

It is a diary of sorts, chaotic notes, a set of unorganized materials.

The publishers were confused by such disarray. They wanted a more standard form.

It seemed to me that a general artistic idea could be traced in this disorder. One poetic hero moves throughout it. A certain unity of time and place has been observed. In a way, a single banal idea is declared – the world is absurd...

Then I tried to foist *The Zone* on them as a collection of short stories. The publishers said that this would be unprofitable, that the reading public is hungry for novels and sagas.

The matter was complicated by the fact that *The Zone* had been arriving in parts. Before my departure from the Soviet Union I microfilmed the manuscript, and my executor gave out pieces of the film to a few courageous French women who were able to smuggle my work through customs borders. The original is still in the Soviet Union.

Over the last few years I've been receiving tiny packages from France. And I've been trying to compose a unified whole out of the separate pieces.

In some places the film is damaged. (Wherever my kind benefactresses may have hidden it I do not know.) A few fragments were lost entirely.

The reconstruction of a manuscript from microfilm is a laborious job. Even in America, for all its technological greatness, it is not easy. And, by the way, not inexpensive. I've restored about thirty per cent of it to date.

I'm enclosing a piece of the finished text with this letter. I'll send off the next part in a few days. You'll receive the rest of it in the next few weeks. Tomorrow I rent a photo-enlarger.

Perhaps we will be able to make a finished whole out of all of this. I'll try to fill in bits here and there with my irresponsible comments.

The main thing is: be tolerant. And as the prisoner Khamrayev used to say, setting off on a wet job\* – Godspeed!

OLD KALYU PAKHAPIL HATED the occupying forces. What he liked was chorus singing, also bitter home-brewed beer and plump little children.

"Only Estonians ought to live in these parts, and no one else," Pakhapil used to say. "Foreigners have no business here."

The peasants would listen to him, nodding their heads in approval.

Then the Germans came. They played harmonicas, sang, treated the children to chocolate. Old Kalyu didn't like any of it. He was silent for a long time, then gathered his things and went into the forest.

It was a dark forest, and from a distance it gave the impression of being impassable. There Pakhapil hunted, clubbed fish, slept on pine branches. In brief – he lived there till the Russians ousted the occupiers. And when the Germans left, Pakhapil returned. He showed up in Rakvere, where a Soviet captain awarded him a medal. The medal was decorated with four incomprehensible words, a figure and an exclamation mark.

"What does an Estonian need a medal for?" Pakhapil wondered for a long time.

Yet all the same, he carefully pinned it to the lapel of his cheviot jacket. This jacket Pakhapil had worn only once: in Lansman's store, when he bought it.

So he lived and worked as a glazier. But when the Russians announced general mobilization, Pakhapil once again disappeared.

"Estonians ought to live here," he said, departing, "and as for Ivans, Fritzes and all these Greenlanders, there's no place for them here!"

Pakhapil again went into the forest, which seemed impassable only from a distance. And again he hunted, thought and was silent. And everything was going well.