passed, and then once again it has been told, 'Don't dare to look at the sky.' One such moment came only recently. That was when you Germans arrived, and it seemed to us that now we could straighten our backs after centuries of gloom under the czars, the decades under Communism. And we were wrong. It wasn't long before you, too, said to us, 'Don't dare look at the sky!' But we des-

perately want to straighten up after our centuries of bowed, humiliating existence. But Hitler comes and says, 'You're destined to be slaves, and slaves must gaze down at the ground.'"

Berger smiled bitterly. "You see that you're not the only ones who were mistaken. We've been mistaken, too. And now the time has begun when we have to pay for our mistakes. All the German people will pay for them, whether they were guilty or not. So I'm ready.... Why should I hope for you to treat me differently from how we'd treat you?"

"Captain Berger," Mark laid his hand on the German's knee, "I see what you're driving at. But you needn't expect that from us. I've known for a long time that you're not one of our enemies. I greatly appreciated the warning you once gave me, risking your position in order to give it. And I know enough about you to say that your life is in no danger from us. But I don't want you to think you've got to pay for your life by doing us services. I don't expect that; we don't expect you to violate your military oath."

"I can only thank you," Berger said.

The night passed, and morning began to creep into that small house in the deserted village, making its way through windows that had long since lost all their glass. The milky light picked out the faces of the Russian and the German, still engaged in a conversation that had gone on all through the night. Mark thrust his head through the window and drew in the scent of the earth; the earth was rested, saturated with moisture, with the sunny, languorous warmth that the night had liberated. A milky mist eddied in extravagantly shaped clumps and knots; it streamed through the fingers, clung to the trees; and it seemed as if everything around were turning in an unceasing circle—turning, rolling, moving.

"Look, Captain Berger!" Mark exclaimed. "So the earth does move! We can say that with Galileo, and we shall be just as right as he was. But Galileo didn't know that our Russian earth moves in its own peculiar fashion. There it lies before you, ruined, defiled, depopulated. But is this the first time it has lain like that? Long ago the Tatars came and reduced it to ashes. The Tatars perished, but Russia rose from the ashes and has survived down to the present day. After the Tatars there were many who wanted to take their place; but as soon as they came to us with the sword, they perished by the sword. The Tatars came from the East, you came from the West; but what difference is there between you? You have the same aim—to rule

over what doesn't belong to you. And the same means of achieving that end—burning, killing, violating. And I don't think there will be any difference in the result, either. Russia has already survived many czars; she will survive you, too. That is just as much a law of existence as the rotation of the earth."

They went outside. The sun was dispelling the mist; the day was sparkling and radiant. The branches of the trees hung motionless; their leaves were just beginning to turn yellow.

"It'll be autumn soon," Mark said.

"Autumn," Berger said thoughtfully. "Your painter Levitan painted it beautifully."

At night the town in which the sixteen members of the Black Cat organization had been executed slept an anxious, restless sleep. And during the day the people huddled in the outskirts, talking of nothing but that execution.

Night. A dark sky. Empty streets. A guard paced up and down outside the house where the bodies hung by ropes from the balcony. He tried to avoid looking at the balcony, at the house before which he was posted. But although he did not look, he could not help being troubled. Behind him he heard a gentle creak. He knew it came from the bodies swinging gently from the balcony. The execution had taken place three days before, but they had not been taken down; let the Russians see where their insolent desire not to submit to German rule led them!

In the distance he heard a clock strike one. He thought regretfully that he still had a whole hour on guard. He began to feel that he was all alone in the world with that row of bodies, which in the night were hardly distinguishable. He extended his march to take himself even farther from those swinging forms, and tried to think of other things. He had heard that Captain Berger had been captured by partisans but had managed to get away. But the Russian officer who had been with him had perished. It must be terrible to fall into the hands of those men of the woods. If Captain Berger hadn't escaped, he'd be hanging somewhere in the forest now.... But better not think about that.

Suddenly shouting and screaming rang across the square. On the farther side from the guard a building began to flame like a torch—the Gestapo headquarters. A thunderous explosion, a column of flame illuminating the night. Half-dressed men running, hurrying around the

burning structure. And from the very heart of the flames came bestial screams—the screams of the men burning alive inside, pinned down by the collapse of the building. The German forces were called out, and also the special Russian unit Major Igoliev had commanded. The Germans danced irresolutely outside the flaming house, shouting to one another. The Russians were more determined; they dashed into the flames and brought out the Germans inside. But they succeeded in bringing out only dead bodies, laying them down along the roadside. Another call for help came from the midst of the flames, and the Russians boldly dashed in again. But too late. They brought out another dead man, to set him down alongside his comrades.

The Russian force retired, leaving the gutted building and the row of bodies outside it. Fifteen bodies.

Rather less than an hour later the sergeant and a change of guard marched to relieve the sentry posted under the balcony. But the man was missing. The sergeant cursed aloud. Obviously he had taken fright and had fled from his post. The sergeant posted the new guard and marched off. The dead bodies had been removed from outside the ruined Gestapo building. The fire had died down. The stillness of early morning enveloped the town.

As dawn broke, the bodies hanging from the balcony emerged from the gloom, and the new sentry posted on guard plucked up courage to turn and look at them. He stared for some time at the thin girl hanging with limp arms, her head on one side. The wind was playing with her hair, throwing a strand over the face, then gently blowing it away. The guard took another step and halted in front of the next body. He started back in horror, dropping his rifle. He was staring at the dead, distorted face of his comrade who had disappeared from his post.

