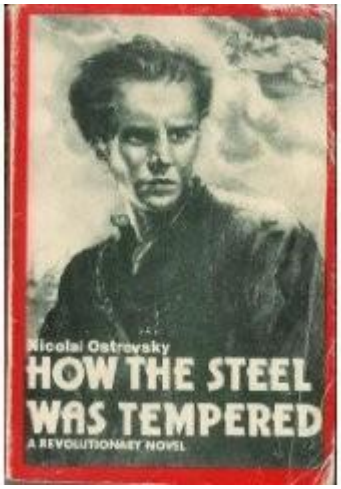
# HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED by NIKOLAI OSTROVSKY

## Translated from the Russian by R. Prokofieva




### INTRODUCTION

The balcony door stood open, and the curtain stirred in the wind, filling out, rising reluctantly, and shrinking like a dipped sail. A crumpled towel left by someone on the radio made a white blur in the dusk. It looked like a white rabbit who had laid down its long ears preparing to jump.

I remembered that bright September morning in Sochi two years ago, the small house in Orekhovaya Street, the ripe, orange persimmons in the sunlit garden, the pleasant whitewashed room, and the dear face on the piled-up pillows.

The white rabbit nestled happily in the folds of the blanket as Nikolai's nervous fingers caressed its long, silky ears. Nikolai was laughing softly, and his gleaming teeth were as white as sugar. On the bedside table lay several big red apples, and their lovely smell filled the whole house. The white rabbit, comically twitching its soft ears, licked the gentle human hand with its small pink tongue.

I wanted to shut my eyes tight and see that hot September morning again, and the house filled with sunlight and apple fragrance. My thoughts refused to take a melancholy course, and my mind was still unable to grasp what had happened and tell itself that this was the irrevocable. . . .

But reality asserted itself, and my eyes saw with ruthless clarity the face that had forever grown still. The last struggle for survival had sapped all his life juices, and dried him as a leaf is dried in a hot wind. It only spared his tall, handsome forehead, and his soft dark chestnut hair. This clear, dome-like brow rose above a small, wizened face. And one fancied that his creative imagination, infused with revolutionary ardour and an irrepressible interest in and love of life, was still working busily. . . . I placed my hand on his forehead. It was still warm and even moist, as though Nikolai was simply resting after his exciting exertion. The Order of Lenin twinkled uncannily on his

sunken chest as if life were stirring in it, and one would see it rise in a soft sigh.

For three days, from morning till night, an endless stream of people of all ages filed past the bier which was literally submerged in flowers and wreaths.

Nikolai Ostrovsky continues to live not only in his books: he himself is a heroic image, and one of the strongest and most striking personalities of his epoch.

Fate treated him cruelly, depriving him of the power of sight and the use of his legs and arms. But he overpowered his physical infirmities, his incurable disease, weakness, grief and torpor, and victoriously asserted life, creative endeavour, and struggle. As an ardent singer of the Bolshevik youth, he sang his militant, joyous song of struggle and victory of socialism, and his voice, ringing with a beautiful, lyrical strength, resounded throughout the Soviet land and the whole world.

Away with melancholy recollections! Let us part with them, for death is the tax we must pay for the frailty of our physical being, and let us turn to the inexhaustible, powerful fount of life. . . .

I went to see him on a cold, windy day in 1932, a typical day for early Moscow spring. He lived in Mertvy Pereulok (since renamed Nikolai Ostrovsky Pereulok— Ed.).

The large flat was packed with tenants. It was noisy and crowded. People jostled you in the corridor, babies were howling, and someone was typing inexpertly in a far room, pecking at the keys with a woodpecker's persistence.

What a setup for a writer! Imagine working in that din! I knocked, and opened the door into Nikolai Ostrovsky's room.

A man, muffled up to his chin in blankets and shawls, was lying on the bed. The pillows were piled high, and I saw a mop of dark chestnut hair, a large, prominent forehead, and a thin, wan face that did not have a drop of colour in it.

The thin eyelids trembled slightly. The thick eyelashes cast bluish shadows on the hollow cheeks. Hands of a waxen transparency lay on top of the blankets.

I knew that Nikolai Ostrovsky was an invalid, but still I did not picture him quite like this.

He looked so terribly weak and helpless that I decided not to bother him and come back another time.

Just then a slight old lady walked briskly into the room. She had lively dark brown eyes, and her face was wreathed in smiles.

"Mother, who's there?" Nikolai suddenly asked in a voice that was somewhat hollow, but very young and not weak at all.

His mother told him my name.

"Oh! How nice," he said. "Come nearer, come here."

A beautiful white-toothed smile lighted up his face. Its every line seemed to glow with youthful eagerness and the joy of living. At first I fancied that his big, brown eyes also sparkled with animation. But in the next moment I realised that the sparkle came from the deep and rich colouring of the irises. Still, during our conversation I kept forgetting that he was blind, for there was so much concentration, attention and joviality in his radiant face.

We were talking about the first part of his novel How the Steel Was Tempered which had just been signed for publication in the magazine Molodaya Gvardia where I worked as editor at the time. Nikolai was curious to hear how his characters had impressed us.

"Pavel, I think, is not a bad kid at all," he said with sly humour, and flashed me a smile. "I'm not

making a secret of it, of course, that Nikolai Ostrovsky and Pavel Korchagin are the closest of friends. He's made from my brain and my blood too, this Pavel person. . . . What I want to know is this: does my novel read simply as an autobiography, the story of just one life?"

His smile suddenly waned, and with his lips compressed, his face looked cold and stern.

"I've purposely put the question so bluntly because I want to know whether the thing I'm doing is good, right, and useful for people or not? There are lots of single cases that are interesting in themselves, but a reader will pause before one for a moment, as before a shopwindow, even in admiration perhaps, and then walk on his way, never again remembering what he had seen there. That is what every writer should fear most, and myself, a beginner, the more so."

I told him that he had nothing to fear on this score. He interrupted me gently and said: "Only please, let's agree on one thing: don't comfort me from the kindness of your heart. You don't have to sugar the pill for me. I'm a soldier, after all, I could sit a horse when I was a mere kid, and I won't be thrown off now."

Although his lips twitched and his smile was shy and gentle, the strength of his unbreakable will was suddenly revealed to me with the utmost clarity. At the same time I felt terribly happy that what I had to say to him would, in fact, comfort him.

I told him that as I read his book I involuntarily recalled the heroes from the Russian and western classics. Many of these heroes, created by writers of genius, shaped the will and the mentality of whole generations. For background they had the history of social relations, social and personal tragedies, and the glory of the peaks attained by human culture.

Pavel Korchagin could take a proud and confident stand among the great and the gloried. This young newcomer, emerging from the fires of the Civil War, should not feel self-conscious finding himself in such illustrious company. Nor did he have to go cap in hand begging for a place, even if only the smallest, in the literati gardens. He had something which the others had not: his young heart was possessed of an inexhaustible strength and throbbed with an unquenchable passion of struggle, and his mind was fired by the most progressive and noble thoughts of people's freedom and happiness.

Needless to say, Pavel Korchagin was irreconcilably hostile to someone like Balzac's Rastignac, but all the freedom-loving characters in literature, whether in the works of Pushkin, Byron or Stendhal, were close to him in spirit. But, of course, he would find the greatest number of kindred souls among Gorky's heroes. We were already talking like old friends, we touched upon different themes but invariably came back to the novel. Nikolai wanted to hear how the editing went and what changes were made by Mark Kolosov, the assistant editor of Molodaya Gvardia, and myself. When I told him how we threw out all sorts of ornamental clichés, he gave a roar of laughter and then chuckled with good humour as I cited his unfortunate turns of speech and some words he had used.

"D'you know the reason for all these slips?" he asked, abruptly changing to a serious, thoughtful tone. "I suppose you'll say it's my lack of culture? That too, but there's another thing you must take into account—my creative isolation, if you know what I mean. I began writing as a lone beginner, on my own responsibility. It's wonderful that I'll have literary friends now!"

He asked me what I thought of the composition of the novel as a whole, his handling of separate scenes, dialogues, descriptions of scenery, how well he had succeeded in bringing out the typical traits of his characters, and where he had made blunders in language, comparisons, metaphors,

descriptive names, and so on.

Each one of his questions showed that he had done a lot of reading and thinking on the subject, and his approach to many of the problems involved in literary work testified to his maturity.

Time simply flew. I was afraid I was tiring Nikolai, but every time I rose to leave a word or a remark would start us off again, and I'd stay "for another minute". Our conversation skipped from one topic to another, the way it does with two people who have only just met and want to know each other better. Still, we went back to the novel all the time, and spoke of the second part on which Nikolai was working. I had completely forgotten that I was in a sickroom, visiting a hopelessly handicapped person.

He told me about his writing plans and worries, set himself the deadline for the coming chapters, and his words were charged with such truly exuberant energy that it never occurred to me to offer any uncalled-for sympathy or encouragement.

I was terribly glad that Molodaya Gvardia had acquired this new author—a fresh and powerful talent, a Bolshevik, veteran of the Civil War, a man with such remarkably clear-cut ideological and moral values.

This was a strong character, tempered in battle, and so, rather than restrain him, I wanted to help him to develop his plans.

I can still hear his deep voice, mellow with happiness and pride, as he said:

"And so I'm back in the ranks. That's the main thing, you know. I'm back in the ranks! Isn't life wonderful! What a life is starting for me!"

All the way home I kept hearing these words: "What a life is starting for me!" and they sounded like a song.

I visited him a few more times before he was taken to Sochi, and gained a still deeper insight into the mentality and character of this amazingly courageous man.

Living in that overcrowded Moscow flat was a trial. Apart from the suffering which he did not immediately learn to hide so skilfully, there were troubles and cares which he was not spared. The family budget was more than modest. Olga Osipovna pinched and scraped as best she could, trying hard to hide their constant want from her son, always keeping her chin up and fussing round him with a smile and a ready joke on her lips, but still Nikolai with his sharpened sensitivity guessed the truth.

"You can't fool me, Mother darling: the wolf is at the door again," he would say to her, and his mother would reply: "Mind your own business and leave the wolf to me." She always tried to turn their cares into a joke and Nikolai readily played the game, but there were some things that simply could not be laughed off.

Their room in that communal flat was cold and damp, and it was impossible for a bedridden person to remain there any longer.

The editors of Molodaya Gvardia approached the Central Committee of the YCL with a request to send Nikolai Ostrovsky to Sochi, and in the summer of 1932 his mother took him south. The day before they left, he sent me the following note:

"Dear Comrade Anna,

We're starting south at 10 a.m. tomorrow. Everything has been done to let me build up a bit of strength to develop my offensive further. I want-to stay in Sochi till late autumn. I'll hang on as

long as I can take it."

By "my offensive" he meant his work on the second part of the novel How the Steel Was Tempered. The difficult and at moments agonising process which Nikolai called "my work" was in truth an offensive. .. .

I often remember his thin, yellowish hands which always lay on top of the blanket. They were the nervous, acutely sensitive hands of a blind man. He had the power of movement left only in his hands, as arthritis, that dread disease of the joints which was to be one of the causes of his death, had already seized the whole of his poor body.

Once, shortly before he left for Sochi, Nikolai said to me in the mocking tone he usually adopted when speaking of his condition:

"My shoulders and elbows don't feel as if they belonged to me at all. It's the craziest feeling! This is all I have left to me, all I possess!" Smiling with puckish sadness, he raised his hands a little and moved his fingers. "Try and manage with these!"

Although he disliked discussing his illness, he told me on one of my earlier visits that for a time he had been able to write with the help of a cardboard stencil.

"It wasn't too convenient, but still it had its uses," he said.

At the beginning of August 1932 I received a letter from him from Sochi. He had written it in pencil with the help of his stencil. The too-straight lines and the unnaturally curved letters compelled the imagination to picture the physical strain and the effort of will that went into the writing of that short letter.

18 Primorskaya,

Sochi,

August 5

"Dear Comrade Anna,

"I am living with my mother very close to the seashore. I spend the whole day out in the garden, lying under an oak-tree and writing, making the best of the lovely weather (the next words were undecipherable) . . . my head is clear. I am in a hurry to live, Comrade Anna, I do not want to be sorry afterwards that I wasted these days. The offensive, brought to a deadlock by my stupid illness, is developing again, and so wish me victory."

The force and tension of this "offensive" could be felt just from the words "I am in a hurry to live".

He had a relapse soon after his arrival in Sochi, and this illness was to him a "stupid" waste of time and a really intolerable hindrance. And though his general health was so badly undermined, it was mainly with his unquailing willpower that he was able to overcome his new illness.

As soon as he was a little better he wrote me that letter "in his own hand" to test his endurance. I could picture him lying there, in the shade of the oak-tree, dictating to his volunteer secretaries for hours at a stretch, refusing to take a rest. . . . His forehead is studded with drops of sweat, his thick eyebrows twitch up and down nervously, his eyelids tremble, and his thin fingers pluck at the edge of the blanket. He often clears his throat, dictating has already tired him, but his imagination has been starved in those "wasted days of illness", and he wants to make up for lost time. His forehead is hot and his heart literally misses a beat: he pictures the field of battle, he feels the earth quaking under the wrathful thudding of the cavalry, he sees the fearless horsemen coming on at a

breakneck pace and cutting down the enemies of the working people. And now he pictures Moscow in those first years of peacetime construction, he recalls the YCL congress in the Bolshoi Theatre, and meeting his comrades-in-arms.

"Hurry . . . hurry . . . I must hurry to live . . . "

Molodaya Gvardia began publication of the second part of Nikolai Ostrovsky's novel How the Steel Was Tempered in its January 1933 issue.

The letters I received from Nikolai in that period told me how great a price he was paying in lifeblood and nerves for his "offensive".

Running ahead of my story I want to say that he stayed in Sochi for three and a half years, and not the few months as originally planned.

In one of his letters he said:

"I have started studying in earnest. It's pretty hard when you're on your own. I've no literature, and no qualified teachers, but all the same I can feel the narrow horizons of my tiny personal experience widening, and my cultural baggage growing heavier. . . . You asked me what I'd been doing these last three months. I devoted a lot of the time intended for my literary studies to the local young people. From a lone wolf I've turned into a 'cheer leader'. The committee bureau now holds its meetings in my house. I'm in charge of the Party activist circle, and chairman of the district culture-promoting council. In short, I've shifted closer to the Party's practical activity, and have become quite a useful fellow. True, I use up a lot of strength, but then living's become more fun. I'm in the Komsomol midst.

"I've set up a literary circle, and I run it as best I can. The Party and Komsomol committees take a lively interest in my work. The Party activists often meet in my house. I can feel the pulse of life. I wanted this local practice, consciously sacrificing three whole months, so as to get the feel of what is most vital and topical today."

And then he wrote:

"Still, I do a lot of reading. I've read Balzac's La peau de chagrin, Figner's Recollections, The Last of the Udeghei, Anna Karenina, Literary Heritage, all the back numbers of Literaturnaya Kritika, Turgenev's A Nest of the Gentry and many more books."

I gave this letter to one of my office friends to read, and he was quite shaken.

"I say, what a heroic character!" he exclaimed. "If I didn't know who had written this letter I'd picture the writer as a big, strong chap in the pink of health reporting on his activities."

We did not learn till after the danger had blown over how terribly ill Nikolai had been. He wrote me in the beginning of 1934:

"I nearly died. The desperate struggle went on for a whole month. The worst is over, and I feel stronger with every day. . . ."

The popularity of his novel was growing rapidly, and Ostrovsky was receiving more and 0iore letters from people complaining that the book was unobtainable in their local libraries or bookstores.

He told me about a great variety of people and their work—miners, metalworkers, steel smelters, electricians, locomotive drivers, stokers, accountants, teachers, actors, artists. He had met some remarkable collective farm chairmen and team leaders. "What characters!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Their experience and knowledge of life are truly wonderful!"

Ostrovsky prided and delighted in his countrymen's integrity, noting each excellent trait, while

shabbiness, stupidity and smugness outraged him so painfully as though he himself had been personally insulted. In this respect his vision was keener than that of many whose eyesight was unimpaired. In 1934 he wrote to me:

"To tell you the truth, even now I live a far happier life than do many of my callers, most of them calling from plain curiosity. I wouldn't wonder. They have healthy bodies, but they lead a dull, colourless existence. They can see with both eyes, but I imagine that they have a bored, indifferent look. They probably pity me and think: 'Heaven preserve me from ever finding myself in his shoes!' To me they seem such sorry creatures, that I swear I'd never agree to change places with them."

Can anything more be added to these lines which speak for themselves so clearly?

Ostrovsky was always full of plans, irrepressible energy and good cheer, and this was the frame of mind in which he began each new day, his only complaint being that the day was over too soon. Nothing could weaken, let alone shatter, the strength of his spirit. If he had troubles his friends would only hear about them in passing, and then always in the past tense. No matter how his friends remonstrated with him, Nikolai refused to listen to reason and worked for fifteen hours a day, he received multitudes of callers, slept little, and squandered the little physical strength he had. The last time I came to see him in Sochi, I scolded him for this. He listened with a comically meek and contrite expression on his face, then he began to sigh and mumble some extraordinary excuses. I kept a straight face as long as I could, and then I burst out laughing. My lecture had been a complete waste of breath!

"I'm a hopeless case, can't you see?" Nikolai said, laughing with me.

What we all feared did happen. In August 1935, his condition took a sudden and sharp turn for the worse.

"For my stubbornness life restored to me this boundless, wonderful, beautiful happiness, and I forgot the warnings and threats of my doctors. I forgot that I had so little physical strength. The fast-moving stream of people —Komsomol youth, esteemed factory workers and miners, all those heroic builders of our happiness—attracted to me by my novel fanned in me what seemed to be a dying fire. I was once again a passionate agitator and propagandist. I often forgot my place in the ranks where my orders were to use my pen rather and not my tongue.

"This traitorous health of mine played me false once again. All at once I rolled down to the dread boundary line.

"But, for all the danger there is, I won't die this time either, of course. I simply must write my Born of the Storm. What is more, I must infuse it with all the ardour of my heart. I've got to make a screenplay of How the Steel Was Tempered. I've got to write a book for children about Pavel Korchagin's childhood, and—this is a must— a book about Pavel's happiness. This will take me five years of strenuous work. Five years of life is the minimum I must figure on. Are you smiling? But it can't be different. My doctors also smile in embarrassment and dismay. Duty comes first with me, and so I take this five-year plan as a minimum. Tell me, Anna, is there a madman who'd depart this life at a time as wonderful as ours?"

It never occurred to me to "smile". His vitality and resistance were so fantastic, and his optimism was always so infectious, that I instantly believed in his "minimum" without a shadow of doubt. He should have his minimum. It could not be otherwise.

He was anxious to return to Moscow so as to be closer to his writer friends, and to avail himself of

the material and counsel he needed for getting down to work on his new novel Born of the Storm. Towards the end of the year, 1935, we succeeded in getting a flat for Ostrovsky in 40, Gorky Street.

In November I received a letter from him in which he said:

"A member of the Government is coming here in a day or two to present me with a decoration. I can't leave until then. I must also get my doctor's permission for the journey, as I am unwell again. When all these things have been cleared up, I'll write and tell you the day of departure."

We were busy fixing up the flat in 40, Gorky Street, anxious to have everything just the way he'd like it. . . . I was called to the phone in the middle of the haste and bustle of our editorial day. It was a long-distance call from Sochi. There was a snowstorm outside. I picked up the phone and heard the blizzardly howling of the wind, snatches of music, whistling, crackling—a cacophony of indistinct sounds and voices.

And suddenly, Nikolai's deep, hollowish voice rang in my ear as clearly as if he were speaking from Arbat Street and not all the way from Sochi.

"I'll be in Moscow on the eleventh! We'll hold a meeting of the 'general staff' in my train compartment, the minute we steam in! You'll tell me all your news, and I'll tell you mine. I work like mad!"

On December llth, a cold wintry day, a small group of us went to Serpukhov to meet Nikolai Ostrovsky. There was a heavy snowfall. The tall, loud-mouthed locomotive tore into the haze of fluffy snow with startling suddenness. When the train came to a stop, we ran to the green service car. A young, round-faced woman emerged from the door.

"Is Nikolai Ostrovsky in this car?" we asked her. "That's

right, that's right," she replied with a nice smile.

Nikolai's compartment was dark and hot. The faint light from the passage cast bluish shadows on his face. He had lost weight, but his laugh was as infectious as ever, his white-toothed smile was so radiant and his thin face so animated that, as usual, I forgot how ill he was.

"The old warrior's back in the ranks," he said jocularly, but his voice rang with pride and jubilance.

He told us about the meetings which his young readers had arranged for him at the stops. And when we were left alone in the compartment for a minute, he said to me:

"You know . . . how I wanted . . . how terribly I wanted to see their faces. I felt all those wonderful boys and girls so strongly, they were so dear to me that at moments I fancied I was really seeing them. . . . Of course, I was the happiest person in the world just then, but if I could see them, I would be able to tell my dear YCL'ers how much I love them more eloquently still."

I tried to change the topic, but Nikolai's eyebrows twitched stubbornly, and he continued with a shadow of a patiently ironic smile on his lips:

"There's no understanding the mentality of doctors at times. Apparently, surgery can restore a person's eyesight for five or six days, and then he'll go blind again. I believe this operation is called resection of the pupil. However, that's not the point. Naturally, I refused to have such kindness done to me. People don't seem to understand that by giving me sight for five days they'd be thrusting me backward and not helping me forward. I have succeeded in mastering all my desperate emotions connected with my blindness, and now from sheer humaneness the doctors are prepared to grant me even worse torments! All right, I'll see you all, my dear friends, and then

what? No, I have conquered darkness, I have trained myself to live in spite of this physical handicap, despising it, and I don't want to have a new burden placed upon my soul."

In order not to tire him, we often left him alone in his compartment, during the journey. As we talked quietly in the passage, however, he'd hear what we were saying with his acute hearing, and call out something gay, witty and very much to the point.

. . .I called on Nikolai at his flat a few days later.

It was very warm in his large, high-ceilinged room. Two impressive electric heaters maintained the temperature at 25 or 26 degrees Centigrade.

Nikolai was wearing an embroidered Ukrainian shirt, which was very becoming. I had never seen him look so well before. There was a bit of colour in his hollow cheeks, and he had a new, earnestly-happy smile. He was lying back on his piled-up pillows, and his dark hair made a soft frame round his tall, white forehead. All of us who loved this man dearly exchanged happy glances, delighting in the wonderful, inexhaustible vitality with which his face vibrated.

The talk was gay and noisy. It suddenly occurred to one of the guests that we were tiring our host, and he asked anxiously:

"Aren't we making too much of a noise?"

"Heavens no," Nikolai replied with a happy laugh. "Let's have a real housewarming!"

I once dropped in on him in the evening when his working day was over. Nikolai was in his everyday tunic made from army cloth. He looked tired. I asked him how many hours of dictation he'd had that day.

"Oh, not many, not many at all," he began, and suddenly admitted the truth: "About ten. I see you don't approve. But I was so starved, so hungry for work! Honestly, even lovers don't long for each other as passionately as I longed for work. And you know the mood that comes upon you after work. When my secretary left, I began thinking over the next scene, and I pictured it so vividly that I could have dictated it right there and then. In such moments "there's no happier person than me in the whole world. I am a lucky fellow anyway, aren't I? Lucky, and how!"

He recalled the interview he once gave in Sochi to an American lady journalist.

"I was virtually in her clutches: she wanted to know this, and she wanted to know that—a terribly noisy lady she was. And then she had to be told how my heart was working, how I felt in general, and so on and so forth. I listened and listened, and finally I asked her what she wanted all that information for about poor me. She began to hem and haw, saying something about compassion, humaneness, pity, and other such considerations. It dawned on me then that she was trying to make a martyr of me, a stoic, and a saint. . . . My, how I wanted to tell her where to get off! Instead, I simply pointed out to her the correct approach to my life story, and explained why I considered myself a useful member of society."

Nikolai could not stand pity, or condescending, gushy kindness. He would ridicule anyone who so much as attempted to moan or lament over him. His sensibilities were extremely acute, and he could instantly discern the slightest change of mood in the people about him.

He himself was very good at cheering up others. The words he said were of the simplest, but they had a more powerful effect than many a passionate eruption of sympathy. He tried to get at the root of the trouble, and then offered his advice in a businesslike manner, very gently and tactfully showing which of the aspects involved were, in his opinion, not worth a tear. This ability to get to the bottom of everything, doing it with objective and passionate earnestness, was one of his

strongest points.

Everyone who was acquainted with Nikolai Ostrovsky knows how hard he worked. To my great sorrow I was not in Moscow during the last week of his life. His secretaries told me how strenuously he worked in those last days. The secretaries took turns, working in two or three shifts, while he dictated without a break, pushing on with the doggedness of a real fighter to finish the first part of his novel Born of the Storm. He had promised the Central Committee of the YCL to have the book finished by mid-December, and he held his word.

His day was strictly scheduled: in the morning, he dictated to his secretary and then had it all read back to him two or three times. After a short break for lunch, he went back to work again. Then came the reading hour—newspapers, new books or the classics. He liked expressive reading, and listened with rapt, childlike attention. The evening ended with music on the radio and the news.

Once, we gathered in his room to hear a programme composed of his favourite songs and music; broadcast was a tribute to Nikolai Ostrovsky from the Radio Committee. When the concert was over, Nikolai said in a low, reflective tone:

"Happiness . . . this is it. Could I have ever thought that one day I'd be listening to a concert dedicated to me?"

We talked about music. He recalled that as a boy he would often stop under people's windows if he heard someone playing the piano.

"The piano always attracted me, and amazed me extremely. Of course, I could not even dream of ever owning an instrument as expensive as a piano. . . . Later, I learnt to play the accordion, and I felt so proud that my fingers could produce music. I loved my accordion. We had an accordion at the front too . . . it's wonderful going into battle singing a song!"

He then recalled those wretched years when he worked as a kitchen boy at the railway station.

"It was a hard job, to put it mildly—fetch this and carry that, get a move on, look sharp, boy. I saw too much of the bottom of life, if you know what I mean, it was as though I were constantly watching the dirty feet of passersby from a basement window. I witnessed so much degradation, so many people go to pot through drink. But I was sorriest for the women, I feared most for those very young girls who were led astray right before my eyes."

The conversation turned to the female characters in Born of the Storm and, speaking with even greater heat, Nikolai said that what he wanted to show was true love and friendship, a truly moral and human attitude to a woman friend.

"There can be friendship without love, but it's a shallow love if it has no friendship in it, no comradeship, no common interests. It's not real love, it's just a selfish pleasure, a pretty bauble. I'm not bragging and it's all past anyway, but in the old days the girls used to give me the glad eye, and I was ridiculously shy and awkward. . . . A Marusya or an Olessya would glance at me with her blue or brown eyes . . . it was a wonderful feeling, there's no gainsaying it."

He laughed softly in reminiscence.

"Do you know," he said, "I got a letter the other day from Tonya Tumanova, not Tonya really but the girl who was the prototype of Tonya. Can you imagine it, she hasn't forgotten me."

Nikolai fell abruptly silent, and for several minutes he lay still with a concentrated frown on his face. Not a muscle stirred, and only his thick black eyelashes trembled slightly. Then, he sort of gave himself a shake, and started telling me about Tonya Tumanova. The man she fell in love with and married, an engineer he was, turned out to be a weak, bad character. Tonya divorced him, and

now lived apart with her two children, teaching for a living.

"She was a good, kind girl, but she was not made for struggle. It was often the case—people who could not fight for the common cause, could not put up a fight for their personal happiness either."

On one of my visits, I was shocked by Nikolai's pallor and his strangely haggard look. He refused to tell me what was wrong at first, but finally he yielded to my insistence and said:

"My eyeballs are sore. I suppose there's an inflammation. The right eye especially, it's simply killing me. Did you ever get coal dust in your eyes? Well, I sometimes have the feeling that my right eye is stuffed full with this blasted coal dust, and it twists and turns inside like mad, ripping the eyeball apart. I had the specialist in the other day. . . ."

He was silent for a minute, then he cleared his throat, and said in a somewhat constrained voice:

"He suggests removing the eyeballs, to spar*e me further suffering. I asked him whether he proposed sewing up my eyelids or sticking in a pair of artificial, glass eyes? Disgusting!"

A painful grimace contorted his face. He bit his lip hard, closed his eyes tight, and tensed himself, stubbornly determined to endure and master the pain.

"I said to him that it was not only myself I had to consider but also the people who associated with me," he spoke at last, breaking the distressing silence. " 'Think how pleasant it will be for my friends/ I said to him, 'to look at this effigy with glass eyes. I can't do it to them.' 'No,' I said. 'No matter how bad it is at times, I'll keep my own eyes, they may be blind but at least they're brown.' Don't you agree?"

He gripped my hand with his thin, nervous fingers that seemed to speak a language all their own. What I feared most in such minutes was "going all maudlin" which he hated. I cradled his cool, frozen-feeling fingers in my hands and, speaking in an affectionately humorous tone, assured him that even if he had carroty hair or a hooked nose, like the boy in Perrault's fairy tale, we'd love him just as tenderly.

He smiled, and then said in a matter-of-fact voice: "I need another five years because the second and third parts of the book will mean a terrific amount of work, you know." Sighing softly, he said dreamily: "Yes, another five years would be nice. And then, oh well . . . if I did fall out of the ranks, at least I'd know that the offensive had been won." He loved such words as "ranks", "offensive", "victory", "battle", and pronounced them with a special sort of elation. I mentioned it to him once. He smiled, and slowly drew his long eyebrows together to the bridge of his nose —a thing he was wont to do in moments of profound and pleasant reflection.

"How could I help loving these words when for me they contain the main expression of life?"

I remember how happy he looked when he received his service card from the People's Commissariat for Defence.

"You see, I'm still in the rank of fighters!" he exclaimed. One day we were talking about friendship, and suddenly Nikolai asked why Mark Kolosov and I did not come to see him more often. Other friends visited him practically every day. I replied that I saw no need in daily calls. In the first place, we did not want to tire him, knowing what a strain visitors were on him both physically and spiritually. In the second, we did not want to take up his time which might otherwise be given to our young people, for whom it was very good to associate with a person like Nikolai Ostrovsky. And is it the number of visits that actually counts? After all, a writer needed privacy, he had to be left alone to think in peace, to talk tete-a-tete with his heroes. In Ostrovsky's case, these hours of solitude were particularly important, seeing that his secretaries were

necessarily present at the creative process itself. All things considered, we were not going to make a nuisance of ourselves, and would continue visiting him as before. As for any outward manifestations of affection, surely, he had sufficient proof that we loved him and were his truest friends. "Oh, yes, yes, I do," he said, deeply moved. Our conversation drifted to other topics, and apropos of something or other I mentioned his copious correspondence. Nikolai responded eagerly, recalling many extremely interesting letters which "made his heart sing", and suddenly changing to a sombre key said:

"I want you to know, in case you ever have to sort out my papers, that you'll find everything quite easily—every scrap of paper is in its right place. I'm a soldier, I like order. . . ."

Everyone who knew him well will, at the memory of him, always feel the bitterness of irreparable loss, the wrench of parting with a bit of his heart. Time will blunt the pain, of course, but the grief will remain as profound.

Nikolai Ostrovsky is impossible to forget. He will never be forgotten by his friends or his readers. His image, personifying fortitude and dedication to the cause of socialism, will never be erased from our memories. He was a singularly charming, touchingly clean and nice person.

ANNA KARAVAYEVA
(From Recollections about Nikolai Ostrovsky)

# PART ONE

## Chapter One

"Those of you who came to my house to be examined before the Easter holidays, stand up!"

The speaker, a corpulent man in the garb of a priest, with a heavy cross dangling from his neck, fixed the class with a baleful glare.

His small hard eyes seemed to bore through the six children—four boys and two girls—who rose from their seats and looked at the man in the robe with apprehension.

"You sit down," the priest said, motioning to the girls. The girls hastily complied, with sighs of relief.

Father Vasili's slits of eyes focussed on the other four. "Now then, my fine lads, come over here!"

Father Vasili rose, pushed back his chair and walked up to the group of boys who stood huddled close together.

"Which of you young ruffians smokes?"

"We don't smoke, father," the four answered timidly. The blood rushed to the priest's face.

"You don't smoke, eh, you scoundrels? Then who put the tobacco in the dough? Tell me that! We'll see whether you smoke or not. Now then, turn out your pockets! Come on, turn them out, I say!"

Three of the boys proceeded to empty the contents of their pockets onto the table.
The priest inspected the seams carefully for grains of tobacco, but found nothing, whereupon he turned to the fourth lad, a dark-eyed youngster in a grey shirt and blue trousers patched at the knees.
"What are you standing there for like a dummy?" The
lad threw a look of silent hatred at his questioner.
"I haven't any pockets," he replied sullenly, running his hands over the sides of his trousers.
"No pockets, eh? You think I don't know who could have played such a scoundrelly trick as to spoil my dough?
You think I'm going to let you off again? Oh no, my boy, you shall suffer for this. Last time I allowed you to stay in this school because your mother begged me to keep you, but now I'm finished with you. Out with you!" He seized the boy painfully by the ear and threw him out into the corridor, slamming the door after him.
The class sat silent, cowed. None of the children could understand why Pavel Korchagin had been ejected, none but Sergei Bruzzhak, who was Pavel's closest friend. He had seen him sprinkle a fistful of home-grown tobacco into the Easter cake dough in the priest's kitchen where six backward pupils had waited for the priest to come and hear them repeat their lesson.
Now Pavel sat down on the bottom step of the school-house and wondered dismally what his mother would say when he told her what had happened, his poor hard-working mother who toiled from morning till night as cook at the excise inspector's.
Tears choked him.
"What shall I do? It's all because of that damned priest. What on earth made me go and put that tobacco in his dough? It was Seryozhka's idea. 'Let's play a trick on the old beast,' he says. So we did. And now Seryozhka's got off and I'll likely be kicked out."
His feud with Father Vasili was of long standing. It dated back to the day he had a scrap with Mishka Levchenkov and in punishment was kept in after lessons. To keep the lad out of mischief in the empty classroom, the teacher took him to the second grade to sit in at a lesson.
Pavel took a seat at the back. The teacher, a wizened little man in a black jacket, was telling the class about the earth and the heavenly bodies, and Pavel gaped with amazement when he learned that the earth had been in existence for millions of years and that the stars too were worlds. So startled was he by what he had heard that he barely refrained from getting up and blurting out: "That isn't what the Bible says!" But he was afraid of getting into more hot water.
The priest had always given Pavel full marks for Scripture. He knew almost the whole prayer book practically by heart, and the Old and New Testament as well. He knew exactly what God had created on each day of the week. Now he resolved to take the matter up with Father Vasili. At the very next lesson, before the priest had time to settle himself properly in his chair, Pavel raised his hand and, having obtained permission to speak, he got up.
"Father, why does the teacher in the second grade say the earth is millions of years old, instead of what the Bible says, five thou. . . ." A hoarse cry from Father Vasili cut him short.
"What did you say, you scoundrel? So that's how you learn your Scripture!"
And before Pavel knew what had happened the priest had seized him by the ears and was banging his head against the wall. A few minutes later, shaken with fright and pain, he found himself outside in the corridor.

His mother too had given him a good scolding that time. And the following day she had gone to the school and begged Father Vasili to take him back. From that day Pavel hated the priest with all his soul. Hated and feared him. His childish heart rebelled against any injustice, however slight. He could not forgive the priest for the undeserved beating, and he grew sullen and bitter.

Pavel suffered many a slight at the hands of Father Vasili after that. The priest was forever sending him out of the classroom; day after day for weeks on end he made him stand in the corner for trifling misdemeanours and never called on him to answer questions, with the result that on the eve of the Easter holidays Pavel had to go with the backward boys to the priest's house to be re-examined. It was there in the kitchen that he had dropped the tobacco into the dough.

No one had seen him do it, but the priest had guessed at once who was to blame.

The lesson ended at last and the children poured out into the yard and crowded round Pavel, who maintained a gloomy silence. Sergei Bruzzhak lingered behind in the classroom. He felt that he too was guilty, but he could do nothing to help his friend.

Yefrem Vasilievich, the headmaster, poked his head out of the open window of the common room and shouted: "Send Korchagin to me at once!" Pavel jumped at the sound of the headmaster's deep bass voice, and with pounding heart obeyed his summons.

The proprietor of the railway station restaurant, a pale middle-aged man with faded, colourless eyes, glanced briefly at Pavel. "How old is he?" "Twelve."

"All right, he can stay. He'll get eight rubles a month and his food on the days he works. He'll work twenty-four hours at a stretch every other day. But mind, no pilfering."

"Oh no, sir. He won't steal, I'll answer for that," the mother hastened fearfully to assure him.

"Let him start in today," ordered the proprietor and, turning to the woman behind the counter, said: "Zina, take the boy to the kitchen and tell Frosya to put him to work instead of Grishka." The barmaid laid down the knife with which she had been slicing ham, nodded to Pavel and led the way across the hall to a side door opening into the scullery.

Pavel followed her. His mother hurried after him and whispered quickly into his ear: "Now Pavlushka, dear, do your best, and don't disgrace yourself."

With sad eyes she watched him go, and left. Work in the scullery was in full swing; plates, forks and knives were piled high on the table and several women were wiping them with towels flung over their shoulders. A boy slightly older than Pavel, with a shaggy mop of ginger hair, was tending two huge samovars.

The scullery was full of steam that rose from the large vat of boiling water in which the dishes were washed, and Pavel could not see the faces of the women at first. He stood waiting uncertainly for someone to tell him what to do.

Zina., the barmaid, went over to one of the dishwashers and touched her shoulder.

"Here, Frosya, I've brought you a new boy to take Grishka's place. You tell him what he's to do."

"She's in charge here," Zina said to Pavel, nodding toward the woman she had called Frosya.

"She'll tell you what you have to do." And with that she turned and went back to the buffet.

"All right," Pavel replied softly and looked questioningly at Frosya. Wiping her perspiring brow she examined him critically from head to foot, then, rolling up her sleeve which had slipped over her elbow, she said in a deep and remarkably pleasant voice:

"It's not much of a job, dearie, but it will keep you busy enough. That copper over there has to be

heated in the morning and kept hot so there's boiling water all the time; then there's the wood to chop and the samovars to take care of besides. You'll have to clean the knives and forks sometimes and carry out the slops. There'll be plenty to do, lad," she said, speaking with a marked Kostroma accent laying the stress on the "a's". Her manner of speaking and her flushed face with the small turned-up nose made Pavel feel better.

"She seems quite decent," he concluded, and overcoming his shyness, said: "What am I to do now, Auntie?"

A loud guffaw from the dishwashers met his words.

"Ha! Ha! Frosya's gone and got herself a nephew. . . ."

Frosya herself laughed even more heartily than the others.

Through the cloud of steam Pavel had not noticed that Frosya was a young girl; she was no more than eighteen.

Much embarrassed, he turned to the boy and

asked: "What do I do now?"

But the boy merely chuckled. "You ask Auntie, she'll tell you all about it. I'm off."

Whereupon he darted through the door leading to the kitchen.

"Come over here and help dry the forks," said one of the dishwashers, a middle-aged woman.

"Stop your cackling," she admonished the others. "The lad didn't say anything funny. Here, take this." She handed Pavel a dish towel. "Hold one end between your teeth and pull the other end tight. Here's a fork, run it up and down the towel, and see you don't leave any dirt between the prongs. They're very strict about that here. The customers always inspect the forks and if they find a speck of dirt, they make a terrible fuss, and the mistress will send you flying out in a jiffy." "The mistress?" Pavel echoed. "I thought the master who hired me was in charge."

The dishwasher laughed.

"The master, my lad, is just a stick of furniture around here. The mistress is the boss. She isn't here today. But if you work here a while you'll see for yourself."

The scullery door opened and three waiters entered carrying trays piled high with dirty dishes. One of them, a broad-shouldered cross-eyed man with a heavy, square jaw, said: "You'd better look lively. The 12 o'clock is due any minute, and here you are dawdling about."

He looked at Pavel. "Who's this?" he

asked. "That's the new boy," said Frosya.

"Ah, the new boy," he said. "Well, listen, my lad." He laid his heavy hands on Pavel's shoulders and pushed him over to the samovars. "You're supposed to keep them boiling all the time, and look, one of them's out, and the other is barely going. Don't let it happen again or I'll beat the stuffings out of you!"

Pavel busied himself with the samovars without a word.

Thus began his life of toil. Never had Pavka worked so hard as on that first day. He realised that this was not home where he could afford to disobey his mother. The cross-eyed waiter had made it quite plain that if he did not do as he was told, he would suffer for it.

Placing one of his top-boots over the chimney and using it as a bellows, Pave! soon had the sparks flying from the large pot-bellied samovars. He picked up the slop pail and rushed out to the garbage dump, added firewood to the water boiler, dried the wet dish towels on the hot samovars —in a word, did everything he was told to do. Late that night when he went off wearily to the

kitchen, Anisia, the middle-aged dishwasher, with a glance at the door that had closed behind him, remarked: "Something queer about that boy, look at the way he dashes about like mad. Must have been a good reason for putting him to work."

"He's a good worker," said Frosya. "Needs no speeding up."

"He'll soon cool off," was Lusha's opinion. "They all try hard in the beginning. . . ."

At seven o'clock the next morning, Pavel, utterly exhausted after a whole night spent on his feet, turned the boiling samovars over to the boy who was to relieve him. The latter, a puffy-faced youngster with a mean look in his eyes, examined the boiling samovars, and having assured himself that all was in order, thrust his hands into his pockets and spat through his teeth with an air of scornful superiority.

"Now listen, snotnose!" he said in an aggressive tone, fixing Pavel with his colourless eyes. "See you're on the job here tomorrow at six sharp."

"Why at six?" Pavka wanted to know. "The shift changes at seven, doesn't it?"

"Never mind when the shift changes. You get here at six. And you'd better not blab too much or I'll smash your silly mug for you. Some cheek, only started in today and already putting on airs." The dishwashers who had just finished their shift listened with interest to the exchange between the two boys. The blustering tone and bullying manner of the other enraged Pavel. He took a step toward his tormentor and was about to lash out at him with his fists when the fear of losing his newly acquired job stopped him.

"Stop your noise," he said, his face dark with rage, "and keep off or you'll get more than you bargained for. I'll be here at seven tomorrow, and I can use my fists as good as you can. Maybe you'd like to try? I'm game."

His adversary cowered back against the boiler, gaping with surprise at the bristling Pavel. He had not expected such a determined rebuff.

"All right, all right, we'll see," he muttered.

Pavel, his first day at work having passed without mishap, hurried home with a sense of having honestly earned his rest. Now he too was a worker and no one could accuse him of being a parasite.

The morning sun was already climbing above the sprawling buildings of the sawmill. Before long the tiny house where Pavel lived would come into view, just behind the Leszczinski garden. "Mother must have just got up, and here I am coming home from work," Pavel thought, and he quickened his pace, whistling as he went. "It turned out not so bad being kicked out of school. That damned priest wouldn't have given me any peace anyway, and he can go to hell now for all I care. As for that gingerhead," he said to himself as he opened the gate, "I'll punch his face for certain."

His mother, who was lighting the samovar in the yard, looked up at her son's approach and asked anxiously:

"Well, how was it?"

"Fine," Pavel replied.

His mother was about to say something when through the open window Pavel caught a glimpse of his brother Artem's broad back.

"Artem's come home?" he asked, worried.

"Yes, he came last night. He's going to stay here and work at the railway yards."

With some hesitation Pavel opened the front door.

The man seated at the table with his back to the door turned his huge frame as Pavel entered and the eyes under the thick black brows looked stern.

"Ah, here comes the tobacco lad. Well, how goes it?" Pavel dreaded the forthcoming interview.

"Artem knows all about it already," he thought. "I'm in for a good row and hiding to boot."

Pavel stood somewhat in awe of his elder brother.

But Artem evidently had no intention of beating him. He sat on a stool, leaning his elbows on the table, and studied Pavel's face with a mingled expression of amusement and scorn.

"So you've graduated from university, eh? Learned all there is to learn and now you're busying yourself with slops, eh?"

Pavel stared down at a nail sticking out of a floor board. Artem got up from the table and went into the kitchen.

"Looks as if I won't get a thrashing after all," Pavel thought with a sigh of relief.

Later on at tea Artem questioned Pavel about the incident at school. Pavel told him all that had happened.

"What will become of you if you grow up to be such a scamp," the mother said sadly. "What shall we do with him? Who does he take after, I wonder? Dear God, to think of all I've had to suffer from that boy," she complained.

Artem pushed his empty cup away and turned to Pavel.

"Now listen to me, mate," he said. "What's done can't be undone. Only now take care and do your work properly and no monkey business, because if you get yourself kicked out of this place I'll give you a proper thrashing. Remember that. You've given mother enough trouble as it is. You're always getting into some sort of mess. Now that's got to stop. When you've worked for a year or thereabouts I'll try and get you taken on at the railway yards as an apprentice, because you'll never amount to anything if you mess about with slops all your life. You've got to learn a trade. You're a bit too young just now, but in a year's time I'll see what I can do, maybe they'll take you. I'll be working here now. Ma won't need to go out to work any more. She's slaved enough for all sorts of swine. Only see here, Pavel, you've got to be a man."

He stood up, his huge frame dwarfing everything about him, and putting on the jacket that hung over the chair, said to his mother: "I've got to go out for an hour or so," and went out, stooping in the doorway.

Passing by the window on his way to the gate, he looked in and called out to Pavel: "I've brought you a pair of boots and a knife. Mother will give them to you."

The station restaurant was open day and night.

Six different railway lines met at this junction, and the station was always packed with people; only for two or three hours at night during a gap between trains was the place comparatively quiet. Hundreds of trains passed through this station bringing maimed and crippled men from the front and taking back a constant stream of new men in monotonous grey overcoats.

Pavel worked there for two years—two years in which he saw nothing more than the scullery and kitchen. The twenty odd people employed in the huge basement kitchen worked at a feverish pace.

Ten waiters scurried constantly back and forth between the restaurant and the kitchen.
By now Pavel was receiving ten rubles instead of eight. He had grown taller and broader in these two years, and many were the trials that fell to his lot. For half a year he had worked as a kitchen boy but had been sent back to the scullery again by the all-powerful chef who had taken a dislike to him—you never knew but what the unruly cub might stick a knife into you if you beat him too often. Indeed Pavel's fiery temper would have lost him the job long since had it not been for his tremendous capacity for hard work. For he could work harder than anyone else and he never seemed to get tired.
During rush hours he would dash with loaded trays up and down the kitchen stairs like a whirlwind, taking several steps at a time.
At night, when the hubbub in both halls of the restaurant subsided, the waiters would gather downstairs in the kitchen storerooms and wild, reckless card games would begin. Pavel often saw large sums of money lying on the tables. He was not surprised, for he knew that each waiter received between thirty and forty rubles a shift in ruble and half ruble tips, which they spent later in drinking and gambling. Pavel hated them.
"The damned swine!" he thought. "There's Artem, a first-class mechanic, and all he gets is forty-eight rubles a month, and I get ten. And they rake in all that money in one day, just for carrying trays back and forth. And then they spend it all on drink and cards."
To Pavel the waiters were as alien and hostile as his employers. "They crawl on their bellies here, the pigs, but their wives and sons strut about town like rich folk."
Sometimes their sons came, wearing smart Gymnasium uniforms, and sometimes their wives, plump and soft with good living. "I bet they have more money than the gentry they serve," Pavel thought. Nor was the lad shocked any longer by what went on at night in the dark corners of the kitchen or in the storerooms. He knew very well that no dishwasher or barmaid would hold her job long if she did not sell herself for a few rubles to those who held the whip hand here.
Pavel, avid of life, had a glimpse of its bottom-most depths, the very sump of its ugly pit, and a musty, mouldy stench, the smell of swamp rot, rose up to him.
Artem was unable to get him hired as an apprentice at the railway yards; they would not take anyone under fifteen. But Pavel was drawn to the huge soot-blackened brick building, and he looked forward to the day when he could get away from the restaurant.
He went to see Artem at the yards frequently, and would go with him to look over the carriages, helping him whenever he could.
He felt particularly lonely after Frosya left. With the gay, laughing girl gone, Pavel felt more keenly than ever how much her friendship had meant to him. Now when he came in the morning to the scullery and listened to the shrill quarrelling of the refugee women he felt a gnawing sense of emptiness and solitude.

During a slack period at night, as he squatted beside his boiler, adding firewood and staring at the flames, he fell to think of Frosya, and a scene he had recently witnessed rose before his mind's eye.
During the night interval on Saturday Pavel was on his way downstairs to the kitchen, when curiosity prompted him to climb onto a pile of firewood to look into the storeroom on the lower

landing where the gamblers usually assembled.

The game was in full swing. Zalivanov, flushed with excitement, was keeping the bank.

Just then footsteps sounded on the stairs. Looking around, Pavel saw Prokhoshka coming down, and he slipped under the staircase to let the man pass into the kitchen. It was dark there under the stairs and Prokhoshka could not see him.

As Prokhoshka passed the turning in the stairs, Pavel caught a glimpse of his broad back and huge head. Just then someone else came hurrying lightly down the steps after the waiter and Pavel heard a familiar voice call out:

"Prokhoshka, wait!"

Prokhoshka stopped and turned around to look up the stairway. "What d'you want?" he growled.

The footsteps pattered down and soon Frosya came into sight. She seized the waiter by the arm and spoke in a broken, choking voice. "Where's the money the Lieutenant gave you, Prokhoshka?"

The man wrenched his arm away from her.

"What money? I gave it to you, didn't I?" His tone was sharp and vicious.

"But he gave you three hundred rubles," Frosya's voice broke into muffled sobs.

"Did he now? Three hundred!" Prokhoshka sneered. "Want to get it all, eh? Flying high for a dishwasher, aren't you, my fine young lady? The fifty I gave you is plenty. Girls a damn sight better than you, educated too, don't take that much. You ought to be thankful for what you got— fifty rubles clear for a night is damn good. All right, I'll give you another ten, maybe twenty, that's all— and if you're not a fool you can earn some more. I can help you." With this Prokhoshka turned and disappeared into the kitchen.

"Scoundrel! Swine!" Frosya screamed after him and, leaning against the woodpile, sobbed bitterly.

It is hard to describe what Pavel felt as he stood in the darkness under the staircase watching Frosya beat her head against the logs of wood. But he did not show himself; only his fingers spasmodically gripped the cast-iron supports of the staircase.

"So they've sold her too, damn them! Oh Frosya, Frosya. . . ."

His hatred for Prokhoshka seared deeper than ever and everything around him was revolting and hateful to him. "If I had the strength I'd beat the scoundrel to death! Why am I not big and strong like Artem?"

The flames under the boiler flared up and died down, their trembling red tongues intertwining into a long bluish spiral; it seemed to Pavel that some jeering, mocking imp was showing its tongue at him.

It was quiet in the room; only the fire crackled and the tap dripped at measured intervals.

Klimka put the last pot, scrubbed until it shone, on the shelf and wiped his hands. There was no one else in the kitchen. The cook on duty and the kitchen help were asleep in the cloakroom. Quiet settled over the kitchen for the three night hours, and these hours Klimka always spent upstairs with Pavel, for a firm friendship had sprung up between the young kitchen boy and the dark-eyed boiler attendant. Upstairs, Klimka found Pavel squatting in front of the open firebox. Pavel saw the shadow of the familiar shaggy figure cast against the wall and said without turning around:

"Sit down, Klimka."

The boy climbed onto the woodpile, stretched out on it and looked at the silent Pavel. "Trying to tell your fortune in the fire?" he asked, smiling.

Pavel tore his gaze away from the licking tongues of flame and turned on Klimka two large shining eyes brimming over with sadness. Klimka had never seen his friend look so unhappy.

"What's wrong with you today, Pavel?" After a pause he asked: "Anything happened?" Pavel got up and sat next to Klimka. "Nothing's happened," he replied in a low voice. "Only I can't stand it here, Klimka." And his hands resting on his knees clenched into fists.

"What's come over you today?" Klimka insisted, propping himself up on his elbows.

"Today? It's been like this ever since I got this job. Just look at this place! We work like horses and instead of thanks we get blows—anyone can beat you and there's nobody to stick up for you. The masters hire us to serve them, but anyone who's strong enough has the right to beat us. After all, you can run yourself ragged but you'll never please everybody and those you can't please always have it in for you. No matter how you try to do everything right so that nobody could find fault, there's always bound to be somebody you haven't served fast enough, and then you get it in the neck just the same. . . ."

"Don't shout like that," Klimka interrupted him, frightened. "Somebody might walk in and hear you." Pavel leapt to his feet.

"Let them hear, I'm going to quit anyway. I'd rather shovel snow than hang around this . . . this hole full of crooks. Look at all the money they've got! They treat us like dirt, and do what they like with the girls. The decent girls who won't do what they want are kicked out, and starving refugees who have no place to go are taken on instead. And that sort hang on because here at least they get something to eat, and they're so down and out they'll do anything for a piece of bread."

He spoke with such passion that Klimka, fearing that someone might overhear, sprang up to close the door leading to the kitchen, while Pavel continued to pour out the bitterness that burned inside him.

"And you, Klimka, take the beatings lying down. Why don't you ever speak up?"

Pavel dropped onto a stool at the table and rested his head wearily on the palm of his hand. Klimka threw some wood into the fire and also sat down at the table.

"Aren't we going to read today?" he asked Pavel.

"There's nothing to read," Pavel replied. "The bookstall's closed." "Why should it be closed today?" Klimka wondered.

"The gendarmes picked up the bookseller. Found something on him," Pavel replied. "Picked him up? What for?"

"For .politics, they say."

Klimka stared at Pavel, unable to grasp his meaning. "Politics. What's that?"

Pavel shrugged his shoulders.

"The devil knows! They say it's politics when you go against the tsar." Klimka looked startled.

"Do people do that sort of thing?" "I dunno," replied Pavel.

The door opened and Glasha, her eyelids puffed from sleepiness, walked into the scullery.

"Why aren't you two sleeping? There's time for an hour's nap before the train pulls in. You'd better

take a rest, Pavel, I'll see to the boiler for you."

Pavel quit his job sooner than he expected and in a manner he had not foreseen.

One frosty January day when Pavel had finished his shift and was ready to go home he found that the lad who was to relieve him had not shown up. Pavel went to the proprietor's wife and announced that he was going nevertheless, but she would not hear of it. There was nothing for him to do but to carry on, exhausted though he was after a day and night of work. By evening he was ready to drop with weariness. During the night interval he had to fill the boilers and have them ready for the three-o'clock train.

Pavel turned the tap but there was no water; the pump evidently was not working. Leaving the tap open, he lay down on the woodpile to wait, but fatigue got the better of him, and he was soon fast asleep.

A few minutes later the tap began gurgling and hissing and the water poured into the boiler, filling it to overflowing and spilling over the tiled floor of the scullery which was deserted at this hour. The water flowed on until it covered the floor and seeped under the door into the restaurant.

Puddles of water gathered under the bags and bundles of the dozing passengers, but nobody noticed it until the water reached a passenger lying on the floor and he jumped to his feet with a shout. There was a rush for luggage and a terrific uproar broke out.

And the water continued to pour in.

Prokhoshka, who had been clearing the tables in the second hall, ran in when he heard the commotion. Leaping over the puddles he made a dash for the door and pushed it open violently. The water dammed behind it burst into the hall.

There was more shouting. The waiters on duty rushed into the scullery. Prokhoshka threw himself on the sleeping Pavel.

Blows rained down on the boy's head, stunning him.

Still half asleep, he had no idea of what was happening. He was only conscious of blinding flashes of lightning before his eyes and agonising pain shooting through his body.

Pavel was so badly beaten that he barely managed to drag himself home.

In the morning Artem, grim-faced and scowling, questioned his brother as to what had happened. Pavel told him everything.

"Who beat you?" Artem asked

hoarsely. "Prokhoshka."

"All right, now lie still."

Without another word Artem pulled on his jacket and walked out.

"Where can I find Prokhor, the waiter?" he asked one of the dishwashers. Glasha stared at the stranger in workingman's clothes who had burst into the scullery.

"He'll be here in a moment," she replied.

The man leaned his enormous bulk against the door

jamb. "All right, I can wait."

Prokhor, carrying a mountain of dishes on a tray, kicked the door open and entered the scullery. 'That's him," Glasha nodded at the waiter.

Artem took a step forward and laying a heavy hand on Prokhor's shoulder looked him straight in

the eye.
"What did you beat up my brother Pavka for?"
Prokhor tried to shake his shoulder loose, but a smashing blow laid him out on the floor; he tried to rise, but a second blow more terrible than the first pinned him down.
The frightened dishwashers scattered on all
sides. Artem turned and walked out.
Prokhoshka lay sprawled on the floor, his battered face bleeding.
That evening Artem did not come home -from the railway yards.
His mother learned that he was being held by the gendarmes.
Six days later Artem returned late at night when his mother was already asleep. He went up to Pavel, who was sitting up in bed, and said gently:
"Feeling better, boy?" Artem sat down next to Pavel. "Might have been worse." After a moment's silence he added: "Never mind, you'll go to work at the electric station; I've spoken to them about you. You'll learn a real trade there."
Pavel seized Artem's powerful hand with both of his.

## Chapter Two

Like a whirlwind the stupendous news broke into the small town: "The tsar's been overthrown!" The townsfolk refused to believe it.
Then one stormy winter day a train crawled into the station: two students in army greatcoats, with rifles slung over their shoulders, and a detachment of revolutionary soldiers wearing red armbands jumped out onto the platform and arrested the station gendarmes, an old colonel and the chief of the garrison. Now the townsfolk believed the news. Thousands streamed down the snowbound streets to the town square.
Eagerly they drank in the new words: liberty, equality and fraternity.
Turbulent days followed, days full of excitement and jubilation. Then a lull set in, and the red flag flying over the town hall where the Mensheviks and adherents of the Bund had ensconced themselves was the sole reminder of the change that had taken place. Everything else remained as before.
Towards the end of the winter a regiment of the cavalry guards was billeted in the town. In the mornings they sallied out in squadrons to hunt for deserters from the South-Western Front at the railway station.
The troopers were great, beefy fellows with well-fed faces. Most of their officers were counts and princes; they wore golden shoulder straps and silver piping on their breeches, just as they had in the tsar's time—for all the world as if there had been no revolution.
For Pavel, Klimka and Sergei Bruzzhak nothing had changed. The bosses were still there. It was not until November that something out of the ordinary began to happen. People of a new kind had appeared at the station and were beginning to stir things up; a steadily increasing number of them were soldiers from the firing lines and they bore the strange name of "Bolsheviks".
Where that resounding, weighty name came from no one knew.
The guardsmen found it increasingly hard to detain the deserters. The crackle of rifles and the

splintering of glass was heard more and more often down at the station. The men came from the front in groups and when stopped they fought back with bayonets. In the beginning of December they began pouring in by trainloads.

The guardsmen came down in force to the station with the intention of holding the soldiers, but they found themselves raked by machine-gun fire. The men who poured out of the railway carriages were inured to death.

The grey-coated frontliners drove the guards back into the town and then returned to the station to continue on their way, trainload after trainload.

One day in the spring of nineteen eighteen, three chums on their way from Sergei Bruzzhak's where they had been playing cards dropped into the Korchagins' garden and threw themselves on the grass. They were bored. All the customary occupations had begun to pall, and they were beginning to rack their brains for some more exciting way to spend the day when they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs behind them and saw a horseman come galloping down the road. With one bound the horse cleared the ditch between the road and the low garden fence and the rider waved his whip at Pavel and Klim. "Hi there, my lads, come over here!" Pavel and Klim sprang to their feet and ran to the fence. The rider was covered with dust; it had settled in a heavy grey Layer on the cap which he wore pushed to the back of his head, and on his khaki tunic and breeches. A revolver and two German grenades dangled from his heavy soldier's belt.

"Can you get me a drink of water, boys?" the horseman asked them. While Pavel dashed off into the house for the water, he turned to Sergei who was staring at him. "Tell me, boy, who's in authority in your town?"

Sergei breathlessly related all the local news to the newcomer.

"There's been nobody in authority for two weeks. The homeguard's the government now. All the inhabitants take turns patrolling the town at night. And who might you be?" Sergei asked in his turn.

"Now, now—if you know too much you'll get old too soon," the horseman smiled.

Pavel ran out of the house carrying a mug of water. The rider thirstily emptied the mug at one gulp and handed it back to Pavel. Then jerking the reins he started off at a gallop, heading for the pine woods. "Who was that?" Pavel asked Klim. "How do I know?" the latter replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"Looks like the authorities are going to be changed again. That's why the Leszczinskis left yesterday. And if the rich are on the run that means the partisans are coming," declared Sergei, settling the political question firmly and with an air of finality.

The logic of this was so convincing that both Pavel and Klim agreed with him at once.

Before the boys had finished discussing the question a clatter of hoofs from the highway sent all three rushing back to the fence.

Over by the forest warden's cottage, which was barely visible among the trees, they saw men and carts emerging from the woods, and nearer still on the highway a party of fifteen or so mounted men with rifles across their pommels. At the head of the horsemen rode an elderly man in khaki jacket and officer's belt with field glasses slung on his chest, and beside him the man the boys had just spoken to. The elderly man wore a red ribbon on his breast.

"What did I tell you?" Sergei nudged Pavel in the ribs. "See the red ribbon? Partisans. I'll be

damned if they aren't partisans. . . ." And whooping with joy he leapt over the fence into the street. The others followed suit and all three stood by the roadside gazing at the approaching horsemen. When the riders were quite close the man whom the boys had met before nodded to them, and pointing to the Leszczinski house with his whip asked: "Who lives over there?"

Pavel paced alongside trying to keep abreast the rider.

"Leszczinski the lawyer. He ran away yesterday. Scared of you most likely. . . ." "How do you know who we are?" the elderly man asked, smiling.

"What about that?" Pavel pointed to the ribbon. "Anybody can tell. . . ."

People poured into the street to stare with curiosity at the detachment entering the town. Our three young friends too stood watching the dusty, exhausted Red Guards go by. And when the detachment's lone cannon and the carts with machine guns clattered over the cobblestones the boys trailed after the partisans, and did not go home until after the unit had halted in the centre of the town and the billeting began.

That evening four men sat around the massive carved-legged table in the spacious Leszczinski parlour: detachment commander Comrade Bulgakov, an elderly man whose hair was touched with grey, and three members of the unit's commanding personnel.

Bulgakov had spread out a map of the gubernia on the table and was now running his finger over it.

"You say we ought to put up a stand here, Comrade Yermachenko," he said, addressing a man with broad features and prominent teeth, "but I think we must move out in the morning. Better still if we could get going during the night, but the men are in need of a rest. Our task is to withdraw to Kazatin before the Germans get there. To resist with the strength we have would be ridiculous. One gun with thirty rounds of ammunition, two hundred infantry and sixty cavalry. A formidable force, isn't it, when the Germans are advancing in an avalanche of steel. We cannot put up a fight until we join up with other withdrawing Red units. Besides, Comrades, we must remember that apart from the Germans there'll be numerous counter-revolutionary bands of all kinds to deal with en route. I propose that we withdraw in the morning after first blowing up the railway bridge beyond the station. It'll take the Germans two or three days to repair it and in the meantime their advance along the railway will be held up. What do you think, Comrades? We must decide. . ." he turned to the others around the table.

Struzhkov, who sat diagonally across from Bulgakov, sucked in his lips and looked first at the map and then at Bulgakov.

"I agree with Bulgakov," he said finally.

The youngest of the men, who was dressed in a worker's blouse, nodded. "Bulgakov's right," he said.

But Yermachenko, the man who had spoken with the boys earlier in the day, shook his head. "What the devil did we get the detachment together for? To retreat from the Germans without putting up a fight? As I see it, we've got to have it out with them here. I'm sick and tired of running. If it was up to me, I'd fight them here without fail. . . ."

Pushing his chair back sharply, he rose and began pacing the room.

Bulgakov looked at him with disapproval.

"We must use our heads, Yermachenko. We can't throw our men into a battle that is bound to end

in defeat and destruction Besides it's ridiculous. There's a whole division with heavy artillery and armoured cars just behind us. . . . This is no time for schoolboy heroics, Comrade Yermachenko. . . ." Turning to the others, he continued: "So it's decided, we evacuate tomorrow morning. . . . Now for the next question, liaison," Bulgakov proceeded. "Since we are the last to leave, it's our job to organise work in the German rear. This is a big railway junction and there are two stations in the town. We must see to it that there is a reliable comrade to carry on the work on the railway. We'll have to decide here whom to leave behind to get the work going. Have you anyone in mind?"

"I think the sailor Fyodor Zhukhrai ought to remain," Yermachenko said, moving up to the table. "In the first place he's a local man. Secondly, he's a fitter and mechanic and can get himself a job at the station. Nobody's seen Fyodor with our detachment—he won't get here until tonight. He's got a good head on his shoulders and he'll get things going properly. I think he's the best man for the job."

Bulgakov nodded.

"I agree with you, Yermachenko. No objections, Comrades?" he turned to the others. "None. Then the matter is settled. We'll leave Zhukhrai some money and the credentials he'll need for his work. . . . Now for the third and last question, Comrades. About the arms stored here in the town. There's quite a stock of rifles, twenty thousand of them, left over from the tsarist war and forgotten by everybody. They are piled up in a peasant's shed. I have this from the owner of the shed who happens to be anxious to get rid of them. We are not going to leave them to the Germans; in my opinion we ought to burn them, and at once, so as to have it over and done with by morning. The only trouble is that the fire might spread to the surrounding cottages. It's on the fringes of the town where the poor peasants live."

Struzhkov stirred in his chair. He was a solidly built man whose unshaven face had not seen a razor for some time.

"Why burn the rifles? Better distribute them among the
population." Bulgakov turned quickly to face him.

"Distribute them, you say?"

"A splendid idea!" Yermachenko responded enthusiastically. "Give them to the workers and anyone else who wants them. At least there will be something to hit back with when the Germans make life impossible. They're bound to do their worst. And when things come to a head, the men will be able to take up arms. Struzhkov's right: the rifles must be distributed. Wouldn't be a bad thing to take some to the villages too; the peasants will hide them away, and when the Germans begin to requisition everything the rifles are sure to come in handy."

Bulgakov laughed.

"That's all right, but the Germans are sure to order all arms turned in and everybody
will obey." "Not everybody," Yermachenko objected. "Some will but others won't."

Bulgakov looked questioningly at the men around the table.

"I'm for distributing the rifles," the young workers supported Yermachenko and Struzhkov.

"All right then, it's decided," Bulgakov agreed. "That's all for now," he said, rising from his chair. "We can take a rest till morning. When Zhukhrai comes, send him in to me, I want to have a talk with him. Yermachenko, you'd better inspect the sentry posts."

When the others left, Bulgakov went into the bedroom next to the parlour, spread his greatcoat on

the mattress and lay down.

The following morning Pavel, coming home from the electric power station where he had been working as a stoker's helper for a year now, felt that something unusual was afoot. The town seethed with excitement. As he went along he met people carrying one or two and sometimes even three rifles each. He could not understand what was happening and he hurried home as fast as he could. Outside the Leszczinski garden he saw his acquaintances of yesterday mounting their horses.

Pavel ran into the house, washed quickly and, learning from his mother that Artem had not come home yet, dashed out again and hurried over to see Sergei Bruzzhak, who lived on the other side of the town.

Sergei's father was an engine driver's helper and owned a tiny house and a small plot of land. Sergei was out, and his mother, a stout, pale-faced woman, eyed Pavel sourly.

"The devil knows where he is! He rushed out first thing in the morning like one possessed. Said they were giving out rifles somewhere, so I suppose that's where he is. What you snotnosed warriors need is a good hiding—you've got out of hand completely. Hardly out of pinafores and already dashing off after firearms. You tell the scamp that if he brings a single cartridge into this house I'll skin him alive. Who knows what he'll be dragging in and then I'll have to answer for it. You're not going there too, are you?"

But before Sergei's mother had finished scolding, Pavel was already racing down the street. On the highway he met a man carrying a rifle on each shoulder. Pavel dashed up to him. "Please, uncle, where did you get them?"

"Over at Verkhovina."

Pavel hurried off as fast as his legs could carry him. Two streets down he collided with a boy who was lugging a heavy infantry rifle with bayonet attached. Pavel stopped him.

"Where'd you get that?"

"The partisans were giving them away out there opposite the school, but there aren't any more. All gone. Handed them out all night and now only the empty cases are left. This is my second one," the boy declared proudly.

Pavel was utterly dismayed by the news.

"Damn it, I should've gone straight there," he thought bitterly. "Now it's too late!"

Suddenly an idea struck him. Spinning around, he overtook the boy in two or three bounds and snatched the rifle out of his hands.

"One's enough for you. This is going to be mine," he said in a tone that brooked no opposition. Infuriated by this robbery in broad daylight, the boy flung himself at Pavel, but the latter leapt back and pointed the bayonet at his antagonist.

"Look out or you'll get hurt!" Pavel shouted.

The boy burst into tears of helpless rage and ran away, swearing at Pavel as he went. Pavel, vastly pleased with himself, trotted home. He climbed over the fence, ran into the shed, laid his acquisition on the crossbeams under the roof, and, whistling gaily, entered the house.

Summer evenings in the Ukraine, especially in small Ukrainian towns like Shepetovka, which are more like villages on the outskirts, are beautiful indeed. These calm summer nights lure all the young folk out of doors. You will see them in groups and in pairs—on the porches, in the little front gardens, or perched on woodpiles lying by the side of the road. Their gay laughter and singing echo in the evening stillness.

The air is heavy and tremulous with the fragrance of flowers. There is a faint pinpoint glimmer of stars in the depths of the sky, and voices carry far, far away. . . .

Pavel dearly loved his accordion. He would lay the melodious instrument tenderly on his knees and let his nimble fingers run lightly up and down the double row of keys. A sighing from the bass, and a cascade of rollicking melody would pour forth. . . .

How can you keep still when the sinuous bellows weave in and out and the accordion breathes its warm compelling harmonies. Before you know it your feet are answering its urgent summons. Ah, how good it is to be alive!

This is a particularly jolly evening. A merry crowd of young folk have gathered on the pile of logs outside Pavel's house. And gayest of them all is Galochka, the daughter of the stonemason who lives next door to Pavel. Galochka loves to dance and sing with the lads. She has a deep velvety contralto.

Pavel is a wee bit afraid of her. For Galochka has a sharp tongue. She sits down beside Pavel and throws her arms around him, laughing gaily.

"What a wonder you are with that accordion!" she says. "It's a pity you're a bit too young or you'd make me a fine hubby. I adore men who play the accordion, my poor heart just melts."

Pavel blushes to the roots of his hair—luckily it is too dark for anyone to see. He edges away from the vixen but she clings fast to him.

"Now then, you wouldn't run away from me, would you? A fine sweetheart you are," she laughs. Her firm breast brushes Pavel's shoulder, and he is strangely stirred in spite of himself, and the loud laughter of the others breaks the accustomed stillness of the lane.

"Move up, I haven't any room to play," says Pavel, giving her shoulder a slight push. This evokes another roar of laughter, jokes and banter.

Marusya comes to Pavel's rescue. "Play something sad, Pavel, something that tugs at your heartstrings."

Slowly the bellows spread out, gently Pavel's fingers caress the keys and a familiar well-loved tune fills the air. Galochka is the first to join in, then Marusya, and the others.

All the boatmen to their cottage
Gathered on the morrow,
O, 'tis good
And O, 'tis sweet
Here to sing our sorrow. . . .

The vibrant young voices of the singers were carried far away into the wooded distances. "Pavka!" It was Artem's voice.

Pavel compressed the bellows of his accordion and fastened the straps. "They're calling me. I've got to go."

"Oh, play just a little more. What's your hurry?" Marusya tried to wheedle him into staying. But Pavel was adamant.

"Can't. We'll have some music tomorrow again, but now I've got to go. Artem's calling." And with that he ran across the street to the little house opposite.

There were two men in the room besides Artem: Roman, a friend of Artem's, and a stranger. They were sitting at the table.

"You wanted me?" Pavel asked.

Artem nodded to him and turned to the stranger:

"This is that brother of mine we've been talking about."

The stranger extended a knotted hand to Pavel.

"See here, Pavka," Artem said to his brother. "You told me the electrician at the power plant is ill. Now what I want you to do is to find out tomorrow whether they want a good man to take his place. If they do you'll let us know."

The stranger interrupted him.

"No need to do that. I'd rather go with him and speak with the boss myself."

"Of course they need someone. Today the power plant didn't work simply because Stankovich was ill. The boss came around twice—he'd been looking high and low for somebody to take his place but couldn't find anyone. He was afraid to start the plant with only a stoker around. The electrician's got the typhus."

"That settles it," the stranger said. "I'll call for you tomorrow and we'll go over there together." "Good."

Pavel's glance met the calm grey eyes of the stranger who was studying him carefully. The firm, steady scrutiny somewhat disconcerted him. The newcomer was wearing a grey jacket buttoned from top to bottom—it was obviously a tight fit for the seams strained on his broad, powerful back. His head and shoulders were joined by a muscular, ox-like neck, and his whole frame suggested the sturdy strength of an old oak.

"Good-bye and good luck, Zhukhrai," Artem said accompanying him to the door. "Tomorrow you'll go along with my brother and get fixed up in the job."

The Germans entered the town three days after the detachment left. Their coming was announced by a locomotive whistle at the station which had latterly been deserted.

"The Germans are coming," the news flashed through the town.

The town stirred like a disturbed anthill, for although the townsfolk had known for some time that the Germans were due, they had somehow not quite believed it. And now these terrible Germans were not only somewhere on their way, but actually here, in town.

The townsfolk clung to the protection of their front-garden fences and wicket gates. They were afraid to venture out into the streets.

The Germans came, marching single file on both sides of the highway; they wore olive-drab uniforms and carried their rifles at the ready. Their rifles were tipped with broad knife-like bayonets; they wore heavy steel helmets, and carried enormous packs on their backs. They came from the station into the town in an endless stream, came cautiously, prepared to repel an attack at any moment, although no one dreamed of attacking them.

In front strode two officers, Mausers in hand, and in the centre of the road walked the interpreter, a sergeant-major in the Hetman's service wearing a blue Ukrainian coat and a tall fur cap.
The Germans lined up on the square in the centre of the town. The drums rolled. A small crowd of the more venturesome townsfolk gathered. The Hetman's man in the Ukrainian coat climbed onto the porch of the chemist's shop and read aloud an order issued by the commandant, Major Korf.

§ 1

All citizens of the town are hereby ordered to turn in any firearms or other weapons in their possession within 24 hours. The penalty for violation of this order is death by shooting.

§ 2

Martial law is declared in the town and citizens are forbidden to appear in the streets after 8 p.m. Major Korf, Town Commandant.

The German Kommandantur took up quarters in the building formerly used by the town administration and, after the revolution, by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. At the entrance a sentry was posted wearing a parade helmet with an imperial eagle of enormous proportions. In the backyard of the same building were storage premises for the arms to be turned in by the population.
All day long weapons were brought in by townsfolk scared by the threat of shooting. The adults did not show themselves; the arms were delivered by youths and small boys. The Germans detained nobody.
Those who did not want to come in person dumped their weapons out on the road during the night, and in the morning a German patrol picked them up, loaded them into an army cart and hauled them to the Kommandantur.
At one o'clock in the afternoon, when the time limit expired, German soldiers began to take stock of their booty: fourteen thousand rifles. That meant that six thousand had not been turned in. The dragnet searches they conducted yielded very insignificant results.
At dawn the next morning two railway men in whose homes concealed rifles had been found were shot at the old Jewish cemetery outside the town.
As soon as he heard of the commandant's order, Artem hurried home. Meeting Pavel in the yard, he took him by the shoulder and asked him quietly but firmly:
"Did you bring any weapons home?"
Pavel had not intended to say anything about the rifle, but he could not lie to his brother and so he made a clean breast of it.
They went into the shed together. Artem took the rifle down from its hiding place on the beams, removed the bolt and bayonet, and seizing the weapon by the barrel swung it with all his might against a fence post. The butt splintered. What remained of the rifle was thrown far away into the waste lot beyond the garden. The bayonet and bolt Artem threw into the privy pit.
When he was finished, Artem turned to his brother.
"You're not a baby any more, Pavka, and you ought to know you can't play with guns. You must

not bring anything into the house. This is dead serious. You might have to pay with your life for that sort of thing nowadays. And don't try any tricks, because if you do bring something like that home and they find it I'd be the first to be shot—they wouldn't touch a youngster like you. These are brutal times, understand that!"

Pavel promised.

As the brothers were crossing the yard to the house, a carriage stopped at the Leszczinskis' gate and the lawyer and his wife and two children, Nelly and Victor, got out.

"So the fine birds have flown back to their nest," Artem muttered angrily. "Now the fun begins, blast them!" He went inside.

All day long Pavel thought regretfully of the rifle. In the meantime his friend Sergei was hard at work in an old, abandoned shed, digging a hole in the ground next to the wall. At last the pit was ready. In it Sergei deposited the three brand-new rifles, carefully wrapped in rags: he had picked them up when the Red Guard detachment distributed arms to the people. He had no intention of giving them up to the Germans and had laboured hard all night to make sure that they were safely hidden.

He filled up the hole, tramped the earth down level, and then piled a heap of refuse on top. Critically reviewing the results of his efforts and finding them satisfactory he took off his cap and wiped the sweat off his forehead.

"Now let them search, and even if they find it, they'll never know who put it there, because the shed is nobody's anyway."

A firm friendship had sprung up between Pavel and the grim-faced electrician who had been working a full month now at the electric station. Zhukhrai showed the stoker's helper how the dynamo was built and how it was run.

The sailor took a liking to the bright youngster. He frequently visited Artem on free days and listened patiently to the mother's tale of domestic woes and worries, especially when she complained about her younger boy's escapades. Thoughtful and serious, Zhukhrai had a calming, reassuring effect on Maria Yakovlevna, who would forget her troubles and grow more cheerful in his company.

One day Zhukhrai stopped Pavel as he was passing between the high piles of firewood in the power station yard.

"Your mother tells me you're fond of a scrap," he said, smiling. " 'He's as bad as a game-cock,' she says." Zhukhrai chuckled approvingly. "As a matter of fact, it doesn't hurt to be a fighter, as long as you know whom to fight and why."

Pavel was not sure whether Zhukhrai was joking or serious.

"I don't fight for nothing," he retorted, "I always fight for what's right and fair."

"Want me to teach you to fight properly?" Zhukhrai asked unexpectedly.

"What d'you mean, properly?" Pavel looked at the other in surprise.

"You'll see." And Pavel was given a brief introductory lecture on boxing.

It did not come easy to Pavel. Time and again he found himself rolling on the ground, knocked off his feet by a blow from Zhukhrai's fist, but he proved a diligent and persevering pupil, and in the end he mastered the art.

One warm day after a visit to Klimka's place Pavel, for want of something better to do, decided to climb up to his favourite spot—the roof of a shed that stood in the corner of the garden behind the

house. He crossed the backyard into the garden, went over to the clapboard shack, and climbed up onto its roof. Pushing through the dense branches of the cherry trees that hung over the shed, he made his way to the centre of the roof and lay down to bask in the sunshine.

One side of the shed jutted out into the Leszczinski garden, and from the end of the roof the whole garden and one side of the house were visible. Poking his head over the edge, Pavel could see part of the yard and a carriage standing there. The batman of the German Lieutenant quartered at the Leszczinskis' was brushing his master's clothes.

Pavel had often seen the Lieutenant at the gate leading to the grounds. He was a squat, ruddy-faced man who wore a tiny clipped moustache, pince-nez and a cap with a shiny lacquered peak. Pavel also knew that he lived in the side room, the window of which opened onto the garden and was visible from the shed roof.

At this moment the Lieutenant was sitting at the table, writing. Presently he picked up what he had written and went out of the room. He handed the paper to the batman and walked off down the garden path leading to the gate. At the summer house he paused to talk to someone inside. A moment later Nelly Leszczinskaya came out. The Lieutenant took her arm and together they went out of the gate into the street.

Pavel watched the proceedings from his vantage point. Presently a drowsiness stole over him and he was about to close his eyes when he noticed the batman entering the Lieutenant's room; he hung up a uniform, opened the window into the garden and tidied up the room. Then he went out, closing the door behind him. The next moment Pavel saw him over by the stable where the horses were.

Through the open window Pavel had a good view of the whole room. On the table lay a belt and some shining object.

Driven by an irresistible curiosity, Pavel climbed noiselessly off the roof onto the cherry tree and slipped down into the Leszczinski garden. Bent double, he bounded across the garden and peered through the window into the room. Before him on the table were a belt with a shoulder strap and holster containing a splendid twelve-shot Mannlicher.

Pavel caught his breath. For a few seconds he hesitated, but reckless daring gained the upper hand and reaching into the room, he seized the holster, pulled out the new blue-steel weapon and sprang down to the ground. With a swift glance around, he slipped the revolver into his pocket and dashed across the garden to the cherry tree. With the agility of a monkey he climbed to the roof and paused to look behind him. The batman was still chatting pleasantly with the groom. The garden was silent and deserted. Pavel slid down the other side and ran home.

His mother was busy in the kitchen cooking dinner and paid no attention to him.

He seized a rag from behind a trunk and shoved it into his pocket, then slipped out unnoticed, ran across the yard, scaled the fence and emerged on the road leading to the woods. Holding the heavy revolver to prevent it from knocking against his thigh, he ran as fast as he could to the abandoned ruins of a brick kiln in the woods.

His feet seemed barely to touch the ground and the wind whistled in his ears.

Everything was quiet at the old brick kiln. It was a depressing sight, with the wooden roof fallen in here and there, the mountains of brick rubble and the collapsed ovens. The place was overgrown with weeds; no one ever visited it except Pavel and his two friends who sometimes came here to play. Pavel knew places where the stolen treasure could be safely hidden.

He climbed through a gap in one of the ovens and looked around him cautiously, but there was no one in sight. Only the pines soughed softly and a slight wind stirred the dust on the road. There was a strong smell of resin in the air.

Pavel placed the revolver wrapped in the rag in a corner of the oven floor and covered it with a small pyramid of old bricks. On the way out he filled the opening in the old oven with loose bricks, noted the exact location, and slowly set out for home, feeling his knees trembling under him.

"What will happen now?" he thought and his heart was heavy with foreboding.

To avoid going home he went to the power station earlier than usual. He took the key from the watchman and opened the wide doors leading into the powerhouse. And while he cleaned out the ashpit, pumped water into the boiler and started the fire going, he wondered what was happening at the Leszczinskis.

It was about eleven o'clock when Zhukhrai came and called Pavel outside. "Why was there a search at your place today?" he asked in a low voice. Pavel started.

"A search?"

"I don't like the look of it," Zhukhrai continued after a brief pause. "Sure you haven't any idea what they were looking for?"

Pavel knew very well what they had been looking for, but he could not risk telling Zhukhrai about the theft of the revolver. Trembling all over he asked:

"Have they arrested Artem?"

"Nobody was arrested, but they turned everything upside down in the house."

This reassured Pavel slightly, although his anxiety did not pass. For a few minutes both he and Zhukhrai stood there each wrapped in his own thoughts. One of the two knew why the search had been made and was worried about the consequences, the other did not and hence was on the alert.

"Damn them, maybe they've got wind of me somehow," Zhukhrai thought. "Artem knows nothing about me, but why did they search his place? Got to be more careful."

The two parted without a word and returned to their work. The Leszczinski house was in a turmoil.

When the Lieutenant had noticed that the revolver was missing, he had called in his batman, who declared that the weapon must have been stolen; whereupon the officer had lost his temper and had smashed his fist into the batman's face. The batman, swaying from the impact of the blow, stood stiffly at attention, blinking and submissively awaiting further developments.

The lawyer, called in for an explanation, was loudly indignant at the theft and apologised to the Lieutenant for having allowed such a thing to occur in his house.

It was Victor Leszczinski who suggested that the revolver might have been stolen by the neighbours, and in particular by that young ruffian Pavel Korchagin. His father lost no time in passing on his son's conjecture to the Lieutenant, who at once ordered a search made.

