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Архип Тесленко
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У збірці оповідань визначного українського письменника Архипа Тесленка (1882—1911) реалістично відтворено життя найбідніших верств українського селянства кінця XIX — початку XX століття.

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1982 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of the well-known Ukrainian writer, Arkhip Teslenko (1882-1911). He was born to a poor peasant family in Poltava Region. After finishing primary school, Teslenko was forced to search for a job. While working, he also engaged in a process of self-education and acquainted himself with the works of classical writers of world literature as well as those of his homeland. After his arrest for taking part in peasant unrest during the Revolution of 1905-1907, Teslenko was incarcerated in a number of tsarist prisons. This broke his health and led to the writer's premature death.

A deep knowledge of the life of the Ukrainian peasantry at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries and the writer's own bitter life experience form the basis of Arkhip Teslenko's creative work. The author pays special attention to honest, hardworking people whose dreams of a better life are shattered by a harsh reality. Among the heroes of his stories are a mother who torments herself over the fate of her imprisoned son; a servant girl whose dreams of getting married and having her own home remain unfulfilled; and a boy for whom a cup of tea with sugar is an unattainable luxury. The stories are written in the living language of the people which the author knew well and effectively used as a means of opening up the inner world of his characters.

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FARM GIRL

Several women from our village set out for Kiev-town to observe the Feast of the Holy Trinity. I joined them and there was this fellow called Vasyl who also went with us. Well, we walked a day; another; the sun was rather high. Everyone was tired, but there was no shade to rest in, no cooling breeze, only the scorching sun and the dusty road, cutting through the plowed fields. So we trudged on only to come soon to a rye field. Good rye it was, too. Further ahead, we could see a sort of wide valley with a couple or so of country houses clinging to the hillside. Because of the trees, we could see only their roofs. There were a lot of trees, indeed. A little further up the hill stood a windmill. The valley's lush meadows were strewn with many-coloured flowers, and butterflies hovered in the air above the waist-high grass. Right in the middle of the valley was a patch of swamp and a willow clump with reed and sedge undergrowth. And if you looked still further, you could see a forest, stretching like a solid wall over hill and dale. There was just no end to it. Twittering larks and quails, so many of them! Buzzing bees. The road was now lined with willows. And amongst these willows, we spotted a well.

Then and there, we stopped to rest. We sat down and started our meal. Chewing on it, we looked around and fell in love with the place. It seemed a very nice place to live.

Right as we were discussing it, there appeared, as if out of nowhere, a girl picking flowers, sniffing them and casting us one look after another.

One of the women, Priska, said, "Oh, I'm downright thirsty, I sure am." Then she got up and hailed the girl. "Be a good girl and get us a bucket of water, would you?"

Losing no time, the girl ran through the herbs to the hut, got hold of a bucket and obligingly brought it. Priska then told her, "There's a good girl, you have my thanks. And now let me get the water from the well myself."

But the girl held on to the bucket and said, "No, no, I'll do it, I'll do it; haven't seen people for so long!"

She fastened the bucket to the sweep and lowered it into the well. She was dressed in a long vest, all in patches, and wore a threadbare kerchief. She was slim and good-looking, with neat black eyebrows and brown eyes.

The girl brought the bucket up, carried it closer to us and said very humbly, "Here it is, please have a drink. May you be healthy!"

"Thank you so much, dear girl. May God keep you in your good health!" Priska said gratefully and continued, "What's your name, dear girl?"

"Marina."

"May God give you, my dear Marina, a good husband."

Another woman, Omelchykha by name, said, "Whether he sends one or not, we have one here," and she winked at Vasyl. "We'll have this boy married to her."

The girl turned very red in the face and lowered her eyes. Vasyl said, "Probably she doesn't need me, she must have someone... do you?"

The girl didn't reply at first. Then, after a little silence, "No, don't have..." and cast Vasyl a couple of looks from under her brows.

The third woman, called Mudrachka, said, "Young people sure must have what's proper for the young," then she looked at the girl's vest, at the run-down house which didn't even have an entry hall, and concluded, "and that they must have in spite of the wolf at the door."

The girl's blush spread even to her ears. She became aware of the patches on her mended dress and made a movement with her hands, as if trying to conceal them. Another woman from our group, Yakovykha, said, "Don't take it hard, my little one, there's no sin in being poor. To be slothful and mischievous, that's sinful."

These words brought an excited reaction from the girl.