With a piercing blast on his whistle the guard summoned the sergeant.

In the morning it was found that the special Russian unit had vanished. Only then did the Germans realize what had happened that night. The men of the Russian detachment had blown up the Gestapo headquarters. Then they had rushed into the burning building but had brought out only dead bodies. The Germans examined those bodies and saw the marks of fingers round their necks. Strangled. Fifteen Gestapo men. And one soldier who had been on guard. Sixteen all told. And the Germans remembered the warning: "For every Russian killed, a German will be killed."



15. A Blow in the Heart

Not long before Kuleshov's capture and execution Mark and Drobnin had held an important conference, after which Drobnin disappeared. The talk took place in the city that the Germans had made the capital of the Russian occupied areas, a city crowded with Golden Pheasants, with innumerable German offices, with officers' casinos, bars, and brothels, with the invariable bulletin board at every entrance, carrying the notice: "Nur für Deutsche."

In the former Jewish quarter, now depopulated, its windows smashed and its doors shattered, Mark and Drobnin had met for a long talk. Mark unfolded a picture of Germany's utter defeat. He had just returned from the zone immediately behind the front line, and he told Drobnin calmly and circumstantially what he had seen. Before long the only Germans left on Russian soil would be prisoners. Stalin had won the war. Many Germans were openly admitting it. Meanwhile, behind the front the experiences of 1941 were being repeated. As the Germans retreated, they were destroying towns and villages, exterminating the population. Mark regarded this as a symptom of Germany's weakness. The Soviet Army had pursued almost the same tactic during its retreat in 1941. And if Stalin had applied the scorched earth policy to his own soil, why expect the Germans to do otherwise?

Drobnin listened closely to Mark's account. He, too, knew that the German Army was being plunged into confusion and went on resisting only through inertia. The army was slowly falling back, and now it was the Soviet Army that was resorting to encirclement tactics; it was the Germans who were finding themselves "in the bag." Columns of German prisoners of war were trudging eastward; Germany's military might was melting away. It was clear her back was broken.

But a dying animal fights desperately. So did the Germans. They were treating the population more and more ruthlessly. The Russian civilians were putting up resistance, but so far it had been directed against the petty officials and unimportant military officers. But if ... Mark stopped and was lost in thought.

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"We must strike a blow right at the enemy's heart," he said quietly. "Then perhaps they'll realize that they would do better not to behave so bestially on Russian soil."

He sat silent, and Drobnin, too, was silent, deep in thought. Then Drobnin asked:

"Bido?"

Mark nodded. If Bido, the Commissar of the Eastern Areas, were eliminated, the Germans would understand that they must change their behavior. They would realize that they were in danger from all sides, since even their all-powerful governor could not be saved from destruction.

Soon after this meeting the Black Cat organization encountered a series of disasters. The Moscow commissars carried through a brilliant operation aimed at smashing the organization with the aid of the Germans. But before doing so, they entered into negotiations with Surov, Nikiforov, and Drobnin, offering them Moscow's pardon, an honorable return to the Communist fatherland, even rewards, even recognition of their "special services." All to no effect. At his last meeting with the secret Soviet emissaries Mark told them bluntly:

"We have no intention of deceiving ourselves. We've never been so happy as we are now, when we find ourselves between Hitler and Stalin. They're both our enemies; they both have to be fought. And we shall fight. I know you'll say our fight hasn't got the ghost of a chance of success; but if you suggest that such a hopeless struggle is meaningless, I don't believe it. We have no intention of hindering you in your formation of partisan forces. But the Black Cat will never be one of those forces and will never become a weapon in Stalin's hands. Our land is vast, and for the present we can go our ways without interfering with one another. You can organize the fight against the Germans. At the moment we're fighting the Germans, too. I make no bones about it; tomorrow we shall have to fight you. But tomorrow hasn't come yet, so let each of us do his own job and not get in each other's way."

When the emissaries reported on their failure to take over the Black Cat organization, Moscow replied sternly: "All measures are to be taken to liquidate it." That it was fighting the common enemy was of no significance whatever.

Disguised Stalinists soon penetrated the Black Cat groups, patiently and methodically working within to betray them to the enemy. Mark had to travel from place to place to save the partisan network by redistributing and relocating various units. He found shelter for Maria with the Nikiforovs, and even persuaded Vera Pavlovna to go to them. Although the Germans were enabled to destroy part of the

Black Cat, its main groups were preserved, with the exception of Kuleshov's. In those places where the attack had been successful, new groups and individuals quickly supplied replacements. Many of these took the name of the Black Cat, though there was no link with the main body. They operated at their own risk, and only very few of the members knew Surov, Drobnin, and Nikiforov and could communicate with them directly. The whole country was now rising up to resist the enemy.

During this critical period, Mark chanced upon a hastily erected memorial tablet in the town of Belostenny, which was completely destroyed. Having changed hands in battle many times, it was turned into a heap of grass-grown ruins. Yet people lived among the ruins, in dugouts, under the ground.

They told how, breaking through the Soviet lines in a desperate counterattack, the German tanks had swept into this town, which was the headquarters of a large Soviet staff. The break-through was so violent and unexpected that it could not be held up, and a bloody battle had raged in the streets. Every house was turned into a fortress, stubbornly defended by Russians to the last drop of blood. The fight went on simultaneously in every part of the town. In the central square, in a house still partly standing, a tall, broad-shouldered Soviet general had crouched over a radio transmitter. His broad square-cut face showed no sign of fear or confusion, although the enemy was getting closer and closer to his headquarters. It was Apanasenko.