The search was fruitless, and the episode of the missing revolver showed Pavel that even enterprises as risky as this could sometimes succeed.

## Chapter Three

Tonya stood at the open window and pensively surveyed the familiar garden bordered by the stately poplars now stirring faintly in the gentle breeze. She could hardly believe that a whole year had passed since she had been here where her childhood years had been spent. It seemed that she had left home only yesterday and returned by this morning's train.

Nothing had changed: the rows of raspberry bushes were as carefully trimmed as ever, and the garden paths, lined with pansies, mother's favourite flowers, were laid out with the same geometric precision. Everything in the garden was neat and tidy—evidence of the pedantic hand of the dendrologist. The sight of these clean-swept, neatly drawn paths bored Tonya.

She picked up the novel she had been reading, opened the door leading to the veranda and walked down the stairs into the garden; she pushed open the little painted wicket gate and slowly headed for the pond next to the station pump house.

She passed the bridge and came out on the tree-lined road. On her right was the pond fringed with willows and alders; on the left the forest began.

She was on her way to the ponds at the old stone-quarry when the sight of a fishing rod swung over the water made her pause.

Leaning over the trunk of a twisted willow, she parted the branches and saw before her a sun-tanned, barefoot boy with trouser legs rolled up above the knee. Next to him was a rusty can with worms. The lad was too engrossed in his occupation to notice her.

"Do you think you can catch fish here?"

Pavel glanced angrily over his shoulder.

A girl in a white sailor blouse with a striped blue collar and a short light-grey skirt stood on the bank, holding on to the willow and bending low over the water. Short socks with a coloured edging clung to her shapely suntanned legs. Her chestnut hair was gathered in a heavy braid.

A slight tremor shook the hand holding the fishing rod and the goose-feather float bobbed, sending circles spreading over the smoothness of the water.

"Look, look, a bite!" the excited voice piped behind Pavel.

He now lost his composure completely and jerked at the line so hard that the hook with the squirming worm on the end of it fairly leapt out of the water.

"Not much chance to fish now, damn it! What the devil brought her here," Pavel thought irritably and in order to cover up his clumsiness cast the hook farther out, landing it, however, exactly where he should not have—between two burdocks where the line could easily get caught.

He realised what had happened and without turning around, hissed at the girl sitting above him on the bank:

"Can't you keep quiet? You'll scare off all the fish that

way." From above came the mocking voice:

"Your black looks have scared the fish away long ago. No self-respecting angler goes fishing in the afternoon anyway!"

Pavel had done his best to behave politely but this was too much for him. He got up and pushed his cap over his eyes, as he usually did when roused.

"You'd do better, miss, if you took yourself off," he muttered through his teeth, drawing on the most inoffensive part of his vocabulary.

Tonya's eyes narrowed slightly and laughter danced in them.

"Am I really interfering?"

The teasing note had gone from her voice and given way to a friendly, conciliatory tone, and Pavel, who had primed himself to be really rude to this "missy" who had sprung from nowhere, found himself disarmed.

"You can stay and watch, if you want to. It's all the same to me," he said grudgingly and sat down to attend to the float again. It had got stuck in the burdock and there was no doubt that the hook had caught in the roots. Pavel was afraid to pull at it. If it caught he would not be able to get it loose. And the girl would be sure to laugh. He wished she would go away.

Tonya, however, had settled more comfortably on the slightly swaying willow trunk and with her book on her knees was watching the sun-tanned, dark-eyed, rough-mannered young man who had given her such an ungracious reception and was now deliberately ignoring her.

Pavel saw the girl clearly reflected in the mirror-like surface of the pond, and when she seemed to be absorbed in her book he cautiously pulled at the entangled line. The float ducked under the water and the line grew taut.

"Caught, damn it!" flashed in his mind and at the same moment he saw out of the corner of his eye the laughing face of the girl looking up at him from the water.

Just then two young men, both seventh-grade Gymnasium students, were coming across the bridge at the pump house. One of them was the seventeen-year-old son of engineer Sukharko, the chief of the railway yards, a loutish, fair-haired, freckle-faced scapegrace whom his schoolmates had clubbed Pockmarked Shurka. He was carrying a fancy fishing rod and line and had a cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth. With him was Victor Leszczinski, a tall, effeminate youth.

"Now this girl is a peach, there's nobody like her about here," Sukharko was saying, winking significantly as he bent toward his companion. "You can take my word for it that she's chock-full of r-r-romance. She's in the sixth grade and goes to school in Kiev. Now she's come to spend the summer with her father—he's the chief forest warden here. My sister Liza knows her. I wrote her a letter once in a sentimental sort of vein. 'I love you madly'—you know the sort of thing—'and await your answer in trepidation'. Even dug up some suitable verses from Nadson."

"Well, what came of it?" Victor asked curiously.

"Oh, she was frightfully stuck up about it," Sukharko muttered rather sheepishly. "Told me not to waste paper writing letters and all that. But that's how it always is in the beginning. I'm an old hand at this sort of thing. As a matter of fact I can't be bothered with all that romantic nonsense— mooning about for ages, sighing. It's much simpler to take a stroll of an evening down to the repairmen's barracks where for three rubles you can pick up a beauty that'd make your mouth water. And no nonsense either. I used to go out there with Valka Tikhonov—do you know him? The foreman on the railway."

Victor scowled in disgust.

"Do you mean to tell me you go in for foul stuff like that,
Shura?" Shura chewed at his cigarette, spat and replied
with a sneer: "Don't pretend to be so virtuous. We know
what you go in for." Victor interrupted him.

"Will you introduce me to this peach of yours?"

"Of course. Let's hurry or she'll give us the slip. Yesterday morning she went fishing by herself." As the two friends came up to Tonya, Sukharko took the cigarette out of his mouth and greeted

her with a gallant bow.
"How do you do, Mademoiselle Tumanova. Have you come to fish too?" "No, I'm just watching," replied Tonya.
"You two haven't met, have you?" Sukharko hastened to put in, taking Victor by the arm. "This is my friend Victor Leszczinski."
Victor, blushing, extended his hand to Tonya.
"And why aren't you fishing today?" Sukharko inquired in an effort to keep up the conversation. "I forgot to bring my rod," Tonya replied.
"I'll get another one right away," Sukharko said. "In the meantime you can have mine. I'll be back in a minute."
He had kept his promise to Victor to introduce him to the girl and was now anxious to leave them alone.
"I'd rather not, we should only be in the way. There's somebody fishing here already," said Tonya. "In whose way?" Sukharko asked. "Oh, you mean him?" For the first time he noticed Pavel who was sitting under a bush. "Well, I'll get rid of him in two shakes."
Before Tonya could stop him he had slipped down to where Pavel was busy with his rod and line. "Pull in that line of yours and clear out," Sukharko told Pavel. "Hurry up now. . ." he added as Pavel continued fishing calmly.
Pavel looked up and gave Sukharko a glance that boded no good. "Shut up. Who do you think you are!"
"Wha-at!" Sukharko exploded. "You've got the cheek to answer back, you wretched tramp! Clear out of here!" He kicked violently at the can of worms which spun around in the air and fell into the pond, splashing water in Tonya's face.
"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Sukharko!" she cried.
Pavel leapt to his feet. He knew that Sukharko was the son of the chief of the railway yards where Artem worked, and that if he hit that flabby, mousy mug of his he would complain to his father and Artem would get into trouble. This alone prevented him from settling the matter then and there.
Sensing that Pavel would hit out at him in another moment, Sukharko rushed forward and pushed him in the chest with both hands. Pavel, standing at the water's edge, teetered dangerously, but by frantically waving his arms regained his balance and saved himself from falling in.
Sukharko was two years older than Pavel and notorious as a troublemaker and bully. The blow in the chest made Pavel see red.
"So, that's what you want! Take this!" And with a short swing of his arm he punched Sukharko's face. Before the latter had time to recover, Pavel seized him firmly by his uniform blouse, clinched him and dragged him into the water.
Knee-deep in the pond, his polished shoes and trousers soaking wet, Sukharko struggled with all his might to wrench himself loose from Pavel's powerful grip. Having achieved his purpose, Pavel jumped ashore. The enraged Sukharko charged after him, ready to tear him to pieces.
As he spun around to face his opponent, Pavel remembered:
"Rest your weight on your left foot, with your right leg tense and right knee bent. Put the weight of your whole body behind the punch and strike upward, at the point of the chin."
Crack!

Sukharko's teeth clicked as Pavel's fist struck. Squealing from the excruciating pain that shot through his chin and his tongue which was caught between the teeth, Sukharko flailed wildly with his arms and fell back into the water with a loud splash.

Up on the bank Tonya was doubled up with laughter.

"Bravo, bravo!" she cried, clapping her hands. "Well done!"

Seizing his entangled fishing line, Pavel jerked at it so hard that it snapped, and scrambled up the bank to the road.

"That's Pavel Korchagin, a rowdy if there ever was one," he heard Victor say to Tonya as he went.

There was trouble brewing at the station. Rumour had it that the railwaymen on the line were downing tools.

The workers of the yards at the next large station had started something big. The Germans arrested two engine drivers suspected of carrying proclamations with them. And among the workers who had ties with the countryside there was serious ferment because of the requisitioning and the return of landlords to their estates.

The lashes of the Hetman's guards seared the backs of the peasants. The partisan movement was developing in the gubernia; the Bolsheviks had already organised nearly a dozen partisan detachments.

There was no rest for Zhukhrai these days. During his stay in the town he had accomplished a great deal. He had made the acquaintance of many railway workers, attended gatherings of young folk, and built up a strong group among the mechanics at the railway yards and the sawmill workers. He tried to find out where Artem stood, and he asked him once what he thought about the Bolshevik Party and its cause.

"I don't know much about these parties, Fyodor," the burly mechanic replied. "But if there's help needed, you can count on me."

Fyodor was satisfied, for he knew that Artem was made of the right stuff and would stand by his word. As for the Party, he wasn't ready for that yet. "Never mind," he thought, "in times like these he'll soon learn for himself."

Fyodor left the power station for a job at the railway yards, where it was easier for him to carry on his work. At the electric station he had been cut off from the railway.

Traffic on the railway was exceedingly heavy. The Germans were shipping carloads of loot by the thousand from the Ukraine to Germany: rye, wheat, cattle. . . .

One day the Hetman's guards arrested Ponomarenko, the station telegrapher. He was taken to the guardhouse and brutally beaten. It was he, evidently, who gave away Roman Sidorenko, a workmate of Artem's.

Two Germans and a Hetman's guard, the Station Commandant's Assistant, came for Roman during working hours. Without saying a word, the Assistant Commandant walked over to the bench where Roman was working and cut him across the face with his riding crop.

"Come along, you sonofabitch!" he said. "You've got some explaining to do!" With an ugly leer he seized hold of the mechanic's arm and wrenched it violently. "We'll teach you to go around agitating!"

Artem, who had been working at the vice next to Roman, dropped his file and came at the

Assistant Commandant, his massive frame menacingly poised.
"Keep your fists off him, you bastard!" Artem spoke hoarsely, doing his best to restrain his rising fury.
The Assistant Commandant fell back, unfastening his holster as he did so. One of the Germans, a short-legged man, unslung his heavy rifle with the broad-bladed bayonet from his shoulder and sharply clicked the bolt.
"Halt!" he barked, ready to shoot at another move.
The tall, brawny mechanic stood helpless before the puny soldier; he could do nothing.
Both Roman and Artem were placed under arrest. Artem was released an hour later, but Roman was locked up in a luggage room in the basement.
Ten minutes after the arrest not a single man was working. The railway yard workers assembled in the station park where they were joined by the switchmen and the men employed at the supply warehouses. Feeling ran high and someone drafted a written demand for the release of Roman and Ponomarenko.
Indignation rose higher still when the Assistant Commandant rushed into the park at the head of a group of guards brandishing a revolver and shouting:
"Back to work, or we'll arrest every last man of you on the spot! And put some of you up against the wall!"
The infuriated workers replied with a bellow that sent him running for cover to the station. In the meantime, however, the Station Commandant had summoned German troops from the town and truckloads of them were already careering down the road leading to the station.
The workers dispersed and hurried home. No one, not even the stationmaster, remained on the job. Zhukhrai's work was beginning to make itself felt; this was the first time the workers at the station had taken mass action.
The Germans mounted a heavy machine gun on the platform; it stood there like a pointer that has spotted a quarry. Next to it squatted a German corporal, his hand resting on the trigger grip.
The station grew deserted.
At night the arrests began. Artem was among those taken. Zhukhrai escaped by not going home that night.
All the arrested men were herded together in a huge freight shed and given the alternative of either returning to work or being court-martialled.
Practically all the railwaymen were on strike all along the line. For a day and a night not a single train went through, and one hundred and twenty kilometres away a battle was being fought with a large partisan detachment which had cut the railway line and blown up the bridges.
During the night a German troop train pulled in but was held up because the engine driver, his helper and the fireman had deserted the locomotive. There were two more trains on the station sidings waiting to leave.
The heavy doors of the freight shed swung open and in walked the Station Commandant, a German lieutenant, his assistant, and a group of other Germans.
"Korchagin, Polentovsky, Bruzzhak," the Commandant's Assistant called out. "You will make up an engine crew and take a train out at once. If you refuse, you will be shot on the spot. What do you say?"
The three workers nodded sullen consent. They were escorted under guard to the locomotive while

the Commandant's Assistant went on to call out the names of the driver, helper and fireman for the next train.

The locomotive snorted angrily, sending up geysers of sparks. Breathing heavily it breasted the gloom ahead as it pounded along the track into the depths of night. Artem, who had just shovelled coal into the firebox, kicked the door shut, took a gulp of water from the snubnosed teapot standing on the toolbox, and turned to Polentovsky, the old engine driver.

"Well, pa, are we taking it through?"

Polentovsky's eyes blinked irritably under their overhanging eyebrows. "You will when there's a bayonet at your back."

"We could chuck everything and make a dash for it," suggested Bruzzhak, watching the German soldier sitting on the tender from the corner of his eye.

"I think so too," muttered Artem, "if it wasn't for that bird behind our backs."

"That's right," Bruzzhak was noncommittal as he stuck his head out of the window. Polentovsky moved closer to Artem.

"We can't take the train through, understand?" he whispered. "There's fighting going on ahead. Our fellows have blown up the track. And here we are bringing these swine there so they can shoot them down. You know, son, even in the tsar's time I never drove an engine when there was a strike on, and I'm not going to do it now. We'd disgrace ourselves for life if we brought destruction down on our own kind. The other engine crew ran away, didn't they? They risked their lives, but they did it. We just can't take the train through. What do you think?"

"You're right, pa, but what are you going to do about him?" and he indicated the soldier with a glance.

The engine driver scowled. He wiped his sweating forehead with a handful of waste and stared with bloodshot eyes at the pressure gauge as if seeking an answer there to the question tormenting him. Then he swore in fury and desperation.

Artem drank again from the teapot. The two men were thinking of one thing, but neither could bring himself to break the tense silence. Artem recalled Zhukhrai's question: "Well, brother, what do you think about the Bolshevik Party and the Gommunist idea?" and his own reply: "I am always ready to help, you can count on me. . . ."

"A fine way to help," he thought, "driving a punitive expedition. . . ."

Polentovsky was now bending over the toolbox next to Artem. Hoarsely he said: "That fellow, we've got to do him in. Understand?"

Artem started. Polentovsky added through clenched teeth:

"There's no other way out. Got to knock him over the head and chuck the throttle and the levers into the firebox, cut off the steam and then run for it."

Feeling as if a heavy weight had dropped off his shoulders Artem said: "Right!" Leaning toward Bruzzhak, Artem told him of their decision.

Bruzzhak did not answer at once. They all were taking a very great risk. Each had a family at home to think of. Polentovsky's was the largest: he had nine mouths to feed. But all three knew that they could not take the train to its destination.

"Good, I'm with you," Bruzzhak said. "But what about him? Who's going to. . . ." He did not finish

the sentence but his meaning was clear enough to Artem.
Artem turned to Polentovsky, who was now busy with the throttle, and nodded as if to say that Bruzzhak agreed with them, but then, tormented by a question still unsettled, he stepped closer to the old man.
"But how?"
Polentovsky looked at Artem.
"You begin, you're the strongest. We'll conk him with the crowbar and it'll be all over." The old man was violently agitated.
Artem frowned.
"I can't do it. I can't. After all, when you come to think of it, the man isn't to blame. He's also been forced into this at the point of the bayonet."
Polentovsky's eyes flashed.
"Not to blame, you say? Neither are we for being made to do this ]ob. But don't forget it's a punitive expedition we're hauling. These innocents are going out to shoot down partisans. Are the partisans to blame then? No, my lad, you've mighty little sense for all that you're strong as an ox. . . ."
"All right, all right," Artem's voice cracked. He picked up the crowbar, but Polentovsky whispered to him:
"I'll do it, be more certain that way. You take the shovel and climb up to pass down the coal from the tender. If necessary you give him one with the shovel. I'll pretend to be loosening up the coal." Bruzzhak heard what was said, and nodded. "The old man's right," he said, and took his place at the throttle.
The German soldier in his forage cap with a red band around it was sitting at the edge of the tender holding his rifle between his feet and smoking a cigar. From time to time he threw a glance at the engine crew going about their work in the cab.
When Artem climbed up on top of the tender the sentry paid little attention to him. And when Polentovsky, who pretended he wanted to get at the larger chunks of coal next to the side of the tender, signed to him to move out of the way, the German readily slipped down in the direction of the door leading to the cab.
The sudden crunch of the German's skull as it caved in under the crowbar made Artem and Bruzzhak jump as if touched by red-hot iron. The body of the soldier rolled limply into the passage leading to the cab.
The blood seeped rapidly through the grey cloth forage cap and the rifle clattered against the iron side of the tender.
"That's that," Polentovsky whispered as he dropped the crowbar. "No turning back for us now," he added, his face twitching convulsively.
His voice broke, then rose to a shout to repel the silence that descended heavily on the three men. "Unscrew the throttle, quick!" he shouted. In ten minutes the job was done. The locomotive, now out of control, was slowly losing speed.
The dark ponderous shapes of trees on the wayside lunged into the radius of light around the engine only to recede into the impenetrable gloom behind. In vain the engine's headlights sought to pierce the thick shroud of night for more than a dozen metres ahead, and gradually its stertorous breathing slowed down as if it had spent the last of its strength.

"Jump, son!" Artem heard Polentovsky's voice behind him and he let go of the handrail. The momentum of the train sent his powerful body hurtling forward until with a jolt his feet met the earth surging up from below. He ran for a pace or two and tumbled heavily head over heels.

Two other shadows left the engine simultaneously, one from each side of the cab.

Gloom had settled over the Bruzzhak house. Antonina Vasilievna, Sergei's mother, had eaten her heart out during the past four days. There had been no news from her husband; all she knew was that the Germans had forced him to man an engine together with Korchagin and Polentovsky. And yesterday three of the Hetman's guards had come around and questioned her in a rough, abusive manner.

From what they said she vaguely gathered that something had gone wrong and, gravely perturbed, she threw her kerchief over her head as soon as the men left and set out to see Maria Yakovlevna in the hope of learning some news of her husband.

Valya, her eldest daughter, who was tidying up the kitchen, noticed her slipping out of the house. "Where're you off to, Mother?" the girl asked.

"To the Korchagins," Antonina Vasilievna replied, glancing at her daughter with eyes brimming with tears. "Perhaps they know something about father. If Sergei comes home tell him to go over to the station to see the Polentovskys."

Valya threw her arms around her mother's shoulders.

"Don't worry, Mum," she said as she saw her to the door.

As usual, Maria Yakovlevna gave Antonina Vasilievna a hearty welcome. Each had hoped that the other would have some news to tell, but the hope vanished as soon as they got talking.

The Korchagins' place had also been searched during the night. The soldiers had been looking for Artem, and had told Maria Yakovlevna on leaving to report to the Kommandantur as soon as her son returned.

The coming of the patrol had frightened Pavel's mother almost out of her wits. She had been home alone, for Pavel as usual was on the night shift at the power plant.

When Pavel returned from work early in the morning and heard from his mother about the search, he was much troubled. He feared for his brother's safety. Despite differences in character and Artem's seeming hardness, the two brothers were deeply attached to one another. It was a stern, undemonstrative affection, but Pavel knew that there was no sacrifice he would not make for his brother's sake,

Without stopping to rest, Pavel ran over to the station to look for Zhukhrai. He could not find him, and the other workers he knew could tell him nothing about the missing men.

Engine driver Polentovsky's family too was completely in the dark; all he could learn from Polentovsky's youngest son, Boris, whom he met in the yard, was that their house too had been searched that night. The soldiers had been looking for his father.

Pavel came back to his mother with no news to report. Exhausted, he threw himself on the bed and dropped instantly into fitful slumber.

Valya looked up as the knock came at the door.

"Who's there?" she asked, unhooking the catch.

The dishevelled carroty head of Klimka Marchenko appeared in the open door. He had evidently

been running, for he was out of breath and his face was red from
exertion. "Is your mother home?" he asked Valya.
"No, she's gone
out." "Where to?"
"To the Korchagins, I think." Valya seized hold of Klimka's sleeve as the boy was about to dash off.
Klimka looked up at the girl in hesitation.
"I've got to see her about something," he ventured.
"What is it?" Valya would not let him go. "Out with it, you red-headed bear you, and stop keeping me in suspense," she commanded.
Klimka forgot Zhukhrai's warnings and his strict instructions to deliver the note into Antonina Vasilievna's hands, and he pulled a soiled scrap of paper out of his pocket and handed it to the girl. He could not refuse anything to Sergei's pretty fair-haired sister, for truth to tell he had a soft spot in his heart for her. He was far too timid, however, to admit it even to himself. The girl quickly read the slip of paper he had handed to her.
"Dear Tonya! Don't worry. All's well. They're safe and sound. Soon you will have more news. Let the others know that everything is all right so they needn't worry. Destroy this note. Zykhar" Valya rushed over to Klimka.
"My dear little brown bear, where did you get this? Who gave it to you?" And she shook Klimka so violently that he quite lost his presence of mind and made his second blunder before he knew it. "Zhukhrai gave it to me down at the station." Then, remembering that he should not have said it, he added: "But he told me not to give it to anybody but your mother."
"That's all right," Valya laughed. "I won't tell anybody. Now you run along like a good little bear to Pavel's place and you'll find mother there." And she gave the lad a light push in the back.
A second later Klimka's red head disappeared through the garden gate.
None of the three railwaymen returned home. In the evening Zhukhrai came to the Korchagins and told Maria Yakovlevna what had happened on the train. He did his best to calm the fear-stricken mother, and assured her that all three were safe with Bruzzhak's uncle who lived in an out-of-the-way village; they could not come back now, of course, but the Germans were in a tight fix and the situation was likely to change any day.
The disappearance of the three men brought their families closer together than ever. The rare notes that were received from them were read with rejoicing, but home seemed an empty and dreary place without them.
One day Zhukhrai dropped in to see Polentovsky's wife as if in passing, and gave her some money.
"Here's something from your husband to keep you going," he said. "Only see you don't mention it to anyone."
The old woman gratefully clasped his hand.
"Thanks. We need it badly. There's nothing to give the children
to eat." The money came from the fund left by Bulgakov.
"Well, now we'll see what comes next," said Zhukhrai to himself as he walked back to the station. "Even if the strike's broken under the threat of shooting, even if the workers are back at the job, the fire has been kindled and it can't be put out any more. As for those three, they're stout fellows,

true proletarians,"

In a little old smithy whose soot-blackened front faced the road in the outskirts of the village of Vorobyova Balka, Polentovsky stood before the glowing forge, his eyes narrowed from the glare, and turned over a red-hot piece of iron with a pair of long-handled tongs.

Artem pumped the bellows suspended from a crossbeam overhead.

"A skilled worker won't go under in the villages these days—there's as much work to be had as you might want," chuckling good-naturedly in his beard the engine driver said. "A week or two like this and we'll be able to send some fatback and flour home to the folks. The peasant always respects a smith, son. You'll see, we'll feed ourselves up like capitalists, ha-ha! Zakhar's a bit different from us—he hangs on to the peasantry, has his roots in the land through that uncle of his. Well, I can't say as I blame him. You and me, Artem, we've got neither harrow nor barrow, so to say, nought but a strong back and a pair of hands—what they call eternal proletarians, that's us—ha-ha—but old Zakhar's kind of split in two, one foot in the locomotive and the other in the village." He shifted the red-hot metal with the tongs and continued in a more serious vein: "As for us, son, things look bad. If the Germans aren't smashed pretty soon we'll have to get through to Yekaterinoslav or Rostov, otherwise we might find ourselves nabbed and strung up between heaven and earth before we know it." "You're right there," Artem mumbled. "I wish I knew how our people are getting on out there. Are the Haidamaks leaving them alone, I wonder."

"Yes, pa, we're in a mess. We'll just have to give up thinking of going home."

The engine driver pulled the hot piece of glowing blue metal from the forge and with a dexterous movement laid it on the anvil.

"Lay on to it, son!"

Artem seized the sledge-hammer, swung it high above his head and then brought it down on the anvil. A fountain of bright sparks spurted with a hiss in all directions, lighting up for a moment the darkest corners of the smithy. Polentovsky turned over the red-hot slab under the powerful blows and the iron obediently flattened out like so much soft wax.

Through the open doors of the smithy came the warm breath of the dark night.

Down below lay the lake, dark and vast. The pines surrounding it on all sides nodded their lofty heads.

"Like living things," thought Tonya looking up at them. She was lying in a grass-carpeted depression on the granite shore. High above her beyond the hollow the woods began, and below, at the very foot of the bluff, was the lake. The shadows of the cliffs pressing in on the lake gave the dark sheet of water a still darker fringe.

This old stone quarry not far from the station was Tonya's favourite haunt. Springs had burst forth in the deep abandoned workings and now three lakes had formed there. The sound of splashing from where the shore dropped into the water caused Tonya to raise her head. Parting the branches in front of her, she looked in the direction of the sound. A supple, sun-tanned body was swimming away from the shore with strong strokes. Tonya caught sight of the swimmer's brown back and dark head; he snorted like a walrus, cut through the water with brisk strokes, somersaulted and dived, then turned over on his back and floated, squinting in the bright sun, his arms stretched out and his body slightly bent.

Tonya let the branch fall back into place. "It's not nice to look," she smiled to herself and returned to her reading.

She was so engrossed in the book which Leszczinski had given her that she did not notice someone climb over the granite rocks that separated the hollow from the pine woods; only when a pebble, inadvertently set into motion by the intruder, rolled onto the book did she look up with a start to see Pavel Korchagin standing before her. He too was taken aback by the encounter and in his confusion turned to go.

"It must have been him I saw in the water," Tonya thought as she noticed his wet hair. "Did I frighten you? I didn't know you were here,"

Pavel laid his hand on the rocky ledge. He had recognised Tonya.

"You aren't interfering at all. You may stay and talk with me for a while if you like." Pavel looked at Tonya in surprise.

"What could we talk about?" Tonya smiled.

"Why don't you sit down—here, for instance?" She pointed to a stone. "What is your name?" "Pavka Korchagin."

"My name's Tonya. So now we've introduced ourselves." Pavel twisted his cap in embarrassment.

"So you're called Pavka?" Tonya broke the silence. "Why Pavka? It doesn't sound nice, Pavel would be ever so much better. That's what I shall call you—Pavel. Do you come here often. .. ." She wanted to say "to swim", but not wishing to admit having seen him in the water, she said instead: "for a walk?"

"No, not often. Only when I've got time off," Pavel replied. "So you work somewhere?" Tonya questioned him further. "At the power plant. As a stoker."

"Tell me, where did you learn to fight so skilfully?' Tonya asked unexpectedly.

"What's my fighting to you?' Pavel blurted out in spite of himself.

"Now don't be angry, Korchagin," said Tonya hastily, seeing that her question had annoyed him. "I'm just interested, that's all. What a punch that was! You shouldn't be so merciless." She burst out laughing.

"Sorry for him, eh?" Pavel asked.

"Not at all. On the contrary, Sukharko only got what he deserved. I enjoyed it immensely. I hear you get into scraps quite often."

"Who says so?" Pavel pricked up his ears.

"Well, Victor Leszczinski declares you're a professional scrapper." Pavel's features darkened.

"Victor's a swine and a softy. He ought to be thankful he didn't get it then. I heard what he said about me, but I didn't want to muck up my hands."

"Don't use such language, Pavel. It's not nice," Tonya interrupted him. Pavel bristled.

"Why did I have to start talking to this ninny?" he thought to himself. "Ordering me about like this: first it's 'Pavka' doesn't suit her and now she's finding fault with my language."

"What have you against Leszczinski?" Tonya asked.

"He's a sissy, a mama's boy without any guts! My fingers itch at the sight of his kind: always trying to walk all over you, thinks he can do anything he wants because he's rich. But I don't give a damn for his wealth. Just let him try to touch me and he'll get it good and proper. Fellows like that are only asking for a punch in the jaw," Pavel went on, roused.

Tonya regretted having mentioned Leszczinski. She could see that this young man had old scores to settle with the dandified schoolboy. To steer the conversation into more placid channels she began questioning Pavel about his family and work.

Before he knew it, Pavel was answering the girl's questions in great detail, forgetting that he had wanted to go.

"Why didn't you finish school?" Tonya
asked. "Got thrown out."

"Why?" Pavel
blushed.

"I put some tobacco in the priest's dough, and so they chucked me out. He was mean, that priest; he'd worry the life out of you." And Pavel told her the whole story.

Tonya listened with interest. Pavel got over his initial shyness and was soon talking to her as if she were an old acquaintance. Among other things he told her about his brother's disappearance. Neither of the two noticed the hours pass as they sat there in the hollow engrossed in friendly conversation. At last Pavel sprang to his feet.

"It's time I was at work. I ought to be firing the boilers instead of sitting here gassing. Danilo is sure to raise a fuss now." Ill at ease once more he added: "Well, good-bye, miss. I've got to dash off to town now."

Tonya jumped up, pulling on her jacket.

"I must go too. Let's go together."

"Oh no, couldn't do that. I'll have to run."

"All right. I'll race you. Let's see who gets there first."

Pavel gave her a disdainful look. "Race me? You haven't a chance!"

"We'll see. Let's get out of here first." Pavel jumped over the ledge of stone, then extended a hand to Tonya, and the two trotted through the woods to the broad, level clearing leading to the station. Tonya stopped in the middle of the road. "Now, let's go: one, two, three, go! Try and catch me!" She was off like a whirlwind down the track, the soles of her shoes flashing and the tail of her blue jacket flying in the wind. Pavel raced after her.

"I'll catch up with her in two shakes," thought Pavel as he sped after the flying jacket, but it was only at the end of the lane quite close to the station that he overtook her. Making a final spurt, he caught up with her and seized her shoulders with his strong hands.

"Tag! You're it!" he cried gaily, panting from the exertion.

"Don't! You're hurting me!" Tonya resisted. As they stood there panting, their pulses racing, Tonya, exhausted by the wild chase, leaned ever so lightly against Pavel in a fleeting moment of sweet intimacy that he was not soon to forget.

"Nobody has ever overtaken me before," she said as she drew away from him.

At this they parted and with a farewell wave of his cap Pavel ran toward town.

When Pavel pushed open the boiler-room door, Danilo, the stoker, was already busy firing the boiler.

"Couldn't you make it any later?" he growled. "Expect me to do your work for you?" Pavel patted his mate on the shoulder placatingly. "We'll have the fire going full blast in a jiffy, old man," he said cheerfully and applied himself to the firewood.

Toward midnight, when Danilo was snoring lustily on the woodpile, Pavel finished oiling the engine, wiped his hands on waste, pulled out the sixty-second instalment of Giuseppe Garibaldi from a toolbox, and was soon lost in the fascinating adventures of the Neapolitan "Redshirts' " legendary leader.

"She gazed at the duke with her beautiful blue eyes. . . ."

"She's also got blue eyes," thought Pavel. "And she's different, not at all like rich folk. And she can run like the devil."

Engrossed in the memory of his encounter with Tonya during the day, Pavel did not hear the rising whine of the engine which was now straining under the pressure of excess steam; the huge flywheel whirled madly and a nervous tremor ran through the concrete mounting.

A glance at the pressure gauge showed Pavel that the needle was several points above the red warning line.

"Damn it!" Pavel leapt to the safety valve, gave it two quick turns, and the steam ejected through the exhaust pipe into the river hissed hoarsely outside the boiler room. Pulling a lever, Pavel threw the drive belt onto the pump pulley.

He glanced at Danilo, but the latter was fast asleep, his mouth wide open and his nose emitting fearful sounds.

Half a minute later the pressure gauge needle had returned to normal.

After parting with Pavel, Tonya headed for home, her thoughts occupied by her encounter with the dark-eyed lad; she felt happy, though she did not know why.

"What spirit he has, what grit! And he isn't at all the ruffian I imagined him to be. At any rate he's nothing like all those silly schoolboys. . . ."

Pavel was of another mould, he came from an environment to which Tonya was a stranger. "But he can be tamed," she thought. "He'll be an interesting friend to have."

As she approached home, she saw Liza Sukharko and Nelly and Victor Leszczinski in the garden. Victor was reading. They were obviously waiting for her.

They exchanged greetings and she sat down on a bench. In the midst of the empty small talk, Victor sat down beside her and asked:

"Have you read the novel I gave you?"

"Novel?" Tonya looked up. "Oh, I. . . ." She almost told him she had forgotten the book on the lakeshore.

"Did you like the love story?" Victor looked at her questioningly.

Tonya was lost in thought for a moment, then, slowly tracing an intricate pattern on the sand of the walk with the toe of her shoe, she raised her head and looked at Victor.

"No. I have begun a far more interesting love story." "Indeed?" Victor drawled, annoyed. "Who's the author?"

Tonya looked at him with shining, smiling eyes. "There is no author. . . ."

"Tonya, ask your visitors in. Tea's served," Tonya's mother called from the balcony.
Taking the two girls by the arm, Tonya led the way to the house. As he followed them, Victor puzzled over her words, unable to guess their meaning.

This strange new feeling that had imperceptibly taken possession of him disturbed Pavel; he did not understand it and his rebellious spirit was troubled.
Tonya's father was the chief forest warden, which, as far as Pavel was concerned, put him in the same class as the lawyer Leszczinski.
Pavel had grown up in poverty and want, and he was hostile to anyone whom he considered to be well off. And so his feeling for Tonya was tinged with apprehension and misgiving; Tonya was not one of his own crowd, she was not simple and easy to understand like Galochka, the stonemason's daughter, for instance. With Tonya he was always on his guard, ready to rebuff any hint of the mockery or condescension he would expect a beautiful and cultivated girl like her to show towards a common stoker like himself.
He had not seen her for a whole week and today he decided to go down to the lake. He deliberately chose the road that took him past her house in the hope of meeting her. As he walked slowly past the fence, he caught sight of the familiar sailor blouse at the far end of the garden. He picked up a pine cone lying on the road, aimed it at the white blouse and let fly.
Tonya turned, saw him and ran over to the fence, stretching out her hand with a warm smile. "You've come at last," she said and there was gladness in her voice. "Where have you been all this time? I went down to the lake to get the book I had left there. I thought you might be there. Won't you come in?"
Pavel shook his
head. "No."
"Why not?" Her eyebrows rose in surprise.
"Your father wouldn't like it, I bet. He'd likely give you hell for letting a ragamuffin like me into the garden."
"What nonsense, Pavel," Tonya said in anger. "Come inside at once. My father would never say anything of the kind. You'll see for yourself. Now come in."
She ran to open the gate for him and Pavel followed her uncertainly.
"Do you like books?" she asked him when they were seated at a round
garden table. "Very much," Pavel replied eagerly.
"What book do you like best of all?"
Pavel pondered the question for a few moments before replying: "Jeezeppy Garibaldi."
"Giuseppe Garibaldi," Tonya corrected him. "So you like that book particularly?"
"Yes. I've read all the sixty-eight instalments. I buy five of them every pay day. Garibaldi, that's a man for you!" Pavel exclaimed. "A real hero! That's what I call the real stuff. All those battles he had to fight and he always came out on top. And he travelled all over the world! If he was alive today I would join him, I swear I would. He used to take young workers into his band and they all fought together for the poor folk."
"Would you like me to show you our library?" Tonya said and took
his arm. "Oh no, I'm not going into the house," Pavel objected.

"Why are you so stubborn? What is there to be afraid of?"

Pavel glanced down at his bare feet which were none too clean, and scratched the back of his head.

"Are you sure your mother or your father won't throw me out?"

"If you don't stop saying such things I'll get really annoyed with you," Tonya flared up.

"Well, Leszczinski would never let the likes of us into his house, he always talks to us in the kitchen. I had to go there for something once and Nelly wouldn't even let me into the room—must have been afraid I'd spoil her carpets or something," Pavel said with a grin.

"Come on, come on," she urged him, taking him by the shoulder and giving him a friendly little push toward the porch.

She led him through the dining room into a room with a huge oak bookcase. And when she opened the doors Pavel beheld hundreds of books standing in neat rows. He had never seen such wealth in his life.

"Now we'll find an interesting book for you, and you must promise to come regularly for more. Will you?"

Pavel nodded happily.

"I love books," he said.

They spent several pleasant hours together that day. She introduced him to her mother. It was not such a terrible ordeal after all. In fact he liked Tonya's mother.

Tonya took Pavel to her own room and showed him her own books.

On the dressing table stood a small mirror. Tonya led Pavel up to it and said with a little laugh: "Why do you let your hair grow wild like that? Don't you ever cut it or comb it?"

"I just shave it clean off when it grows too long. What else should I do with it?" Pavel said, embarrassed.

Tonya laughed, and picking up a comb from the dressing table she ran it quickly a few times through his unruly locks.

"There, that's better," she said as she surveyed her handiwork. "Hair ought to be neatly cut, you shouldn't go around looking like an oaf."

She glanced critically at his faded brown shirt and his shabby trousers but made no further comment.

Pavel noticed the glance and felt ashamed of his clothes.

When they said good-bye, Tonya invited him to come again. She made him promise to come in two days' time and go fishing with her.

Pavel left the house by the simple expedient of jumping out of the window; he did not care to go through the other rooms and meet Tonya's mother again.

With Artem gone, things grew hard for the Korchagins. Pavel's wages did not suffice.

Maria Yakovlevna suggested to Pavel that she go out to work again, especially since the Leszczinskis happened to be in need of a cook. But Pavel was against it.

"No, mother, I'll find some extra work to do. They need men at the sawmill to stack the timber. I'll put in a half a day there and that'll give us enough to live on. You mustn't go to work, or Artem will be angry with me for not being able to get along without that."

His mother tried to insist, but Pavel was adamant.

The next day Pavel was already working at the sawmill stacking up the freshly sawn boards to dry.

There he met several lads he knew, Misha Levchukov, an old schoolmate of his, and Vanya Kuleshov. Misha and he teamed together and working at piece rates they earned quite well. Pavel spent his days at the sawmill and in the evenings went to his job at the power plant.

On the evening of the tenth day Pavel brought his earnings to his mother. As he handed her the money, he fidgeted uneasily, blushed and said finally:

"You know what, mother, buy me a sateen shirt, a blue one—like the one I had last year, remember? It'll take about half the money, but don't worry, I'll earn some more. This shirt of mine is pretty shabby," he added, as if apologising far his request.

"Why, of course I'll buy it for you," said his mother, "I'll get the material today, Pavlusha, and tomorrow I'll sew it. You really do need a new shirt." And she gazed tenderly at her son.

Pavel paused at the entrance to the barbershop and fingering the ruble in his pocket turned into the doorway.

The barber, a smart-looking young man, noticed him entering and signed toward the empty chair with his head.

"Next, please."

As he settled into the deep, soft chair, Pavel saw in the mirror before him a flustered, confused face.

"Clip it close?" the barber asked.

"Yes, that is, no—well, what I want is a haircut—how do you call it?" Pavel floundered, making a despairing gesture with his hand.

"I understand," the barber smiled.

A quarter of an hour later Pavel emerged, perspiring and exhausted by the ordeal, but with his hair neatly trimmed and combed. The barber had worked hard at the unruly mop, but water and the comb had won out in the end and the bristling tufts now lay neatly in place.

Out in the street Pavel heaved a sigh of relief and pulled his cap down over his eyes. "I wonder what mother'll say when she sees me?" he thought.

Tonya was vexed when Pavel did not keep his promise to go fishing with her.

"That stoker boy isn't very considerate," she thought with annoyance, but when several more days passed and Pavel failed to appear she began to long for his company.

One day as she was about to go out for a walk, her mother looked into her room and said: "A visitor to see you, Tonya. May he come in?"

Pavel appeared in the doorway, changed so much that Tonya barely recognised him at first. He was wearing a brand-new blue sateen shirt and dark trousers. His boots had been polished until they shone, and, as Tonya noted at once, his bristly mop had been trimmed. The grimy young stoker was transformed.

Tonya was about to express her surprise, but checked herself in time for she did not want to embarrass the lad, who was uncomfortable enough as it was. So she pretended not to have noticed the striking change in his appearance and began scolding him instead.

"Why didn't you come fishing? You should be ashamed of yourself! Is that how you keep your

promises?"
"I've been working at the sawmill these days and just couldn't get away."
He could not tell her that he had been working the last few days to the point of exhaustion in order to buy himself the shirt and trousers.
Tonya, however, guessed the truth herself and her annoyance with Pavel vanished.
"Let's go for a walk down to the pond," she suggested, and they went out through the garden onto the road.
Before long Pavel was telling Tonya about the revolver he had stolen from the Lieutenant, sharing his big secret with her as with a friend, and promising her that some day very soon they would go deep into the woods to do some shooting.
"But see that you don't give me away," Pavel said
abruptly. "I shall never give you away," Tonya vowed.

## Chapter Four

A fierce and merciless class struggle gripped the Ukraine. More and more people took to arms and each clash brought forth new fighters.
Gone were the days of peace and tranquillity for the respectable citizen.
The little tumbledown houses shook in the storm blasts of gun salvos, and the respectable citizen huddled against the walls of his cellar or took cover in his backyard trench.
An avalanche of Petlyura bands of all shades and hues overran the gubernia, led by little chieftains and big ones, all manner of Golubs, Archangels, Angels and Gordiuses and a host of other bandits. Ex-officers of the tsarist army, Right and Left Ukrainian Socialist-Revolutionaries—any desperado who could muster a band of cutthroats, declared himself Ataman, and some raised the yellow-and-blue Petlyura flag and established their authority over whatever area was within the scope of their strength and opportunities.
Out of these heterogeneous bands reinforced by kulaks and the Galician regiments of Ataman Konovalets' siege corps, "Chief Ataman" Petlyura formed his regiments and divisions. And when Red partisan detachments struck at this Socialist-Revolutionary and kulak rabble the very earth trembled under the pounding of hundreds and thousands of hoofs and the rumble of the wheels of machine-gun carts and gun carriages.
In April of that turbulent 1919, the respectable citizen, dazed and terrified, would open his shutters of a morning and, peering out with sleep-heavy eyes, greet his next-door neighbour with the anxious question:
"Avtonom Petrovich, do you happen to know who's in power today?"
And Avtonom Petrovich would hitch up his trousers and cast a frightened look around.
"Can't say, Afanas Kirillovich. Somebody did enter the town during the night. Who it was we'll find out soon enough; if they start robbing the Jews, we'll know they're Petlyura men, and if they're some of the 'comrades', we'll be able to tell at once by the way they talk. I'm keeping an eye open myself so's to know what portrait to hang up. Wouldn't care to get into trouble like Gerasim Leontievich next door. You see, he didn't look out properly and had just gone and hung up a picture of Lenin when three men rushed in—Petlyura men as it turned out. They took one

look at the picture and jumped on him—a good twenty strokes they gave him. 'We'll skin you alive, you Communist sonofabitch,' they shouted. And no matter how hard he tried to explain and how loud he yelled, nothing helped."

Noting groups of armed men coming down the street the respectable citizen closed his windows and went into hiding. Better to be on the safe side. . . .

As for the workers, they regarded the yellow-and-blue flags of the Petlyura thugs with suppressed hatred. They were powerless in the face of this wave of Ukrainian bourgeois chauvinism, and their spirits rose only when passing Red units, fighting fiercely against the yellow-and-blues that were bearing down on them from all sides, wedged their way into the town. For a day or two the flag so dear to the worker's heart would fly over the town hall, but then the unit would move on again and the engulfing gloom return.

Now the town was in the hands of Colonel Golub, the "hope and pride" of the Transdnieper Division.

His band of two thousand cutthroats had made a triumphal entry into the town the day before. Pan the Colonel had ridden at the head of the column on a splendid black stallion. In spite of the warm April sun he wore a Caucasian burka, a lambskin Zaporozhye Cossack cap with a raspberry-red crown, a cherkesska, and the weapons that went with the outfit: dagger and sabre with chased-silver hilts. Between his teeth he held a pipe with a curved stem.

A handsome fellow, Pan the Colonel Golub, with his black eyebrows and pallid complexion tinged slightly green from incessant carousals!

Before the revolution Pan the Colonel had been an agronomist at the beet plantations of a sugar refinery, but that was a dull life not to be compared with the position of an Ataman, and so on the crest of the murky waves that swept the land the agronomist emerged as Pan the Colonel Golub.

In the only theatre in town a gala affair was got up in honour of the new arrivals. The "flower" of the Petlyura intelligentsia was there in full force: Ukrainian teachers, the priest's two daughters, the beautiful Anya and her younger sister Dina, some ladies of lesser standing, former members of the household of Count Potocki, a few members of the middle class, remnants of the Ukrainian Socialist-Revolutionaries, who called themselves "free Cossacks".

The theatre was packed. Spur-clicking officers who might have been copied from old paintings of Zaporozhye Cossacks pranced around the teachers, the priest's daughters and the burghers' ladies who were decked out in Ukrainian national costumes ornamented with bright-coloured embroidered flowers and multihued beads and ribbons.

The regimental band blared. On the stage feverish preparations were under way for the performance of Nazar Stodolya scheduled for the evening.

There was no electricity, however, and the fact was reported in due course to Pan the Colonel at headquarters by his adjutant, Sublieutenant Polyantsev, who had now Ukrainianised his name and rank and styled himself Khorunzhy Palyanytsya. The Colonel, who intended to grace the evening with his presence, heard out Palyanytsya and said casually but imperiously:

"See that there is light. Find an electrician and start the electric power plant if you have to break your neck doing it."

"Very good, Pan Colonel."

Khorunzhy Palyanytsya found electricians without breaking his neck. Within two hours Pavel and two other workers were brought to the power plant by armed guards.

"If you don't have the lights on by seven I'll have all three of you strung up," Palyanytsya told them curtly, pointing to an iron beam overhead.

This blunt exposition of the situation had its effect and the lights came on at the appointed time. The evening was in full swing when Pan the Colonel arrived with his lady, the buxom yellow-haired daughter of the barkeeper in whose house he was staying. Her father being a man of means, she had been educated at the Gymnasium in the gubernia town.

When the two had taken the seats reserved for them as guests of honour in the front row, Pan the Colonel gave the signal and the curtain rose so suddenly that the audience had a glimpse of the stage director's back as he hurried off the stage.

During the play the officers and their ladies whiled away the time at the refreshment counter, filling up on raw homebrew supplied by the ubiquitous Palyanytsya and delicacies acquired by requisitioning. By the end of the performance they were all well under the weather.

After the final curtain Palyanytsya leaped on the stage

"Ladies and gentlemen, the dancing is about to begin," he announced with a theatrical sweep of his arm.

There was general applause and the audience emptied out into the yard to give the Petlyura soldiers posted to guard the guests a chance to carry out the chairs and clear the dance floor.

A half an hour later the theatre was the scene of wild revelry.

The Petlyura officers, flinging all restraint to the winds, furiously danced the hopak with local belles flushed from the heat, and the pounding of heavy boots rocked the walls of the ramshackle theatre building.

In the meantime a troop of armed horsemen was approaching the town from the direction of the flour mill. A Petlyura sentry-post stationed at the town limits sprang in alarm to their machine guns and there was a clicking of breech-blocks in the night. Through the darkness came the sharp challenge:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Two dark figures loomed out of the darkness. One of them stepped forward and roared out in a hoarse bass:

"Ataman Pavlyuk with his detachment. Who are you? Golub's
men?" "That's right," replied an officer who had also stepped
forward. "Where can I billet my men?" Pavlyuk asked.

"I'll phone headquarters at once," replied the officer and disappeared into a tiny hut on the roadside.

A minute later he came out and began issuing orders:

"Clear the machine gun off the road, men! Let the Pan Ataman pass."

Pavlyuk reined in his horse in front of the brightly illuminated theatre where a great many people were strolling out in the open air.

"Some fun going on here by the look of it," he said, turning to the captain riding beside him. "Let's dismount, Gukmach, and join the merrymaking. We'll pick ourselves a couple of women—I see the place is thick with them. Hey, Stalezhko," he shouted. "You billet the lads with the townsfolk. We'll stop here. Escort, follow me." And he heaved himself heavily from his staggering mount.

At the entrance to the theatre Pavlyuk was stopped by two armed
Petlyura men. "Tickets?"

Pavlyuk gave them a derisive look and pushed one of them aside with his shoulder. The dozen men with him followed suit. Their horses were outside, tethered to the fence.

The newcomers were noticed at once. Particularly conspicuous was the huge frame of Pavlyuk; he was wearing an officer's coat of good cloth, blue breeches of the kind worn in the guards, and a shaggy fur cap. A Mauser hung from a strap slung over his shoulder and a hand grenade stuck out of his pocket.

"Who's that?" the whisper passed through the crowd around the dance floor where Golub's second in command was executing a wild dance.

His partner was the priest's elder daughter, ^ who was whirling round with such abandon that her skirts flared out high enough to give the delighted men a good view of her silk petticoats.

Forcing his way through the crowd, Pavlyuk went right out onto the dance floor.

Pavlyuk stared with glazed eyes at the priest's daughter's legs, passed his tongue over his dry lips, then strode across the dance floor to the orchestra platform, stopped, and flicked his plaited riding whip.

"Come on, give us the hopak!"

The conductor paid no attention to the order.

A sharp movement of Pavlyuk's hand and the whip cut down the conductor's back. The latter jumped as if stung and the music broke off, plunging the hall into silence.

"What insolence!" The barkeeper's daughter was furious. "You can't let him do that," she cried, clutching at the elbow of Golub seated at her side.

Golub heaved himself to his feet, kicked aside a chair, took three paces forward and stopped face to face with Pavlyuk. He had recognised the newcomer at once, and he had scores to settle with this rival claimant for local power. Only a week ago Pavlyuk had played the most scurvy trick on Pan the Colonel. At the height of a battle with a Red regiment which had mauled Golub's detachment on more than one occasion, Pavlyuk, instead of striking at the Bolsheviks from the rear, had broken into a town, overcome the resistance of the small pickets the Reds had left there, and, leaving a screening force to protect himself, sacked the place in the most thorough fashion. Of course, being a true Petlyura man, he saw to it that the Jewish population were the chief victims. In the meantime the Reds had smashed up Golub's right flank and moved on.

And now this arrogant cavalry Captain had burst in here and had the audacity to strike Pan the Colonel's own bandmaster under his very eyes. No, this was too much. Golub knew that if he did not put the conceited upstart in his place his prestige in the regiment would be gone.

For several seconds the two men stood there in silence glaring at each other.

Gripping the hilt of his sabre with one hand and feeling for the revolver in his pocket with the other, Golub rapped out:

"How dare you lay your hands on my men, you scoundrel!"

Pavlyuk's hand crept toward the grip of the Mauser.

"Easy there, Pan Golub, easy, or you may trip yourself up. Don't step on my pet corn. I'm liable to lose my temper."

This was more than Golub could stand.

"Throw them out and give them twenty-five lashes each!" he shouted.

The officers fell upon Pavlyuk and his men like a pack of hounds.

A shot crashed out with a report that sounded as if an electric bulb had been smashed against the

floor, and the struggling men swirled and spun down the hall like two packs of fighting dogs. In the wild melee men slashed at each other with sabres and dug their fingers into hair and throats, while the women, squealing with terror like stuck pigs, scattered away from the contestants.

In a few minutes Pavlyuk and his followers, disarmed and beaten, were dragged out of the hall, and thrown out into the street.

Pavlyuk lost his fur hat in the scrimmage, his face was bruised and his weapons were gone and now he was beside himself with rage. He and his men leapt into the saddle and galloped down the street.

The evening was broken up. No one felt inclined to make merry after what had happened. The women refused to dance and insisted on being taken home, but Golub would not hear of it.

"Post sentries," he ordered. "Nobody is to leave the
hall." Palyanytsya hastened to carry out the orders.

"The dancing will continue until morning, ladies and gentlemen," Golub replied stubbornly to the protests that showered upon him. "I shall dance the first waltz myself."

The orchestra struck up again but there was to be no more frolicking that night nevertheless.

The Colonel had not circled the dance floor once with the priest's daughter when the sentries ran into the hall shouting:

"Pavlyuk's surrounding the theatre!"

At that moment a window facing the street crashed in and the snub-nosed muzzle of a machine gun was pushed in through the shattered window frame. It moved stupidly this way and that, as if picking out the figures scattering wildly away from it toward the centre of the hall as from the devil himself.

Palyanytsya fired at the thousand-candle-power lamp in the ceiling which exploded like a bomb, sending a shower of splintered glass down on everyone in the hall.

The hall was plunged in darkness. Someone shouted in the yard:

"Everybody get outside!" A stream of violent abuse followed.

The wild, hysterical screams of the women, the furious commands issued by Golub as he dashed about the hall trying to rally his officers who had completely lost their heads, the firing and shouting out in the yard all merged into an indescribable pandemonium. In the panic nobody noticed Palyanytsya slip through the back door into a deserted side street and run for all he was worth to Golub's headquarters.

A half an hour later a full-dress battle was raging in the town. The silence of the night was shattered by the incessant cracking of rifle fire interspersed with the rattle of machine guns. Completely stupefied, the townsfolk leapt up from warm beds and pressed against window panes. At last the firing abated, and only one machine gun somewhere in the outskirts kept up a desultory shooting like the barking of a dog.

The fighting died down as the glimmer of dawn appeared on the horizon. . . .

Rumours that a pogrom was brewing crept through the town, finally reaching the tiny, low-roofed Jewish cottages with crooked windows that somehow managed to cling to the top of the filthy ravine leading down to the river. In these incredibly overcrowded hovels called houses lived the Jewish poor.

The compositors and other workers at the printshop where Sergei Bruzzhak had been working for more than a year were Jews. Strong bonds of friendship had sprung up between them and Sergei. Like a closely knit family, they stood solid against their employer, the smug, well-fed Mr. Blumstein. An incessant struggle went on between the proprietor and the printers. Blumstein did his best to grab more and pay his workers less. The printers had gone on strike several times and the printshop had stood idle for two or three weeks running. There were fourteen of them. Sergei, the youngest, spent twelve hours a day turning the wheel of a hand press.

Today Sergei noticed an ominous uneasiness among the workers. For the past several troubled months the shop had had little to do apart from printing occasional proclamations issued by the "Chief Ataman".

A consumptive compositor named Mendel called Sergei into a corner.

"Do you know there's a pogrom coming?" he said, looking at the boy with his sad eyes. Sergei looked up in surprise.

"No, I hadn't the slightest idea."

Mendel laid a withered, yellow hand on Sergei's shoulder and spoke in a confiding, paternal tone. "There's going to be a pogrom—that's a fact. The Jews are going to be beaten up. What I want to know is this—will you help your comrades in their misfortune or not?"

"Of course I will, if I only can. What can I do, Mendel?"

The compositors were now listening to the conversation.

"You're a good boy, Seryozha, and we trust you. After all, your father's a worker like us. Now you run home and ask him whether he would agree to hide some old men and women at his place, and then we'll decide who they will be. Ask your people if there's anyone else they know willing to do the same. The Russians will be safe from these bandits for the time being. Run along, Seryozha, there's no time to waste."

"You can count on me, Mendel. I'll see Pavka and Klimka right away—their folks are sure to take in somebody."

"Just a minute," Mendel anxiously halted Sergei who was about to leave. "Who are Pavka and Klimka? Do you know them well?"

Sergei nodded confidently.

"Of course. They're my pals. Pavka Korchagin's brother is a mechanic."

"Ah, Korchagin," Mendel was reassured. "I know him —used to live in the same house. Yes, you can see the Korchagins. Go, Seryozha, and bring back an answer as soon as you can."

Sergei shot out into the street.

The pogrom began on the third day after the pitched battle between the Pavlyuk detachment and Golub's men.

Pavlyuk, routed and driven out of Shepetovka, had cleared out of the neighbourhood and seized a small town nearby. The night encounter in Shepetovka had cost him a score of men. Golub had lost as many.

The dead were hastily carted off to the cemetery and buried the same day without much ceremony, for there was nothing to boast about in the whole affair. The two Atamans had flown at each other's throats like two stray curs, and to make a fuss over the funeral would have been unseemly.

True, Palyanytsya had wanted to make a big thing of it and declare Pavlyuk a Red bandit, but the Socialist-Revolutionaries headed by the priest Vasili objected.

The skirmish evoked some grumbling in Golub's regiment, especially among his bodyguard which had sustained the heaviest losses, and to put an end to the dissatisfaction and bolster up spirits, Palyanytsya proposed staging a pogrom—to provide "a little diversion" for the men, was the cynical way he broached the subject to Golub. He argued that this was essential in view of the grumbling in the unit. And although the Colonel was loth to disturb the peace in the town on the eve of his marriage to the barkeeper's daughter, he finally gave in.

Pan the Colonel had another reason for objecting to the operation: his recent admission into the S.R. Party. His enemies might stir up trouble again by branding him a pogrom-monger, and without doubt would slander him to the "Chief Ataman". So far, however, Golub was not greatly dependent on the "Chief", since he foraged for himself. Besides, the "Chief" knew very well what riffraff he had serving under him, and himself had time and again demanded money for the Directory's needs from the so-called requisitions; as for the reputation of a pogrom-monger, Golub already had quite a record in that respect. There was very little that he could add to it now.

The pogrom began early in the morning.

The town was still wrapped in the grey mist of dawn. The narrow streets which wound themselves like strips of wet linen around the haphazardly built blocks of the Jewish quarter were deserted and dead. The windows were heavily curtained and shuttered.

Outwardly the quarter appeared to be immersed in sound early-morning slumber, but inside the houses there was no sleep. Entire families, fully dressed, huddled together in one room, preparing themselves for the impending disaster. Only children, too young to realise what was happening, slept peacefully in their mothers' arms.

Salomyga, the chief of Golub's bodyguard, a dark fellow with the swarthy complexion of a Gypsy and a livid sabre scar across his cheek, worked hard that morning to wake up Golub's aide. It was a painful awakening for Palyanytsya—he could not shake himself loose from the nightmare that had beset him all night; the grimacing, hunchbacked devil was still clawing at his throat. At last he raised his splitting head and saw Salomyga bending over him.

"Get up, you souse," Salomyga was shaking him by the shoulder. "It's high time to get down to business!"

Palyanytsya, now wide awake, sat up and, his face grimacing with pain, spat out the bitter saliva that filled his mouth.

"What business?" he stared blankly at Salomyga.

"To rip up the sheenies, of course! You haven't forgotten, I hope."

It all came back to Palyanytsya. True enough, he had forgotten about it. The drinking bout at the farm where Pan the Colonel had retired with his fiancée and a handful of boon companions had been a heavy one.

Golub had found it convenient to leave town for the duration of the pogrom, for afterwards he could put it down to a misunderstanding in his absence, and in the meantime Palyanytsya would have ample opportunity to make a thorough job of it. Yes, Palyanytsya was an expert when it came to providing "diversion"!

Palyanytsya poured a pail of water over his head and, thus sobered, was soon striding about headquarters issuing orders.

The bodyguard hundred was already in the saddle. To avoid possible complications, the farsighted Palyanytsya ordered pickets posted between the town proper and the workers' quarters and the station. A machine gun was mounted in the Leszczinski garden facing the road in order to meet the workers with a squall of lead if they took it into their heads to interfere.

When all the preparations were complete, the aide and Salomyga leapt into the saddle.

"Wait, I nearly forgot," Palyanytsya said when they had already set out. "Get two carts to bring back Golub's wedding present. Ha-ha-ha! The first spoils as always to the commander, and the first girl for his aide—and that's me. Got it, you blockhead?"

The last remark was addressed to Salomyga, who glared back at him with jaundiced eyes. "There'll be enough for everybody."

They spurred their horses down the highway, the aide and Salomyga leading the disorderly mob of mounted men.

The mist had lifted when Palyanytsya reined in his horse in front of a two-storey house with a rusty sign reading "Fuchs, Draper".

His thin-shanked grey mare nervously stamped her hoof against the cobblestones.

"Well, with God's help we'll begin here," Palyanytsya said as he jumped to the ground.

"All right, men, dismount," he turned to the men crowding around him. "The show's beginning. Now I don't want any heads bashed, there'll be a time for that. As for the girls, if you can manage it, hold out until evening."

One of the men bared his strong teeth and protested:

"Now then, Pan Khorunzhy, what if it's by mutual consent?"

There was loud guffawing all around. Palyanytsya eyed the man who had spoken with admiring approbation.

"Well, that's another story—if they're willing, go right ahead, nobody can prohibit that."

Palyanytsya went up to the closed door of the store and kicked at it hard, but the sturdy oaken planks did not so much as tremble.

This was clearly the wrong place to begin. Palyanytsya rounded the corner of the house and headed for the door leading to Fuchs' place, supporting his sabre with his hand as he went. Salomyga followed.

The people inside the house had heard the clatter of hoofs on the pavement outside and when the sound ceased in front of the shop and the men's voices carried through the walls their hearts seemed to stop beating and their bodies stiffened with fright.

The wealthy Fuchs had left town the day before with his wife and daughters, leaving his servant Riva, a gentle timid girl of nineteen, to look after his property. Since she was afraid to remain alone in the house, he had suggested that she bring her old father and mother to stay with her until his return.

When Riva had tried meekly to protest, the cunning merchant had assured her that in all probability there would be no pogrom at all, for what could they expect to get from beggars? And he promised to give her a piece of stuff for a dress when he returned.

Now the three waited in fear and trembling, hoping against hope that the men would ride past; perhaps they had been mistaken, perhaps it had only seemed that the horses had stopped in front of their house. But their hopes were dashed by the dull reverberation of a blow at the shop door.

Old, silvery-haired Peisakh stood in the doorway, his blue eyes wide open like a frightened child's, and he whispered a prayer to Almighty Jehovah with all the passion of the fanatical believer. He prayed to God to protect this house from misfortune and for a while the old woman standing beside him could not hear the approaching footsteps for the mumble of his prayer.

Riva had fled to the farthest room where she hid behind the big oaken sideboard.

A shattering blow at the door sent a convulsive tremor through the two old people.

"Open the door!" Another blow, still more violent than the first, descended on the door, followed by furious curses.

But those within, numb with fright, could not lift a hand to unfasten the door.

Outside the rifle butts pounded until the bolts gave way and the splintering door crashed open. Armed men poured into the house; they searched every corner. A blow from a rifle butt smashed in the door leading into the shop and the front door bolts were drawn from within.

The looting began.

When the carts had been piled high with cloth, shoes and other loot, Salomyga set out with the booty to Golub's quarters. When he returned he heard a shriek of terror issuing from the house. Palyanytsya, leaving his men to sack the shop, had walked into the proprietor's apartment and found the old folks and the girl standing there. Casting his green lynx-like eyes over them he snapped at the old couple: "Get out of here!" Neither mother nor father stirred.

Palyanytsya took a step forward and slowly drew his sabre.

"Mama!" the girl gave a heart-rending scream. It was this that Salomyga heard. Palyanytsya turned to his men who had run in at the cry.

"Throw them out!" he barked, pointing at the two old people. When this had been done, he told Salomyga who had now appeared. "You watch here at the door while I have a chat with the wench."

The girl screamed again. Old Peisakh made a rush for the door leading into the room, but a violent blow in the chest sent him reeling back against the wall, gasping with pain. Like a she-wolf fighting for her young, Toiba, the old mother, always so quiet and submissive, now flung herself at Salomyga.

"Let me .in! What are you doing to my girl?" She was struggling to get to the door, and try as he might Salomyga could not break her convulsive grip on his coat.

Peisakh, now recovered from the shock and pain, came to Toiba's assistance. "Let us pass! Let us pass! Oh my daughter!"

Between them the old couple managed to push Salomyga away from the door. Enraged, he jerked his revolver from under his belt and brought the steel grip down hard upon the old man's grey head. Peisakh crumpled to the floor.

Inside the room Riva was screaming.

Toiba was dragged out of the house frantic with grief, and the street echoed to her wild shrieks and entreaties for help.

Inside the house everything was quiet.

Palyanytsya came out of the room. Without looking at Salomyga, whose hand was already on the door handle, he said:

"No use going in—she choked when I tried to shut her up with a pillow." As he stepped over Peisakh's body he put his foot into a dark sticky mess.

"Bad beginning," he muttered as he went outside.

The others followed him without a word, leaving behind bloody footprints on the floor and the stairs.

Pillage was in full swing in the town. Brief savage clashes flared up between brigands over the division of the spoils, and here and there sabres flashed. And almost everywhere fists flailed without restraint. From the beer saloon twenty-five gallon kegs were rolled out onto the street.

Then the looters began to break into Jewish homes.

There was no resistance. They went through the rooms, hastily turned every corner upside down, and went away laden with booty, leaving behind disordered heaps of clothing and the fluttering contents of ripped feather beds and pillows. The first day took a toll of only two victims: Riva and her father; but the oncoming night carried with it the unavoidable menace of death.

By evening the motley crew of scavengers was roaring drunk. The crazed Petlyura men were waiting for the night.

Darkness released them from the last restraint. It is easier to destroy a man in the pit of night; even the jackal prefers the hours of gloom.

Few would ever forget these two terrible nights and three days. How many crushed and mangled lives they left behind, how many youthful heads turned grey in these bloody hours, how many bitter tears were shed! It is hard to tell whether those were the more fortunate who were left to live with souls desolated, in the agony of shame and humiliation, gnawed by indescribable grief for loved ones who would never return. In the narrow alleys lay the lacerated, tormented, broken bodies of young girls with arms thrown back in convulsive gestures of agony.

Only at the very riverfront, in the house where Naum the blacksmith lived, the jackals who fell upon his young wife Sarah got a fierce rebuff. The smith, a man of powerful build in the prime of his twenty-four years and with the steel muscles of one who wielded the sledge-hammer for a living, did not yield his mate.

In a brief but furious clash in the tiny cottage the skulls of two Petlyura men were crushed like rotten melons. With the terrible fury of despair, the smith fought fiercely for two lives, and for a long time the dry crackle of rifle fire could be heard from the river bank where the brigands now rushed, sensing the danger. With only one round of ammunition left, the smith mercifully shot his wife, and himself rushed out to his death, bayonet in hand. He was met by a squall of lead and his powerful body crashed to the ground outside his front door.

Prosperous peasants from nearby villages drove into town in carts drawn by well-fed horses, loaded their waggon boxes with whatever met their fancy, and, escorted by sons and relatives serving in Golub's force, hurried home so as to make another trip or two to town and back.

Seryozha Bruzzhak, who together with his father had hidden half of his printshop comrades in the cellar and attic, was crossing the garden on his way home when he saw a man in a long, patched coat running up the road, violently swinging his arms.

It was an old Jew, and behind the bareheaded, panting man whose features were paralysed with mortal terror, galloped a Petlyura man on a grey horse. The distance between them dwindled fast and the mounted man leaned forward in the saddle to cut down his victim. Hearing the hoofbeats behind him, the old man threw up his hands as if to ward off the blow. At that moment Seryozha leapt onto the road and threw himself in front of the horse.

"Stop, you dog of a bandit!"

The rider, making no effort to stay the descending sabre, brought the flat of the blade down on the fair young head.

## Chapter Five

The Red forces were pressing down hard on "Chief Ataman" Petlyura's units, and Golub's regiment was called to the front. Only a small rearguard detachment and the Commandant's detail were left in the town.

The people stirred. The Jewish section of the population took advantage of the temporary lull to bury their dead, and life in the tiny huts of the Jewish quarter returned to normal.

On quiet evenings an indistinct rumble was carried from the distance; somewhere not too far off the fighting was in progress.

At the station, railwaymen were leaving their jobs to roam the countryside in search of work. The Gymnasium was closed.

Martial law was declared in town.

It was a black, ugly night, one of those nights when the eyes, strain as they might, cannot pierce the gloom, and a man gropes about blindly expecting at any moment to fall into a ditch and break his neck.

The respectable citizen knows that at a time like this it is safer to sit at home in the dark; he will not light a lamp if he can help it, for light might attract unwelcome guests. Better the dark, much safer. There are of course those who are always restless—let them venture abroad if they wish, that's none of the respectable citizen's business. But he himself will not risk going out—not for anything.

It was one of those nights, yet there was a man abroad.

Making his way to the Korchagin house, he knocked cautiously at the window. There was no answer and he knocked again, louder and more insistently.

Pavel dreamed that a queer creature, anything but human, was aiming a machine gun at him; he wanted to flee, but there was nowhere to go, and the machine gun had broken into a terrifying chatter.

He woke up to find the window rattling. Someone was knocking.

Pavel jumped out of bed and went to the window to see who it was, but all he could make out was a vague dark shape.

He was all alone in the house. His mother had gone on a visit to his eldest sister, whose husband was a mechanic at the sugar refinery. And Artem was blacksmithing in a neighbouring village, wielding the sledge for his keep.

Yet it could only be Artem.

Pavel decided to open the window. "Who's there?" he said into the darkness.

There was a movement outside the window and a muffled bass replied: "It's me, Zhukhrai."

Two hands were laid on the windowsill and Fyodor's head came up until it was level with Pavel's face.

"I've come to spend the night with you. Any objections, mate?" Zhukhrai whispered. "Of course not," Pavel replied warmly. "You know you're always welcome. Climb in." Fyodor squeezed his great bulk through the opening.

He closed the window but did not move away from the window at once. He stood listening intently, and when the moon slipped out from behind a cloud and the road became visible he scanned it carefully. Then he turned to Pavel.

"We won't wake up your mother, will we?"

Pavel told him there was nobody home besides himself. The sailor felt more at ease and spoke in a louder voice.

"Those cutthroats are after my hide in earnest now, matey. They've got it in for me after what happened over at the station. If our fellows would stick together a bit more we could have given the greycoats a fine reception during the pogrom. But folks, as you see, aren't ready to plunge into the fire yet, and so nothing came of it. Now they're looking for me, twice they've had the dragnet out —today I got away by the skin of my teeth. I was going home, you see, by the back way of course, and had just stopped at the shed to look around, when I saw a bayonet sticking out from behind a tree trunk. I naturally cast off and headed for your place. If you've got nothing against it I'll drop anchor here for a few days. All right, mate? Good."

Zhukhrai, still breathing heavily, began pulling off his mud-splashed boots.

Pavel was glad he had come. The power plant had not been working latterly and Pavel felt lonely in the empty house.

They went to bed. Pavel fell asleep at once, but Fyodor lay awake for a long time smoking. Presently he rose and, tiptoeing on bare feet to the window, stared out for a long time into the street. Finally, overcome by fatigue, he lay down and fell asleep, but his hand remained on the butt of the heavy Colt which he had tucked under the pillow.

Zhukhrai's unexpected arrival that night and the eight days spent in his company influenced the whole course of Pavel's life. From the sailor Pavel learned much that was new to him, and that stirred him to the depths of his being.

Driven into hiding, Zhukhrai made use of his enforced idleness to pass on to the eager Pavel all his passionate fury and burning hatred for the Ukrainian Nationalists who were throttling the area. Zhukhrai spoke in language that was vivid, lucid and simple. He had no doubts, his path lay clearly before him, and Pavel came to see that all this tangle of political parties with high-sounding names—Socialist-Revolutionaries, Social-Democrats, Polish Socialists—was a collection of vicious enemies of the workers, and that the only revolutionary party which steadfastly fought against the rich was the Bolshevik Party.

Formerly Pavel had been hopelessly confused about all this.

And so this staunch, stout-hearted Baltic sailor weathered by sea squalls, a confirmed Bolshevik, who had been a member of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) since 1915, taught Pavel the harsh truths of life, and the young stoker listened spellbound.

"I was something like you, matey, when I was young," he said. "Just didn't know what to do with

my energy, a restless youngster always ready to kick over the traces. I was brought up in poverty. And at times the very sight of those pampered, well-fed sons of the town gentry made me see red. Often enough I beat them up badly, but all I got out of it was a proper trouncing- from my father. You can't change things by carrying on a lone fight. You, Pavlusha, have all the makings of a good fighter in the workingman's cause, only you're still very young - and you don't know much about the class struggle. I'll put you on the right road, matey, because I know you'll make good. I can't stand the quiet, smug- sort. The whole world's afire now. The slaves have risen and the old life's got to be scuttled. But to do that we need stout fellows, not sissies, who'll go crawling into cracks like so many cockroaches when the fighting starts, but men with guts who'll hit out without mercy."

His fist crashed down on the table.

He got up, frowning1, and paced up and down the room with hands thrust deep in his pockets. His inactivity depressed him. He bitterly regretted having- stayed behind in this town, and believing any further stay to be pointless, was firmly resolved to make his way through the front to meet the Red units.

A group of nine Party members would remain in town to carry on the work.

"They'll manage without me. I can't sit around any longer doing- nothing1. I've wasted ten months as it is," Zhukhrai thought irritably.

"What exactly are you, Fyodor?" Pavel had asked him once.

Zhukhrai got up and shoved his hands into his pockets. He did not grasp the meaning of the question at first.

"Don't you know?"

"I think you're a Bolshevik or a Communist," Pavel said in a low voice.

Zhukhrai burst out laughing, slapping his massive chest in its tight-fitting striped jersey.

"Right enough, matey! It's as much a fact as that Bolshevik and Communist are one and the same thing." Suddenly he grew serious. "But now that you've grasped that much, remember it's not to be mentioned to anyone or anywhere, if you don't want them to draw and quarter me. Understand?"

"I understand," Pavel replied firmly. Voices were heard from the yard and the door was pushed open without a preliminary knock. Zhukhrai's hand slipped into his pocket but emerged again when Sergei Bruzzhak, thin and pale, with a bandage on his head, entered the room, followed by Valya and Klimka.

"Hullo, old man," Sergei shook Pavel's hand and smiled. "Decided to pay you a visit, all three of us. Valya wouldn't let me go out alone, and Klimka is afraid to let her go by herself. He may be a redhead but he knows what he's about."

Valya playfully clapped her hand over his mouth. "Chatterbox," she laughed. "He won't give Klimka any peace today."

Klimka showed his white teeth in a good-natured grin. "What can you do with a sick fellow? Brain pan's damaged, as you can see." They all laughed.

Sergei, who had not yet recovered from the effects of the sabre blow, settled on Pavel's bed and soon the young people were engaged in a lively conversation. As he told Zhukhrai the story of his encounter with the Petlyura bandit, Sergei, usually so gay and cheerful, was quiet and depressed.

Zhukhrai knew the three young people, for he had visited the Bruzzhaks on several occasions. He liked these youngsters; they had not yet found their place in the vortex of the struggle, but the

aspirations of their class were clearly expressed in them. He listened with interest to the young people's account of how they had helped to shelter Jewish families in their homes to save them from the pogrom. That evening he told the young folk much about the Bolsheviks, about Lenin, helping them to understand what was happening.

It was quite late when Pavel's guests left. Zhukhrai went out every evening and returned late at night; before leaving town he had to discuss with the comrades who would remain in town the work they would have to do.

This particular night Zhukhrai did not come back, When Pavel woke up in the morning he saw at a glance that the sailor's bed had not been slept in.

Seized by some vague premonition, Pavel dressed hurriedly and left the house. Locking the door and putting the key in the usual place, he went to Klimka's house hoping that the latter would have some news of Fyodor. Klimka's mother, a stocky woman with a broad face pitted with pockmarks, was doing the wash. To Pavel's question whether she knew where Fyodor was she replied curtly:

"You'd think I'd nothing else to do but keep an eye on your Fyodor. It's all through him— the devil take him— that Zozulikha's house was turned upside down. What've you got to do with him? A queer lot, if you ask me. Klimka and you and the rest of them. . . ." She turned back in anger to her washtub.

Klimka's mother was an ill-tempered woman, with a biting tongue. . . .

From Klimka's house Pavel went to Sergei's where he voiced his fears.

"Why should you be so worried?" said Valya. "Perhaps he stayed over at some friend's place." But her words lacked confidence.

Pavel was too restless to stop at the Bruzzhaks for long, and although they tried to persuade him to stay for dinner he took his leave.

He headed back home in hopes of finding Zhukhrai there.

The door was locked. Pavel stood outside for a while with a heavy heart; he couldn't bear the thought of going into the deserted house.

For a few minutes he stood in the yard deep in thought, then, moved by an impulse, he went into the shed. He climbed up under the roof and brushing away the cobwebs reached into his secret hiding place and brought out the heavy Mannlicher wrapped in rags.

He left the shed and went down to the station, strangely elated by the feel of the revolver weighing down his pocket.

But there was no news of Zhukhrai at the station. On the way back his step slowed down as he drew alongside the now familiar garden of the forest warden. With a faint flicker of hope, he looked up at the windows of the house, but it was as lifeless as the garden. When he had passed the garden he turned back to glance at the paths now covered with a rusty crop of last year's leaves. The place seemed desolate and neglected—no industrious hand had laid a visible imprint here—and the dead stillness of the big old house made Pavel feel sadder still.

His last quarrel with Tonya had been the most serious they had had. It had all happened quite unexpectedly, nearly a month ago.

As he slowly walked back to town, his hands shoved deep into his pockets, Pavel recalled how it had come about.

They had met quite by chance on the road and Tonya had invited him over to her place.

"Dad and mother are going to a birthday party at the Bolshanskys, and I'll be all alone. Why don't you come over, Pavlusha? I have a very interesting book we could read—Leonid Andreyev's Sashka Zhigulyov. I've already finished it, but I'd like to reread it with you. I'm sure it would be a nice evening. Will you come?"

Her big, wide-open eyes looked at him expectantly from under the white bonnet she wore over her thick chestnut hair.

"I'll come."

At that they parted.

Pavel Hurried to his machines, and the very thought that he had a whole evening with Tonya to look forward to, made the flames in the firebox seem to burn more brightly and the burning logs to crackle more merrily than usual.

When he knocked at the wide front door that evening it was a slightly disconcerted Tonya who answered.

"I have visitors tonight. I didn't expect them, Pavlusha. But you must come in,"

she said. Pavel wanted to go and turned to the door.

"Come in," she took him by the arm. "It'll do them good to know you." And putting her arm around his waist, she led him through the dining room into her own room.

As they entered she turned to the young people seated there

and smiled. "I want you to meet my friend Pavel Korchagin."

There were three people sitting around the small table in the middle of the room: Liza Sukharko, a pretty, dark-complexioned Gymnasium student with a pouting little mouth and a fetching coiffure, a lanky youth in a well-tailored black jacket, his sleek hair shining with hair-oil, and a vacant look in his grey eyes, and between them, in a foppish school jacket, Victor Leszczinski. It was him Pavel saw first when Tonya opened the door.

Leszczinski too recognised Korchagin at once and his fine arched eyebrows lifted in surprise.

For a few seconds Pavel stood silent at the door, eyeing Victor with frank hostility. Tonya hastened to break the awkward silence by asking Pavel to come in and turning to Liza to introduce her.

Liza Sukharko, who was inspecting the new arrival with interest, rose from her chair.

Pavel, however, turned sharply and strode out through the semidark dining room to the front door.

He was already on the porch when Tonya overtook him and seized him by the shoulders.

"Why are you running off? I especially wanted them to meet you."

Pavel removed her hands from his shoulders and replied sharply:

"I'm not going to be put on a show before that dummy. I don't belong to that crowd—you may like them, but I hate them. If I'd known they were your friends I'd never have come."

Tonya, suppressing her rising anger, interrupted him:

"What right have you to speak to me like that? I don't ask you who your friends are and who comes to see you."

"I don't care whom you see, only I'm not coming here any more," Pavel shot back at her as he went down the front steps. He ran to the garden gate.

He had not seen Tonya since then. During the pogrom, when he and the electrician had hidden several Jewish families at the power station, he had forgotten about the quarrel, and today he wanted to see her again.

Zhukhrai's disappearance and the knowledge that there was no one at home depressed Pavel. The grey stretch of road swung to the right ahead of him. The spring mud had not yet dried, and the road was pitted with holes filled with brown mire. Beyond a house whose shabby, peeling facade jutted out onto the edge of the pavement the road forked off.

Victor Leszczinski was saying good-bye to Liza at the street intersection opposite a wrecked stand with a splintered door and an inverted "Mineral Water" sign.

He held her hand in his as he spoke, pleadingly gazing into

her eyes. "You will come? You won't deceive me?"

"Of course I shall come. You must wait for me," Liza replied coquettishly.

And as she left him she smiled at him with promise in her misty hazel eyes.

A few yards farther down the street Liza saw two men emerge from behind a corner onto the roadway. The first was a sturdy, broadchested man in worker's clothes, his unbuttoned jacket revealing a striped jersey underneath, a black cap pulled down over his forehead, and brown, low-topped boots on his feet. There was a blue-black bruise under his eye.

The man walked with a firm, slightly rolling gait.

Three paces behind, his bayonet almost touching the man's back, came a Petlyura soldier in a grey coat and two cartridge pouches at his belt. From under his shaggy sheepskin cap two small, wary eyes watched the back of his captive's head. Yellow, tobacco-stained moustaches bristled on either side of his face.

Liza slackened her pace slightly and crossed over to the other side of the road. Just then Pavel emerged onto the highway behind her.

As he passed the old house and turned to the right at the bend in the road, he too saw the two men coming toward him.

Pavel stopped with a start and stood as if rooted to the ground. The arrested man was Zhukhrai. "So that's why he didn't come back!"

Zhukhrai was coming nearer and nearer. Pavel's heart pounded as if it would burst. His thoughts raced madly as his mind sought vainly to grasp the situation. There was not enough time for deliberation. Only one thing was clear: Zhukhrai was caught.

Stunned and bewildered Pavel watched the two approach. What was to be done?

At the last moment he remembered the revolver in his pocket. As soon as they passed him he would shoot the man with the rifle in the back, and Fyodor would be free. With that decision reached on the spur of the moment his mind cleared. After all, it was only yesterday that Fyodor had told him: "For that we need stout fellows. . . ."

Pavel glanced quickly behind him. The street leading to town was deserted; there was not a soul in sight. Ahead a woman in a light coat was hurrying across the road. She would not interfere. The second street branching off at the intersection he could not see. Only far away on the road to the station some people were visible.

Pavel moved over to the edge of the road. Zhukhrai saw him when they were only a few paces apart.

Zhukhrai looked at him from the corner of his eye and his thick eyebrows quivered. The unexpectedness of the encounter made him slow down his step. The bayonet pricked him in the

back.
"Lively, there, or you'll get a taste of this butt!" cried the escort in a screechy falsetto.
Zhukhrai quickened his pace. He wanted to speak to Pavel, but refrained; he only waved his hand as if in greeting.
Fearing to attract the attention of the yellow-moustached soldier, Pavel turned aside as Zhukhrai passed, as if completely indifferent to what was going on.
But in his head drilled the anxious thought: "What if I miss him and the bullet hits Zhukhrai. . . ." But there was no time to think.
When the yellow-moustached soldier came abreast of him, Pavel made a sudden lunge at him and seizing hold of the rifle struck the barrel down.
The bayonet hit the pavement with a grating sound.
The attack caught the soldier unawares, and for a moment he was dumbfounded. Then he violently jerked the rifle toward himself. Throwing the full weight of his body on it, Pavel managed to retain his grip. A shot crashed out, the bullet striking a stone and ricocheting with a whine into the ditch.
Hearing the shot, Zhukhrai leapt aside and spun around. The soldier was wrenching at the rifle fiercely in an effort to tear it out of Pavel's hands. Pavel's arms were painfully twisted, but he did not release his hold. Then with a sharp lunge the enraged Petlyura man threw Pavel down on the ground, but still he could not wrench the rifle loose. Pavel went down, dragging the soldier down with him. Nothing could have made him relinquish the rifle at this crucial moment.
In two strides Zhukhrai was alongside the struggling pair. His iron fist swung through the air and descended on the soldier's head; a second later the Petlyura man had been wrenched off Pavel and, sagging under the impact of two smashing blows in the face, his limp body collapsed into the wayside ditch.
The same strong hands that had delivered those blows lifted Pavel from the ground and set him on his feet.

Victor, who by this time had gone a hundred paces or so from the intersection, walked on whistling La donna e mobile, his spirits soaring after his meeting with Liza and her promise to see him at the abandoned factory the next day.
Among the Gymnasium youths Liza Sukharko had the reputation of being rather daring in her love affairs. That arrogant braggart Semyon Zalivanov had once declared that Liza had surrendered to him, and although Victor did not quite believe Semyon, Liza nevertheless intrigued him. Tomorrow he would find out whether Zalivanov had spoken the truth or not.
"If she comes I shan't be bashful. After all, she lets you kiss her. And if Semyon is telling the truth. . . ." Here his thoughts were interrupted as he stepped aside to let two Petlyura soldiers pass. One of them was astride a dock-tailed horse, swinging a canvas bucket—evidently on his way to water the animal. The other, in a short jacket and loose blue trousers, was walking alongside, resting his hand on the rider's knee and telling him a funny story.
Victor let them pass and was about to continue on his way when a rifle shot on the highway made him stop in his tracks. He turned and saw the mounted man spurring his horse toward the sound, while the other soldier ran behind, supporting his sabre with his hand.

Victor ran after them. When he had almost reached the highway another shot rang out, and from around the corner came the horseman galloping madly. He urged on the horse with his heels and the canvas bucket, and leaping to the ground at the first gateway shouted to the men in the yard:

"To arms! They've killed one of our men!"

A minute later several men dashed out of the yard, clicking the bolts of their rifles as they ran. Victor was arrested.

Several people were now gathered on the road, among them Victor and Liza, who had been detained as a witness.

Liza had been rooted to the spot from fright, and hence had a good view of Zhukhrai and Korchagin when they ran past; much to her surprise she realised that the lad who had attacked the Petlyura soldier was the one Tonya had wanted to introduce to her.

The two had just vaulted over the fence into a garden when the horseman came galloping down the street. Noticing Zhukhrai running with a rifle in his hands and the stunned soldier struggling to get back on his feet, the rider spurred his horse towards the fence.

Zhukhrai, however, turned around, raised the rifle and fired at the pursuer, who swung around and beat a hasty retreat.

The soldier, barely able to speak through his torn lips, was now telling what had happened.

"You dunderhead, what do you mean by letting a prisoner get away from under your nose? Now you're in for twenty-five strokes for sure."

"Smart, aren't you?" the soldier snapped back angrily. "From under my nose, eh? How was I to know the other bastard would jump on me like a madman?"

Liza too was questioned. She told the same story as the escort, but she omitted to say that she knew the assailant. Nevertheless they were all taken to the Commandant's office, and were not released until evening.

The Commandant himself offered to see Liza home, but she refused. His breath smelled of vodka and the offer boded no good.

Victor escorted Liza home.

It was quite a distance to the station and as they walked along arm in arm Victor was grateful for the incident.

"You haven't any idea who it was that freed the prisoner?" Liza asked as they were approaching her home.

"No, I haven't. How can I?"

"Do you remember the evening Tonya wanted to introduce a certain young man to us?" Victor halted.

"Pavel Korchagin?" he asked, surprised.

"Yes, I think his name was Korchagin. Remember how he walked out in such a funny way? Well, it was he."

Victor stood dumbfounded.

"Are you sure?" he asked Liza.

"Yes. I remember his face perfectly." "Why didn't you tell the Commandant?" Liza was indignant.

"Do you think I would do anything so vile?"

"Vile? You call it vile to tell who attacked the escort?"
"And do you consider it honourable? You seem to have forgotten what they've done. Have you any idea how many Jewish orphans there are at the Gymnasium, and yet you'd want me to tell them about Korchagin? I'm sorry, I didn't expect that of you."
Leszczinski was much surprised by Liza's reply. But since it did not fit in with his plans to quarrel with her, he tried to change the subject.
"Don't be angry, Liza, I was only joking. I didn't know you were so
upright." "The joke was in very bad taste," Liza retorted dryly.
As he was saying good-bye to her outside the Sukharko house,
Victor asked: "Will you come then, Liza?"
"I don't know," she replied vaguely.
Walking back to town, Victor turned the matter over in his mind. "Well, mademoiselle, you may think it vile, but I happen to think differently. Of course it's all the same to me who freed whom." To him as a Leszczinski, the scion of an old Polish family, both sides were equally obnoxious. The only government he recognised was the government of the Polish gentry, the Rzecz Pospolita, and that would soon come with the Polish legions. But here was an opportunity to get rid of that scoundrel Korchagin. They'd twist his neck sure enough.
Victor was the only member of the family to have remained in town. He was staying with an aunt, who was married to the assistant director of the sugar refinery. His family had been living for some time in Warsaw, where his father Sigismund Leszczinski occupied a position of some importance.
Victor walked up to the Commandant's office and turned into the open door.
Shortly afterwards he was on his way to the Korchagin house accompanied by four Petlyura men. "That's the place," he said quietly, pointing to a lighted window. "May I go now?" he asked the Khorunzhy.
"Of course. We'll manage ourselves. Thanks for
the tip." Victor hurried away.

The last blow in the back sent Pavel reeling into the dark room to which they had led him, and his outstretched arms collided with the opposite wall. Feeling around he found something like a bunk, and he sat down, bruised and aching in body and spirit.
The arrest had come as a complete surprise. How had the Petlyura crowd found out about him? He was sure no one had seen him. What would happen next? And where was Zhukhrai?
He had left the sailor at Klimka's place. From there he had gone to Sergei, while Zhukhrai remained to wait for the evening in order to slip out of town.
"Good thing I hid the revolver in the crow's nest," Pavel thought. "If they had found it, it would have been all up with me. But how did they find out?" There was no answer to the question that tormented him.
The Petlyura men had not got much out of the Korchagin house although they made a thorough search of its every corner. Artem had taken his best suit and the accordion to the village, and his mother had taken a trunk with her, so that there was little left for them to pick up.
The journey to the guardhouse, however, was something Pavel would never forget. The night was

pitch black, the sky overcast with clouds, and he had blundered along, blindly and half-dazed, propelled by brutal kicks from all sides.

He could hear voices behind the door leading into the next room, which was occupied by the Commandant's guard. A bright strip of light showed under the door. Pavel got up and feeling his way along the wall walked around the room. Opposite the bunk he discovered a heavily barred window. He tried the bars with his hand— they were immovable. The place had obviously been a storeroom.

He made his way to the door and stood there for a moment listening. Then he pressed lightly on the handle. The door gave a sickening creak and Pavel swore violently under his breath.

Through the narrow slit that opened before him he saw a pair of calloused feet with crooked toes sticking out over the edge of a bunk. Another light push against the handle and the door protested louder still. A dishevelled figure with a sleep-swollen face now rose up in the bunk and fiercely scratching his lousy head with all five fingers burst into a long tirade. When the obscene flow of abuse ended, the creature reached out to the rifle standing at the head of the bunk and added phlegmatically:

"Shut that door and if I catch you looking in here once more I'll bash in your. . . ." Pavel shut the door. There was a roar of laughter in the next room.

He thought a great deal that night. His initial attempt to take a hand in the fight had ended badly for him. The very first step had brought capture and now he was trapped like a mouse.

Still sitting up, he drifted into a restless half-sleep, and the image of his mother with her peaked, wrinkled features and the eyes he loved so well rose before him. And the thought: "It's a good thing she's away—that makes it less painful."

A grey square of light from the window appeared on the floor. The darkness was .gradually retreating. Dawn was approaching.

## Chapter Six

A light shone in only one window of the big old house; the curtains were drawn. Outside Tresor, now chained for the night, suddenly barked in his reverberating bass.

Through a sleepy haze Tonya heard her mother speaking in a low voice. "No, she is not asleep yet. Come in, Liza."

The light footsteps of her friend and the warm, impulsive hug finally dispelled her drowsiness. Tonya smiled wanly.

"I'm so glad you've come, Liza. Papa passed the crisis yesterday and today he has been sleeping soundly all day. Mama and I have had some rest too after so many sleepless nights. Tell me all the news." Tonya drew her friend down beside her on the couch.

"Oh, there's plenty of news, but some of it's for your ears only," Liza smiled with a sly look at Yekaterina Mikhailovna.

Tonya's mother smiled. She was a matronly woman of thirty-six with the vigorous movements of a young girl, clever grey eyes and a face that was pleasant if not beautiful.

"I will gladly leave you alone in a few minutes, but first I want to hear the news that is fit for everybody's ears," she joked, pulling a chair up to the couch.

"Well, to begin with we've finished with school. The board has decided to issue graduation certificates to the seventh-graders. I am glad. I'm so sick of all this algebra and geometry! What good is it to anyone? The boys may possibly continue their studies, although they don't know where, with all this fighting going on. It's simply terrible. . . . As for us, we'll be married and wives don't need algebra," Liza laughed.

After sitting with the girls for a little while, Yekaterina Mikhailovna went to her own room.

Liza now moved closer to Tonya and with her arms about her gave her a whispered account of the encounter at the crossroads.

"You can imagine my surprise, Tonya, when I recognised the lad who was running away. Guess who it was?"

Tonya, who was listening with interest, shrugged her shoulders. "Korchagin!" Liza blurted out breathlessly.

Tonya started and winced. "Korchagin?"

Liza, pleased with the impression she had made, went on to describe her quarrel with Victor. Carried away by her story, Liza did not notice Tonya's face grow pale and her fingers pluck nervously at her blue blouse. Liza did not know how Tonya's heart constricted with anxiety, nor did she notice how the long lashes that hid her beautiful eyes trembled.

Tonya paid scant heed to Liza's story of the drunken Khorunzhy. One thought gave her no rest: "Victor Leszczinski knows who attacked the soldier. Oh, why did Liza tell him?" And in spite of herself the words broke from her lips.

"What did you say?" Liza could not grasp her meaning at once.

"Why did you tell Leszczinski about Pavlusha . . . I mean Korchagin? He's sure to betray him. . . ." "Oh, surely not!" Liza protested. "I don't think he would do such a thing. After all, why should he?"

Tonya sat up sharply and hugged her knees so hard that it hurt.

"You don't understand, Liza! He and Korchagin are enemies, and besides, there is something else. . . . You made a big mistake when you told Victor about Pavlusha."

Only now did Liza notice Tonya's agitation, and her use of Korchagin's first name confirmed what she had vaguely suspected.

She could not help feeling guilty and lapsed into an embarrassed silence.

"So it's true," she thought. "Fancy Tonya falling in love with a plain workman." Liza wanted to talk about it very much, but out of consideration for her friend she refrained. Anxious to atone for her guilt in some way, she seized Tonya's.

"Are you very worried, Tonya?"

"No, perhaps Victor is more honourable than I think," Tonya replied absently.

The awkward silence that ensued was broken by the arrival of a schoolmate of theirs, a bashful, gawky lad named Demianov.

After seeing her friends off, Tonya stood for a long time leaning against the wicket gate and staring at the dark strip of road leading to town. The wind laden with a chill dampness and the dank odour of the wet spring soil fanned her face. Dull red lights blinked in the windows of the houses over in the town. There it was, that town that lived a life apart from hers, and somewhere there, under one of those roofs, unaware of the danger that threatened him, was her rebellious

friend Pavel. Perhaps he had forgotten her—how many days had flown by since their last meeting? He had been in the wrong that time, but all that had long been forgotten. Tomorrow she would see him and their friendship would be restored, a moving, warming friendship. It was sure to return—of that Tonya had not the slightest doubt. If only the night did not betray him, the night that seemed to harbour evil, as if lying in wait for him. . . . A shiver ran through her, and after a last look at the road, she went in. The thought, "If only the night does not betray him", still drilled in her head as she dozed off.

Tonya woke up early in the morning before anyone else was about, and dressed quickly. She slipped out of the house quietly so as not to wake up the family, untied the big shaggy Tresor and set out for town with the dog. She hesitated for a moment in front of the Korchagin house, then pushed the gate open and walked into the yard. Tresor dashed ahead wagging his tail. . . .

Artem had returned from the village early that same morning. The blacksmith he had worked for had given him a lift into town on his cart. On reaching home he threw the sack of flour he had earned on his shoulders and walked into the yard, followed by the blacksmith carrying the rest of his belongings. Outside the open door Artem set the sack down on the ground and called out; "Pavka!"

There was no answer.

"What's the hitch there? Why not go right in?" said the smith as he came up.

Setting his belongings down in the kitchen, Artem went into the next room. The sight that met his eyes there dumbfounded him: the place was turned upside down and old clothes littered the floor. "What the devil is this?" Artem muttered completely at a loss.

"It's a mess all right," agreed the blacksmith.

"Where's the boy got to?" Artem was getting angry. But the place was deserted and dead. The blacksmith said good-bye and left.

Artem went into the yard and looked around.

"I can't make head or tail of this! All the doors wide open and no Pavka."

Then he heard footsteps behind him. Turning around he saw a huge dog with ears pricked standing before him. A girl was walking toward the house from the gate.

"I want to see Pavel Korchagin," she said in a low voice, surveying Artem.

"So do I. But the devil knows where he's gone. When I got here the house was unlocked and no Pavka anywhere about. So you're looking for him too?" he addressed the girl.

The girl answered with a question:

"Are you Korchagin's brother

Artem?" "I am. Why?"

Instead of replying, the girl stared in alarm at the open door. "Why didn't I come last night?" she thought. "It can't be, it can't be. . . ." And her heart grew heavier still.

"You found the door open and Pavel gone?" she asked Artem, who was staring at her in surprise. "And what would you be wanting of Pavel, may I ask?" Tonya came closer to him and casting a look around spoke jerkily:

"I don't know for sure, but if Pavel isn't at home he must have been

arrested." Artem started nervously. "Arrested? What for?"

"Let's go inside," Tonya said.

Artem listened in silence while Tonya told him all she knew. By the time she had finished he was

despairing.
"Damn it all! As if there wasn't enough trouble without this mess," he muttered gloomily. "Now I see why the place was turned upside down. What the hell did the boy have to get mixed up in this business for. . . . Where can I find him now? And who may you be, miss?"
"My father is forest warden Tumanov. I'm a friend of Pavel's."
"I see," Artem said absently. "Here I was bringing flour to feed the boy up, and now this. . . ." Tonya and Artem looked at each other in silence.
"I must go now," Tonya said softly as she prepared to go. "I hope you'll find him. I'll come back later."
Artem gave her a silent nod.

A lean fly just awakened from its winter sleep buzzed in a corner of the window. On the edge of an old threadbare couch sat a young peasant woman, her elbows resting on her knees and her eyes fixed blankly on the filthy floor.
The Commandant, chewing a cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth, finished writing on a sheet of paper with a flourish, and, obviously pleased with himself, added an ornate signature ending in a curlicue under the title "Commandant of the town of Shepetovka, Khorunzhy". From the door came the clinking of spurs. The Commandant looked up.
Before him stood Salomyga with a bandaged arm.
"Hullo, what's blown you in?" the Commandant greeted him.
"Not a good wind, at any rate. Got my hand sliced to the bone by a Bogunets." ( Bogunets—a fighting man of the Red Army Regiment named after Bogun, the hero of the national liberation struggle waged by the Ukrainian people in the 17th century.)
Ignoring the woman's presence Salomyga cursed violently. "So what are you doing here? Convalescing?"
"We'll have time to convalesce in the next world. They're pressing down pretty hard on us at the front."
The Commandant interrupted him, nodding toward the woman. "We'll talk about that later."
Salomyga sat down heavily on a stool and removed his cap, which bore a cockade with an enamel trident, the emblem of the UNR (Ukrainian National Republic).
"Golub sent me," he began in a low tune. "A division of regulars is going to be transferred here soon. In general there's going to be some doings in town, and it's my job to put things straight. The 'Chief himself may come here with some foreign bigwig or other, so there's to be no talk about any 'diversions'. What're you writing?"
The Commandant shifted the cigarette to the other corner of his mouth.
"I've got a damn nuisance of a boy here. Remember that chap Zhukhrai, the one who stirred up the railway-men against us? Well, he was caught at the station."
"He was, eh? Go on," Salomyga pulled his stool closer.
"Well, that blockhead Omelchenko, the Station Commandant, sent him over escorted by a Cossack, and on the way the lad I've got in here took the prisoner away from him in broad daylight. The Cossack was disarmed and got his teeth knocked out, and was left to whistle for his

prisoner. Zhukhrai got away, but we managed to grab this fellow. Here you have it all down on paper," and he pushed a sheaf of sheets covered with writing toward Salomyga.
The latter scanned through the report, turning over the sheets with his
left hand. When he had finished, he looked at the Commandant.
"And so you got nothing out of him?"
The Commandant pulled nervously at the peak of his cap.
"I've been at him for five days now, but all he says is, 'I don't know anything and I didn't free him.' The young scoundrel! You see, the escort recognised him—practically choked the life out of him as soon as he saw him. I could hardly pull the fellow off—no wonder, he'd good reason to be sore because Omelchenko at the station had given him twenty-five strokes with the cleaning rod for losing his prisoner. There's no sense in keeping him any more, so I'm sending this off to headquarters for permission to finish him off."
Salomyga spat in disdain.
"If I had him he'd speak up sure enough. You're not much at conducting enquiries. Whoever heard of a theology student making a Commandant! Did you try the rod?"
The Commandant was furious.
"You're going a bit too far. Keep your sneers to yourself. I'm the Commandant here and I'll ask you not to interfere."
Salomyga looked at the bristling Commandant and roared with laughter.
"Ha-ha-ha. . . . Don't puff yourself up too much, priest's son, or you'll burst. To hell with you and your problems. Better tell me where a fellow can get a couple of bottles of samogon?"
The Commandant
grinned. "That s easy. "
"As for this," Salomyga jabbed at the sheaf of papers with his finger, "if you want to fix him properly put him down as eighteen years instead of sixteen. Round the top of six off like that. Otherwise they mightn't pass it."

There were three of them in the storeroom. A bearded old man in a threadbare coat lay on his side on the bunk, his spindle legs in their wide linen trousers drawn up under him. He had been arrested because the horse of the Petlyura men billeted with him had been missing from the shed. An elderly woman with small shifty eyes and a pointed chin was sitting on the floor. She made her living by selling samogon and had been thrown in here on a charge of stealing a watch and other valuables. Korchagin lay semiconscious in the corner under the window, his head resting on his crushed cap.
A young woman, in a peasant kerchief, her eyes wide with terror, was led into the storeroom.
She stood for a moment or two and then sat down next to the samogon woman.
"Got caught, eh, wench?" the latter spoke rapidly, inspecting the newcomer with
curious eyes. There was no answer, but the samogon woman would not give up.
"Why'd they pick you up, eh? Nothing to do with samogon by any chance?" The peasant girl got up and looked at the persistent
"No, it's because of my brother," she replied quietly.

"And who's he?" the old woman
persisted. The old man spoke up.
"Why don't you leave her alone? She's got enough to worry about without your chattering." The woman turned quickly toward the bunk.
"Who are you to tell me what to do? I'm not talking to you,
am I?" The old man spat.
"Leave her alone, I tell you."
Silence descended again on the storeroom. The peasant girl spread out a big shawl and lay down, resting her head on her arm.
The samogon woman began to eat. The old man sat up, lowered his feet onto the floor, slowly rolled himself a cigarette and lit it. Clouds of acrid smoke spread out.
"A person can't eat in peace with that stink," the woman grumbled, her jaws working busily. "You've smoked the whole place up."
The old man returned with a sneer:
"Afraid of losing weight, eh? You won't be able to get through the door soon. Why don't you give the boy something to eat instead of stuffing it all into yourself?"
The woman made an angry gesture.
"I tried, but he doesn't want anything. And as for that you can keep your mouth shut—it's not your food I'm eating."
The girl turned to the samogon woman and, nodding toward Korchagin,
asked: "What is he in here for?"
The woman brightened up at being addressed and readily replied:
"He's a local lad—Korchagin's younger boy. His mother's a cook."
Leaning over to the girl, she whispered in her ear:
"He freed a Bolshevik—a sailor we had hereabouts .who used to lodge with my neighbour Zozulikha."
The young woman remembered the words, she had overheard: "I'm sending this off to headquarters for permission to finish him off."

One after the other troop trains pulled in at the junction, and battalions of regulars poured out in a disorderly mob. The armoured train Zaporozhets, four cars long, its steel sides ribbed with rivets, crawled along a side track. Guns were unloaded and horses were led out of closed box cars. The horses were saddled on the spot and mounted men jostled their way through the milling crowds of infantrymen to the station yard where the cavalry unit was lining up.
Officers ran up and down, calling the numbers of their units.
The station buzzed like a wasps' nest. Gradually the regular squares of platoons were hammered out of the shapeless mass of vociferous, swirling humanity and soon a stream of armed men was pouring into town. Until late in the evening carts creaked and rattled and the stragglers bringing up the rear of the rifle division trailed along the highway.
The procession finally ended with the headquarters company marching briskly by, bellowing from a hundred and twenty throats:

What's the shouting?
What's the noise?
It's Petlyura
And his boys
Come to town. . . .

Pavel Korchagin got up to look out of the window. Through the early twilight he could hear the rumbling of wheels on the street, the tramping of many feet, and the lusty singing.

Behind him a soft voice said:

"The troops have come to
town." Korchagin turned round.

The speaker was the girl who had been brought in the day before.

He had already heard her story—the samogon woman had wormed it out of her. She came from a village seven versts from the town, where her elder brother, Gritsko, now a Red partisan, had headed a poor peasants' committee when the Soviets were in power.

When the Reds left, Gritsko girded himself with a machine-gun belt and went with them. Now the family was being hounded incessantly. Their only horse had been taken away from them. The father had been imprisoned for a while and had a rough time of it. The village elder — one of those on whom Gritsko had clamped down—was always billeting strangers in their house, out of sheer spite. The family was destitute. And when the Commandant had come to the village the day before to make a search, the elder had brought him to the girl's place. She struck his fancy and the next morning he brought her to town with him "for interrogation".

Korchagin could not fall asleep, try as he might he could not find rest, and in his brain drilled one insistent thought which he could not dispel: "What next?"

His bruised body ached, for the guard had beaten him with bestial fury.

To escape the bitter thoughts crowding his mind he listened to the whispering of the two women. In a barely audible voice the girl was telling how the Commandant had pestered her, how he had threatened and coaxed, and when she rebuffed him, turned on her in fury. "I'll lock you up in a cellar and let you rot there," he had said.

Darkness lurked in the corners of the cell. There was another night ahead, a stifling, restless night. It was the seventh night in captivity, but to Pavel it seemed that he had been there for months. The floor was hard, and pain racked his body. There were three of them now in the storeroom. The samogon woman had been released by the Khorunzhy to procure some vodka. Grandpa was snoring on the bunk as if he were at home on his Russian stove; he bore his misfortune with stoic calm and slept soundly through the night. Khristina and Pavel lay on the floor, almost side by side. Yesterday Pavel had seen Sergei through the window — he had stood for a long time out in the street, looking sadly at the windows of the houses.

"He knows I'm here," Pavel had thought.

For three days running someone had brought sour black bread for him—who it was the guards would not tell. And for two days the Commandant had repeatedly questioned him.

What could it all mean?

During the questioning he had given nothing away; on the contrary he had denied everything. Why he had kept silent, he did not know himself. He wanted to be brave and strong, like those of

whom he had read in books, yet that night when he was being taken to prison and one of his captors had said, "What's the use of dragging him along, Pan Khorunzhy? A bullet in the back will fix him", he had been afraid. Yes, the thought of dying at sixteen was terrifying! Death was the end of everything. Khristina was also thinking. She knew more than the young man. Most likely he did not know yet what was in store for him . . . what she had overheard.

He tossed about restlessly at night unable to sleep. Khristina pitied him, though the prospect she herself faced was hardly better—she could not forget the menace of the Commandant's words: "I'll fix you up tomorrow— if you won't have me it's the guardhouse for you. The Cossacks will be glad to get you. So take your choice." Oh, how hard it was, and no mercy to be expected anywhere! Was it her fault that Gritsko had joined the Reds? How cruel life was!

A dull pain choked her and in the agony of helpless despair and fear her body was racked by soundless sobs. A shadow moved in the corner by the wall. "Why are you crying?"

In a passionate whisper Khristina poured out her woes to her silent cell mate. He did not speak, but laid his hand lightly on hers.

"They'll torture me to death, curse them," she whispered in terror, gulping down her tears. "Nothing can save me." What could Pavel say to this girl? There was nothing to say. Life was crushing them both in an iron ring.

Perhaps he ought to put up a fight when they came for her tomorrow? They'd only beat him to death, or a sabre blow on the head would end it all. Wishing to comfort the distraught girl somehow, he stroked her hand tenderly. The sobbing ceased. At intervals the sentry at the entrance could be heard challenging a passer-by with the usual "Who goes there?" and then everything was quiet again. Grandpa was fast asleep. The interminable minutes crawled slowly by.

Then, to his utter surprise, Pavel felt the girl's arms go around him and pull him toward her.

"Listen," hot lips were whispering, "there is no escape for me: if it isn't the officer, it'll be those others. Take me, love, so that dog won't be the first to have me."

"What are you saying, Khristina!"

But the strong arms did not release him. Full, burning lips pressed down on his—they were hard to escape. The girl's words were simple, tender—and he knew why she uttered them.

For a moment everything receded—the bolted door, the red-headed Cossack, the Commandant, the brutal beatings, the seven stifling, sleepless nights—all were forgotten, and only the burning lips and the face moist with tears existed.

Suddenly he remembered Tonya.

How could he forget her? Those dear, wonderful eyes.

He mustered his strength and broke away from Khristina's embrace. He staggered to his feet like a drunken man and seized hold of the grill. Khristina's hands found him.

"Why, what is the matter?"

All her heart was in that question. He bent down to her and pressing her hands

said: "I can't, Khristina. You are so . . . good." He hardly knew what he was saying.

He stood up again in the intolerable silence and went over to the bunk. Sitting down on the edge, he woke up the old man.

"Give me a smoke, please, Granddad."

The girl, huddled in her shawl, wept in the corner.

The next day the Commandant came with some Cossacks and took Khristina away. Her eyes

sought Pavel's in farewell, and there was reproach in them. And when the door slammed behind her his soul was more desolate and dreary than ever.

All day long the old man could not get a word out of Pavel. The sentries and the Commandant's guard were changed. Toward evening a new prisoner was brought in. Pavel recognised him: it was Dolinnik, a joiner from the sugar refinery, a short thickset man wearing a faded yellow shirt under a threadbare jacket. He surveyed the storeroom with a keen eye.

Pavel had seen him in February 1917, when the reverberation of the revolution reached their town. He had heard only one Bolshevik speak during the noisy demonstrations held then and that Bolshevik was Dolinnik. He had climbed onto a roadside fence and addressed the troops. Pavel remembered his closing words:

"Follow the Bolsheviks, soldiers, they will not betray

you!" He had not seen the joiner since.

Granddad was glad to have a new cell mate, for he obviously found it hard to sit silent all day long. Dolinnik settled down next to him on the edge of the bunk, smoked a cigarette with him and questioned him about everything.

Then the newcomer moved over to Korchagin. "Well, young man?" he asked Pavel. "And how did you get in here?"

Pavel replied in monosyllables and Dolinnik saw that it was caution that kept the young man from speaking. When he learned of the charge laid against Pavel his intelligent eyes widened with amazement and he sat down beside the lad.

"So you say you got Zhukhrai away? That's interesting. I didn't know they'd nabbed you."

Pavel, taken by surprise, raised himself on his elbow. "I don't know any Zhukhrai. They can pin anything on you here."

Dolinnik, smiling, moved closer to him. "That's all right, my boy. You don't need to be cautious with me. I know more than you do."

Quietly, so that the old man should not overhear he continued:

"I saw Zhukhrai off myself, he's probably reached his destination by now. He told me all about what happened." After a moment's pause, Dolinnik added: "I see you're made of the right stuff, boy. Though, the fact that they caught you and know everything is bad, Very bad, I should say."

He took off his jacket and spreading it on the floor sat down on it with his back against the wall, and began to roll another cigarette.

Dolinnik's last remark made everything clear to Pavel. There was no doubt about it, Dolinnik was all right. Besides, he had seen Zhukhrai off, and that meant. . . .

That evening he learned that Dolinnik had been arrested for agitation among Petlyura's Cossacks. Moreover, he had been caught distributing an appeal issued by the gubernia revolutionary committee calling on the troops to surrender and go over to the Reds.

Dolinnik was careful not to tell Pavel much.

"Who knows," he thought to himself, "they may use the ramrod on the boy. He's still too young." Late at night when they were settling themselves for sleep, he voiced his apprehensions in the brief remark:

"Well, Korchagin, we seem to be in a pretty bad fix. Let's see what will come of it."

The next day a new prisoner was brought in—the flop-eared, scraggy-necked barber Shlyoma

Zeltser.

"Fuchs, Bluvstein and Trachtenberg are going to welcome him with bread and salt," he told Dolinnik gesturing excitedly as he spoke. "I said that if they want to do that, they can, but will the rest of the Jewish population back them up? No, they won't, you can take it from me. Of course they have their own fish to fry. Fuchs has a store and Trachtenberg's got the flour mill. But what've I got? And the rest of the hungry lot? Nothing—paupers, that's what we are. Well, I've got a long tongue, and today when I was shaving an officer—one of the new ones who came recently —I said: 'Do you think Ataman Petlyura knows about these pogroms or not? Will he see the delegation?' Oi, how many times I've got into trouble through this tongue of mine. So what do you think this officer did when I had shaved him and powdered his face and done all in fine style too? He gets up and instead of paying me arrests me for agitating against the authorities." Zeltser struck his chest with his fist. "Now what sort of agitation was that? What did I say? I only asked the fellow. . . . And to lock me up for that. . . ."

In his excitement Zeltser twisted a button on Dolinnik's shirt and tugged at his arms.

Dolinnik smiled in spite of himself as he listened to the indignant Shlyoma.

"Yes, Shlyoma," he said gravely when the barber had finished, "that was a stupid thing for a clever fellow like you to do. You chose the wrong time to let your tongue run away with you. I wouldn't have advised you to get in here."

Zeltser nodded understandingly and made a gesture of despair with his hand. Just then the door opened and the samogon woman was pushed in. She staggered in, heaping foul curses on the Cossack who brought her.

"You and your Commandant ought to be roasted on a slow fire! I hope he shrivels up and croaks from that booze of mine!"

The guard slammed the door shut and they heard him locking it on the outside.

As the woman settled down on the edge of the bunk the old man greeted her jocularly:

"So you're back with us again, you old chatterbox? Sit down and make yourself at home."

The samogon woman darted a hostile glance at him and picking up her bundle sat down on the floor next to Dolinnik.

It turned out that she had been released just long enough for her captors to get some bottles of samogon out of her.

Suddenly shouts and the sound of running feet could be heard from the guardroom next door. Somebody was barking out orders. The prisoners stopped talking to listen.

Strange things were happening on the square in front of the ungainly church with the ancient belfry. On three sides the square was lined with rectangles of troops— units of the division of regular infantry mustered in full battle kit.

In front, facing the entrance to the church, stood three regiments of infantry in squares placed in checkerboard fashion, their ranks buttressed against the school fence.

This grey, rather dirty mass of Petlyura soldiers standing there with rifles at rest, wearing absurd Russian helmets like pumpkins cut in half, and heavily laden down with bandoliers, was the best division the "Directorate" had.

Well-uniformed and shod from the stores of the former tsarist army and consisting mainly of

kulaks who were consciously fighting the Soviets, the division had been transferred here to defend this strategically important railway junction. Five different railway lines converged at Shepetovka, and for Petlyura the loss of the junction would have meant the end of everything. As it was, the "Directorate" had very little territory left in its hands, and the small town of Vinnitsa was now Petlyura's capital.

The "Chief Ataman" himself had decided to inspect the troops and now everything was in readiness for his arrival.

Back in a far corner of the square where they were least likely to be seen stood a regiment of new recruits— barefoot youths in shabby civilian clothes of all descriptions. These were farm lads picked up from their beds by midnight raiding parties or seized on the streets, and none of them had the least intention of doing any fighting.

"Let them look for fools somewhere else," they said.

The most the Petlyura officers could do was to bring the recruits to town under escort, divide them into companies and battalions and issue them arms. The very next day, however, a third of the recruits thus herded together would disappear and with each passing day their numbers dwindled.

It would have been more than foolhardy to issue them boots, particularly since the boot stocks were far from plentiful. And so everyone was ordered to report for conscription shod. The result was an astonishing collection of dilapidated footwear tied on with bits of string and wire.

They were marched out for parade barefoot.

Behind the infantry stood Golub's cavalry regiment.

Mounted men held back the dense crowds of curious townsfolk who had come to see the parade. After all, the "Chief Ataman" himself was to be present! Events like this were rare enough in town and no one wanted to miss the free entertainment it promised.

On the church steps were gathered the colonels and captains, the priest's two daughters, a handful of Ukrainian schoolteachers, a group of "free Cossacks", and the slightly hunchbacked mayor—in a word, the elite representing the "public", and among them the Inspector-General of Infantry wearing a Caucasian cherkesska. It was he who was in command of the parade.

Inside the church Vasili, the priest, was garbing himself in his Easter service vestments.

Petlyura was to be received in grand style. For one thing, the newly-mobilised recruits were to take the oath of allegiance, and for this purpose a yellow-and-blue flag had been brought out.

The Division Commander set out for the station in a rickety old Ford car to meet Petlyura.

When he had gone, the Inspector of Infantry called over Colonel Chernyak, a tall, well-built officer with a foppishly twirled moustache.

"Take someone along with you and see that the Commandant's office and the rear services are in proper shape. If you find any prisoners there look them over and get rid of the riffraff."

Chernyak clicked his heels, took along the first Cossack captain his eye lighted on and galloped off.

The Inspector turned politely to the priest's elder daughter.

"What about the banquet, everything in order?"

"Oh, yes. The Commandant's doing his best," she replied, gazing avidly at the handsome Inspector.

Suddenly a stir passed through the crowd: a rider was coming down the road at a mad gallop, bending low over the neck of his horse. He waved his hand and shouted:

"They're coming!"

"Fall in!" barked the Inspector.

The officers ran to their places.

As the Ford chugged up to the church the band struck up The Ukraine Lives On.

Following the Division Commander, the "Chief Ataman" heaved himself laboriously out of the car. Petlyura was a man of medium height, with a square head firmly planted on a red bull neck; he wore a blue tunic of fine wool cloth girded tight with a yellow belt to which a small Browning in a chamois holster was attached. On his head was a peaked khaki uniform cap with a cockade bearing the enamel trident.

There was nothing especially warlike about the figure of Simon Petlyura. As a matter of fact, he did not look like a military man at all.

He heard out the Inspector's report with an expression of displeasure on his face. Then the mayor addressed him in greeting.

Petlyura listened absently, staring at the assembled regiments over the

mayor's head. "Let us begin," he nodded to the Inspector.

Mounting the small platform next to the flag, Petlyura delivered a ten-minute speech to the troops. The speech was unconvincing. Evidently tired from the journey, the Ataman spoke without enthusiasm. He finished to the accompaniment of the regulation shouts of "Slava! Slava!" from the soldiers and climbed down from the platform dabbing his perspiring forehead with a handkerchief. Then, together with the Inspector and the Division Commander, he inspected the units.

As he passed the ranks of the newly-mobilised recruits his eyes narrowed in a disdainful scowl and he bit his lips in annoyance.

Toward the end of the inspection, when the platoons of new recruits marched in uneven ranks to the flag, where the priest Vasili was standing, Bible in hand, and kissed first the Bible and then the hem of the flag, an unforeseen incident occurred.

A delegation which had contrived by some unknown means to reach the square approached Petlyura. At the head of the group came the wealthy timber merchant Bluvstein with an offering of bread and salt, followed by Fuchs the draper, and three other well-to-do businessmen.

With a servile bow Bluvstein extended the tray to Petlyura. It was taken by an officer standing alongside.

"The Jewish population wishes to express its sincere gratitude and respect for you, the head of the state. Please accept this address of greeting."

"Good," muttered Petlyura, quickly scanning the sheet of

paper. Fuchs stepped forward.

"We most humbly beg you to allow us to open our enterprises and we ask for protection against pogroms." Fuchs stumbled over the last word.

An angry scowl darkened Petlyura's features.

"My army does not engage in pogroms. You had better remember

that." Fuchs spread out his arms in a gesture of resignation.

Petlyura's shoulder twitched nervously. The untimely appearance of the delegation irritated him. He turned to Golub, who was standing behind chewing his black moustache.

"Here's a complaint against your Cossacks, Pan Colonel. Investigate the matter and take measures

accordingly," said Petlyura. Then, addressing the Inspector, he
said dryly: "You may begin the parade."
The ill-starred delegation had not expected to run up against Golub and they hastened to withdraw. The attention of the spectators was now wholly absorbed by the preparations for the ceremonial march-past. Sharp commands were rapped out.
Golub, his features outwardly calm, walked over to Bluvstein and said in a loud
whisper: "Get out of here, you rotten heathens, or I'll make mincemeat out of you!"
The band struck up and the first units marched through the square. As they drew alongside Petlyura, the troops bellowed a mechanical "Slava!" and then swung down the highway to disappear into the sidestreets. At the head of the companies, uniformed in brand-new khaki outfits, the officers marched at an easy gait as if they were simply taking a stroll, swinging their swagger sticks. The swagger stick mode, like cleaning rods for the soldiers, had just been introduced in the division.
The new recruits brought up the rear of the parade. They came in a disorderly mass, out of step and jostling one another.
There was a low rustle of bare feet as the mobilised men shuffled by, prodded on by the officers who worked hard but in vain to bring about some semblance of order. When the second company was passing a peasant lad in a linen shirt on the side nearest the reviewing stand gaped in such wide-eyed amazement at the "Chief" that he stepped into a hole in the road and fell flat on the ground. His rifle slid over the cobblestones with a loud clatter. He tried to get up but was knocked down again by the men behind him.
Some of the spectators burst out laughing. The company broke ranks and passed through the square in complete disorder. The luckless lad picked up his rifle and ran after the others.
Petlyura turned away from this sorry spectacle and walked over to the car without waiting for the end of the review. The Inspector, who followed him, asked diffidently:
"Pan the Ataman will not stay for dinner?"
"No," Petlyura flung back curtly.
Sergei Bruzzhak, Valya and Klimka were watching the parade in the crowd of spectators pressed against the high fence surrounding the church. Sergei, gripping the bars of the grill, looked at the faces of the people below him with hatred in his eyes.
"Let's go, Valya, they've shut up shop," he said in a deliberately loud defiant voice, and turned away from the fence. People stared at him in astonishment.
Ignoring everyone, he walked to the gate, followed by his sister and Klimka.

Colonel Chernyak and the Captain galloped up to the Commandant's office and dismounted. Leaving the horses in the charge of a dispatch rider they strode rapidly into the guardhouse.
"Where's the Commandant?" Chernyak asked the dispatch rider sharply.
"Dunno," the man stammered. "Gone off somewhere."
Chernyak looked around the filthy, untidy room, the unmade beds and the Cossacks of the Commandant's guard who sprawled on them and made no attempt to rise when the officers entered.
"What sort of a pigsty is this?" Chernyak roared. "And who gave you permission to wallow about

like hogs?" he lashed at the men lying flat on their backs.

One of the Cossacks sat up, belched and growled:

"What're you squawking for? We've got our own squawker here."

"What!" Chernyak sprang toward the man. "Who do you think you're talking to, you bastard? I'm Colonel Chernyak. D'you hear, you swine! Up, all of you, or I'll have you flogged!" The enraged Colonel dashed about the guardhouse. "I'll give you one minute to sweep out the filth, straighten out the bedding and make your filthy mugs presentable. You look like a band of brigands, not Cossacks!"

Beside himself with rage, the Colonel violently kicked at a slop pail obstructing his path.

The Captain was no less violent, and, adding emphasis to his curses by wielding his three-thonged whip, drove the men out of their bunks.

"The Chief Ataman's reviewing the parade. He's liable to drop in here any minute. Get a move on there!"

Seeing that things were taking a serious turn and that they really might be in for a flogging—they knew Chernyak's reputation well enough—the Cossacks sprang into feverish activity.

In no time work was in full swing.

"We ought to have a look at the prisoners," the Captain suggested. "There's no telling whom they've got locked up here. Might be trouble if the Chief looks in."

"Who has the key?" Chernyak asked the sentry. "Open the door
at once." A Sergeant jumped up and opened the lock.

"Where's the Commandant? How long do you think I'm going to wait for him? Find him at once and send him in here," Chernyak ordered. "Muster the guard in the yard! Why are the rifles without bayonets?"

"We only took over yesterday," the Sergeant tried to explain, and hurried off in search of the Commandant.

The Captain kicked the storeroom door open. Several of the people inside got up from the floor, the others remained motionless.

"Open the door wider," Chernyak commanded. "Not enough light
here." He scrutinised the prisoners' faces.

"What are you in for?" he snapped at the old man sitting on the edge of the bunk.

The old man half rose, hitched up his trousers and, frightened by the sharp order, mumbled: "Dunno myself. They just locked me up and here I am. There was a horse disappeared from the yard, but I've got nothing to do with it."

"Whose horse?" the Captain interrupted him.

"An army horse, of course. My billets sold him and drank the proceeds and now they're blaming me."

Chernyak ran his eye swiftly over the old man and with an impatient jerk of his shoulder shouted: "Pick up your things and get out of here!" Then he turned to the samogon woman.

The old man could not believe his ears. Blinking his shortsighted eyes, he turned to the Captain: "Does that mean I can go?"

The Cossack nodded as much as to say: the faster you get out the better.

Hurriedly the old man seized his bundle which hung over the edge of the bunk and dashed through the door.

"And what are you in for?" Chernyak was questioning the samogon woman.
Swallowing the mouthful of pie she had been chewing, the woman rattled off a ready answer: "It's an injustice it is that I should be in here, Pan Chief. Just think of it, to drink a poor widow's samogon and then lock her up."
"You're not in the samogon business, are you?" Chernyak asked.
"Business? Nothing of the kind," said the woman with an injured air. "The Commandant came and took four bottles and didn't pay a kopek. That's how it is: they drink your booze and never pay. You wouldn't call that business, would you?"
"Enough. Now go to the devil!"
The woman did not wait for the order to be repeated. She picked up her basket and backed to the door, bowing in gratitude.
"May God bless you with good health, your honours."
Dolinnik watched the comedy with frank amazement.
None of the prisoners could make out what it was all about. The only thing that was clear was that the arrivals were chiefs of some kind who had the power to dispose of them as they saw fit.
"And you there?" Chernyak spoke to Dolinnik.
"Stand up when Pan the Colonel speaks to you!" barked the
Captain. Slowly Dolinnik raised himself to his feet from the floor.
"What are you in for?" Chernyak repeated.
Dolinnik looked at the Colonel's neatly twirled moustache, at his clean-shaven face, looked at the peak of his new cap with the enamel cockade, and a wild thought flashed through his mind: Maybe it'll work!
"I was arrested for being out on the streets after eight o'clock," he said, blurting out the first thing that came into his head.
He awaited the answer in an agony of
suspense. "What were you doing out at night?"
"It wasn't night, only about eleven o'clock."
He no longer believed that this shot in the dark would succeed.
His knees trembled when he heard the brief command:
"Get out."
Dolinnik walked hurriedly out of the door, forgetting his jacket; the Captain was already questioning the next prisoner.
Korchagin was the last to be interrogated. He sat on the floor' completely dumbfounded by the proceedings. At first he could not believe that Dolinnik had been released. Why were they letting everyone off like this? But Dolinnik . . . Dolinnik had said that he had been arrested for breaking the curfew. . . . Then it dawned upon him.
The Colonel began questioning the scraggy Zeltser with the usual "What are you
in for?" The barber, pale with nervousness, blurted out:
"They tell me I was agitating, but I don't know what they're talking
about." Chernyak pricked up his ears.
"What's that? Agitation? What were you agitating
about?" Zeltser spread out his arms in bewilderment.
"I don't know myself, I only said that they were collecting signatures to a petition to the Chief

Ataman for the Jewish population."

"What sort of petition?" both Chernyak and the Captain moved menacingly toward Zeltser.

"A petition asking that pogroms be prohibited. You know, we had a terrible pogrom. The whole population's afraid.

"That's enough," Chernyak interrupted him. "We'll give you a petition you won't forget, you dirty Jew." Turning to the Captain, he snapped: "Put this one away properly. Have him taken to headquarters—I'll talk to him there personally. We'll see who's behind this petition business."

Zeltser tried to protest but the Captain struck him sharply across the back with his riding crop. "Shut up, you bastard!"

His face twisted with pain, Zeltser staggered back into a corner. His lips trembled and he barely restrained his sobs.

While this was going on, Pavel rose to his feet. He was now the only prisoner besides Zeltser in the storeroom.

Chernyak stood in front of the boy and inspected him with his piercing black eyes. "Well, what are you doing here?"

Pavel had his answer ready.

"I cut off a saddle skirt for soles," he said quickly. ("What saddle?" the Colonel asked.

"We've got two Cossacks billeted at our place and I cut off a bit of an old saddle to sole my boots with. So the Cossacks hauled me in here." Seized by a wild hope to regain his freedom, he added: "I didn't know it wasn't allowed. . . ."

The Colonel eyed Pavel with disgust.

"Of all the things this Commandant thought of, blast him! Look at the prisoners he picked up!" As he turned to the door, he shouted: "You can go home, and tell your father to give you the thrashing you deserve. Out with you!"

Still unable to believe his ears, Pavel snatched up Dolinnik's jacket from the floor and rushed for the door, his heart pounding as if it would burst. He ran through the guardroom and slipped outside behind the Colonel who was walking out into the yard. In a moment Pavel was through the wicket gate and in the street.

The unlucky Zeltser remained alone in the storeroom. He looked round with harassed eyes, instinctively took a few steps towards the exit, but just then a sentry entered the guardhouse, closed the door, inserted the padlock, and sat down on a stool next to the door.

Out on the porch Chernyak, much pleased with himself, said to the Captain:

"It's a good thing we looked in. Think of the rubbish we found there—we'll have to lock up that Commandant for a couple of weeks. Well, it's time we were going."

The Sergeant had mustered his detail in the yard. When he saw the Colonel, he ran over and reported:

"Everything's in order, Pan Colonel."

Chernyak inserted a boot into a stirrup and sprang lightly into the saddle. The Captain was having some trouble with his restive horse. Reining in his mount, the Colonel said to the Sergeant:

"Tell the Commandant I cleared out all the rubbish he'd collected in there. And tell him I'll give him two weeks in the guardhouse for the way he ran things here. As for the fellow in there now, transfer him to headquarters at once. Let the guard be in readiness."

"Very good, Pan Colonel," said the Sergeant and saluted.
Spurring on their horses, the Colonel and the Captain galloped back to the square where the parade was already coming to an end.

Pavel swung himself over another fence and stopped exhausted. He could go no farther. Those days cooped up in the stifling storeroom without food had sapped his strength.
Where should he go? Home was out of the question, and to go to the Bruzzhaks might bring disaster upon the whole family if anyone discovered him there.
He did not know what to do, and ran on again blindly, leaving behind the vegetable patches and back gardens at the edge of the town. Colliding heavily with a fence, he came to himself with a start and looked about him in amazement: there behind the tall fence was the forest warden's garden. So this was where his weary legs had brought him! He could have sworn that he had had no thought of coming this way. How then did he happen to be here? For that he could find no answer.
Yet rest awhile he must; he had to consider the situation and decide on the next step. He remembered that there was a summerhouse at the end of the garden. No one would see him there. Hoisting himself to the top of the fence, he clambered over and dropped into the garden below. With a brief glance at the house, barely visible among the trees, he made for the summerhouse. To his dismay he found that it was open on nearly all sides. The wild vine that had walled it in during the summer had withered and now all was bare.
He turned to go back, but it was too late. There was a furious barking behind him. He wheeled round and saw a huge dog coming straight at him down the leaf-strewn path leading from the house. Its fierce growls rent the stillness of the garden.
Pavel made ready to defend himself. The first attack he repulsed with a heavy kick. But the animal crouched to spring a second time. There is no saying how the encounter would have ended had a familiar voice not called out: "Come here, Tresor! Come here!"

Tonya came running down the path. She dragged Tresor back by the collar and turned to address the young man standing by the fence.
"What are you doing here? You might have been badly mauled by the dog. It's lucky I. . . ."
She stopped short and her eyes widened in surprise. How extraordinarily like Korchagin was this stranger who had wandered into her garden.
The figure by the fence stirred.
"Tonya!" said the young man softly. "Don't you recognise
me?" Tonya cried out and rushed impulsively over to him.
"Pavel, you?"
Tresor, taking the cry as a signal for attack, sprang forward.
"Down, Tresor, down!" A few cuffs from Tonya and he slunk back with an injured air toward the house, his tail between his legs.
"So you're free?" said Tonya, clinging to Pavel's
hands. "You knew then?"
"I know everything," replied Tonya breathlessly. "Liza told me. But however did you get here?

Did they let you go?"

"Yes, but only by mistake," Pavel replied wearily. "I ran away. I suppose they're looking for me now. I really don't know how I got here. I thought I'd rest a bit in your summerhouse. I'm awfully tired," he added apologetically.

She gazed at him for a moment or two and a wave of pity and tenderness swept over her.

"Pavel, my darling Pavel," she murmured holding his hands fast in hers. "I love you. . . . Do you hear me? My stubborn boy, why did you go away that time? Now you're coming to us, to me. I shan't let you go for anything. It's nice and quiet in our house and you can stay as long as you like."

Pavel shook his head.

"What if they find me here? No, I can't stay in your place."

Her hands squeezed his fingers and her eyes flashed.

"If you refuse, I shall never speak to you again. Artem isn't here, he was marched off under escort to the locomotive. All the railwaymen are being mobilised. Where will you go?"

Pavel shared her anxiety, and only his fear of bringing trouble to this girl now grown so dear to him held him back. But at last, worn out by his harrowing experiences, hungry and exhausted, he gave in.

While he sat on the sofa in Tonya's room, the following conversation ensued between mother and daughter in the kitchen.

"Mama, Korchagin is in my room. He was my pupil, you remember? I don't want to hide anything from you. He was arrested for helping a Bolshevik sailor to escape. Now he has run away from prison, but he has nowhere to go." Her voice trembled. "Mother dear, please let him stay here for a while."

The mother looked into her daughter's pleading eyes.

"Very well, I have no objection. But where do you intend to put
him?" Tonya flushed.

"He can sleep in my room on the sofa," she said. "We needn't tell Papa anything for the time being."

Her mother looked straight into her eyes.

"Is this what you have been fretting about so much lately?" she
asked. "Yes."

"But he is scarcely more than a boy."

"I know," replied Tonya, nervously fingering the sleeve of her blouse. "But if he hadn't escaped they would have shot him just the same."

Yekaterina Mikhailovna was alarmed by Korchagin's presence in her home. His arrest and her daughter's obvious infatuation with a lad she scarcely knew disturbed her.

But Tonya, considering the matter settled, was already thinking of attending to her guest's comfort.

"He must have a bath, first thing, Mama. I'll see to it at once. He is as dirty as a chimney sweep. It must be ages since he had a wash."

And she bustled off to heat the water for the bath and find some clean linen for Pavel. When all was ready she rushed into the room, seized Pavel by the arm and hurried him off to the bathroom without more ado.

"You must have a complete change of clothes. Here is a suit for you to put on. Your things will have to be washed. You can wear that in the meantime," she said pointing to the chair where a blue sailor blouse with striped white collar and a pair of bell-bottomed trousers were neatly laid out.

Pavel looked surprised. Tonya smiled.

"I wore it at a masquerade ball once," she explained. "It will be just right for you. Now, hurry. While you're washing, I'll get you something to eat."

She went out and shut the door, leaving Pavel with no alternative but to undress and climb into the tub.

An hour later all three, mother, daughter and Pavel, were dining in the kitchen.

Pavel, who was ravenously hungry, consumed three helpings before he was aware of it. He was rather shy of Yekaterina Mikhailovna at first but soon thawed out when he saw how friendly she was.

After dinner they retired to Tonya's room and at Yekaterina Mikhailovna's request Pavel related his experiences.

"What do you intend doing now?" Yekaterina Mikhailovna asked when he had finished.

Pavel pondered the question a moment. "I should like to see Artem first, and then I shall have to get away from here."

"But where will you go?"

"I think I could make my way to Uman or perhaps to Kiev. I don't know myself yet, but I must get away from here as soon as possible."

Pavel could hardly believe that everything had changed so quickly. Only that morning he had been in the filthy cell and now here he was sitting beside Tonya, wearing clean clothes, and, what was most important, he was free.

What queer turns life can take, he thought: one moment the sky seems black as night, and then the sun comes shining through again. Had it not been for the danger of being arrested again he would have been the happiest lad alive at this moment.

But he knew that even in this large, silent house he was far from safe. He must go away from here, it did not matter where. And yet he did not at all welcome the idea of going away. How thrilling it had been to read about the heroic Garibaldi! How he had envied him! But now he realised that Garibaldi's must have been a hard life, hounded as he was from place to place. He, Pavel, had only lived through seven days of misery and torment, yet it had seemed like a whole year.

No, clearly he was not cut out to be a hero.

"What are you thinking about?" Tonya asked, bending over toward him. The deep blue of her eyes seemed fathomless.

"Tonya, shall I tell you about Khristina?"

"Yes, do," Tonya urged him.

He told her the sad story of his fellow-captive.

The clock ticked loudly in the silence as he ended his story: ".. .And that was the last we saw of her," his

words came with difficulty. Tonya's head dropped and she had to bite her lips to force back the tears.

Pavel looked at her. "1 must go away tonight," he said with
finality. "No, no, 1 shan't let you go anywhere tonight."
She stroked his bristly hair tenderly with her slim warm fingers. . . .
"Tonya, you must help me. Someone must go to the station and find out what has happened to Artem and take a note to Seryozha. I have a revolver hidden in a crow's nest. I daren't go for it, but Seryozha can get it for me. Will you be able to do this for me?"
Tonya got up.
"I'll go to Liza Sukharko right away. She and I will go to the station together. Write your note and I'll take it to Seryozha. Where does he live? Shall I tell him where you are if he should want to see you?"
Pavel considered for a moment before replying. "Tell him to bring the gun to your garden this evening."
It was very late when Tonya returned. Pavel was fast asleep. The touch of her hand awoke him and he opened his eyes to find her standing over him, smiling happily.
"Artem is coming here soon. He has just come back. Liza's father has agreed to vouch for him and they're letting him go for an hour. The engine is standing at the station. I couldn't tell him you are here. I just told him I had something very important to tell him. There he is now!"
Tonya ran to open the door. Artem stood in the doorway dumb with amazement, unable to believe his eyes. Tonya closed the door behind him so that her father, who was lying ill with typhus in the study, might not overhear them.
Another moment and Artem was giving Pavel a bear's hug that made his bones crack, and crying: "Pavel! My little brother!"

And so it was decided: Pavel was to leave the next day. Artem would arrange for Bruzzhak to take him on a train bound for Kazatin.
Artem, usually grave and reserved, was now almost beside himself with joy at having found his brother after so many days of anxiety and uncertainty.
"Then it's settled. Tomorrow morning at five you'll be at the warehouse. While they're loading on fuel you can slip in. I wish I could stay and have a chat with you but I must be getting back. I'll see you off tomorrow. They're making up a battalion of railwaymen. We go about under an armed escort just like when the Germans were here."
Artem said good-bye to his brother and left.
Dusk gathered fast, Sergei would be arriving soon with the revolver. While he waited, Pavel paced nervously up and down the dark room. Tonya and her mother were with the forest warden.
He met Sergei in the darkness by the fence and the two friends shook hands warmly. Sergei had brought Valya with him. They conversed in low tones.
"I haven't brought the gun," Sergei said. "That backyard of yours is thick with Petlyura men. There are carts standing all over the place and they had a bonfire going. So I couldn't climb the tree to get the gun. It's a damn shame." Sergei was much put out.
"Never mind," Pavel consoled him. "Perhaps it's just as well. It would be worse if I happened to be caught on the way with the gun. But make sure you get hold of it."
Valya moved closer to Pavel.

"When are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow, at daybreak."

"How did you manage to get away? Tell us."

In a rapid whisper Pavel told them his story. Then he took leave of his comrades. The jolly Sergei was unusually silent.

"Good luck, Pavel, don't forget us," Valya said in a choking voice.

And with that they left him, the darkness swallowing them up in an instant.

Inside the house all was quiet. The measured ticking of the clock was the only sound in the stillness.

For two of the house's inmates there was no thought of sleep that night. How could they sleep when in six hours they were to part, perhaps never to meet again. Was it possible in that brief space of time to give utterance to the myriad of unspoken thoughts that seethed within them?

Youth, sublime youth, when passion, as yet unknown, is only dimly felt in a quickening of the pulse; when your hand coming in chance contact with your sweetheart's breast trembles as if affrighted and falters, and when the sacred friendship of youth guards you from the final step! What can be sweeter than to feel her arm about your neck and her burning kiss on your lips.

It was the second kiss they had exchanged throughout their friendship. Pavel, who had experienced many a beating but never a caress except from his mother, was stirred to the depths of his being. Hitherto life had shown him its most brutal side, and he had not known it could be such a glorious thing; now this girl had taught him what happiness could mean.

He breathed the perfume of her hair and seemed to see her eyes in the darkness. "I love you so, Tonya, I can't tell you how much, for I don't know how to say it."

His brain was in a whirl. How responsive her supple body. . . . But youth's friendship is a sacred trust.

"Tonya, when all this mess is over I'm bound to get a job as a mechanic, and if you really want me, if you're really serious and not just playing with me, I'll be a good husband to you. I'll never beat you, never do anything to hurt you, I swear it."

Fearing to fall asleep in each other's arms—lest Tonya's mother find them and think ill of them— they separated.

Day was breaking when they fell asleep after having made a solemn compact never to forget one another.

Yekaterina Mikhailovna woke Pavel early. He jumped quickly out of bed. While he was in the bathroom, putting on his own clothes and boots, with Dolinnik's jacket on top, Yekaterina Mikhailovna woke Tonya.

They hurried through the grey morning mist to the station. When they reached the timber yards by the back way they found Artem waiting impatiently for them beside the loaded tender.

A powerful engine moved up slowly, enveloped in clouds of hissing steam. Bruzzhak looked out of the cab.

Pavel bid Tonya and Artem a hasty farewell, then gripped the iron rail and climbed up into the engine. Looking back he saw two familiar figures at the crossing: the tall figure of Artem and the small graceful form of Tonya beside him. The wind tore angrily at the collar of her blouse and tossed her chestnut hair. She waved to him.

Artem glanced at Tonya out of the corner of his eye and noticing that she was on the verge of

tears, he sighed.
"I'll be damned if there isn't something up between these two," he said to himself. "And me thinking Pavel is still a little boy!"
When the train disappeared behind the bend he turned to Tonya and said: "Well, shall we be friends?" And Tonya's tiny hand was lost in his huge paw.
From the distance came the rumble of the train gathering speed.

## Chapter Seven

For a whole week the town, belted with trenches and enmeshed in barbed-wire entanglements, went to sleep at night and woke up in the morning to the pounding of guns and the rattle of rifle fire. Only in the small hours would the din subside, and even then the silence would be shattered from time to time by bursts of fire as the outposts probed out each other. At dawn men busied themselves around the battery at the railway station. The black snout of a gun belched savagely and the men hastened to feed it another portion of steel and explosive. Each time a gunner pulled at a lanyard the earth trembled underfoot. Three versts from town the shells whined over the village occupied by the Reds, drowning out all other sounds, and sending up geysers of earth.
The Red battery was stationed on the grounds of an old Polish monastery standing on a high hill in the centre of the village.
The Military Commissar of the battery, Comrade Zamostin, leapt to his feet. He had been sleeping with his head resting on the trail of a gun. Now, tightening his belt with the heavy Mauser attached to it, he listened to the flight of the shell and waited for the explosion. Then the courtyard echoed to his resonant voice.
"Time to get up, Comrades!"
The gun crews slept beside their guns, and they were on their feet as quickly as the Commissar.
All but Sidorchuk, who raised his head reluctantly and looked around with sleep-heavy eyes. "The swine—hardly light yet and they're at it again. Just out of spite, the bastards!"
Zamostin laughed.
"Unsocial elements, Sidorchuk, that's what they are. They don't care whether you want to sleep or not."
The artilleryman grumblingly roused himself.
A few minutes later the guns in the monastery yard were in action and shells were exploding in the town.
On a platform of planks rigged up on top of the tall smoke stack of the sugar refinery squatted a Petlyura officer and a telephonist. They had climbed up the iron ladder inside the chimney.
From this vantage point they directed the fire of their artillery. Through their field glasses they could see every movement made by the Red troops besieging the town. Today the Bolsheviks were particularly active. An armoured train was slowly edging in on the Podolsk Station, keeping up an incessant fire as it came. Beyond it the attack lines of the infantry could be seen. Several times the Red forces tried to take the town by storm, but the Petlyura troops were firmly entrenched on the approaches. The trenches erupted a squall of fire, filling the air with a maddening din which mounted to an unintermittent roar, reaching its highest pitch during the

attacks. Swept by this leaden hailstorm, unable to stand the inhuman strain, the Bolshevik lines fell back, leaving motionless bodies behind on the field.

Today the blows delivered at the town were more persistent and more frequent than before. The air quivered from the reverberations of the gunfire. From the height of the smoke stack you could see the steadily advancing Bolshevik lines, the men throwing themselves on the ground only to rise again and press irresistibly forward. Now they had all but taken the station. The Petlyura division's available reserves were sent into action, but they could not close the breach driven in their positions. Filled with a desperate resolve, the Bolshevik attack lines spilled into the streets adjoining the station, whose defenders, the third regiment of the Petlyura division, routed from their last positions in the gardens and orchards at the edge of the town by a brief but terrible thrust, scattered into the town. Before they could recover enough to make a new stand, the Red Army men poured into the streets, sweeping away in bayonet charges the Petlyura pickets left behind to cover the retreat.

Nothing could induce Sergei Bruzzhak to stay down in the basement where his family and the nearest neighbours had taken refuge. And in spite of his mother's entreaties he climbed out of the chilly cellar. An armoured car with the name Sagaidachny on its side clattered past the house, firing wildly as it went. Behind it ran panic-stricken Petlyura men in complete disorder. One of them slipped into Sergei's yard, where with feverish haste he tore off his cartridge belt, helmet and rifle and then vaulted over the fence and disappeared in the kitchen gardens beyond. Sergei looked out into the street. Petlyura soldiers were running down the road leading to the Southwestern Station, their retreat covered by an armoured car. The highway leading to town was deserted. Then a Red Army man dashed into sight. He threw himself down on the ground and began firing down the road. A second and a third Red Army man came into sight behind him. . . . Sergei watched them coming, crouching down and firing as they ran. A bronzed Chinese with bloodshot eyes, clad in an undershirt and girded with machine-gun belts, was running full height, a grenade in each hand. And ahead of them all came a Red Army man, hardly more than a boy, with a light machine gun. The advance guard of the Red Army had entered the town. Sergei, wild with joy, dashed out onto the road and shouted as loud as he could:

"Long live the comrades!"

So unexpectedly did he rush out that the Chinese all but knocked him off his feet. The latter was about to turn on him, but the exultation on Sergei's face stayed him.

"Where is Petlyura?" the Chinese shouted at him, panting heavily.

But Sergei did not hear him. He ran back into the yard, picked up the cartridge belt and rifle abandoned by the Petlyura man and hurried after the Red Army men. They did not notice him until they had stormed the Southwestern Station. Here, after cutting off several trainloads of munitions and supplies and hurling the enemy into the woods, they stopped to rest and regroup. The young machine gunner came over to Sergei and asked in surprise:

"Where are you from, Comrade?"

"I'm from this town. I've been waiting for you to come."

Sergei was soon surrounded by Red Army men.

"I know him," the Chinese said in broken Russian. "He yelled 'Long live comrades!' He Bolshevik, he with us, a good fellow!" he added with a broad smile, slapping Sergei on the shoulder approvingly.

Sergei's heart leapt with joy. He had been accepted at once, accepted as one of them. And together with them he had taken the station in a bayonet charge.

The town bestirred itself. The townsfolk, exhausted by their ordeal, emerged from the cellars and basements and came out to the front gates to see the Red Army units enter the town. Thus it was that Sergei's mother and his sister Valya saw Sergei marching along with the others in the ranks of the Red Army men. He was hatless, but girded with a cartridge belt and with a rifle slung over his shoulder.

Antonina Vasilievna threw up her hands in indignation.

So her Seryozha had got mixed up in the fight. He would pay for this! Fancy him parading with a rifle in front of the whole town! There was bound to be trouble later on. Antonina Vasilievna could no longer restrain herself:

"Seryozha, come home this minute!" she shouted. "I'll show you how to behave, you scamp! I'll teach you to fight!" And at that she marched out to the road with the firm intention of bringing her son back.

But this time her Seryozha, her boy whose ears she had so often boxed, looked sternly at his mother, his face burning with shame and anger as he snapped at her: "Stop shouting! I'm staying where I am." And he marched past without stopping.

Antonina Vasilievna was beside herself with anger.

"So that's how you treat your mother! Don't you dare come home
after this!" "I won't!" Sergei cried, without turning around.

Antonina Vasilievna stood speechless on the road staring after him, while the ranks of weather-beaten, dust-covered fighting men trudged past.

"Don't cry, mother! We'll make your laddie a commissar," a strong, jovial voice rang out. A roar of good-natured laughter ran through the platoon. Up at the head of the company voices struck up in unison:

Comrades, the bugles are sounding,
Shoulder your arms for the fray.
On to the kingdom of liberty
Boldly shall we fight our way. . . .

The ranks joined in a mighty chorus and Sergei's ringing voice merged in the swelling melody. He had found a new family. One bayonet in it was his, Sergei's.

On the gates of the Leszczinski house hung a strip of white cardboard with the brief inscription: "Revcom." Beside it was an arresting poster of a Red Army man looking into your eyes and pointing his finger straight at you over the words: "Have you joined the Red Army?"

The Political Department people had been at work during the night putting up these posters all over the town. Nearby hung the Revolutionary Committee's first proclamation to the toiling population of Shepetovka:

"Comrades! The proletarian troops have taken this town. Soviet power has been restored. We call on you to maintain order. The bloody cutthroats have been thrown back, but if you want them never to return, if you want to see them destroyed once and for all, join the ranks of the Red

Army. Give all your support to the power of the working folk. Military authority in this town is in the hands of the chief of the garrison. Civilian affairs will be administered by the Revolutionary Committee.
"Signed: Dolinnik

"Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee."
People of a new sort appeared in the Leszczinski house. The word "comrade", for which only yesterday people had paid with their life, was now heard on all sides. That indescribably moving word, "comrade"!
For Dolinnik there was no sleep or rest these days. The joiner was busy establishing revolutionary government.
In a small room on the door of which hung a slip of paper with the pencilled words "Party Committee" sat Comrade Ignatieva, calm and imperturbable as always. The Political Department entrusted her and Dolinnik with the task of setting up the organs of Soviet power.
One more day and office workers were seated at desks and a typewriter was clicking busily. A Commissariat of Supplies was organised under nervous, dynamic Tyzycki. Now that Soviet power was firmly established in the town, Tyzycki, formerly a mechanic's helper at the local sugar refinery, proceeded with grim determination to wage war on the bosses of the sugar refinery who, nursing a bitter hatred for the Bolsheviks, were lying low and biding their time.
At a meeting of the refinery workers he summed up the situation in harsh, unrelenting terms. "The past is gone never to return," he declared, speaking in Polish and banging his fist on the edge of the rostrum to drive home his words. "It is enough that our fathers and we ourselves slaved all our lives for the Potockis. We built palaces for them and in return His Highness the Count gave us just enough to keep us from dying of starvation.
"How many years did the Potocki counts and the Sanguszko princes ride our backs? Are there not any number of Polish workers whom Potocki ground down just as he did the Russians and Ukrainians? And yet the count's henchmen have now spread the rumour among these very same workers that the Soviet power will rule them all with an iron hand.
"That is a foul lie, Comrades! Never have workingmen of different nationalities had such freedom as now. All proletarians are brothers. As for the gentry, we are going to curb them, you may depend on that." His hand swung down again heavily on the barrier of the rostrum. "Who is it that has made brothers spill each other's blood? For centuries kings and nobles have sent Polish peasants to fight the Turks. They have always incited one nation against another. Think of all the bloodshed and misery they have caused! And who benefited by it all? But soon all that will stop. This is the end of those vermin. The Bolsheviks have flung out a slogan that strikes terror into the hearts of the bourgeoisie: 'Workers of all countries, unite!' There lies our salvation, there lies our hope for a better future, for the day when all workingmen will be brothers. Comrades, join the Communist Party!
"There will be a Polish republic too one day but it will be a Soviet republic without the Potockis, for they will be rooted out and we shall be the masters of Soviet Poland. You all know Bronik Ptaszinski, don't you? The Revolutionary Committee has appointed him commissar of our factory. 'We were naught, we shall be all.' We shall have cause for rejoicing, Comrades. Only take care not to give ear to the hissing of those hidden reptiles! Let us place our faith in the workingman's cause

and we shall establish the brotherhood of all peoples throughout the world!"

These words were uttered with a sincerity and fervour that came from the bottom of this simple workingman's heart. He descended the platform amid shouts of enthusiastic acclaim from the younger members of the audience. The older workers, however, hesitated to speak up. Who knew but what tomorrow the Bolsheviks might have to give up the town and then those who remained would have to pay dearly for every rash word. Even if you escaped the gallows, you would lose your job for sure.

The Commissar of Education, the slim, well-knit Czarnopyski, was so far the only schoolteacher in the locality who had sided with the Bolsheviks.

Opposite the premises of the Revolutionary Committee the Special Duty Company was quartered; its men were on duty at the Revolutionary Committee. At night a Maxim gun stood ready in the garden at the entrance to the Revcom, a sinewy ammunition belt trailing from its breech. Two men with rifles stood guard beside it.

Comrade Ignatieva on her way to the Revcom went up to one of them, a young Red Army man, and asked:

"How old are you, Comrade?"

"Going on seventeen."

"Do you live here?"

The Red Army man smiled. "Yes, I only joined the army the day before yesterday during the fighting."

Ignatieva studied his face.

"What does your father do?"

"He's an engine driver's assistant."

At that moment Dolinnik appeared, accompanied by a man in uniform.

"Here you are," said Ignatieva, turning to Dolinnik, "I've found the very lad to put in charge of the district committee of the Komsomol. He's a local man."

Dolinnik glanced quickly at Sergei—for it was he.

"Ah yes. You're Zakhar's boy, aren't you? All right, go ahead and stir up the young folk." Sergei looked at them in surprise. "But what about the company?"

"That's all right, we'll attend to that," Dolinnik, already mounting the steps, threw over his shoulder.

Two days later the local committee of the Young Communist League of the Ukraine was formed. Sergei plunged into the vortex of the new life that had burst suddenly and swiftly upon the town. It filled his entire existence so completely that he forgot his family although it was so near at hand. He, Sergei Bruzzhak, was now a Bolshevik. For the hundredth time he pulled out of his pocket the document issued by the Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party, certifying that he, Sergei, was a Komsomol and Secretary of the Komsomol Committee. And should anyone entertain any doubts on that score there was the impressive Mannlicher—a gift from dear old Pavel—in its makeshift canvas holster hanging from the belt of his tunic. A most convincing credential that! Too bad Pavlushka wasn't around!

Sergei's days were spent on assignments given by the Revcom. Today too Ignatieva was waiting for him. They were to go down to the station to the Division Political Department to get newspapers and books for the Revolutionary Committee. Sergei hurried out of the building to the

street, where a man from the Political Department was waiting for them with an automobile. During the long drive to the station where the Headquarters and Political Department of the First Soviet Ukrainian Division were located in railway carriages, Ignatieva plied Sergei with questions. "How has your work been going? Have you formed your organisation yet? You ought to persuade your friends, the workers' children, to join the Komsomol. We shall need a group of Communist youth very soon. Tomorrow we shall draw up and print a Komsomol leaflet. Then we'll hold a big youth rally in the theatre. When we get to the Political Department I'll introduce you to Ustinovich. She is working with the young people, if I'm not mistaken."

Ustinovich turned out to be a girl of eighteen with dark bobbed hair, in a new khaki tunic with a narrow leather belt. She gave Sergei a great many pointers in his work and promised to help him. Before he left she gave him a large bundle of books and newspapers, including one of particular importance, a booklet containing the programme and rules of the Komsomol.

When he returned late that night to the Revcom Sergei found Valya waiting for him outside,

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she cried. "What do you mean by staying away from home like this? Mother is crying her eyes out and father is very angry with you. There's going to be an awful row.

"No, there isn't," he reassured her. "I haven't any time to go home, honest I haven't. I won't be coming tonight either. But I'm glad you've come because I want to have a talk with you. Let's go inside."

Valya could hardly recognise her brother. He was quite changed. He fairly bubbled with energy. As soon as she was seated Sergei went straight to the point.

"Here's the situation, Valya. You've got to join the Komsomol. You don't know what that is? The Young Communist League. I'm running things here. You don't believe me? All right, look at this!" Valya read the paper and looked at her brother in bewilderment.

"What will I do in the Komsomol?"

Sergei spread out his hands. "My dear girl, there's heaps to do! Look at me, I'm so busy I don't sleep nights. We've got to make propaganda. Ignatieva says we're going to hold a meeting in the theatre soon and talk about the Soviet power. She says I'll have to make a speech. I think it's a mistake because I don't know how to make speeches. I'm bound to make a hash of it. Now, what about your joining the Komsomol?"

"I don't know what to say. Mother would be wild with me if I did."

"Never mind mother, Valya," Sergei urged. "She doesn't understand. All she cares about is to have her children beside her. But she has nothing against the Soviet power. On the contrary, she's all for it. But she would rather other people's sons did the fighting. Now, is that fair? Remember what Zhukhrai told us? And look at Pavel, he didn't stop to think about his mother. The time has come when we young folk must fight for our right to make something of our lives. Surely you won't refuse, Valya? Think how fine it will be. You could work with the girls, and I would be working with the fellows. That reminds me, I'll tackle that red-headed devil Klimka this very day. Well, Valya, what do you say? Are you with us or not? I have a little booklet here that will tell you all about it."

He took the booklet of Komsomol Rules out of his pocket and handed it to her.

"But what if Petlyura comes back again?" Valya asked him in a low voice, her eyes glued to her brother's face.

This thought had not yet occurred to Sergei and he pondered it for a moment.
"I would have to leave with all the others, of course," he said. "But what would happen to you? Yes, it would make mother very unhappy." He lapsed into silence.
"Seryozha, couldn't you enrol me without mother or anyone else knowing? Just you and me? I could help just the same. That would be the best way."
"I believe you're right, Valya." Ignatieva
entered the room at that point.
"This is my little sister Valya, Comrade Ignatieva. I've just been talking to her about joining the Komsomol. She would make a suitable member, but you see, our mother might make difficulties. Could we enrol Valya so that no one would know about it? You see, we might have to give up the town. I would leave with the army, of course, but Valya is afraid it would go hard with mother."
Ignatieva, sitting on the edge of a chair, listened
gravely. "Yes," she agreed. "That is the best course."

The packed theatre buzzed with the excited chatter of the youth who had come in response to notices posted all over town. A brass band of workers from the sugar refinery was playing. The audience, consisting mainly of students of the local secondary school and Gymnasium, was less interested in the meeting than in the concert that was to follow it.
At last the curtain rose and Comrade Razin, Secretary of the Uyezd Committee, who had just arrived, appeared on the platform.
All eyes were turned to this short, slenderly built man with the small, sharp nose, and his speech was listened to with keen attention. He told them about the struggle that had swept the entire country and called on youth to rally to the Communist Party. He spoke like an experienced orator but made excessive use of terms like "orthodox Marxists", "social-chauvinists" and the like, which his hearers did not understand. Nevertheless, when he finished they applauded him warmly, and after introducing the next speaker, who was Sergei, he left.
It was as he had feared: now that he was face to face with the audience, Sergei did not know what to say. He fumbled painfully for a while until Ignatieva came to his rescue by whispering from her seat on the platform: "Tell them about organising a Komsomol cell."
Sergei at once went straight to the point.
"Well, Comrades, you've heard all there is to be said. What we've got to do now is to form a cell. Who is in favour?"
A hush fell on the gathering. Ustinovich stepped into the breach. She got up and told the audience how the youth were being organised in Moscow. Sergei in the meantime stood aside in confusion. He raged inwardly at the meeting's reaction to the question of organising a cell and he scowled down at the audience. They hardly listened to Ustinovich. Sergei saw Zalivanov whisper something to Liza Sukharko with a contemptuous look at the speaker on the platform. In the front row the senior Gymnasium girls with powdered faces were casting coy glances about them and whispering among themselves. Over in the corner near the door leading backstage was a group of young Red Army men. Among them Sergei saw the young machine gunner. He was sitting on the edge of the stage fidgeting nervously and gazing with undisguised hatred at the flashily dressed Liza Sukharko and Anna Admovskaya who, totally unabashed, were carrying on a lively

conversation with their escorts.

Realising that no one was listening to her, Ustinovich quickly wound up her speech and sat down. Ignatieva took the floor next, and her calm compelling manner quelled the restless audience.

"Comrades," she said, "I advise each of you to think over what has been said here tonight. I am sure that some of you will become active participants in the revolution and not merely spectators. The doors are open to receive you, the rest is up to you. We should like to hear you express your opinion. We invite anyone who has anything to say to step up to the platform."

Once more silence reigned in the hall. Then a voice spoke up from the back. "I'd like to speak!"

Misha Levchukov, a lad with a slight squint and the build of a young bear, made his way to the stage.

"The way things are," he said, "we've got to help the Bolsheviks. I'm for it. Seryozhka knows me. I'm joining the Komsomol."

Sergei beamed. He sprang forward to the centre of .the stage.

"You see, Comrades!" he cried. "I always said Misha was one of us: his father was a switchman and he was crushed by a train, and that's why Misha couldn't get an education. But he didn't need to go to Gymnasium to understand what's wanted at a time like this."

There was an uproar in the hall. A young man with carefully groomed hair asked for the floor. It was Okushev, a Gymnasium student and the son of the local apothecary. Tugging at his tunic, he began:

"I beg your pardon, Comrades. I don't understand what is wanted of us. Are we expected to go in for politics? If so, when are we going to study? We've got to finish the Gymnasium. If it was some sports society, or club that was being organised where we could gather and read, that would be another matter. But to go in for politics means taking the risk of getting hanged afterwards. Sorry, but I don't think anybody will agree to that."

There was laughter in the hall as Okushev jumped off the stage and resumed his seat. The next speaker was the young machine gunner. Pulling his cap down over his forehead with a furious gesture and glaring down at the audience, he shouted:

"What're you laughing at, you vermin!"

His eyes were two burning coals and he trembled all over with fury. Taking a deep breath he began:

"Ivan Zharky is my name. I'm an orphan. I never knew my mother or my father and I never had a home. I grew up on the street, begging for a crust of bread and starving most of the time. It was a dog's life, I can tell you, something you mama's boys know nothing about. Then the Soviet power came along and the Red Army men picked me up and took care of me. A whole platoon of them adopted me. They gave me clothes and taught me to read and write. But what's most important, they taught me what it was to be a human being. Because of them I became a Bolshevik and I'll be a Bolshevik till I die. I know damn well what we're fighting for, we're fighting for us poor folk, for the workers' government. You sit there cackling but you don't know that two hundred comrades were killed fighting for this town. They perished. . . ." Zharky's voice vibrated like a taut string. "They gave up their lives gladly for our happiness, for our cause. . . . People are dying all over the country, on all the fronts, and you're playing at merry-go-rounds here. Comrades," he went on, turning suddenly to the presidium table, "you're wasting your time talking to them there," he

jabbed a finger toward the hall. "Think they'll understand you? No! A full stomach is no comrade to an empty one. Only one man came forward here and that's because he's one of the poor, an orphan. Never mind," he roared furiously at the gathering, "we'll get along without you. We're not going to beg you to join us, you can go to the devil, the lot of you! The only way to talk to the likes of you is with a machine gun!" And with this parting thrust he stepped off the stage and made straight for the exit, glancing neither to right nor left.

None of those who had presided at the meeting stayed on for the concert.

"What a mess!" said Sergei with chagrin as they were on their way back to the Revcom. "Zharky was right. We couldn't do anything with that Gymnasium crowd. It just makes you wild!"

"It's not surprising," Ignatieva interrupted him. "After all there were hardly any proletarian youth there at all. Most of them were either sons of the petty bourgeois or local intellectuals—philistines all of them. You will have to work among the sawmill and sugar refinery workers. But that meeting was not altogether wasted. You'll find there are some very good comrades among the students."

Ustinovich agreed with Ignatieva.

"Our task, Seryozha," she said, "is to bring home our ideas, our slogans, to everyone. The Party will focus the attention of all working people on every new event. We shall hold many meetings, conferences and congresses. The Political Department is opening a summer theatre at the station. A propaganda train is due to arrive in a few days and then we'll get things going in real earnest. Remember what Lenin said—we won't win unless we draw the masses, the millions of working people into the struggle."

Late that evening Sergei escorted Ustinovich to the station. On parting he clasped her hand firmly and held it a few seconds longer than absolutely necessary. A faint smile flitted across her face. On his way back Sergei dropped in to see his people. He listened in silence to his mother's scolding, but when his father chimed in, Sergei took up the offensive and soon had Zakhar Vasilievich at a disadvantage.

"Now listen, dad, when you went on strike under the Germans and killed that sentry on the locomotive, you thought of your family, didn't you? Of course you did. But you went through with it just the same because your workingman's conscience told you to. I've also thought of the family. I know very well that if we retreat you folks will be persecuted because of me. But I couldn't sit at home anyway. You know how it is yourself, dad, so why all this fuss? I'm working for a good cause and you ought to back me up instead of kicking up a row. Come on, dad, let's make it up and then ma will stop scolding me too." He regarded his father with his clear blue eyes and smiled affectionately, confident that he was in the right.

Zakhar Vasilievich stirred uneasily on the bench and through his thick bristling moustache and untidy little beard his yellowish teeth showed in a smile.

"Dragging class consciousness into it, eh, you young rascal? You think that revolver you're sporting is going to stop me from giving you a good hiding?"

But his voice held no hint of anger, and mastering his confusion, he held out his horny hand to his son. "Carry on, Seryozha. Once you've started up the gradient I'll not be putting on the brakes. But you mustn't forget us altogether, drop in once in a while."

It was night. A shaft of light from a crack in the door lay on the steps. Behind the huge lawyer's desk in the large room with its upholstered plush furniture sat five people: Dolinnik, Ignatieva, Cheka chief Timoshenko, looking like a Kirghiz in his Cossack fur cap, the giant railwayman Shudik and flat-nosed Ostapchuk from the railway yards. A meeting of the Revcom was in progress.