"Can you hear me, Kornei?" the General shouted; he heard his friend's distant voice answer:

"I hear you, Joseph. Hold out for a couple of hours longer!"

An officer reported that the German tanks were approaching the square. Apanasenko straightened up and ordered:

"Assemble all the staff officers, all the wounded, every living man in the place!"

Altogether a score of men fell in, mostly high-ranking officers. All the others had already been sent into battle. Apanasenko himself led these twenty to combat.

Just then ten tanks with red stars on their sides were shooting their way toward the town through the German screens. General Kornei Surov stood in the turret of the leading tank. His main force had fallen behind. With ten tanks he had torn ahead to save his friend.

Only two tanks broke into Belostenny. The rest were shot up by the German artillery.

His head bandaged with a bloody rag, Kornei Surov charged at the mass of German tanks with his two tanks.

Soviet officers dragged him out of his flaming tank, and took him to Apanasenko. The Germans were close. The end was predetermined. But Apanasenko gave the order:

"Attack!"

He led his few men forward. At his side was another general, burned and bloodstained, with wide-set gray eyes and a face of inviolable calm: Kornei.

The Germans shot them down without difficulty. The two generals who had started together so long ago, in the sunburned steppe, now fell side by side.

A red-bearded peasant halted in front of the tablet on the wall of the ruined building. He took off his cap and bowed his gray head.

"Yours was a fine death, Kornei," he whispered, his eyes fixed on the engraved stone. "And Ivan and Simon died before you. Simon burst with a bomb into a German staff and blew them and himself up. He did not want to go on living, and he did not know how else to die. And so now I am alone, the last of the Surovs, whom you have left behind to solve what is not yet solved. Quite alone. I am proud of the way you died, but I don't want to die like that, or to die for what all of you gave your lives for."

When the crisis within the Black Cat was over, Mark hurried to the town where Maria lived. There a little shoemaker with a round, clean-shaven pate—Abdulla—had opened a cobbler's shop. In the back of the shop Nikiforov and his family had lived, but now his family was in hiding, for that was the only way of saving them from retaliation, since the Germans had placed Nikiforov third on the list of wanted Russians for whom they offered rewards. But Mark tarried but a few minutes in that house. He came out hurriedly and strode off to the highway. He hung about for a long time, until he obtained a lift in a German truck; the driver agreed to take the redbearded Russian to the city in exchange for a bottle of vodka.

Mark searched for and found Drobnin the same day. When he burst into the room, Drobnin realized that his friend was shaken to the depths of his being. He had been expecting Mark, and was ready for the painful scene that followed, though he would have been glad to avoid it. Mark rushed at him with eyes blazing:

"Why did you do it?" he roared hoarsely into Drobnin's face.

"It had to be, Mark. It was the only way," Drobnin quietly answered.

Helpless with anger, Mark dropped into a chair and clutched his head. Drobnin slowly went over to him and in a voice low, yet quivering, said:

"It had to be, Mark. . . . A blow right in the enemy's heart."

Not long before, Drobnin had learned indirectly that a woman was required for domestic service in the home of the all-powerful commissar, Bido. He looked about in search of such a woman. He knew that it would not be easy to find anyone suitable. The Germans would subject any applicant to a scrutiny of her life right from the day of her birth, and only when they were quite sure she was not dangerous in any way would they take her on. And once she was in their service, she would be under their control ceaselessly. In any case, few women would be prepared to sacrifice themselves in order to eliminate Bido, as Drobnin planned. For Drobnin that had become the whole purpose of life.

Just about this time Maria visited him. When she learned what he wanted to do, she said simply: "I'll do it."

Drobnin was at first overwhelmed. He knew how closely Mark and Maria were united in their belated, autumnal love.

"But it means your death, Maria; your death, I say . . . " he almost groaned.

"I know," she said, her voice faltering. "But we've long been planning this, and you mustn't stop me."

"But what about Mark?" Drobnin exclaimed.

"Leave Mark out of it," she whispered. "If I didn't go, he would no longer love me."

He gave way. By devious means he had the information conveyed to Bido's household that a solitary, fairly young woman, modest and quiet, who had lost her husband before the war, lived on the edge of the town. The officer who was charged with the search for a suitable woman made the most careful inquiries, rummaged through the prewar archives, consulted various files, and decided that Olga Prakhina, as Maria was now known, was perfectly suitable. That modest, rather repressed woman, completely uninterested in politics, and without any suspicious entanglements, was just what the Germans required.

· A large black automobile drove over the cobbles of the street running out of the town; a little later it came back, turned into a side street, and halted outside an iron gate leading to a garden. In the

depths of the garden stood a house with white walls. A sentry was posted at the gate day and night. An officer stepped out of the automobile, followed by a modestly dressed woman with bare head, a sprinkle of gray in her hair. A calm, rather long face, with full lips and wide, serious eyes.

The woman followed the officer upstairs to the second floor, stepped carefully over the expensive carpet, and was shown into a large office furnished with expensive leather-upholstered furniture. A man in a yellow tunic, which fitted closely to his body, was sitting at a desk. He had a pale, fat face with pendulous cheeks, so that he looked rather like a bulldog. Bido closely scrutinized the woman who had halted at the door. He enjoyed the reputation of being a clairvoyant, capable of reading the secrets of the human heart. He highly valued this reputation, especially as the same had been said of Hitler at the beginning of his career. The officer who had brought the woman leaned respectfully over the desk and waited for the Commissar to pronounce whether she suited him or not. Evidently the Commissar was satisfied with what he saw, for he nodded. "Frau Olga" had passed the test.

The pleasant little room that was assigned to "Frau Olga" opened onto the ground floor corridor, and its windows looked out into the yard at the back. A guard paced up and down the yard day and night. At one end of the same corridor was the accommodation for the Reich Commissar's special guards, and next to it was a large room occupied by two great Danes, one white and one brown. At night a guard was also posted inside the house in the large hall on the second floor; to reach the Commissar's bedroom one had to pass through that hall. One of "Frau Olga's" many duties was to take the great Danes out for a walk three times a day.

She was often summoned upstairs, to Frau Emma Bido's luxurious boudoir, where the air was saturated with the scent of perfumes, powders, and the strong smell of a woman's sweaty body. Frau Emma Bido was only twenty-eight, but she was a woman of much experience. "Frau Olga" soon became completely indispensable to her, for the garrulous Frau Bido could not stand the other women of her circle. "They talk so much," she would declare, "that I simply can't stand it."

Before retiring to bed, which usually occurred not long before midnight, "Frau Olga" had to unfasten and leave open the door from the dogs' room into the corridor. This was one of the strictest injunctions laid on her. In her talkativeness Frau Bido had revealed to her

that this was done so that the dogs could guard her Willy's sleep. The dogs were trained and performed an extremely responsible function; one of the two was always under Bido's bed when he was asleep. The dogs relieved each other at the same time as the guard was changed in the house, so the door of their room had to be left open all night.

Many days had passed since the officer had taken "Frau Olga" to Bido's house and had told her that it was strictly forbidden to go out without permission or to see anybody outside. The only spot where she was allowed to walk was the town park, and then only with the dogs. The park was one street away from the house, and in the day-time it was usually deserted.

In one of the side avenues of the park was a bench, and the woman took a fancy to sitting on it while the dogs were exercising. Occasionally a workman in a cap went by, but he took no notice of the solitary woman sitting on the bench with a book in her hands.

One morning, as she was sitting on the bench, a boy of twelve or so came and played with a bow and arrow in the next avenue. He aimed at a tree, sent an arrow into the bark, and ran to pull it out. Then he aimed at another tree. Maria watched the boy for awhile, then turned to her book.

Suddenly something whistled past her, and she threw herself back. The boy had aimed badly, and had sent an arrow into the back of the bench. He approached fearfully, afraid of the dogs, but anxious to recover his arrow. She laid down her book and looked at him severely. He smiled guiltily, muttered an apology, took his arrow, and ran off. She watched him go, a thoughtful look in her eyes. He might have been her own Peter, whom she had left with his grandmother. But she had no right to think of her son now, and she stretched out her hand for the book. For a moment her hand hung in mid-air; then instead of picking up the book she closed it. She had noticed a sheet of paper lying on the open page.

Her watch showed that it was time to return to the house. She leashed the dogs, led them out of the park, and passed through the iron gate. She locked herself in her room and drew the curtains, as she always did when changing, for the guard in the back yard could see into her room. Then she took out the tiny scrap of paper. In a fine hand Drobnin ordered her not to take any step until she was given exact instructions. She was to sit on the same bench each day, and always at the right-hand end. At a convenient moment she was to slip her fingers into a gap she would find between the iron leg of

the bench and the second wooden slat of the seat. If she found any paper in the gap, she was to take it out, put it in her book, and read it in her room, destroying it immediately.

Since that day she had sat many times on the bench, always at the right-hand end, and regularly feeling in the gap. But she had never found anything.

She could not know that during all those days, in a house at the far end of the town, Mark was struggling with an insoluble problem. There could be no thought of withdrawing Maria from Bido's house. She would not leave until she had done what she had gone there to do. With every day it was growing more necessary to get rid of Bido, so a way of doing it had to be found. Only, not a way that would destroy Maria. She was now in a position to carry out the task and kill Bido. But in doing so she herself would perish. And on no account would Mark agree to that.

"I must know everything, Paul," he told Drobnin. "Down to the tiniest details. You must find out for me when Bido goes to bed and what time he gets up, the situation and arrangement of the rooms, the addresses of his women and where he meets them, the names of the officers and soldiers, how often he's with his wife, whether he drinks.... I must know everything."

Drobnin did not believe that all these details could be of any use; but he saw that Mark would fight for Maria's life with all the obstinacy he possessed. And with a similar obstinacy he assisted him. Day by day he brought back information he had acquired, and night by night Mark devoted all his mind, his heart, and his imagination to the task of fitting together all the details of life in Bido's house. The more details he accumulated, the more he fitted them together this way and that, so the more he came to the inexorable conclusion: Bido was invulnerable.

But when that conclusion began to sear unbearably into his mind, he turned away from the jigsaw puzzle, in which so many, so very many pieces were missing, and muttered thickly: "She's got to come through."

She had to come through. He flung himself on his hard bed, clutched his head, and the tears ran down his cheeks as a sigh burst from his lips: "I can't, Maria! I won't!"