Dolinnik, lea'ning over the table and fixing Ignatieva with a stern look, hammered out hoarsely: "The front must have supplies. The workers have to eat. As soon as we came the shopkeepers and market profiteers raised their prices. They won't take Soviet money. Old tsarist money or Kerensky notes are the only kind in circulation here. Today we must sit down and work out fixed prices. We know very well that none of the profiteers are going to sell their goods at the fixed price. They'll hide what they've got. In that case we'll make searches and confiscate the bloodsuckers' goods. This is no time for niceties. We can't let the workers starve any longer. Comrade Ignatieva warns us not to go too far. That's the reaction of a fainthearted intellectual, if you ask me. Now don't take offence, Zoya, I know what I'm talking about. And in any case it isn't a matter of the petty traders. I have received information today that Boris Zon, the innkeeper, has a secret cellar in his house. Even before Petlyura came, the big shopown-ers had huge stocks of goods hidden away there." He paused to throw a sly, mocking glance at Timoshenko.

"How did you find that out?" queried Timoshenko, surprised and annoyed at Dolinnik's having stolen a march on the Cheka.

Dolinnik chuckled. "I know everything, brother. Besides finding out about the cellar, I happen to know that you and the Division Commander's chauffeur polished off half a bottle of samogon between you yesterday."

Timoshenko fidgeted in his chair and a flush spread over his sallow features.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed in unwilling admiration. But catching sight of Ignatieva's disapproving frown, he went no further. "That blasted joiner has his own Cheka!" he thought to himself as he eyed the Chairman of the Revcom.

"Sergei Bruzzhak told me," Dolinnik went on. "He knows someone who used to work in the refreshment bar. Well, that lad heard from the cooks that Zon used to supply them with all they needed in unlimited quantities. Yesterday Sergei found out definitely about that cellar. All that has to be done now is to locate it. Get the boys on the job, Timoshenko, at once. Take Sergei along. If we're lucky we'll be able to supply the workers and the division."

Half an hour later eight armed men entered the innkeeper's home. Two remained outside to guard the entrance.

The proprietor, a short stout man as round as a barrel, with a wooden leg and a face covered with a bristly growth of red hair, met the newcomers with obsequious politeness.

"What do you wish at this late hour, Comrades?" he inquired in a husky bass.

Behind Zon, stood his daughters in hastily donned dressing-gowns, blinking in the glare of Timoshenko's torch. From the next room came the sighs and groans of Zon's buxom wife who was hurriedly dressing.

"We've come to search the house," Timoshenko explained curtly.

Every square inch of the floor was thoroughly examined. A spacious barn piled high with sawn wood, several pantries, the kitchen and a roomy cellar—all were inspected with the greatest care. But not a trace of the secret cellar was found.

In a tiny room off the kitchen the servant girl lay fast asleep. She slept so soundly that she did not hear them come in. Sergei wakened her gently.
"You work here?" he asked. The bewildered sleepy-eyed girl drew the blanket over her shoulders and shielded her eyes from the light.
"Yes," she replied. "Who are you?"
Sergei told her and, instructing her to get dressed, left the room.
In the spacious dining room Timoshenko was questioning the innkeeper who spluttered and fumed in great agitation:
"What do you want of me? I haven't got any more cellars. You're just wasting your time, I assure you. Yes, I did keep a tavern once but now I'm a poor man. The Petlyura crowd cleaned me out and very nearly killed me too. I am very glad the Soviets have come to power, but all I own is here for you to see." And he spread out his short pudgy hands, the while his bloodshot eyes darted from the face of the Cheka chief to Sergei and from Sergei to the corner and the ceiling.
Timoshenko bit his lips.
"So you won't tell, eh? For the last time I order you to show us where that cellar is."
"But, Comrade Officer, we've got nothing to eat ourselves," the innkeeper's wife wailed. "They've taken all we had." She tried to weep but nothing came of it.
"You say you're starving, but you keep a servant," Sergei put in.
"That's not a servant. She's just a poor girl we've taken in because she has nowhere to go. She'll tell you that herself."
Timoshenko's patience snapped. "All right then," he shouted, "now we'll set to work in earnest!" Morning dawned and the search was still going on. Exasperated after thirteen hours of fruitless efforts, Timoshenko had already decided to abandon the quest when Sergei, on the point of leaving the servant girl's room he had been examining, heard the girl's faint whisper behind him: "Look inside the stove in the kitchen."
Ten minutes later the dismantled Russian stove revealed an iron trapdoor. And within an hour a two-ton truck loaded with barrels and sacks drove away from the innkeeper's house now surrounded by a crowd of gaping onlookers.

Maria Yakovlevna Korchagina came home one hot day carrying her small bundle of belongings. She wept bitterly when Artem told her what had happened to Pavel. Her life now seemed empty and dreary. She had to look for work, and after a time she began taking in washing from Red Army men who arranged for her to receive soldiers' rations by way of payment.
One evening she heard Artem's footsteps outside the window sounding more hurried than usual. He pushed the door open and announced from the threshold: "I've brought a letter from Pavka."

"Dear Brother Artem," wrote Pavel. "This is to let you know that I am alive although not altogether well. I got a bullet in my hip but I am getting better now. The doctor says the bone is uninjured. So don't worry about me, I'll be all right. I may get leave after I'm discharged from hospital and I'll come home for a while. I didn't manage to get to mother's. I joined the cavalry brigade commanded by Comrade Kotovsky, whom I'm sure you've heard about because he's famous for his bravery. I have never seen anyone like him before and I have the greatest respect

for him. Has mother come home yet? If she has, give her my best love. Forgive me for all the trouble I have caused you. Your brother Pavel.
"Artem, please go to the forest warden's and tell them about this letter."

Maria Yakovlevna shed many tears over Pavel's letter. The scatterbrained lad had not even given the address of his hospital.
Sergei had become a frequent visitor at the green railway coach down at the station bearing the sign: "Agitprop Div. Pol. Dept." In one of the compartments of the Agitation and Propaganda Coach, Ustinovich and Ignatieva had their office. The latter, with the inevitable cigarette between her lips, smiled knowingly whenever he appeared.
The Secretary of the Komsomol District Committee had grown quite friendly with Rita Ustinovich, and besides the bundles of books and newspapers, he carried away with him from the station a vague sense of happiness after every brief encounter with her.
Every day the open-air theatre of the Division Political Department drew big audiences of workers and Red Army men. The agit train of the Twelfth Army, swathed in bright coloured posters, stood on a siding, seething with activity twenty-four hours a day. A printing plant had been installed inside and newspapers, leaflets and proclamations poured out in a steady stream. The front was near at hand.
One evening Sergei chanced to drop in at the theatre and found Rita there with a group of Red Army men. Late that night, as he was seeing her home to the station where the Political Department staff was quartered, he blurted out: "Why do I always want to be seeing you, Comrade Rita?" And added: "It's so nice to be with you! After seeing you I always feel I could go on working without stopping."
Rita halted. "Now look here, Comrade Bruzzhak," she said, "let's agree here and now that you won't ever wax lyrical any more. I don't like it."
Sergei blushed like a reprimanded schoolboy.
"I didn't mean anything," he said, "I thought we were friends . . . I didn't say anything counter-revolutionary, did I? Very well, Comrade Ustinovich, I shan't say another word!"
And leaving her with a hasty handshake he all but ran back to town.
Sergei did not go near the station for several days. When Ignatieva asked him to come he refused on the grounds that he was too busy. And indeed he had plenty to do.

One night someone fired at Comrade Shudik as he was going home through a street inhabited mainly by Poles who held managerial positions at the sugar refinery. The searches that followed brought to light weapons and documents belonging to a Pilsudski organisation known as the Strelets.
A meeting was held at the Revcom. Ustinovich, who was present, took Sergei aside and said in a calm voice: "So your philistine vanity was hurt, was it? You're letting personal matters interfere with your work? That won't do, Comrade."
And so Sergei resumed his visits to the green railway coach.
He attended a district conference and participated in the heated debates that lasted for two days. On the third day he went off with the rest of the conference delegates to the forest beyond the river

and spent a day and a night fighting bandits led by Zarudny, one of Petlyura's officers still at large. On his return he went to see Ignatieva and found Ustinovich there. Afterwards he saw her home to the station and on parting held her hand tightly. She drew it away angrily. Again Sergei kept away from the agitprop coach for many days and avoided seeing Rita even on business. And when she would demand an explanation of his behaviour he would reply curtly: "What's the use of talking to you? You'll only accuse me of being a philistine or a traitor to the working class or something."

Trains carrying the Caucasian Red Banner Division pulled in at the station. Three swarthy-complexioned commanders came over to the Revcom. One of them, a tall slim man wearing a belt of chased silver, went straight up to Dolinnik and demanded one hundred cartloads of hay. "No argument now," he said shortly, "I've got to have that hay. My horses are dying."

And so Sergei was sent with two Red Army men to get hay. In one village they were attacked by a band of kulaks. The Red Army men were disarmed and beaten unmercifully. Sergei got off lightly because of his youth. All three were carted back to town by people from the Poor Peasants' Committee.

An armed detachment was sent out to the village and the hay was delivered the following day. Not wishing to alarm his family, Sergei stayed at Ignatieva's place until he recovered. Rita Ustinovich came to visit him there and for the first time she pressed Sergei's hand with a warmth and tenderness he himself would never have dared to show.

One hot afternoon Sergei dropped in at the agit coach to see Rita. He read her Pavel's letter and told her something about his friend. On his way out he threw over his shoulder: "I think I'll go to the woods and take a dip in the lake."

Rita looked up from her work. "Wait for me. I'll come with you."

The lake was as smooth and placid as a mirror. Its warm translucent water exuded an inviting freshness.

"Wait for me over by the road. I'm going in," Rita ordered him.

Sergei sat down on a boulder by the bridge and lifted his face to the sun. He could hear her splashing in the water behind him.

Presently through the trees he caught sight of Tonya Tumanova and Chuzhanin, the Military Commissar of the agit train, coming down the road arm-in-arm. Chuzhanin, in his well-made officer's uniform with its smart leather belt and numberless straps and leather shiny top-boots, cut a dashing figure. He was in earnest conversation with Tonya.

Sergei recognised Tonya as the girl who had brought him the note from Pavel. She too looked hard at him as they approached. She seemed to be trying to place him. When they came abreast of him Sergei took Pavel's last letter out of his pocket and went up to her.

"Just a moment, Comrade. I have a letter here which concerns you partly."

Pulling her hand free Tonya took the letter. The slip of paper trembled slightly in her hand as she read.

"Have you had any more news from him?" she asked, handing the letter back to Sergei. "No," he replied.

At that moment the pebbles crunched under Rita's feet and Chuzhanin, who had been unaware of her presence, bent over and whispered to Tonya: "We'd better go."

But Rita's mocking, scornful voice stopped him.
"Comrade Chuzhanin! They've been looking for you over at the train all day." Chuzhanin eyed her with dislike.
"Never mind," he said surlily. "They'll manage without me. Rita watched Tonya and the Military Commissar go.
"It's high time that good-for-nothing was sent packing!" she observed dryly.
The forest murmured as the breeze stirred the mighty crowns of the oaks. A delicious freshness was wafted from the lake. Sergei decided to go in.
When he came back from his swim he found Rita sitting on a treetrunk not far from the road. They wandered, talking, into the depths of the woods. In a small glade with tall thick grass they paused to rest. It was very quiet in the forest. The oaks whispered to one another. Rita threw herself down on the soft grass and clasped her hands under her head. Her shapely legs in their old patched boots were hidden in the tall grass.
Sergei's eye chanced to fall on her feet. He noticed the neatly patched boots, then looked down at his own boot with the toe sticking out of a hole, and he laughed.
"What are you laughing at?" she asked.
Sergei pointed to his boot. "How are we going to fight in boots like these?"
Rita did not reply. She was chewing a blade of grass and her thoughts were obviously elsewhere. "Chuzhanin is a poor Communist," she said at last. "All our political workers go about in rags but he thinks of nobody but himself. He does not belong in our Party. . . . As for the front, the situation there is really very serious. Our country has a long and bitter fight before it." She paused, then added, "We shall have to fight with both words and rifles, Sergei. Have you heard about the Central Committee's decision to draft one-fourth of the Komsomol into the army? If you ask me, Sergei, we shan't be here long."
Listening to her, Sergei was surprised to detect a new note in her voice. With her black limpid eyes upon him, he was ready to throw discretion to the winds and tell her that her eyes were like mirrors, but he checked himself in time.
Rita raised herself on her elbow. "Where's your revolver?"
Sergei fingered his belt ruefully. "That kulak band took it away from me."
Rita put her hand into the pocket of her tunic and brought out a gleaming automatic pistol.
"See that oak, Sergei?" she pointed the muzzle at a furrowed trunk about twenty-five paces from where they lay. And raising the weapon to the level of her eyes she fired almost without taking aim. The splintered bark showered down.
"See?" she said much pleased with herself and fired again. And again the bark splintered and fell in the grass.
"Here," she handed him the weapon with a mocking smile. "Now let's see what you can do." Sergei muffed one out of three shots. Rita smiled condescendingly. "I thought you'd do worse." She put down the pistol and lay down on the grass. Her tunic stretched tightly over her firm breasts.
"Sergei," she said softly. "Come here." He moved closer.
"Look at the sky. See how blue it is. Your eyes are that colour. And that's bad. They ought to be grey, like steel. Blue is much too soft a colour."

And suddenly clasping his blond head, she kissed him passionately on the lips.

Two months passed. Autumn arrived.
Night crept up stealthily, enveloping the trees in its dark shroud. The telegraphist at Division Headquarters bent over his apparatus which was ticking out Morse and, gathering up the long narrow ribbon that wound itself snakily beneath his fingers, rapidly translated the dots and dashes into words and phrases:

"Chief of Staff First Division Copy to Chairman Revcom Shepetovka. Evacuate all official institutions in town within ten hours after receipt of this wire. Leave one battalion in town at disposal of commander of X. regiment in command sector of front. Division Headquarters, Political Department, all military institutions to be moved to Baranchev station. Report execution of order to Division Commander.
"(Signed)"

Ten minutes later a motorcycle was hurtling through the slumbering streets of the town, its headlight stabbing the darkness. It stopped, spluttering, outside the gates of the Revcom. The rider hurried inside and handed the telegram to the chairman Dolinnik. At once the place was seething with activity. The Special Duty Company lined up. An hour later carts loaded with Revcom property were rumbling through the town to the Podolsk Station where it was loaded into railway cars.
When he learned the contents of the telegram Sergei ran out after the
motorcyclist. "Can you give me a lift to the station, Comrade?" he asked the rider.
"Climb on behind, but mind you hold on fast."
A dozen paces from the agit coach which had already been attached to the train Sergei saw Rita. He seized her by the shoulders and, conscious that he was about to lose something that had become very dear to him, he whispered: "Good-bye, Rita, dear comrade! We'll meet again sometime. Don't forget me."
To his horror he felt the tears choking him. He must go at once. Not trusting himself to speak, he wrung her hand until it hurt.

Morning found the town and station desolate and deserted. The last train had blown its whistle as if in farewell and pulled out, and now the rearguard battalion which had been left behind took up positions on either side of the tracks.
Yellow leaves fluttered down from the trees leaving the branches bare. The wind caught the fallen leaves and sent them rustling along the paths.
Sergei in a Red Army greatcoat, with canvas cartridge belts slung over his shoulders, occupied the crossing opposite the sugar refinery with a dozen Red Army men. The Poles were approaching.

Avtonom Petrovich knocked at the door of his neighbour Gerasim Leontievich. The latter, not yet

dressed, poked his head out of the
door. "What's up?"
Avtonom Petrovich pointed to the Red Army men moving down the street, and winked: "They're clearing out."
Gerasim Leontievich looked at him with a worried air: "What sort of emblem do the Poles have, do you know?"
"A single-headed eagle, I believe."
"Where the devil can you find one?"
Avtonom Petrovich scratched his head in consternation.
"It's all right for them," he said after a moment or two of reflection. "They just get up and go. But you have to worry your head about getting in right with the new authorities."

The rattle of a machine gun tore into the silence. An engine whistle sounded from the station and a gun boomed from the same quarter. A heavy shell bored its way high into the air with a loud whine and fell on the road beyond the refinery, enveloping the roadside shrubs in a cloud of blue smoke. Silent and grim, the retreating Red Army troops marched through the street, turning frequently to look back as they went.
A tear rolled down Sergei's cheek. Quickly he wiped it away, glancing furtively at his comrades to make sure that no one had seen it. Beside Sergei marched Antek Klopotowski, a lanky sawmill worker. His finger rested on the trigger of his rifle. Antek was gloomy and preoccupied. His eyes met Sergei's, and he burst out:
"They'll come down hard on our folks, especially mine because we're Poles. You, a Pole, they'll say, opposing the Polish Legion. They're sure to kick my old man out of the sawmill and flog him. I told him to come with us, but he didn't have the heart to leave the family. Hell, I can't wait to get my hands on those accursed swine!" And Antek angrily pushed back the helmet that had slipped down over his eyes.
. . .Farewell, dear old town, unsightly and dirty though you are with your ugly little houses and your crooked roads. Farewell, dear ones, farewell. Farewell, Valya and the comrades who have remained to work in the underground. The Polish Whiteguard legions, brutal and merciless, are approaching.
Sadly the railway workers in their oil-stained shirts watched the Red Army
men go. "We'll be back, Comrades!" Sergei cried out with aching heart.

## Chapter Eight

The river gleams dully through the early morning haze; softly its waters gurgle against the smooth pebbles of the banks. In the shallows by the banks the river is calm, its silvery surface almost unruffled; but out in midstream it is dark and restless, hurrying swiftly onward. The majestic Dnieper, the river immortalised by Gogol. The tall right bank drops steeply down to the water, like a mountain halted in its advance by the broad sweep of the waters. The flat left bank below is covered with sandy spots left when the water receded after the spring floods.

Five men lay beside a snub-nosed Maxim gun in a tiny trench dug into the river bank. This was a forward outpost of the Seventh Rifle Division. Nearest the gun and facing the river lay Sergei Bruzzhak.

The day before, worn out by the endless battles and swept back by a hurricane of Polish artillery fire, they had given up Kiev, withdrawn to the left bank of the river, and dug in there.

The retreat, the heavy losses and finally the surrender of Kiev to the enemy had been a bitter blow to the men. The Seventh Division had heroically fought its way through enemy encirclement and, advancing through the forests, had emerged on the railway line at Malin Station, and with one furious blow had hurled back the Polish forces and cleared the road to Kiev.

But the lovely city had been given up and the Red Army men were downcast.

The Poles, having driven the Red units out of Darnitsa, now occupied a small bridgehead on the left bank of the river beside the railway bridge. But furious counterattacks had frustrated all their efforts to advance beyond that point.

As he watched the river flowing past, Sergei thought of what had happened the previous day. Yesterday, at noon, his unit had given battle to the Poles; yesterday he had had his first hand-to-hand engagement with the enemy. A young Polish legionary had come swooping down upon him, his rifle with its long, sabre-like French bayonet thrust forward; he bounded towards Sergei like a hare, shouting something unintelligible. For a fraction of a second Sergei saw his eyes dilated with frenzy. The next instant Sergei's bayonet clashed with the Pole's, and the shining French blade was thrust aside. The Pole fell. . . .

Sergei's hand did not falter. He knew that he would have to go on killing, he, Sergei, who was capable of such tender love, such steadfast friendship. He was not vicious or cruel by nature, but he knew that he must fight these misguided soldiers whom the world's parasites had whipped up into a frenzy of bestial hatred and sent against his native land. And he, Sergei, would kill in order to hasten the day when men would kill one another no longer.

Paramonov tapped him on the shoulder. "We'd better be moving on, Sergei, or they'll spot us."

For a year now Pavel Korchagin had travelled up and down his native land, riding on machine-gun carriages and gun caissons or astride a small grey mare with a nick in her ear. He was a grown man now, matured and hardened by suffering and privation. The tender skin chafed to the raw by the heavy cartridge belt had long since healed and a hard callus had formed under the rifle strap on his shoulder.

Pavel had seen much that was terrible in that year. Together with thousands of other fighting men as ragged and ill-clad as himself but afire with the indomitable determination to fight for the power of their class, he had marched over the length and breadth of his native land and only twice had the storm swept on without him: the first time when he was wounded in the hip, and the second, when in the bitterly cold February of 1920 he sweltered in the sticky heat of typhus.

The typhus took a more fearful toll of the regiments and divisions of the Twelfth Army than Polish machine guns. By that time the Twelfth Army was operating over a vast territory stretching across nearly the whole of the Northern Ukraine blocking the advance of the Poles.

Pavel had barely recovered from his illness when he returned to his unit which was now holding the station of Frontovka, on the Kazatin-Uman branch line. Frontovka stood in the forest and

consisted of a small station building with a few wrecked and abandoned cottages around it. Three years of intermittent battles had made civilian life in these parts impossible. Frontovka had changed hands times without number.

Big events were brewing again. At the time when the Twelfth Army, its ranks fearfully depleted and partly disorganised, was falling back to Kiev under the pressure of the Polish armies, the proletarian republic was mustering its forces to strike a crushing blow at the victory-drunk Polish Whites.

The battle-seasoned divisions of the First Cavalry Army were being transferred to the Ukraine all the way from the North Caucasus in a campaign unparalleled in military history. The Fourth, Sixth, Eleventh and Fourteenth Cavalry divisions moved up one after another to the Uman area, concentrating in the rear of the front and sweeping away the Makhno bandits on their way to the scene of decisive battles.

Sixteen and a half thousand sabres, sixteen and a half thousand fighting men scorched by the blazing steppe sun.

To prevent this decisive blow from being thwarted by the enemy was the primary concern of the Supreme Command of the Red Army and the Command of the Southwestern Front at this juncture. Everything was done to ensure the successful concentration of this huge mounted force. Active operations were suspended on the Uman sector. The direct telegraph lines from Moscow to the front headquarters in Kharkov and thence to the headquarters of the Fourteenth and Twelfth armies hummed incessantly. Telegraph operators tapped out coded orders: "Divert attention Poles from concentration cavalry army." The enemy was actively engaged only when the Polish advance threatened to involve the Budyonny cavalry divisions.

The campfire shot up red tongues of flame. Dark spirals of smoke curled up from the fire, driving off the swarms of restless buzzing midges. The men lay in a semicircle around the fire whose reflection cast a coppery glow on their faces. The water bubbled in messtins set in the bluish-grey ashes.

A stray tongue of flame leaped out suddenly from beneath a burning log and licked at someone's tousled head. The head was jerked away with a growl: "Damnation!" And a gust of laughter rose from the men grouped around the fire.

"The lad's so full of book-learning he don't feel the heat of the fire," boomed a middle-aged soldier with a clipped moustache, who had just been examining the barrel of his rifle against the firelight.

"You might tell the rest of us what you're reading there, Korchagin?" someone suggested.

The young Red Army man fingered his singed locks and smiled.

"A real good book, Comrade Androshchuk. Just can't tear myself away from it."

"What's it about?" inquired a snub-nosed lad sitting next to Korchagin, laboriously repairing the strap of his pouch. He bit off the coarse thread, wound the remainder round the needle and stuck it inside his helmet. "If it's about love I'm your man."

A loud guffaw greeted this remark. Matveichuk raised his close-cropped head and winked slyly at the snub-nosed lad: "Love's a fine thing, Sereda," he said. "And you're such a handsome lad, a regular picture. Wherever we go the girls fairly wear their shoes out running after you. Too bad a handsome phiz like yours should be spoiled by one little defect: you've got a five-kopek piece instead of a nose. But that's easily remedied. Just hang a Novitsky 10-pounder ( The Novitsky grenade weighing about four kilograms and used to demolish barbed-wire entanglements.) on the

end of it overnight and in the morning it'll be all right."

The roar of laughter that followed this sally caused the horses tethered to the machine-gun carriers to whinny in fright.

Sereda glanced nonchalantly over his shoulder. "It's not your face but what you've got in here that counts." He tapped himself on the forehead expressively. "Take you, you've got a tongue like a stinging nettle but you're no better than a donkey, and your ears are cold."

"Now then, lads, what's the sense in getting riled?" Tatarinov, the Section Commander, admonished the two who were about to fly at each other. "Better let Korchagin read to us if he's got something worth listening to."

"That's right. Go to it, Pavlushka!" the men urged from all sides.

Pavel moved a saddle closer to the fire, settled himself on it and opened the small thick volume resting on his knees.

"It's called The Gadfly, Comrades. The Battalion Commissar gave it to me. Wonderful book, Comrades. If you'll sit quietly I'll read it to you."

"Fire away! We're all listening."

When some time later Comrade Puzyrevsky, the Regimental Commander, rode up unnoticed to the campfire with his Commissar he saw eleven pairs of eyes glued to the reader. He turned to the Commissar:

"There you have half of the regiment's scouts," he said, pointing to the group of men. "Four of them are raw young Komsomols, but they're good soldiers all of them. The one who's reading is Korchagin, and that one there with eyes like a wolfcub is Zharky. They're friends, but they're always competing with each other on the quiet. Korchagin used to be my best scout. Now he has a very serious rival. What they're doing just now is political work, and very effective it is too. I hear these youngsters are called 'the young guard'. Most appropriate, in my opinion."

"Is that the political instructor reading?" the Commissar asked.

"No. Kramer is the political instructor." Puzyrevsky spurred his horse forward. "Greetings, Comrades!" he called.

All heads turned toward the commander as he sprang lightly from the saddle and went up to the group.

"Warming yourselves, friends?" he said with a broad smile and his strong face with the narrow, slightly Mongolian eyes lost its severity. The men greeted their commander warmly as they would a good comrade and friend. The Commissar did not dismount.

Pushing aside his pistol in its holster, Puzyrevsky sat down next to Korchagin.

"Shall we have a smoke?" he suggested. "I have some first-rate tobacco here."

He rolled a cigarette, lit it and turned to the Commissar: "You go ahead, Doronin. I'll stay here for a while. If I'm needed at headquarters you can let me know."

"Go on reading, I'll listen too," Puzyrevsky said to Korchagin when Doronin had gone.

Pavel read to the end, laid the book down on his knees and gazed pensively at the fire. For a few moments no one spoke. All brooded on the tragic fate of the Gadfly. Puzyrevsky puffed on his cigarette, waiting for the discussion to begin.

"A grim story that," said Sereda, breaking the silence. "I suppose there are people like that in the world. It's not many who could stand what he did. But when a man has an idea to fight for he can stand anything," Sereda was-visibly moved. The book had made a deep impression on him.

"If I could lay my hands on that priest who tried to shove a cross down his throat I'd finish the swine off on the spot!" Andryusha Fomichev, a shoemaker's apprentice from Belaya Tserkov, cried wrathfully.

"A man doesn't mind dying if he has something to die for," Androshchuk, pushing one of the messtins closer to the, fire with a stick, said in a tone of conviction. "That's what gives a man strength. You can die without regrets if you know you're in the right. That's how heroes are made. I knew a lad once, Poraika was his name. When the Whites cornered him in Odessa, he tackled a whole platoon singlehanded and before they could get at him with their bayonets he blew himself and the whole lot of them up with a grenade. And he wasn't anything much to look at. Not the kind of a fellow you read about in books, though he'd be well worth writing about. There's plenty of fine lads to be found among our kind."

He stirred the contents of the messtin with a spoon, tasted it with pursed-up lips and continued:

"There are some who die a dog's death, a mean, dishonourable death. I'll tell you something that happened during the fighting at Izyaslav. That's an old town on the Goryn River built back in the time of the princes. There was a Polish church there, built like a fortress. Well, we entered that town and advanced single file along the crooked alleys. A company of Letts were holding our right flank. When we get to the highway what do we see but three saddled horses tied to the fence of one of the houses. Aha, we think, here's where we bag some Poles! About ten of us rushed into the yard. In front of us ran the commander of that Lettish company, waving his Mauser.

"The front door was open and we ran in. But instead of Poles we found our own men in there. A mounted patrol it was. They'd got in ahead of us. It wasn't a pretty sight we laid eyes on there. They were abusing a woman, the wife of the Polish officer who lived there. When the Lett saw what was going on he shouted something in his own language. His men grabbed the three and dragged them outside. There were only two of us Russians, the rest were Letts. Their commander was a man by the name of Bredis. I don't understand their language but I could see he'd given orders to finish those fellows off. They're a tough lot those Letts, unflinching. They dragged those three out to the stables. I could see their goose was cooked. One of them, a great hulking fellow with a mug that just asked for a brick, was kicking and struggling for all he was worth. They couldn't put him up against the wall just because of a wench, he yelped. The others were begging for mercy too.

"I broke out into a cold sweat. I ran over to Bredis and said: 'Comrade Company Commander,' I said, 'let the tribunal try them. What do you want to dirty your hands with their blood for? The fighting isn't over in the town and here we are wasting time with this here scum.' He turned on me with eyes blazing like a tiger's. Believe me, I was sorry I spoke. He points his gun at me. I've been fighting for seven years but I admit I was properly scared that minute. I see he's ready to shoot first and ask questions afterwards. He yells at me in bad Russian so I could hardly understand what he was saying: 'Our banner is dyed with our blood,' he says. 'These men are a disgrace to the whole army. The penalty for banditry is death.'

"I couldn't stand it any more and I ran out of that yard into the street as fast as I could and behind me I heard them shooting. I knew those three were done for. By the time we got back to the others the town was already ours.

"That's what I mean by a dog's death, the way those fellows died. The patrol was one of those that'd joined us at Melitopol. They'd been with Makhno at one time. Riffraff, that's what they

were."

Androshchuk drew his messtin toward him and proceeded to untie his bread bag.

"Yes, you find scum like that on our side too sometimes. You can't account for everyone. On the face of it they're all for the revolution. And through them we all get a bad name. But that was a nasty business, I tell you. I shan't forget it so soon," he wound up, sipping his tea.

Night was well advanced by the time the camp was asleep. Sereda's whistling snores could be heard in the silence. Puzyrevsky slept with his head resting on the saddle. Kramer, the political instructor, sat scribbling in his notebook.

Returning the next day from a scouting detail, Pavel tethered his horse to a tree and called over Kramer, who had just finished drinking tea.

"Look, Kramer, what would you say if I switched over to the First Cavalry Army? There's going to be big doings there by the looks of it. They're not being massed in such numbers just for fun, are they? And we here won't be seeing much of it."

Kramer looked at him in surprise.

"Switch over? Do you think you can change units in the army the way you change seats in a cinema?"

"But what difference does it make where a man fights?" Pavel interposed. "I'm not deserting to the rear, am I?"

But Kramer was categorically opposed to the idea.

"What about discipline? You're not a bad youngster, Pavel, on the whole, but in some things you're a bit of an anarchist. You think you can do as you please? You forget, my lad, that the Party and the Komsomol are founded on iron discipline. The Party must come first. And each one of us must be where he is most needed and not where he wants to be. Puzyrevsky turned down your application for a transfer, didn't he? Well, there's your answer."

Kramer spoke with such agitation that he was seized with a fit of coughing. This tall, gaunt man was a printer by profession and the lead dust had lodged itself firmly in his lungs and often a hectic flush would appear on his waxen cheeks.

When he had calmed down, Pavel said in a low but firm voice:

"All that is quite correct but I'm going over to the Budyonny army just the same." The next evening Pavel was missing at the campfire.

In the neighbouring village a group of Budyonny cavalrymen had formed a wide circle on a hill outside the schoolhouse. One giant of a fellow, seated on the back of a machine-gun carrier, his cap pushed to the back of his head, was playing an accordion. The instrument wailed and blared under his inept fingers like a thing in torment, confusing the dashing cavalryman in unbelievably wide red riding breeches who was dancing a mad hopak in the centre of the ring.

Eager-eyed village lads and lasses clambered onto the gun carrier and fences to watch the antics of these troopers whose brigade had just entered their village.

"Go it, Toptalo! Kick up the earth! Ekh, that's the stuff, brother! Come on there, you with the accordion, make it hot!"

But the player's huge fingers that could bend an iron horseshoe with the utmost ease sprawled clumsily over the keys.

"Too bad Makhno got Afanasi Kulyabko," remarked one bronzed cavalryman regretfully. "That lad was a first-class hand at the accordion. He rode on the right flank of our squadron. Too bad he was killed. A good soldier, and the best accordion player we ever had!"
Pavel, who was standing in the circle, overheard this last remark. He pushed his way over to the machine-gun carrier and laid his hand on the accordion bellows. The music subsided.
"What d'you want?" the accordionist demanded with a scowl.
Toptalo stopped short and an angry murmur rose from the crowd: "What's the trouble there?" Pavel reached out for the instrument. "Let's have a try," he said.
The Budyonny cavalryman looked at the Red infantryman with some mistrust and reluctantly slipped the accordion strap off his shoulder.
With an accustomed gesture Pavel laid the instrument on his knee, spread the sinuous bellows out fanwise and let go with a rollicking melody that poured forth with all the lusty vigour of which the accordion is capable:

Ekh, little apple,
Whither away?
Get copped by the Cheka
And that's where you stay!

Toptalo caught up the familiar tune and swinging his arms like some great bird he swept into the ring, executing the most incredible twists and turns, and slapping himself smartly on the thighs, knees, head, forehead, the shoe soles, and finally on the mouth in time with the music. Faster and faster played the accordion in a mad intoxicating rhythm, and Toptalo, kicking his legs out wildly, spun around the circle like a top until he was quite out of breath.

On June 5, 1920, after a few brief but furious encounters Budyonny's First Cavalry Army broke through the Polish front between the Third and Fourth Polish armies, smashed a cavalry brigade under General Sawicki en route and swept on toward Ruzhiny.
The Polish command hastily formed a striking force and threw it into the breach. Five tanks were rushed from Pogrebishche Station to the scene of the fighting. But the Cavalry Army bypassed Zarudnitsy from where the Poles planned to strike and came out in the Polish rear.
General Kornicki's Cavalry Division was dispatched in pursuit of the First Cavalry Army with orders to strike at the rear of the force, which the Polish command believed to be headed for Kazatin, one of the most important strategic points in the Polish rear. This move, however, did not improve the position of the Poles. Although they succeeded in closing the breach and cutting off the Cavalry Army, the presence of a strong mounted force behind their lines which threatened to destroy their rear bases and swoop down on their army group at Kiev, was far from reassuring. As they advanced, the Red cavalry divisions destroyed small railway bridges and tore up railway track to hamper the Polish retreat. On learning from prisoners that the Poles had an army headquarters in Zhitomir (actually the headquarters of the whole front was located there), the commander of the First Cavalry Army decided to take Zhitomir and Berdichev, both important railway junctions and administrative centres. At dawn on June 7 the Fourth Cavalry Division was

already on its way at full speed to Zhitomir.

Korchagin now rode on the right flank of one of the squadrons in place of Kulyabko, the lamented accordionist. He had been enrolled in the squadron on the collective request of the men, who had refused to part with such an excellent accordion player.

Without checking their foam-flecked horses they fanned out at Zhitomir and bore down on the city with naked steel flashing in the sun.

The earth groaned under the pounding hoofs, the mounts breathed hoarsely, and the men rose in their stirrups.

Underfoot the ground sped past and ahead the large city with its gardens and parks hurried to meet the division. The mounted avalanche flashed by the gardens and poured into the centre of the city, and the air was rent by a fear-inspiring battle-cry as inexorable as death itself.

The Poles were so stunned that they offered little resistance. The local garrison was crushed.

Bending low over the neck of his mount, Pavel Korchagin sped along side by side with Toptalo astride his thin-shanked black. Pavel saw the dashing cavalryman cut down with an unerring blow a Polish legionary before the man had time to raise his rifle to his shoulder.

The iron-shod hoofs grated on the paving stones as they careered down the street. Then at an intersection they found themselves face to face with a machine gun planted in the very middle of the road and three men in blue uniforms and rectangular Polish caps bending over it. There was also a fourth, with coils of gold braid on his collar, who levelled a Mauser at the mounted men.

Neither Toptalo nor Pavel could check their horses and they galloped toward the machine gun, straight into the jaws of death. The officer fired at Korchagin, but missed. The bullet whanged past Pavel's cheek, and the next moment the Lieutenant had struck his head against the paving stones and was lying limp on his back, thrown off his feet by the horse's onrush.

That very moment the machine gun spat out in savage frenzy, and stung by a dozen bullets, Toptalo and his black crumpled to the ground.

Pavel's mount reared up on its hind legs, snorting with terror, and leapt with its rider over the prone bodies to the men at the machine gun. His sabre described a flashing arc in the air and sank into the blue rectangle of one of the army caps.

Again the sabre flashed upwards ready to descend upon a second head, but the frantic horse leapt aside.

Like a mountain torrent the squadron poured into the streets and scores of sabres flashed in the air.

The long narrow corridors of the prison echoed with cries.

The cells packed with gaunt, hollow-eyed men and women were in a turmoil. They could hear the battle raging in the town—could this mean liberation? Could it be that this force that had swept suddenly into the town had come to set them free?

The shooting reached the prison yard. Men came running down the corridors. And then the cherished, long-awaited words: "You are free, Comrades!"

Pavel ran to a locked door with a tiny window, from which stared dozens of pairs of eyes, and brought his rifle butt down fiercely against the lock again and again.

"Wait, let me crack it with a bomb," cried Mironov. He pushed Pavel aside and produced a hand grenade from a pocket.

Platoon commander Tsygarchenko tore the grenade from his hands.

"Stop, you fool, are you mad! They'll bring the keys in a jiffy. What we can't break down we'll open with keys."

The prison guards were already being led down the corridor, prodded along with revolvers, when the ragged and unwashed prisoners, wild with joy, poured out of their cells.

Throwing a cell door wide open, Pavel ran inside.

"Comrades, you're free! We're Budyonny's men—our division's taken the town!" A woman ran weeping to Pavel and throwing her arms around him broke into sobs.

The liberation of five thousand and seventy-one Bolsheviks and of two thousand Red Army political workers, whom the Polish Whites had driven into these stone dungeons to await shooting or the gallows, was more important to the division's fighting men than all the trophies they had captured, a greater reward than victory itself. For seven thousand revolutionaries the impenetrable gloom of night had been supplanted by the bright sun of a hot June day.

One of the prisoners, with skin as yellow as a lemon, rushed at Pavel in a transport of joy. It was Samuel Lekher, one of the compositors from the Shepetovka printshop.

Pavel's face turned grey as he listened to Samuel's account of the bloody tragedy enacted in his native town and the words seared his heart like drops of molten metal.

"They took us at night, all of us at once. Some scoundrel had betrayed us to the military gendarmes. And once they had us in their clutches they showed no mercy. They beat us terribly, Pavel. I suffered less than the others because after the first blows I lost consciousness. But the others were stronger than me.

"We had nothing to hide. The gendarmes knew everything better than we did. They knew every step we had taken, and no wonder, for there had been a traitor among us. I can't talk about those days, Pavel. You know many of those who were taken. Valya Bruzzhak, and Rosa Gritsman, a fine girl just turned seventeen—such trusting eyes she had, Pavel! Then there was Sasha Bunshaft, you know him, one of our typesetters, a merry lad, always drawing caricatures of the boss. They took him and two Gymnasium students, Novoselsky and Tuzhits—you remember them too most likely. The others too were local people or from the district centre. Altogether twenty-nine were arrested, six of them women. They were all brutally tortured. Valya and Rosa were raped the first day. Those swine outraged the poor things in every possible way, then dragged them back to the cell more dead than alive. Soon after that Rosa began to rave and a few days later she was completely out of her mind.

"They didn't believe that she was insane, they said she was shamming and beat her unmercifully every time they questioned her. She was a terrible sight when they finally shot her. Her face was black with bruises, her eyes were wild, she looked like an old woman.

"Valya Bruzzhak was splendid to the very end. They all died like real fighters. I don't know how they had the strength to endure it all. Ah, Pavel, how can I describe their death to you? It was too horrible.

"Valya had been doing the most dangerous kind of work: she was the one who had contact with the wireless operators at the Polish headquarters and with our people in the district centre, besides which they found two grenades and a pistol when they searched her place. The grenades had been

given to her by the provocateur. Everything had been framed so as to charge them with intending to blow up the headquarters.

"Ah, Pavel, it is painful for me to speak of those last days, but since you insist I shall tell you. The military court sentenced Valya and two others to be hanged, the rest to be shot. The Polish soldiers who had worked with us were tried two days earlier. Corporal Snegurko, a young wireless operator who had worked in Lodz as an electrician before the war, was charged with treason and with conducting Communist propaganda among the soldiers and sentenced to be shot. He did not appeal, and was shot twenty-four hours after the sentence.

"Valya was called in to give evidence at his trial. She told us afterwards that Snegurko pleaded guilty to the charge of conducting Communist propaganda but vigorously denied that he had betrayed his country. 'My fatherland,' he said, 'is the Polish Soviet Socialist Republic. Yes, I am a member of the Communist Party of Poland. I was drafted into the army against my will, and once there I did my best to open the eyes of other men like myself who had been driven off to the front. You may hang me for that, but not for being a traitor to my fatherland, for that I never was and never will be. Your fatherland is not my fatherland. Yours is the fatherland of the gentry, mine is the workers' and peasants' fatherland. And in my fatherland, which will come—of that I am deeply convinced—no one will ever call me a traitor.'

"After the trial we were all kept together. Just before the execution we were transferred to the jail. During the night they set up the gallows opposite the prison beside the hospital. For the shooting they chose a place near a big ditch over by the forest not far from the road. A common grave was dug for us.

"The sentence was posted up all over town so that everyone should know of it. The Poles decided to hold a public execution to frighten the population. From early morning they began driving the townsfolk to the place of execution. Some went out of curiosity, terrible though it was. Before long they had a big crowd collected outside the prison wall. From our cell we could hear the hum of voices. They had stationed machine guns on the street behind the crowd, and brought up mounted and foot gendarmes from all parts of the area. A whole battalion of them surrounded the streets and vegetable fields beyond. A pit had been dug beside the gallows for those who were to be hanged.

"We waited silently for the end, now and then exchanging a few words. We had talked everything over the night before and said our good-byes. Only Rosa kept whispering to herself over in one corner of the cell. Valya, after all the beatings and outrages she had endured, was too weak to move and lay still most of the time. Two local Communist girls, sisters they were, could not keep back the tears as they clung to one another in their last farewell. Stepanov, a young man from the country, a strapping lad who had knocked out two gendarmes when they came to arrest him, told them to stop. 'No tears, Comrades! You may weep here, but not out there. We don't want to give those bloody swine a chance to gloat. There won't be any mercy anyway. We've got to die, so we might as well die decently. We won't crawl on our knees. Remember, Comrades, we must meet death bravely.'

"Then they came for us. In the lead was Szwarkowski, the Intelligence Chief, a mad dog of a sadist if there ever was one. When he didn't do the raping himself he enjoyed watching his gendarmes do it. We were marched to the gallows across the road between two rows of gendarmes, 'canaries' we called them on account of their yellow shoulder-knots. They stood there

with their sabres bared.

"They hurried us through the prison yard with their rifle butts and made us form fours. Then they opened the gates and led us out into the street and stood us up facing the gallows so that we should see our comrades die as we waited for our turn to come. It was a tall gallows made of thick logs. Three nooses of heavy rope hung down from the crosspiece and under each noose was a platform with steps supported by a block of wood that could be kicked aside. A faint murmur rose from the sea of people which rocked and swayed. All eyes were fixed on us. We recognised some of our people in the crowd.

"On a porch some distance away stood a group of Polish gentry and officers with binoculars. They had come to see the Bolsheviks hanged.

"The snow was soft underfoot. The forest was white with it, and it lay thick on the trees like cotton fluff. The whirling snowflakes fell slowly, melting on our burning faces, and the steps of the gallows were carpeted with snow. We were scantily dressed but none of us felt the cold. Stepanov did not even notice that he was walking in his stockinged feet.

"Beside the gallows stood the military prosecutor and senior officers. At last Valya and the two other comrades who were to be hanged were led out of the jail. They walked all three arm-in-arm, Valya was in the middle supported by the other two for she had no strength to walk alone. But she did her best to hold herself erect, remembering Stepanov's words: 'We must meet death bravely, Comrades!' She wore a woollen jacket but no coat.

"Szwarkowski evidently didn't like the idea of them walking arm-in-arm for he pushed them from behind. Valya said something and one of the mounted gendarmes slashed her full force across the face with his whip. A woman in the crowd let out a frightful shriek and began struggling madly in an effort to break through the cordon and reach the prisoners, but she was seized and dragged away. It must have been Valya's mother. When they were close to the gallows Valya began to sing. Never have I heard a voice like that—only a person going to his death could sing with such feeling. She sang the Warszawianka, and the other two joined in. The mounted guards lashed out in a blind fury with their whips, but the three did not seem to feel the blows. They were knocked down and dragged to the gallows like sacks. The sentence was quickly read and the nooses were slipped over their heads. At that point we began to sing:

Arise, ye prisoners of starvation. . . .

"Guards rushed at us from all sides and I just had time to see the blocks knocked out from under the platforms with rifle butts and the three bodies jerking in the nooses. .. .

"The rest of us had already been put to the wall when it was announced that ten of us had had our sentences commuted to 20 years' imprisonment. The other sixteen were shot."

Samuel clutched convulsively at the collar of his shirt as if he were choking.

"For three days the bodies hung there in the nooses. The gallows were guarded day and night. After that a new batch of prisoners was brought to jail and they told us that on the fourth day the rope that held the corpse of Comrade Toboldin, the heaviest of the three, had given way. After that they removed the other two and buried them all.

"But the gallows was not taken down. It was still standing when we were brought to this place. It stood there with the nooses waiting for fresh victims."

Samuel fell silent staring with unseeing eyes before him, but Pavel was unaware that the story had ended. The three bodies with the heads twisted horribly to one side swayed silently before his

eyes.
The bugle sounding the assembly outside brought Pavel to himself with a start. "Let's go, Samuel," he said in a barely audible voice.
A column of Polish prisoners was being marched down the street lined with cavalry. At the prison gates stood the Regimental Commissar writing an order on his notepad.
"Comrade Antipov," he said, handing the slip of paper to a stalwart squadron commander, "take this, and have all the prisoners taken under cavalry escort to Novograd-Volynsky. See that the wounded are given medical attention. Then put them on carts, drive them about twenty versts from the town and let them go. We have no time to bother with them. But there must be no maltreatment of prisoners."
Mounting his horse, Pavel turned to Samuel. "Hear that?" he said. "They hang our people, but we have to escort them back to their own side and treat them nicely besides. How can we do it?"
The Regimental Commissar turned and looked sternly at the speaker. "Cruelty to unarmed prisoners," Pavel heard him say as if speaking to himself, "will be punished by death. We are not Whites!"
As he rode off, Pavel recalled the final words of the order of the Revolutionary Military Council which had been read out to the regiment:
"The land of the workers and peasants loves its Red Army. It is proud of it. And on that Army's banners there shall not be a single stain."
"Not a single stain," Pavel whispered.

At the time the Fourth Cavalry Division took Zhitomir, the 20th Brigade of the Seventh Rifle Division forming part of a shock corps under Comrade Golikov was crossing the Dnieper River in the area of Okuninovo village.
Another corps, which consisted of the 25th Rifle Division and a Bashkir Cavalry brigade, had orders to cross the Dnieper and straddle the Kiev-Korosten railway at Irsha Station. This manoeuvre would cut off the Poles' last avenue of retreat from Kiev.
It was during the crossing of the river that Misha Levchukov of the Shepetovka Komsomol organisation perished. They were running over the shaky pontoon bridge when a shell fired from somewhere beyond the steep bank opposite whined viciously overhead and plunged into the water, ripping it to shreds. The same instant Misha disappeared under one of the pontoons. The river swallowed him up and did not give him back. Yakimenko, a fair-haired soldier in a battered cap, cried out: "Mishka! Hell, that was Mishka! Went down like a stone, poor lad!" For a moment he stared horrified into the dark water, but the men running up from behind pushed him on: "What're you gaping there for, you fool. Get on with you!" There was no time to stop for anyone. The brigade had fallen behind the others who had already occupied the right bank of the river.
It was not until four days later that Sergei learned of Misha's death. By that time the brigade had captured Bucha Station, and turning in the direction of Kiev, was repulsing furious attacks by the Poles who were attempting to break through to Korosten.
Yakimenko threw himself down beside Sergei in the firing line. He had been firing steadily for some time and now he had difficulty forcing back the bolt of his overheated rifle. Keeping his head carefully lowered he turned to Sergei and said: "Got to give her a rest. She's red hot!"

Sergei barely heard him above the din of the shooting.

When the noise subsided somewhat, Yakimenko remarked as if casually: "Your comrade got drowned in the Dnieper. He was gone before I could do anything." That was all he said. He tried the bolt of his rifle, took out another clip and applied himself to the task of reloading.

The Eleventh Division sent to take Berdichev encountered fierce resistance from the Poles. A bloody battle was fought in the streets of the town. The Red Cavalry advanced through a squall of machine-gun fire. The town was captured and the remnants of the routed Polish forces fled. Trains were seized intact in the railway yards. But the most terrible disaster for the Poles was the exploding of an ammunition dump which served the whole front. A million shells went up in the air. The explosion shattered window panes into tiny fragments and caused the houses to tremble as if they were made of cardboard.

The capture of Zhitomir and Berdichev took the Poles in the rear and they came pouring out of Kiev in two streams, fighting desperately to make their way out of the steel ring encircling them. Swept along by the maelstrom of battle, Pavel lost all sense of self these days. His individuality merged with the mass and for him, as for every fighting man, the word "I" was forgotten; only the word "we" remained: our regiment, our squadron, our brigade.

Events developed with the speed of a hurricane. Each day brought something new. Budyonny's Cavalry Army swept forward like an avalanche, striking blow after blow until the entire Polish rear was smashed to pieces. Drunk with the excitement of their victories, the mounted divisions hurled themselves with passionate fury at Novograd-Volynsky, the heart of the Polish rear. As the ocean wave dashes itself against the rockbound shore, recedes and rushes on again, so they fell back only to press on again and again with awesome shouts of "Forward! Forward!"

Nothing could save the Poles—neither the barbed-wire entanglements, nor the desperate resistance put up by the garrison entrenched in the city. And on the morning of June 27 Budyonny's cavalry forded the Sluch River without dismounting, entered Novograd-Volynsky and drove the Poles out of the city in the direction of Korets. At the same time the Forty-Fifth Division crossed the Sluch at Novy Miropol, and the Kotovsky Cavalry Brigade swooped down upon the settlement of Lyubar.

The radio station of the First Cavalry Army received an order from the commander-in-chief of the front to concentrate the entire cavalry force for the capture of Rovno. The irresistible onslaught of the Red divisions sent the Poles scattering in demoralised panic-stricken groups.

It was in these hectic days that Pavel Korchagin had a most unexpected encounter. He had been sent by the Brigade Commander to the station where an armoured train was standing. Pavel took the steep railway embankment at a canter and reined in at the steel-grey head carriage. With the black muzzles of guns protruding from the turrets, the armoured train looked grim and formidable. Several men in oil-stained clothes were at work beside it raising the heavy steel armour plating that protected the wheels.

"Where can I find the commander of the train?" Pavel inquired of a leather-jacketed Red Army man carrying a pail of water.

"Over there," the man replied pointing to the engine.

Pavel rode up to the engine. "I want to see the commander!" he said. A man with a pockmarked face, clad in leather from head to foot, turned. "I'm the commander."
Pavel pulled an envelope from his pocket.
"Here is an order from the Brigade Commander. Sign on the envelope."
The commander rested the envelope on his knee and scribbled his signature on it. Down on the tracks a man with an oil can was working on the middle wheel of the engine. Pavel could only see his broad back and the pistol-butt sticking out of the pocket of his leather trousers.
The commander handed the envelope back to Pavel who picked up the reins and was about to set off when the man with the oil can straightened up and turned round. The next moment Pavel had leapt off his horse as though swept down by a violent gust of wind.
"Artem!"
The man dropped his oil can and caught the young Red Army man in a bear's embrace. "Pavka! You rascal! It's you!" he cried unable to believe his eyes.
The commander of the armoured train looked puzzled, and several gunners standing by smiled broadly at the joy of the two brothers in this chance meeting.

It happened on August 19 during a battle in the Lvov area. Pavel had lost his cap in the fighting and had reined in his horse. The squadrons ahead had already cut into the Polish positions. At that moment Demidov came galloping through the bushes on his way down to the river. As he flew past Pavel he shouted:
"The Division Commander's been killed!"
Pavel started. Letunov, his heroic commander, that man of sterling courage, dead! A savage fury seized Pavel.
With the blunt edge of his sabre he urged on his exhausted Gnedko, whose bit dripped with a bloody foam, and tore into the thick of the battle.
"Kill the vermin, kill 'em! Cut down the Polish szlachtal They've killed Letunov!" And blindly he slashed at a figure in a green uniform. Enraged at the death of their Division Commander, the cavalrymen wiped out a whole platoon of Polish legionaries.
They galloped headlong over the battlefield in pursuit of the enemy, but now a Polish battery went into action. Shrapnel rent the air spattering death on all sides.
Suddenly there was a blinding green flash before Pavel's eyes, thunder smote his ears and red-hot iron seared into his skull. The earth spun strangely and horribly about him and began to turn slowly upside down.
Pavel was thrown from the saddle like a straw. He flew right over Gnedko's head and fell heavily to the ground.
Instantly black night descended.

## Chapter Nine

The octopus has a bulging eye the size of a cat's head, a glazed reddish eye green in the centre with a pulsating phosphorescent glow. The octopus is a loathsome mass of tentacles, which writhe

and squirm like a tangled knot of snakes, the scaly skin rustling hideously as they move. The octopus stirs. He sees it next to his very eyes. And now the tentacles creep over his body; they are cold and they sting like nettles. The octopus shoots out its sting, and it bites into his head like a leech, and, wriggling convulsively, it sucks at his blood. He feels the blood draining out of his body into the swelling body of the octopus. And the sting goes on sucking and the pain of its sucking is unbearable.

Somewhere far far away he can hear human

voices: "How is his pulse now?"

And another voice, a woman's, replies softly:

"His pulse is a hundred and thirty-eight. His temperature 103.1. He is delirious all the time."

The octopus disappears, but the pain lingers. Pavel feels someone touch his wrist. He tries to open his eyes, but his lids are so heavy he has no strength to lift them. Why is it so hot? Mother must have heated the stove. And again he hears those voices:

"His pulse is one hundred and twenty-two now." He tries to open his eyelids. But a fire burns within him. He is suffocating.

He is terribly thirsty, he must get up at once and get a drink. But why does he not get up? He tries to move but his limbs refuse to obey him, his body is a stranger to him. Mother will bring him some water at once. He will say to her: "I want to drink." Something stirs beside him. Is it the octopus about to crawl over him again? There it comes, he sees its red eyes. . . . From afar comes that soft voice: "Frosya, bring some water!"

"Whose name is that?" But the effort to remember is too much for him and darkness engulfs him once more. Emerging presently from the gloom he recalls: "I am thirsty."

And hears voices saying: "He seems to be regaining consciousness." Closer and more distinct now, that gentle voice: "Do you want to drink, Comrade?"

"Can it be me they are addressing? Am I ill? Oh yes, I've got the typhus, that's it." And for the third time he tries to lift his eyelids. And at last he succeeds. The first thing that reaches his consciousness through the narrowed vision of his slightly opened eyes is a red ball hanging above his head. But the red ball is blotted out by something dark which bends towards him, and his lips feel the hard edge of a glass and moisture, life-giving moisture. The fire within him subsides. Satisfied, he whispers: "That's better."

"Can you see me, Comrade?"

The dark shape standing over him has spoken, and just before drowsiness overpowers him he manages to say: "I can't see, but I can hear. . . ."

"Now, who would have believed he would pull through? Yet see how he has clambered back to life! A remarkably strong constitution. You may be proud of yourself, Nina Vladimirovna. You have literally saved his life." And the woman's voice, trembling slightly, answers: "I am so glad!"

After thirteen days of oblivion, consciousness returned to Pavel Korchagin. His young body had not wanted to die, and slowly he recovered his strength. It was like being born again. Everything seemed new and miraculous. Only his head lay motionless and unbearably heavy in its plaster cast, and he had not the strength to move it. But feeling returned to the rest of his body and soon he was able to bend his fingers.

Nina Vladimirovna, junior doctor of the military clinical hospital, sat at a small table in her room turning the leaves of a thick lilac-covered notebook filled with brief entries made in a neat slanting handwriting.

August 26, 1920

Some serious cases were brought in today by ambulance train. One of them has a very ugly head wound. We put him in the corner by the window. He is only seventeen. They gave me an envelope with the papers found in his pockets and the case history. His name is Korchagin, Pavel Andreyevich. Among his papers were a well-worn membership card (No. 967) of the Young Communist League of the Ukraine, a torn Red Army identification book and a copy of a regimental order stating that Red Army man Korchagin was coinmended for exemplary fulfilment of a reconnaissance rnission. There was also a note, evidently written by himself, which said: "In the event of my death please write to my relatives: Shepetov-ka, Railway Junction, Mechanic Artem Korchagin." He has been unconscious ever since he was hit by a shell fragment on August 19. Tomorrow Anatoli Stepanovich will examine him.

August 27

Today we examined Korchagin's wound. It is very deep, the skull is fractured and the entire right side of the head is paralysed. A blood vessel burst in the right eye which is badly swollen.

Anatoli Stepanovich wanted to remove the eye to prevent inflammation, but I dissuaded him, since there is still hope that the swelling might go down. In doing this I was prompted solely by aesthetic considerations. The lad may recover; it would be a pity if he were disfigured.

He is delirious all the time and terribly restless. One of us is constantly on duty at his bedside. I spend much of my time with him. He is too young to die and I am determined to tear his young life out of Death's clutches. I must succeed.

Yesterday I spent several hours in his ward after my shift was over. His is the worst case there. I sat listening to his ravings. Sometimes they sound like a story, and I learn quite a lot about his life. But at times he curses horribly. He uses frightful language. Somehow it hurts me to hear such awful cursing from him. Anatoli Stepanovich does not believe that he will recover. "I can't understand what the army wants with such children," the old man growls. "It's a disgrace."

August 30

Korchagin is still unconscious. He has been removed to the ward for hopeless cases. The nurse Frosya is almost constantly at his side. It appears she knows him. They worked together once. How gentle she is with him! Now I too am beginning to fear that his condition is hopeless.

September 2, 11 p.m.

This has been a wonderful day for me. My patient Korchagin regained consciousness. The crisis is over. I spent the past two days at the hospital without going home.
I cannot describe my joy at the knowledge that one more life has been saved. One death less in our ward. The recovery of a patient is the most wonderful thing about this exhausting work of mine. They become like children. Their affection is simple and sincere, and I too grow fond of them so that when they leave I often weep. I know it is foolish of me, but I cannot help it.

September 10

Today I wrote Korchagin's first letter to his family. He writes his wound is not serious and he'll soon recover and come home. He has lost a great deal of blood and is as pale as a ghost, and still very weak.

September 14

Korchagin smiled today for the first time. He has a very nice smile. Usually he is grave beyond his years. He is making a remarkably rapid recovery. He and Frosya are great friends. I often see her at his bedside. She must have been talking to him about me, and evidently singing my praises, for now the patient greets me with a faint smile. Yesterday he asked:
"What are those black marks on your arms, doctor?" I did not tell him that those bruises had been made by his fingers clutching my arm convulsively when he was delirious.

September 17

The wound on Korchagin's forehead is healing nicely. We doctors are amazed at the remarkable fortitude with which this young man endures the painful business of dressing his wound.
Usually in such cases the patient groans a great deal and is generally troublesome. But this one lies quietly and when the open wound is daubed with iodine he draws himself taut like a violin string. Often he loses consciousness, but not once have we heard a groan escape him.
We know now that when Korchagin groans he is unconscious. Where does he get that tremendous endurance, I wonder?

September 21

We wheeled Korchagin out onto the big balcony today for the first time. How his face lit up when he saw the garden, how greedily he breathed in the fresh air! His head is swathed in bandages and only one eye is open. And that live, shining eye looked out on the world as if seeing it for the first time.

September 26

Today two young women came to the hospital asking to see Korchagin. I went downstairs to the waiting room to speak to them. One of them was very beautiful. They introduced themselves as Tonya Tumanova and Tatiana Buranovskaya. I had heard of Tonya, Korchagin had mentioned the name when he was delirious. I gave them permission to see him.

October 8

Korchagin now walks unaided in the garden. He keeps asking me when he can leave hospital. I tell him—soon. The two girls come to see him every visiting day. I know now why he never groans. I asked him, and he replied: "Read The Gadfly and you'll know."

October 14

Korchagin has been discharged. He took leave of me very warmly. The bandage has been removed from his eye and now only his head is bound. The eye is blind, but looks quite normal. It was very sad to part with this fine young comrade. But that's how it is: once they've recovered they leave us and rarely do we ever see them again.
As he left he said: "Pity it wasn't the left eye. How will I be able to shoot
now?" He still thinks of the front.

After his discharge from hospital Pavel lived for a time at the Buranovskys where Tonya was staying.
Pavel sought at once to draw Tonya into Komsomol activities. He began by inviting her to attend a meeting of the town's Komsomol. Tonya agreed to go, but when she emerged from her room where she had been dressing for the meeting Pavel bit his lip. She was very smartly attired, with a studied elegance which Pavel felt would be entirely out of place at a Komsomol gathering.
This was the cause of their first quarrel. When he asked her why she had dressed up like that she took offence.
"I don't see why I must look like everyone else. But if my clothes don't suit you, I can stay at home."
At the club Tonya's fine clothes were so conspicuous among all the faded tunics and shabby blouses that Pavel was deeply embarrassed. The young people treated her as an outsider, and Tonya, conscious of their disapproval, assumed a contemptuous, defiant air.
Pankratov, the secretary of the Komsomol organisation at the shipping wharves, a broad-shouldered docker in a coarse linen shirt, called Pavel aside, and indicating Tonya with his eyes, said with a scowl:

"Was it you who brought that doll here?" "Yes," Pavel replied curtly.

"Mm," observed Pankratov. "She doesn't belong here by the looks of her. Too bourgeois by half. How did she get in?"

Pavel's temples pounded.

"She is a friend of mine. I brought her here. Understand? She isn't hostile to us at all, even if she does think too much about clothes. You can't always judge people by the way they dress. I know as well as you do whom to bring here so you needn't be so officious, Comrade."

He wanted to say something sharp and insulting but realising that Pankratov was voicing the general opinion he checked himself, and that only increased his anger at Tonya.

"I told her what to expect! Why the devil must she put on such airs?"

That evening marked the beginning of the end of their friendship. With bitterness and dismay Pavel watched the break-up of a relationship that had seemed so enduring.

Several more days passed, and with every meeting, every conversation they drifted further and further apart. Tonya's cheap individualism became unbearable to Pavel.

Both realised that a break was inevitable.

Today they had met in the Kupechesky Gardens for the last time. The paths were strewn with decaying leaves. They stood by the balustrade at the top of the cliff and looked down at the grey waters of the Dnieper. From behind the towering hulk of the bridge a tug came crawling wearily down the river with two heavy barges in tow. The setting sun painted the Trukhanov Island with daubs of gold and set the windows of the houses on fire.

Tonya looked at the golden shafts of sunlight and said with deep sadness: "Is our friendship going to fade like that dying sun?"

Pavel, who had been gazing at her face, knitted his brows sternly and answered in a low voice: "Tonya, we have gone over this before. You know, of course, that I loved you, and even now my love might return, but for that you must be with us. I am not the Pavlusha I was before. And I would be a poor husband to you if you expect me to put you before the Party. For I shall always put the Party first, and you and my other loved ones second."

Tonya stared miserably down at the dark-blue water and her eyes filled with tears.

Pavel gazed at the profile he had come to know so well, her thick chestnut hair, and a wave of pity for this girl who had once been so dear to him swept over him.

Gently he laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Tonya, cut yourself loose and come to us. Let's work together to finish with the bosses. There are many splendid girls among us who are sharing the burden of this bitter struggle, enduring all the hardships and privation. They may not be so well educated as you are, but why, oh why, don't you want to join us? You say Chuzhanin tried to seduce you, but he is a degenerate, not a fighter. You say the comrades were unfriendly toward you. Then why did you have to dress up as if you were going to a bourgeois ball? It's your silly pride that's to blame: why should I wear a dirty old army tunic just because everybody else does? You had the courage to love a workingman, but you cannot love an idea. I am sorry to have to part with you, and I should like to cherish your memory."

He said no more.

The next day he saw an order posted up in the street signed by Zhukhrai, chairman of the regional

Cheka. His heart leapt. It was with great difficulty that he gained admission to the sailor's office. The sentries would not let him in and he raised such a fuss that he was very nearly arrested, but in the end he had his way.

Fyodor gave him a very warm welcome. The sailor had lost an arm; it had been torn off by a shell. The conversation turned at once to work. "You can help me crush the counter-revolution here until you're fit for the front again. Start tomorrow," said Zhukhrai.

The struggle with the Polish Whites came to an end. The Red armies pursued the enemy almost to the very walls of Warsaw, but with their material and physical strength expended and their supply bases left far behind, they were unable to take this final stronghold and so fell back. Thus the "miracle on the Vistula", as the Poles called the withdrawal of the Red forces from Warsaw, came to pass, and the Poland of the gentry received a new lease of life. The dream of the Polish Soviet Socialist Republic was not yet to be fulfilled.

The blood-drenched land demanded a respite.

Pavel was unable to see his people, for Shepetovka was again in Polish hands and had become a temporary frontier outpost. Peace talks were in progress.

Pavel spent days and nights in the Cheka carrying out diverse assignments. He was much upset when he learned that his hometown was occupied by the Poles.

"Does that mean my mother will be on the other side of the border if the armistice is signed now?" he asked Zhukhrai.

But Fyodor calmed his fears.

"Most likely the frontier will pass through Goryn along the river, which means that your town will be on our side," he said. "In any case we'll know soon enough."

Divisions were being transferred from the Polish front to the South. For while the republic had been straining every effort on the Polish front, Wrangel had taken advantage of the respite to crawl out of his Crimean lair and advance northward along the Dnieper with Yekaterinoslav Gubernia as his immediate objective.

Now that the war with the Poles was over, the republic rushed its armies to the Crimea to wipe out the last hotbed of counter-revolution.

Trainloads of troops, carts, field kitchens and guns passed through Kiev en route to the South. The Cheka of the regional transport services worked at fever pitch these days coping with the bottlenecks caused by the huge flood of traffic. Stations were jammed with trains and frequently traffic would be held up for lack of free tracks. Telegraph operators tapped out countless messages ordering the line cleared for this or that division. The tickers spilled out endless ribbons of tape covered with dots and dashes and each of them demanding priority: "Precedence above all else . ..

this is a military order . . . clear line immediately. . . ." And nearly every message included a reminder that failure to carry out the order would entail prosecution by a revolutionary military tribunal.

The local transport Cheka was responsible for keeping traffic moving without interruption.

Commanders of army units would burst into its headquarters brandishing revolvers and demanding that their trains be dispatched at once in accordance with telegram number so-and-so signed by the commander of the army. And none of them would accept the explanation that this

was impossible. "You'll get that train off if you croak doing it!" And a string of frightful curses would follow. In particularly serious cases Zhukhrai would be urgently sent for, and then the excited men who were ready to shoot each other on the spot would calm down at once. At the sight of this man of iron with his quiet icy voice that brooked no argument revolvers were thrust back into their holsters.

At times Pavel would stagger out of his office onto the platform with a stabbing pain in his head. Work in the Cheka was having a devastating effect on his nerves.

One day he caught sight of Sergei Bruzzhak on a truck loaded with ammunition crates. Sergei jumped down, nearly knocking Pavel off his feet, and flung his arms round his friend.

"Pavka, you devil! I knew it was you the minute I laid eyes on you."

The two young men had so much news to exchange that they did not know where to begin. So much had happened to both of them since they had last met. They plied each other with questions, and talked on without waiting for answers. They did not hear the engine whistle and it was only when the train began to move out of the station that they became aware of their surroundings.

They still had much to say to each other, but the train was already gathering speed and Sergei, shouting something to his friend, raced along the platform and caught on to the open door of one of the box cars. Several hands snatched him up and drew him inside. As Pavel stood watching him go he suddenly remembered that Sergei knew nothing about Valya's death. For he had not visited Shepetovka since he left it, and in the unexpectedness of this encounter Pavel had forgotten to tell him.

"It's a good thing he does not know, his mind will be at ease," thought Pavel. He did not know that he was never to see his friend again. Nor did Sergei, standing on the roof of the box car, his chest exposed to the autumn wind, know that he was going to his death.

"Get down from there, Seryozha," urged Doroshenko, a Red Army man wearing a coat with a hole burnt in the back.

"That's all right," said Sergei laughing. "The wind and I are good friends."

A week later he was struck by a stray bullet in his first engagement. He staggered forward, his chest rent by a tearing pain, clutched at the air, and pressing his arms tightly against his chest, he swayed and dropped heavily to the ground and his sightless blue eyes stared out over the boundless Ukrainian steppe.

His nerve-wracking work in the Cheka began to tell on Pavel's weakened condition. His violent headaches became more frequent, but it was not until he fainted one day after two sleepless nights that he finally decided to take the matter up with Zhukhrai.

"Don't you think I ought to try some other sort of work, Fyodor? I would like best of all to work at my own trade at the railway shops. I'm afraid there's something wrong with my head. They told me in the medical commission that I was unfit for army service. But this sort of work is worse than the front. The two days we spent rounding up Sutyr's band have knocked me out completely. I must have a rest from all this shooting. You see, Fyodor, I shan't be much good to you if I can barely stand on my feet."

Zhukhrai studied Pavel's face with concern.

"Yes, you don't look so good. It's all my fault. I ought to have let you go long before this. But I've been too busy to notice."

Shortly after the above conversation Pavel presented himself at the Regional Committee of the Komsomol with a paper certifying that he was being placed at the Committee's disposal. An officious youngster with his cap perched jauntily over his nose ran his eyes rapidly over the paper and winked to Pavel:

"From the Cheka, eh? A jolly organisation that. We'll find work for you here in a jiffy. We need everybody we can get. Where would you like to go? Commissary department? No? All right. What about the agitation section down at the waterfront? No? Too bad. Nice soft job that, special rations too."

Pavel interrupted him.

"I would prefer the railway repair shops," he said. The lad gaped. "Mm. . . . I don't think we need anybody there. But go to Ustinovich. She'll fit you in somewhere."

After a brief interview with the dark-eyed girl it was decided to assign Pavel as secretary of the Komsomol organisation in the railway shops where he was to work.

Meanwhile the Whites had been fortifying the gates of the Crimea, and now on this narrow neck of land that once had been the frontier between the Crimean Tatars and the Zaporozhye Cossack settlements stood the modernised fortified line of Perekop.

And behind Perekop in the Crimea, the old, doomed world which had been driven here from all corners of the land, feeling quite secure, lived in wine-fuddled revelry.

One chill dank autumn night tens of thousands of sons of the toiling people plunged into the icy waters of the Sivash to cross the bay under the cover of darkness and strike from behind at the enemy entrenched in their forts. Among the thousands waded Ivan Zharky, carrying his machine gun on his head to prevent it from getting wet.

And when dawn found Perekop seething in a wild turmoil, its fortifications attacked in a frontal assault, the first columns of men that had crossed the Sivash climbed ashore on Litovsky Peninsula to take the Whites from the rear. And among the first to clamber onto that rock coast was Ivan Zharky.

A battle of unprecedented ferocity ensued. The White cavalry bore down savagely on the Red Army men as they emerged from the water. Zharky's machine gun spewed death, never ceasing its lethal tattoo. Men and horses fell in heaps under the leaden spray. Zharky fed new magazines into the gun with feverish speed.

Perekop thundered back through the throats of hundreds of guns. The very earth seemed to have dropped into a bottomless abyss, and death carried by thousands of shells pierced the heavens with ear-splitting screams and exploded, scattering myriads of minute fragments far and wide. The torn and lacerated earth spouted up in black clouds that blotted out the sun.

The monster's head was crushed, and into the Crimea swept the Red flood of the First Cavalry Army to deliver the final, smashing blow. Frantic with terror, the White-guards rushed in a panic to board the ships leaving the ports.

And the Republic pinned the golden badge of the Order of the Red Banner to many a faded Red Army tunic, and one of these tunics was Ivan Zharky's, the Komsomol machine gunner.

Peace was signed with the Poles and, as Zhukhrai had predicted, Shepetovka remained in Soviet Ukraine. A river thirty-five kilometres outside the town now marked the frontier.
One memorable morning in December 1920 Pavel arrived in his native town. He stepped onto the snowy platform, glanced up at the sign Shepetovka I, then turned left, and went straight to the railway yards and asked for Artem. But his brother was not there. Drawing his army coat tighter about him, Pavel strode off through the woods to the town.
Maria Yakovlevna turned when the knock came at the door and said, "Come in." A snow-covered figure pushed into the house and she saw the dear face of her son. Her hand flew to her heart, joy robbed her of speech.
She fell on her son's breast and smothered his face with kisses, and tears of happiness streamed down her cheeks. And Pavel, pressing the spare little body close, gazed silently down at the careworn face of his mother furrowed with deep lines of pain and anxiety, and waited for her to grow calmer.
Once again the light of happiness shone in the eyes of this woman who had suffered so much. It seemed she would never have her fill of gazing at this son whom she had lost all hope of ever seeing again. Her joy knew no bounds when three days later Artem too burst into the tiny room late at night with his kit-bag over his shoulders.
Now the Korchagin family was reunited. Both brothers had escaped death, and after harrowing ordeals and trials they had met again.
"What are you going to do now?" the mother asked her sons.
"It's back to the repair shops for me, Mother!" replied Artem gaily.
As for Pavel, after two weeks at home he went back to Kiev where his work was awaiting him.

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# PART TWO

## Chapter One

Midnight. The last tramcar has long since dragged its battered carcass back to the depot. The moon lays its cold light on the windowsill and spreads a luminous coverlet on the bed, leaving the rest of the room in semi-darkness. At the table in the corner under a circle of light shed by the desk lamp sits Rita bent over a thick notebook, her diary. The sharp point of her pencil traces the words:

May 24

"I am making another attempt to jot down my impressions. Again there is a big gap. Six weeks have passed since I made the last entry. But it cannot be helped.

"How can I find time for my diary? It is past midnight now, and here I am still writing. Sleep eludes me. Comrade Segal is leaving us: he is going to work in the Central Committee. We were all very much upset by the news. He is a wonderful person, our Lazar Alexandrovich. I did not realise until now how much his friendship has meant to us all. The dialectical materialism class is bound to go to pieces when he leaves. Yesterday we stayed at his place until the wee hours verifying the progress made by our 'pupils'. Akim, the Secretary of the Komsomol Gubernia Committee, came and that horrid Tufta as well. I can't stand that Mr. Know-All! Segal was delighted when his pupil Korchagin brilliantly defeated Tufta in an argument on Party history. Yes, these two months have not been wasted. You don't begrudge your efforts when you see such splendid results. It is rumoured that Zhukhrai is being transferred to the Special Department of the Military Region. I wonder why.

"Lazar Alexandrovich turned his pupil over to me. 'You will have to complete what I have begun,' he said. 'Don't stop halfway. You and he, Rita, can learn a great deal from each other. The lad is still rather disorganised. His is a turbulent nature and he is apt to be carried away by his emotions. I feel that you will be a most suitable guide for him, Rita. I wish you success. Don't forget to write me in Moscow.'

"Today a new secretary for the Solomensky District Committee was sent down from the Central Committee. His name is Zharky. I knew him in the army.

"Tomorrow Dmitri Dubava will bring Korchagin. Let me try to describe Dubava. Medium height, strong, muscular. Joined the Komsomol in 1918, and has been a Party member since 1920. He was one of the three who were expelled from the Komsomol Gubernia Committee for having belonged to the 'Workers' Opposition'. Instructing him has not been easy. Every day he upset the programme by asking innumerable questions and making us digress from the subject. He and Olga Yureneva, my other pupil, did not get along at all. At their very first meeting he looked her up and down and remarked: 'Your get-up is all wrong, old girl. You ought to have trousers with leather seats, spurs, a Budyonny hat and a sabre. This way you're neither fish nor fowl.'

"Olga wouldn't stand for that, of course, and I had to interfere. I believe Dubava is a friend of Korchagin's. Well enough for tonight. It's time for bed."

The earth wilted under the scorching sun. The iron railing of the footbridge over the railway platforms was burning to the touch. People, limp and exhausted from the heat, climbed the bridge wearily; most of them were not travellers, but residents of the railway district who used the bridge to get to the town proper.

As he came down the steps Pavel caught sight of Rita. She had reached the station before him and was watching the people coming off the bridge.

Pavel paused some three paces away from her. She did not notice him, and he studied her with new-found interest. She was wearing a striped blouse and a short dark-blue skirt of some cheap material. A soft leather jacket was slung over her shoulder. Her sun-tanned face was framed in a shock of unruly hair and as she stood there with her head thrown slightly back and her eyes narrowed against the sun's glare, it struck Korchagin for the first time that Rita, his friend and

teacher, was not only a member of the bureau of the Komsomol Gubernia Committee, but....

Annoyed with himself for entertaining such "sinful" thoughts, he called to her.

"I've been staring at you for a whole hour, but you didn't notice me," he laughed. "Come along, our train is already in."

They went over to the service door leading to the platform.

The previous day the Gubernia Committee had appointed Rita as its representative at a district conference of the Komsomol, and Korchagin was to go as her assistant. Their immediate problem was to board the train, which was by no means a simple task. The railway station on those rare occasions when the trains ran was taken over by an all-powerful Committee of Five in charge of boarding and without a permit from this body no one was allowed on the platform. All exits and approaches to the platform were guarded by the Committee's men. The overcrowded train could take on only a fraction of the crowd anxious to leave, but no one wanted to be left behind to spend days waiting for a chance train to come through. And so thousands stormed the platform doors in an effort to break through to the unattainable carriages. In those days the station was literally besieged and sometimes pitched battles were fought.

After vainly attempting to push through the crowd collected at the platform entrance, Pavel, who knew all the ins and outs at the station, led Rita through the luggage room. With difficulty they made their way to coach No. 4. At the carriage door a Cheka man, sweating profusely in the heat, was trying to hold back the crowd, and repeated over and over again:

"The carriage's full, and it's against the rules to ride on the buffers or the roof."

Irate people bore down on him, waving tickets issued by the Committee under his nose. There were angry curses, shouts and violent jostling at every carriage. Pavel saw that it would be impossible to board the train in the conventional manner. Yet board it they must, otherwise the conference would have to be called off.

Taking Rita aside, he outlined his plan of action: he would push his way inside, open a window and help her to climb in. There was no other way.

"Let me have that jacket of yours. It's better than any credential."

He slipped on the jacket and stuck his revolver into the pocket so that the grip and cord showed. Leaving the bag with Rita, he went over to the carriage, elbowed through the knot of excited passengers at the entrance and gripped the handrail.

"Hey, Comrade, where you going?"

Pavel glanced nonchalantly over his shoulder at the stocky Cheka man.

"I'm from the Special Department. I want to see whether all the passengers in this carriage have tickets issued by the Committee," he said in a tone that left no doubt as to his authority.

The Cheka man glanced at Pavel's pocket, wiped his perspiring brow with his sleeve and said wearily:

"Go ahead if you can shove yourself in."

Working with his hands, shoulders, and here and there with his fists, holding on to the ledges of the upper berths to climb over the passengers who had planted themselves on their belongings in the middle of the passage, Pavel made his way through to the centre of the carriage, ignoring the torrent of abuse that rained down on him from all sides.

"Can't you look where you're going, curse you!" screamed a stout woman when Pavel accidentally brushed her knee with his foot, as he lowered himself to the floor. She had contrived to wedge her

18-stone bulk onto the edge of a seat and had a large vegetable oil can between her knees. All the shelves were stuffed with similar cans, hampers, sacks and baskets. The air in the carriage was suffocating.

Paying no heed to the abuse, Pavel demanded: "Your ticket, please!"

"My what!" the woman snapped back at the unwelcome ticket-collector.

A head appeared from the uppermost berth and an ugly voice boomed out: "Vaska, what's this 'ere mug want. Give 'im a ticket to kingdom come, will ya?"

The huge frame and hairy chest of what was obviously Vaska swung into view right above Pavel's head and a pair of bloodshot eyes fixed him with a bovine stare.

"Leave the lady alone, can't ya? What d'ye want tickets for?"

Four pairs of legs dangled from an upper side berth; their owners sat with their arms around one another's shoulders noisily cracking sunflower seeds. One glance at their faces told Pavel who they were: a gang of food sharks, hardened crooks who travelled up and down the country buying up food and selling it at speculative prices. Pavel had no time to waste with them. He had to get Rita inside somehow.

"Whose box is this?" he inquired of an elderly man in railway uniform, indicating a wooden chest standing under the window.

"Hers," replied the other, pointing to a pair of thick legs in brown stockings.

The window had to be opened and the box was in the way. Since there was nowhere to move it Pavel picked it up and handed it to its owner who was seated on an upper berth.

"Hold it a moment, please, I'm going to open the window."

"Keep your hands off my things!" screamed the flat-nosed wench when he placed the box on her knees.

"Motka, what's this feller think he's doin'?" she said to the man seated beside her. The latter gave Pavel a kick in the back with his sandalled foot.

"Lissen 'ere, you! Clear out of here before I punch your nose!"

Pavel endured the kick in silence. He was too busy unfastening the window. "Move aside, please," he said to the railwayman.

Shifting another can out of the way Pavel cleared a space in front of the window. Rita was on the platform below. Quickly she handed him the bag. Throwing it onto the knees of the stout woman with the vegetable oil can, Pavel bent down, seized Rita's hands and drew her in. Before the guard had time to notice this infringement of the rules, Rita was inside the carriage, leaving the guard swearing belatedly outside. The gang of toughs met Rita's appearance with such an uproar that she was taken aback. Since there was not even standing room on the floor, she found a place for her feet on the very edge of the lower berth and stood there holding on to the upper berth for support. Foul curses sounded on all sides. From above the ugly bass voice croaked:

"Look at the swine, gets in himself and drags his broad in after 'im!"

A voice from above squeaked: "Motka, poke him one between the eyes!"

The woman was doing her best to stand her wooden box on Pavel's head. The two newcomers were surrounded by a ring of evil, brutish faces. Pavel was sorry that Rita had to be exposed to this but there was nothing to be done but to make the best of it.

"Move your sacks and make room for the comrade," he said to the one they called Motka, but the answer was a curse so foul that he boiled with rage. The pulse over his right eyebrow began to

throb painfully. "Just wait, you scoundrel, you'll answer for this," he said to the ruffian, but received a kick on the head from above.

"Good for you, Vaska, fetch 'im another!" came approving cries from all sides.

Pavel's self-control gave way at last, and as always in such moments his actions became swift and sure.

"You speculating bastards, you think you can get away with it?" he shouted, and hoisting himself agilely on to the upper berth, he sent his fist smashing against Motka's leering face. The speculator went tumbling onto the heads of the other passengers.

"Clear out of here, you swine, or I'll shoot down the whole lot of you!" Pavel yelled, waving his revolver under the noses of the four.

The tables were turned. Rita watched closely, ready to shoot if anyone attacked Korchagin. The upper berth-quickly cleared. The gang hastily withdrew to the neighbouring compartment.

As he helped Rita up to the empty berth, Pavel whispered:

"You stay here, I'm going to see about those fellows."

Rita tried to stop him. "You're not going to fight them, are you?" "No," he reassured her. "I'll be back soon."

He opened the window again and climbed out onto the platform. A few minutes later he was talking to Burmeister of the Transport Cheka, his former chief. The Lett heard him out and then gave orders to have the entire carriage cleared and the passengers' papers checked.

"It's just as I said," growled Burmeister. "The trains are full of speculators before they get here." A detail of ten Cheka men cleared the carriage. Pavel, assuming his old duties, helped to examine the documents of the passengers. He had not broken all ties with his former Cheka comrades and in his capacity as secretary of the Komsomol he had sent some of the best Komsomol members to work there. When the screening was over, Pavel returned to Rita. The carriage was now occupied by a vastly different type of passenger: Red Army men and factory and office workers travelling on business.