He could order her to leave the house, but she was not likely to obey; even if she did, he would never see her again. A wall would be raised between them, and neither he nor she would attempt to cross

it. She would be shattered by the knowledge that she had not done her duty, and he would be conscious of his guilt in withdrawing her from her post. She would be lost to him as surely as if she had died.

Day after day went by, and still the jigsaw revealed yawning gaps; in Mark's brain, too, yawning gaps began to appear; he saw no way of reconciling those two opposites: Bido's death and Maria's life. Now he knew a great deal about Bido; he even knew who was his mistress; but she would be taken to the house, and the almighty commissar gave himself over to his amours in a small room next to his wife's bedroom. Whenever he left his house, he always fixed the time of departure himself, and never left at a regular time; he was always escorted by a swarm of police on motorcycles. He was fond of his food, but he had his own special cook, and the sources of the food for his table were kept a strict secret.

"He's invulnerable," Mark whispered, as he studied his jigsaw puzzle. More precious details had been revealed, but many more were still lacking. Thus, he knew that Private Behrend preferred to do his turn on guard in the back yard. He was rather fond of dozing on duty, and he would lean up against the iron gate and doze right through his two hours. And then Lieutenant Hans Peterson, the guard commander, was a hard drinker and paid frequent visits to a young and beautiful Russian actress. Through her Drobnin learned all that Peterson let drop. Other details were added in various ways to the picture, but it was still far from complete.

Exhausted, frustrated, neglectful of food, Mark decided on a last step:

"Let Maria herself describe the life of the house for us," he told Drobnin. A cold shiver ran down his back. If the Germans discovered the connection, Maria was lost. But there was no other way.

The morning after this conversation Maria returned from her stroll in the park, went to her room, drew the curtains, and took out a tiny roll, no bigger than a matchstick in length and thickness, from the back binding of her book. It was a very short note from Drobnin, saying that she had to describe all the life of the house for M. She laughed happily and pressed the tiny piece of paper to her lips. "I knew you were here, Mark; I knew all the time, my dear."

Three days later Drobnin brought to Mark a tiny booklet of cigarette paper, every sheet of which was covered with the finest of writing. He had thoughtfully carried a magnifying glass with him, and Mark set to work to read all about the life of the Bido household.

Drobnin had gone, so he did not see Mark's eyes light up more and more with joy. When he reached the sheet describing the dogs and their duties, he danced with delight and flung himself on his bed, laughing uncontrollably.

A day or two later Maria received another warning not to take any step for the time being, but to wait. The note added that if she found anything in her room, she was to hide it in a safe place.

There followed a long silence.

Dr. Vladimirov was given an odd assignment; he had to find out whether anybody in that city still possessed a great Dane. He discovered several and called on their owners, asking them to allow him to take the dogs' measurements, for a "scientific purpose." He measured their chests, their girth, their legs, noting the details in his notebook. After collecting this information he turned up one day in the park and, standing some distance away, studied the two large dogs sitting on the path at the feet of the woman reading a book. Then he spent a whole day sketching something resembling a dog's harness, writing figures underneath, and adding the note: "Material of strong white leather. It must be soft. Buckles and hooks of white metal."

Nikiforov had been absent from Abdulla's small shack for a few days. When he returned, he found the Tatar fuming, sitting over a sheet of paper containing a sketch of some queer, small-sized harness. When Nikiforov entered, Abdulla shouted in his half-Tatar jargon:

"Morning, Nikifa. Tell my why brought this paper. What leather, what soft? We make soft leather and straps on machine, another leather soft, no scratch yourself. But what for me. Tell me: do this, make that. But they brought me paper; they think Abdulla has office, and sits and looks at paper."

Reassuring the Tatar, and just as astonished as he at the extraordinary contraption, Nikiforov explained the sketch, then disappeared into his room. He took out of his pocket a box about half the size of a brick, painted red, and rather heavy. At one end a slanting hole was pierced. From another pocket he took a small can of white paint and a brush. From his cap lining he fished out a metallic object, like a stump of pencil. At the pointed end were several figures and a bright red dot. Taking down a small cardboard box from a shelf, he wrapped the metallic object in cottonwool and packed it carefully in the box. Next morning Vera Pavlovna emerged from Abdulla's workshop and went to the station. On the way she turned aside into a church and prayed. As soon as she had gone out, Abdulla hung an enormous padlock on the door of his workshop and pinned up a notice in foot-high letters:

"Workshop closed; master gone walk. Will walk ten days. Come later please."

He made his way out of the town to a small cart, in which Nikiforov was sitting. They fell in with a train of carts driven by peasants who had brought hay into the town, and now were returning to their villages. Abdulla and Nikiforov drove off behind them.

Maria received one more note; she was asked to supply a complete list of guard duties for the following week. The list was always posted on the outside of the guard-room door, so the task was not difficult. She "posted" the list in the bench next morning.

While all this activity was going on in various places, Mark, too, was fully occupied. Only he and Drobnin could draw all the threads together. Nikiforov had no idea why Mark had ordered him to fashion that strange harness for a great Dane; Abdulla swore as he made it because it had got to be of soft white leather and have hooks sewn on to it at exactly the points indicated; Kotov, who had hunted high and low for a small mine and detonator and had obtained them both at great risk, had no idea what they were wanted for. At Mark's request, Dr. Vladimirov went to work at a fuel store that supplied the German houses and quarters with coal. One day Russian workers were unloading coal from a truck in Bido's yard. Maria's window was open, and one of the workmen, a fellow in spectacles, suddenly swung his spade and hurled some coal through the open window. The sentry rushed at him, cursing, and looked up at the window as though soliciting "Frau Olga's" approval. She threw out the pieces of coal but gently kicked the largest, rather symmetrical piece, under her divan. That evening she had washed it and carefully dried it. It was a white box.