Rita and Pavel had the top berth in one corner of the carriage, but so much of it was taken up with bundles of newspapers that there was only room for Rita to lie down.

"Never mind," she said, "we'll manage somehow."

The train began to move at last. As it slid slowly out of the station they caught a brief glimpse of the fat woman seated on a bundle of sacks on the platform and heard her yelling:

"Hey Manka, where's my oil can gone?"

Sitting in their cramped quarters with the bundles of newspapers shielding them from their neighbours, Pavel and Rita munched bread and apples and laughingly recalled the far from laughable episode with which their journey had begun.

The train crawled along. The old, battered and overloaded carriage creaked and groaned and trembled violently at every joint in the track. The deep blue twilight looked in at the windows. Then night came, folding the carriage in darkness.

Rita was tired and she dozed with her head resting on the bag. Pavel sat on the edge of the berth and smoked. He too was tired but there was no room to lie down. The fresh night breeze blew through the open window.

Rita, awakened by a sudden jolt, saw the glow of Pavel's cigarette in the darkness. It was just like him to sit up all night rather than cause her discomfort.

"Comrade Korchagin! Drop those bourgeois conventions and lie down," she said lightly. Pavel obediently lay down beside her and stretched his stiff legs luxuriously.
"We have heaps of work tomorrow. So try and get some sleep, you rowdy." She put her arm trustingly around his neck and he felt her hair touching his cheek.
To Pavel, Rita was sacred. She was his friend and comrade, his political guide. Yet she was a woman as well. He had first become aware of this over there at the footbridge, and that was why her embrace stirred him so much now. He felt her deep even breathing; somewhere quite close to him were her lips. Proximity awoke in him a powerful desire to find those lips, and it was only with a great effort of will that he suppressed the impulse.
Rita, as if divining his feelings, smiled in the darkness. She had already known the joy of passion and the pain of loss. She had given her love to two Bolsheviks. Whiteguard bullets had robbed her of both. One had been a splendid giant of a man, a Brigade Commander; the other, a lad with clear blue eyes.
Soon the regular rhythm of the wheels rocked Pavel to sleep and he did not wake until the engine whistled shrilly the next morning.

Work kept Rita occupied every day until late at night and she had little time for her diary. After an interval a few more brief entries appeared:

August 11

"The gubernia conference is over. Akim, Mikhailo and several others have gone to Kharkov for the all-Ukraine conference, leaving all the paper work to me. Dubava and Pavel have been sent to work at the Gubernia Committee. Ever since Dmitri was made secretary of the Pechorsk District Committee he has stopped coming to lessons. He is up to his neck in work. Pavel tries to do some studying, but we don't get much done because either I am too busy or else he is sent off on some assignment. With the present tense situation on the railways the Komsomols are constantly being mobilised for work. Zharky came to see me yesterday. He complained about the boys being taken away from him, says he needs them badly himself."

August 23

"I was going down the corridor today when I saw Korchagin standing outside the manager's office with Pankratov and another man. As I came closer I heard Pavel say:
" 'Those fellows sitting there ought to be shot. "You've no right to countermand our orders," he says. "The Railway Firewood Committee is the boss here and you Komsomols had better keep out of it." You ought to have seen his mug.... And the place is infested with parasites like him!' He followed this up with some shocking language. Pankratov caught sight of me and nudged him. Pavel swung round and when he saw me he turned pale and walked off without meeting my eyes. He won't be coming around for a long while now. He knows I will not tolerate bad language."

August 27

"We had a closed meeting of the bureau. The situation is becoming serious. I cannot write about it in detail just yet. Akim came back from the regional conference looking very worried. Yesterday another supply train was derailed. I don't think I shall try to keep this diary any more. It is much too haphazard anyway. I am expecting Korchagin. I saw him the other day and he told me he and Zharky are organising a commune of five."

One day while at work in the railway shops Pavel was called to the telephone. It was Rita. She happened to be free that evening and suggested that they finish the chapter they had been studying — the reasons for the fall of the Paris Commune.

As he approached Rita's house on University Street that evening, Pavel glanced up and saw a light in her window. He ran upstairs, gave his usual brief knock on the door and went in.

There on the bed, where none of the young comrades were allowed even to sit for a moment, lay a man in uniform. A revolver, knapsack and cap with the red star lay on the table. Rita was sitting beside the stranger with her arms clasped tightly around him. The two were engaged in earnest conversation and as Pavel entered Rita looked up with a radiant face.

The man freed himself from her embrace and rose.

"Pavel," said Rita shaking hands with him, "this is ...."

"David Ustinovich," the man said, clasping Korchagin's hand warmly.

"He turned up quite unexpectedly," Rita explained with a happy laugh.

Pavel shook hands coldly with the newcomer and a gleam of resentment flashed in his eyes. He noticed the four squares of a Company Commander on the sleeve of the man's uniform.

Rita was about to say something but Pavel interrupted her. "I just dropped in to tell you that I shall be busy loading wood down at the wharves this evening," he said. "And anyhow you have a visitor. Well, I'll be off, the boys are waiting for me downstairs."

And he disappeared through the door as suddenly _ as he had come. They heard him hurrying down the stairs. Then the outside door slammed and all was quiet.

"There's something the matter with him," Rita faltered in answer to David's questioning look. Down below under the bridge an engine heaved a deep sigh, exhaling a shower of golden sparks from its mighty lungs. They soared upward executing a fantastic dance and were lost in the smoke. Pavel leaned against the railing and stared at the coloured signal lights winking on the switches. He screwed up his eyes.

"What I don't understand, Comrade Korchagin, is why it should hurt so much to discover that Rita has a husband? Has she ever told you she hadn't? And even if she has, what of it? Why should you take it like that? You thought, Comrade, it was all platonic friendship and nothing else. ... How could you have let this happen?" he asked himself with bitter irony. "But what if he isn't her husband? David Ustinovich might be her brother or her uncle.... In which case you've done the chap an injustice, you fool. You're no better than any other swine. It's easy enough to find out whether he's her brother or not. Suppose he turns out to be a brother or an uncle, how are you

going to face her after the way you've behaved? No, you've got to stop seeing her!" The scream of an engine whistle interrupted his reflections. "It's getting late. Time to be going home. Enough of this nonsense."

At Solomenka, as the district where the railway workers lived was called, five young men set up a miniature commune. They were Zharky, Pavel, Klavicek, a jolly fair-haired Czech, Nikolai Okunev, secretary of the railway-yards Komsomol, and Stepan Artyukhin, a boiler repairman who was now working for the railway Cheka.

They found a room and for three days spent all their free time cleaning, painting and whitewashing. They dashed back and forth with pails so many times that the neighbours thought the house was on fire. They made themselves bunks, and mattresses filled with maple leaves gathered in the park, and on the fourth day the room, with a portrait of Petrovsky and a huge map on the wall, literally shone with cleanliness.

Between the windows was a shelf piled high with books. Two crates covered with cardboard served for chairs, another larger crate did duty as a cupboard. In the middle of the room stood a huge billiard table, minus the cloth, which the room's inmates had carried on their shoulders from the warehouse. By day it was used as a table and at night Klavicek slept on it. The five lads fetched all their belongings, and the practical-minded Klavicek made an inventory of the commune's possessions. He wanted to hang it up on the wall but the others objected. Everything in the room was declared common property. Earnings, rations and occasional parcels from home were all divided equally; the sole items of personal property were their weapons. It was unanimously decided that any member of the commune who violated the law of communal ownership or who betrayed his comrades' trust would be expelled from the commune. Okunev and Klavicek insisted that expulsion should be followed by eviction from the room, and the motion was carried.

All the active members of the District Komsomol came to the commune's house-warming party. A gigantic samovar was borrowed from the next-door neighbour. The tea party consumed the commune's entire stock of saccharine. After tea, they sang in chorus and their lusty young voices rocked the rafters:

The whole wide world is drenched with tears,
In bitter toil our days are passed,
But, wait, the radiant dawn appears....

Talya Lagutina, the girl from the tobacco factory, led the singing. Her crimson kerchief had slipped to one side of her head and her eyes, whose depths none as yet had fathomed, danced with mischief. Talya had a most infectious laugh and she looked at the world from the radiant height of her eighteen years. Now her arm swept up and the singing poured forth like a fanfare of trumpets:

Spread, our song, o'er the world like a flood,
Proudly our flag waves unfurled.
It burns and glows throughout the world,

On fire from our heart's blood.

The party broke up late and the silent streets awoke to the echo of their young voices. The telephone rang and Zharky reached for the receiver.

"Keep quiet, I can't hear anything!" he shouted to the noisy Komsomols who had crowded in the Secretary's office.

The hubbub subsided somewhat.

"Hullo! Ah, it's you. Yes, right away. What's on the agenda? Oh, the same old thing, hauling firewood from the wharves. What's that? No, he's not been sent anywhere. He's here. Want to speak to him? Just a minute."

Zharky beckoned to Pavel.

"Comrade Ustinovich wants to speak to you," he said and handed him the receiver.

"I thought you were out of town," Pavel heard Rita's voice say. "I happen to be free this evening. Why don't you come over? My brother has gone. He was just passing through town and decided to look me up. We haven't seen each other for two years."

Her brother!

Pavel did not hear any more. He was recalling that unfortunate evening and the resolve he had taken that night down on the bridge. Yes, he must go to her this evening and put an end to this. Love brought too much pain and anxiety with it. Was this the time for such things?

The voice in his ear said: "Can't you hear me?"

"Yes, yes. I hear you. Very well. I'll come over after the Bureau meeting." And he hung up.

He looked her straight in the eyes and, gripping the edge of the oak table, he said: "I don't think I'll be able to come and see you any more." He saw her thick eyelashes sweep upward at his words. Her pencil paused in its flight over the page and then lay motionless on the open pad.

"Why not?"

"It's very hard for me to find the time. You know yourself we're not having it so easy just now. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid we'll have to call it off...."

He was conscious that the last few words sounded none too firm.

"What are you beating about the bush for?" he raged inwardly. "You haven't the courage to strike out with both fists."

Aloud he went on: "Besides, I've been wanting to tell you for some time — I have difficulty in grasping your explanations. When we studied with Segal what I learned stayed in my head somehow, but with you it doesn't. I've always had to go to Tokarev after our lessons and get him to explain things properly. It's my fault — my noodle just can't take it. You'll have to find some pupil with a bit more brains."

He turned away from her searching gaze, and, deliberately burning all his bridges, added doggedly: "So you see it would just be a waste of time for us to continue."

Then he got up, moved the chair aside carefully with his foot and looked at the bowed head and the face that turned pale in the light of the lamp. He put on his cap.

"Well, good-bye, Comrade Rita. Sorry I've wasted so much of your time. I ought to have told you long before this. That's where I'm to blame."

Rita mechanically gave him her hand, but she was too stunned by his sudden coldness to say more than a few words.

"I don't blame you, Pavel. If I haven't succeeded in finding some way of making things clear to you I deserve this."

Pavel walked heavily to the door. He closed it after him softly. Downstairs he paused for a moment — it was not too late to go back and explain.... But what was the use? For what? To hear her scornful response and find himself outside again? No.

Graveyards of dilapidated railway carriages and abandoned engines grew on the sidings. The wind whirled and scattered the dry sawdust in the deserted woodyards.

And all around the town in the forest thickets and deep ravines lurked Orlik's band. By day they lay low in surrounding hamlets or in wooded tracts, but at night they crept out onto the railway tracks, tore them up ruthlessly and, their evil work done, crawled back again into their lair.

And many an iron steed went crashing down the railway embankment. Boxcars were smashed to smithereens, sleepy humans were flattened like pancakes beneath the wreckage, and precious grain mingled with blood and earth.

The band would swoop down suddenly on some small town scattering the frightened, clucking hens in all directions. A few shots would be fired at random. Outside the building of the Volost Soviet there would be a brief crackle of rifle fire, like the sound of bracken underfoot, and the bandits would dash about the village on their well-fed horses cutting down everyone who crossed their path. They hacked at their victims as calmly as if they were splitting logs. Rarely did they shoot, for bullets were scarce.

The band would be gone as swiftly as it had come. It had its eyes and ears everywhere. Those eyes saw through the walls of the small white building that housed the Volost Soviet, for invisible threads led from the priest's house and the kulaks' cottages to the forest thickets. Cases of ammunition, chunks of fresh pork, bottles of bluish raw spirit went the same way, also news that was whispered into the ears of the lesser atamans and then passed on by devious routes to Orlik himself.

Though it consisted of no more than two or three hundred cutthroats, the band had so far eluded capture. It would split up into several small units and operate in two or three districts simultaneously. It was impossible to catch all of them. Last night's bandit would next day appear as a peaceful peasant pottering in his garden, feeding his horse or standing at his gate puffing smugly at his pipe and watching the cavalry patrols ride by with a sly look in his eyes.

Alexander Puzyrevsky with his regiment chased the bandits up and down the three districts with dogged persistence. Occasionally he did succeed in treading on their tail; a month later Orlik was obliged to withdraw his gangs from two of the districts, and now he was hemmed in on a narrow strip of territory.

Life in the town jogged along at its customary pace. Noisy crowds swarmed its five markets. Two impulses dominated the milling throngs — to grab as much as possible, and to give as little as

possible. This environment offered unlimited scope for the energy and abilities of all manner of sharks and swindlers. Hundreds of slippery individuals with eyes that expressed everything but honesty snooped about among the crowds. All the scum of the town gathered here like flies on a dunghill, moved by a single purpose: to hoodwink the gullible. The few trains that came this way spewed out gobs of sack-laden people who made at once for the markets.

At night the market places were deserted, and the dark rows of booths and stalls looked sinister and menacing.

It was the bold man who would venture after dark into this desolate quarter where danger lurked behind every stall. And often by night a shot would ring out like the clang of a hammer on iron, and some throat would choke on its own blood. And by the time the handful of militiamen from the nearest beats would reach the spot (they did not venture out alone) they would find nothing but the mutilated corpse. The killers had taken to their heels and the commotion had swept away the few nocturnal habitués of the market square like a gust of wind.

Opposite the market place was the "Orion" cinema. The street and pavement were flooded with electric light and people crowded around the entrance. Inside the hall the movie projector clicked, flashing melodramatic love scenes onto the screen; now and then the film snapped and the operator stopped the projector amid roars of disapproval from the audience.

In the centre of the town and on the outskirts life appeared to be taking its usual course. Even in the Gubernia Committee of the Party, the nerve centre of revolutionary authority, everything was quiet. But this was merely an outward calm.

A storm was brewing in the town. Many of those who came there from various directions, with their army rifles plainly visible under their long peasant overcoats, were aware of its coming. So did those who under the guise of food speculators arrived on the roofs of trains, but instead of carrying their sacks to the market took them to carefully memorised addresses.

These knew. But the workers' districts, and even Bolsheviks, had no inkling of the approaching storm.

Only five Bolsheviks in town knew what was being plotted.

Closely co-operating with foreign missions in Warsaw, the remnants of Petlyura's bands which the Red Army had driven into White Poland were preparing to take part in the uprising. A raiding force was being formed of what remained of Petlyura's regiments.

The central committee of the insurgents had an organisation in Shepetovka; it consisted of forty-seven members, most of them former active counter-revolutionaries whom the local Cheka had trustingly left at liberty.

Father Vasili, Ensign Vinnik, and Kuzmenko, a Petlyura officer, were the leaders of the organisation. The priest's daughters, Vinnik's father and brother, and a man named Samotinya who had wormed his way into the office of the Executive Committee did the spying.

The plan was to attack the frontier Special Department by night with hand grenades, release the prisoners and, if possible, seize the railway station.

Meanwhile officers were being secretly concentrated in the city which was to be the hub of the uprising, and bandit gangs were being moved into the neighbouring forests. From here, contact with Rumania and with Petlyura himself was maintained through trusted agents.

Fyodor Zhukhrai, in his office at the Special Department, had not slept for six nights. He was one of the five Bolsheviks who were aware of what was brewing. The ex-sailor was now experiencing the sensation of the big game hunter who has tracked down his prey and is now waiting for the beast to spring.

He dare not shout or raise the alarm. The bloodthirsty monster must be slain. Then and then only would it be possible to work in peace, without having to glance fearfully behind every bush. The beast must not be scared away. In a life and death struggle such as this it is endurance and firmness that win the day.

The crucial moment was at hand. Somewhere in the town amidst the labyrinth of conspiratorial hide-outs the time had been set: tomorrow night.

But the five Bolsheviks who knew decided to strike first. The time was tonight.

The same evening an armoured train slid quietly out of the railway yards and the massive gates closed as quietly behind it.

Coded telegrams flew over the wires and in response to their urgent summons the alert and watchful men to whom the republic's security had been entrusted took immediate steps to stamp out the hornet's nests.

Akim telephoned to Zharky.

"Cell meetings in order? Good. Come over here at once for a conference and bring the Party District Committee Secretary with you. The fuel problem is worse than we thought. We'll discuss the details when you get here." Akim spoke in a firm, hurried voice.

"This firewood business is driving us all potty," Zharky growled back into the receiver.

Litke drove the two secretaries over to headquarters at breakneck speed. As they ascended the stairs to the first floor they saw at once that they had not been summoned here to talk about firewood.

On the office manager's desk stood a machine-gun and gunners from the Special Task Unit were busy beside it. Silent guards from the town's Party and Komsomol organisations stood in the corridors. Behind the wide doors of the Secretary's office an emergency session of the Bureau of the Party Gubernia Committee was drawing to a close.

Through a fanlight giving onto the street wires led to two field telephones. There was a subdued hum of conversation in the room. Akim, Rita and Mikhailo were there, Rita in a Red Army helmet, khaki skirt, leather jacket with a heavy Mauser strapped on to it — the uniform she used to wear at the front when she had been Company Political Instructor.

"What's all this about?" Zharky asked her in surprise.

"Alert drill, Vanya. We're going to your district right away. We are to meet at the Fifth Infantry School. The Komsomols are going there straight from their cell meetings. The main thing is to get there without attracting attention."

The grounds of the old military school with its giant old oaks, its stagnant pond overgrown with burdock and nettles and its broad unswept paths were wrapped in silence.

In the centre of the grounds behind a high white wall stood the school building, now the premises of the Fifth Infantry School for Red Army commanders. It was late at night. The upper floor of the building was dark. Outwardly all was serene, and the chance passerby would have thought that the school's inmates were asleep. Why, then, were the iron gates open, and what were those two dark

shapes like monster toads standing by the entrance? The people who gathered here from all parts of the railway district knew that the school's inmates could not be asleep, once a night alert had been given. They were coming straight from their Komsomol and Party cell meetings where the brief announcement had been made; they came quietly, individually, in pairs, never more than three together, and each of them carried the Communist Party or Komsomol membership card, without which no one could pass through the iron gates.

The assembly hall, where a large crowd had already gathered, was flooded with light. The windows were heavily curtained with thick canvas tenting. The Bolsheviks who had been summoned here stood about calmly smoking their homemade cigarettes and cracking jokes about the precautions taken for a drill. No one felt this was a real alert; it was being done to maintain discipline in the special task detachments. The seasoned soldier, however, recognised the signs of a genuine alert as soon as he entered the schoolyard. Far too much caution was being displayed. Platoons of students were lining up outside to whispered commands. Machine-guns were being carried quietly into the yard and not a chink of light showed in any of the windows of the building.

"Something serious in the wind, Mityai?" Pavel Korchagin inquired of Dubava, who was sitting on a windowsill next to a girl Pavel remembered seeing a couple of days before at Zharky's place.

Dubava clapped Pavel good-humouredly on the shoulder.

"Getting cold feet, eh? Never mind, we'll teach you fellows how to fight. You don't know each other, do you?" he nodded toward the girl. "This is Anna, don't know her second name, she's in charge of the agitation and propaganda centre."

The girl thus introduced regarded Korchagin with interest and pushed back a wisp of hair that had escaped from under her violet kerchief. Korchagin's eyes met hers and for a moment or two a silent contest ensued. Her sparking jet-black eyes under their sweeping lashes challenged his. Pavel shifted his gaze to Dubava. Conscious that he was blushing, he scowled.

"Which of you does the agitating?" he inquired forcing a smile.

At that moment there was a stir in the hall. A Company Commander climbed onto a chair and shouted: "Members of the first company, line up. Hurry, Comrades, hurry!"

Zhukhrai entered with the Chairman of the Gubernia Executive Committee and Akim. They had just arrived. The hall was now filled from end to end with people lined up in formation.

The Chairman of the Gubernia Executive Committee stepped onto the mounting of a training machine-gun and raised his hand.

"Comrades," he said, "you have been summoned here on an extremely serious and urgent matter. What I am going to tell you now could not have been told even yesterday for security reasons. Tomorrow night a counterrevolutionary uprising is scheduled to break out in this and other towns of the Ukraine. The town is full of Whiteguard officers. Bandit units have been concentrated all around the town. Part of the conspirators have penetrated into the armoured car detachment and are working there as drivers. But the Cheka has uncovered the plot in good time and we are putting the entire Party and Komsomol organisations under arms. The first and second Communist battalions will operate together with the military school units and Cheka detachments. The military school units have already gone into action. It is now your turn, Comrades. You have fifteen minutes to get your weapons and line up. Comrade Zhukhrai will be in command of the operation. The unit commanders will take their orders from him. I need hardly stress the gravity of the situation. Tomorrow's insurrection must be averted today."

A quarter of an hour later the armed battalion was lined up in the schoolyard.

Zhukhrai ran his eye over the motionless ranks. Three paces in front of them stood two men girded with leather belts: Battalion Commander Menyailo, a foundry worker, a giant of a man from the Urals, and beside him Commissar Akim. To the left were the platoons of the first company, with the company commander and political instructor two paces in front. Behind them stood the silent ranks of the Communist battalion, three hundred strong. Fyodor gave the signal. "Time to begin."

The three hundred men marched through the deserted
streets. The city slept.

On Lvovskaya Street, opposite Dikaya, the battalion broke ranks.

Noiselessly they surrounded the buildings. Headquarters was set up on the steps of a shop.

An automobile came speeding down Lvovskaya Street from the direction of the centre, its headlights cutting a bright path before it. It pulled up sharply in front of the battalion command post.

Hugo Litke had brought his father this time. The commandant sprang out of the car, throwing a few clipped Lettish sentences over his shoulder to his son. The car leapt forward and disappeared in a flash around the bend of the road. Litke, his hands gripping the steering wheel as though part of it, his eyes glued to the road, drove like a devil.

Yes, there was need of Litke's wild driving tonight. He was hardly likely to get two nights in the guardhouse for speeding now!

And Hugo flew down the streets like a meteor.

Zhukhrai, whom young Litke drove from one end of town to the other in the twinkling of an eye, remarked approvingly: "If you don't knock anyone down tonight you'll get a gold watch tomorrow."

Hugo was jubilant. "I thought I'd get ten days in jail for that corner...."

The first blows were struck at the conspirators' headquarters. Before long groups of prisoners and batches of documents were being delivered to the Special Department.

In house No. 11 on Dikaya Street lived one Zurbert who, according to information in possession of the Cheka, had played no small part in the Whiteguard plot. The lists of the officers' units that were to operate in the Podol area were in his keeping.

Litke senior himself came to Dikaya Street to make the arrest. The windows of Zurbert's apartment looked out onto a garden which was separated from a former nunnery by a high wall. Zurbert was not at home. The neighbours said that he had not been seen at all that day. A search was made and, the lists of names and addresses were found, together with a case of hand grenades. Litke, having ordered an ambush to be set, lingered for a moment in the room to examine the papers.

The young military school student on sentry duty in the garden below could see the lighted window from the corner of the garden where he was stationed. It was a little frightening to stand there alone in the dark. He had been told to keep an eye on the wall. The comforting light seemed very far from his post. And to make matters worse, the moon kept darting behind the clouds. In the night the bushes seemed to be invested with a sinister life of their own. The young soldier stabbed at the darkness around him with his bayonet. Nothingness.

"Why did they put me here? No one could climb that wall anyhow, it's far too high. I think I'll go over to the window and peep in." Glancing up again at the wall, he emerged from his dank, fungus-smelling corner. As he came up to the window, Litke picked up the papers from the table. At that moment a shadow appeared on top of the wall whence both the sentry by the window and the man inside the room were clearly visible. With catlike agility the shadow swung itself onto a tree and dropped down to the ground. Stealthily it crept up to its victim. A single blow and the sentry was sprawled on the ground with a naval dirk driven up to the hilt into his neck.

A shot rang out in the garden galvanising the men surrounding the block. Six of them ran toward the house, their steps ringing loudly in the night. Litke sat slumped forward over the table, the blood pouring from the wound in his head. He was dead. The window pane was shattered. But the assassin had not had time to seize the documents.

Several more shots were heard behind the nunnery wall. The murderer had climbed over the wall to the street and was now shooting his way out, trying to escape by way of the Lukyanov vacant lot. But a bullet cut short his flight.

All night long the searches continued. Hundreds of people not registered in the books of the house committees and found in possession of suspicious documents and carrying weapons were dispatched to the Cheka, where a commission was at work screening the suspects.

Here and there the conspirators fought back. During the search in a house on Zhilyanskaya Street Anton Lebedev was killed by a shot fired point-blank.

The Solomenka battalion lost five men that night, and the Cheka lost Jan Litke, that staunch Bolshevik and faithful guardian of the republic.

But the Whiteguard uprising was nipped in the bud.

That same night Father Vasili with his daughters and the rest of the gang were arrested in Shepetovka.

The tension relaxed. But soon a new enemy threatened the town: paralysis of the railways, which meant starvation and cold in the coming winter.

Everything now depended on grain and firewood.

## Chapter Two

Fyodor took his short-stemmed pipe out of his mouth and poked reflectively at the ash in the bowl with a cautious finger; the pipe was out.

A dense cloud of grey smoke from a dozen cigarettes hovered below the ceiling and over the chair where sat the Chairman of the Gubernia Executive Committee. From the corners of the room the faces of the people seated around the table were only dimly visible through the haze.

Tokarev, sitting next to the Chairman, leaned forward and plucked irritably at his sparse beard, glancing now and again out of the corner of his eye at a short, bald-headed man whose high-pitched voice went on endlessly stringing out phrases that were as empty and meaningless as a sucked egg.

Akim caught the look in the old worker's eye and was reminded of a fighting cock back in his childhood days in the village who had had the same wicked look in his eye just before pouncing on his adversary.

The Gubernia Party Committee had been in conference for more than an hour. The bald man was Chairman of the Railway Firewood Committee.

Leafing with nimble fingers through the heap of papers before him, the bald man rattled on: "... Under these circumstances it is clearly impossible to carry out the decision of the Gubernia Committee and the railway management. I repeat, even a month from now we shall not be able to give more than four hundred cubic metres of firewood. As for the one hundred and eighty thousand cubic metres required, well, that's sheer..." the speaker fumbled for the right word, "er... sheer utopia!" he wound up and his small mouth pursed itself up into an expression of injury. There was a long silence.

Fyodor tapped his pipe with his fingernail and knocked out the ashes. It was Tokarev who finally broke the silence.

"There's no use wasting our breath," he began in his rumbling bass. "The Railway Firewood Committee hasn't any firewood, never had any, and doesn't expect any in the future.... Right?" The bald man shrugged a shoulder.

"Excuse me, Comrade, we did stock up firewood, but the shortage of road transport...." He swallowed, wiped his polished pate with a checkered handkerchief; he made several fruitless attempts to stuff the handkerchief back into his pocket, and finally shoved it nervously under his portfolio.

"What have you done about delivering the wood? After all, a good many days have passed since the leading specialists mixed up in the conspiracy were arrested," Denekko observed from his corner.

The bald man turned to him. "I wrote the railway administration three times stating that unless we had the proper transport facilities it would be impossible...."

Tokarev stopped him. "We've heard that already," he said coldly, eyeing the bald man with hostility. "Do you take us for a pack of fools?"

The bald man felt a chill run down his spine at these words.

"I cannot answer for the actions of counter-revolutionaries," he replied in a low voice.

"But you knew, didn't you, that the timber was being felled a long distance from the railway line?" "I heard about it, but I could not bring the attention of my superiors to irregularities on a sector outside my province."

"How many men have you on the job?" the chairman of the trade union council demanded. "About two hundred," the bald man replied.

"That makes a cubic metre a year for every parasite!" fumed Tokarev.

"The Railway Firewood Committee has been allotted special rations, food the workers ought to be getting, and look what you're doing? What happened to those two carriages of flour you received for the workers?" the trade union chairman persisted.

Similar pointed questions rained down on the bald man from all sides and he answered them in the harassed manner of a man trying to ward off annoying creditors. He twisted and turned like an eel to avoid direct answers, but his eyes darted nervously about him. He sensed danger and his cowardly soul craved but one thing: to get away from here as quickly as possible and slink off to his cosy nest, to his supper and his still youthful wife who was probably cosily whiling away the time with a Paul de Kock novel.

Lending an attentive ear to the bald man's replies, Fyodor scribbled in his notebook: "I believe this

man ought to be checked up on properly. This is more than mere incompetence. I know one or two things about him.... Stop the discussion and let him go so we can get down to business."

The Chairman read the note and nodded to Fyodor.

Zhukhrai rose and went out into the corridor to make a telephone call. When he returned the Chairman was reading the resolution:

". . .to remove the management of the Railway Firewood Committee for downright sabotage, the matter of the timber workings to be turned over to the investigation authorities."

The bald man had expected worse. True, to be removed from his post for downright sabotage would raise the question of his reliability in general, but that was a mere trifle. As for the Boyarka business, he was not worried, that was not his province after all. "A close shave, though," he said to himself, "I thought they had really dug up something. ..."

Now almost reassured, he remarked as he put his papers back into his portfolio: "Of course, I am a non-Party specialist and you are at liberty to distrust me. But my conscience is clear. If I have failed to do what was required of me that was because it was impossible."

No one made any comment. The bald man went out, hurried downstairs, and opened the street door with a feeling of intense relief.

"Your name, please?" a man in an army coat accosted him.

With a sinking heart the baldhead stammered: "Cher. . . vinsky...."

Upstairs as soon as the outsider was gone, thirteen heads bent closer over the large conference table.

"See here," Zhukhrai's finger jabbed the unfolded map. "That's Boyarka station. The timber felling is six versts away. There are two hundred and ten thousand cubic metres of wood stacked up at this point: a whole army of men worked hard for eight months to pile up all that wood, and what's the result? Treachery. The railway and the town are without firewood. To haul that timber six versts to the station would take five thousand carts no less than one month, and that only if they made two trips a day. The nearest village is fifteen versts away. What's more, Orlik and his band are prowling about in those parts. You realise what this means? Look, according to the plan the felling was to have been started right here and continued in the direction of the station, and those scoundrels carried it right into the depths of the forest. The purpose was to make sure we would not be able to haul the firewood to the railway line. And they weren't far wrong — we can't even get a hundred carts for the job. It's a foul blow they've struck us. The uprising was no more serious than this."

Zhukhrai's clenched fist dropped heavily onto the waxed paper of the map. Each of the thirteen clearly visualised the grimmer aspects of the situation which Zhukhrai had omitted to mention. Winter was in the offing. They saw hospitals, schools, offices and hundreds of thousands of people caught in the icy grip of the frost; the railway stations swarming with people and only one train a week to handle the traffic.

There was deep silence as each man pondered the
situation. At length Fyodor relaxed his fist.

"There is one way out, Comrades," he said.

"We must build a seven-verst narrow-gauge line from the station to the timber tract in three months. The first section leading to the beginning of the tract must be ready in six weeks. I've been working on this for the past week. We'll need," Zhukhrai's voice cracked in his dry throat,

"three hundred and fifty workers and two engineers. There is enough rails and seven engines at Pushcha-Voditsa. The Komsomols dug them up in the warehouses. There was a project to lay a narrow-gauge line from Pushcha-Voditsa to the town before the war. The trouble is there are no accommodations in Boyarka for the workers, the place is in ruins. We'll have to send the men in small groups for a fortnight at a time, they won't be able to hold out any longer than that. Shall we send the Komsomols, Akim?" And without waiting for an answer, he went on: "The Komsomol will rush as many of its members to the spot as possible. There's the Solomenka organisation to begin with, and some from the town. The task is hard, very hard, but if the youngsters are told what is at stake I'm certain they'll do it."

The chief of the railway shook his head dubiously.

"I'm afraid it's no use. To lay seven versts of track in the woods under such conditions, with the autumn rains due and the frosts coming..." he began wearily. But Zhukhrai cut him short.

"You ought to have paid more attention to the firewood problem, Andrei Vasilievich. That line has got to be built and we're going to build it. We're not going to fold our hands and freeze to death, are we?"

The last crates of tools were loaded onto the train. The train crew took their places. A fine drizzle was falling. Crystal raindrops rolled down Rita's glistening leather jacket.

Rita shook hands warmly with Tokarev. "We wish you luck," she said softly. The old man regarded her affectionately from beneath his bushy grey eyebrows.

"Yes, they've given us a peck of trouble, blast 'em," he growled in answer to his own thoughts. "You here had better look to things, so that if there's any hitch over there you can put a bit of pressure on where it's needed. These good-for-nothings here can't do anything without a lot of red tape. Well, time I was getting aboard, daughter."

The old man buttoned up his jacket. At the last moment Rita inquired casually: "Isn't Korchagin going along? I didn't notice him among the boys."

"No, he and the job superintendent went out there yesterday by handcar to prepare for our coming."

At that moment Zharky, Dubava, and Anna Borhart with her jacket thrown carelessly across her shoulders and a cigarette between her slender fingers, came hurrying down the platform toward them.

Rita had time to ask Tokarev one more question before the others joined them. "How are your studies with Korchagin getting along?"

The old man looked at her in surprise.

"What studies? The lad's under your wing, isn't he? He's told me a lot about you. Thinks the world of you."

Rita looked sceptical. "Are you quite sure, Comrade Tokarev? Didn't he always go to you for a proper explanation after his lessons with me?"

The old man burst out laughing. "To me? Why, I never saw hide or hair of him." The engine shrieked. Klavicek shouted from one of the carriages:

"Hey, Comrade Ustinovich, give us our daddy back! What'd we do without him?"

The Czech was about to say something else, but catching sight of the three late-comers he checked

himself. He noticed the anxious look in Anna's eyes, caught with a pang her parting smile to Dubava and turned quickly away from the window.

The autumn rain lashed the face. Low clouds, leaden-hued and swollen with moisture, crawled over the earth. Late autumn had stripped the woods bare; and the old hornbeams looked gaunt and downcast, their wrinkled trunks hidden under the brown moss. Remorseless autumn had robbed them of their luxuriant garments, and they stood there naked and pitiful.

The little station building huddled forlornly in the midst of the forest. A strip of freshly dug earth ran from the stone freight platform into the woods. Around this strip men swarmed like ants.

The clayey mud squelched unpleasantly underfoot. There was a ringing of crowbars and a grating of spades on stone over by the embankment where the men were furiously digging.

The rain came down as if through a fine sieve and the chill drops penetrated the men's clothing. The rain threatened to wash away what their labour had accomplished, for the clay slid down the embankment in a soggy mass.

Soaked to the skin, their clothing chill and sodden, the men worked on until long after dark.

And with every day the strip of upturned earth penetrated farther and farther into the forest.

Not far from the station loomed the grim skeleton of what had once been a brick building. Everything that could be removed bodily, torn out or blasted loose had long since been carried off by marauders. There were gaping holes in place of windows and doors; black gashes where stove doors had once been. Through the holes in the tattered roof the rafters showed like the ribs of a skeleton.

Only the concrete floor in the four large rooms remained intact. At night four hundred men slept on this floor in their damp, mud-caked clothing. Muddy water streamed from their clothes when they wrung them out at the doorway. And the men heaped bitter curses on the rain and the boggy soil. They lay in compact rows on the concrete floor with its thin covering of straw, huddling together for warmth. The steam rose from their clothing but it did not dry. And the rain seeped through the sacks that were nailed over the empty window frames and trickled down onto the floor. It drummed loudly on the remnants of sheet metal roofing, and the wind whistled through the great cracks in the door.

In the morning they drank tea in the tumbledown barracks that served for a kitchen, and went off to their work. Dinner, day after day with sickening monotony, consisted of plain boiled lentils, and there was a daily allowance of a pound and a half of bread as black as coal.

That was all the town could provide. The job superintendent, Valerian Nikodimovich Patoshkin, a tall spare old man with two deep lines at his mouth, and technician Vakulenko, a thickset man with a coarse-featured face and a fleshy nose, had put up at the station master's house.

Tokarev shared the tiny room occupied by the station Cheka agent, a small, volatile man named Kholyava.

The men endured the hardships with dogged fortitude, and the railway embankment reached farther into the forest from day to day.

True, there had been some desertions: at first nine, and a few days later, another five.

The first major calamity occurred a week after the work started, when the bread supply failed to arrive with the night train.

Dubava woke Tokarev and told him the news. The secretary of the Party group swung his hairy legs over the side of the bed and scratched himself furiously under the armpit.
"The fun's beginning!" he growled and began hastily to
dress. Kholyava waddled in on his short legs.
"Run down to the telephone and call the Special Department," Tokarev instructed him, and turning to Dubava added, "and not a word to anybody about the bread, mind."
After berating the railway telephone operators for a full half hour, the irrepressible Kholyava succeeded in getting Zhukhrai, the assistant chief of the Special Department, on the line, while Tokarev stood by fidgeting with impatience.
"What! Bread not delivered? I'll find out who's responsible for that!" Zhukhrai's voice coming over the wire had an ominous ring.
"What are we going to give the men to eat tomorrow?" Tokarev shouted back angrily.
There was a long pause; Zhukhrai was evidently considering some plan of action. "You'll get the bread tonight," he said at last. "I'll send young Litke with the car. He knows the way. You'll have the bread by morning."
At dawn a mud-spattered car loaded with sacks of bread drove up to the station. Litke, his face white and strained after a sleepless night at the wheel, climbed out wearily.
Work on the railway line became a struggle against increasing odds. The railway administration announced that there were no sleepers to be had. The town authorities could find no means of shipping the rails and engines to the railway job, and the engines themselves turned out to be in need of substantial repairs. No workers were forthcoming to replace the first batch who had done their share and were now so completely worn out that there could be no question of detaining them.
The leading Party members met in the tumbledown shed dimly lit by a wick lamp and sat up late into the night discussing the situation.
The following morning Tokarev, Dubava and Klavicek went to town, taking six men with them to repair the engines and speed up the shipment of the rails. Klavicek, who was a baker by trade, was sent as inspector to the supply department, while the rest went on to Pushcha-Voditsa.
The rain poured down without ceasing.

Pavel Korchagin pulled his foot out of the sticky slime with an effort. A sharp sensation of cold told him that the worn sole of his boot had finally parted from the uppers. His torn boots had been a source of keen discomfort to Pavel ever since he had come to the job. They were never dry and the mud that filtered in squelched when he walked. Now one sole was gone altogether and the icy mire cut into his bare foot. Pavel pulled the sole out of the mud and regarded it with despair and broke the vow he had given himself not to swear. He could not go on working with one foot exposed, so he hobbled back to the barracks, sat down beside the field kitchen, took off his muddy footcloth and stretched out his numb foot to the fire.
Odarka, the lineman's wife who worked as cook's helper, was busy cutting up beetroots at the kitchen table. A woman of generous proportions, still youthful, with broad almost masculine shoulders, an ample bosom and massive hips, she wielded the kitchen knife with vigour and the mountain of sliced vegetables grew rapidly under her nimble fingers.

Odarka threw a careless glance at Pavel and snapped at him:
"If it's dinner you're hankering after you're a bit early, my lad. Ought to be ashamed of yourself sneaking away from work like that! Take your feet off that stove. This is a kitchen, not a bathhouse!"
The cook came in at that point.
"My blasted boot has gone to pieces," Pavel said, explaining his untimely presence in the kitchen. The elderly cook looked at the battered boot and nodding toward Odarka he said: "Her husband might be able to do something with it, he's a bit of a cobbler. Better see to it or you'll be in a bad way. You can't get along without boots."
When she heard this, Odarka took another look at
Pavel. "I took you for a loafer," she admitted.
Pavel smiled to show that there were no hard feelings. Odarka examined the boot with the eye of an expert.
"There's no use trying to patch it," she concluded.
"But I'll tell you what I can do. I'll bring you an old galosh we've got lying around at home and you can wear it on top of the boot. You can't go around like that, you'll kill yourself! The frosts will start any day now!"
And Odarka, now all sympathy, laid down her knife and hurried out, returning shortly with a deep galosh and a strip of stout linen.
As he wrapped his foot, now warm and dry, in the thick linen and put it into the galosh, Pavel rewarded Odarka with a grateful look.

Tokarev came back from town fuming. He called a meeting of the leading Communists in Kholyava's room and told them the unpleasant news.
"Nothing but obstacles all along the line. Wherever you go the wheels seem to be turning but they don't get anywhere. Far too many of those White rats about, and it looks as if there'll be enough to last our lifetime anyway. I tell you, boys, things look bad. There are no replacements for us yet and no one knows how many there will be. The frosts are due any day now, and we must get through the marsh before then at all costs, because when the ground freezes it'll be too late. So while they're shaking up those fellows in town who're making a mess of things, we here have to double our speed. That line has got to be built and we're going to build it if we die doing it. Otherwise it isn't Bolsheviks we'll be but jelly-fish." There was a steely note in Tokarev's hoarse bass voice, and his eyes under their bushy brows had a stubborn gleam.
"We'll call a closed meeting today and pass on the news to our Party members and tomorrow we'll all get down to work. In the morning we'll let the non-Party fellows go; the rest of us will stay. Here's the Gubernia Committee decision," he said, handing Pankratov a folded sheet of paper.
Pavel Korchagin, peering over Pankratov's shoulder, read: "In view of the emergency all members of the Komsomol are to remain on the job and are not to be relieved until the first consignment of firewood is forthcoming. Signed R. Ustinovich, on behalf of the Secretary of the Gubernia Committee."
The kitchen barracks was packed. One hundred and twenty men had squeezed themselves into its narrow confines. They stood against the walls, climbed on the tables and some were even perched

on top of the field kitchen.

Pankratov opened the meeting. Then Tokarev made a brief speech winding up with an announcement that had the effect of a bombshell:

"The Communists and Komsomols will not leave the job tomorrow."

The old man accompanied his statement with a gesture that stressed the finality of the "decision. It swept away all cherished hopes of returning to town, going home, getting away from this hole.

A roar of angry voices drowned out everything else for a few moments. The swaying bodies caused the feeble oil light to flicker fitfully. In the semidarkness the commotion increased. They wanted to go "home"; they protested indignantly that they had had as much as they could stand. Some received the news in silence. And only one man spoke of deserting.

"To hell with it all!" he shouted angrily from his corner, loosing an ugly stream of invective. "I'm not going to stay here another day. It's all right to do hard labour if you've committed a crime. But what have we done? We're fools to stand for it. We've had two weeks of it, and that's enough. Let those who made the decision come out and do the work themselves. Maybe some folks like poking around in this muck, but I've only one life to live. I'm leaving tomorrow."

The voice came from behind Okunev and he lit a match to see who it was. For an instant the speaker's rage-distorted face and open mouth were snatched out of the darkness by the match's flame. But that instant was enough for Okunev to recognise the son of a gubernia food commissariat bookkeeper.

"Checking up, eh?" he snarled. "Well, I'm not afraid, I'm no thief."

The match flickered out. Pankratov rose and drew himself up to his full height.

"What kind of talk is that? Who dares to compare a Party task to a hard-labour sentence?" he thundered, running his eyes menacingly over the front rows. "No, Comrades, there's no going to town for us, our place is here. If we clear out now folks will freeze to death. The sooner we finish the job the sooner we get back home. Running away like that whiner back there suggests doesn't fit in with our ideas or our discipline."

Pankratov, a stevedore, was not fond of long speeches but even this brief statement was interrupted by the same irate voice.

"The non-Party fellows are leaving, aren't
they?" "Yes."

A lad in a short overcoat came elbowing his way to the front. A Komsomol card flew up, struck against Pankratov's chest, dropped onto the table and stood on edge.

"There, take your card. I'm not going to risk my health for a bit of
cardboard!" His last words were drowned out by a roar of angry voices:

"What do you think you're throwing
around!" "Treacherous bastard!"

"Got into the Komsomol because he thought he'd have it
easy." "Chuck him out!"

"Let me get at the louse!"

The deserter, his head lowered, made his way to the exit. They let him pass, shrinking away from him as from a leper. The door closed with a creak behind him.

Pankratov picked up the discarded membership card and held it to the flame of the oil lamp. The cardboard caught alight and curled up as it burned.

A shot echoed in the forest. A horseman turned from the tumbledown barracks and dived into the darkness of the forest. A moment later men came pouring out of the barracks and school building. Someone discovered a piece of plywood that had been stuck into the door. A match flared up and shielding the unsteady flame from the wind they read the scrawled message: "Clear out of here and go back where you came from. If you don't, we will shoot every one of you. I give you till tomorrow night to get out. Ataman Chesnok."
Chesnok belonged to Orlik's band.

An open diary lies on the table in Rita's room.

December 2

"We had our first snow this morning. The frost is severe. I met Vyacheslav Olshinsky on the stairs and we walked down the street together.
" 'I always enjoy the first snowfall,' he said. 'Particularly when it is frosty like this. Lovely, isn't it?'
"But I was thinking of Boyarka and I told him that the frost and snow do not gladden me at all. On the contrary they depress me. And I told him why.
" 'That is a purely subjective reaction,' he said. 'If one argues on that premise all merriment or any manifestation of joy in wartime, for example, would have to be banned. But life is not like that. The tragedy is confined to the strip of front line where the battle is being fought. There life is overshadowed by the proximity of death. Yet even there people laugh. And away from the front, life goes on as always: people laugh, weep, suffer, rejoice, love, seek amusement, entertainment, excitement.'
"It was difficult to detect any shade of irony in Olshinsky's words. Olshinsky is a representative of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. He has been in the Party since 1917. He dresses well, is always cleanly shaven with a faint scent of perfume about him. He lives in our house, in Segal's apartment. Sometimes he drops in to see me in the evenings. He is very interesting to talk to, he knows a lot about Europe, lived for many years in Paris. But I doubt whether he and I could ever be good friends. That is because for him I am primarily a woman; the fact that I am his Party comrade is a secondary consideration. True, he does not attempt to disguise his sentiments and opinions on this score, he has the courage of his convictions and there is nothing coarse about his attentions. He has the knack of investing them with a sort of beauty. Yet I do not like him.
"The gruff simplicity of Zhukhrai is far more to my taste than all Olshinsky's polished European manners.
"News from Boyarka comes in the form of brief reports. Each day another two hundred yards laid. They are laying the sleepers straight on the frozen earth, hewing out shallow beds for them. There are only two hundred and forty men on the job. Half of the replacements deserted. The conditions there are truly frightful. I can't imagine how they will be able to carry on in the frost. Dubava has

been gone a week now. They were only able to repair five of the eight engines at Pushcha-Voditsa, there were not enough parts for the others.

"Dmitri has had criminal charges laid against him by the tramcar authorities. He and his brigade held up all the flatcars belonging to the tram system running to town from Pushcha-Voditsa, cleared off the passengers and loaded the cars with rails for the Boyarka line. They brought 19 carloads of rails along the tram tracks to the railway station in town. The tram crews were only too glad to help.

"The Solomenka Komsomols still in town worked all night loading the rails onto railway cars and Dmitri and his brigade went off with them to Boyarka.

"Akim refused to have Dubava's action taken up at the Komsomol Bureau. Dmitri has told us about the outrageous bureaucracy and red tape in the tramcar administration. They flatly refused to give more than two cars for the job.

"Tufta, however, privately reprimanded Dubava. 'It's time to drop these partisan tactics,' he said, 'or you'll find yourself in jail before you know it. Surely you could have come to some agreement without resorting to force of arms?'

"I had never seen Dubava so furious.

" 'Why didn't you try talking to them yourself, you rotten pen-pusher?' he stormed. 'All you can do is sit here warming your chair and wagging your tongue. How do you think I could go back to Boyarka without those rails? Instead of hanging around here and getting in everybody's hair you ought to be sent out there to do some useful work. Tokarev would knock some sense into you!' Dmitri roared so loudly he could be heard all over the building.

"Tufta wrote a complaint against Dubava, but Akim asked me to leave the room and talked to him alone for about ten minutes, after which Tufta stamped out red and fuming."

December 3

"The Gubernia Committee has received another complaint, this time from the Transport Cheka. It appears that Pankratov, Okunev and several other comrades went to Motovilovka station and removed all the doors and window frames from the empty buildings. When they were loading all this onto a freight train the station Cheka man tried to arrest them. They disarmed him, emptied his revolver and returned it to him only after the train was in motion. They got away with the doors and window frames.

"Tokarev is charged by the supply department of the railway for taking twenty poods of nails from the Boyarka railway stocks. He gave the nails to the peasants in payment for their help in hauling the timber they are using for sleepers.

"I spoke to Comrade Zhukhrai about all these complaints. But he only laughed. 'We'll take care of all that,' he said.

"The situation at the railway job is very tense and now every day is precious. We have to bring pressure to bear here for every trifle. Every now and then we have to summon hinderers to the Gubernia Committee. And over at the job the boys are overriding all formalities more and more often.

"Olshinsky has brought me a little electric stove. Olga Yureneva and I warm our hands over it, but

it doesn't make the room any warmer. I wonder how those men in the woods are faring this bitter cold night? Olga tells me that it is so cold in the hospital that the patients shiver under their blankets. The place is heated only once in two days.
"No, Comrade Olshinsky, a tragedy at the front is a tragedy in the rear too!"

December 4

"It snowed all night. From Boyarka they write that everything is snowbound and they have had to stop working to clear the track. Today the Gubernia Committee passed a decision that the first section of the railway, up to where the wood was being cut, is to be ready not later than January 1, 1922. When this decision reached Boyarka, Tokarev is said to have remarked: 'We'll do it, if we don't croak by then.'
"I hear nothing at all about Korchagin. I'm rather surprised that he hasn't been mixed up in something like the Pankratov 'case'. I still don't understand why he avoids me."

December 5

"Yesterday there was a bandit raid on the railway job."

The horses trod warily in the soft, yielding snow. Now and then a twig hidden under the snow would snap under a hoof and the horse would snort and shy, but a sharp rap over its laid-back ears would send it galloping after the others.
Some dozen horsemen crossed the hilly ridge beyond which lay a strip of dark earth not yet blanketed with snow. Here the riders reined in their horses. There was a faint clink as stirrup met stirrup. The leader's stallion, its coat glossy with sweat after the long run, shook itself noisily.
"There's a hell of a lot of them here," said the head rider in Ukrainian. "But we'll soon put the fear of God into 'em. The ataman said the bastards were to be chased out of here by tomorrow. They're getting too damned close to the firewood."
They rode up to the station single file, hugging the sides of the narrow-gauge line. In sight of the clearing near the old school building they slowed down to a walking pace and came to a halt behind the trees, not venturing out into the open.
A volley rent the silence of the night. A layer of snow dropped squirrel-like off the branch of a birch that gleamed like silver in the light of the moon. Gunfire flashed among the trees, bullets bored into crumbling plaster and there was a tinkling of broken glass as Pan-kratov's window panes were smashed to smithereens.
The men on the concrete floor leapt up at the shooting only to drop back again on top of one another when the lethal insects began to fly about the room.
"Where you going?" Dubava seized Pavel by the
coat tail. "Outside."
"Get down, you idiot!" Dmitri hissed. "They'll get you the moment you stick your head out."

They lay side by side next to the door. Dubava was flattened against the floor, with his revolver pointing toward the door. Pavel sat on his haunches nervously fingering the drum of his revolver. There were five rounds in it — one chamber was empty. He turned the cylinder another notch.
The shooting ceased suddenly. The silence that followed was weighted with tension. "All those who have weapons come this way," Dubava commanded in a hoarse whisper.
Pavel opened the door cautiously. The clearing was deserted. Snowflakes were falling softly. In the forest ten horsemen were whipping their mounts into a gallop.
The next day a trolley arrived from town. Zhukhrai and Akim alighted and were met by Tokarev and Kholyava. A machine-gun, several crates of cartridge belts and two dozen rifles were unloaded onto the platform.
They hurried over to the railway line. The tails of Fyodor's long greatcoat trailed a zigzag pattern in the snow behind him. He still walked with the clumsy rolling gait of the seaman, as if he were pacing the pitching deck of a destroyer. Long-legged Akim walked in step with Fyodor, but Tokarev had to break into a trot now and again to keep up with them.
"The bandit raid is not our worst trouble. There's a nasty rise in the ground right in the path of the line. Just our bad luck. It'll mean a lot of extra digging."
The old man stopped, turned his back to the wind and lit a cigarette, cupping his hand over the match. After blowing out a few puffs of smoke he hurried to catch up with the others. Akim had stopped to wait for him, but Zhukhrai strode on ahead.
"Do you think you'll be able to finish the line on time?" Akim asked
Tokarev. Tokarev paused a while before replying.
"Well, it's like this, son," he said at last. "Generally speaking it can't be done. But it's got to be done, so there you are."
They caught up with Fyodor and continued abreast.
"Here's how it is," Tokarev began earnestly. "Only two of us here, Patoshkin and I, know that it's impossible to build a line under these conditions, with the scanty equipment and labour power we have. But all the others, every last man of them, know that the line has got to be built at all costs. So you see that's why I said if we don't freeze to death, it'll be done. Judge for yourselves: we've been digging here for over a month, the fourth batch of replacements are due for a rest, but the main body of workers have been on the job all the time. It's only their youth that keeps them going. But half of them are badly chilled. Makes your heart bleed to look at them. These lads are worth their weight in gold. But this cursed hole will be the death of more than one of them."

The ready narrow-gauge track came to an end a kilometre from the station. Beyond that, for a stretch of about one and a half kilometres, the levelled roadbed was covered by what looked like a log palisade blown down by wind — these were the sleepers, all firmly planted in place. And beyond them, all the way to the rise, there was only a level road.
Pankratov's building crew No. 1 was working at this section. Forty men were laying ties, while a carroty-bearded peasant wearing a new pair of bast shoes was unhurriedly emptying a load of logs on the roadbed. Several more sleds were being unloaded a little farther away. Two long iron bars lay on the ground — these were used to level up the sleepers properly. Axes, crowbars and shovels were all used to tamp down the ballast.

Laying railway sleepers is slow, laborious work. The sleepers must be firmly imbedded in the earth so that the rails press evenly on each of them.

Only one man in the group knew the technique of laying sleepers. That was Talya's father, the line foreman Lagutin, a man of 54 with a pitch-black beard parted in the middle and not a grey hair in his head. He had worked at Boyarka since the beginning of the job, sharing all the hardships with the younger men and had earned the respect of the whole detachment. Although he was not a Party member, Lagutin invariably held a place of honour at all Party conferences. He was very proud of this and had given his word not to leave until the job was finished.

"How can I leave you to carry on by yourselves? Something's bound to go wrong without an experienced man to keep an eye on things. When it comes to that, I've hammered in more of these here sleepers up and down the country in my time than I can remember," he would say good-humouredly each time the question of replacements came up. And so he stayed.

Patoshkin saw that Lagutin knew his job and rarely inspected his sector. When Tokarev with Akim and Zhukhrai came over to where they were working, Pankratov, flushed and perspiring with exertion, was hewing out a hollow for a sleeper. Akim hardly recognised the young stevedore. Pankratov had lost much weight, his broad cheekbones protruded sharply in his grimy face which was sallow and sunken.

"Well, well," he said as he gave Akim a hot, damp hand, "the big chiefs have come!"

The ringing of spades ceased. Akim surveyed the pale worn faces of the men around him. Their coats and jackets lay in a careless heap on the snow.

After a brief talk with Lagutin, Tokarev took the party to the excavation site, inviting Pankratov to join them. The stevedore walked alongside Zhukhrai.

"Tell me, Pankratov, what happened at Motovilovka? Don't you think you overdid it disarming that Cheka man?" Fyodor asked the taciturn stevedore sternly.

Pankratov grinned sheepishly.

"It was all done by mutual consent," he explained. "He asked us to disarm him. He's a good lad. When we explained what it was all about, he says: 'I see your difficulty, boys, but I haven't the right to let you take those windows and doors away. We have orders from Comrade Dzerzhinsky to put a stop to the plunder of railway property. The station master here has his knife in me. He's stealing stuff, the bastard, and I'm in his way. If I let you get away with it he's bound to report me and I'll be tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal. But you can disarm me and clear off. And if the station master doesn't report the matter that will be the end of it.' So that's what we did. After all, we weren't taking those doors and windows for ourselves, were we?"

Noting the twinkle in Zhukhrai's eye, he went on: "You can punish us for it if you want to, but don't be hard on that lad, Comrade Zhukhrai."

"That's all over and done with. But see there's no more of that in the future, it's bad for discipline. We are strong enough now to smash bureaucracy in an organised way. Now let's talk about something more important." And Fyodor proceeded to inquire about the details of the bandit raid.

About four and a half kilometres from Boyarka station a group of men were digging furiously into a rise in the ground that stood in the path of the line. Seven men armed with all the weapons the detachment possessed — Kholyava's rifle and the revolvers belonging to Korchagin, Pankratov,

Dubava and Khomutov — stood on guard.

Patoshkin was sitting on top of the rise jotting down figures in his notebook. He was the only engineer on the job. Vakulenko, the technician, preferring to stand trial for desertion rather than death at a bandit's hand, had fled that morning.

"It will take two weeks to clear this hill out of the way. The ground's frozen hard," Patoshkin remarked in a low voice to the gloomy Khomutov standing beside him.

"We've been given twenty-five days to finish the whole line, and you're figuring fifteen for this," Khomutov growled, chewing the tip of his moustache.

"Can't be done, I'm afraid. Of course, I've never built anything before under such conditions and with workers like these. I may be mistaken. As a matter of fact I have been mistaken twice before."

At that moment Zhukhrai, Akim and Pankratov were seen approaching the slope.

"Look, who's that down there?" cried Pyotr Trofimov, a young mechanic from the railway workshops in an old sweater torn at the elbows. He nudged Korchagin and pointed to the newcomers. The next moment Korchagin, spade in hands, was dashing down the hill. His eyes under the peak of his helmet smiled a warm greeting and Fyodor lingered over their handshake.

"Hallo there, Pavel! Hardly recognised you in this rig-out."

Pankratov laughed drily: "Rig-out isn't the word for it. Plenty of ventilation holes anyway. The deserters pinched his overcoat, Okunev gave him that jacket — they've got a commune, you know. But Pavel's all right, he's got warm blood in his veins. He'll warm himself for a week or two more on the concrete floor — the straw doesn't make much difference — and then he'll be ready for a nice pine-wood coffin," the stevedore wound up with grim humour.

Dark-browed, snub-nosed Okunev narrowed his mischievous eyes and objected: "Never mind, we'll take care of Pavel. We can vote him a job in the kitchen helping Odarka. If he isn't a fool he can get himself a bit of extra grub and snuggle up to the stove or to Odarka herself."

A roar of laughter met this remark; it was the first time they had laughed that day.

Fyodor inspected the rise, then drove out with Tokarev and Patoshkin by sled to the timber felling. When he returned, the men were still digging with dogged persistence into the hill. Fyodor noted the rapid movement of the spades, and the backs of the workers bent under the strain. Turning to Akim, he said in an undertone:

"No need of meetings. No agitation required here. You were right, Tokarev, when you said these lads are worth their weight in gold. This is where the steel is tempered."

Zhukhrai gazed at the diggers with admiration and stern, yet tender pride. Some of them only a short time back had stood before him bristling with the steel of their bayonets. That was on the night before the insurrection. And now, moved by a single impulse, they were toiling in order that the steel arteries of the railway might reach out to the precious source of warmth and life.

Politely but firmly Patoshkin showed Fyodor that it was impossible to dig through the rise in less than two weeks. Fyodor listened to his arguments with a preoccupied air, his mind clearly busy with some problem of its own.

"Stop all work on the cut and carry on farther up the line. We'll tackle that hill in a different way," he said finally.

Down at the station he spent a long time at the telephone. Kholyava, on guard outside the door, heard Fyodor's hoarse bass from within.

"Ring up the chief of staff of the Military Area and tell him in my name to transfer Puzyrevsky's regiment to the railway job at once. The bandits must be cleared out of the area without delay. Send an armoured train over with demolition men. I'll take care of the rest myself. I'll be back late. Tell Litke to be at the station with the car by midnight."

In the barracks, after a short speech by Akim, Zhukhrai took the floor and an hour fled by in comradely discussion. Fyodor told the men there could be no question of extending the January 1 time limit allotted for the completion of the job.

"From now on we are putting the work on a military footing," he said. "The Party members will form a special task company with Comrade Dubava in command. All six work teams will receive definite assignments. The remainder of the job will be divided into six equal sectors, one for each team. By January 1 all the work must be completed. The team that finishes first will be allowed to go back to town. Also, the Presidium of the Gubernia Executive Committee is asking the Government to award the Order of the Red Banner to the best worker in the team that comes out first."

The leaders of the various teams were appointed as follows: No. 1, Comrade Pankratov, No. 2, Comrade Dubava, No. 3, Comrade Khomutov, No. 4, Comrade Lagutin, No. 5, Comrade Korchagin, No. 6, Comrade Okunev.

"The chief of the job, its political and administrative leader will, as before, be Anton Nikiforovich Tokarev," Zhukhrai wound up with an oratorical flourish.

Like a flock of birds suddenly taking wing, the hand-clapping burst forth and stern faces relaxed in smiles. The warm whimsical conclusion to the speech relieved the strained attention of the meeting in a gust of laughter.

Some twenty men trooped down to the station to see Akim and Fyodor off.

As he shook hands with Korchagin, Fyodor glanced down at Pavel's snow-filled galosh.

"I'll send you a pair of boots," he said in a low voice. "You haven't frozen your feet yet, I hope?" "They've begun to swell a bit," Pavel replied, then remembering something he had asked for a long time ago, he caught Fyodor by the arm. "Could you let me have a few cartridges for my revolver? I believe I only have three good ones left."

Zhukhrai shook his head in regret, but catching Pavel's disappointed look, he quickly unstrapped his own Mauser. "Here's a present for you."

Pavel could not believe at first that he was really getting something he had set his heart on for so long, but Zhukhrai threw the leather strap over his shoulder saying: "Take it, take it! I know you've had your eye on it for a long time. But take care you don't shoot any of our own men with it. Here are three full clips to go with it." Pavel felt the envious eyes of the others upon him. "Hey, Pavka," someone yelled, "I'll swap with you for a pair of boots and a sheepskin thrown in."

Pankratov nudged Pavel provokingly in the back.

"Come on, I'll give you a pair of felt boots for it. Anyway you'll be dead before Christmas with that galosh of yours."

With one foot on the step of the trolley for support, Zhukhrai wrote out a permit for the Mauser.

Early the next morning an armoured train clattered over the switches and pulled up at the station. The engine spouted plumes of steam as white as swansdown that vanished in the crystal-clear frosty air. Leather-clad figures emerged from the steel cars. A few hours later three demolition men from the train had planted in the earth of the hill two large black pumpkin-like objects with long fuses attached. They fired a few warning shots and the men scattered in all directions away from the now deadly hill. A match was put to the end of the fuse which flared up with a tiny phosphorescent flame.

For a while the men held their breath. One or two moments of suspense, and then the earth trembled, and a terrific force rent the hill asunder, tossing huge chunks of earth skywards. The second explosion was more powerful than the first. The thunder of it reverberated over the surrounding forest, filling it with a confusion of sound.

When the smoke and dust cleared a deep pit yawned where the hill had just stood, and the sugary snow was sprinkled with earth for dozens of paces all around.

Men with picks and shovels rushed to the cavity formed by the explosion.

After Zhukhrai's departure, a stubborn contest for the honour of being the first to finish the job commenced among the teams.

Long before dawn Korchagin rose quietly, taking care not to wake the others, and stepping cautiously on numb feet over the chilly floor made his way to the kitchen. There he heated the water for tea and went back to wake up his team.

By the time the others were up it was broad daylight.

That morning Pankratov elbowed his way through the crowded barracks to where Dubava and his group were having their breakfast.

"Hear that, Mityai?" he said heatedly. "Pavka went and got his lads up before daylight. I bet they've got a good twenty yards laid out by now. The fellows say he's got those railway repair shop boys all worked up to finish their section by the twenty-fifth. Wants to beat the rest of us hollow. But I say nothing doing!"

Dubava gave a sour smile. He could understand why the secretary of the river-port Komsomol had been touched on the raw by what the railway repair shopmen had done. As a matter of fact his friend Pavel had stolen a march on him, Dubava, as well. Without saying a word to anyone he had simply challenged the whole company.

"Friends or no friends, it's the best man who wins," Pankratov said.

Around midday Korchagin's team was hard at work when an unexpected interruption occurred. The sentry standing guard over the rifles caught sight of a group of horsemen approaching through the trees and fired a warning shot.

"To arms, lads! Bandits!" cried Pavel. He flung down his spade and rushed over to the tree where his Mauser hung.

Snatching their rifles the others dropped down straight in the snow by the edge of the line. The leading horsemen waved their caps.

"Steady there, Comrades, don't shoot!" one of them shouted.

Some fifty cavalrymen in Budyonny caps with bright red stars came riding up the road.
A unit of Puzyrevsky's regiment had come on a visit to the job. Pavel noticed that the commander's horse, a handsome grey mare with a white blaze on her forehead, had the tip of one ear missing. She pranced restlessly under her rider, and when Pavel rushed forward and seized her by the bridle, she shied away nervously.
"Why, Lyska old girl, I never thought we'd meet again! So the bullets didn't get you, my one-eared beauty."
He embraced her slender neck tenderly and stroked her quivering nostrils.
The commander stared at Pavel for a moment, then cried out in amazement: "Well, if it isn't Korchagin! You recognise the mare but you don't see your old pal Sereda. Greetings, lad!"

In the meantime back in town pressure was being exerted in all quarters to expedite the building of the line, and this was felt at once at the job. Zharky had literally stripped the Komsomol District Committee of all the male personnel and sent them out to Boyarka. Only the girls were left at Solomenka. He got the railway school to send out another batch of students.
"I'm left here with the female proletariat," he joked, reporting the results of his work to Akim. "I think I'll put Talya Lagutina in my place, hang out the sign 'Women's Department' on the door and clear out to Boyarka myself. It's awkward for me here, the only man among all these women. You ought to see the nasty looks they give me. I'm sure they're saying: 'Look, the sly beggar sent everybody off, but stays on himself.' Or something worse still. You must let me go."
But Akim merely laughed at his words.

New workers continued to arrive at Boyarka, among them sixty students from the railway school. Zhukhrai induced the railway administration to send four passenger carriages to Boyarka to house the newcomers.
Dubava's team was released from work and sent to Pushcha-Voditsa to bring back the engines and sixty-five narrow-gauge flatcars. This assignment was to be counted as part of the work on their section.
Before leaving, Dubava advised Tokarev to recall Klavicek from town and put him in charge of one of the newly-organised work teams at Boyarka. Tokarev did so. He did not know the real reason for Dubava's request: a note from Anna which the newcomers from Solomenka had brought.

"Dmitri!" Anna wrote. "Klavicek and I have prepared a pile of books for you. We send our warmest greetings to you and all the other Boyarka shock workers. You are all wonderful! We wish you strength and energy to carry on. Yesterday the last stocks of wood were distributed. Klavicek asks me to send you his greetings. He is wonderful. He bakes all the bread for Boyarka, sifts the flour and kneads the dough high himself. He doesn't trust anyone in the bakery to do it. He managed to get excellent flour and his bread is good, much better than the kind I get. In the evenings our friends gather in my place — Lagutina, Artyukhin, Klavicek, and sometimes Zharky. We do a bit of reading but mostly we talk about everybody and everything, chiefly about you in

Boyarka. The girls are furious with Tokarev for refusing to let them work on the railway. They say they can endure hardships as well as anyone. Talya declares she's going to dress up in her father's clothes and go out to Boyarka by herself. 'Let him just try to kick me out,' she says.
"I wouldn't be surprised if she kept her word. Please give my regards to your dark-eyed friend. "Anna."

The blizzard came upon them suddenly. Low grey clouds spread themselves over the sky and the snow fell thickly. When night came the wind howled in the chimneys and moaned in the trees, chasing the whirling snow-flakes and awakening the forest echoes with its malevolent whine.
All night long the storm raged in a wild fury, and although the stoves were kept warm throughout the night the men shivered; the wrecked station building could not hold the warmth.
In the morning they had to plough through the deep snow to reach their sections. High above the trees the sun shone in a blue sky without a single cloudlet to mar its clear expanse.
Korchagin and his men went to work to clear the snowdrifts from their section. Only now did Pavel realise how much a man could suffer from the cold. Okunev's threadbare jacket gave him scant protection and his galosh was constantly full of snow. He kept losing it in the snow, and now his other boot was threatening to fall apart. Two enormous boils had broken out on his neck — the result of sleeping on the cold floor. Tokarev had given him his towel to wear in place of a scarf.
Gaunt and red-eyed, Pavel was furiously plying his wooden snow shovel when a passenger train puffed slowly into the station. Its expiring engine had barely managed to haul it this far; there was not a single log of wood in the tender and the last embers were burning low in the firebox.
"Give us fuel and we'll go on, or else shunt us onto a siding while we still have the power to move!" the engine driver yelled to the station master.
The train was switched onto a siding. The reason for the halt was explained to the disgruntled passengers and a storm of complaints and curses broke out in the crowded carriages.
"Go and talk to that old chap," the station master advised the train guards, pointing to Tokarev who was walking down the platform.
"He's the chief of the job here. Maybe he can get wood brought down by sled to the engine. They're using the logs for sleepers."
"I'll give you the wood, but you'll have to work for it," said Tokarev when" the conductors applied to him. "After all, it's our building material. We're being held up at the moment by the snow. There must be about six or seven hundred passengers inside your train. The women and children can stay inside but let the men come and lend a hand clearing the snow until evening and I'll give you firewood. If they refuse they can stay where they are till New Year's."

"Look at the crowd coming this way! Look, women too!" Korchagin heard a surprised exclamation at his back. He turned round. Tokarev came up.
"Here are a hundred helpers for you," he said. "Give them work and see none of them is idle." Korchagin put the newcomers to work. One tall man in a smart railway uniform with a fur collar and a warm caracul cap indignantly twirled the shovel in his hands and turned to his companion, a young woman wearing a sealskin hat with a fluffy pompon on top.
"I am not going to shovel snow and nobody has the right to force me to do it. As a railway

engineer I could take charge of the work if they ask me to, but neither you nor I need to shovel snow. It's contrary to the regulations. That old man is breaking the law. I can have him prosecuted. Where is your foreman?" he demanded of the worker nearest him.

Korchagin came over.

"Why aren't you working?"

The man examined Pavel contemptuously from head to foot. "And who may you be?"

"I am a worker."

"Then I have nothing to say to you. Send me your foreman, or whatever you call him...." Korchagin scowled.

"You needn't work if you don't want to. But you won't get back on that train unless your ticket is countersigned by us. That's the construction chief's orders."

"What about you?" Pavel turned to the woman and was struck dumb with surprise. Before him stood Tonya Tumanova!

Tonya could hardly believe that this tramp who stood before her in his tattered clothing and incredible footwear, with a filthy towel around his neck and a face that had not been washed for many a day, was the Korchagin she once knew. Only his eyes blazed as fiercely as ever. The eyes of the Pavel she remembered. And to think that only a short while ago she had given her love to this ragged creature. How everything had changed!

She had recently married, and she and her husband were on their way to the city where he held an important position in the railway administration. Who could have thought that she would meet the object of her girlish affections in this way? She even hesitated to give him her hand. What would Vasili think? How awful of Korchagin to have fallen so low. Evidently the young stoker had not been able to rise above navvy work.

She stood hesitating, her cheeks burning. Meanwhile the railway engineer, infuriated by what he considered the insolence of this tramp who stood staring at his wife, flung down his shovel and went over to her side.

"Let us go, Tonya, I can't stand the sight of this lazzarone."

Korchagin had read Giuseppe Garibaldi and he knew what that word meant.

"I may be a lazzarone, but you're no more than a rotten bourgeois," he said hoarsely, and turning to Tonya, added curtly: "Take a shovel, Comrade Tumanova, and get into line. Don't take an example from this prize bull here. . .. Excuse me if he is any relation of yours."

Pavel glanced at Tonya's fur boots and smiled grimly, adding casually:

"I wouldn't advise you to stop over here. The other night we were attacked by bandits."

With that he turned on his heel and walked off, his galosh flapping as he went.

His last words impressed the railway engineer, and Tonya succeeded in persuading him to stay and work.

That evening, when the day's work was over, the crowd streamed back to the station. Tonya's husband hurried ahead to make sure of a seat in the train. Tonya, stopping to let a group of workers pass, saw Pavel trudging wearily behind the others, leaning heavily on his shovel.

"Hello, Pavlusha," she said and fell into step beside him. "I must say I never expected to find you in such straits. Surely the authorities ought to know you deserve something better than navvy's work? I thought you'd be a commissar or something like that by now. What a pity life has been so

unkind to you...."

Pavel halted and surveyed Tonya with surprise.

"Nor did I expect to find you ... so stuffy," he said, choosing the most polite word he could think of to express his feelings.

The tips of Tonya's ears burned.

"You're just as rude as ever!"

Korchagin hoisted his shovel onto his shoulder and strode off. After a few steps he stopped.

"My rudeness, Comrade Tumanova," he said, "is not half as offensive as your so-called politeness. And as for my life, please don't worry about that. There's nothing wrong with it. It's your life that's all wrong, ever so much worse than I expected. Two years ago you were better, you wouldn't have been ashamed to shake hands with a workingman. But now you reek of moth balls. To tell the truth, you and I have nothing more to say to each other."

Pavel had a letter from Artem announcing that he was going to be married and urging Pavel to come to the wedding without fail.

The wind tore the sheet of paper out of Pavel's hand and it flew off into the air. No wedding parties for him. How could he leave now? Only yesterday that bear Pankratov had outstripped his team and spurted forward at a pace that amazed everyone. The stevedore was making a desperate bid for first place in the contest. His usual nonchalance had forsaken him and he was whipping up his "water-fronters" to a furious tempo.

Patoshkin, noting the silent intensity with which the men worked, scratched his head perplexedly. "Are these men or giants?" he marvelled. "Where do they get their incredible strength? If the weather holds out for only eight more days we'll reach the timber! Well, live and learn! These men are breaking all records and estimates." Klavicek came from town bringing the last batch of bread he had baked. He had a talk with Tokarev and then went off to hunt for Korchagin. The two men shook hands warmly. Klavicek with a broad smile dived into his knapsack and produced a handsome fur-lined leather jacket of Swedish make.

"This is for you!" he said stroking the soft leather. "Guess from whom? What! You don't know? You are dense, man! It's from Comrade Ustinovich. So you shouldn't catch cold. Olshinsky gave it to her. She took it from him and handed it straight to me with orders to take it to you. Akim told her you've been going about in the frost with nothing but a thin jacket. Olshinsky's nose was put out of joint a bit. 'I can send the comrade an army coat,' he says. But Rita only laughed. 'Never mind,' she said, 'he'll work better in this jacket.' "

The astonished Pavel took the luxurious-looking jacket and after some hesitation slipped it on. Almost at once he felt the warmth from the soft fur spreading over his shoulders and chest.

Rita wrote in her diary:

December 20

"We have been having a bout of blizzards. Snow and wind. Out at Boyarka they had almost reached their goal when the frosts and storms halted them. They are up to their necks in snow and the frozen earth is not easy to dig. They have only three-quarters of a kilometre to go, but this is the hardest lap of all.
"Tokarev reports an outbreak of typhoid fever. Three men are down with it."

December 22

"There was a plenary session of the Komsomol Guber-nia Committee but no one from Boyarka attended. Bandits derailed a trainload of grain seventeen kilometres from Boyarka, and the Food Commissariat representative ordered all the construction workers to be sent to the spot."

December 23

"Another seven typhoid cases have been brought to town from Boyarka. Okunev is one of them. I went down to the station and saw frozen corpses of people who had been riding the buffers taken off a Kharkov train. The hospitals are unheated. This accursed blizzard, when will it end?"

December 24

"Just seen Zhukhrai. He confirmed the rumour that Orlik and his band attacked Boyarka last night. The fight lasted two hours. Communications were cut and Zhukhrai did not get the exact report until this morning. The band was beaten back but Tokarev has been wounded, a bullet went right through his chest. He will be brought to town today. Franz Klavicek, who was in charge of the guard that night, was killed. He was the one who spotted the band and raised the alarm. He started shooting at the raiders but they were on him before he had time to reach the school building. He was cut down by a sabre blow. Eleven of the builders were wounded. Two cavalry squadrons and an armoured train are there by now.
"Pankratov has taken charge of the job. Today Puzyrevsky caught up with part of the band in Gluboky village and wiped it out. Some of the non-Party workers started out for town without waiting for a train; they are walking along the track."

December 25

"Tokarev and the other wounded men arrived, and were placed in hospital. The doctors promised to save the old man. He is still unconscious. The lives of the others are not in danger.
"A telegram came from Boyarka addressed to us and the Gubernia Party Committee. 'In reply to the bandit assault, we builders of the narrow-gauge line gathered at this meeting together with the crew of the armoured train For Soviet Power and the Red Army men of the cavalry regiment, vow to you that notwithstanding all obstacles the town shall have firewood by January 1. Mustering all

our strength we are setting to work. Long live the Communist Party, which sent us here! Korchagin, chairman of the meeting. Berzin, secretary.'
"Klavicek was buried with military honours at Solomenka."

The cherished goal was in sight, but the advance toward it was agonisingly slow, for every day typhoid fever tore dozens of badly needed hands from the builders' ranks.
One day Korchagin, returning from work to the station, staggered along like a drunkard, his legs ready to give way beneath him. He had been feverish for quite some time, but today it gripped him more fiercely than usual.
Typhoid fever, which had thinned the ranks of the building detachment, had claimed a new victim. But Pavel's sturdy constitution resisted the disease and for five days in succession he had found the strength to pick himself up from his straw pallet on the concrete floor and join the others at work. But the fever had taken possession of him and now neither the warm jacket nor the felt boots, Fyodor's gift, worn over his already frostbitten feet, helped.
A sharp pain seared his chest with each step he took, his teeth chattered, and his vision was blurred so that the trees seemed to be whirling around in a strange merry-go-round.
With difficulty he dragged himself to the station. An unusual commotion there caused him to halt, and straining his fever-hazed eyes, he saw a long train of flatcars stretching the entire length of the platform. Men who had come with the train were busy unloading narrow-gauge engines, rails and sleepers. Pavel staggered forward and lost his balance. He felt a dull pain as his head hit the ground and the pleasant coolness of the snow against his burning cheek.
Several hours later he was found and carried back to the barracks. He was breathing heavily, quite unconscious of his surroundings. A doctor's assistant summoned from the armoured train examined him and diagnosed pneumonia and typhoid fever. His temperature was over 106°. The doctor's assistant noted the inflammation of the joints and the ulcers on the neck but said they were trifles compared with the pneumonia and typhoid which alone were enough to kill him.
Pankratov and Dubava, who had arrived from town, did all they could to save Pavel.
Alyosha Kokhansky, who came from the same town as Pavel, was entrusted with taking him home to his people.
With the help of all the members of Korchagin's team, and mainly with Kholyava acting as battering ram, Pankratov and Dubava managed to get Alyosha and the unconscious Korchagin into the packed railway carriage. The passengers, suspecting typhus, resisted violently and threatened to throw the sick man out of the train en route.
Kholyava waved his gun under their noses and roared: "His illness is not infectious! And he's going on this train even if we have to throw out the whole lot of you! And remember, you swine, if anyone lays a finger on him, I'll send word down the line and you'll all be taken off the train and put behind the bars. Here, Alyosha, take Pavel's Mauser and shoot the first man who tries to put him off," Kholyava wound up for additional emphasis.
The train puffed out of the station. Pankratov went over to Dubava standing on the deserted platform.
"Do you think he'll pull through?" The

question remained unanswered.

"Come along, Mityai, it can't be helped. We've got to answer for everything now. We must get those engines unloaded during the night and in the morning we'll try to start them going." Kholyava telephoned to all his Cheka friends along the line urging them to make sure that the sick Korchagin was not taken off the train anywhere. Not until he had been given a firm assurance that this would be done did he finally go to bed.

At a railway junction farther down the line the body of an unknown fair-haired young man was carried out of one of the carriages of a passenger train passing through and set down on the platform. Who he was and what he had died of no one knew. The station Cheka men, remembering Kholyava's request, ran over to the carriage, but when they saw that the youth was dead, gave instructions for the corpse to be removed to the morgue, and immediately telephoned to Kholyava at Boyarka informing him of the death of his friend whose life he had been so anxious to save.
A brief telegram was sent from Boyarka to the Gubernia Committee of the Komsomol announcing Korchagin's death.
In the meantime, however, Alyosha Kokhansky delivered the sick Korchagin to his people and came down himself with the fever.

January 9

"Why does my heart ache so? Before I sat down to write I wept bitterly. Who would have believed that Rita could weep and with such anguish? But are tears always a sign of weakness? Today mine are tears of searing grief. Why did grief come on this day of victory when the horrors of cold have been overcome, when the railway stations are piled high with precious fuel, when I have just returned from the celebration of the victory, an enlarged plenary meeting of the Town Soviet where the heroes of the railway job were accorded all honours. This is victory, but two men lost their lives — Klavicek and Korchagin.
"Pavel's death has opened my eyes to the truth — he was far dearer to me than I had thought.
"And now I shall close this diary. I doubt whether I shall ever return to it. Tomorrow I am writing to Kharkov to accept the job offered me in the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Komsomol."

## Chapter Three

But youth triumphed. Pavel did not succumb to the typhoid fever. For the fourth time he crossed the border line of death and came back to life. It was a whole month, however, before he was able to rise from his bed. Gaunt and pale, he tottered feebly across the room on his shaky legs, clinging to the wall for support. With his mother's help he reached the window and stood there for a long time looking out onto the road where pools of melted snow glittered in the early spring sunshine. It was the first thaw of the year.
Just in front of the window a grey-breasted sparrow perched on the branch of a cherry-tree was

preening its feathers, stealing quick uneasy glances at Pavel.
"So you and I got through the winter, eh?" Pavel said, softly tapping on the window pane. His mother looked up startled.
"Who are you talking to out there?"
"A sparrow.... There now, he's flown away, the little rascal." And Pavel gave a wan smile.
By the time spring was at its height Pavel began to think of returning to town. He was now strong enough to walk, but some mysterious disease was undermining his strength. One day as he was walking in the garden a sudden excruciating pain in his spine knocked him off his feet. With difficulty he got up and dragged himself back to his room. The next day he submitted to a thorough medical examination. The doctor, examining Pavel's back, discovered a deep depression in his spine.
"How did you get this?" he asked.
"That was in the fighting near Rovno. A three-inch gun tore up the highway behind us and a stone hit me in the back."
"But how did you manage to walk? Hasn't it ever bothered you?"
"No. I couldn't get up for an hour or two after it happened, but then it passed and I got into the saddle again. It has never troubled me till now,"
The doctor's face was very grave as he carefully examined the depression.
"Yes, my friend, a very nasty business. The spine does not like to be shaken up like that. Let us hope that it will pass."
The doctor looked at his patient with undisguised concern.