Maria herself did not know what Mark's plan was until she found a long, detailed letter hidden in the bench.

Meanwhile life in the Bido establishment flowed along normally and peacefully. The Commissar applied himself to his work methodically, drank his nightly glass of milk methodically (just as his mother had taught him), cuddled his mistress methodically, and his wife just as methodically, then methodically went back to his bed in his own room to sleep methodically till morning. The whole house was plunged in silence and darkness.

In the yard there was a clatter of footsteps. The outside guards were being changed. One soldier was posted at the main gate, the other in the back yard. Behrend, who preferred to pass his time dozing, went to the yard. His comrades knew his little foible, but they did not complain; each had his own way of passing his time on guard.

The light showed only dimly through the curtains of "Frau Olga's" room. Behrend ran his eyes over the curtains, but they fitted closely, and he could not get any view of her. He yawned, went off to the iron gate, squatted down on the stone paving, and leaning against the gate, dozed off at once.

Maria moved slowly about her room. Her eyes had a look of calm and tense concentration. She drew out the drawer of her cupboard and found the white harness with its white straps and hooks. From under a pile of linen she obtained a white box fitted with loops, which hooked firmly on the hooks of the harness. She worked systematically, following exactly the instructions she had received two days previously, in which her every step and every moment had been planned for her.

The soldier at the front gate paced up and down. Eight paces in one direction, eight paces in the other direction. The night was fine, the sky sprinkled with stars. The poplars rustled pensively, but the soldier was indifferent. He was not moved by an alien sky and an alien soil.

For a moment he thought someone called him by name. He halted and listened to the silence disturbed only by the gentle rustle of the poplars. But the call was not repeated. He began to measure out his eight paces once more.

Maria glanced at her watch and got up from her chair. Twelve fifteen, the time given in the instructions. She took a bundle of dirty linen from under her bed, rummaged through it, and found a long metallic object. Her lips stirred as she mentally repeated her instructions: "Draw out the thin end, turn it to the right, until the red dot is opposite the figure 3. Note carefully: the figure three." She drew out the thin end and turned it; the red dot shifted until it was opposite 3. The long object fitted perfectly into the hole made in the white box.

Twelve twenty. She went quietly to the door and opened it very

slightly. "Are the hinges of your door and the door leading from the corridor to the back yard well oiled?" She had been able to attend to that. Her door opened without a sound, and she glanced up and down the corridor. A small bulb, hanging from the ceiling, shed a dim light; the corridor was half dark and empty. Picking up the harness and the box, she slipped out and vanished into the dogs' room.

The white dog looked at her in astonishment. Such a visit had never occurred before. It lay stretched out on a rug, and felt an incomprehensible agitation. But instinct and training warned it that the time was at hand when it would hear the soldier's steps, and would rise, trot upstairs, and crawl under the bed, to the place its fellow had just left. It submitted quietly to Maria's hands as she hurriedly slipped the leather harness over its neck, fastening the straps beneath it. It watched her as she went to the door. Before she went out, she halted and looked back. The white box and the white straps were hardly visible against its white hair. For a moment she felt sorry for the dog, which had always been friendly to her. She slipped out into the corridor and went back to her room.

There she put on a short jacket, threw a kerchief over her head, and glanced again at her watch. Twelve twenty-eight. She sat down and squeezed her hands between her knees, as if she were cold. It was warm in the room, but her body began to tremble all over.

She heard the sound of a door being opened in the distance. Then there was silence. The soldier had gone upstairs to relieve the guard, but she had not heard him pass; his steps were muffled in the carpeting. Now there was a quiet noise outside. She opened the door a little; through the crack she saw the white dog standing and listening in the corridor. She thought the white box on its chest was very obvious, though in that twilight she could hardly distinguish its outline. The dog heard the guard's retreating footsteps and set off after him at a gentle trot. The time dragged by, but she remained standing with her back against the doorpost of her closed door. Waiting. A door creaked again; the man who had been relieved went past. But where was the brown dog? Surely it should have followed him down? At last it entered the corridor and trotted to its room.

When it had passed, the weakness that had fettered her legs left her; she felt a return of strength. She opened the door wider and went slowly in the direction opposite to the guard room, toward the door leading into the back yard. On the low veranda she halted, to accustom her eyes to the darkness. Then she cautiously went down the steps and took several paces across the yard. Unexpectedly she stumbled over a heap of coal, and exclaimed softly, but at once froze still. She heard the sentry at the main gate come to a halt—had he heard? But a moment or two later she caught his tread again. Eight paces in one direction, eight in the other. She stood by the heap of coal and waited.

Now Maria quietly went on, making for the third post at the fence, as had been indicated in her note. Her eves were used to the dark by now, and she could avoid any obstacles. But at the third post she saw the figure of a man. He was sitting with his back against the very post she was making for, and seemed to be waiting for her. It must be the guard. Behrend, a little soldier with sleepy eyes, should be on duty at this time of the night. The form was perfectly still, and she went up to him. Her note instructed her that she was to proceed to the third post, and she would have gone on even if Lieutenant Peterson, the guard commander, had drawn up all his company there. The sentry did not move. She bent over him, and hurriedly straightened up again. Behrend was dead. His tongue was lolling out of his mouth, his head was flung back, and he was gazing with half-open eyes up at the stars. A rope was buried in his neck; it passed through the iron gate and kept his body from toppling over. Right by his feet the paving had been pulled up, to form a larger gap under the gate. She went down on her knees; but before she could wriggle under the gate she had to move Behrend's leg. Shuddering with revulsion, she took hold of the soldier's boot with both hands and shifted the leg aside. Then she put her head through the gap, squeezed all her body after it, and wriggled through to the outside of the gate. She rose to her feet and took several steps to the right. But she stumbled over someone lying right against the wall and fell. A rough palm was laid over her mouth, and strong hands set her on her feet.

"Go on," she heard a voice; someone gently pushed her in the back. She obediently went on. She took ten steps, and abruptly realized that the man was Mark. She turned around sharply. But a voice came from the shadow of a great poplar; there was no mistaking Abdulla's tones:

"Go on, please; go on, quick; go on, straight."

In front of her rose the vague shadow of a man, whom she knew she had to follow. When he pressed against the wall and became invisible, she, too, pressed against the wall and became invisible. In the distance she heard the steps of a German patrol, moving away from them. When she and the man reached the outskirts of the town, she wanted to stop and wait; but the man was inexorable and hurried on. They turned into wasteland, made their way through bushes, and came out on a little hill.

She heard footsteps coming toward her, and she knew it was Mark. Others were coming through the same hollow across which she had followed the man who had brought her safely past the numerous posts and patrols. The moon had risen; and when the man in front halted, she saw he was Korovin. She went up to him and kissed him on the cheek.

"Let's wait," she said. "Mark's coming."

Korovin shook his head and went on. "It might be Mark, or it might be Fritz," he said. But Maria knew it was Mark.

"I haven't the strength to go any further," she called after him. He stopped and spat angrily, then turned back.

"I'll go and see who it is. If anything happens, you dive into the bushes and make for the edge of the forest; Kotov's waiting there with his men. You and your 'haven't the strength!' " he mimicked her, and went off to see who was following them.

She stood straining all her body toward those who were coming along behind. The kerchief had slipped from her head, and the wind played with her hair. A group of men emerged from the dusk, at their head a man she would have picked out from a million on the darkest night. He came up to her swiftly, but as she rushed to him, he pushed her away with one hand and said in a strange, agitated tone, as he set the luminous dial of his watch close to his eyes:

"Three thirty."

Those who had come with him—Abdulla, Nikiforov, Drobnin, and Vladimirov—halted and turned to face the town. Mark lowered his hand and stood with his back to Maria, gazing in the same direction. A minute passed. Two minutes.

"Surely it hasn't gone wrong?" he exclaimed; his voice was alarmed, perplexed.

At that moment a sudden sharp flash of light lit up the sky above the town; a second later they heard a distant, muffled explosion.

"Fine!" Mark shouted. He turned and seized Maria, crushed her in his arms, and whispered joyfully, almost deliriously:

"Maria, my beloved! It's done! Get that? We've done it! A blow right in the enemy's heart. And you struck the blow, Maria, my precious one."

She laughed happily, excitedly, stroked his cheek, pressed against him with all her body, so tensely, so passionately.

Even before there had been time to gather up the fragments of the Reich Commissar and the great Dane, even while Frau Bido was still writhing in terror on her bed, while the police, the gendarmes, the Gestapo were still rushing through the streets toward the Commissar's house, Lieutenant Peterson began to assemble his company and called for the addition of a company of field gendarmerie. He took the surviving brown great Dane to "Frau Olga's" empty room, gave the dog her shoes and linen to sniff at, and then put it on the lead. The Lieutenant was terrible in his fury, for now he was in danger of a field court-martial for failing to guard Bido's life, and he knew that somehow the missing Russian, Olga, must be at the bottom of the explosion. He would find her and take a terrible vengeance on her.

Kotov had made many mistakes in his life; but now he made his last. "We'll spend the day in this forest, and move on at night," he said. "We might be seen in the daytime."

Drunk with their success, Mark, Drobnin, and the others who were escorted by Kotov's small force of a few dozen men readily agreed with him.

Kotov should have set up distant outposts, but he, too, was intoxicated with success, and he mounted guards only a hundred yards from their camp. The outposts were quick to notice the Germans approaching, and opened fire; but the infuriated German soldiers overran the guards in no time; before Kotov could realize what was happening, the green uniforms of the German soldiers were already showing through the trees.

Korovin snatched a hand machine gun from the slow-moving machine-gunner and fired a long burst, forcing the Germans to lie down. But Lieutenant Peterson would not allow them to lie down. "Vorwärts!" he shouted, and led the way. With perfect aim Kotov sent the Lieutenant down, thus resolving the problem of the threatening court-martial. The Germans opened a torrent of fire on the Russians; in a moment, dead and wounded were lying heaped on the ground. Drobnin hurriedly bandaged his left arm; Vladimirov tried to drag Maria away from Mark, and pressed one hand to the streaming wound in her side. But she clung to Mark with all her strength, looking into his eyes. In a gasping voice she said softly: "Mark... dearest...you alone..."

He clutched her head between his hands, pressed his face to hers, and with all the pain that was in him, cried into her fading eyes: "You'll come through! You'll come through!"

The bullets sang their boring songs without words, but he did not hear them. All his strength, all his will were concentrated in his entreaties as he cried out for her to live.