One day Pavel went to see his brother. Artem lived with his wife's people. His wife Styosha was a plain-featured young peasant woman who came from a poverty-stricken family. A grimy slant-eyed urchin playing in the small, filthy yard stared fixedly at Pavel, picking his nose stolidly.
"What d'ye want?" he demanded. "Maybe you're a thief? You'd better clear off or you'll get it from my Ma!"
A tiny window was flung open in the shabby old cottage and Artem looked out. "Come on in, Pavel!" he called.
An old woman with a face like yellowed parchment was busy at the stove. She flung Pavel an unfriendly look as he passed her and resumed her clattering with the pots.
Two girls with stringy pigtails clambered onto the stove ledge and stared down from there at the newcomer with the gaping curiosity of little savages.
Artem, sitting at the table, looked somewhat uncomfortable. He was aware that neither his mother nor his brother approved of his marriage. They could not understand why Artem, whose family had been proletarian for generations, had broken off with Galya, the stonemason's pretty daughter and a seamstress by trade whom he had been courting for three years, to go and live with a dull, ignorant woman like Styosha and be the breadwinner in a family of five. Now, after a hard day's work at the railway yard he had to toil at the plough in an effort to revive the run-down farm.

Artem knew that Pavel disapproved of his desertion to what he called the "petty-bourgeois

elements", and he now watched his brother take stock of his surroundings.
They sat for a while exchanging a few casual remarks. Presently Pavel rose to go, but Artem detained him.
"Wait a bit, and have a bite with us. Styosha will bring the milk in soon. So you're going away again tomorrow? Are you sure you're quite strong enough, Pavka?"
Styosha came in. She greeted Pavel, and asked Artem to go with her to the barn and help her carry something. Pavel was left alone with the dour old woman. Through the window came the sound of church bells. The old woman laid down her pothook and began to mutter sourly: "Lord above, with all this cursed housework a body can scarce find time to pray!" She took off her shawl and, eyeing the newcomer askance, went over to the corner where hung the holy images, dreary and tarnished with age. Pressing together three bony fingers she crossed herself.
"Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name!" she whispered through withered lips. The urchin playing outside in the yard leapt astride a black lop-eared hog. He dug his small bare heels smartly into its sides, clung to its bristles and shouted to the running, snorting beast: "Gee-up, gee-up! Whoa! Whoa!"
The hog with the boy on its back dashed madly about the yard in a desperate effort to throw him, but the slant-eyed imp kept his seat firmly.
The old woman stopped praying and stuck her head out of the window.
"Get off that pig this minute, you little beast, or I'll wring your neck!"
The hog finally succeeded in shaking his tormentor off his back, and the old woman, mollified, returned to her icons, composed her features into a pious expression and continued:
"Thy kingdom come. . . ."
At that moment the boy appeared in the doorway, his face grimy with tears. Wiping his smarting nose with his sleeve and sobbing with pain, he whined:
"Gimme a pancake, Mummy!"
The old woman turned on him in a fury.
"Can't you see I'm praying, you cross-eyed devil, you? I'll give you pancakes, you limb of satan!..." And she snatched a whip from the bench. The boy was gone in a flash. The two little girls on top of the stove snickered.
The old woman returned to her devotions for the third time.
Pavel got up and went out without waiting for his brother. As he closed the gate behind him he noticed the old woman peering suspiciously out at him through the end window of the house. "What evil spirit lured Artem out here?" he thought bitterly. "Now he's tied down for the rest of his life. Styosha will have a baby every year. And Artem will be stuck like a beetle on a dunghill. He may even give up his work at the railway." Thus Pavel reflected gloomily as he strode down the deserted streets of the little town. "And I had hoped to be able to interest him in political work."
Pavel rejoiced at the thought that tomorrow he would be leaving this place and going to the big town to join his friends and comrades, all those dear to his heart. The big city with its bustling life and activity, its endless stream of humanity, its clattering trams and hooting automobiles drew him like a magnet. But most of all he yearned for the large brick factory buildings, the sooty workshops, the machines, the low hum of transmission belts. He yearned for the mad spinning of the giant flywheels, for the smell of machine oil, for all that had become so much a part of him.

This quiet provincial town whose streets he now roamed filled him with a vague feeling of depression. He was not surprised that he felt a stranger here now. Even to take a stroll through the town in daytime had become an ordeal. Passing by the gossiping housewives sitting on their stoops, he could not help overhearing their idle chatter.

"Now who could that scarecrow be?"

"Looks like he had the consumption, lung trouble, that is." "A fine jacket he's got on. Stolen, I'll be bound."

And plenty more in the same vein. Pavel was disgusted with it all.

He had torn himself away from all this long ago. He felt a far closer kinship now with the big city to which he was bound by the strong, vitalising bonds of comradeship and labour.

By now he had reached the pine woods, and he paused a moment at the road fork. To his right stood the old prison cut off from the woods by a high spiked fence, and beyond it the white buildings of the hospital.

It was here on this broad common that the hangman's noose had choked the warm life out of Valya and her comrades. Pavel stood in silence on the spot where the gallows had been, then walked over to the bluff and down to the little cemetery where the victims of the Whiteguard terror lay in their common graves. Loving hands had laid spruce branches on the graves and built a neat green fence around the graveyard. The pines grew straight and slender on the top of the bluff and the young grass spread a silky green carpet over the slopes.

There was a melancholy hush here on the outskirts of the town. The trees whispered gently and the fresh scent of spring rose from the regenerated earth. On this spot Pavel's comrades had gone bravely to their deaths that life might be beautiful for those born in poverty.

Slowly Pavel raised his hand and removed his cap, his heart filled with sadness.

Man's dearest possession is life. It is given to him but once, and he must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, he might say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world — the fight for the Liberation of Mankind. And one must make use of every moment of life, lest some sudden illness or tragic accident cut it short.

With these reflections, Korchagin turned away from the cemetery.

At home his mother was unhappily preparing for her son's departure. Watching her, Pavel saw that she was hiding her tears from him.

"Perhaps you'll stay, Pavel dear?" she ventured. "It's hard for me to be left alone in my old age. It doesn't matter how many children you have, they all grow up and leave you. Why must you run off to the city? You can live here just as well. Or perhaps some bob-haired magpie there has caught your fancy? You boys never tell your old mother anything. Artem went and got married without a word to me and you're worse than him in that respect. I only see you when you get yourself crippled," his mother grumbled softly as she packed his meagre belongings into a clean bag.

Pavel took her by the shoulders and drew her towards him.

"No magpies for me, Mother! Don't you know that birds choose mates of their own species? And would you say I was a magpie?"

His mother smiled in spite of herself.
"No, Mother, I've given my word to keep away from the girls until we've finished with all the bourgeois in the world. Bit long to wait, you say? No, Mother, the bourgeoisie can't hold out very long now. Soon there will be one big republic for all men, and you old folk who've worked all your lives will go to Italy, a beautiful warm country by the sea. There is no winter there, Mother. We'll install you in the rich men's palaces, and you'll lie about in the sun warming your old bones while we'll go and finish off the bourgeois in America."
"That's a lovely fairy-tale, Son, but I shan't live to see it come true. . . . You're just like your grandad, the sailor, always full of ideas he was. A regular brigand, God forgive him! Finished up at Sevastopol and came home with one arm and one leg missing and two crosses and two silver medals on his chest. But he died poor. Bad-tempered too, he was. Hit some official over the head with his crutch once and was sent to jail for about a year. Even his military crosses didn't help him then. Yes, it's your grandad you take after and no mistake."
"Now then, Ma, we can't have such a sorrowful farewell, can we? Let me have my accordion. I haven't touched it for a long time."
He bent his head over the mother-of-pearl rows of keys and began to play. His mother, listening, caught a new quality in his music. He never used to play like this. The dashing, rollicking tunes with the trills and runs, the intoxicating rhythms for which the young accordionist had once been famed, were gone. His fingers had lost none of their power or skill, but the melody that flowed from under them now was richer and deeper.
Pavel went to the station alone.
He had persuaded his mother to stay at home for he knew that the final parting would upset her too much.
The waiting crowd piled pell-mell into the train. Pavel climbed onto one of the topmost shelves and sat there watching the shouting, excited passengers arguing and gesticulating down below.
As usual everyone carried packs and bundles which they shoved under the seats.
As soon as the train got into motion the hubbub subsided somewhat and the passengers settled down to the business of stuffing themselves with food.
Pavel soon fell asleep.

On his arrival in Kiev, Pavel set out at once for Kreshchatik Street in the heart of the city. Slowly he climbed onto the bridge. Everything was as it had been, nothing had changed. He walked across the bridge, sliding his hand over the smooth railings. There was not a soul on the bridge. He paused before descending to admire the majesty of the scene. The horizon was wrapped in the velvety folds of darkness, the stars sparkled and glittered with a phosphorescent glow. And down below, where the earth merged with the sky at some invisible point, the city scattered the darkness with a million lights. . . .
Voices raised in argument invaded the stillness of the night and roused Pavel from his reverie. Someone was coming this way. Pavel tore his eyes away from the city lights and descended the stairs.
At the Area Special Department the man on duty informed Pavel that Zhukhrai had left town a long time ago.

He questioned Pavel searchingly and, satisfied that the young man really was a personal friend of Zhukhrai, finally told him that Fyodor had been sent to work in Tashkent on the Turkestan front. Pavel was so upset by the news that he turned and walked out without asking for further details. A sudden weariness made him sink down onto the doorstep to rest.

A tramcar clattered by, filling the street with its din. An endless stream of people flowed past him. Pavel caught snatches of gay women's laughter, a rumbling bass, the high-pitched treble of a youth, the wheezy falsetto of an old man. The ebb and flow of hurrying crowds never ceased. Brightly-lit trams, glaring automobile headlights, electric lights ablaze over the entrance to a cinema near by.... And everywhere — people, filling the street with their incessant hum of conversation.

The noise and bustle of the avenue dulled the edge of the pain caused by the news of Fyodor's departure. Where was he to go now? It was a long way to Solo-menka where his friends lived. Suddenly he remembered the house on University Street. It was not far from here. Of course he would go there! After all, the first person he longed to see, after Fyodor, was Rita. And perhaps he could arrange to spend the night at Akim's place.

He saw a light in the end window from afar. Controlling his emotion with an effort he pulled open the heavy oaken outer door. For a few seconds he paused on the landing. Voices issued from Rita's room and someone was strumming on a guitar.

"Oho, so she allows guitars nowadays. Must have relaxed the regime," he said to himself. He tapped lightly on the door, biting his lip to quell his inner excitement.

The door was opened by a young woman with corkscrew curls. She looked questioningly at Korchagin.

"Whom do you want?"

She held the door ajar and a brief glance within told Pavel that his errand was fruitless. "May I see Rita Ustinovich?"

"She's not here. She went to Kharkov last January and I hear she's in Moscow now." "Does Comrade Akim still live here or has he left as well?"

"No, he isn't here either. He is Secretary of the Odessa Gubernia Komsomol now." There was nothing to do but turn back. The joy of his return to the city had faded. The problem now was to find somewhere to spend the night.

"You can walk your legs off trying to look up old friends who aren't there," he grumbled to himself, swallowing his disappointment. Nevertheless he decided to try his luck once more and see whether Pankratov was still in town. The stevedore lived in the vicinity of the wharves and that was nearer than Solomenka.

By the time he reached Pankratov's place he was utterly exhausted. "If he isn't here either I'll give up the search," Pavel vowed to himself as he knocked at a door that had once been painted yellow. "I'll crawl under a boat and spend the night there."

The door was opened by an old woman with a kerchief tied under her chin. It was Pankratov's mother.

"Is Ignat home, Mother?"

"He's just come in."

She did not recognise Pavel, and turned round to call: "Ignat, someone to see you!"

Pavel followed her into the room and laid his knapsack on the floor. Pankratov, sitting at the table

eating his supper, glanced quickly at the newcomer over his shoulder.
"If it's me you want, sit down and fire away, while I get some borshch into my system," he said. "Haven't had a bite since morning." And he picked up a giant wooden spoon.
Pavel sat on a rickety chair to one side. He took off his cap and, relapsing into an old habit, wiped his forehead with it.
"Have I really changed so much that even Ignat doesn't recognise me?" he asked himself. Pankratov dispatched a spoon or two of borshch, but since his visitor said nothing, he turned his head to look at him.
"Well, come on! What's on your mind?"
His hand with the piece of bread remained suspended in mid air. He stared at his visitor blinking with astonishment.
"Hey.... What's this? ... Well, of all the! ..."
The sight of the confusion and bewilderment on Pankratov's red face was too much for Pavel and he burst out laughing.
"Pavka!" cried the other. "But we all thought you were a goner! Wait a minute, now? What's your name again?"
Pankratov's elder sister and his mother came running in from the next room at his shouts. All three began showering Pavel with questions until at last they finally satisfied themselves that it really was Pavel Korchagin and none other.
Long after everyone in the house was fast asleep Pankratov was still giving Pavel an account of all that had happened during the past four months.
"Zharky and Mityai went off to Kharkov last winter. And where do you think they went, the beggars? To the Communist University! Got into the preparatory course. There were fifteen of us at first. I also got into the spirit of the thing and applied. About time I got rid of some of the sawdust in my noodle, I thought. And would you believe it, that examination board flunked me!" Pankratov snorted at the memory and went on: "At first everything was fine. I fitted in on all counts: I had my Party card, I'd been in the Komsomol long enough, nothing wrong with my background and antecedents, but when it came to political knowledge I got into hot water.
"I got into an argument with one of the chaps on the examining board. He comes at me with a nasty little question like this: 'Tell me, Comrade Pankratov, what do you know about philosophy?' Well, the fact is I didn't know a damned thing about philosophy. But there was a fellow used to work with us at the wharves, a grammar school student turned tramp, who had taken a job as a stevedore for the fun of it. Well, I remember him telling us about some brainy fellows in Greece who knew all the answers to everything, philosophers they called them, he said. Well, there was one chap, can't remember his name now, Diogineez or something like that, he lived all his life in a barrel. .. . The smartest of them all was the one who could prove forty times over that black was white and white was black. A lot of spoofers, you see? So I remembered what that student told me and I says to myself: 'Aha, he's trying to trip me up.' I see that examiner looking at me with a twinkle in his eye and I let him have it. 'Philosophy,' I says, 'is just poppycock, and I'm not going to have any truck with it, Comrades. The history of the Party, now, that's another matter. I'll be only too glad to have a crack at that.' Well, they went for me good and proper, wanted to know where I'd gotten those queer ideas of mine. So I told them about that student fellow and some of the things he'd said and the whole commission nearly split their sides. The laugh was on me all

right. But I got sore and walked out.

"Later on that examiner fellow got hold of me in the Gubernia Committee and lectured me for a good three hours. It turns out that the student down at the docks had got things mixed up. It seems philosophy is all right, dashed important, as a matter o' fact.

"Dubava and Zharky passed the exams. Mityai was always good at studies, but Zharky isn't much better than me. Must have been his Order that got him by. Anyway I was left back here. After they went I was given a managing job at the wharves — assistant chief of the freight wharves. I always used to be scrapping with the managers about the youth and now I'm a manager myself. Nowadays if I come across some slacker or nitwit I haul him over the coals both as manager and Komsomol secretary. He can't throw dust in my eyes! Well, enough about me. What else is there to tell you? You know about Akim already; Tufta is the only one of the old crowd left on the Gubernia Committee. Still on his old job. Tokarev is Secretary of the District Committee of the Party at Solomenka. Okunev, your fellow commune member, is on the Komsomol District Committee. Talya works in the Political Education Department. Tsvetayev has your job down in the repair shops. I don't know him very well. We only meet occasionally in the Gubernia Committee; he seems to be quite a brainy fellow, but a bit standoffish. Remember Anna Borhart? She's at Solomenka too, head of the Women's Department of the District Party Committee. I've told you about all the others. Yes, Pavel, the Party's sent lots of folk off to study. All the old activists attend the Gubernia Soviet and Party School. They promise to send me too next year."

It was long past midnight when they retired for the night. By the time Pavel awoke the next morning, Pankratov had gone to the wharves. Dusya, his sister, a strapping lass closely resembling her brother, served Pavel tea, keeping up a lively patter of talk all the while. Pankratov the elder, a ship's engineer, was away from home.

As Pavel was preparing to go out, Dusya reminded him:

"Don't forget now, we're expecting you for dinner."

The Gubernia Committee of the Party presented the usual scene of bustling activity. The front door opened and closed incessantly. The corridors and offices were crowded, and the muffled clicking of typewriters issued from behind the door of the Administration Department.

Pavel lingered in the corridor for a while in search of a familiar face, but finding no one he knew, went straight in to see the secretary. The latter, dressed in a blue Russian shirt, was seated behind a large desk. He looked up briefly as Pavel entered and went on writing.

Pavel took a seat opposite him and studied the features of Akim's successor.

"What can I do for you?" the secretary in the Russian shirt asked as he finished his writing. Pavel told him his story.

"I want you to restore my membership and send me to the railway workshops," he wound up. "Please issue the necessary instructions."

The secretary leaned back in his chair.

"Well put you back on the lists, of course, that goes without saying," he replied with some hesitation. "But it'll be a bit awkward to send you to the workshops. Tsvetayev is there. He's a member of the Gubernia Committee. We'll have to find something else for you to do."

Korchagin narrowed his eyes.

"I don't intend to interfere with Tsvetayev's work," he said. "I'm going to work at my trade and not as secretary. And since my health is rather poor I would ask you not to assign me to any other job."

The secretary agreed. He scribbled a few words on a slip of paper.

"Give this to Comrade Tufta, he'll make all the arrangements."

In the Personnel Department Pavel found Tufta giving a dressing down to his assistant. Pavel stood for a minute or two listening to the heated exchange, but since it threatened to last for a long time, he broke in.

"You'll finish the argument another time, Tufta. Here's a note for you about fixing up my paper." Tufta stared. He looked from the paper to Korchagin, until at last it dawned on him,

"I'll be damned! So you didn't die after all? Tut, tut, what are we going to do now? You've been struck off the lists. I myself turned in your card to the Central Committee. What's more, you've missed the census, and according to the circular from the Komsomol C.C. those who weren't registered in the census are out. So the only thing you can do is to file an application again in the regular way." Tufta's tone brooked no argument.

Pavel frowned.

"I see you haven't changed, Tufta. The same musty old bureaucrat. When will you learn to be human?"

Tufta sprang up as if a flea had bitten him.

"I would thank you not to lecture me. I am in charge here. Circular instructions are issued to be obeyed and not violated. And you'd better be careful with your accusations!"

With these words, Tufta sat down and demonstratively drew the pile of unopened mail toward him.

Pavel walked slowly to the door, then remembering something, he went back to the desk and picked up the secretary's slip that lay before Tufta. The latter watched him closely. He was a mean spiteful person, with nothing youthful about him, a trifle ridiculous with his big ears that seemed forever on the alert.

"All right," Pavel said in a calm mocking voice. "You can accuse me of disorganising statistics if you like, but, tell me, how on earth do you manage to wangle reprimands for people who go and die without giving formal notice in advance? After all, anyone can get sick if he wants to, or die if he feels like it, there's nothing in the instructions about that, I bet."

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" roared Tufta's assistant, no longer able to preserve his neutrality.

The point of Tufta's pencil broke and he flung it on the floor, but before he had time to retort several people burst into the room, talking and laughing. Okunev was among them. There was much excitement when Pavel was recognised and endless questions were fired at him. A few minutes later another group of young people came in, Olga Yureneva with them. Dazed by the shock and delight of seeing Pavel again, Olga clung to his hand for a long time.

Pavel had to tell his story all over again. The sincere joy of his comrades, their undisguised friendship and sympathy, the warm handclasps and friendly slaps on the back made Pavel forget about Tufta for the moment.

But when he had finished his account of himself and told his comrades about his talk with Tufta there was a chorus of indignant comments. Olga, with an annihilating look at Tufta, marched off to the secretary's office.

"Come on, let's all go to Nezhdanov," cried Okunev. "He'll take care of him." And with these words he took Pavel by the shoulders and the whole group of young friends trooped after Olga into the office of the secretary.

"That Tufta ought to be taken off the job and sent down to the wharves to work under Pankratov for a year. He's a hidebound bureaucrat!" stormed Olga.

The Gubernia Committee secretary listened with an indulgent smile when Okunev, Olga and the others demanded that Tufta be dismissed from the Personnel Department.

"Korchagin will be reinstated without question," he assured Olga. "A new card will be issued him at once. I agree with you that Tufta is a formalist," he went on. "That is his chief failing. But it must be admitted that he has not done so badly on the job. Komsomol personnel statistics wherever I have worked have always been in a state of indescribable chaos, not a single figure could be relied on. In our Personnel Department the statistics are in good order. You know yourselves that Tufta often sits up nights working. Here's how I look at it: he can always be removed, But if his place is taken by some free and easy chap who knows nothing about keeping records, we may not have any bureaucracy, but neither will we have any order. Let him stay on the job. I'll give him a good talking to. That will help for a while and later on we'll see."

"All right, let him be," Okunev agreed. "Come on, Pavel, let's go to Solomenka. There's a meeting at the club tonight. Nobody knows you're back yet. Think what a surprise they'll get when we announce: 'Korchagin has the floor!' You're a great lad, Pavel, for not dying. What good would you be to the proletariat dead?" And Okunev threw his arm around his friend and piloted him down the corridor.

"Will you come, Olga?"

"Of course I will."

Korchagin did not return to the Pankratovs for dinner, in fact he did not go back there at all that day. Okunev took him to his own room in the House of Soviets. He gave him the best meal he could muster, then placed a pile of newspapers and two thick files of the minutes of the District Komsomol Bureau meetings before him with the advice:

"Glance through this stuff. Lots of things happened while you were frittering away your time with the typhus. I'll come back toward evening and we'll go to the club together. You can lie down and take a nap if you get tired."

Stuffing his pockets full with all kinds of papers and documents (Okunev scorned the use of a portfolio on principle and it lay neglected under his bed), the District Committee secretary said good-bye and went out.

When he returned that evening the floor of his room was littered with newspapers and a heap of books had been moved out from under the bed. Some of them were piled on the table. Pavel was sitting on the bed reading the last letters of the Central Committee which he had found under his friend's pillow.

"A fine mess you've made of my quarters, you ruffian!" Okunev cried in mock indignation. "Hey, wait a minute, Comrade! Those are secret documents you're reading! That's what I get for letting a nosy chap like you into my den!"

Pavel, grinning, laid the letter aside.

"This particular one doesn't happen to be secret," he said, "but the one you're using for a lampshade is marked 'confidential'. Look, it's all singed around the edges!"

Okunev took the scorched slip of paper, glanced at the title and struck himself on the forehead in dismay.
"I've been looking for the damn thing for three days! Couldn't imagine where it had got to. Now I remember. Volyntsev made a lampshade out of it the other day and then he himself searched for it high and low." Okunev folded the document carefully and stuffed it under the mattress. "We'll put everything in order later on," he said reassuringly. "Now for a bite and then off to the club. Pull up to the table, Pavel!"
From one pocket he produced a long dried roach wrapped in newspaper and from the other, two slices of bread. He spread the newspaper out on the table, took the roach by the head and whipped it smartly against the table's edge to soften it.
Sitting on the table and working vigorously with his jaws, the jolly Okunev gave Pavel all the news, cracking jokes the while.

At the club Okunev took Korchagin through the back entrance behind the stage. In the corner of the spacious hall, to the right of the stage near the piano sat Talya Lagutina and Anna Borhart with a group of Komsomols from the railway district. Volyntsev, the Komsomol secretary of the railway shops, was sitting opposite Anna. He had a face as ruddy as an August apple, hair and eyebrows the colour of ripe corn. His once black leather jacket was extremely shabby.
Next to him, his elbow resting negligently on the lid of the piano, sat Tsvetayev, a handsome young man with brown hair and finely chiselled lips. His shirt was unbuttoned at the throat.
As he came up to the group, Okunev heard Anna say:
"Some people are doing everything they can to complicate the admission of new members. Tsvetayev is one."
"The Komsomol is not a picnic ground," Tsvetayev snapped with stubborn disdain.
"Look at Nikolai!" cried Talya, catching sight of Okunev. "He's beaming like a polished samovar tonight!"
Okunev was dragged into the circle and bombarded with
questions. "Where have you been?"
"Let's get started."
Okunev raised his hand for silence.
"Hold on, lads. As soon as Tokarev comes we'll
begin." "There he comes now," remarked Anna.
Sure enough the Secretary of the District Party Committee approached. Okunev ran forward to meet him.
"Come along, Dad, I'm going to take you backstage to meet a friend of mine. Prepare for a shock!" "What're you up to now?" the old man growled, puffing on his cigarette, but Okunev was already pulling him by the sleeve.

Okunev rang the chairman's bell with such violence that even the noisiest members of the audience were silenced.
Behind Tokarev the leonine head of the genius of the Communist Manifesto, in a frame of

evergreen, surveyed the assembly. While Okunev opened the meeting Tokarev could not keep his eyes off Korchagin who stood in the wings waiting for his cue.

"Comrades! Before we get down to the current organisational questions on the agenda, a comrade here has asked for the floor. Tokarev and I move that he be allowed to speak."

A murmur of approval rose from the hall, whereupon Okunev rapped out: "I call upon Pavel Korchagin to address the meeting!"

At least eighty of the one hundred in the hall knew Korchagin, and when the familiar figure appeared before the footlights and the tall pale young man began to speak, a storm of delighted cries and thunderous applause broke from the audience.

"Dear Comrades!"

Korchagin's voice was steady but he could not conceal his emotion.

"Friends, I have returned to take my place in the ranks. I am happy to be back. I see a great number of my comrades here. I understand that the Solomenka Komsomol has thirty per cent more members than before, and that they've stopped making cigarette lighters in the workshops and yards, and the old carcasses are being hauled out of the railway cemetery for capital repairs. That means our country is getting a new lease on life and is mustering its strength. That is something to live for! How could I die at a time like this!" Korchagin's eyes lit up in a happy smile.

Amid a storm of applause and greetings he descended the platform and went over to where Anna and Talya were sitting. He shook the hands outstretched in greeting, and then the friends moved up and made room for him between them. Talya laid her hand on his and squeezed it tight. Anna's eyes were still wide with surprise, her eyelashes quivered faintly as she gave Pavel a look of warm welcome.

The days slipped swiftly by. Yet there was nothing monotonous about their passage, for each day brought something new, and as he planned his work in the morning Pavel would note with chagrin that the day was all too short and much of what he had planned remained undone.

Pavel had moved in with Okunev. He worked at the railway shops as assistant electrical fitter. He had had a long argument with Okunev before the latter agreed to his temporary withdrawal from work in the Komsomol leadership.

"We're too short of people for you to cool your heels in the workshops," Okunev had objected. "Don't tell me you're ill. I hobbled about with a stick myself for a whole month after the typhus. You can't fool me, Pavel, I know you, there's something behind all this. Come on, out with it," Okunev insisted.

"You're right, Kolya, there is. I want to study."

"There you are!" Okunev cried exultantly. "I knew it! Do you think I don't want to study too? It's downright egoism on your part. Expect us to put our shoulders to the wheel while you go off to study. Nothing doing, my lad, tomorrow you start as organiser."

Nevertheless, after a lengthy discussion Okunev gave in.

"Very well, I'll leave you alone for two months. And I hope you appreciate my generosity. But I don't think you'll get along with Tsvetayev, he's a bit too conceited."

Pavel's return to the workshops had put Tsvetayev on the alert. He was certain that Korchagin's

coming would mark the beginning of a struggle for leadership. His self-esteem was wounded and he prepared to put up a stiff resistance. He soon saw, however, that he had been mistaken. When Korchagin learned that there was a plan afoot to make him a member of the Komsomol Bureau he went straight to the Komsomol secretary's office and persuaded him to strike the question off the agenda, giving his understanding with Okunev as the excuse. In the Komsomol shop cell Pavel took a political study class, but did not ask for work in the Bureau. Nevertheless, although he had officially no part in the leadership, Pavel's influence was felt in all phases of the collective's work. In his comradely, unobtrusive fashion he helped Tsvetayev out of difficulties on more than one occasion.

Coming into the shop one day Tsvetayev was amazed to see all the members of the Komsomol cell and some three dozen non-Party lads busy washing windows, scraping many years' accumulation of filth off the machines and carting heaps of rubbish out into the yard. Pavel, armed with a huge mop, was furiously scrubbing the cement floor which was covered with machine oil and grease.

"Spring-cleaning? What's the occasion?" Tsvetayev asked Pavel.

"We're tired of all this muck. The place hasn't been cleaned for a good twenty years, we'll make it look like new in a week," Korchagin replied briefly.

Tsvetayev shrugged his shoulders and went away.

Not content with cleaning out their workshop, the electricians tackled the factory yard. For years the huge yard had served as a dumping ground for all manner of disused equipment. There were hundreds of carriage wheels, and axles, mountains of rusty iron, rails, buffers, axle boxes — several thousand tons of metal lay rusting under the open sky. But the factory management put a stop to the young people's activities.

"We have more important things to attend to. The yard can wait," they were told.

And so the electricians paved a small area of the yard outside the entrance to their shop, placing a wire mat outside the door and left it at that. But inside their shop the cleaning continued after working hours. When Strizh, the chief engineer, dropped in a week later he found the workshop flooded with light. The huge iron barred windows, freed from their heavy layer of dust and oil, now admitted the sunlight which was reflected brightly in the polished copper parts of the diesel engines. The heavy parts of the machines shone with a fresh coat of green paint, and someone had even painted yellow arrows on the spokes of the wheels.

"Well, well..." Strizh muttered in amazement.

In the far corner of the shop a few of the men were finishing their work. Strizh went over. On the way he met Korchagin carrying a tin of paint.

"Just a moment, my friend," the engineer stopped him. "I fully approve of what you have done here. But where did you get that paint? Haven't I given strict orders that no paint is to be used without my permission? We can't afford to waste paint for such purposes. We need all we've got for the engine parts."

"This paint was scraped out of the bottoms of discarded cans. We spent two days on it but we scraped out about twenty-five pounds. We're not breaking any laws here, Comrade Engineer." The engineer snorted again, but he looked rather sheepish.

"Then carry on, of course. Well, well. Now this is really interesting. How do you explain this ... what shall we call it ... this voluntary striving for cleanliness in a workshop? All done after

working hours, I take it?"
Korchagin detected a note of genuine perplexity in the
engineer's voice. "Of course," he said. "What did you suppose?"
"Yes, but...."
"There is nothing to be surprised at, Comrade Strizh. Who told you that the Bolsheviks are going to leave dirt alone? Wait till we get this thing going properly. We have some more surprises in store for you."
And carefully skirting the engineer so as to avoid splashing him with paint, Korchagin moved on.
Every evening found Pavel in the public library where he lingered until late. He had made friends with all the three librarians, and by using all his powers of persuasion he had finally won the right to browse freely among the books. Propping the ladder against the tall bookcases he would sit there for hours leafing through volume after volume. Most of the books were old. Modern literature occupied one small bookcase — a few odd Civil War pamphlets, Marx's Capital, The Iron Heel by Jack London and several others. Rummaging among the old books he came across Spartacus. He read it in two nights and when he finished it he placed it on the shelf alongside the works of Maxim Gorky. This gradual selection of the more interesting books with a modern revolutionary message lasted for some time.
The librarians did not object.

The calm routine of Komsomol life at the railway shops was suddenly disturbed by what appeared at first to be an insignificant incident: repair worker Kostya Fidin, member of the cell bureau, a sluggish lad with a snub nose and a pock-marked face, broke an expensive imported drill on a piece of iron. The accident was the result of downright carelessness; worse, it looked like deliberate mischief on Fidin's part.
It happened in the morning. Khodorov, senior repair foreman, had told Kostya to drill several holes in an iron plate. Kostya refused at first, but on the foreman's insistence he picked up the iron and started to drill it. The foreman, an exacting taskmaster, was not popular with the workers. A former Menshevik, he took no part in the social life of the plant and did not approve of the Young Communists. But he was an expert at his job and he performed his duties conscientiously. Khodorov noticed that Kostya was drilling "dry", without using any oil. He hurried over to the machine and stopped it.
"Are you blind or what? Don't you know better than to use a drill that way!" he shouted at Kostya, knowing that the drill would not last long with such handling.
Kostya snapped back at him and restarted the lathe. Khodorov went to the department chief to complain. Kostya in the meantime, leaving the machine running, hurried off to fetch the oiling can so that everything would be in order by the time the chief appeared. When he returned with the oil the drill was broken. The chief submitted a report recommending Fidin's dismissal. The bureau of the Komsomol cell, however, took up the cudgels on Fidin's behalf on the grounds that Khodorov had a grudge against all active Komsomol members. The management insisted on Fidin's dismissal, and the case was put before the Komsomol bureau of the workshops. The fight was on.
Three of the five members of the bureau were in favour of giving Kostya an official reprimand and transferring him to other work. Tsvetayev was one of the three. The other two did not think

Fidin should be punished at all.

The bureau meeting to discuss the case was called in Tsvetayev's office. Around a large table covered with red cloth stood several benches and stools made by the Komsomols of the carpenter shops. There were portraits of the leaders on the walls, and the railway workshops' banner was spread over one entire wall behind the table.

Tsvetayev was now a "full-time" Komsomol worker. He was a blacksmith by trade, but being a good organiser had been promoted to a leading post in the Komsomol: he was now a member of the Bureau of the Komsomol District Committee and a member of the Gubernia Committee besides. He was a newcomer to the railway shops. From the first he had taken the reins of management firmly into his hands. Self-assured and hasty in his decisions, he had suppressed the initiative of the other Komsomol members from the outset. He insisted on doing everything himself — even the office had been decorated under his personal supervision — and when he found himself unable to cope with all the work, stormed at his assistants for their inactivity.

He conducted the meeting sprawled in the only soft armchair in the room which had been brought from the club. It was a closed meeting. Khomutov, the Party organiser, had just asked for the floor, when there was a knock on the door which was closed on the latch. Tsvetayev scowled at the interruption. The knock was repeated. Katya Zelenova got up and opened the door. Korchagin stood on the threshold. Katya let him in.

Pavel was making his way to a vacant seat when Tsvetayev
addressed him. "Korchagin, this is a closed meeting of the bureau."

The blood rushed to Pavel's face, and he turned slowly to face the table.

"I know that. I am interested in hearing your opinion on the Fidin case. I have a point to raise in connection with it. What's the matter, do you object to my presence?"

"I don't object, but you ought to know that closed meetings are attended only by bureau members. The more people there are the harder it is to thrash things out properly. But since you're here you might as well stay."

Korchagin had never suffered such a slight. A crease appeared on his forehead.

"What's all the formality about?" Khomutov remarked disapprovingly, but Korchagin stopped him with a gesture, and sat down. "Well, this is what I wanted to say," Khomutov went on. "It's true that Khodorov belongs to the old school, but something ought to be done about discipline. If all the Komsomols go smashing up drills, there'll be nothing to work with. What's more, we're giving a rotten example to the non-Party workers. In my opinion the lad ought to be given a serious warning."

Tsvetayev did not give him a chance to finish, and began voicing his objections. Ten minutes passed. In the meantime Korchagin saw which way the wind was blowing. When the matter was finally put to the vote he got up and asked for the floor. Tsvetayev reluctantly permitted him to speak.

"I should like to give you my opinion of the Fidin case, Comrades," Pavel began. His voice sounded harsh in spite of himself.

"The Fidin case is a signal, and it is not Kostya's action in itself that's most important. I collected some-figures yesterday." Pavel took a notebook out of his pocket. "I got them from the timekeeper. Now listen carefully: twenty-three per cent of our Komsomols come to work from five to fifteen minutes late every day. That has become a rule. Seventeen per cent don't report for

work at all one or two days out of every month; the percentage of absenteeism among young non-Party workers is fourteen per cent. These figures sting worse than a whiplash, Comrades. I jotted down a few more: four per cent of our Party members are absent one day a month, and four per cent report late for work. Of the non-Party workers eleven per cent miss one day in the month while thirteen per cent regularly report late for work. Ninety per cent of breakages are accounted for by young workers, seven per cent of whom are newcomers. The conclusion to be drawn from these figures is that we Komsomols are making a far worse showing than the Party members and adult workers. But the situation is not the same everywhere. The foundry record is excellent, the electricians are not so bad, but the rest are more or less on the same level. In my opinion Comrade Khomutov said only a fraction of what ought to be said about discipline. The immediate problem now is to straighten out these zigzags. I don't intend to begin agitating here, but we've got to put a stop to carelessness and sloppiness. The old workers are frankly admitting that they used to work much better for the master, for the capitalist, but now we're the masters and there's no excuse for working badly. It's not so much Kostya or any other worker who's to blame. We ourselves, all of us, are at fault because instead of fighting the evil properly we sometimes defend workers like Kostya under one or another pretext.

"Samokhin and Butylyak have just said here that Fidin is a good lad, one of the best, an active Komsomol and all that. What if he did bust a drill, it could happen to anybody. He's one of us, while the foreman isn't... . But has anyone ever tried to talk to Khodorov? Don't forget that grumbler has thirty years of working experience behind him! We won't talk about his politics. In the given case he is in the right, because he, an outsider, is taking care of state property while we are smashing up valuable tools. What do you call such a state of affairs? I believe that we ought to strike the first blow now and launch an offensive on this sector.

"I move that Fidin be expelled from the Komsomol as a slacker and disorganiser of production. His case should be discussed in the wall newspaper, and these figures published in an editorial article openly without fear of the consequences. We are strong, we have forces we can rely on. The majority of the Komsomol members are good workers. Sixty of them have gone through Boyarka and that was a severe test. With their help and their assistance we can iron out the difficulties. Only we've got to change our attitude to the whole business once and for all."

Korchagin, usually calm and reticent, spoke with a passion that surprised Tsvetayev. He was seeing the real Pavel for the first time. He realised that Pavel was right, but he was too cautious to agree with him openly. He took Korchagin's speech as a harsh criticism of the general state of the organisation, as an attempt to undermine his, Tsvetayev's, authority, and he resolved to make short shrift of his opponent. He began his speech by accusing Korchagin of defending the Menshevik Khodorov.

The stormy debate lasted for three hours. Late that night the final point was reached. Defeated by the inexorable logic of facts and having lost the majority to Korchagin, Tsvetayev made a false step. He violated the rules of democracy by ordering Korchagin to leave the room just before the final vote was taken.

"Very well, I shall go, although your behaviour does not do you credit, Tsvetayev. I warn you that if you continue to insist on your viewpoint I shall put the matter before the general meeting tomorrow and I am sure you will not be able to win over the majority there. You are not right, Tsvetayev. I think, Comrade Khomutov, that it is your duty to take up the question with the Party

group before the general meeting."

"Don't try to scare me," Tsvetayev shouted defiantly. "I can go to the Party group myself, and what's more I have something to tell them about you. If you don't want to work yourself, don't interfere with those who do."

Pavel closed the door behind him. He passed his hand over his burning forehead and went through the empty office to the exit. Outside on the street he took a deep breath of air, lit a cigarette and set out for the little house on Baty Hill where Tokarev lived.

He found the old mechanic at supper.

"Come on, let's hear the news. Darya, bring the lad a plate of gruel," said Tokarev, inviting Pavel to the table.

Darya Fominishna, Tokarev's wife, as tall and buxom as her husband was short and spare, placed a plate of millet gruel before Pavel and wiping her moist lips with the edge of her white apron said kindly: "Set to, dearie."

Pavel had been a frequent visitor at the Tokarevs' in the days when the old man worked in the repair shops, and had spent many a pleasant evening with the old couple, but this was his first visit since his return to the city.

The old mechanic listened attentively to Pavel's story, working busily with his spoon and making no comment apart from an occasional grunt. When he had finished his porridge, he wiped his moustache with his handkerchief and cleared his throat.

"You're right, of course," he said. "It's high time the question was put properly. There are more Komsomols down at the workshops than anywhere else in the district and that's where we ought to start. So you and Tsvetayev have come to blows after all, eh? Too bad. He's a bit of an upstart, of course. You used to get on with the lads, didn't you? By the way, what exactly is your job at the shops?"

"I'm working in one of the departments. And generally I'm in on everything that's doing. In my own cell I lead a political study circle."

"What about the bureau?"

Korchagin hesitated.

"I thought that while I still felt a bit shaky on my legs, and since I wanted to do some studying, I wouldn't take part officially in the leadership for a while."

"So that's it!" Tokarev cried in disapproval. "Now, my boy, if it weren't for your health I'd give you a good scolding. How do you feel now, by the way? Stronger?"

"Yes."

"Good, and now get to work in earnest. Stop beating about the bush. No good will come of sitting on the sidelines! You're just trying to evade responsibility and you know it. You must put things to rights tomorrow. Okunev will hear from me about this." Tokarev's tone showed his annoyance.

"No, dad, you leave him alone," Pavel hastened to object. "I asked him not to give me any work." Tokarev whistled in scorn.

"You did, eh, and he let you off? Oh well, what can we do with you, Komsomols. . . . Will you read me the paper, son, the way you used to? My eyes aren't as good as they might be."

The Party bureau at the workshops upheld the decision of the majority in the Komsomol bureau.

The Party and Komsomol groups undertook the important and difficult task of setting an example of labour discipline. Tsvetayev was given a thorough dressing down at the bureau. He tried to bluster at first but pinned to the wall by Lopakhin, the Secretary, an elderly man with the waxen pallor of the consumptive, Tsvetayev gave in and partly admitted his error.

The following day the wall newspaper carried a series of articles that caused something of a sensation at the railway shops. The articles were read aloud and hotly discussed, and the unusually well-attended youth meeting held that same evening dealt exclusively with the problems they raised.

Fidin was expelled from the Komsomol, and a new member was added to the bureau in charge of political education — Korchagin.

Unusual quiet reigned in the hall as the meeting listened to Nezhdanov outline the new tasks confronting the railway workshops at this new stage.

After the meeting Tsvetayev found Korchagin waiting for him outside. "I have something to say to you," Pavel said.

"What about?" Tsvetayev asked sourly.

Pavel took him by the arm and after they had gone a few yards paused at a bench. "Shall we sit down for a moment?" he suggested and set the example.

The burning tip of Tsvetayev's cigarette now glowed red, now faded. "What have you got against me, Tsvetayev?"

There was silence for a few minutes.

"Oh, so that's it? I thought you wanted to talk business," Tsvetayev said feigning surprise, but his voice was unsteady.

Pavel laid his hand firmly on the other's knee.

"Get off your high horse, Dimka. That sort of talk is only for diplomats. You tell me this: why have you taken such a dislike to me?"

Tsvetayev shifted uneasily in his seat.

"What are you talking about? Why should I have anything against you? I offered you work, didn't I? You refused, and now you're accusing me of trying to keep you out."

But his words carried no conviction, and Pavel, his hand still on Tsvetayev's knee, went on with feeling:

"If you won't say it, I will. You think I want to cramp your style, you think it's your job I'm after. If you didn't, we wouldn't have quarrelled over the Kostya affair. Relations like these can ruin our work. If this concerned only the two of us it wouldn't matter — I wouldn't care what you thought of me. But from tomorrow we'll be working together. How can we carry on like this? Now listen. There must be no rift between us. You and I are both workingmen. If our cause is dearer to you than everything else you'll give me your hand on it, and tomorrow we'll start as friends. But unless you throw all this nonsense out of your head and steer clear of intrigues, you and I will fight like blazes over every setback in the work that results. Now here's my hand, take it, while it is still proffered to you in friendship."

A deep sense of satisfaction swept Korchagin as Tsvetayev's rough fingers closed over his palm.

A week passed. The workday was coming to an end in the District Committee of the Party. Quiet

settled over the offices. But Tokarev was still at his desk. He was sitting in his armchair studying the latest reports, when a knock came at the door.

"Come in!"

Korchagin entered and placed two filled out questionnaire blanks on the Secretary's desk. "What's this?"

"It's an end to irresponsibility, Dad. And high time, if you ask me. If you are of the same opinion I would be grateful for your support."

Tokarev glanced at the heading, looked up quickly at the young man, then picked up his pen. Under the head: "Party standing of comrades recommending Pavel Andreyevich Korchagin for candidate membership in the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)" he wrote "1903" with a firm hand, and signed his name.

"There, my son. I know that you will never bring disgrace upon my old grey head."

The room was suffocatingly hot. One thought was uppermost in everyone's mind: to get away to the cool shade of the chestnut trees of Solomenka as quickly as possible.

"Wind up, Pavel, I can't stand another minute of this," implored Tsvetayev, who was sweating profusely. Katyusha and the others supported him.

Pavel Korchagin closed the book and the study circle broke up.

As they rose the old-fashioned Ericson telephone on the wall jangled. Tsvetayev, who answered its summons, had to shout to make himself heard above the clamour of voices in the room.

He hung up the receiver and turned to Korchagin.

"There are two diplomatic railway carriages down at the station belonging to the Polish consulate. Their lights are out, something's gone wrong with the wiring. The train leaves in an hour. Get some tools together and run down there, Pavel. It's urgent."

The two sleepers gleaming with polished brass and plate glass stood at the first platform. The saloon-carriage with its wide windows was brightly lit. But the neighbouring carriage was in darkness.

Pavel went up to the steps of the luxurious carriage and gripped the handrail with the intention of entering the carriage.

A figure hastily detached itself from the station wall and seized him by the shoulder. "Where are you going?"

The voice was familiar. Pavel turned and took in the leather jacket, broad-peaked cap, the thin, hooked nose and the suspicious look in the eyes.

It was Artyukhin. He had not recognised Pavel at first, but now his hand fell from Pavel's shoulder, and his grim features relaxed although his glance paused questioningly on the instrument case.

"Where were you heading for?" he said in a less formal tone.

Pavel briefly explained. Another figure appeared from behind the carriage.

"Just a moment, I'll call their guard." Several people in expensive travelling clothes were sitting in the saloon-carriage when Korchagin entered on the heels of the guard. A woman sat with her back to the door at a table covered with a damask cloth. When Pavel entered she was chatting with a tall officer. They stopped talking when the electrician appeared.

Korchagin made a rapid examination of the wiring which ran from the last lamp into the corridor, and finding it in order, left the carriage to continue his search for the damage. The stout, bull-necked guard, in a uniform resplendent with large brass buttons bearing the Polish eagle, kept close at his heels.

"Let's try the next carriage, everything is in order here. The trouble must be there."

The guard turned the key in the door and they passed into the darkened corridor. Training his torch on the wiring Pavel soon found the spot where the short circuit had occurred. A few minutes later the first lamp went on in the corridor suffusing it with opaque light.

"The bulbs inside the compartment will have to be changed. They have burned out," Korchagin said to his guide.

"In that case I'll have to call the lady, she has the key." Not wishing to leave the electrician alone in the carriage, the guard bade him to follow.

The woman entered the compartment first, Korchagin followed. The guard remained standing in the doorway, blocking the entrance. Pavel noted the two elegant leather travelling bags, a silken cloak flung carelessly on the seat, a bottle of perfume and a small malachite vanity case on the table under the window. The woman sat down in a corner of the couch, patted her fair hair and watched the electrician at work.

"Will madam permit me to leave for a moment?" the guard said obsequiously, inclining his bull neck with some difficulty. "The Major has asked for some cold beer."

"You may go," replied the woman in an affected
voice. The exchange had been in Polish.

A shaft of light from the corridor fell on the woman's shoulder. Her exquisite gown of fine silk made by the best Paris dress designers left her shoulders and arms bare. In the lobe of each delicate ear a diamond drop blazed and sparkled. Korchagin could only see one ivory shoulder and arm. The face was in shadow. Working swiftly with his screwdriver Pavel changed the outlet in the ceiling and a moment later the lights went on in the compartment. Now he had only to examine the other bulb over the sofa on which the woman sat.

"I need to test that bulb," Korchagin said, pausing in front of her.

"Oh yes, I am in your way," the lady replied in perfect Russian. She rose lightly and stood close beside him. Now he had a full view of her. The arched eyebrows and the pursed, disdainful lips were familiar. There could be no doubt of it: it was Nelly Leszczinskaya, the lawyer's daughter. She could not help noticing his look of astonishment. But though Pavel had recognised her, he had altered too much in these four years for her to realise that this electrician was her troublesome neighbour.

With a frown of displeasure at his surprised stare, she went over to the door of the compartment and stood there tapping the heel of her patent-leather shoe impatiently. Pavel turned his attention to the second bulb. He unscrewed it, raised it to the light and almost as much to his own surprise as hers he asked in Polish:

"Is Victor here as well?"

Pavel had not turned when he spoke. He did not see Nelly's face, but the long silence that followed his query bore testimony to her confusion.

"Why, do you mean you know him?"

"Yes, and very well too. We were neighbours, you know." Pavel turned to look at her.

"You're . . . you're Pavel, the son. . . ." Nelly broke off in
confusion. ". . .Of your cook," Korchagin came to her assistance.
"But how you have grown! You were a wild youngster when I knew
you." Nelly examined him coolly from head to foot.
"Why do you ask about Victor? As far as I remember you and he were not exactly friends," she said in her cooing voice. This unexpected encounter promised to be a pleasant relief to her boredom.
The screw swiftly sank into the wall.
"There is a certain debt Victor hasn't paid yet. Tell him when you see him that I haven't lost hope of seeing it settled."
"Tell me how much he owes you and I shall pay you on his account."
She knew very well what debt Korchagin had in mind. She knew that her brother had betrayed Pavel to the Petlyura men, but she could not resist the temptation to make fun of this "ragamuffin".
Korchagin said nothing.
"Tell me, is it true that our house has been looted and is now falling into decay? I daresay the summer house and the bushes have all been torn up," Nelly inquired wistfully.
"The house is not yours any more, it is ours, and we are not likely to destroy our own property." Nelly gave a mocking little laugh.
"Oh, I see you have been well schooled! Incidentally, this carriage belongs to the Polish mission and here I am the mistress and you are the servant just as you always were. You see, you are working now to give me light so that I may lie comfortably on the sofa and read. Your mother used to wash clothes for us and you used to carry water. We meet again under precisely the same circumstances."
Her voice rang with malicious triumph. Scraping the insulation off the end of the wire with his penknife, Pavel gave her a look of undisguised contempt.
"I wouldn't hammer a single rusty nail for you, but since the bourgeoisie have invented diplomats we can play the same game. We don't cut off their heads, in fact we're even polite to them, which is more than can be said of yourself."
Nelly's cheeks crimsoned.
"What would you do with me if you succeeded in taking Warsaw? I suppose you would make mincemeat out of me, or perhaps take me for your mistress?"
She stood in the doorway in a graceful pose; her sensitive nostrils that were no strangers to cocaine quivered. The light went on over the sofa. Pavel straightened up.
"You? Who would bother to kill the likes of you! You'll croak from too much cocaine anyway. I'd sooner take a whore than the likes of you!"
He picked up his tool case and strode to the door. Nelly moved aside to let him pass. He was half-way down the corridor when he heard the curse she spat after him: "Damned Bolshevik!"

The following evening as he was on his way to the library Pavel met Katyusha Zelenova. She caught hold of his sleeve with her tiny hand and laughingly barred his path.
"Where are you dashing off to, old politics-and-enlightenment?"

"To the library, auntie, let me pass," Pavel replied in the same bantering tone. He took her gently by the shoulders and shifted her aside. Katyusha shook herself free and walked along beside him. "Listen here, Pavel! You can't study all the time, you know. I'll tell you what — let's go to a party tonight. The crowd is meeting at Zina Gladysh's. The girls keep asking me to bring you. But you never think of anything but political study nowadays. Don't you ever want to have some fun? It will do you good to miss your reading for once," Katyusha coaxed.

"What sort of a party is it? What are we going to do there?"

"What are we going to do!" Katyusha smilingly mocked him. "We're not going to say prayers, we're going to have a good time, that's all. You play the accordion, don't you? I've never heard you play! Do come and play for us this evening, won't you? Just to please me? Zina's uncle has an accordion but he can't play for anything. The girls are very much interested about you, you old bookworm. Who said Komsomols mustn't enjoy themselves? Come along, before I get sick of persuading you or else we'll quarrel and then I shan't talk to you for a month."

Katyusha was a house painter, a good comrade and a first-rate Komsomol member. Pavel did not want to hurt her feelings and so he agreed, although he felt awkward and out of place at such parties.

A noisy crowd of young people had gathered at engine-driver Giadysh's home. The adults had retired to another room, leaving some fifteen lads and girls in possession of the large living room and porch which gave onto a small front garden. A game called "feeding the pigeons" was in progress when Katyusha led Pavel through the garden into the porch. In the middle of the porch stood two chairs back to back. At a call from the hostess who was leading the game, a boy and a girl seated themselves on the chairs with their backs to each other, and when she cried "Now feed the pigeons!" the couple leaned back until their lips met, much to the delight of the onlookers. After that they played "the ring" and "postman's knock", both kissing games, although in "postman's knock" the players avoided publicity by doing their kissing not on the brightly lit porch but in the room with the lights out. For those who did not care for these two games, there was a pack of "flower flirt" cards on a small round table in the corner. Pavel's neighbour, a girl of about sixteen with pale blue eyes who introduced herself as Mura, handed him one of the cards with a coy glance and said softly:

"Violet."

A few years back Pavel had attended parties of this kind, and if he had not taken a direct part in the frivolities he had not thought them anything out of the ordinary. But now that he had broken for ever with petty-bourgeois small-town life, the party struck him as disgusting and silly.

Yet here he was with the "flower" card in his hands. Opposite the "violet" he read the words: "I like you very much."

Pavel looked up at the girl. She returned his look without a trace of embarrassment. "Why?"

His question sounded rather flat. But Mura had her answer ready. "Rose," she murmured and handed him another card.

The card with the "rose" bore the legend:

"You are my ideal." Korchagin turned to the girl and making a conscious effort to soften his tone, asked:

"Why do you go in for this nonsense?"

Mura was so taken aback that she did not know what to say.

"Don't you like my message?" she said with a capricious pout.

Pavel ignored the question. Yet he was curious to know more about her. He asked her a number of questions which she willingly answered. Within a few minutes he had learned that she attended secondary school, that her father worked at the repair shops and that she had known Pavel for a long time and had wanted to make his acquaintance.

"What is your surname?" Pavel

asked. "Volyntseva."

"Your brother is secretary of the Komsomol cell at the yards,

isn't he?" "Yes."

Now it was clear to him that Volyntsev, one of the most active Komsomols in the district, was allowing his own sister to grow up an ignorant little philistine. She and her friends had attended innumerable kissing parties like this in the past year. She told Pavel she had seen him several times at her brother's place.

Mura felt that Pavel did not approve of her. Noticing the scornful smile on his face, she flatly refused to obey the summons to come and "feed the pigeons". They sat talking for another few minutes while Mura told him more about herself. Presently Katyusha came over to them.

"Shall I bring you the accordion?" she asked, adding with a mischievous glance at Mura, "I see you've made friends?"

Pavel made Katyusha sit down beside them, and taking advantage of the noise and laughter around them, he said:

"I'm not going to play. Mura and I are leaving."

"Oho! So you've fallen for her, have you?" Katyusha teased.

"That's right. Tell me, Katyusha, are there any other Komsomols here besides ourselves? Or are we the only 'pigeon fanciers'?"

"They've stopped that nonsense," Katyusha said placatingly. "We're going to

dance now." Korchagin rose.

"All right, old girl, you can dance, but Mura and I are going."

One evening Anna Borhart dropped in to Okunev's place and found Korchagin there alone.

"Are you very busy, Pavel? Would you care to come with me to the plenary session of the Town Soviet? I would rather not go alone, especially since we'll be returning late."

Korchagin agreed at once. He was about to take the Mauser from the nail over his bed, but decided it was too heavy. Instead he pulled Okunev's pistol out of the drawer and slipped it into his pocket. He left a note for Okunev and put the key where his room-mate would find it.

At the theatre where the plenum was being held they met Pankratov and Olga Yureneva. They all sat together in the hall and during the intermissions strolled in a group on the square. As Anna had expected, the meeting ended very late.

"Perhaps you'd better come to my place for the night?" Olga suggested. "It's late and you've a long way to go."

But Anna declined. "Pavel has agreed to see me home," she said.

Pankratov and Olga set off down the main street and the other two took the road up the hill to

Solomenka.

It was a dark, stuffy night. The city was asleep as the young people made their way through the deserted streets. Gradually the sound of their steps and voices died away. Pavel and Anna walked at a brisk pace away from the centre of the town. At the market place they were stopped by a patrol who examined their papers and let them pass. They crossed the boulevard and came out onto a dark silent street which cut across a vacant lot. Turning left, they continued along the highway parallel to the main railway warehouses, a long row of gloomy and forbidding concrete buildings. Anna was seized by a vague feeling of apprehension. She peered anxiously into the darkness, giving nervous jerky answers to her companion's questions. When a sinister shadow turned out to be nothing more terrible than a telephone pole, she laughed aloud and confided her nervousness to Pavel. She took him by the arm and the pressure of his shoulder against hers reassured her.

"I am only twenty-three but I'm as nervous as an old woman. If you think I'm a coward, you are mistaken. But somehow my nerves are all on edge tonight. With you here though I feel quite safe, and I'm really ashamed of my fears."

And indeed Pavel's calmness, the warm glow of his cigarette which for an instant lit up part of his face, revealing the courageous sweep of his brows — all this drove away the terrors evoked by the dark night, the loneliness of the spot and the story they had just heard at the meeting about a horrible murder committed the night before on the outskirts of town.

The warehouses were left behind. They crossed the plank spanning a small creek and continued along the main road to the tunnel which ran under the railway line and connected this section of the town with the railway district.

The station building was now far behind them to the right. A train was pulling into a siding beyond the engine-shed. They were already on home ground. Up above on the railway track the coloured lights of switches and semaphores twinkled in the darkness, and over by the shed a shunting engine on its way home for the night sighed wearily.

Above the mouth of the tunnel a street lamp hung from a rusty hook. The wind swayed it gently, causing its murky yellow light to dance on the tunnel walls.

A small cottage stood solitary by the side of the highway some ten yards from the tunnel entrance. Two years ago it had been hit by a heavy shell which had burnt out the interior and badly damaged the facade, so that it was now one huge gaping hole, and it stood there like a beggar on the roadside exhibiting its deformity. A train roared over the embankment above.

"We're nearly home now," Anna said with a sigh of relief.

Pavel made a furtive attempt to extricate his arm. But Anna would not release it. They walked past the ruined house.

Suddenly something crashed behind them. There was a sound of running feet, hoarse breathing. They were overtaken.

Korchagin jerked his arm but Anna, petrified with fear, clung wildly to it. And by the time he was able to tear it loose, it was too late; his neck was caught in an iron grip. Another moment and he was swung round to face his assailant. The hand crept up to his throat and, twisting his tunic collar until it all but choked him, held him facing the muzzle of a revolver that slowly described an arc before his eyes.

Pavel's fascinated eyes followed the arc with superhuman tension. Death stared at him through the

muzzle of the revolver, and he had neither the strength nor the will to tear his eyes from that muzzle. He waited for the end. But his assailant did not fire, and Pavel's dilated eyes saw the bandit's face, saw the huge skull, the heavy jaw, the black shadow of unshaven beard. But the eyes under the wide peak of the cap were invisible.

Out of the corner of his eye Korchagin had one brief and stark glimpse of the chalk-white face of Anna whom one of the three dragged into the gaping hole in the wall at that moment. Twisting her arms cruelly he flung her onto the ground. Another shadow leapt towards them; Pavel only saw its reflection on the tunnel wall. He heard the scuffle within the ruined house behind him. Anna was fighting desperately; her choking cry broke off abruptly as a cap was stuffed against her mouth. The large-skulled ruffian who had Korchagin at his mercy, was drawn to the scene of the rape like a beast to its prey. He was evidently the leader of the gang and the role of passive observer under the circumstances did not suit him. This youngster he had covered was just a greenhorn, looked like one of those "railway yard softies". Nothing to fear from a snotnose like him. Give him a couple of good knocks on the head and tell him to cut along over the field and he'd run all the way to town without looking back. He relaxed his hold.

"All right you, hop it, clear out the way you came, but no squealin', mind, or you'll get a bullet in your neck." He pressed the barrel of the gun against Korchagin's forehead. "Hop it, now," he said in a hoarse whisper and lowered his gun to show that his victim need not fear a bullet in the back. Korchagin staggered back and began to run sideways keeping his eyes on his assailant. The ruffian, thinking the youngster was still afraid that he would shoot, turned and made for the ruined house.

Korchagin's hand flew to his pocket. If only he could be quick enough! He swung round, thrust his left hand forward, took swift aim and fired.

The bandit realised his mistake too late. The bullet tore into his side before he had time to raise his hand.

The blow sent him reeling against the tunnel wall with a low howl, and clawing at the wall he slowly sank to the ground. A shadow slid out of the house and made for the gully below. Korchagin sent another bullet in pursuit. A second shadow bent double darted toward the inky depths of the tunnel. A shot rang out. The dark shape, sprinkled with the dust from the bullet-shattered concrete, leapt aside and vanished into the blackness. Once again the Browning rent the night's stillness. Beside the wall the large-headed bandit writhed in his death agony.

Korchagin helped Anna to her feet. Stunned and shaken, she stared at the bandit's convulsions, unable to believe that she was safe.

Korchagin dragged her away into the darkness back toward the town and away from the circle of light. As they ran toward the railway station, lights were already twinkling on the embankment near the tunnel and a rifle shot rang out on the track.

By the time they reached Anna's flat, on Baty Hill, the cocks were crowing. Anna lay down on the bed. Korchagin sat by the table, smoking a cigarette and watching the grey spiral of smoke floating upward. ... He had just killed for the fourth time in his life.

Is there such a thing as courage, he wondered. Something that manifests itself always in its most perfect form? Reliving all his sensations he admitted to himself that in those first few seconds with

the black sinister eye of the gun muzzle upon him fear had laid its icy grip on his heart. And was it only because of his weak eyesight and the fact that he had had to shoot with his left hand that those two shadows had been able to escape? No. At the distance of a few paces his bullets would have found their mark, but tension and haste, sure signs of nervousness, had made him waver.

The light from the table lamp fell on his face. Anna studied his features anxiously. But his eyes were calm; only the knitted brow showed that he was deep in thought.

"What are you thinking about, Pavel?"

His thoughts, startled by the sudden question, floated away like smoke beyond the circle of light, and he said the first thing that came into his head:

"I must go over to the Commandant's Office. This business must be reported at once." He rose with reluctance, conscious of a great weariness.

She clung to his hand for she shrank from being left alone. Then she saw him to the door and stood on the threshold until he had vanished into the night.

Korchagin's report cleared up the mystery of the murder that had puzzled the railway guards. The body was identified at once as that of a notorious criminal named Fimka Death-Skull, a murderer and bandit with a long prison record.

The next day everybody was talking about the incident by the tunnel. As it happened that incident was the cause of an unexpected clash between Pavel and Tsvetayev.

Tsvetayev came into the workshop in the middle of the shift and asked Korchagin to step outside. He led the way in silence to a remote corner of the corridor. He was extremely agitated, and did not seem to know how to begin. At last he blurted out:

"Tell me what happened yesterday." "I thought you knew?"

Tsvetayev jerked his shoulders uneasily. Pavel was unaware that the tunnel incident affected Tsvetayev more keenly than the others. He did not know that, for all his outward indifference, the blacksmith had formed a deep attachment for Anna Borhart. He was not the only one who was attracted to her, but he was seriously smitten. Lagutina had just told him what had happened the night before at the tunnel and he was now tormented by one question that had remained unanswered. He could not put the question bluntly to Pavel, yet he had to know the answer. His better self told him that his fears were selfish and base, yet in the conflict of emotions that seethed within him the savage and primitive prevailed.

"Listen, Korchagin," he said hoarsely. "This is strictly between ourselves. I know you don't want to talk about it for Anna's sake, but you can surely trust me. Tell me this, while that bandit had you covered did the others rape Anna?"

He lowered his eyes in confusion before he finished speaking.

Dimly Korchagin began to see what was in his mind. "If he cared nothing for Anna he would not be so upset. But if Anna is dear to him, then...." And Pavel burned at the insult to Anna the question implied.

"Why do you ask?"

Tsvetayev mumbled something incoherent. He felt that Pavel understood what was in question and he lost his temper:

"Don't beat about the bush. All I want is a straight answer." "Do you love Anna?"

There was a long silence. At last Tsvetayev forced out: "Yes."
Korchagin, suppressing his anger with an effort, turned and strode down the corridor without looking back.

One night Okunev, who had been hovering uncertainly around his friend's bed for some time, finally sat down on the edge and laid his hand on the book Pavel was reading.
"Listen, Pavel, there's something I've got to get off my chest. On the one hand, it mightn't seem important, but on the other, it's quite the reverse. There's been a misunderstanding between me and Talya Lagutina. You see, at first, I liked her quite a bit." Okunev scratched his head sheepishly, but seeing no sign of laughter on his friend's face, he took courage. "But then, Talya .. . well, you know. All right, I won't give you all the details, you know how it is. Yesterday she and I decided to hitch up and see how it works out. I'm twenty-two, we're both of age. We want to live together on an equality basis. What do you think?"
Korchagin pondered the question.
"What can I say, Kolya? You are both friends of mine, we're all members of the same clan, and we have everything else in common. Talya's a very nice girl. It's all plain sailing."
The next day Korchagin moved over to the workers' hostel, and a few days later Anna gave a party, a modest Communist party without food and drink, in honour of Talya and Nikolai. It was an evening of reminiscences, and readings of excerpts from favourite books. They sang many songs and sang them well; the rousing melodies echoed far and wide. Later on, Katyusha Zelenova and Volyntseva brought an accordion, and the rich rolling basses and silvery cadences filled the room. That evening Pavel played even better than usual, and when to everyone's delight the hulking Pankratov flung himself into the dance, Pavel forgot the new melancholy style he had adopted and played with his old abandon.

When Denikin gets to know
Of old Kolchak's overthrow,
Oh, how crazy he will go!

The accordion sang of the past, of the years of storm and stress and of today's friendship, struggles and joys. But when the instrument was handed over to Volyntsev and the whirling rhythm of the "Yablochko" dance rang out, Korchagin surprised everyone by breaking into a wild tap dance — the third and last time he was to dance in his life.

## Chapter Four

This is the frontier — two posts facing one another in silent hostility, each standing for a world of its own. One of them is planed and polished and painted black and white like a police box, and topped by a single-headed eagle nailed in place with sturdy spikes. Wings outspread, claws gripping the striped pole, hooked beak outstretched, the bird of prey stares with malicious eyes at

the cast-iron shield with the sickle-and-hammer emblem on the opposite pole — a sturdy, round, rough-hewn oak post planted firmly in the ground. The two poles stand six paces apart on level ground, yet there is a deep gulf between them and the two worlds they stand for. To try to cross this no man's land means risking one's life.

This is the frontier.

From the Black Sea over thousands of kilometres to the Arctic Ocean in the Far North stands the motionless line of these silent sentinels of the Soviet Socialist Republics bearing the great emblem of labour on their iron shields. The post with the rapacious bird marks the beginning of the border between Soviet Ukraine and bourgeois Poland. It stands ten kilometres from the small town of Berezdov tucked away in the Ukrainian hinterland, and opposite it is the Polish townlet of Korets. From Slavuta to Anapol the border area is guarded by a Frontier Guard battalion.

The frontier posts march across the snowbound fields, push through clearings cut in forests, plunge down valleys and, heaving themselves up hillsides, disappear behind the crests only to pause on the high bank of a river to survey the wintry plains of an alien land.

It is biting cold, one of those days when the frost makes the snow crunch under the soles of felt boots. A giant of a Red Army man in a helmet fit for the titans of old moves away from a post with the sickle-and-hammer shield and with heavy tread sets out on his beat. He is wearing a grey greatcoat with green tabs on the collar, and felt boots. On top of the greatcoat he has a sheepskin coat reaching down to his heels with a collar of generous proportions to match — a coat that will keep a man warm in the cruellest blizzard. On his head he wears a cloth helmet and his hands are encased in sheepskin mittens. His rifle is slung on his shoulder, and as he proceeds along the sentry path, the tail of his long coat wearing a groove in the snow, he pulls at a cigarette of home-grown tobacco with obvious relish. On open stretches the Soviet border guards are posted a kilometre apart so that each man can always see his neighbour. On the Polish side there are two sentries to the kilometre.

A Polish infantryman plods along his sentry path toward the Red Army man. He is wearing rough army issue boots, a greenish grey uniform and on top a black coat with two rows of shining buttons. On his head he has the square-topped uniform cap with the white eagle emblem; there are more white eagles on his cloth shoulder straps and the collar tabs, but they do not make him feel any warmer. The frost has chilled him to the marrow, and he rubs his numb ears and knocks his heels together as he walks, while his hands in the thin gloves are stiff with cold. The Pole cannot risk stopping his pacing for a moment, and sometimes he trots, for otherwise the frost would stiffen his joints in a moment. When the two sentries draw together, the zolnierz turns around to walk alongside the Red Army man.

Conversation on the frontier is forbidden, but when there is no one around within a kilometre — who can tell whether the two are patrolling their sectors in silence or violating international laws. The Pole wants a smoke very badly, but he has forgotten his matches in the barracks, and the breeze wafts over from the Soviet side the tantalising fragrance of tobacco. The Pole stops rubbing his ear and glances back over his shoulder, for who knows when the captain, or maybe Pan the lieutenant, might pop up from behind a knoll with a mounted patrol on one of their eternal inspection rounds. But he sees nothing save the dazzling whiteness of the snow in the sun. In the sky there is not so much as a fleck of a cloud.

"Got a light, Comrade?" The Pole is the first to violate the sanctity of the law. And shifting his

French magazine rifle with the sword bayonet back on his shoulder he laboriously extracts with stiff fingers a packet of cheap cigarettes from the depths of his coat pocket,
The Red Army man hears him, but the frontier service regulations forbid conversation across the border. Besides, he could not quite catch what the soldier wanted to say. So he continues on his way, firmly treading down on the crunching snow with his warm, soft felt boots.
"Comrade Bolshevik, got a light? Maybe you'll throw a box of matches across?" This time the Pole speaks Russian.
The Red Army man looks closely at his neighbour. "The frost has nipped the Pan good and proper," he says to himself. "The poor beggar may be a bourgeois soldier but he's got a dog's life. Imagine being chased out into this cold in that miserable outfit, no wonder he jumps about like a rabbit, and without smoke either." Not turning around, the Red Army man throws a box of matches across to the other. The soldier catches it on the fly, and getting his cigarette going after several unsuccessful attempts, promptly sends the box back across the border.
"Keep it. I've got some more," says the Red frontier guard, forgetting
the rules. From beyond the frontier comes the response:
"Thanks, I'd better not. If they found that box on me I'd get a couple of years in jail."
The Red Army man examines the match box. On the label is an airplane with a sinewy fist instead of a propeller and the word "Ultimatum".
"Right enough, it won't do for them."
The soldier continues to walk, keeping pace with the Red Army man. He does not like to be alone in the midst of this deserted field.

The saddles creaked rhythmically as the horses trotted along at an even, soothing pace, their breath congealing into momentary plumes of white vapour in the frosty air. A hoary rime stood out around the nostrils of the black stallion. Stepping gracefully, her fine neck arched, the Battalion Commander's dappled mare was playing with her bit. Both horsemen wore army greatcoats belted in at the waist and with three red squares on the sleeves; the only difference was that Battalion Commander Gavrilov's collar tabs were green, while his companion's were red.
Gavrilov was with the Frontier Guards; it was his battalion that manned the frontier posts on this seventy-kilometre stretch, he was the man in charge of this frontier belt. His companion was a visitor from Berezdov — Battalion Commissar Korchagin of the universal military training system.
It had snowed during the night and now the snow lay white and fluffy, untouched by either man or beast. The two men cantered out from the woods and were about to cross an open stretch some forty paces from border posts when Gavrilov suddenly reined in his horse. Korchagin wheeled around to see Gavrilov leaning over from his saddle and inspecting a curious trail in the snow that looked as if someone had been running a tiny cogwheel over the surface. Some cunning little beast had passed here leaving behind the intricate, confusing pattern. It was hard to make out which way the creature had been travelling, but it was not this that caused the Battalion Commander to halt. Two paces away lay another trail under a powdery sprinkling of snow — the footsteps of a man. There was nothing uncertain about these footprints — they led straight toward the woods, and there was not the slightest doubt that the intruder had come from the Polish side. The Battalion

Commander urged on his horse and followed the tracks to the sentry path. The footprints showed distinctly for a dozen paces or so on the Polish side.

"Somebody crossed the border last night," muttered the Battalion Commander. "The third platoon has been napping again — no mention of it in the morning report!" Gavrilov's greying moustache silvered by his congealed breath hung grimly over his lip.

In the distance two figures were approaching — one a slight man garbed in black and with the blade of a French bayonet gleaming in the sun, the other a giant in a yellow sheepskin coat. The dappled mare responded to a jab in her flanks and briskly the two riders bore down on the approaching pair. As they came, the Red Army man hitched up the rifle on his shoulder and spat out the butt of his cigarette into the snow.

"Hullo, Comrade. How's everything on your sector?" The Battalion Commander stretched out his hand to the Red Army man, who hurriedly removed a mitt to return the handclasp. So tall was the frontier guard that the Commander hardly had to bend forward in his saddle to reach him.

The Pole looked on from a distance. Here were two Red officers greeting a soldier as they would a close friend. For a moment he pictured himself shaking hands with Major Zakrzewski, but the very thought was so shocking that he glanced furtively over his shoulder.

"Just look over, Comrade Battalion Commander," reported the Red Army man. "Seen the track over there?"

"No, not yet."

"Who was on duty here from two to six at night?"

"Surotenko, Comrade Battalion Commander." "All right, but keep your eyes open."

As the Commander was about to ride on he added a stern word of warning: "And you'd better keep away from those fellows."

"You have to keep your eyes open on the border," the Commander said to his companion as their horses cantered along the broad road leading from the frontier to Berezdov. "The slightest slip can cost you dearly. Can't afford to take a nap on a job like ours. In broad daylight it's not so easy to skip the border, but at night we've got to be on the alert. Now judge for yourself, Comrade Korchagin. On my sector the frontier cuts right through four villages, which complicates things considerably. No matter how close you place your guards you'll find all the relatives from the one side of the line attending every wedding or feast held on the other. And no wonder — it's only a couple of dozen paces from cottage to cottage and the creek's shallow enough for a chicken to wade across. And there's some smuggling being done, too. True, much of it on a petty scale — an old woman carting across a bottle or two of Polish vodka and that sort of thing. But there is quite a bit of large-scale contraband traffic — people with big money to operate with. Have you heard that the Poles have opened shops in all the border villages where you can get practically everything you want? Those shops aren't intended for their own pauperised peasants, you may be sure."

As he listened to the Battalion Commander, Korchagin reflected that life on the border must resemble an endless scouting mission.

"Probably there's something more serious than smuggling going on. What do you say, Comrade Gavrilov?"

"That's just the trouble," the Battalion Commander replied gloomily.

Berezdov was a small backwoods town that had been within the Jewish pale of residence. It had two or three hundred small houses scattered haphazardly, and a huge market square with a couple of dozen shops in the middle. The square was filthy with manure. Around the town proper were the peasant huts. In the Jewish central section, on the road to the slaughter house, stood an old synagogue — a rickety, depressing building. Although the synagogue still drew crowds on Saturdays, its heyday had gone, and the rabbi lived a life that was by no means to his liking. What happened in 1917 must have been evil indeed if even in this Godforsaken corner the youngsters no longer accorded him the respect due his position. True, the old folk would still eat only kosher food, but how many of the youngsters indulged in the pork sausage which God had cursed. The very thought was revolting! And Rabbi Borukh in a fit of temper kicked viciously at a pig that was assiduously digging in a heap of manure in search of something edible. The rabbi was not at all pleased that Berezdov had been made a district centre, nor did he approve of these Communists who had descended on the place from the devil knows where and were now turning things upside down. Each day brought some fresh unpleasantness. Yesterday, for instance, he had seen a new sign over the gate of the priest's house: "Berezdov District Committee, Young Communist League of the Ukraine," it had read.

To expect this sign to augur anything but ill would be useless, mused the rabbi. So engrossed was he in his thoughts that he did not notice the small announcement pasted on the door of his synagogue before he actually bumped into it.

A public meeting of working youth will be held today at the club. The speakers will be Lisitsyn, Chairman of the Executive Committee, and Korchagin, Acting Secretary of the Komsomol District Committee. After the meeting a concert will be given by the pupils of the nine-year school.

In a fury the rabbi tore down the sheet of paper. The struggle had begun.

In the centre of a large garden adjoining the local church stood an old house that had once belonged to the priest. A deadly air of boredom filled the musty emptiness of the rooms in which the priest and his wife had lived, two people as old and as dull as the house itself and long bored with one another. The dreariness was swept away as soon as the new masters of the place moved in. The big hall in which the former pious residents had entertained guests only on church holidays was now always full of people, for the house was the headquarters of the Berezdov Communist Party Committee. On the door leading into a small room to the right just inside the front hall the words "Komsomol District Committee" had been written in chalk. Here Korchagin spent part of his working day. Besides being Military Commissar of the Second Universal Military Training Battalion he was also Acting Secretary of the newly-organised Komsomol District Committee.

Eight months had passed since that gathering at Anna's, yet it seemed that it had been only yesterday. Korchagin pushed the stack of papers aside, and leaning back in his chair gave himself up to his thoughts. ...

The house was still. It was late at night and the Party Committee office was deserted. Trofimov,

the Committee's Secretary, had gone home some time ago, leaving Korchagin alone in the building. Frost had woven a fantastic pattern on the window, but the room was warm. A paraffin lamp was burning on the table. Korchagin recalled the recent past. He remembered how in August the shop Komsomol organisation had sent him as a youth organiser with a repair train to Yekaterinoslav. Until late autumn he had travelled with the train's crew of a hundred and fifty from station to station bringing order into the chaotic aftermath of war, repairing damage and clearing away the remnants of smashed and burnt-out railway carriages. Their route took them from Sinelnikovo to Polog, through country where the bandit Makhno had once operated leaving behind him a trail of wreckage and wanton destruction. In Gulyai-Polye a whole week went into repairing the brick structure of the water tower and patching the sides of the dynamited water tank with iron sheets. Though lacking the skill of a fitter and unaccustomed to the heavy work, Pavel wielded a wrench along with the others and tightened more thousands of rusty bolts than he could remember.

Late in the autumn the train returned home and the railway shops again were the richer for a hundred and fifty pairs of hands. . . .

Pavel was now a more frequent visitor at Anna's place. The crease on his forehead smoothed out and his infectious laughter could again be heard.

Once again the grimy-faced fraternity from the railway shops gathered to hear him talk of bygone years of struggle, of the attempts made by rebellious but enslaved peasant Russia to overthrow the crowned monster that sat heavily on her shoulders, of the insurrections of Stepan Razin and Pugachov.

One evening at Anna's, when even more young people than usual had gathered there, Pavel announced that he was going to give up smoking, which unhealthy habit he had acquired at an early age.

"I'm not smoking any more," he declared firmly.

It all came about unexpectedly. One of the young people present had said that habit — smoking, for instance — was stronger than will power. Opinions were divided. At first Pavel said nothing, but drawn in by Talya, he finally joined the debate.

"Man governs his habits, and not the other way round. Otherwise what would we get?"

"Sounds fine, doesn't it?" Tsvetayev put in from his corner. "Korchagin likes to talk big. But why doesn't he apply his wisdom to himself? He smokes, doesn't he? He knows it's a rotten habit. Of course he does. But he isn't man enough to drop it." Then, changing his tone, Tsvetayev went on with a cold sneer: "He was busy 'spreading culture' in the study circles not so long ago. But did this prevent him from using foul language? Anyone who knows Pavel will tell you that he doesn't swear very often, but when he does he certainly lets himself go. It's much easier to lecture others than to be virtuous yourself."

There was a strained silence. The sharpness of Tsvetayev's tone had laid a chill on the gathering. Korchagin did not reply at once. Slowly he removed the cigarette from between his lips and said quietly:

"I'm not smoking any more."

Then, after a pause, he added:

"I'm doing this more for myself than for Dimka. A man who can't break himself of a bad habit isn't worth anything. That leaves only the swearing to be taken care of. I know I haven't quite

overcome that shameful habit, but even Dimka admits that he doesn't hear me curse very often. It's harder to stop a foul word from slipping out than to stop smoking, so I can't say at the moment that I've finished with that too. But I will."

Just before the frosts set in, rafts of firewood drifting down the river jammed the channel. Then the autumn floods broke them up and the much-needed fuel was swept away by the rushing waters. And again Solomenka sent its people to the rescue, this time to save the precious wood.

Unwilling to drop behind the others, Korchagin concealed the fact that he had caught a bad chill until a week later, when the wood had been piled high on shore. The icy water and the chill dankness of autumn had awakened the enemy lurking in his blood and he came down with a high fever. For two weeks acute rheumatism racked his body, and when he returned from hospital, he was able to work at the vice only by straddling the bench. The foreman would look at him and shake his head sadly. A few days later a medical board declared him unfit for work and he was given his discharge pay and papers certifying his right to a pension. This, however, he indignantly refused to accept.

With a heavy heart he left the shops. He moved about slowly, leaning on his stick, but every step caused excruciating pain. There were several letters from his mother asking him to come home for a visit, and each time he thought of her, her parting words came back to his mind:

"I never see you unless you're crippled!"

At the Gubernia Committee he was handed his Komsomol and Party registration cards and, with as few leave-takings as possible, he left town bound for home. For two weeks his mother steamed and massaged his swollen legs, and a month later to his great joy he was able to walk without the cane. Once again sunlight pierced the gloom. Before long he was back in the gubernia centre; three days there and the Organisational Department sent him to the regional military commissariat to be used as a political worker in a military training unit.

Another week passed and Pavel arrived in a small snowbound town as Military Commissar assigned to Battalion Two. The Regional Committee of the Komsomol too gave him an assignment: to rally the scattered Komsomol members in the locality and set up a youth league organisation in the district. Thus life got into a new stride.

Outside it was stifling hot. The branch of a cherry-tree peeped in through the open window of the Executive Committee Chairman's office. Across the way the gilded cross atop the gothic belfry of the Polish church blazed in the sun. And in the yard in front of the window tiny downy goslings as green as the grass around — the property of the caretaker of the Executive Committee premises — were busily searching for food.

The Chairman of the Executive Committee read the dispatch he had just received to the end. A shadow flitted across his face, and a huge gnarled hand strayed into his luxurious crop of hair and paused there.

Nikolai Nikolayevich Lisitsyn, the Chairman of the Berezdov Executive Committee, was only twenty-four, but none of the members of his staff and the local Party workers would have believed it. A big, strong man, stern and often formidable in appearance, he looked at least thirty-five. He

had a powerful physique, a big head firmly planted on a thick neck, piercing brown eyes, and a strong, energetic jaw. He wore blue breeches and a grey tunic, somewhat the worse for wear, with the Order of the Red Banner over the left breast pocket.

Like his father and grandfather before him Lisitsyn had been a metalworker almost from childhood, and before the October Revolution he had "commanded" a lathe at a Tula munitions plant.

Beginning with that autumn night when the Tula gunsmith shouldered a rifle and went out to fight for the workers' power, he had been caught up in the whirlwind of events. The Revolution and the Party sent Lisitsyn from one tight spot to another along a glorious path that witnessed his rise from rank-and-file Red Army man to regimental commander and commissar.

The fire of battle and the thunder of guns had receded into the past. Nikolai Lisitsyn was now working in a frontier district. Life went on at a quiet measured pace, and the Executive Committee Chairman sat in his office until late night after night poring over harvest reports. The dispatch he was now studying, however, momentarily revived the recent past. It was a warning couched in terse telegraphic language:

"Strictly confidential. To Lisitsyn, Chairman of the Berezdov Executive Committee.

"Marked activity has been observed latterly on the border where the Poles have been trying to send across a large band to terrorise the frontier districts. Take precautions. Suggest everything valuable at the Finance Department, including collected taxes, be transferred to area centre."

From his window Lisitsyn could see everyone who entered the District Executive Committee building. Looking up he caught sight of Pavel Korchagin on the steps. A moment later there was a knock on the door.

"Sit down, I've got something to tell you," Lisitsyn said, returning Pavel's handshake. For a whole hour the two were closeted in the office.

By the time Korchagin emerged from the office it was noon. As he stepped out, Lisitsyn's little sister, Anyutka, a timid child far too serious for her years, ran toward him from the garden. She always had a warm smile for Korchagin and now too she greeted him shyly, tossing a stray lock of her cropped hair back from her forehead.

"Is Kolya busy?" she asked. "Maria Mikhailovna has had his dinner ready for a long time." "Go right in, Anyutka, he's alone."

Long before dawn the next morning three carts harnessed to well-fed horses pulled up in front of the Executive Committee. The men who came with them exchanged a few words in undertones, and several sealed sacks were then carried out of the Finance Department. These were loaded into the carts and a few minutes later the rumble of wheels receded down the highway. The carts were convoyed by a detail under Korchagin's command. The forty-kilometre journey to the regional centre (twenty-five of them through forests) was made without mishap and the valuables safely deposited in the vaults of the Regional Finance Department.

Some days later a cavalryman galloped into Berezdov from the direction of the frontier. As he passed through the streets he was followed by the wondering stares of the local idlers.

At the gates of the Executive Committee the rider leapt to the ground, and, supporting his sabre with one hand, stamped up the front stairs in his heavy boots. Lisitsyn took the packet with a

worried frown. A few minutes later, the messenger was galloping back in the direction whence he had come.

No one but the Chairman of the Executive Committee knew the contents of the dispatch. But such news had a way of getting round, especially among the local shopkeepers many of whom were smugglers in a small way and had almost an instinct for sensing danger.

Two men walked briskly along the pavement leading to the headquarters of the Military Training Battalion. One of them was Pavel Korchagin. Him the watchers knew; he always carried a gun. But the fact that his companion, the Party Committee Secretary Trofimov, had strapped on a revolver looked ominous.

Several minutes later a dozen men ran out of the headquarters carrying rifles with bayonets fixed and marched briskly to the mill standing at the crossroads. The rest of the local Communist Party and Komsomol members were being issued arms at the Party Committee offices. The Chairman of the Executive Committee galloped past, wearing a Cossack cap and the customary Mauser. Something was obviously afoot. The main square and sidestreets grew deserted. Not a soul was in sight. In a flash huge medieval padlocks appeared on the doors of the tiny shops and shutters boarded windows. Only the fearless hens and hogs continued to rummage among piles of refuse.

The pickets took cover in the gardens at the edge of the town where they had a good view of the open fields and the straight road reaching into the distance.

The dispatch received by Lisitsyn had been brief:

"A mounted band of about one hundred men with two light machine-guns broke through to Soviet territory after a fight in the area of Poddubtsy last night. Take precautionary measures. The trail of the band has been lost in the Slavuta woods. A Red Cossack company has been sent in pursuit of the band. The company will pass through Berezdov during the day. Do not mistake them for the enemy. Gavrilov, Commander, Detached Frontier Battalion.

No more than an hour had passed when a rider appeared on the road leading to the town, followed by a group of horsemen moving about a kilometre behind. Korchagin's keen eyes followed their movements. The lone rider was a young Red Army man from the Seventh Red Cossack Regiment, a novice at reconnaissance, and hence, though he picked his way cautiously enough, he failed to spot the pickets ambushed in the roadside gardens. Before he knew it he was surrounded by armed men who poured onto the road from the greenery, and when he saw the Komsomol emblem on their tunics, he smiled sheepishly. After a brief confab, he turned his horse around and galloped back to the mounted force now coming up at a trot. The pickets let the Red Cossacks through and resumed their watch in the gardens.

Several anxious days passed before Lisitsyn received word that the raid had failed. Pursued by the Red cavalry, the riders had had to beat a hasty retreat across the frontier.

A handful of Bolsheviks, numbering nineteen in all, applied themselves energetically to the job of building up Soviet life in the district. This was a new administrative unit and hence everything had to be created from bottom up. Besides, the proximity of the border called for unflagging vigilance. Lisitsyn, Trofimov, Korchagin and the small group of active workers they had rallied toiled from dawn till dusk arranging for re-elections of Soviets, fighting the bandits, organising cultural work, putting down smuggling, in addition to Party and Komsomol work to strengthen defence.

From saddle to desk, and from desk to the common where squads of young military trainees diligently drilled, then the club and the school and two or three committee meetings — such was the daily round of the Military Commissar of Battalion Two. Often enough his nights were spent on horseback, Mauser at his side, nights whose stillness was broken by a sharp "Halt, who goes there?" and the pounding of the wheels of a fleeing cart laden with smuggled goods from beyond the border.

The Berezdov District Committee of the Komsomol consisted of Korchagin, Lida Polevykh, a girl from the Volga who headed the Women's Department, and Zhenka Razvalikhin, a tall, handsome young man who had been a Gymnasium student only a short time before. Razvalikhin had a weakness for thrilling adventures and was an authority on Sherlock Holmes and Louis Boussenard. Previously he had been office manager for the District Committee of the Party, and though he had joined the Komsomol only four months before, posed as an "old Bolshevik". Someone was needed in Berezdov to take charge of political education work, and since there was no one else to send, the Regional Committee, after some hesitation, had chosen Razvalikhin.

The sun had reached its zenith. The heat penetrated everywhere and all living creatures sought refuge in the shade. Even the dogs crawled under sheds and lay there panting, inert and sleepy. The only sign of life in the village was a hog revelling in a puddle of mud next to the well.

Korchagin untethered his horse, and biting his lip from the pain in his knee, climbed into the saddle. The teacher was standing on the steps of the schoolhouse shading her eyes from the sun with the palm of her hand.

"I hope to see you soon again, Comrade Military Commissar," she smiled.

The horse stamped impatiently, stretched its neck and pulled at the reins.

"Good-bye, Comrade Rakitina. So it's settled: you'll give the first lesson tomorrow."

Feeling the pressure of the bit relax, the horse was off at a brisk trot. Suddenly wild cries reached Pavel's ears. It sounded like the shrieking of women when villages catch fire. Wheeling his mount sharply around, the Military Commissar saw a young peasant woman running breathlessly into the village. Rakitina rushed forward and stopped her. From the nearby cottages the inhabitants looked out, mostly old men and women, for all the able-bodied peasants were working in the fields.

"0-o-oh! Good people! Come quickly! Come quickly! They're a-murdering each other over there!" When Korchagin galloped up people were crowding around the woman, pulling at her white blouse and showering her with anxious questions, but they could make nothing of her incoherent cries. "It's murder! They're cutting them up..." was all she could say. An old man with a tousled beard came up, supporting his homespun trousers with one hand as he ran.

"Stop your noise," he shouted at the hysterical woman. "Who's being murdered? What's it all about? Stop your squealing, damn you!"

"It's our men and the Poddubtsy crowd . . . fighting over the boundaries again. They're slaughtering our men!"

That told them all. Women wailed and the old men bellowed in fury. The news swept through the village and eddied in the backyards: "The Poddubtsy crowd are cutting up our fellows with scythes.... It's those boundaries again!" Only the bedridden remained indoors, all the rest poured into the village street and arming themselves with pitchforks, axes or sticks pulled from wattle

fences ran toward the fields where the two villages were engaged in their bloody annual contest over the boundaries between their fields.

Korchagin struck his horse and the animal was off at a gallop. The animal flew past the running village folk and, ears pressed back and hooves furiously pounding the ground, steadily increased its breakneck pace. On a hillock a windmill spread out its arms as if to bar the way. To the right, by the river bank, were the low meadows, and to the left a rye field rose and dipped all the way to the horizon. The wind rippled the ears of the ripe grain. Poppies sprinkled the roadside with bright red. It was quiet here, and unbearably hot. But from the distance, where the silvery ribbon of the river basked in the sun, came the cries of battle.

The horse continued its wild career down toward the meadows. "If he stumbles, it's the end of both of us," flashed in Pavel's mind. But there was no stopping now, and all he could do was to listen to the wind whistle in his ears as he bent low in the saddle.

Like a whirlwind he galloped into the field where the bloody combat was raging. Several already lay bleeding on the ground.

The horse ran down a bearded peasant armed with the stub of a scythe handle who was pursuing a young man with blood streaming down his face. Nearby a sunburned giant of a man was aiming vicious kicks with his big heavy boots at the solar plexus of his victim.

Charging into the mass of struggling men at full speed, Korchagin sent them flying in all directions. Before they could recover from the surprise, he whirled madly now upon one, now on another, realising that he could disperse this knot of brutalised humanity only by terrorising them. "Scatter, you swine!" he shouted in a fury. "Or I'll shoot every last man of you, you blasted bandits!"

And pulling out his Mauser he fired over an upturned face twisted with savage rage. Again the horse whirled around and again the Mauser spoke. Some of the combatants dropped their scythes and turned back. Dashing up and down the field and firing incessantly, the Commissar finally got the situation in hand. The peasants took to their heels and scattered in all directions anxious to escape both from responsibility for the bloody brawl and from this man on horseback so terrible in his fury who was shooting without stop.

Luckily no one was killed and the wounded recovered. Nevertheless soon afterward a session of the district court was held in Poddubtsy to hear the case, but all the judge's efforts to discover the ringleaders were unavailing. With the persistence and patience of the true Bolshevik, the judge sought to make the sullen peasants before him see how barbarous their actions had been, and to impress upon them that such violence would not be tolerated.

"It's the boundaries that are to blame, Comrade judge," they said. "They've a way of getting mixed up — every year we fight over them."

Nevertheless some of the peasants had to answer for the fight.

A week later a commission came to the hay lands in question and began staking out the disputed strips.

"I've been working as land surveyor for nearly thirty years, and always it's been the dividing lines that caused trouble," the old surveyor with the commission said to Korchagin as he rolled up his tape. The old man was sweating profusely from the heat and the exertion. "Ljooking at the way the meadows are divided you'd hardly believe your eyes. A drunkard could draw straighter lines. And the fields are even worse. Strips three paces wide and one crossing into the other — to try and

separate them is enough to drive you mad. And they're being cut up more and more what with sons growing up and fathers splitting up their land with them. Believe me, twenty years from now there won't be any land left to till, it'll all be balks. As it is, ten per cent of the land is being wasted in this way."

Korchagin smiled.

"Twenty years from now we won't have a single balk left, Comrade surveyor." The old man gave him an indulgent look.

"The communist society, you mean? Well, now, that's pretty much in the future, isn't it?" "Have you heard about the Budanovka Collective Farm?"

"Yes. I've been in Budanovka. But that's the exception, Comrade Korchagin."

The commission went on measuring strips of land. Two young men hammered in stakes. And on both sides stood the peasants watching closely to make sure that they went down where the half-rotten sticks barely visible in the grass marked the previous dividing lines.

Whipping up his wretched nag, the garrulous driver turned to his passengers.

"Where all these Komsomol lads have sprung up from beats me!" he said. "Don't remember anything like it before. It's that schoolteacher woman who's started it, for sure. Rakitina's her name, maybe you know her? She's a young wench, but she's a troublemaker. Stirs up all the womenfolk in the village, puts all kinds of silly ideas into their heads and that's how the trouble begins. It's got so a man can't beat his wife any more! In the old days you'd give the old woman a clout whenever you felt out of sorts and she'd slink away and sulk, but now she kicks up such a row you wished you hadn't touched her. She'll threaten you with the People's Court, and as for the younger ones, they'll talk about divorce and reel off all the laws to you. Look at my Ganka, she quietest wench you ever saw, now she's gone and got herself made a delegate; the elder among the womenfolk, I think that means. The women come to her from all over the village. I nearly let her have a taste of the whip when I heard about it, but I spat on the whole business. They can go to the devil! Let them jabber. She isn't a bad wench when it comes to housework and such things."

The driver scratched his hairy chest visible through the opening in his homespun shirt and flicked his whip under the horse's belly. The two in the cart were Razvalikhin and Lida. They both had business in Poddubtsy. Lida planned to call a conference of women's delegates, and Razvalikhin had been sent to help the local cell organise its work.

"So you don't like the Komsomols?" Lida jokingly asked the driver. He plucked at his little beard for a while before replying.

"Oh I don't mind them.... I believe in letting the youngsters enjoy themselves, putting on plays and such like. I'm fond of a comedy myself if it's good. We did think at the beginning the young folk would get out of hand, but it turned out just the opposite. I've heard folks say they're very strict about drinking and rowing and such like. They go in more for book learning. But they won't leave God be, and they're always trying to take the church away and use it for a club. Now that's no good, it's turned the old folks against them. But on the whole they're not so bad. If you ask me, though, they make a big mistake taking in all the down-and-outs in the village, the ones who hire out, or who can't make a go of their farms. They won't have anything to do with the rich peasants' sons."

The cart clattered down the hill and pulled up outside the school building.

The caretaker had put up the new arrivals and gone off to sleep in the hay. Lida and Razvalikhin had just returned from a meeting which had ended rather late. It was dark inside the cottage. Lida undressed quickly, climbed into bed and fell asleep almost at once. She was rudely awakened by Razvalikhin's hands travelling over her in a manner that left no doubt as to his intentions.

"What do you want?"

"Shush, Lida, don't make so much noise. I'm sick of lying there all by myself. Can't you find anything more exciting to do than snooze?"

"Stop pawing me and get off my bed at once!" Lida said, pushing him away. Razvalikhin's oily smile had always sickened her and she wanted to say something insulting and humiliating, but sleep overpowered her and she closed her eyes.

"Aw, come on! You weren't brought up in a nunnery by any chance? Stop playing the little innocent, you can't fool me. If you were really an advanced woman, you'd satisfy my desire and then go to sleep as much as you want."

Considering the matter settled, he went over and sat on the edge of the bed again, laying a possessive hand on her shoulder.

"Go to hell!" Lida was now wide awake. "I'm going to tell Korchagin about this tomorrow."

Razvalikhin seized her hand and whispered testily: "I don't care a damn about your Korchagin, and you'd better not try to resist or I'll take you by force."

There was a brief scuffle and then two resounding slaps rang out. Razvalikhin leapt aside. Lida groped her way to the door, pushed it open and rushed out into the yard. She stood there in the moonlight, panting with fury and disgust.

"Get inside, you fool!" Razvalikhin called to her viciously.

He carried his own bed out under the shed and spent the rest of the night there. Lida fastened the door on the latch, curled up on the bed and went to sleep again.

In the morning they set out for home. Razvalikhin sat gloomily beside the old driver smoking one cigarette after another.

"That touch-me-not may really go and spill the beans to Korchagin, blast her!" he was thinking. "Who'd have thought she'd turn out to be such a prig? You'd think she was a raving beauty by the way she acts, but she's nothing to look at. But I'd better make it up with her or there may be trouble. Korchagin has his eye on me as it is."

He moved over to Lida. He pretended to be ashamed of himself, put on a downcast air and mumbled a few words of apology.

That did the trick. Before they had reached the edge of the village Lida had given him her promise not to tell anyone what had happened that night.

Komsomol cells sprang up one after another in the border villages. The District Committee members carefully tended these first young shoots of the Communist movement. Korchagin and Lida Polevykh spent much time in the various localities working with the local Komsomol members.

Razvalikhin did not like making trips to the countryside. He did not know how to win the confidence of the peasant lads and only succeeded in bungling things. Lida and Pavel, on the other

hand, had no difficulty in making friends with the peasant youth. The girls took to Lida at once, they accepted her as one of themselves and gradually she awakened their interest in the Komsomol movement. As for Korchagin, all the young folk in the district knew him. One thousand six hundred of the young men due to be called up for military service went through preliminary training in his battalion. Never before had his accordion played such an important role in propaganda as here in the village. The instrument made Pavel tremendously popular with the young folk, who gathered of an evening on the village lane to enjoy themselves, and for many a towheaded youngster the road to the Komsomol began here as he listened to the enchanting music of the accordion, now passionate and stirring, now strident and brave, now tender and caressing as only the sad, wistful songs of the Ukraine can be. They listened to the accordion, and they listened to the young man who played it, a railway worker who was now Military Commissar and Komsomol secretary. And the music of the accordion seemed to mingle harmoniously with what the young Commissar told them. Soon new songs rang out in the villages, and new books appeared in the cottages beside the prayer-books and Bibles.

The smugglers now had more than the frontier guards to reckon with; in the Komsomol members the Soviet Government had acquired staunch friends and zealous assistants. Sometimes the Komsomol cells in the border towns allowed themselves to be carried away by their enthusiasm in hunting down enemies and then Korchagin would have to come to the aid of his young comrades.

Once Grishutka Khorovodko, the blue-eyed Secretary of the Poddubtsy cell, a hot-headed lad fond of an argument and very active in the anti-religious movement, learned from private sources of information that some smuggled goods were to be brought that night to the village mill. He roused all the Komsomol members and, armed with a training rifle and two bayonets, they set out at the dead of night, quietly laid an ambush at the mill and waited for their quarry to appear. The border post, which had been informed of the smugglers' move, sent out a detail of its own. In the dark the two sides met and clashed, and had it not been for the vigilance displayed by the frontier guards, the young men might have suffered heavy casualties in the skirmish. As it was the youngsters were merely disarmed, taken to a village four kilometres away and locked up.

Korchagin happened to be at Gavrilov's place at the time. When the Battalion Commander told him the news the following morning, Pavel mounted his horse and galloped off to rescue his boys. The frontier man in charge laughed as he told him the story.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Comrade Korchagin," he said. "They're fine lads and we shan't make trouble for them. But you had better give them a good talking to so that they won't try to do our work for us in the future."

The sentry opened the door of the shed and the eleven lads got up and stood sheepishly shifting their weight from one foot to the other.

"Look at them," the frontier man said with studied severity. "They've gone and made a mess of things, and now I'll have to send them on to area headquarters."

Then Grishutka spoke up.

"But Comrade Sakharov," he said agitatedly, "what crime have we committed? We've had our eye on that kulak for a long time. We only wanted to help the Soviet authorities, and you go and lock us up like bandits." He turned away with an injured air.

After a solemn consultation, during which Korchagin and Sakharov had difficulty in preserving their gravity, they decided the boys had had enough of a fright.

"If you will vouch for them and promise us that they won't go taking walks over to the frontier any more I'll let them go," Sakharov said to Pavel. "They can help us in other ways."

"Very well, I'll vouch for them. I hope they won't let me down any more."

The youngsters marched back to Poddubtsy singing. The incident was hushed up. And it was not long before the miller was caught, this time by the law.

In the Maidan-Villa woods there lived a colony of rich German farmers. The kulak farms stood within half a kilometre of each other, as sturdily built as miniature fortresses. It was from Maidan-Villa that Antonyuk and his band operated. Antonyuk, a one-time tsarist army sergeant major, had recruited a band of seven cutthroats from among his kith and kin and, armed with pistols, staged hold-ups on the country roads. He did not hesitate to spill blood, he was not averse to robbing wealthy speculators, but neither did he stop at molesting Soviet workers. Speed was Antonyuk's watchword. One day he would rob a couple of co-operative store clerks and the next day he would disarm a postal employee in a village a good twenty kilometres away, stealing everything the man had on him, down to the last kopek. Antonyuk competed with his fellow-brigand Gordei, one was worse than the other, and between them the two kept the area militia and frontier guard authorities very busy. Antonyuk operated just outside Berezdov, and it grew dangerous to appear on the roads leading to the town. The bandit eluded capture; when things grew too hot for him he would withdraw beyond the border and lie low only to turn up again when he was least expected. His very elusiveness made him a menace. Every report of some fresh outrage committed by this brigand caused Lisitsyn to gnaw his lips with rage.

"When will that rattlesnake stop biting us? He'd better take care, the scoundrel, or I'll have to settle his hash myself," he would mutter through clenched teeth. Twice the District Executive Chairman, taking Korchagin and three other Communists with him, set out hot on the bandit's trail, but each time Antonyuk got away.

A special detachment was sent to Berezdov from the area centre to fight the bandits. It was commanded by a dapper youth named Filatov. Instead of reporting to the Chairman of the Executive Committee, as frontier regulations demanded, this conceited youngster went straight to the nearest village, Semaki, and arriving at the dead of night, put up with his men in a house on the outskirts. The mysterious arrival of these armed men was observed by a Komsomol member living next door who hurried off at once to report to the Chairman of the Village Soviet. The latter, knowing nothing about the detachment, took them for bandits and dispatched the lad at once to the district centre for help. Filatov's foolhardiness very nearly cost many lives. Lisitsyn roused the militia in the middle of the night and hurried off with a dozen men to tackle the "bandits" in Semaki. They galloped up to the house, dismounted and climbing over the fence closed in on the house. The sentry on duty at the door was knocked down by a blow on the head with a revolver-butt, Lisitsyn broke in the door with his shoulder and he and his men rushed into a room dimly lighted by an oil lamp hanging from the ceiling. With a grenade in one hand and his Mauser in the other Lisitsyn roared so that the window panes rattled:

"Surrender, or I'll blow you to bits!"

Another second and the sleepy men leaping to their feet from the floor might have been cut down by a hail of bullets. But the sight of the man with the grenade poised for the throw was so awe-

inspiring that they put up their hands. A few minutes later, when the "bandits" were herded outside in their underwear, Filatov noticed the decoration on Lisitsyn's tunic and hastened to explain. Lisitsyn was furious. "You fool!" he spat out with withering contempt.

Tidings of the German revolution, dim echoes of the rifle fire on the Hamburg barricades reached the border area. An atmosphere of tension hung over the frontier. Newspapers were read with eager expectation. The wind of revolution blew from the West. Applications poured in to the Komsomol District Committee from Komsomols volunteering for service in the Red Army. Korchagin was kept busy explaining to the youngsters from the cells that the Soviet Union was pursuing a policy of peace and that it had no intentions of going to war with its neighbours. But this had little effect. Every Sunday Komsomol members from the entire district held meetings in the big garden of the priest's house, and one day at noon the Poddubtsy cell turned up in proper marching order in the yard of the District Committee. Korchagin saw them through the window and went out into the porch. Eleven lads, with Khorovodko at their head, all wearing top boots, and with large canvas knapsacks on their backs, halted at the entrance.

"What's this, Grisha?" Korchagin asked in surprise.

Instead of replying, Khorovodko signed to Pavel with his eyes and went inside the building with him. Lida, Razvalikhin and two other Komsomol members pressed around the newcomer demanding an explanation. Khorovodko closed the door and wrinkling his bleached eyebrows announced:

"This is a sort of test mobilisation, Comrades. My own idea. I told the boys this morning a telegram had come from the district, strictly confidential of course, that we're going to war with the German bourgeoisie, and we'll soon be fighting the Polish Pany as well. All Komsomols are called up, on orders from Moscow, I told them. Anyone who's scared can file an application and he'll be allowed to stay home. I ordered them not to say a word about the war to anyone, just to take a loaf of bread and a hunk of fatback apiece, and those who didn't have any fatback could bring garlic or onions. We were to meet secretly outside the village and go to the district centre and from there to the area centre where arms would be issued. You ought to see what an effect that had on the boys! They tried hard to pump me, but I told them to get busy and cut out the questions. Those who wanted to stay behind should say so. We only wanted volunteers. Well, my boys dispersed and I began to get properly worried. Supposing nobody turned up? If that happened I would disband the whole cell and move to some other place. I sat there outside the village waiting with my heart in my boots. After a while they began coming, one by one. Some of them had been crying, you could see by their faces, though they tried to hide it. All ten of them turned up, not a single deserter. That's our Poddubtsy cell for you!" he wound up triumphantly.

When the shocked Lida Polevykh began to scold him, he stared at her in amazement.

"What do you mean? This is the best way to test them, I tell you. You can see right through each one of them. There's no fraud there. I was going to drag them to the area centre just to keep up appearances, but the poor beggars are dog-tired. You'll have to make a little speech to them, Korchagin. You will, won't you? It wouldn't be right without a speech. Tell them the mobilisation has been called off or something, but say that we're proud of them just the same."

Korchagin seldom visited the area centre, for the journey took several days and pressure of work demanded his constant presence in the district. Razvalikhin, on the other hand, was ready to ride off to town on any pretext. He would set out on the journey armed from head to foot, fancying himself one of Fenimore Cooper's heroes. As he drove through the woods he would take pot shots at crows or at some fleetfooted squirrel, stop lone passersby and question them sternly as to who they were, where they had come from and whither they were bound. On approaching the town he would remove his weapons, stick his rifle under the hay in the cart and, hiding his revolver in his pocket, stroll into the office of the Komsomol Regional Committee looking his usual self.

"Well, what's the news in Berezdov?" Fedotov, Secretary of the Regional Committee, inquired as Razvalikhin entered his office one day.

Fedotov's office was always crowded with people all talking at once. It was not easy to work under such conditions, listening to four different people, while replying to a fifth and writing something at the same time. Although Fedotov was very young he had been a Party member since 1919; it was only in those stormy times that a 15-year-old lad could have been admitted into the Party. "Oh, there's plenty of news," answered Razvalikhin nonchalantly. "Too much to tell all at once. It's one long grind from morning till night. There's so much to attend to. We've had to start from the very beginning, you know. I set up two new cells. Now, tell me what you called me here for?" And he sat down in an armchair with a businesslike air.

Krymsky, the head of the economic department, looked up from the heap of papers on his desk for a moment.

"We asked for Korchagin, not you," he said. Razvalikhin blew out a thick cloud of tobacco smoke. "Korchagin doesn't like coming here, so I have to do it on top of everything else.... In general, some secretaries have a fine time of it. They don't do anything themselves. It's the donkeys like me who have to carry the load. Whenever Korchagin goes to the border he's gone for two or three weeks and all the work is left to me."

Razvalikhin's broad hint that he was the better man for the job of district secretary was not lost on his hearers.

"That fellow doesn't appeal to me much," Fedotov remarked to the others when Razvalikhin had gone.

Razvalikhin's trickery was exposed quite by chance. Lisitsyn dropped into Fedotov's office one day to pick up the mail, which was the custom for anyone coming from the district, and in the course of a conversation between the two men Razvalikhin was exposed.

"Send Korchagin to us anyway," said Fedotov in parting. "We hardly know him here."

"Very well. But don't try to take him away from us, mind. We shan't allow that."

This year the anniversary of the October Revolution was celebrated on the border with even greater enthusiasm than usual. Korchagin was elected chairman of the committee organising the celebrations in the border villages. After the meeting in Poddubtsy, five thousand peasants from three neighbouring villages marched to the frontier in a procession half a kilometre long, carrying scarlet banners and with a military band and the training battalion at the head. They marched in perfect order on the Soviet side of the frontier, parallel to the border posts, bound for the villages

that had been cut in two by the demarcation line. Never before had the Poles witnessed the like on their frontier. Battalion Commander Gavrilov and Korchagin rode ahead of the column on horseback, and behind them the band played, the banners rustled in the breeze and the singing of the people resounded far and wide. The peasant youth clad in their holiday best were in high spirits, the village girls twittered and laughed gaily, the adults marched along gravely, the old folk with an air of solemn triumph. The human stream stretched as far as eye could see. One of its banks was the frontier, but no one so much as stepped across that forbidden line. Korchagin watched the sea of people march past. The strains of the Komsomol song "From the forests dense to Britain's seas, the Red Army is strongest of all!" gave way to a girls' chorus singing "Up on yonder hillside the girls are a-mowing...."

The Soviet sentries greeted the procession with happy smiles. The Polish guards looked on bewildered. This demonstration on the frontier caused no little consternation on the other side, although the Polish command had been warned of it in advance. Mounted gendarme patrols moved restlessly back and forth, the frontier guard had been strengthened fivefold and reserves were hidden behind the nearby hills ready for any emergency. But the procession kept to its own territory, marching along gaily, filling the air with its singing.

A Polish sentry stood on a knoll. The column approached with measured tread. The first notes of a march rang out. The Pole brought his rifle smartly to his side and then presented arms, and Korchagin distinctly heard the words: "Long live the Commune!"

The soldier's eyes told Pavel that it was he who had uttered the words. Pavel stared at him fascinated.

A friend! Beneath the soldier's uniform a heart beat in sympathy with the demonstrators. Pavel replied softly in Polish:

"Greetings, Comrade!"

The sentry stood in the same position while the demonstration marched past. Pavel turned round several times to look at the dark little figure. Here was another Pole. His whiskers were touched with grey and the eyes under the shiny peak of his cap expressed nothing. Pavel, still under the impression of what he had just heard, murmured in Polish as if to himself:

"Greetings, Comrade!"

But there was no reply.

Gavrilov smiled. He had overheard what had passed.

"You expect too much," he observed. "They aren't all plain infantrymen, you know. Some of them are gendarmes. Didn't you notice the chevron on his sleeve? That one was a gendarme for sure." The head of the column was already descending the hill toward a village cut in two by the frontier. The Soviet half of the village had prepared to meet the guests in grand style. All the inhabitants were waiting at the frontier bridge on the bank of the stream. The young folk were lined up on either side of the road. The roofs of cottages and sheds on the Polish side were covered with people who were watching the proceedings on the opposite bank with tense interest. There were crowds of peasants on the cottage steps and by the garden fences. When the procession entered the human corridor the band struck up the Internationale. Later stirring speeches were delivered from a platform decorated with greenery. Young men and white-headed veterans addressed the crowd. Korchagin too spoke in his native Ukrainian. His words flew over the border and were heard on the other side of the river, whereupon the gendarmes over there began to disperse the villagers for

fear that those fiery words might inflame the hearts of those who listened. Whips whistled and shots were fired into the air.

The streets emptied out. The young folk, scared off the roofs by gendarme bullets, disappeared. Those on the Soviet side looked on and their faces grew grave. Filled with wrath by what he had just witnessed, an aged shepherd climbed onto the platform with the help of some village lads and addressed the crowd in great agitation.

"You've seen, my children? That's how we used to be treated too. But no more. Nobody dare whip us peasants any more. We've finished with the gentry and their whippings. We're in power now and it's for you, my sons, to hold on firmly to that power. I'm an old man and I'm not much good at speech-making. But I'd tell you a lot if I could. I'd tell you how we used to toil like oxen in the days of the tsars. That's why it hurts to see those poor folks over there." He pointed with a shaking hand toward the other side of the river, and fell to weeping as old men do.

Then Grishutka Khorovodko spoke. Gavrilov, listening to his wrathful speech, turned his horse around and scanned the opposite bank to see whether anyone there was taking notes. But the river bank was deserted. Even the sentry by the bridge had been removed.

"Well, it looks as if there won't be any protest note to the Foreign Affairs Commissariat after all," he laughed.

One rainy night in late autumn the bloody trail of Antonyuk and his seven men came to an end. The bandits were caught at a wedding party in the house of a wealthy farmer in the German colony in Maidan-Villa. It was the peasants from the Khrolinsky Commune who tracked him down.

The local women had spread the news about these guests at the colony wedding, and the Komsomols got together at once, twelve of them, and armed with whatever they could lay their hands on, set out for Maidan-Villa by cart, sending a messenger post-haste to Berezdov. At Semaki the messenger chanced to meet Filatov's detachment, which rushed off hot on the trail. The Khrolinsky men surrounded the farm and began to exchange rifle fire with the Antonyuk band. The latter entrenched themselves in a small wing of the farmhouse and opened fire at anyone who came within range. They tried to make a dash for it, but were driven back inside the building after losing one of their number. Antonyuk had been in many a tight corner like this and had fought his way out with the aid of hand grenades and darkness. He might have escaped this time too, for the Khrolinsky Komsomols had already lost two men, but Filatov arrived in the nick of time. Antonyuk saw that the game was up. He continued firing back till morning from all the windows, but at dawn they took him. Not one of the seven surrendered. It cost four lives to stamp out the viper's nest. Three of the casualties were lads from the newly-organised Khrolinsky Komsomol group.

Korchagin's battalion was called up for the autumn manoeuvres of the territorial forces. The battalion covered the forty kilometres to the divisional camp in a single day's march under a driving rain. They set out early in the morning and reached their destination late at night. Gusev, the Battalion Commander, and his commissar rode on horseback. The eight hundred trainees reached the barracks exhausted and went to sleep at once. The manoeuvres were due to begin the following morning; the headquarters of the territorial division had been late in summoning the

battalion. Lined up for inspection, the battalion, now in uniform and carrying rifles, presented an entirely different appearance. Both Gusev and Korchagin had invested much time and effort in training these young men and they were confident that the unit would pass muster. After the official inspection had ended and the battalion had shown its skill on the drill ground, one of the commanders, a man with a handsome though flaccid face, turned to Korchagin and demanded sharply:

"Why are you mounted? The commanders and commissars of our training battalions are not entitled to horses. Turn your mount over to the stables and report for manoeuvres on foot." Korchagin knew that if he dismounted he would be unable to take part in the manoeuvres, for his legs would not carry him a single kilometre. But how could he explain the situation to this loud-mouthed coxcomb festooned with leather straps?

"I shall not be able to take part in the manoeuvres on
foot." "Why not?"

Realising that he would have to give some explanation, Korchagin replied in a low voice:

"My legs are swollen and I will not be able to stand a whole week of running and walking. But perhaps you will tell me who you are, Comrade?"

"In the first place I am Chief of Staff of your regiment. Secondly, I order you once more to get off that horse. If you are an invalid you ought not to be in the army."

Pavel felt as if he had been struck on the face with a whip. He jerked the reins, but Gusev's strong hand checked him. For a few moments injured pride and self-restraint fought for supremacy in Pavel. But Pavel Korchagin was no longer the Red Army man who could shift light-heartedly from unit to unit. He was a Battalion Commissar now, and his battalion stood there behind him. What a poor example of discipline he would be showing his men if he disobeyed the order! It was not for this conceited ass that he had reared his battalion. He slipped his feet out of the stirrups, dismounted and, fighting the excruciating pain in his joints, walked over to the right flank.

For several days the weather had been unusually fine. The manoeuvres were drawing to a close. On the fifth day the troops were in the vicinity of Shepetovka, where the exercises were to end. The Berezdov Battalion had been given the assignment of capturing the station from the direction of Klimentovichi village.

Korchagin, who was now on homeground, showed Gusev all the approaches. The battalion, divided into two parts, made a wide detour and emerging in the enemy rear broke into the station building with loud cheers. The operation was given the highest appraisal. The Berezdov men remained in possession of the station while the battalion that had defended it withdrew to the woods having been judged to have "lost" fifty per cent of its men.

Korchagin was in command of one half of the battalion. He had ordered his men to deploy and was standing in the middle of the street with the commander and political instructor of the third company when a Red Army man came running up to him.

"Comrade Commissar," he panted, "the Battalion Commander wants to know whether the machine-gunners are holding the railway crossings. The commission's on its way here."

Pavel and the commanders with him went over to one of the crossings. The Regimental Commander and his aides were there. Gusev was congratulated on the successful operations.

Representatives from the routed battalion looked sheepish and did not even try to justify themselves.

Gusev said: "I can't take the credit for it. It was Korchagin here who showed us the way. He hails from these parts."

The Chief of Staff rode up to Pavel and said with a sneer: "So you can run quite well after all, Comrade. The horse was just a show-off, I suppose?" He was about to say something else, but the look on Korchagin's face stopped him.

"You don't happen to know his name, do you?" Korchagin asked Gusev when the higher commanders had gone.

Gusev slapped him on the shoulder.

"Now then, don't you pay any attention to that upstart. His name is Chuzhanin. A former ensign, I believe."

Several times that day Pavel racked his brains in an effort to recall where he had heard that name before, but he could not remember.

The manoeuvres were over. The battalion, having been highly commended, went back to Berezdov. Korchagin, utterly exhausted, remained behind to rest for a day or two at home. For two days he slept round the clock, and on the third day he went to see Artem down at the engine sheds. Here in this grimy, smoke-blackened building Pavel felt at home. Hungrily he inhaled the coal smoke. This was where he really belonged and it was here he wished to be. He felt as if he had lost something infinitely dear to him. It was months since he had heard an engine whistle, and the one-time stoker and electrician yearned as much for the familiar surroundings as the sailor yearns for the boundless sea expanse after a prolonged stay on shore. It was a long time before he could get over this feeling. He spoke little to his brother, who now worked at a portable forge. He noticed a new furrow on Artem's brow. He was the father of two children now. Evidently Artem was having a hard time of it. He did not complain, but Pavel could see for himself.

They worked side by side for an hour or two. Then they parted.

At the railway crossing Pavel reined in his horse and gazed for a long while at the station. Then he struck his mount and galloped down the road through the woods.

The forest roads were now quite safe. All the bandits, big and small, had been stamped out by the Bolsheviks, and the villages in the area now lived in peace.

Pavel reached Berezdov around noon. Lida Polevykh ran out into the porch of the District Committee to meet him.

"Welcome home!" she said with a warm smile. "We have missed you here!" She put her arm around him and the two went in doors.

"Where is Razvalikhin?" he asked her as he took off his coat.

"I don't know," Lida replied rather reluctantly. "Oh yes, I remember now. He said this morning he was going to the school to take the class in sociology instead of you. He says it's his job not yours."

This was an unpleasant surprise for Pavel. He had never liked Razvalikhin. "That fellow may make a hash of things at the school," he thought in annoyance.

"Never mind him," he said to Lida. "Tell me, what's the good news here. Have you been to

Grushevka? How are things with the youngsters over there?"
While Lida gave him the news, Pavel relaxed on the couch resting his aching limbs.
"The day before yesterday Rakitina was accepted as candidate member of the Party. That makes our Poddubtsy cell much stronger. Rakitina is a good girl, I like her very much. The teachers are beginning to come over to our side, some of them are with us already."

Korchagin and Lychikov, the new Secretary of the Party District Committee, often met at Lisitsyn's place of an evening and the three would sit studying at the big desk until the early hours of the morning.
The door leading to the bedroom where Lisitsyn's wife and sister slept would be tightly closed and the three bending over a small volume would converse in low tones. Lisitsyn had only time to study at night. Even so whenever Pavel returned from his frequent trips to the villages he would find to his chagrin that his comrades had gone far ahead of him.

One day a messenger from Poddubtsy brought the news that Grishutka Khorovodko had been murdered the night before by unknown assailants. Pavel rushed off at once to the Executive Committee stables, forgetting the pain in his legs, saddled a horse with feverish haste and galloped off toward the frontier.
Grishutka's body lay amid spruce branches on a table in the Village Soviet cottage, the red banner of the Soviet draped over him. A frontier man and a Komsomol stood on guard at the door admitting no one until the authorities arrived. Korchagin entered the cottage, went over to the table and turned back the banner.
Grishutka, his face waxen, his dilated eyes transfixed in agony of death, lay with his head to one side. A spruce branch covered the spot where the back of his head had been bashed in by some sharp weapon.
Who had taken the life of this young man? He was the only son of widow Khorovodko. His father, a mill hand and member of the Poor Peasants' Committee, had died fighting for the Revolution.
The shock of her son's death had brought the old woman to her bed and neighbours were trying to comfort her. And her son lay cold and still preserving the secret of his untimely end.
Grishutka's murder had aroused the indignation of the whole village. The young Komsomol leader and champion of the poor peasants turned out to have far more friends in the village than enemies. Rakitina, greatly upset by the news, sat in her room weeping bitterly. She did not even look up when Korchagin came in.
"Who do you think killed him, Rakitina?" Korchagin asked hoarsely, dropping heavily into a chair.
"It must be that gang from the mill. Grisha had always been a thorn in the side of those smugglers."

Two villages turned up for Grisha Khorovodko's funeral. Korchagin brought his battalion, and the whole Komsomol organisation came to pay its last respects to their comrade. Gavrilov mustered a

company of two hundred and fifty border guards on the square in front of the Village Soviet. To the accompaniment of the mournful strains of the funeral march the coffin swathed in red bunting was brought out and placed on the square where a fresh grave had been dug beside the graves of the Bolshevik partisans who had fallen in the Civil War.

Grishutka's death united all those whose interests he had so staunchly upheld. The young agricultural labourers and the poor peasants vowed to support the Komsomol, and all who spoke at the graveside wrathfully demanded that the murderers be brought to book, that they be tried here on the square beside the grave of their victim, so that everyone might see who the enemies were.

Three volleys thundered forth, and fresh spruce branches were laid on the grave. That evening the cell elected a new secretary — Rakitina. A message came for Korchagin from the border post with the news that they were on the trail of the murderers.

A week later, when the second District Congress of Soviets opened in the town theatre, Lisitsyn, gravely triumphant, announced:

"Comrades, I am happy to be able to report to this congress that we have accomplished a great deal in the past year. Soviet power is firmly established in the district, banditism has been uprooted and smuggling has been all but wiped out. Strong organisations of peasant poor have come into being in the villages, the Komsomol organisations are ten times as strong as they were and the Party organisations have expanded. The last kulak provocation in Poddubtsy, which cost us the life of our comrade Khorovodko, has been exposed. The murderers, the miller and his son-in-law, have been arrested and will be tried in a few days by the gubernia assizes. Several delegations from the villages have demanded that this congress pass a resolution demanding the supreme penalty for these bandits and terrorists."

A storm of approval shook the hall.

"Hear, hear! Death to the enemies of Soviet power!"

Lida Polevykh appeared at one of the side doors. She beckoned to Pavel.

Outside in the corridor she handed him an envelope marked "urgent". He opened it and read:

"To the Berezdov District Committee of the Komsomol. Copy to the District Committee of the Party. By decision of the Gubernia Committee Comrade Korchagin is recalled from the district to the Gubernia Committee for appointment to responsible Komsomol work."

Pavel took leave of the district where he had worked for the past year. There were two items on the agenda of the last meeting of the Party District Committee held before his departure: 1) Transfer of Comrade Korchagin to membership in the Communist Party, 2) Endorsement of his testimonial upon his release from the post of Secretary of the Komsomol District Committee.

Lisitsyn and Lida wrung Pavel's hand on parting and embraced him affectionately, and when his horse turned out of the courtyard onto the road, a dozen revolvers fired a parting salute.

## Chapter Five

The tramcar crawled laboriously up Fundukleyevskaya Street, its motors groaning with the effort. At the Opera House it stopped and a group of young people alighted. The car continued the climb.

"We'd better get a move on," Pankratov urged the others, "or we'll be late for sure." Okunev caught up with him at the theatre entrance.

"We came here under similar circumstances three years ago, you remember, Genka? That was when Dubava came back to us with the 'Workers' Opposition'. A grand meeting! And tonight we've got to grapple with him again!"

They had presented their passes and been admitted into the hall before Pankratov replied: "Yes, history is repeating itself on the very same spot."

They were hissed to silence. The evening session of the conference had already begun and they had to take the first seats they could find. A young woman was addressing the gathering from the rostrum. It was Talya.

"We're just in time. Now sit quiet and listen to what wifie has to say," Pankratov whispered, giving Okunev a dig in the ribs.

". . .It's true that we have spent much time and energy on this discussion, but I think that we have all learned a great deal from it. Today we are very glad to note that in our organisation Trotsky's followers have been defeated. They cannot complain that they were not given a hearing. On the contrary: they have had every opportunity to express their point of view. As a matter of fact they have abused the freedom we gave them and committed a number of gross violations of Party discipline."

Talya was nervous; you could tell by the way she kept tossing back a lock of hair that fell forward over her eyes as she spoke.

"Many comrades from the districts have spoken here, and they have all had something to say about the methods the Trotskyites have been using. There are quite a number of Trotskyites at this conference. The districts deliberately sent them here to give us another opportunity to hear them out at this city Party conference. It is not our fault if they are not making full use of this opportunity. Evidently their complete defeat in the districts and cells has taught them something. They could hardly get up at this conference and repeat what they were saying only yesterday."

A harsh voice from the right-hand corner of the hall interrupted Talya at this point: "We haven't had our say yet!"

Talya turned in the direction of the voice:

"All right, Dubava, come up here now and speak, we'll listen to you."

Dubava stared gloomily back at her and his lips twisted in anger.

"We'll talk when the time comes!" he shouted back. He thought of the crushing defeat he had sustained the day before in his own district. The memory still rankled.

A low murmur passed over the hall. Pankratov, unable to restrain himself, cried out: "Going to try shaking up the Party again, eh?"

Dubava recognised the voice, but did not turn round. He merely dug his teeth into his lower lip and bent his head.

"Dubava himself offers a striking example of how the Trotskyites are violating Party discipline," Talya went on. "He has worked in the Komsomol for a long time, many of us know him, the arsenal workers in particular. He is a student of the Kharkov Communist University, yet we all know that he has been here with Shumsky for the past three weeks. What has brought them here in the middle of the university term? There isn't a single district in town where they haven't addressed meetings. True, during the past few days Shumsky has shown signs of coming to his

senses. Who sent them here? Besides them, there are a good number of other Trotskyites from various organisations. They all worked here before at one time or another and now they have come back to stir up trouble within the Party. Do their Party organisations know where they are? Of course not."

The conference was expecting the Trotskyites to come forward and admit their mistakes. Talya, hoping to persuade them to take this step, appealed to them earnestly. She addressed herself directly to them as if in comradely, informal debate:

"Three years ago in this very theatre Dubava came back to us with the former 'Workers' Opposition'. Remember? And do you remember what he said then: 'Never shall we let the Party banner fall from our hands.' But hardly three years have passed and Dubava has done just that. Yes, I repeat, he has let the Party banner fall. 'We haven't had our say yet!' he just said. That shows that he and his fellow Trotskyites intend to go still further."

"Let Tufta tell us about the barometer," came a voice from the back rows. "He's their weather expert."

To which indignant voices responded:

"This is no time for silly jokes!"

"Are they going to stop fighting the Party or not? Let them answer that!" "Let them tell us who wrote that anti-Party declaration!"

Indignation rose higher and higher and the chairman rang his bell long and insistently for silence. Talya's voice was drowned out by the din, and it was some time before she was able to continue. "The letters we receive from our comrades in the outlying localities show that they are with us in this and that is very encouraging. Permit me to read part of one letter we have received. It is from Olga Yureneva. Many of you here know her. She is in charge of the Organisational Department of an Area Committee of the Komsomol."

Talya drew a sheet of paper out of a pile before her, ran her eye over it and began:

"All practical work has been neglected. For the past four days all bureau members have been out in the districts where the Trotskyites have launched a more vicious campaign than ever. An incident occurred yesterday which aroused the indignation of the entire organisation. Failing to get a majority in a single cell in town, the opposition decided to rally their forces and put up a fight in the cell of the Regional Military Commissariat, which also includes the Communists working in the Regional Planning Commission and Educational Department. The cell has forty-two members, but all the Trotskyites banded together there. Never had we heard such anti-Party speeches as were made at that meeting. One of the Military Commissariat members got up and said outright: 'If the Party apparatus doesn't give in, we will smash it by force.' The oppositionists applauded that statement. Then Korchagin took the floor. 'How can you applaud that fascist and call yourselves Party members?' he said, but they raised such a commotion, shouting and banging their chairs, that he could not go on. The members who were disgusted by this outrageous behaviour demanded that Korchagin be given a hearing, but the uproar was repeated as soon as he tried to make himself heard. 'So this is what you call democracy!' he shouted above the din. 'I'm going to speak just the same!' At that point several of them fell on him and tried to drag him off the platform. There was wild confusion. Pavel fought back and went on speaking, but they dragged him off the stage, opened. a side door and threw him onto the stairway, his face was bleeding. After that, nearly all the members left the meeting. That incident was an eye-opener for many. ..."

Talya left the platform.

Segal, who had been in charge of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Gubernia Party Committee for two months now, sat in the presidium next to Tokarev and listened attentively to the speeches of the delegates. So far the conference had been addressed exclusively by young people who were still in the Komsomol.

"How they have matured these past few years!" Segal was thinking.

"The opposition is already getting it hot," he remarked to Tokarev, "and the heavy artillery has not yet been brought into action. It's the youth who are routing the Trotskyites."

Just then Tufta leapt onto the platform. He was met by a loud buzz of disapproval and a brief outburst of laughter. Tufta turned to the presidium to protest against his reception, but the hall had already quieted down.

"Someone here called me a weather expert. So that is how you mock at my political views, Comrades of the majority!" he burst out in one breath.

A roar of laughter greeted his words. Tufta appealed indignantly to the chairman:

"You can laugh, but I tell you once again, the youth is a barometer. Lenin has said so time and again."

In an instant silence reigned in the hall.

"What did Lenin say?" came voices from the audience. Tufta livened up.

"When preparations were being made for the October uprising Lenin issued instructions to muster the resolute working-class youth, arm them and send them together with the sailors to the most important sectors. Do you want me to read you that passage? I have all the quotations down on cards." Tufta dug into his portfolio.

"Never mind, we know it!"

"But what did Lenin say about unity?" "And about Party discipline?"

"When did Lenin ever set up the youth in opposition to the old guard?" Tufta lost the thread of his thoughts and switched over to another theme:

"Lagutina here read a letter from Yureneva. We cannot be expected to answer for certain excesses that might occur in the course of debate."

Tsvetayev, sitting next to Shumsky, hissed in fury: "Fools barge in. . . ."

"Yes," Shumsky whispered back. "That idiot will ruin us completely." Tufta's shrill, high-pitched voice continued to grate on the ears of his hearers:

"If you have organised a majority faction, we have the right to organise a minority faction." A commotion arose in the hall.

Angry cries rained down on Tufta from all sides:

"What's that? Again Bolsheviks and Mensheviks!"

"The Russian Communist Party isn't a parliament!"

"They're working for all sorts of factionists, from Myasnikov to Martov!"

Tufta threw up his arms as if about to plunge into a river, and returned an excited rapid-fire:

"Yes, we must have freedom to form groups. Otherwise how can we who hold different views

fight for our opinions against such an organised, well-disciplined majority?" The uproar increased. Pankratov got up and shouted:

"Let him speak. We might as well hear what he has to say. Tufta may blurt out what the others prefer to keep to themselves."

The hall quieted down. Tufta realised that he had gone too far. Perhaps he ought not to have said that now. His thoughts went off at a tangent and he wound up his speech in a rush of words:

"Of course you can expel us and shove us overboard. That sort of thing is beginning already. You've already got me out of the Gubernia Committee of the Komsomol. But never mind, we'll soon see who was right." And with that he jumped off the stage into the hall.

Tsvetayev passed a note down to Dubava. "Mityai, you take the floor next. Of course it won't alter the situation, we are obviously getting the worst of it here. We must put Tufta right. He's a blockhead and a gas-bag."

Dubava asked for the floor and his request was granted immediately.

An expectant hush fell over the hall as he mounted the platform. It was the usual silence that precedes a speech, but to Dubava it was pregnant with hostility. The ardour with which he had addressed the cell meetings had cooled off by now. From day to day his passion had waned, and after the crushing defeat and the stern rebuff from his former comrades, it was like a fire doused with water, and now he was enveloped by the bitter smoke of wounded vanity made bitterer still by his stubborn refusal to admit himself in the wrong. He resolved to plunge straight in although he knew that he would only be alienating himself still further from the majority. His voice when he spoke was toneless, yet distinct.

"Please do not interrupt me or annoy me by heckling. I want to set forth our position in full, although I know in advance that it is no use. You have the majority."

When at last he finished speaking it was as if a bombshell had burst in the hall. A hurricane of angry shouts descended upon him, stinging him like whiplashes.

"Shame!"

"Down with the splitters!"

"Enough mud-slinging!"

To the accompaniment of mocking laughter Dubava went back to his seat, and that laughter cut like a knife-thrust. Had they stormed and railed at him he would have been gratified, but to be jeered at like a third-rate actor whose voice had cracked on a false note was too much.

"Shumsky has the floor," announced the chairman. Shumsky got up. "I decline to speak."

Then Pankratov's bass boomed from the back rows. "Let me speak!"

Dubava could tell by his voice that Pankratov was seething inwardly. His deep voice always boomed thus when he was mortally insulted, and a deep uneasiness seized Dubava as he gloomily watched the tall, slightly bent figure stride swiftly over to the platform. He knew what Pankratov was going to say. He thought of the meeting he had had the day before with his old friends at Solomenka and how they had pleaded with him to break with the opposition. Tsvetayev and Shumsky had been with him. They had met at Tokarev's place. Pankratov, Okunev, Talya, Volyntsev, Zelenova, Staroverov and Artyukhin had been present. Dubava had remained deaf to this attempt to restore unity. In the middle of the discussion he had walked out with Tsvetayev,

thus emphasising his unwillingness to admit his mistakes. Shumsky had remained. And now he had refused to take the floor. "Spineless intellectual! Of course they've won him over," Dubava thought with bitter resentment. He was losing all his friends in this frenzied struggle. At the university there had been a rupture in his friendship with Zharky, who had sharply censured the declaration of the "forty-six" at a meeting of the Party bureau. And later, when the clash grew sharper, he had ceased to be on speaking terms. Several times after that Zharky had come to his place to visit Anna. It was a year since Dubava and Anna had been married. They occupied separate rooms, and Dubava believed that his strained relations with Anna, who did not share his views, had been aggravated by Zharky's frequent visits. It was not jealousy on his part, he assured himself, but under the circumstances her friendship with Zharky irritated him. He had spoken to Anna about it and the result had been a scene which had by no means improved their relations. He had left for the conference without telling her where he was going.

The swift flight of his thoughts was cut short by Pankratov.

"Comrades!" the word rang out as the speaker took up a position at the very edge of the platform. "Comrades! For nine days we have listened to the speeches of the opposition, and I must say quite frankly that they spoke here not as fellow fighters, revolutionaries, our comrades in the class struggle. Their speeches were hostile, implacable, malicious and slanderous. Yes, Comrades, slanderous! They have tried to represent us Bolsheviks as supporters of a mailed-fist regime in the Party, as people who are betraying the interests of their class and the Revolution. They have attempted to brand as Party bureaucrats the best, the most tried and trusty section of our Party, the glorious old guard of Bolsheviks, men who built up the Russian Communist Party, men who suffered in tsarist prisons, men who with Comrade Lenin at their head have waged a relentless struggle against world Menshevism and Trotsky. Could anyone but an enemy make such statements? Is the Party and its functionaries not one single whole? Then what is this all about, I want to know? What would we say of men who would try to incite young Red Army men against their commanders and commissars, against army headquarters — and at a time when the unit was surrounded by the enemy? According to the Trotskyites, so long as I am a mechanic I'm 'all right', but if tomorrow I should become the secretary of a Party Committee I would be a 'bureaucrat' and a 'chairwarmer'! Isn't it a bit strange, Comrades, that among the oppositionists who are fighting against bureaucracy and for democracy there should be men like Tufta, for example, who was recently removed from his job for being a bureaucrat? Or Tsvetayev, who is well known to the Solomenka folks for his 'democracy'; or Afanasyev, who was taken off the job three times by the Gubernia Committee for his highhanded way of running things in Podolsk District? It turns out that all those whom the Party has punished have united to fight the Party. Let the old Bolsheviks tell us about Trotsky's 'Bolshevism'. It is very important for the youth to know the history of Trotsky's struggle against the Bolsheviks, about his constant shifting from one camp to another. The struggle against the opposition has welded our ranks and it has strengthened the youth ideologically. The Bolshevik Party and the Komsomol have become steeled in the fight against petty-bourgeois trends. The hysterical panic-mongers of the opposition are predicting complete economic and political collapse. Our tomorrow will show how much these prophecies are worth. They are demanding that we send old Bolsheviks like Tokarev, for instance, back to the bench and replace him by some weather-vane like Dubava who imagines his struggle against the Party to be a sort of heroic feat. No, Comrades, we won't agree to that. The old Bolsheviks will get

replacement, but not from among those who violently attack the Party line whenever we are up against some difficulty. We shall not permit the unity of our great Party to be disrupted. Never will the old and young guard be split. Under the banner of Lenin, in unrelenting struggle against petty-bourgeois trends, we shall march to victory!"

Pankratov descended the platform amid thunderous applause.

The following day a group of ten met at Tufta's place.

"Shumsky and I are leaving today for Kharkov," Dubava said. "There is nothing more for us to do here. You must try to keep together. All we can do now is to wait and see what happens. It is obvious that the All-Russia Conference will condemn us, but it seems to me that it is too soon to expect any repressive measures to be taken against us. The majority has decided to give us another chance. To carry on the struggle openly now, especially after the conference, means getting kicked out of the Party, and that does not enter into our plans. It is hard to say what the future holds for us. I think that's all there is to be said." Dubava got up to go.

The gaunt, thin-lipped Staroverov also rose.

"I don't understand you, Mityai," he said, rolling his r's and slightly stammering. "Does that mean that the conference decision is not binding on us?"

"Formally, it is," Tsvetayev cut him short. "Otherwise you'll lose your Party card. But we'll wait and see which way the wind blows and in the meantime we'll disperse."

Tufta stirred uneasily in his chair. Shumsky, pale and downcast, with dark circles under his eyes, sat by the window biting his nails. At Tsvetayev's words he abandoned his depressing occupation and turned to the meeting.

"I'm opposed to such manoeuvres," he said in sudden anger. "I personally consider that the decision of the conference is binding on us. We have fought for our convictions, but now we must submit to the decision that has been taken."

Staroverov looked at him with approval.

"That is what I wanted to say," he lisped.

Dubava fixed Shumsky with his eyes and said with a sneer:

"Nobody's suggesting that you do anything. You still have a chance to 'repent' at the Gubernia Conference."

Shumsky leapt to his feet.

"I resent your tone, Dmitri! And to be quite frank, what you say disgusts me and forces me to reconsider my position."

Dubava waved him away.

"That's exactly what I thought you'd do. Run along and repent before it is too late." With that Dubava shook hands with Tufta and the others and left. Shumsky and Staroverov followed soon after.

Cruel cold marked the advent in history of the year one thousand nine hundred and twenty-four. January fastened its icy grip on the snowbound land, and from the second half of the month howling storms and blizzards raged.

The Southwestern Railway was snowed up. Men fought the maddened elements. The steel screws of snowploughs cut into the drifts, clearing a path for the trains. Telegraph wires weighted down

with ice snapped under the impact of frost and blizzard, and of the twelve lines only three functioned — the Indo-European and two government lines.

In the telegraph office at Shepetovka station three apparatuses continued their unceasing chatter understandable only to the trained ear.

The girl operators were new at the job; the length of the tape they had tapped out would not have exceeded twenty kilometres, but the old telegrapher who worked beside them had already passed the two-hundred-kilometre mark. Unlike his younger colleagues he did not need to read the tape in order to make out the message, nor did he puzzle with wrinkled brow over difficult words or phrases. Instead he wrote down the words one after the other as the apparatus ticked them out. Now his ear caught the words "To all, to all, to all!"

"Must be another of those circulars about clearing away the snow," the old telegrapher thought to himself as he wrote down the words. Outside, the blizzard raged, hurling the snow against the window. The telegrapher thought someone was knocking at the window, his eyes strayed in the direction of the sound and for a moment were arrested by the intricate pattern the frost had traced on the panes. No engraver could ever match that exquisite leaf-and-stalk design!

His thoughts wandered and for a while he stopped listening to the telegraph. But presently he looked down and reached for the tape to read the words he had missed.

The telegraph had tapped out these words:

"At 6.50 in the afternoon of January 21. . .." Quickly writing down the words, the telegrapher dropped the tape and resting his head on his hand returned to listening.

"Yesterday in Gorki the death occurred...." Slowly he put the letters down on paper. How many messages had he taken down in his long life, joyous messages as well as tragic ones, how often had he been the first to hear of the sorrows or happiness of others! He had long since ceased to ponder over the meaning of the terse, clipped phrases, he merely caught the sounds and mechanically set them down on paper.

Now too someone had died, and someone was being notified of the fact. The telegrapher had forgotten the initial words: "To all, to all, to all." The apparatus clicked out the letters "V-1-a-d-i-m-i-r I-1-y-i-c-h ', and the old telegrapher translated the hammer taps into words. He sat there unperturbed, a trifle weary. Someone named Vladimir Ilyich had died somewhere, someone would receive the message with the tragic tidings, a cry of grief and anguish would be wrung from someone, but it was no concern of his, for he was only a chance witness. The apparatus tapped out a dot, a dash, more dots, another dash, and out of the familiar sounds he caught the first letter and set it down on the telegraph form. It was the letter "L". Then came the second letter, "E"; next to it he inscribed a neat "N", drawing a heavy slanting line between the two uprights, hastily added an "I" and absently picked up the last letter — "N".

The apparatus tapped out a pause, and for the fraction of a second the telegrapher's eye rested on the word he had written: "LENIN".

The apparatus went on tapping, but the familiar name now pierced the telegrapher's consciousness. He glanced once more at the last words of the message — "LENIN". What? Lenin? The entire text of the telegram flashed before his mind's eye. He stared at the telegraph form, and for the first time in all his thirty-two years of work he could not believe what he had written.

He ran his eye swiftly thrice over the lines, but the words obstinately refused to change: "the death occurred of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin." The old man leapt to his feet, snatched up the spiral of tape

and bored it with his eyes. The two-metre strip confirmed that which he refused to believe! He turned a deathlike face to his fellow workers, and his frightened cry fell on their ears: "Lenin is dead!"

The terrible news slipped through the wide open door of the telegraph office and with the speed of a hurricane swept over the station and into the blizzard, whipped over the tracks and switches and along with the icy blast tore through the ironbound gates of the railway shops.

A current repair crew was busy overhauling an engine standing over the first pit. Old Polentovsky himself had crawled down under the belly of his engine and was pointing out the ailing spots to the mechanics. Zakhar Bruzzhak and Artem were straightening out the bent bars of the fire grate. Zakhar held the grating on the anvil and Artem wielded the hammer.

Zakhar had aged. The past few years had left a deep furrow on his forehead and touched his temples with silver. His back was bent and there were shadows in his sunken eyes.

The figure of a man was silhouetted for a moment in the doorway, and then the evening shadows swallowed him up. The blows of the hammer on iron drowned out his first cry, but when he reached the men working at the engine Artem paused with his hammer poised to strike.

"Comrades! Lenin is dead!"

The hammer slid slowly from Artem's shoulder and his hands lowered it noiselessly onto the concrete floor.

"What's that? What did you say?" Artem's hand clutched convulsively at the sheepskin of the man who had brought the fearful tidings.

And he, gasping for breath, covered with snow, repeated in a low,

broken voice: "Yes, Comrades, Lenin is dead."

And because the man did not shout, Artem realised that the terrible news was true. Only now did he recognise the man — it was the secretary of the local Party organisation.

Men climbed out of the pit and heard in silence of the death of the man with whose name the whole world had rung.

Somewhere outside the gates an engine shrieked, sending a shudder through the group of men. The anguished sound was echoed by another engine at the far side of the station, then by a third. Their mighty chorus was joined by the siren of the power station, high-pitched and piercing like the flight of shrapnel. Then all was drowned out by the deep sonorous voice of the handsome engine of the passenger train about to leave for Kiev.

A GPU agent started in surprise when the driver of the Polish engine of the Shepetovka-Warsaw express, on learning the reason for the alarming whistles, listened for a moment, then slowly raised his hand and pulled at the whistle cord. He knew that this was the last time he would do so, that he would never be allowed to drive this train again, but his hand did not let go of the cord, and the shriek of his engine roused the startled Polish couriers and diplomats from their soft couches.

People crowded into the railway shops. They poured through all the gates and when the vast building was filled to overflowing the funeral meeting opened amid heavy silence. The old Bolshevik Sharabrin, Secretary of the Shepetovka Regional Committee of the Party, addressed the gathering.

"Comrades! Lenin, the leader of the world proletariat, is dead. The Party has suffered an

irreparable loss, for the man who created the Bolshevik Party and taught it to be implacable to its enemies is no more.... The death of the leader of our Party and our class is a summons to the best sons of the proletariat to join our ranks...."

The strains of the funeral march rang out, the men bared their heads, and Artem, who had not wept for fifteen years, felt a lump rising in his throat and his powerful shoulders shook.

The very walls of the railwaymen's club seemed to groan under the pressure of the human mass. Outside it was bitterly cold, the two tall fir-trees at the entrance to the hall were garbed in snow and icicles, but inside it was suffocating from the heated stoves and the breath of six hundred people who had gathered to the memorial meeting arranged by the Party organisation.

The usual hum of conversation was stilled. Overpowering grief muffled men's voices and they spoke in whispers, and there was sorrow and anxiety in the eyes of many. They were like the crew of a ship that had lost her helmsman in a storm.

Silently the members of the bureau took their seats on the platform. The stocky Sirotenko carefully lifted the bell, rang it gently and replaced it on the table. This was enough for an oppressive hush to settle over the hall.

When the main speech had been delivered, Sirotenko, the Secretary of the Party organisation, rose to speak. And although the announcement he made was unusual for a memorial meeting, it surprised no one.

"A number of workers," he said, "have asked this meeting to consider an application for membership in the Party. The application is signed by thirty-seven comrades." And he read out the application:

"To the railway organisation of the Bolshevik Party at Shepetovka Station, Southwestern Railway. "The death of our leader is a summons to us to join the ranks of the Bolsheviks, and we ask that this meeting judge of our worthiness to join the Party of Lenin."

Two columns of signatures were affixed to this brief statement.

Sirotenko read them aloud, pausing a few seconds after each name to allow the meeting to memorise them.

"Stanislav Zigmundovich Polentovsky, engine driver, thirty-six years of service." A murmur of approval rippled over the hall.

"Artem Andreyevich Korchagin, mechanic, seventeen years of service."

"Zakhar Filippovich Bruzzhak, engine driver, twenty-one years of service."

The murmur increased in volume as the man on the platform continued to call out the names of veteran members of the horny-palmed fraternity of railwaymen.

Silence again reigned when Polentovsky, whose name headed the list, stood before the meeting. The old engine driver could not but betray his agitation as he told the story of his life.

". . . What can I tell you, Comrades? You all know what the life of a workingman was like in the old days. Worked like a slave all my life and remained a beggar in my old age. When the Revolution came, I confess I considered myself an old man burdened down by family cares, and I did not see my way into the Party. And although I never sided with the enemy I rarely took part in

the struggle myself. In nineteen hundred and five I was a member of the strike committee in the Warsaw railway shops and I was on the side of the Bolsheviks. I was young then and full of fight. But what's the use of recalling the past! Ilyich's death has struck right at my heart; we've lost our friend and champion, and it's the last time I'll ever speak about being old. I don't know how to put it, for I never was much good at speech making. But let me say this: my road is the Bolsheviks' road and no other."

The engine driver tossed his grey head and his eyes under his white brows looked out steadily and resolutely at the audience as if awaiting its decisive words.

Not a single voice was raised in opposition to the little grey-haired man's application, and no one abstained during the voting in which the non-Party people too were invited to take part.

Polentovsky walked away from the presidium table a member of the Communist Party.

Everyone was conscious that something momentous was taking place. Now Artem's great bulk loomed where the engine driver had just stood. The mechanic did not know what to do with his hands, and he nervously gripped his shaggy fur cap. His sheepskin jacket, threadbare at the edges, was open, but the high-necked collar of his grey army tunic was fastened on two brass buttons lending his whole figure a holiday neatness. Artem turned to face the hall and caught a fleeting glimpse of a familiar woman's face. It was Galina, the stonemason's daughter, sitting with her workmates from the tailor shop. She was gazing at him with a forgiving smile, and in that smile he read approval and something he could not have put into words.

"Tell them about yourself, Artem!" he heard Sirotenko say.

But it was not easy for Artem to begin his tale. He was not accustomed to addressing such a large audience, and he suddenly felt that to express all that life had stored within him was beyond his powers. He fumbled painfully for words, and his nervousness made it all the harder for him. Never had he experienced the like. He felt that this was a vital turning point for him, that he was about to take a step that would bring warmth and meaning into his harsh, warped life.

"There were four of us," Artem began.

The hall was hushed. Six hundred people listened eagerly to this tall worker with the beaked nose and the eyes hidden under the dark fringe of eyebrows.

"My mother worked as cook for the rich folk. I hardly remember my father; he and mother didn't get along. He drank too much. So mother had to take care of us kids. It was hard for her with so many mouths to feed. She slaved from morning till night and got four rubles a month and her grub. I was lucky enough to get two winters of school. They taught me to read and write, but when I turned nine my mother had to send me to work as an apprentice in a machine shop. I worked for three years for nothing but my grub. . .. The shop owner was a German named Foerster. He didn't want to take me at first, said I was too young. But I was a sturdy lad, and my mother added on a couple of years. I worked three years for that German, but instead of learning a trade I had to do odd jobs around the house, and run for vodka. The boss drank like a fish. . . . He'd send me to fetch coal and iron too.. . . The mistress made a regular slave out of me: I had to peel potatoes and scour pots. I was always getting kicked and cuffed, most times for no reason, just out of habit. If I didn't please the mistress — and she was always on the rampage on account of her husband's drinking — she would beat me. I'd run away from her out into the street, but where could I go, who was there to complain to? My mother was forty miles away, and she couldn't keep me anyway.... And in the shop it wasn't any better. The master's brother was in charge, a swine of a

man who used to enjoy playing tricks on me. 'Here boy,' he'd say, 'fetch me that washer from over there,' and he'd point to the corner by the forge. I'd run over and grab the washer and let out a yell. It had just come out of the forge; and though it looked black lying there on the ground, when you touched it, it burned right through the flesh. I'd stand there screaming with the pain and he'd burst his sides laughing. I couldn't stand any more of this and I ran away home to mother. But she didn't know what to do with me, so she brought me back. She cried all the way there, I remember. In my third year they began to teach me something about the trade, but the beatings continued. I ran away again, this time to Starokonstantinov. I found work in a sausage factory and wasted more than a year and a half washing casings. Then our boss gambled away his factory, didn't pay us a kopek for four months and disappeared. I got out of that hole, took a train to Zhmerinka and went to look for work. I was lucky enough to meet a railwayman there who took pity on me. When I told him I was a mechanic of sorts, he took me to his boss and said I was his nephew and asked him to find some work for me. By my size they took me for seventeen, and so I got a job as a mechanic's helper. As for my present job, I've been working here for more than eight years. That is all I can tell you about my past. You all know about my present life here."

Artem wiped his brow with his cap and heaved a deep sigh. He had not yet said the chief thing. This was the hardest thing of all to say, but he had to say it before anyone asked the inevitable question. And knitting his bushy eyebrows, he went on with his story:

"Why did I not join the Bolsheviks before? That is a question you all have the right to ask me. How can I answer? After all, I'm not an old man yet. How is it I didn't find the road here until today? I'll tell you straight, for I've nothing to hide. I missed that road, I ought to have taken it back in nineteen eighteen when we rose against the Germans. Zhukhrai, the sailor, told me so many a time. It wasn't until 1920 that I took up a rifle. When the storm was over and we had driven the Whites into the Black Sea, we came back home. Then came the family, children. ... I got all tied up in family life. But now that our Comrade Lenin is gone and the Party has issued its call, I have looked back at my life and seen what was lacking. It's not enough to defend your own power, we have to stick together like one big family, in Lenin's place, so that the Soviet power should stand solid like a mountain of steel. We must become Bolsheviks. It's our Party, isn't it?"

When he finished, a little abashed at having made such a long speech, he felt as though a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders, and, pulling himself up to his full height, he stood waiting for the questions to come.

"Any questions?" Sirotenko's voice broke the ensuing silence.

A stir ran over the gathering, but no one responded at first to the chairman's call. Then a stoker, straight from his engine and black as a beetle, said with finality:

"What's there to ask? Don't we know him? Vote him in and be done with it!"

Gilyaka, the smith, his face scarlet from the heat and the excitement, cried out hoarsely:

"This comrade's the right sort, he won't jump the rails, you can depend on him. Vote him, Sirotenko!"

At the very back of the hall where the Komsomols were sitting, someone, invisible in the semidarkness, rose and said:

"Let Comrade Korchagin explain why he has settled on the land and how he reconciles his peasant status with his proletarian psychology."

A light rustle of disapproval passed over the hall and a voice rose in protest:

"Why don't you talk so us plain folks can understand? A fine time to show off...." But Artem was already replying:

"That's all right, Comrade. The lad is right about my having settled on the land. That's true, but I haven't betrayed my working-class conscience. Anyhow, that's over and done with from today. I'm moving my family closer to the sheds. It's better here. That cursed bit of land has been sticking in my throat for a long time."

Once again Artem's heart trembled when he saw the forest of hands raised in his favour, and with head held high he walked back to his seat. Behind him he heard Sirotenko announce: "Unanimous."

The third to take his place at the presidium table was Zakhar Bruzzhak, Polentovsky's former helper. The taciturn old man had been an engine driver himself now for some time. When he finished his account of a lifetime of labour and brought his story up to the present, his voice dropped and he spoke softly but loud enough for all to hear:

"It is my duty to finish what my children began. They wouldn't have wanted me to hide away in a corner with my grief. That isn't what they died for. I haven't tried to fill the gap left by their death, but now the death of our leader has opened my eyes. Don't ask me to answer for the past. From today our life starts anew."

Zakhar's face clouded and looked stern as painful memories stirred within him. But when a sea of hands swept up, voting for his acceptance into the Party, his eyes lit up and his greying head was no longer bowed.

Far into the night continued this review of the new Party replacements. Only the best were admitted, those whom everyone knew well, whose lives were without blemish.

The death of Lenin brought many thousands of workers into the Bolshevik Party. The leader was gone but the Party's ranks were unshaken. A tree that has thrust its mighty roots deep into the ground does not perish if its crown is severed.

## Chapter Six

Two men stood at the entrance to the hotel concert hall. The taller of the two wore pince-nez and a red armband marked "Commandant".

"Is the Ukrainian delegation meeting here?" Rita inquired.

"Yes," the tall man replied coldly. "Your business, Comrade?"

The tall man blocked the entrance and examined Rita from head to foot. "Have you a delegate's mandate?"

Rita produced her card with the gilt-embossed words "Member of the Central Committee" and the man unbent at once.

"Pass in, Comrade," he said cordially. "You'll find some vacant seats over to the left." Rita walked down the aisle, saw a vacant seat and sat down.

The meeting was evidently drawing to a close, for the chairman was summing up. His voice struck Rita as familiar.

"The council of the All-Russia Congress has now been elected. The Congress opens in two hours' time. In the meantime permit me to go over the list of delegates once more."

It was Akim! Rita listened with rapt attention as he hurriedly read out the list. As his name was called, each delegate raised his hand showing his red or white pass.

Suddenly Rita caught a familiar name: Pankratov.

She glanced round as a hand shot up but through the intervening rows she could not glimpse the stevedore's face. The names ran on, and again Rita heard one she knew — Okunev, and immediately after that another, Zharky.

Scanning the faces of the delegates she caught sight of Zharky. He was sitting not far away with Kis face half turned towards her. Yes, it was Vanya all right. She had almost forgotten that profile. After all, she had not seen him for several years.

The roll-call continued. And then Akim read out a name that caused Rita to start violently: "Korchagin."

Far away in one of the front rows a hand rose and fell, and, strange to say, Rita was seized with a painful longing to see the face of the man who bore the same name as her lost comrade. She could not tear her eyes away from the spot where the hand had risen, but all the heads in the rows before her seemed all alike. She got up and went down the aisle toward the front rows. At that moment Akim finished reading. Chairs were pushed back noisily and the hall was filled with the hum of voices and young laughter. Akim, trying to make himself heard above the din, shouted":

"Bolshoi Theatre ... seven o'clock. Don't be late!"

The delegates crowded to the single exit. Rita saw that she would never be able to find any of her old friends in this throng. She must try to catch Akim before he left; he would help her find the others. Just then a group of delegates passed her in the aisle on their way to the exit and she heard someone say:

"Well, Korchagin old man, we'd better be pushing off too!"

And a well-remembered voice replied: "Good, let's go."

Rita turned quickly. Before her stood a tall, dark-complexioned young man in a khaki tunic with a slender Caucasian belt, and blue riding breeches.

Rita stared at him. Then she felt his arms around her and heard his trembling voice say softly: "Rita", and she knew that it was Pavel Korchagin. "So you're alive?"

These words told him all. She had not known that his reported death was a mistake.

The hall had emptied out long since, and the din and bustle of Tverskaya, that mighty artery of the city, poured through the open window. The clock struck six, but to both of them it seemed that they had met only a moment ago. But the clock summoned them to the Bolshoi Theatre. As they walked down the broad staircase to the exit she surveyed Pavel once more. He was a head taller than her now and more mature and self-possessed. But otherwise he was the Pavel she had always known.

"I haven't even asked you where you are working," she said.

"I am Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Komsomol, what Dubava would call a 'penpusher'," Pavel replied with a smile.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, and I have the most unpleasant memories of that meeting."

They stepped into the street. Automobiles hooted, noisy bustling througs filled the pavements. They hardly exchanged a word on the way to the theatre, their minds full of the same thoughts. They found the theatre besieged by a surging, tempestuous sea of people which tossed itself

against the stone bulk of the theatre building in an effort to break through the line of Red Army men guarding the entrances. But the sentries gave admittance only to delegates, who passed through the cordon, their credentials proudly displayed.

It was a Komsomol sea that surrounded the theatre, a sea of young people who had been unable to obtain tickets to the opening of the Congress but who were determined to get in at all costs. Some of the more agile youngsters managed to work their way into the midst of groups of delegates and by presenting some slip of red paper sometimes contrived to get as far as the entrance.

A few even managed to slip through the doors only to be stopped by the Central Committee man on duty, or the commandant who directed the guests and delegates to their appointed places. And then, to the infinite satisfaction of all the rest of the "ticketless" fraternity, they were unceremoniously ejected.

The theatre could not hold a fraction of all who wished to be present.

Rita and Pavel pushed their way with difficulty to the entrance. The delegates continued to pour in, some arriving by tram, others by car. A large knot of them gathered at the entrance and the Red Army men, Komsomols themselves, were pressed back against the wall. At that moment a mighty shout arose from the crowd near the entrance:

"Bauman District, here goes!"

"Come on, lads, our side's

winning!" "Hurray!"

Through the doorway along with Pavel and Rita slipped a sharp-eyed youngster wearing a Komsomol badge, and eluding the commandant, made a beeline for the foyer. A moment later he was swallowed up by the crowd.

"Let's sit here," Rita said, indicating two seats in a corner at the back of the stalls.

"There is one question I must ask you," said Rita when they were seated. "It concerns bygone days, but I am sure you will not refuse to answer it. Why did you break off our studies and our friendship that time?"

And though Pavel had been expecting this question ever since they had met, it disconcerted him. Their eyes met and Pavel saw that she knew.

"I think you know the answer yourself, Rita. That happened three years ago, and now I can only condemn Pavel for what he did. As a matter of fact Korchagin has committed many a blunder, big and small, in his life. That was one of them."

Rita smiled.

"An excellent preamble. Now for the answer!"

"It is not only I who was to blame," Pavel began in a low voice. "It was the Gadfly's fault too, that revolutionary romanticism of his. In those days I was very much influenced by books with vivid descriptions of staunch, courageous revolutionaries consecrated to our cause. Those men made a deep impression on me and I longed to be like them. I allowed The Gadfly to influence my feeling for you. It seems absurd to me now, and I regret it more than I can say."

"Then you have changed your mind about The Gadfly?"

"No, Rita, not fundamentally. I have only discarded the needless tragedy of that painful process of testing one's will. I still stand for what is most important in the Gadfly, for his courage, his supreme endurance, for the type of man who is capable of enduring suffering without exhibiting his pain to all and sundry. I stand for the type of revolutionary whose personal life is nothing as

compared with the life of society as a whole."

"It is a pity, Pavel, that you did not tell me this three years ago," said Rita with a smile that showed her thoughts to be far away.

"A pity, you mean, because I have never been more to you than a comrade, Rita?" "No, Pavel, you might have been more."

"But surely that can be remedied."

"No, Comrade Gadfly, it is too late for that. You see, I have a little daughter now," Rita smilingly explained. "I am very fond of her father. In general, the three of us are very good friends, and so far our trio is inseparable."

Her fingers brushed Pavel's hand. The gesture was prompted by anxiety for him, but she realised at once that it was unnecessary. Yes, he had matured in these three years, and not only physically. She could tell by his eyes that he was deeply hurt by her confession, but all he said was:

"What I have left is still incomparably more than what I have just lost." And Rita knew that this was not merely an empty phrase, it was the simple truth.

It was time to take their places nearer to the stage. They got up and went forward to the row occupied by the Ukrainian delegation. The band struck up. Scarlet streamers flung across the hall were emblazoned with the words: "The Future Is Ours!" Thousands filled the stalls, the boxes and the tiers of the great theatre. These thousands merged here in one mighty organism throbbing with inexhaustible energy. The flower of the young guard of the country's great industrial brotherhood was gathered here. Thousands of pairs of eyes reflected the glow of those words traced in burning letters over the heavy curtain: "The Future Is Ours!" And still the human tide rolled in. Another few moments and the heavy velvet curtain would move aside, and the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Russian Young Communist League, overwhelmed for a moment by the solemnity of the occasion, would announce with a tremor in his voice:

"I declare the Sixth Congress of the Russian Young Communist League open."

Never before had Pavel Korchagin been so profoundly, so stirringly conscious of the grandeur and might of the Revolution, and an indescribable surge of pride and joy swept over him at the thought that life had brought him, a fighter and builder, to this triumphant rally of the young guard to Bolshevism.

The Congress claimed all of his time from early morning until late at night, so that it was not until one of the final sessions that Pavel met Rita again. She was with a group of Ukrainians.

"I am leaving tomorrow as soon as the Congress closes," she told him. "I don't know whether we will have another chance for a talk, and so I have prepared two old notebooks of my diary for you, and a short note. Read them and send them back to me by post. They will tell you all that I have not told you."

He pressed her hand and gave her a long look as if committing her features to memory.

They met as agreed the following day at the main entrance and Rita handed him a package and a sealed letter. There were people all around and so their leave-taking was restrained, but in her slightly misted eyes Pavel read a deep tenderness tinged with sadness.

The next day their trains bore them away in different directions. The Ukrainian delegation occupied several carriages of the train in which Pavel travelled. He shared a compartment with some delegates from Kiev. In the evening, when the other passengers had retired and Okunev on the neighbouring berth was snoring peacefully, Pavel moved the lamp closer and opened the letter.

"Pavel, my darling! I might have told you all this when we were together, but it is better this way. I wish only one thing: that what we spoke of before the Congress should leave no scar on your life. I know you are strong and I believe that you meant what you said. I do not take a formal attitude to life, I feel that one may make exceptions — though rarely — in one's personal relationships, provided they are founded on a genuine and deep attachment. For you I would have made that exception, but I rejected my impulse to pay tribute to our youth. I feel that there would be no true happiness in it for either of us. Still, you ought not to be so harsh to yourself, Pavel. Our life is not all struggle, there is room in it for the happiness that real love brings.

"As for the rest, the main purport of your life, I have no fears for you. I press your hand warmly. "Rita."

Pavel tore up the letter reflectively; he thrust his hand out of the window and felt the wind tearing the scraps of paper out of his hand.

By morning he had read both notebooks of Rita's diary, wrapped them up and tied them ready for posting. At Kharkov he left the train with Okunev and Pankratov and several other delegates. Okunev was going to Kiev to fetch Talya, who was staying with Anna. Pankratov, who had been elected member of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Komsomol, also had business in Kiev. Pavel decided to go on with them to Kiev and pay a visit to Dubava and Anna.

By the time he emerged from the post-office at the Kiev station after sending off the parcel to Rita, the others had gone, so he set off alone. The tram stopped outside the house where Anna and Dubava lived. Pavel climbed the stairs to the second floor and knocked at the door on the left, Anna's room. No one answered. It was too early for her to have gone to work. "She must be sleeping," he thought. The door of the neighbouring room opened and a sleepy-eyed Dubava came out on the landing. His face was ashen and there were dark circles under his eyes. He exuded a strong smell of onions and Pavel's sharp nose caught a whiff of alcohol. Through the half-open door he caught a glimpse of the fleshy leg and shoulders of some woman on the bed.

Dubava, noticing the direction of his glance, kicked the door shut.

"You've come to see Comrade Borhart, I suppose?" he inquired hoarsely, evading Pavel's eyes. "She doesn't live here any more. Didn't you know that?"

Korchagin, his face stern, looked searchingly at

Dubava. "No, I didn't. Where has she gone?"

Dubava suddenly lost his temper.

"That's no concern of mine!" he shouted. He belched and added with suppressed malice: "Come to console her, eh? You're just in time to fill the vacancy. Here's your chance. Don't worry, she won't refuse you. She told me many a time how much she liked you ... or however those silly women put it. Go on, strike the iron while it's hot. It will be a true communion of soul and body."