"Friends, we'll break through," Kotov raised a shout; but his words were lost to Mark.

"Mark . . . my dearest . . . you alone . . . "

Her face was pressed to his face, her body nestled close to his, for the last time.

Mark bent over her, tears streaming from his eyes. As her head fell back, he began to kiss her on the temple, on the cheek, hands, and neck. He softly whispered: "Forgive me, forgive me for this, Maria." She understood him and smiled at him, at Drobnin, at Vladimirov, who was still pressing his hand to her side.

"You must live! You must!" Mark insisted.

She fixed her eyes on his and murmured to Drobnin:

"Don't . . . lose . . . Mark. . . . "

Kotov shouted sharply, shrilly:

"Follow me, friends!"

The remnants of his force ran past the little group. And at that moment Drobnin snatched Maria out of Mark's arms, pushed him away, set his pistol to her temple, and fired.

Like a maddened animal Mark flung himself at Drobnin, but Nikiforov, Abdulla, Vladimirov hung onto his arms. They pushed him away, in the direction that Kotov had led his force. But Drobnin remained standing beside Maria. A flood of sobs racked him as he stared down at her body resting by his feet.

"Forward, Mark!" Nikiforov ordered sharply, roughly. "Forward!" Mark had no will left to resist; he turned in the direction they were pushing him. Several Germans rushed toward Drobnin, but he remained standing over Maria's body. A German fired at him, but the bullet only grazed his shoulder. Snorting with fury, Abdulla flung himself on the man and stunned him with the butt of his automatic. More and more green-uniformed soldiers appeared among the trees, many of them going off in pursuit of Mark and Kotov. Drobnin dropped to the ground and seized the hand machine gun Korovin had abandoned. He let fly a savage burst. Abdulla crawled up with two loaded drums for the gun. He neatly removed the empty one

and reloaded the gun. Holding his automatic ready, he lay down beside Drobnin. "Ah, the devils!" he spat at the green figures twinkling among the trees.

The retreating Russians heard the firing going on behind them. At the edge of the forest a man who had been lying motionless raised his head. It was Kotov. A bullet had caught him in the chest; the others had left him for dead. In his last clear moment he surveyed the glade, saw Drobnin with the machine gun, Abdulla with his clean-shaven, yellow head pressed to the ground, Maria with her bloodstained face turned to the sky. He buried his face in the ground, gave one jerk, and then was still.

Three days later Vladimirov went with Mark back to the town. There, in a street not far from Bido's house, was a row of hanging figures. Mark stood under the gallows and tears of despair streamed from his eyes. Maria was hanging, her long body stretched as though trying to touch the ground with her toes. Her bloodstained face retained the traces of an inviolable tranquillity. Her arms hung impotently at her sides. On her left was Abdulla, his yellow head obstinately bent. His mouth was twisted in a grimace, as though he had tried to say something and failed, and so died, flashing his yellow, tobacco-stained teeth. On her right hung Kotov. His youthful head was bent over almost to Maria's shoulder. Not far from there, Drobnin's dead body was hanging from a telegraph pole.

Vladimirov led him gently away.



16. An Unfinished Chapter

THE steely pincers of the two fronts—the western and the eastern—squeezed Germany in a mortal clutch. The aureole of Hitlerite Germany's invincibility was dissipated in the fires of war. From Berlin came hysterical calls to defend the sacred Third Reich. The German army crawled out of Russia like a mortally wounded animal.

Swarms of refugees poured into Germany from the east-Russians

who had no desire to fall again under the Communist regime. They went to face hunger, privations, anything rather than their former life. They were losing their native land; but they were not prepared to bow their heads again to the Soviet regime. Drobnin, Nikiforov, Kotov had perished, as many others had perished. Vladimirov and the remnants of Kotov's force were mingling with the stream of refugees and retreating westward.

Mark and Vladimirov met for the last time at a small station where refugee trains were being assembled and dispatched. Mark ran his eyes over the square outside the station; it was crowded with people carrying bundles, with men, women, children. But his eyes saw farther, out of Russia, westward, where this flow of refugees was pouring. Behind these refugees would come Stalin's divisions and corps, in all the glory of their victory over Germany, pushing the enemy westward. But both the wretched hordes of fleeing refugees and the victorious Russian troops moving westward were only a small fragment of that silent, grief-laden Russia, his Russia, for which he suffered. And that silent, downtrodden Russia would remain. It was immobile. And he belonged to it.

"You must come, too," Vladimirov said. "You can fight for Russia elsewhere, with us. And return when the time comes."

Mark gazed at his friend and was moved by a deep feeling for him, as he realized how painful it must be for him to leave his native land. Quietly, gently, he answered, "You go. Russia has to be fought for everywhere, all over the world. Go, and remember those of us who are left behind...living and dead."

"But you can fight for Russia in the west, Mark. Perhaps fight better..."

"Perhaps, Vladimirov," and he took his friend's hand. "But my place is here—on Russian soil. Good-by. We will meet again—in a free Russia."

As Mark walked away from the station, Korovin overtook him. They went up a hill. The ruins of the town were left behind. All around them extended the endless plain that was their homeland. Mark stopped to brood over the vast expanse of plain saturated with the scents of the soil he loved so much.

"What are you looking for?" Korovin finally asked.

"I am looking for a sunrise. I have faith that God will bring forth another sunrise in the east."

Mind of the Market of the