Pavel felt the blood rushing to his cheeks. Restraining himself with difficulty, he said in a low voice:

"What are you doing to yourself, Mityai! I never thought you'd fall so low. You weren't a bad fellow once. Why are you letting yourself go to the dogs?"

Dubava leaned back against the wall. The cement floor evidently felt cold to his bare feet, for he

shivered.

The door opened and a woman's face with swollen eyes and puffy cheeks appeared. "Come back in, duckie, what're you standing out there for?"

Before she could say any more, Dubava slammed the door to and stood against it.

"A fine beginning," Pavel observed. "Look at the company you're keeping. Where will it all end?" But Dubava would hear no more.

"Are you going to tell me who I should sleep with?" he shouted. "I've had enough of your preaching. Now get back where you came from! Run along and tell them all that Dubava has taken to drinking and whoring."

Pavel went up to him and said in a voice of suppressed emotion:

"Mityai, get rid of that woman. I want to talk to you, for the last time...."

Dubava's face darkened. He turned on his heel and went back into the room without another word. "The swine!" Pavel muttered and walked slowly down the stairs.

Two years went by. Time counted off the days and months, but the swift colourful pageant of life filled its seeming monotony with novelty, so that no two days were alike. The great nation of one hundred and sixty million people, the first people in the world to have taken the destiny of their vast land with its untold riches into their own hands, were engaged in the Herculean task of reviving their war-ravaged economy. The country grew stronger, new vigour flowed into its veins, and the dismal spectacle of smokeless abandoned factories was no longer to be seen.

For Pavel those two years fled by in ceaseless activity. He was not one to take life calmly, to greet each day with a leisurely yawn and retire at the stroke of ten. He lived at a swift tempo, grudging himself and others every wasted moment.

He allowed a bare minimum of time for sleep. Often the light burned in his window late into the night, and within, a group of people would be gathered around the table engrossed in study. They had made a thorough study of Volume III of Capital in these two years and the subtle mechanics of capitalist exploitation were now revealed to them.

Razvalikhin had turned up in the area where Korchagin now worked. He had been sent by the Gubernia Committee with the recommendation that he be appointed Secretary of a district Komsomol organisation. Pavel happened to be away when Razvalikhin arrived and in his absence the Bureau had sent the newcomer to one of the districts. Pavel received the news on his return without comment.

A month later Pavel made an unexpected visit to Razvalikhin's district. There was not much evidence, but what there was turned out to be sufficiently damning: the new secretary drank, he had surrounded himself with toadies and was suppressing the initiative of the conscientious members. Pavel submitted the evidence to the Bureau, and when the meeting voted administering Razvalikhin a severe reprimand, Pavel surprised everyone by getting up and saying:

"I move that he be expelled and that his expulsion be final."

The others were taken aback by the motion. It seemed too severe a measure under the circumstances. But Pavel insisted.

"The scoundrel must be expelled. He had every chance to become a decent human being, but he has remained an outsider in the Komsomol." And Pavel told the Bureau about the Berezdov

incident.
"I protest!" Razvalikhin shouted. "Korchagin is simply trying to settle personal scores. What he says is nothing but idle gossip. Let him back up his charges with facts and documents. Suppose I were to come to you with a story that Korchagin had gone in for smuggling, would you expel him on the strength of that? He's got to submit written proof."
"Don't worry, I'll submit all the proofs necessary," Korchagin replied.
Razvalikhin left the room. Half an hour later Pavel persuaded the Bureau to adopt a resolution expelling Razvalikhin from the Komsomol as an alien element.

Summer came and with it the vacation season. Pavel's fellow workers left for their well-earned holiday one after another. Those whose health demanded it went to the seaside and Pavel helped them to secure sanatorium accommodations and financial assistance. They went away pale and worn, but elated at the prospect of their coming holiday. The burden of their work fell on Pavel's shoulders and he bore the added load without a murmur. In due time they returned sunburned and full of life and energy, and others went off. Throughout the summer the office was short-handed. But life did not lessen its swift pace, and Pavel could not afford to miss a single day's work.
The summer passed. Pavel dreaded the approach of autumn and winter for they invariably brought him much physical distress.
He had looked forward with particular eagerness to the coming of summer that year. For painful though it was for him to admit it even to himself he felt his strength waning from year to year. There were only two alternatives: to admit that he could not endure the intensive effort his work demanded of him and declare himself an invalid, or remain at his post as long as he could. He chose the latter course.
One day at a meeting of the Bureau of the Regional Committee of the Party Dr. Bartelik, an old Party underground worker now in charge of public health in the region, came over and sat down beside him.
"You're looking rather seedy, Korchagin. How's your health? Have you been examined by the Medical Commission? You haven't? I thought as much. But you look as if you were in need of an overhauling, my friend. Come over on Thursday evening and we'll have a look at you."
Pavel did not go. He was too busy. But Bartelik did not forget him and some time later he came for Pavel and took him to the commission in which he participated as neuropathologist. The Medical Commission recommended "an immediate vacation with prolonged treatment in the Crimea, to be followed by regular medical treatment. Unless this is done serious consequences are unavoidable."
From the long list of ailments in Latin that preceded this recommendation Pavel understood only one thing — the main trouble was not in his legs, but in his central nervous system, which was seriously impaired.
Bartelik put the commission's decision before the Bureau, and the motion that Korchagin be released at once from work evoked no opposition. Korchagin himself, however, suggested that his vacation be postponed until the return of Sbitnev, Chief of the Organisational Department. He did not want to leave the Committee without leadership. The Bureau agreed, although Bartelik objected to the delay.

And so in three weeks' time Pavel was to leave for his holiday, the first in his life. Accommodation had already been reserved for him in a Yevpatoria sanatorium and a paper to that effect lay in his desk drawer.

He worked at even greater pressure in this period; he held a plenary meeting of the Regional Komsomol and drove himself relentlessly to tie up all loose ends so as to be able to leave with his mind at rest.

And on the very eve of his departure for his first glimpse of the sea, a revolting, unbelievable thing happened.

Pavel had gone to the Party propaganda section after work that day to attend a meeting. There was no one in the room when he arrived and so he had sat down on the windowsill by the open window behind the bookcase to wait for the others to assemble. Before long several people came in. He could not see them from behind the bookcase but he recognised one voice. It belonged to Failo, the man in charge of the Regional Economic Department, a tall, handsome fellow with a dashing military bearing, who had earned himself a reputation for drinking and running after women.

Failo had once been a partisan and never missed an opportunity to brag laughingly of the way he had sliced off the heads of Makhno men by the dozen. Pavel could not stand the man. One day a Komsomol girl had come weeping to Pavel with the story that Failo had promised to marry her, but after living with her for a week had left her and now did not even greet her when they met. When the matter came up before the Control Commission, Failo wriggled out of it since the girl could give no proofs. But Pavel had believed her. He now listened while the others, unaware of his presence, talked freely.

"Well, Failo, how goes it? What have you been up to lately?"

The speaker was Gribov, one of Failo's boon companions. For some reason Gribov was considered a propagandist although he was ignorant, narrow-minded and stupid. Nevertheless he prided himself on being called a propaganda worker and made a point of reminding everyone of the fact on all and every occasion.

"You can congratulate me, my boy. I made another conquest yesterday. Korotayeva. You said nothing would come of it. That's where you were mistaken, my lad. If I go after a woman you may be sure I'll get her sooner or later," Failo boasted, adding some obscenities.

Pavel felt the nervous chill that always seized him when he was deeply roused. Korotayeva was in charge of the Women's Department and had come to the Regional Committee at the same time as he had. Pavel knew her for a pleasant, earnest Party worker, kind and considerate to the women who came to her for help and advice, and respected by her fellow workers in the Committee. Pavel knew that she was not married, and he had no doubt that it was of her that Failo had spoken.

"Go on, Failo, you're making it up! It doesn't sound like her."

"Me, making it up? What do you take me for? I've broken in harder cases than that. You only have to know how. Got to have the right approach. Some of them will give in right away, but that kind aren't worth the trouble. Others take a whole month to come to heel. The important thing is to understand their psychology. The right approach, that's the thing. Why, man, it's a whole science, but I'm a regular professor in such matters. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

Failo was positively slobbering with self-satisfaction. His listeners egged him on, all agog for more juicy details.

Korchagin got up. He clenched his fists, feeling his heart pounding wildly in his chest.

"I knew there wasn't much hope of catching Korotayeva with the usual bait, but I didn't want to give up the game, especially since I'd wagered Gribov a dozen of port wine that I'd do it. So I tried subversive tactics, so to speak. I dropped into her office once or twice, but I could see I wasn't making much of an impression. Besides, there's all sorts of silly talk going on about me and some of it must have reached her ears.... Well, to cut a long story short, the frontal attack failed, so I tried flanking tactics. Ho! Ho! Pretty good that, eh! Well, I told her my sad story, how I'd fought at the front, wandered about the earth and had plenty of hard knocks, but I'd never been able to find the right sort of woman and so here I was a lonely cuss with nobody to love me. ... And plenty more of the same sort of tripe. I was striking at her weak spots, see? I must admit I had a lot of trouble with her. At one point I thought I'd send her to hell and drop the whole silly business. But by now it was a matter of principle, and so out of principle I had to stick it out. And finally I broke down her resistance, and what do you think? She turned out to be a virgin! Ha! Ha! What a lark!"

And Failo went on with his revolting story.

Pavel, seething with rage, found himself beside

Failo. "You swine!" he roared.

"Oh, I'm a swine, am I, and what about you eavesdropping?"

Pavel evidently said something else, because Failo who was a bit tipsy seized him by the front of his tunic.

"Insult me, eh?" He shouted and struck Pavel with his fist.

Pavel snatched a heavy oak stool and knocked the other down with one blow. Fortunately for Failo, Pavel did not happen to have his revolver on him, or he would have been a dead man.

But the senseless, incredible thing had happened, and on the day scheduled for his departure to the Crimea, Pavel stood before a Party court.

The whole Party organisation had assembled in the town theatre. The incident had aroused much feeling, and the hearing developed into a serious discussion of Party ethics, morals and personal relationships. The case served as a signal for the discussion of the general issues involved, and the incident itself was relegated to the background. Failo behaved in the most insolent manner, smiling sardonically and declaring that he would take the case to the People's Court and that Korchagin would get a hard labour sentence for assaulting him. He refused categorically to answer any questions.

"You want to have a nice little gossip at my expense? Nothing doing. You can accuse me of anything you like, but the fact remains that the women here have their knife in me because I don't pay any attention to them. And this whole case of yours isn't worth a damn. If this was 1918 I'd settle scores with that madman Korchagin in my own way. And now you can carry on without me." And he left the hall.

The chairman then asked Pavel to tell what had happened. Pavel began calmly enough, though he restrained himself with difficulty.

"The whole thing happened because I was unable to control myself. But the days when I worked more with my hands than with my head are long since gone. What happened this time was an accident. I knocked Failo down before I knew what I was doing. This is the only instance of 'partisan' action I have been guilty of in the past few years, and I condemn it, although I think that the blow was well deserved. Failo's type is a disgusting phenomenon. I cannot understand, I shall

never believe that a revolutionary, a Communist, can be at the same time a dirty beast and a scoundrel. The only positive aspect of the whole business is that it has focussed our attention on the behaviour of our fellow Communists in private life."

The overwhelming majority of the membership voted in favour of expelling Failo from the Party. Gribov was administered a severe reprimand for giving false evidence and a warning that the next offence would mean expulsion. The others who had taken part in the conversation admitted their mistake and got off with a word of censure.

Bartelik then told the gathering about the state of Pavel's nerves and the meeting protested violently when the comrade who had been appointed by the Party to investigate the case moved that Korchagin be reprimanded. The investigator withdrew his motion and Pavel was acquitted.

A few days later Pavel was on his way to Kharkov. The Regional Committee of the Party had finally granted his insistent request to be released from his job and placed at the disposal of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Komsomol. He had been given a good testimonial. Akim was one of the secretaries of the Central Committee. Pavel went to see him as soon as he arrived in Kharkov and told him the whole story.

Akim looked over Pavel's testimonial. It declared him to be "boundlessly devoted to the Party", but added: "A levelheaded Party worker, on the whole, he is, however, on rare occasions apt to lose his self-control. This is due to the serious condition of his nervous system."

"Spoiled a good testimonial with that fact, Pavel," said Akim. "But never mind, boy, such things happen to the strongest of us. Go south and build up your health and when you come back we'll talk about work."

And Akim gave him a hearty handshake.

The Kommunar Sanatorium of the Central Committee. White buildings overgrown with vines set amid gardens of rose bushes and sparkling fountains, and vacationers in white summer clothes and bathing suits.... A young woman doctor entered his name in the register and he found himself in a spacious room in the corner building. Dazzling white bed linen, virginal cleanliness and peace, blessed undisturbed peace.

After a refreshing bath and a change of clothes, Pavel hurried down to the beach.

The sea lay before him calm, majestic, a blue-black expanse of polished marble, spreading all the way to the horizon. Far away in the distance where sea met sky a bluish haze hovered and a molten sun was reflected in a ruddy glow on its surface. The massive contours of a mountain range were dimly seen through the morning mist. Pavel breathed the invigorating freshness of the sea breeze deep into his lungs and feasted his eyes on the infinite calm of the blue expanse.

A wave rolled lazily up to his feet, licking the golden sand of the beach.

## Chapter Seven

The garden of the central poly clinic adjoined the grounds of the Central Committee Sanatorium.

The patients used it as a short cut on their way home from the beach. Pavel loved to rest here in the shade of a spreading plane tree which grew beside a high limestone wall. From this quiet nook he could watch the lively movement of the crowd strolling along the garden paths and listen to the music of the band in the evenings without being jostled by the gay throngs of the large health resort.

Today too he had sought his favourite retreat. Drowsy from the sunshine and the bath he had just taken, he stretched himself out luxuriously on the chaise-lounge and fell into a doze. His bath towel and the book he was reading, Furmanov's Insurrection, lay on the chair beside him. His first days in the sanatorium had brought no relief to his nerves and his headaches continued. His ailment had so far baffled the sanatorium doctors, who were still trying to get to the root of the trouble. Pavel was sick of the perpetual examinations. They wearied him and he did his best to avoid his ward doctor, a pleasant woman with the curious name of Yerusalimchik, who had a difficult time hunting for her unwilling patient and persuading him to let her take him to some specialist or other.

"I'm tired of the whole business," Pavel would plead with her. "Five times a day I have to tell the same story and answer all sorts of silly questions: was your grandmother insane, or did your great-grandfather suffer with rheumatism? How the devil should I know what he suffered from? I never saw him in my life! Every doctor tries to induce me to confess that I had gonorrhea or something worse, until I swear I'm ready to punch their bald heads. Give me a chance to rest, that's all I want. If I'm going to let myself be diagnosed all the six weeks of my stay here I'll become a danger to society."

Yerusalimchik would laugh and joke with him, but a few minutes later she would take him gently by the arm and lead him to the surgeon, chattering volubly all the way.

But today there was no examination in the offing, and dinner was an hour away. Presently, through his doze, he heard steps approaching. He did not open his eyes. "They'll think I'm asleep and go away," he thought. Vain hope! He heard the chair beside him creak as someone sat down. A faint whiff of perfume told him it was a woman. He opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a dazzling white dress and a pair of bronzed feet encased in soft leather slippers, then a boyish bob, two enormous eyes, and a row of white teeth as sharp as a mouse's. She gave him a shy smile.

"I haven't disturbed you, I hope?"

Pavel made no reply, which was not very polite of him, but he still hoped that she would go. "Is this your book?" She was turning the pages of Insurrection.

"It is."

There was a moment of silence.

"You're from the Kommunar Sanatorium, aren't you?"

Pavel stirred impatiently. Why couldn't she leave him in peace? Now she would start asking about his illness. He would have to go.

"No," he replied curtly.

"I was sure I had seen you there."

Pavel was on the point of rising when a deep, pleasant woman's voice behind him said: "Why, Dora, what are you doing here?"

A plump, sunburned, fair-haired girl in a beach costume seated herself on the edge of a chair. She

glanced quickly at Korchagin.
"I've seen you somewhere, Comrade. You're from Kharkov, aren't you?" "Yes."
"Where do you work?"
Pavel decided to put an end to the conversation.
"In the garbage disposal department," he replied. The laugh this sally evoked made him jump. "You're not very polite, are you, Comrade?"
That is how their friendship began. Dora Rodkina turned out to be a member of the Bureau of the Kharkov City Committee of the Party and later, when they came to know each other well, she often teased him about the amusing incident with which their acquaintance had started.

One afternoon at an open-air concert in the grounds of the Thalassa Sanatorium Pavel ran across his old friend Zharky. And curious to relate, it was a foxtrot that brought them together. After the audience had been treated to a highly emotional rendering of Oh, Nights of Burning Passion by a buxom soprano, a couple sprang onto the stage. The man, half-naked but for a red top hat, some shiny spangles on his hips, a dazzling white shirt front and bow tie, in feeble imitation of a savage, and his doll-faced partner in voluminous skirts. To the accompaniment of a delighted buzz from the crowd of beefy-necked shopowners standing behind the armchairs and cots occupied by the sanatorium patients, the couple gyrated about the stage in the intricate figures of a foxtrot. A more revolting spectacle could scarcely be imagined. The fleshy man in his idiotic top hat, with his partner pressed tightly to him, writhed on the stage in suggestive poses. Pavel heard the stertorous breathing of some fat carcass at his back. He turned to go when someone in the front row got up and shouted:
"Enough of this brothel show! To hell with it!" It was Zharky.
The pianist stopped playing and the violin subsided with a squeak. The couple on the stage ceased writhing. The crowd at the back set up a vicious hissing.
"What impudence to interrupt a number!" "All Europe is dancing foxtrot!" "Outrageous!"
But Seryozha Zhbanov, Secretary of the Cherepovets Komsomol organisation and one of the Kommunar patients, put four fingers into his mouth and emitted a piercing whistle. Others followed his example and in an instant the couple vanished from the stage, as if swept off by a gust of wind. The obsequious compere who looked like nothing so much as an old-time flunkey, announced that the concert troupe was leaving.
"Good riddance to bad rubbish!" a lad in a sanatorium bathrobe shouted amid general laughter. Pavel went over to the front rows and found Zharky. The two friends had a long chat in Pavel's room. Zharky told Pavel that he was working in the propaganda section of one of the Party's regional committees.
"You didn't know I was married, did you?" said Zharky. "I'm expecting a son or a daughter before long."
"Married, eh?" Pavel was surprised. "Who is your wife?"

Zharky took a photograph out of his pocket and showed it to
Pavel. "Recognise her?"
It was a photo of himself and Anna Borhart.
"What happened to Dubava?" Pavel asked in still greater surprise.
"He's in Moscow. He left the university after he was expelled from the Party. He's at the Bauman Technical Institute now. I hear he's been reinstated. Too bad, if it's true. He's rotten through and through. ... Guess what Pankratov is doing? He's assistant director of a shipyard. I don't know much about the others. We've lost touch lately. We all work in different parts of the country. But it's nice to get together occasionally and recall the old times."
Dora came in bringing several other people with her. She glanced at the decoration on Zharky's jacket and asked Pavel:
"Is your comrade a Party member? Where does he
work?" Puzzled, Pavel told her briefly about Zharky.
"Good," she said. "Then he can remain. These comrades have just come from Moscow. They are going to give us the latest Party news. We decided to come to your room and hold a sort of closed Party meeting," she explained.
With the exception of Pavel and Zharky all the newcomers were old Bolsheviks. Bartashev, a member of the Moscow Control Commission, told them about the new opposition headed by Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev.
"At this critical moment we ought to be at our posts," Bartashev said in conclusion. "I am leaving tomorrow."
Three days after that meeting in Pavel's room the sanatorium was deserted. Pavel too left shortly afterward, before his time was up.
The Central Committee of the Komsomol did not detain him. He was given an appointment as Komsomol Secretary in one of the industrial regions, and within a week he was already addressing a meeting of the local town organisation.
Late that autumn the car in which Pavel was travelling with two other Party workers to one of the remote districts, skidded into a ditch and overturned.
All the occupants were injured. Pavel's right knee was crushed. A few days later he was taken to the surgical institute in Kharkov. After an examination and X-ray of the injured limb the medical commission advised an immediate operation.
Pavel gave his consent.
"Tomorrow morning then," said the stout professor, who headed the commission. He got up and the others filed out after him.
A small bright ward with a single cot. Spotless cleanliness and the peculiar hospital smell he had long since forgotten. He glanced about him. Beside the cot stood a small table covered with a snow-white cloth and a white-painted stool. And that was all.
The nurse brought in his supper. Pavel sent it back. Half-sitting in his bed, he was writing letters. The pain in his knee interfered with his thoughts and robbed him of his appetite.
When the fourth letter had been written the door opened softly and a young woman in a white smock and cap came over to his bed.
In the twilight he made out a pair of arched eyebrows and large eyes that seemed black. In one hand she held a portfolio, in the other, a sheet of paper and a pencil.

"I am your ward doctor," she said. "Now I am going to ask you a lot of questions and you will have to tell me all about yourself, whether you like it or not."
She smiled pleasantly and her smile took the edge off her "cross-examination". Pavel spent the better part of an hour telling her not only about himself but about all his relatives several generations back.

... The operating theatre. People with gauze masks over noses and mouths. Shining nickel instruments, a long narrow table with a huge basin beneath it.
The professor was still washing his hands when Pavel lay down on the operating table. Behind him swift preparations were being made for the operation. He turned his head. The nurse was laying out pincets and lancets.
"Don't look, Comrade Korchagin," said Bazhanova, his ward doctor, who was unbandaging his leg. "It is bad for the nerves."
"For whose nerves, doctor?" Pavel asked with a mocking smile.
A few minutes later a heavy mask covered his face and he heard the professor's voice saying: "We are going to give you an anaesthetic. Now breathe in deeply through your nose and begin counting."
"Very well," a calm voice muffled by the mask replied. "I apologise in advance for any unprintable remarks I am liable to make."
The professor could not suppress a smile.
The first drops of ether. The suffocating loathsome smell.
Pavel took a deep breath and making an effort to speak distinctly began counting. The curtain had risen on the first act of his tragedy.

Artem tore open the envelope and trembling inwardly unfolded the letter. His eyes bored into the first few lines, then ran quickly over the rest of the page.

"Artem! We write to each other so seldom, once, or at best twice a year! But is it quantity that matters? You write that you and your family have moved from Shepetovka to Kazatin railway yards because you wished to tear up your roots. I know that those roots lie in the backward, petty-proprietor psychology of Styosha and her relatives. It is hard to remake people of Styosha's type, and I am very much afraid you will not succeed. You say you are finding it hard to study 'in your old age', yet you seem to be doing not so badly. You are wrong in your stubborn refusal to leave the factory and take up work as Chairman of the Town Soviet. You fought for the Soviet power, didn't you? Then take it! Take over the Town Soviet tomorrow and get to work!
"Now about myself. Something is seriously wrong with me. I have become a far too frequent inmate in hospitals. They have cut me up twice. I have lost quite a bit of blood and strength, but nobody can tell me yet when it will all end.
"I am no longer fit for work. I have acquired a new profession, that of 'invalid'. I am enduring much pain, and the net result of all this is loss of movement in the joint of my right knee, several scars in various parts of my body, and now the latest medical discovery: seven years ago I injured

my spine and now I am told that this injury may cost me dearly. But I am ready to endure anything so long as I can return to the ranks.

"There is nothing more terrible to me in life than to fall out of the ranks. That is a possibility I refuse to contemplate. And that is why I let them do anything they like with me. But there is no improvement and the clouds grow darker and thicker all the time. After the first operation I returned to work as soon as I could walk, but before long they brought me back again. Now I am being sent to a sanatorium in Yevpatoria. I leave tomorrow. But don't be downhearted, Artem, you know I don't give in easily. I have life enough in me for three. You and I will do some good work yet, brother. Now take care of your health, don't try to overtax your strength, because health repairs cost the Party far too much. All the experience we gain in work, and the knowledge we acquire by study is far too precious to be wasted in hospitals. I shake your hand.

"Pavel."

While Artem, his heavy brows knitted, was reading his brother's letter, Pavel was taking leave of Dr. Bazhanova in the hospital.

"So you are leaving for the Crimea tomorrow?" she said as she gave him her hand. "How are you going to spend the rest of the day?"

"Comrade Rodkina is coming here soon," Pavel replied. "She is taking me to her place to meet her family. I shall spend the night there and tomorrow she will take me to the station."

Bazhanova knew Dora for she had often visited Pavel in the hospital.

"But, Comrade Korchagin, have you forgotten your promise to let my father see you before you go? I have given him a detailed account of your illness and I should like him to examine you. Perhaps you could manage it this evening."

Pavel agreed at once.

That evening Bazhanova showed Pavel into her father's spacious office.

The famous surgeon gave Pavel a careful examination. His daughter had brought all the X-ray pictures and analyses from the clinic. Pavel could not help noticing how pale she turned when her father made some lengthy remark in Latin. Pavel stared at the professor's large bald head bent over him and searched his keen eyes, but Bazhanov's expression was inscrutable.

When Pavel had dressed, the professor took leave of him cordially, explaining that he was due at a conference, and left his daughter to inform Pavel of the result of his examination.

Pavel lay on the couch in Bazhanova's tastefully furnished room waiting for the doctor to speak. But she did not know how to begin. She could not bring herself to repeat what her father had told her — that medicine was so far unable to check the disastrous inflammatory process at work in Pavel's organism. The professor had been opposed to an operation. "This young man is fated to lose the use of his limbs and we are powerless to avert the tragedy."

She did not consider it wise either as doctor or friend to tell him the whole truth and so in carefully chosen words she told him only part of the truth.

"I am certain, Comrade Korchagin, that the Yevpatoria mud will put you right and that by autumn you will be able to return to work."

But she had forgotten that his sharp eye had been watching her all the time.

"From what you say, or rather from what you have not said, I see that the situation is grave. Remember I asked you always to be perfectly frank with me. You need not hide anything from

me, I shan't faint or try to cut my throat. But I very much want to know what is in store for me." Bazhanova evaded a direct answer by making some cheerful remark and Pavel did not learn the truth about his future that night.

"Do not forget that I am your friend, Comrade Korchagin," the doctor said softly in parting. "Who knows what life has in store for you. If ever you need my help or my advice please write to me. I shall do everything in my power to help you."

Through the window she watched the tall leather-clad figure, leaning heavily on a stick, move painfully from the door to the waiting cab.

Yevpatoria again. The hot southern sun. Noisy sunburned people in embroidered skullcaps. A ten-minute drive brought the new arrivals to a two-storey grey limestone building — the Mainak Sanatorium.

The doctor on duty, learning that Pavel's accommodation had been reserved by the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party, took him up to room No. 11.

"I shall put you in with Comrade Ebner. He is a German and he has asked for a Russian room-mate," he explained as he knocked at the door. A voice with a heavy German accent sounded from within. "Come in."

Pavel put down his travelling bag and turned to the fair-haired man with the lively blue eyes who was lying on the bed. The German met him with a warm smile.

"Guten Morgen, Genosse. I mean, good day," he corrected himself, stretching a pale, long-fingered hand to Pavel.

A few moments later Pavel was sitting by his bed and the two were engrossed in a lively conversation in that "international language" in which words play a minor role, and imagination, gestures and mimicry, all the media of the unwritten Esperanto, fill in the gaps.

Pavel learned that Ebner was a German worker who had been wounded in the hip during the Hamburg uprising of 1923. The old wound had re-opened and he was confined to his bed. But he bore his sufferings cheerfully and that won Pavel's respect for him at once.

Pavel could not have wished for a better room-mate. This one would not talk about his ailments from morning till night and bemoan his lot. On the contrary, with him one could forget one's own troubles.

"Too bad I don't know any German, though," Pavel thought ruefully.

In a corner of the sanatorium grounds stood several rocking-chairs, a bamboo table and two bath-chairs. It was here that the five patients whom the others referred to as the "Executive of the Comintern" were in the habit of spending their time after the day's medical treatments were over.

Ebner half reclined in one of the bath-chairs. Pavel, who had also been forbidden to walk, in the other. The three other members of the group were Weiman, a thickset Estonian, who worked at a Republican Commissariat of Trade, Marta Laurin, a young, brown-eyed Lettish woman who looked like a girl of eighteen, and Ledenev, a tall, powerfully-built Siberian with greying temples. This small group indeed represented five different nationalities — German, Estonian, Lettish, Russian and Ukrainian. Marta and Weiman spoke German and Ebner used them as interpreters.

Pavel and Ebner were friends because they shared the same room; Marta, Weiman and Ebner, because they shared a common language. The bond between Ledenev and Korchagin was chess. Before Ledenev arrived, Korchagin had been the sanatorium chess "champion". He had won the title from Weiman after a stiff struggle. The phlegmatic Estonian had been somewhat shaken by his defeat and for a long time he could not forgive Korchagin for having worsted him. But one day a tall man, looking remarkably young for his fifty years, turned up at the sanatorium and suggested a game of chess with Korchagin. Pavel, having no inkling of danger, calmly began with a Queen's Gambit, which Ledenev countered by advancing his central pawns. As "champion", Pavel was obliged to play all new arrivals, and there was always a knot of interested spectators around the board. After the ninth move Pavel realised that his opponent was cramping him by steadily advancing his pawns. Pavel saw now that he had a dangerous opponent and began to regret that he had treated the game so lightly at the start.

After a three-hour struggle during which Pavel exerted all his skill and ingenuity he was obliged to give up. He foresaw his defeat long before any of the onlookers. He glanced up at his opponent and saw Ledenev looking at him with a kindly smile. It was clear that he too saw how the game would end. The Estonian, who was following the game tensely and making no secret of his desire to see Korchagin defeated, was still unaware of what was happening.

"I always hold out to my last pawn," Pavel said, and Ledenev nodded approvingly.

Pavel played ten games with Ledenev in five days, losing seven, winning two and drawing one. Weiman was jubilant.

"Thank you, Comrade Ledenev, thank you! That was a wonderful thrashing you gave him! He deserved it! He knocked out all of us old chess players and now he's been paid back by an old man himself. Ha! Ha!"

"How does it feel to be the loser, eh?" he teased the now vanquished victor.

Pavel lost the title of "champion" but won in Ledenev a friend who was later to become very precious to him. He saw now that his defeat on the chessboard was only to have been expected. His knowledge of chess strategy had been purely superficial and he had lost to an expert who knew all the secrets of the game.

Korchagin and Ledenev found that they had one important date in common: Pavel was born the year Ledenev joined the Party. Both were typical representatives of the young and old guard of Bolsheviks. The one had behind him a long life of intensive political activity, years of work in the underground movement and tsarist imprisonment, followed by important government work; the other had his flaming youth and only eight years of struggle, but years that could have burnt up more than one life. And both of them, the old man and the young, were avid of life and broken in health.

In the evenings the room shared by Ebner and Korchagin became a sort of club. All the political news emanated from here. The room rang with laughter and talk. Weiman usually tried to insert a bawdy anecdote into the conversation but invariably found himself attacked from two sides, by Marta and Korchagin. As a rule Marta was able to restrain him by some sharp sarcastic remark, but when this did not help Korchagin would intervene.

"Your particular brand of 'humour' is not exactly to our taste, you know, Weiman," Marta would say.

"I can't understand how you can stoop to that sort of thing," Korchagin would begin.

Weiman would stick out his thick underlip and survey the gathering with a mocking glint in his small eyes.

"We shall have to set up a department of morals under the Political Enlightenment Department and recommend Korchagin as chief inspector. I can understand why Marta objects, she is the professional feminine opposition, but Korchagin is just trying to pose as a young innocent, a sort of Komsomol babe-in-arms. . . . What's more, I object to the egg trying to teach the hen."

After one heated debate on the question of communist ethics, the matter of obscene jokes was discussed from the standpoint of principle. Marta translated to Ebner the various views expressed. "Die erotische Anekdote" he said, "is no good. I agree with Pavel."

Weiman was obliged to retreat. He laughed the matter off as best he could, but told no more smutty stories.

Pavel had taken Marta for a Komsomol member, judging her to be no more than nineteen. He was much surprised when he learned that she had been in the Party since 1917, that she was thirty-one and an active member of the Latvian Communist Party. In 1918 the Whites had sentenced her to be shot, but she had eventually been turned over to the Soviet Government along with some other comrades in an exchange of prisoners. She was now working on the editorial staff of the Pravda and taking a university course at the same time.

Before Pavel was aware of it, a friendship sprang up between them, and the little Lettish woman who often dropped in to see Ebner, became an inseparable member of the "five". Eglit, a Latvian underground worker, liked to tease her on this score. "What about poor Ozol pining away at home in Moscow? Oh Marta, how can you?"

Every morning, just before the bell to rise sounded, a lusty cockcrow would ring out over the sanatorium. The puzzled attendants would run hither and thither in search of the errant bird. It never occurred to them that Ebner, who could give a perfect imitation of a cockcrow, was having a little joke at their expense. Ebner enjoyed himself immensely.

Toward the end of his month's stay in the sanatorium Pavel's condition took a turn for the worse. The doctors ordered him to bed. Ebner was much upset. He had grown very fond of this courageous young Bolshevik, so full of life and energy, who had lost his health so early in life. And when Marta told him of the tragic future the doctors predicted for Korchagin, Ebner was deeply distressed.

Pavel was confined to his bed for the remainder of his stay in the sanatorium. He managed to hide his suffering from those around him, and Marta alone guessed by his ghastly pallor that he must be in pain. A week before his departure Pavel received a letter from the Ukrainian Central Committee informing him that his leave had been prolonged for two months on the advice of the sanatorium doctors who declared him unfit for work. Money to cover his expenses arrived along with the letter.

Pavel took this first blow as years before during his boxing lessons he had taken Zhukhrai's punches. Then too he had fallen only to rise again at once.

A letter came from his mother asking him to go and see an old friend of hers, Albina Kyutsam, who lived in a small port town not far from Yevpatoria. Pavel's mother had not seen her friend for fifteen years and she begged him to pay her a visit while he was in the Crimea. This letter was to play an important role in Pavel's life.

A week later his sanatorium friends gave him a warm send-off at the pier. Ebner embraced him

and kissed him like a brother. Marta was away at the time and Pavel left without saying good-bye to her.

The next morning the horse cab which brought Pavel from the pier drove up to a little house fronted by a small garden.

The Kyutsam family consisted of five people: Albina the mother, a plump elderly woman with dark, mournful eyes and traces of beauty on her aging face, her two daughters, Lola and Taya, Lola's little son, and old Kyutsam, the head of the house, a burly, unpleasant old man resembling a boar.

Old Kyutsam worked in a co-operative store. Taya, the younger girl, did any odd job that came along, and Lola, who had been a typist, had recently separated from her husband, a drunkard and a bully, and now stayed at home to look after her little boy and help her mother with the housework. Besides the two daughters, there was a son named George, who was away in Leningrad at the time of Pavel's arrival.

The family gave Pavel a warm welcome. Only the old man eyed the visitor with hostility and suspicion.

Pavel patiently told Albina all the family news, and in his turn learned a good deal about the life of the Kyutsams.

Lola was twenty-two. A simple girl, with bobbed brown hair and a broad-featured, open face, she at once took Pavel into her confidence and initiated him into all the family secrets. She told him that the old man ruled the whole family with a despotic hand, suppressing the slightest manifestation of independence on the part of the others. Narrow-minded, bigoted and captious, he kept the family in a permanent state of terror. This had earned him the deep dislike of his children and the hatred of his wife who had fought vainly against his despotism for twenty-five years. The girls always took their mother's side. These incessant family quarrels were poisoning their lives. Days passed in endless bickering and strife.

Another source of family trouble, Lola told Pavel, was her brother George, a typical good-for-nothing, boastful, arrogant, caring for nothing but good food, strong drink and smart clothes. When he finished school, George, who had been his mother's favourite, announced that he was going to the university and demanded money for the trip.

"Lola can sell her ring and you've got some things you can raise money on too. I need the money and I don't care how you get it."

George knew very well that his mother would refuse him nothing and he shamelessly took advantage of her affection for him. He looked down on his sisters. The mother sent her son all the money she could wheedle out of her husband, and whatever Taya earned besides. In the meantime George, having flunked the entrance examinations, had a pleasant time in Leningrad staying with his uncle and terrorising his mother by frequent telegraphic demands for more money.

Pavel did not meet Taya until late in the evening of his arrival. Her mother hurried out to meet her in the hallway and Pavel heard her whispering the news of his coming. The girl shook hands shyly with the strange young man, blushing to the tips of her small ears, and Pavel held her strong, calloused little hand for a few moments before releasing it.

Taya was in her nineteenth year. She was not beautiful, yet with her large brown eyes, and her slanting, Mongolian brows, fine nose and full fresh lips she was very attractive. Her firm young breasts stood out under her striped blouse.

The sisters had two tiny rooms to themselves. In Taya's room there was a narrow iron cot, a chest of drawers covered with knick-knacks, a small mirror, and dozens of photographs and postcards on the walls. On the windowsill stood two flower pots with scarlet geraniums and pale pink asters. The lace curtain was caught up by a pale blue ribbon.

"Taya does not usually admit members of the male sex to her room. She is making an exception for you," Lola teased her sister.

The next evening the family was seated at tea in the old couple's half of the house. Kyutsam stirred his tea busily, casting hostile glances over his spectacles at the visitor.

"I don't think much of the marriage laws nowadays," he said. "Married one day, unmarried the next. Just as you please. Complete freedom."

The old man choked and spluttered. When he recovered his breath he pointed to Lola.

"Look at her, she and that fine fellow of hers got married without asking anyone's permission and separated the same way. And now it's me who's got to feed her and her brat. An outrage I call it!" Lola blushed painfully and hid her tear-filled eyes from Pavel.

"So you think she ought to live with that scoundrel?" Pavel asked, his eyes flashing. "She should have known whom she was marrying."

Albina intervened. Barely repressing her wrath, she said quickly: "Why must you discuss such things before a stranger? Can't you find anything else to talk about?"

The old man turned and pounced on her:

"I know what I'm talking about! Since when have you begun to tell me what to do!"

That night Pavel lay awake for a long time thinking about the Kyutsams. Brought here by chance, he had unwittingly become a participant in this family drama. He wondered how he could help the mother and daughters to free themselves from this bondage. His own life was far from settled, many problems remained to be solved and it was harder than ever before to take resolute action.

There was clearly but one way out: the family had to break up, the mother and daughters must leave the old man. But this was not so simple. Pavel was in no position to undertake this family revolution, for he was due to leave in a few days and he might never see these people again. Was it not better to let things take their course instead of trying to stir these turbid backwaters? But the repulsive image of the old man gave him no rest. Several plans occurred to Pavel but on second thoughts he discarded them all as impracticable.

The next day was Sunday and when Pavel returned from a walk in town he found Taya alone at home. The others were out visiting relatives.

Pavel went to her room and dropped wearily onto a chair.

"Why don't you ever go out and enjoy yourself?" he asked her.

"I don't want to go anywhere," she replied in a low voice.

He remembered the plans he had thought of during the night and decided to put them before her. Speaking quickly so as to finish before the others returned, he went straight to the point.

"Listen, Taya, you and I are good friends. Why should we stand on ceremony with each other? I am going away soon. It is a pity that I should have come to know your family just at the time when I myself am in trouble, otherwise things might have turned out differently. If this happened a year ago we could all leave here together. There is plenty of work everywhere for people like you and Lola. It's useless to expect the old man to change. The only way out is for you to leave home. But that is impossible at present. I don't know yet what is going to happen to me. I am going to

insist on being sent back to work. The doctors have written all sorts of nonsense about me and the comrades are trying to make me cure myself endlessly. But we'll see about that.... I shall write to mother and get her advice about your trouble here. I can't let things go on this way. But you must realise, Taya, that this will mean wrenching yourself loose from your present life. Would you want that, and would you have the strength to go through with it?"

Taya looked up.

- "I do want it," she said softly. "As for the strength, I don't know." Pavel could understand her uncertainty.

"Never mind, Taya! So long as the desire is there everything will be all right. Tell me, are you very much attached to your family?"

Taya hesitated for a moment.

"I am very sorry for mother," she said at last. "Father has made her life miserable and now George is torturing her. I'm terribly sorry for her, although she never loved me as much as she does George...."

" They had a long heart to heart talk. Shortly before the rest of the family returned, Pavel remarked jokingly:

"It's surprising the old man hasn't married you off to someone by now." Taya threw up her hands in horror at the thought.

"Oh no, I'll never marry. I've seen what poor Lola has been through. I shan't get married for anything."

Pavel laughed.

"So you've settled the matter for the rest of your life? And what if some fine, handsome young fellow comes along, what then?"

"No, I won't. They're all fine while they're courting."

Pavel laid his hand conciliatingly on her shoulder.

"That's all right, Taya. You can get along quite well without a husband. But you needn't be so hard on the young men. It's a good thing you don't suspect me of trying to court you, or there'd be trouble," and he patted her arm in brotherly fashion.

"Men like you marry girls of a different sort," she said softly.

A few days later Pavel left for Kharkov. Taya, Lola and Albina with her sister Rosa came to the station to see him off. Albina made him promise not to forget her daughters and to help them all to find some way out of their plight. They took leave of him as of someone near and dear to them, and there were tears in Taya's eyes. From the window of his carriage Pavel watched Lola's white kerchief and Taya's striped blouse grow smaller and smaller until they finally disappeared.

In Kharkov he put up at his friend Petya Novikov's place, for he did not want to disturb Dora. As soon as he had rested from the journey he went to the Central Committee. There he waited for Akim, and when at last the two were alone, he asked to be sent at once to work. Akim shook his head.

"Can't be done, Pavel! We have the decision of the Medical Commission and the Central Committee says your condition is serious. You're to be sent to the Neu-ropathological Institute for treatment and not to be permitted to work."

"What do I care what they say, Akim! I am appealing to you. Give me a chance to work! This moving about from one hospital to another is killing me."

Akim tried to refuse. "We can't go against the decision. Don't you see it's for your own good, Pavel?" he argued. But Pavel pleaded his cause so fervently that Akim finally gave in.

The very next day Pavel was working in the Special Department of the Central Committee Secretariat. He believed that he had only to begin working for his lost strength to return to him. But he soon saw that he had been mistaken. He sat at his desk for eight hours at a stretch without pausing for lunch simply because the effort of going down three flights of stairs to the canteen across the way was too much for him. Very often his hand or his leg would suddenly go numb, and at times his whole body would be paralysed for a few moments. He was nearly always feverish. On some mornings he found himself unable to rise from his bed, and by the time the attack passed, he realised in despair that he would be a whole hour late for work. Finally the day came when he was officially reprimanded for reporting late for work and he saw that this was the beginning of what he dreaded most in life — he was falling out of the ranks.

Twice Akim helped him by shifting him to other work, but the inevitable happened. A month after his return to work he was confined to his bed again. It was then that he remembered Bazhanova's parting words. He wrote to her and she came the same day. She told him what he had wanted to know: that hospitalisation was not imperative.

"So I don't need any more treatment? That's fine!" he said cheerfully, but the joke fell flat.

As soon as he felt a little stronger he went back to the Central Committee. This time Akim was adamant. He insisted on Pavel's going to the hospital.

"I'm not going," Pavel said wearily. "It's useless. I have it on excellent authority. There is only one thing left for me — to retire on pension. But that I shall never do! You can't make me give up my work. I am only twenty-four and I'm not going to be a labour invalid for the rest of my life, moving from hospital to hospital, knowing that it won't do me any good. You must give me something to do, some work suitable to my condition. I can work at home, or I can live in the office. Only don't give me any paper work. I've got to have work that will give me the satisfaction of knowing that I can still be useful."

Pavel's voice, vibrant with emotion, rose higher and higher.

Akim felt keenly for Pavel. He knew what a tragedy it was for this passionate-hearted youth, who had given the whole of his short life to the Party, to be torn from the ranks and doomed to a life far from the battlefront. He resolved to do all he could to help him.

"All right, Pavel, calm yourself. There will be a meeting of the Secretariat tomorrow and I'll put your case before the comrades. I promise to do all I can."

Pavel rose heavily and seized Akim's hand.

"Do you really think, Akim, that life can drive me into a corner and crush me? So long as my heart beats here" — and he pressed Akim's hand to his chest so that he could feel the dull pounding of his heart — "so long as it beats, no one will be able to tear me away from the Party. Death alone can put me out of the ranks. Remember that, my friend."

Akim said nothing. He knew that this was not an empty phrase. It was the cry of a soldier mortally wounded in battle. He knew that men like Korchagin could not speak or feel otherwise.

Two days later Akim told Pavel that he was to be given an opportunity to work on the staff of a big newspaper, provided, of course, it was found that he could be used for literary work. Pavel

was courteously received at the editorial office and was interviewed by the assistant editor, an old Party worker, and member of the Presidium of the Central Control Committee of the Ukraine. "What education have you had, Comrade?" she asked him.
"Three years of elementary school."
"Have you been to any of the Party political
schools?" "No."
"Well, one can be a good journalist without all that. Comrade Akim has told us about you. We can give you work to do at home, and in general, we are prepared to provide you with suitable conditions for work. True, work of this kind requires considerable knowledge. Particularly in the sphere of literature and language."
This was by no means encouraging. The half-hour interview showed Pavel that his knowledge was inadequate, and the trial article he wrote was returned to him with some three dozen stylistic and spelling mistakes marked in red pencil.
"You have considerable ability, Comrade Korchagin," said the editor, "and with some hard work you might learn to write quite well. But at the present time your grammar is faulty. Your article shows that you do not know the Russian language well enough. That is not surprising considering that you have had no time to learn it. Unfortunately we can't use you, although as I said before, you have ability. If your article were edited, without altering the contents, it would be excellent. But, you see, we haven't enough editors as it is."
Korchagin rose, leaning heavily on his stick. His right eyebrow twitched.
"Yes, I see your point. What sort of a journalist would I make? I was a good stoker once, and not a bad electrician. I rode a horse well, and I knew how to stir up the Komsomol youth, but I can see I would cut a sorry figure on your front."
He shook hands and left.
At a turning in the corridor he stumbled and would have fallen had he not been caught by a woman who happened to be passing by.
"What's the matter, Comrade? You look quite ill!"
It took Pavel several seconds to recover. Then he gently released himself and walked on, leaning heavily on his stick.
From that day Pavel felt that his life was on the decline. Work was now out of the question. More and more often he was confined to his bed. The Central Committee released him from work and arranged for his pension. In due time the pension came together with the certificate of a labour invalid. The Central Committee gave him money and issued him his papers, giving him the right to go wherever he wished.
He received a letter from Marta inviting him to come to visit her in Moscow and have a rest. Pavel had intended going to Moscow in any case, for he cherished the dim hope that the All-Union Central Committee would help him to find work that would not require moving around. But in Moscow too he was advised to take medical treatment and offered accommodation in a good hospital. He refused.
The nineteen days spent in the flat Marta shared with her friend Nadya Peterson flew quickly by. Pavel was left a great deal to himself, for the two young women left the house in the morning for work and did not return till evening. Pavel spent his time reading books from Marta's well-stocked library. The evenings passed pleasantly in the company of the girls and their friends.

Letters came from the Kyutsams inviting him to come and visit them. Life there was becoming unendurable and his help was wanted.

And so one morning Korchagin left the quiet little flat on Gusyatnikov Street. The train bore him swiftly south to the sea, away from the damp rainy autumn to the warm shores of the southern Crimea. He sat at the window watching the telegraph poles fly past. His brows were knit and there was an obstinate gleam in his dark eyes.

## Chapter Eight

Down below, the sea broke on the jagged chaos of rock. A stiff dry breeze blowing from distant Turkey fanned his face. The harbour, protected from the sea by a concrete mole, thrust itself in an irregular arc into the shore-line. And overlooking it all were the tiny white cottages of the town's outskirts perched on the slopes of the mountain range which broke off abruptly at the sea.

It was quiet here in the old park outside of the town. Yellow maple leaves floated slowly down onto its grass-grown paths.

The old Persian cabby who had driven Pavel out here from town could not help asking as his strange fare alighted:

"Why come here of all places? No young ladies, no amusements. Nothing but the jackals. . . . What will you do here? Better let me drive you back to town, mister tovarish!" Pavel paid him and the old man drove away.

The park was indeed a wilderness. Pavel found a bench on a cliff overlooking the sea, and sat down, lifting his face to the now mild autumn sun.

He had come to this quiet spot to think things over and consider what to do with his life. The time had come to review the situation and take some decision.

His second visit to the Kyutsams had brought the family strife to a head. The old man on learning of his arrival had flown into a rage. It fell naturally to Korchagin to lead the resistance. The old man unexpectedly encountered a vigorous rebuff from his wife and daughters, and from the first day of Pavel's arrival the house split into two hostile camps. The door leading to the parents' half of the house was locked and one of the small side rooms was rented to Korchagin. Pavel paid the rent in advance and the old man was somewhat mollified by the arrangement; now that his daughters had cut themselves off from him he would no longer be expected to support them.

For diplomatic reasons Albina remained with her husband. As for the old man, he kept strictly to his side of the house and avoided meeting the man he so heartily detested. But outside in the yard he made as much noise as possible to show that he was still the master.

Before he went to work in the co-operative shop, old Kyutsam had earned his living by shoemaking and carpentry and had built himself a small workshop in the backyard. To annoy his lodger, he shifted his work bench from the shed to a spot in the yard right under Pavel's window where he hammered furiously for hours on end, deriving a malicious satisfaction from the knowledge that he was interfering with Korchagin's reading.

"Just you wait," he hissed to himself, "I'll get you out of here. .. ."

Far away a steamer laid a small dark trail of smoke over the sea at the very horizon. A flock of gulls skimmed the waves with piercing cries.

Pavel, his chin resting in his hand, sat lost in thought. His whole life passed swiftly before his mind's eye, from his childhood to the present. How had these twenty-four years of his been lived? Worthily or unworthily? He went over them again, year by year, subjecting them to sober, impartial judgement, and he found to his immense relief that he had not done so badly with his life. Mistakes there had been, the mistakes of youth, and chiefly of ignorance. But in the stormy days of struggle for Soviet power he had been in the thick of the fighting and on the crimson banner of Revolution there were a few drops of his own life's blood.

He had remained in the ranks until his strength had failed him. And now, struck down and unable to hold his place in the firing lines, there was nothing left for him but the field hospital. He remembered the time when they had stormed Warsaw and how, at the height of battle, one of the men had been hit. He fell to the ground under his horse's hooves. His comrades quickly bandaged his wounds, turned him over to the stretcher-bearers and sped onward in pursuit of the enemy. The squadron had not halted its advance for the sake of one fallen soldier. Thus it was in the fight for a great cause and thus it had to be. True, there were exceptions. He had seen legless machine-gunners on gun carriages in battle. These men had struck terror into the enemy's ranks, their guns had sown death and destruction, and their steel-like courage and unerring eye had made them the pride of their units. But such men were few.

What was he to do now that defeat had overtaken him and there was no longer any hope of returning to the ranks? Had he not extracted from Bazhanova the admission that the future held even worse torment in store for him? What was to be done? The question was like a yawning abyss spreading at his feet.

What was there to live for now that he had lost what he prized most — the ability to fight? How was he to justify his existence today and in the cheerless tomorrow? How was he to fill his days? Exist merely to breathe, to eat and to drink? Remain a helpless bystander watching his comrades fight their way forward? Be a burden to the detachment? No, better to destroy his treacherous body! A bullet in the heart — and be done with it! A timely end to a life well lived. Who would condemn the soldier for putting himself out of his agony?

He felt the flat body of his Browning in his pocket. His fingers closed over the grip, and slowly he drew out the weapon.

"Who would have thought that you would come to this?"

The muzzle stared back at him with cold contempt. Pavel laid the pistol on his knee and cursed bitterly.

"Cheap heroics, my lad! Any fool can shoot himself. That is the easiest way out, the coward's way. You can always put a bullet through your head when life hits you too hard. But have you tried getting the better of life? Are you sure you have done everything you can to break out of the steel trap? Have you forgotten the fighting at Novograd-Volynsky when we went into the attack seventeen times in one day until finally, in spite of everything, we won through? Put away that gun and never breathe a word of this to anyone. Learn how to go on living when life becomes unbearable. Make your life useful."

He got up and went down to the road. A passing mountaineer gave him a lift on his cart. When they reached town he got off and bought a newspaper and read the announcement of a meeting of the city Party group in the Demyan Bedny Club. It was very late when he returned home that night. He had made a speech at the meeting, little suspecting that it was the last he was ever to

make at a large public gathering.

Taya was still awake when he got home. She had been worried at Pavel's prolonged absence. What had happened to him? She remembered the grim, cold look she had observed that morning in his eyes, always so live and warm. He never liked to talk about himself, but she felt that he was under some severe mental strain.

As the clock in her mother's room chimed two she heard the gate creak and, slipping on her jacket, she went to open the door. Lola, asleep in her own room, murmured restlessly as Taya passed her. "I was beginning to get worried," Taya whispered with relief when Pavel came in.

"Nothing is going to happen to me as long as I live, Taya," he whispered. "Lola's asleep? I am not the least bit sleepy for some reason. I have something to tell you. Let's go to your room so as not to wake Lola."

Taya hesitated. It was very late. How could she let him come to her room at this late hour? What would mother think? But she could not refuse for fear of offending him. What could he have to say to her, she wondered, as she led the way to her room.

"This is how it is, Taya," Pavel began in a low voice. He sat down opposite her in the dimly-lighted room, so close that she could feel his breath. "Life takes such strange turns that you begin to wonder sometimes. I have had a bad time of it these past few days. I did not know how I could go on living. Life had never seemed so black. But today I held a meeting of my own private 'political bureau' and adopted a decision of tremendous importance. Don't be surprised at what I have to say."

He told her what he had gone through in the past few months and much of what had passed through his mind during his visit to the park.

"That is the situation. Now for the most important thing. The storm in this family is only beginning. We must get out of here into the fresh air and as far away from this hole as possible. We must start life afresh. Once I have taken a hand in this fight I'm going to see it through. Our life, yours and mine, is none too happy at present. I have decided to breathe some warmth into it. Do you know what I mean? Will you be my life's companion, my wife?"

Taya was deeply moved by his confession, but these last words startled her.

"I am not asking you for an answer tonight," he went on. "You must think it over carefully. I suppose you cannot understand how such things can be put so bluntly without the usual courting. But you and I have no need of all that nonsense. I give you my hand, little girl, here it is. If you will put your trust in me you will not be mistaken. We can both give each other a great deal. Now, here is what I have decided: our compact will be in force until you grow up to be a real human being, a true Bolshevik. If I can't help you in that I am not worth a kopek. We must not break our compact until then. But when you grow up you will be freed of all obligations. Who knows what may happen? I may become a complete physical wreck, and in that case, remember, you must not consider yourself bound to me in any way."

He fell silent for a few moments, then he went on in tender, caressing voice: "And for the present, I offer you my friendship and my love."

He held her fingers in his, feeling at peace, as if she had already given her consent.

"Do you promise never to leave me?" "I can only give you my word, Taya. It is for you to believe that men like me do not betray their friends. . . . I only hope they will not betray me," he added bitterly. "I can't give you an answer tonight. It is all very sudden," she replied. Pavel got up.

"Go to bed, Taya. It will soon be morning." He went to his own room and lay down on the bed without undressing and was asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

The desk by the window in Pavel's room was piled high with books from the Party library, newspapers and several notebooks filled with notes. A bed, two chairs and a huge map of China dotted with tiny black and red flags pinned up over the door between his room and Taya's, completed the furnishings. The people in the local Party Committee had agreed to supply Pavel with books and periodicals and had promised to instruct the manager of the biggest public library in town to send him whatever he needed. Before long large parcels of books began to arrive. Lola was amazed at the way he would sit over his books from early morning, reading and making notes all day long with only short breaks for breakfast and dinner. In the evenings, which he always spent with the two sisters, he would relate to them what he had read.

Long past midnight old Kyutsam would see a chink of light between the shutters of the room occupied by his unwelcome lodger. He would creep over to the window on tiptoe and peer in through the crack at the head bent over the books.

"Decent folks are in their beds at this hour but he keeps the light burning all night long. He behaves as if he were the master here. The girls have got altogether out of hand since he came," the old man would grumble to himself as he retired to his own quarters.

For the first time in eight years Pavel found himself with plenty of time on his hands, and no duties of any kind to attend to. He made good use of his time, reading with the avid eagerness of the newly-enlightened. He studied eighteen hours a day. How much longer his health could have withstood the strain is hard to say, but a seemingly casual remark from Taya one day changed everything.

"I have moved the chest of drawers away from the door leading to your room. If ever you want to talk to me you can come straight in. You don't need to go through Lola's room."

The blood rushed to Pavel's cheeks. Taya smiled happily. Their compact was sealed.

The old man no longer saw the chink of light through the shuttered window of the corner room, and Taya's mother began to notice a glow in her daughter's eyes that betrayed a happiness she could not conceal. The faint shadows under her eyes spoke of sleepless nights. Often now Taya's singing and the strumming of a guitar echoed through the little house.

Yet Taya's happiness was not unmarred; her awakened womanhood rebelled against the clandestine relationship. She trembled at every sound, fancying that she heard her mother's footsteps. What if they asked her why she had taken to closing her door on the latch at night? The thought tormented her. Pavel noticed her fears and tried to comfort her.

"What are you afraid of?" he would say tenderly. "After all, you and I are grown-up people. Sleep in peace. No one shall intrude on our lives."

Comforted, she would press her cheek against his breast, and fall asleep, her arms around her loved one. And he would lie awake, listening to her steady breathing, keeping quite still lest he disturb her slumber, his whole being flooded with a deep tenderness for this girl who had entrusted her life to him.

Lola was the first to discover the reason for the shining light in Taya's eyes, and from that day the shadow of estrangement fell between the two sisters. Soon the mother too found out, or rather,

guessed. And she was troubled. She had not expected it of Korchagin.

"Taya is not the wife for him," she remarked to Lola. "What will come of it, I wonder?"

Alarming thoughts beset her but she could not muster the courage to speak to Korchagin.

Young people began visiting Pavel, and sometimes his little room could barely hold them all. The sound of their voices like the beehive's hum reached the old man's ears and often he could hear them singing in chorus:

Forbidding is this sea of ours,
Night and day its angry voice is heard. . .

and Pavel's favourite:

The whole wide world is drenched with tears....

It was the study circle of young workers which the Party Committee had assigned to Pavel in response to his insistent request for propaganda work.

Once more he had gripped the helm firmly with both hands, and the ship of life, having veered dangerously a few times, was now steering a new course. His dream of returning to the ranks through study and learning was on the way to being realised.

But life continued to heap obstacles in his path, and bitterly he saw each obstacle as a further delay to the attainment of his goal.

One day the ill-starred student George turned up from Moscow, bringing a wife with him. He put up at the house of his father-in-law, a lawyer, and from there continued to pester his mother with demands for money.

George's coming widened the rift in the Kyutsam family. George at once sided with his father, and together with his wife's family, which was inclined to be anti-Soviet, he sought by underhand means to drive Korchagin out of the house and induce Taya to break with him.

Two weeks after George's arrival Lola got a job in another town and she left, taking her mother and her little son with her. Soon afterward, Pavel and Taya moved to a distant seaside town.

Artem did not often receive letters from his brother and the sight of an envelope with the familiar handwriting waiting for him on his desk in the City Soviet always made his heart beat faster. Today too as he opened the envelope he thought tenderly:

"Ah, Pavel! If only you lived nearer to me. I could do with your advice, lad."

"Artem," he read. "I am writing to tell you all that has happened to me lately. I do not write such things to anyone but you. But I know I can confide in you because you know me well and you will understand.

"Life continues to press down on me on the health front, dealing me blow upon blow. I hardly managed to struggle to my feet after one blow when another, more merciless than the last, lays me low. The most terrible thing is that I am powerless to resist. First I lost the power of my left arm. And now, as if that were not enough, my legs have failed me. I could barely move about (within

the limits of the room, of course) as it was, but now I have difficulty in crawling from bed to table. And I daresay there is worse to come. What tomorrow will bring me no one knows.

"I never leave the house now, and only a tiny fragment of the sea is visible from my window. Can there be a greater tragedy than that of a man who combines in himself a treacherous body that refuses to obey him, and the heart of a Bolshevik, a Bolshevik who passionately yearns to work, to be with all of you in the ranks of the fighters advancing along the whole front in the midst of the stormy avalanche?

"I still believe that I shall return to the ranks, that in time my bayonet will take its place in the attacking columns. I must believe that, I have no right not to. For ten years the Party and the Komsomol taught me to fight, and the leader's words, spoken to all of us, apply equally to me: 'There are no fortresses Bolsheviks cannot take.'

"My life now is spent entirely in study. Books, books and more books. I have accomplished a great deal, Artem. I have read and studied all the classics, and have passed my examinations in the first year of the correspondence course at the Communist University. In the evenings I lead a study circle of Communist youth. These young comrades are my link with the practical life of the Party organisation. Then there is Taya's education, and of course love, and the tender caresses of my little wife. Taya and I are the best of friends. Our household is very simply run — with my pension of thirty-two rubles and Taya's earnings we get along quite well. Taya is following the path I myself took to the Party: for a time she worked as a domestic servant, and now has a job as a dishwasher in a canteen (there is no industry in this town).

"The other day she proudly showed me her first delegate's credentials issued by the Women's Department. This is not simply a strip of cardboard to her. In her I see the birth of the new woman, and I am doing my best to help in this birth. The time will come when she will work in a big factory, where as part of a large working community she will become politically mature. But she is taking the only possible course open to her here.

"Taya's mother has visited us twice. Unconsciously she is trying to drag Taya back to a life of petty, personal selfish cares. I tried to make Albina see that she ought not to allow the shadow of her own unhappy past to darken the path her daughter has chosen. But it was no use. I feel that one day the mother will try to stand in her daughter's way and then a clash will be unavoidable. I shake your hand.

"Your Pavel."

Sanatorium No. 5 in Old Matsesta.... A three-storey brick building standing on a ledge hewed into the mountain-side. Thick woods all around and a road winding down to the sea. The windows are open and the breeze carries the smell of the sulphur springs into the room. Pavel Korchagin is alone in the room. Tomorrow new patients will arrive and then he will have a room-mate. He hears steps outside the window and the sound of a familiar voice. Several people are talking. But where has he heard that deep bass voice before? From the dim recesses of his memory, hidden away but not forgotten, comes the name: "Ledenev. He and none other."

Pavel confidently called to his friend, and a moment later Ledenev was beside his bed shaking his hand warmly.

"So Korchagin is still going strong? Well, and what have you got to say for yourself? Don't tell me

you have decided to get sick in real earnest? That will never do! You should take an example from me. The doctors have tried to put me on the shelf too, but I keep going just to spite them." And Ledenev laughed merrily.

But Pavel felt the sympathy and distress hidden behind that laughter.

They spent two hours together. Ledenev told Pavel all the latest news from Moscow. From him Pavel first heard of the important decisions taken by the Party on the collectivisation of agriculture and the reorganisation of life in the village and he eagerly drank in every word.

"Here I was thinking you were busy stirring things up somewhere at home in the Ukraine," said Ledenev. "You disappoint me. But never mind, I was in an even worse way. I thought I'd be tied to my bed for good, and now you see I'm still on my feet. There's no taking life easy nowadays. It simply won't work! I must confess I find myself thinking sometimes how nice it would be to take a little rest, just to catch your breath. After all, I'm not as young as I was, and ten and twelve hours' work a day is a bit hard on me at times. Well, I think about it for a while and even try to ease the load a little, but it's no use. Before you know it, you're up to your ears again, never getting home before midnight. The more powerful the machine, the faster the wheels run, and with us the speed increases every day, so that we old folk simply have to stay young."

Ledenev passed a hand over his high forehead and said in a kindly manner: "And now tell me about yourself."

Pavel gave Ledenev an account of his life since they had last met, and as he talked he felt his friend's warm approving glance on him.

Under the shade of spreading trees in one corner of the terrace a group of sanatorium patients were seated around a small table. One of them was reading the Pravda, his bushy eyebrows knitted. The black Russian shirt, the shabby old cap and the unshaved face with deep-sunken blue eyes all bespoke the veteran miner. It was twelve years since Khrisanf Chernokozov had left the mines to take up an important post in the government, yet he seemed to have just come up from the pit. Everything about him, his bearing, his gait, his manner of speaking, betrayed his profession.

Chernokozov was a member of the Territorial Party Bureau besides. A painful disease was sapping his strength: Chernokozov hated his gangrenous leg which had kept him tied to his bed for nearly half a year now.

Opposite him, puffing thoughtfully on her cigarette, was Zhigareva — Alexandra Alexeyevna Zhigareva, who had been a Party member for nineteen of her thirty-seven years. "Shurochka the metalworker", as her comrades in the Petersburg underground movement used to call her, had been hardly more than a girl when she was exiled to Siberia.

The third member of the group was Pankov. His handsome head with the sculptured profile was bent over a German magazine, and now and then he raised his hand to adjust his enormous horn-rimmed spectacles. It was painful to see this thirty-year-old man of athletic build dragging his paralysed leg after him. An editor and writer, Pankov worked in the People's Commissariat of Education. He was an authority on Europe and knew several foreign languages. He was a man of considerable erudition and even the reserved Chernokozov treated him with great respect.

"So that is your room-mate?" Zhigareva whispered to Chernokozov, nodding toward the chair in which Pavel Korchagin was seated.

Chernokozov looked up from his newspaper and his brow cleared at once.

"Yes! That's Korchagin. You ought to know him, Shura. It's too bad illness has put many a spoke in his wheel, otherwise that lad would be a great help to us in tight spots. He belongs to the first Komsomol generation. I am convinced that if we give him our support — and that's what I have decided to do — he will still be able to work."

Pankov too listened to what Chernokozov was saying.

"What is he suffering from?" Shura Zhigareva asked softly.

"The aftermath of the Civil War. Some trouble with his spine. I spoke to the doctor here and he told me there is a danger of total paralysis. Poor lad!"

"I shall go and bring him over here," said Shura.

That was the beginning of their friendship. Pavel did not know then that Zhigareva and Chernokozov were to become very dear to him and that in the years of illness ahead of him they were to be his mainstays.

Life flowed on as before. Taya worked and Pavel studied. Before he had time to resume his work with the study groups another disaster stole upon him unawares. Both his legs were completely paralysed. Now only his right hand obeyed him. He bit his lips until the blood came when after repeated efforts he finally realised that he could not move. Taya bravely hid her despair and bitterness at being powerless to help him. But he said to her with an apologetic smile:

"You and I must separate, Taya. After all, this was not in our compact. I shall think it over properly today, little girl!"

She would not let him speak. The sobs burst forth and she hid her face against his chest in a paroxysm of weeping.

When Artem learned of his brother's latest misfortune he wrote to his mother. Maria Yakovlevna left everything and went at once to her son. Now the three lived together. Taya and the old lady took to each other from the first.

Pavel carried on with his studies in spite of everything.

One winter's evening Taya came home to report her first victory — she had been elected to the City Soviet. After that Pavel saw very little of her. When her day's work in the sanatorium kitchen was over Taya would go straight to the Soviet, returning home late at night weary but full of impressions. She was about to apply for candidate membership in the Party and was preparing for the long-awaited day with eager anticipation. And then misfortune struck another blow. The steadily progressing disease was doing its work. A burning excruciating pain suddenly seared Pavel's right eye, spreading rapidly to the left. A black curtain fell, blotting out all about him, and for the first time in his life Pavel knew the horror of total blindness.

A new obstacle had moved noiselessly onto his path barring his way. A terrifying, seemingly insurmountable obstacle. It plunged Taya and his mother into despair. But he, frigidly calm, resolved:

"I must wait and see what happens. If there is really no possibility of advancing, if everything I have done to return to the ranks has been swept away by this blindness I must put an end to it all."

Pavel wrote to his friends and they wrote back urging him to take courage and carry on the fight.

It was in these days of grim struggle for him that Taya came home radiant and announced:

"I am a candidate to the Party, Pavel!"
Pavel listened to her excited account of the meeting at which her application was accepted and remembered his own initial steps in the Party.
"Well, Comrade Korchagina, you and I are a Communist faction now," he said, squeezing her hand.
The next day he wrote to the secretary of the District Party Committee asking the latter to come and see him. The same evening a mud-spattered car drew up outside the house and in a few moments Volmer, a middle-aged Lett with a spreading beard that reached to his ears, was pumping Pavel's hand.
"Well, how goes it? What do you mean by behaving like this, eh? Up with you and we'll send you off to work in the village at once," he said with a breezy laugh. He stayed for two hours, forgetting all about the conference he was to have attended. He paced up and down the room, listening to Pavel's impassioned appeal for work.
"Stop talking about study groups," he said when Pavel had finished. "You've got to rest. And we must see about your eyes. It may still be possible to do something. What about going to Moscow and consulting a specialist? You ought to think it over.. . ." But Pavel interrupted him:
"I want people, Comrade Volmer, live, flesh-and-blood people! I need them now more than ever before. I cannot go on living alone. Send the youth to me, those with the least experience. They're veering too much to the left out there in the villages, the collective farms don't give them enough scope, they want to organise communes. You know the Komsomols, if you don't hold them back they're liable to try and dash forward ahead of the lines. I was like that myself." Volmer stopped in his tracks.
"How do you come to know about that? They only brought the news in today from the district." Pavel smiled.
"My wife told me. Perhaps you remember her? She was admitted to the Party yesterday."
"Korchagina, the dishwasher? So that's your wife! I didn't know that!" He fell silent for a few moments, then he slapped his forehead as an idea occurred to him. "I know whom we'll send you. Lev Bersenev. You couldn't wish for a better comrade. He's a man after your own heart, the two of you ought to get along famously. Like two high-voltage transformers. I was an electrician once, you know. Lev will rig up a wireless for you, he's an expert at that sort of thing. I often sit up till two in the morning at his place with those earphones. The wife actually got suspicious. Wanted to know what I meant by coming home so late." Korchagin smiled. "Who is Bersenev?" he asked.
Volmer ceased his pacing and sat down. "He's our notary public, although he's no more notary public really than I am a ballet dancer. He held an important post until quite recently. Been in the movement since 1912 and a Party member since the Revolution. Served in the Civil War on the revolutionary tribunal of the Second Cavalry Army; that was the time they were combing out the Whiteguard lice in the Caucasus. He was in Tsaritsyn too, and on the Southern Front as well. Then for a time he was a member of the Supreme Military Court of the Far Eastern Republic. Had a very tough time of it there. Finally tuberculosis got him. He left the Far East and came down here to the Caucasus. At first he worked as chairman of a gubernia court, and vice-chairman of a territorial court. And then his lung trouble knocked him out completely. It was a matter of coming down here and taking it easy or giving up the ghost. So that's how we come to have such a remarkable notary. It's a nice quiet job too, just the thing for him. Well, gradually the people here

got him to take up a group. After that he was elected to the District Committee, then, before he knew it, he had charge of a political school, and now they've put him on the Control Commission. He's a permanent member on all important commissions appointed to unravel nasty tangles. Apart from all that he goes in for hunting, he's a passionate radio fan, and although he has only one lung, you wouldn't believe it to look at him. He is simply bursting with energy. When he dies it'll be somewhere on the way between the District Committee and the court."

Pavel cut him short.

"Why do you load him down like that?" he asked sharply. "He is doing more work here than before!"

Volmer gave him a quizzical look:

"And if I give you a study circle and something else Lev would be sure to say: 'Why must you load him down like that?' But he himself says he'd rather have one year of intensive work than five years on his back in hospital. It looks as if we'll have to build socialism before we can take proper care of our people."

"That's true. I too prefer one year of life to five years of stagnation, but we are sometimes criminally wasteful of our energies. I know now that this is less a sign of heroism than of inefficiency and irresponsibility. Only now have I begun to see that I had no right to be so stupidly careless about my own health. I see now that there was nothing heroic about it at all. I might have held out a few more years if it hadn't been for that misguided Spartanism. In other words, the infantile disease of leftism is one of the chief dangers."

"That's what he says now," thought Volmer, "but let him get back on his feet and he'll forget everything but work." But he said nothing.

The following evening Lev Bersenev came. It was midnight before he left Pavel. He went away feeling as if he had found a brother.

In the morning a wireless antenna was set up on the roof of Korchagin's house, while Lev busied himself inside the house with the receiving set, regaling Pavel the while with interesting stories from his past. Pavel could not see him, but from what Taya had told him he knew that Lev was a tall, fair-haired, blue-eyed young man with impulsive gestures, which was exactly as Pavel had pictured him the moment they had first met.

When evening came three valves began to glow in the room. Lev triumphantly handed Pavel the earphones. A chaos of sounds filled the ether. The transmitters in the port chirped like so many birds, and somewhere not far out at sea a ship's wireless was sending out an endless stream of dots and dashes. But in this vortex of noises and sounds jostling one another the tuning coil picked out and clung to a calm and confident voice:

"This is Moscow calling...."

The tiny wireless set brought sixty broadcasting stations in different parts of the world within Pavel's reach. The life from which he had been debarred broke through to him from the earphone membranes, and once again he felt its mighty pulse.

Noticing the glow of pleasure in Pavel's eyes, the weary Bersenev smiled with satisfaction.

The big house was hushed. Taya murmured restlessly in her sleep. Pavel saw little of his wife these days. She came home late, worn out and shivering from cold. Her work claimed more and

more of her time and seldom did she have a free evening. Pavel remembered what Bersenev had told him on this score:

"If a Bolshevik has a wife who is his Party comrade they rarely see one another. But this has two advantages: they never get tired of each other, and there's no time to quarrel!"

And indeed, how could he object? It was only to be expected. There was a time when Taya had devoted all her evenings to him. There had been more warmth and tenderness in their relationship then. But she had been only a wife, a mate to him; now she was his pupil and his Party comrade.

He knew that the more Taya matured politically, the less time she would be able to give him, and he bowed to the inevitable.

He was given a study group to lead and once again a noisy hum of voices filled the house in the evenings. These hours spent with the youth infused Pavel with new energy and vigour.

The rest of the time went in listening to the radio, and his mother had difficulty in tearing him away from the earphones at mealtimes.

The radio gave him what his blindness had taken from him — the opportunity to acquire knowledge, and this consuming passion for learning helped him to forget the pain that racked his body, the fire that seared his eyes and all the misery an unkind fate had heaped upon him.

When the radio brought the news from Magnitostroi of the exploits of the Komsomols who had succeeded Pavel's generation he was filled with happiness.

He pictured the cruel blizzards, the bitter Urals frosts as vicious as a pack of hungry wolves. He heard the howling of the wind and saw amid the whirling of the snow a detachment of second-generation Komsomols working in the light of arc lamps on the roof of the giant factory buildings to save the first sections of the huge plant from the ravages of snow and ice. Compared to this, how tiny seemed the forest construction job on which the first generation of Kiev Komsomols had battled with the elements! The country had grown, and with it, the people.

And on the Dnieper, the water had burst through the steel barriers and swept away men and machines. And again the Komsomol youth had hurled themselves into the breach, and after a furious two-day battle had brought the unruly torrent back under control. A new Komsomol generation marched in the van of this great struggle. And among the heroes Pavel heard with pride the name of his old comrade Ignat Pankratov.

## Chapter Nine

They spent the first few days in Moscow with a friend who was arranging for Pavel to enter a special clinic.

Only now did Pavel realise how much easier it had been to be brave when he had his youth and a strong body. Now that life held him in its iron grip to hold out was a matter of honour.

It was a year and a half since Pavel Korchagin had come to Moscow. Eighteen months of indescribable anguish.

In the eye clinic Professor Averbach had told Pavel quite frankly that there was no hope of recovering his sight. Some time in the future, when the inflammation disappeared it might be

possible to operate on the pupils. In the meantime he advised an operation to halt the inflammatory process.

Pavel gave his consent; he told his doctors to do everything they thought necessary.

Three times he felt the touch of Death's bony fingers as he lay for hours at a time on the operating table with lancets probing his throat to remove the parathyroid gland. But he clung tenaciously to life and, after long hours of anguished suspense, Taya would find him deathly pale but alive and as calm and gentle as always.

"Don't worry, little girl, it's not so easy to kill me. I'll go on living and kicking up a fuss if only to upset the calculations of the learned doctors. They are right in everything they say about my health, but they are gravely mistaken when they try to write me off as totally unfit for work. I'll show them yet."

Pavel was determined to resume his place in the ranks of the builders of the new life. He knew now what he had to do.

Winter was over, spring had burst through the open windows, and Pavel, having survived another operation, resolved that, weak as he was, he would remain in hospital no longer. To live so many months in the midst of human suffering, to have to listen to the groans of the incurably sick was far harder for him than to endure his own anguish.

And so when another operation was proposed, he refused.

"No," he said firmly. "I've had enough. I have shed enough blood for science. I have other uses for what is left."

That day Pavel wrote a letter to the Central Committee, explaining that since it was now useless for him to continue his wanderings in search of medical treatment, he wished to remain in Moscow where his wife was now working. It was the first time he had turned to the Party for help. His request was granted and the Moscow Soviet gave him living quarters. Pavel left the hospital with the fervent hope that he might never return.

The modest room in a quiet side lane off Kropotkinskaya Street seemed to him the height of luxury. And often, waking at night, Pavel would find it hard to believe that hospital was indeed a thing of the past for him now.

Taya was a full-fledged Party member by now. She was an excellent worker, and in spite of the tragedy of her personal life, she did not lag behind the best shock workers at the factory. Her fellow workers soon showed their respect for this quiet, unassuming young woman by electing her a member of the factory trade-union committee. Pride for his wife, who was proving to be a true Bolshevik, made Pavel's sufferings easier to bear.

Bazhanova came to Moscow on business and paid him a visit. They had a long talk. Pavel grew animated as he told her of his plans to return in the near future to the fighting ranks.

Bazhanova noticed the wisp of silver on Pavel's temples and she said softly:

"I see that you have gone through a great deal. Yet you have lost none of your enthusiasm. And that is the main thing. I am glad that you have decided to begin the work for which you have been preparing these past five years. But how do you intend to go about it?"

Pavel smiled confidently.

"Tomorrow my friends are bringing me a sort of cardboard stencil, which will enable me to write without getting the lines mixed up. I couldn't write without it. I hit upon the idea after much thought. You see, the stiff edges of the cardboard will keep my pencil from straying off the straight line. Of course, it is very hard to write without seeing what you are writing, but it is not impossible. I have tried it and I know. It took me some time to get the knack of it, but now I have learned to write more slowly, taking pains with every letter and the result is quite satisfactory."

And so Pavel began to work.

He had conceived the idea of writing a novel about the heroic Kotovsky Division. The title came of itself: Born of the Storm.

His whole life was now geared to the writing of his book. Slowly, line by line, the pages emerged. He worked oblivious to his surroundings, wholly immersed in the world of images, and for the first time he suffered the throes of creation, knew the bitterness the artist feels when vivid, unforgettable scenes so tangibly perceptible turn pallid and lifeless on paper.

He had to remember everything he wrote, word by word. The slightest interruption caused him to lose the thread of his thoughts and retarded his work.

Sometimes he had to recite aloud whole pages and even chapters from memory, and there were moments when his mother feared that he was losing his mind. She did not dare approach him while he worked, but as she picked up the sheets that had fallen on the floor she would say timidly:

"I do wish you would do something else, Pavlusha. It can't be good for you to keep writing all the time like this. ..."

He would laugh heartily at her fears and assure the old lady that she need not worry, he hadn't "gone crazy yet".

Three chapters of the book were finished. Pavel sent them to Odessa to his old fighting comrades from the Kotovsky Division for their opinion, and before long he received a letter praising his work. But on its way back to him the manuscript was lost in the mails. Six months' work was gone. It was a terrible blow to him. Bitterly he regretted having sent off the only copy he possessed. Ledenev scolded him roundly when he heard what had happened.

"How could you have been so careless? But never mind, it's no use crying over spilt milk. You must begin over again."

"But I have been robbed of six months' work. Eight hours of strenuous labour every day. Curse the parasites!"

Ledenev did his best to console his friend.

There was nothing for it but to start afresh. Ledenev supplied him with paper and helped him to get the manuscript typed. Six weeks later the first chapter was rewritten.

A family by the name of Alexeyev lived in the same apartment as the Korchagins. The eldest son, Alexander, was secretary of one of the district committees of the Komsomol. His sister Galya, a lively girl of eighteen, had finished a factory training school. Pavel asked his mother to speak to Galya and find out whether she would agree to help him with his work in the capacity of "secretary". Galya willingly agreed. She came in one day, smiling pleasantly, and was delighted when she learned that Pavel was writing a novel.

"I shall be very glad to help you, Comrade Korchagin," she said. "It will be so much more fun than

writing those dull circular letters for father about the maintenance of hygiene in communal apartments."

From that day Pavel's work progressed with doubled speed. Indeed so much was accomplished in one month that Pavel was amazed. Galya's lively participation and sympathy were a great help to him. Her pencil rustled swiftly over the paper, and whenever some passage particularly appealed to her she would read it over several times, taking sincere delight in Pavel's success. She was almost the only person in the house who believed in his work, the others felt that nothing would come of it and that Pavel was merely trying to fill in the hours of enforced idleness.

Ledenev, returning to Moscow after a business trip out of town, read the first few chapters and said:

"Carry on, my friend. I have no doubt that you will win. You have great happiness in store for you, Pavel. I firmly believe that your dream of returning to the ranks will soon materialise. Don't lose hope, my son."

The old man went away deeply satisfied to have found Pavel so full of energy.

Galya came regularly, her pencil raced over the pages reviving scenes from the unforgettable past. In moments when Pavel lay lost in thought, overwhelmed by a flood of memory, Galya would watch his lashes quivering, and see his eyes reflecting the swift passage of thought. It seemed incredible that those eyes could not see, so alive were the clear, unblemished pupils.

When the day's work was over she would read what she had written and he would listen tensely, his brow wrinkled.

"Why are you frowning, Comrade Korchagin? It is good,

isn't it?" "No, Galya, it is bad."

The pages he did not like he rewrote himself. Hampered by the narrow strip of the stencil he would sometimes lose his patience and fling it from him. And then, furious with life for having robbed him of his eyesight, he would break his pencils and bite his lips until the blood came.

As the work drew to a close, forbidden emotions began more often to burst the bonds of his ever-vigilant will: sadness and all those simple human feelings, warm and tender, to which everyone but himself had the right. But he knew that were he to succumb to a single one of them the consequences would be tragic.

At last the final chapter was written. For the next few days Galya read the book aloud to Pavel. Tomorrow the manuscript would be sent to Leningrad, to the Cultural Department of the Regional Party Committee. If the book was approved there, it would be turned over to the publishers — and then. . . .

His heart beat anxiously at the thought. If all was well, the new life would begin, a life won by years of weary, unremitting toil.

The fate of the book would decide Pavel's own fate. If the manuscript was rejected that would be the end for him. If, on the other hand, it was found to be bad only in part, if its defects could be remedied by further work, he would launch a new offensive.

His mother took the parcel with the manuscript to the post office. Days of anxious waiting began. Never in his life had Pavel waited in such anguished suspense for a letter as he did now. He lived from the morning to the evening post. But no news came from Leningrad.

The continued silence of the publishers began to look ominous. From day to day the presentiment of disaster mounted, and Pavel admitted to himself that total rejection of his book would finish him. That, he could not endure. There would be no longer any reason to live.

At such moments he remembered the park on the hill overlooking the sea, and he asked himself the same question over and over again:

"Have you done everything you can to break out of the steel bonds and return to the ranks, to make your life useful?"

And he had to answer: "Yes, I believe I have done everything!"

At last, when the agony of waiting had become well-nigh unbearable, his mother, who had been suffering from the suspense no less than her son, came running into the room with the cry:

"News from Leningrad!"

It was a telegram from the Regional Committee. A terse message on a telegraph form: "Novel heartily approved. Turned over to publishers. Congratulations on your victory."

His heart beat fast. His cherished dream was realised! The steel bonds have been burst, and now, armed with a new weapon, he had returned to the fighting ranks and to life.

1930-1934