"Oh, I'm good at work! I went to work when I was thirteen... That's right after my father died. What else was there to do? We were four children in the family. Sister Nastusya died last year, may she rest in the Kingdom of Heaven... Besides, there were sister Parasya and brother Mykolka... They were too small... I alone could do some work. So my mother took me to a landlord, in a village rather far away. She was quite glad to have me bringing home some money. 'I can't decide,' she used to say, 'whe-

ther to buy straw for fuel with your money or bread.' I didn't have time to be idle! It wasn't easy work either, and I worked for that landlord for six years nonstop; he wanted me to stay for the seventh. He told me, 'You're obedient and hard-working.' Then, I went to work for another landlord, to be closer to home, in a small village. This winter, I left him too, got the money due me. I worked for him four full years..."

She sadly smiled to herself and looked at everyone, expecting a reaction to her words. Would there be any surprise, or praise? But nobody said a word, except for Priska.

"That's the way it goes, my girl." Then she switched over to complaining, "Oh, my poor blessed shoulders! This sack is so heavy!"

At that, Yakovykha rejoined, "Oh, my good friend, if you only knew how sore my back is after carrying those loaves! It sure is!"

And they launched into a heated argument over whose sack was heavier, and whose food, that each of them carried, would last longer and whose preparations for the trip were better.

Now the girl tried again, "I've worked for landlords for ten years. I've learnt to do so many things... I've had to till the land and tend the oxen..." She stopped and stole a glance at Vasyl. He was mending his *postoly* * and didn't indicate, in any way, that he was listening.

She went on after a little while, "I can do lots of things... If I had to, I could fix a broken plow." Here, she again glanced at Vasyl. And again, no reaction on his part. She turned to the two women engaged in the argument, but they ignored her in their excitement. She stood and asked for attention by silently looking for quite some time. Then she turned away to wipe her tears.

She thought to herself, "They won't even talk with me. And the way they started — 'We'll have her married to this boy...' It's not the first time people talk about getting me married... Just talk!" She burst out crying in earnest.

"Hey, what is it, my dear girl?" Omelchykha paid heed, at last, to the girl. But the girl didn't respond.

"You are not angry with us, are you?"

"Well, no," the girl said.

"What's the matter then?"

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* Peasant footwear, made of raw leather or hide.

"Well, that was... I just remembered that once they tried to marry me off."

"And what came out of it? Tell us."

"I don't know... what I should tell."

"There, there, my dear girl, sit down here, and do tell us."

The girl sat down, wiped her tears and began her story in a plaintive voice. "It looks like I left work for nothing. At Christmas, the landlord allowed me to stay with the other girls... Was I happy! I put on bead necklaces, a sheepskin coat, ribbons and flowers and went to a party the girls were having. There they were sitting and adjusting each other's flowers and silk scarves. All of them were so cheerful too. Then one of them says, 'Hey, let's see who's going to get married by the end of this *Myasnytsya?'* * And another responds like this, 'You're going to be the one. Didn't you get some sort of proposal at the *Pilipivka?'* ** And the first girl quips back, 'And didn't you receive matchmakers after the *Pilipivka?'* And so they went on, giggling, both of them. And I thought to myself, 'See, they are getting their marriages arranged, and they're so young; they can't be more than eighteen, to look at them. And, what about myself?' that's what I was thinking. 'I'm already going on twenty-three! And I've never even had a chance to learn what it feels like having a date.' I took great pity on myself, was real sorry for myself. Those girls had their share of merriment and went out caroling. And poor me, I had only my tears to wipe. They had sung for the woman at whose place we had held the party and took off for the houses next door. And I... I choked with tears, couldn't help crying and rushed back to mama. I went in, said hello, sat down at the end of the table and didn't know what to say; lost my tongue. My mother moved herself down from the *pich* ***, looked at me, smiled and said, 'Well I've got a daughter with pretty eyes, nicely dressed too, and fair to look at.' These words felt like a stab in my heart. 'Fair to look at,' I said. 'What good will it do me if other girls are expecting matchmakers already, and you still

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* Season during which it is allowed to eat meat, esp. after Christmas to Shrovetide.

** Fasting time before Christmas.

*** The stove which occupied a central place in all Ukrainian peasant huts. It was built in such a manner as to provide sleeping space above the oven area.

keep me working. That work's just killing me! Will I ever have a chance to get married? Will I be working for those landlords forever?' And as I was saying it, I knew my mother wasn't to blame. It was only said in disappointment. I sat there, bent over the table, and then the tears came, a lot of tears. My mother burst into tears, too. 'My little dove, my dear daughter, do you think I don't want you to be happy? I've been thinking about that for a long time. But what can we do? There, there, don't cry, my dear daughter, don't cry. If God is willing, you can stay on at your work to the end of the year, then quit. Then, maybe, with God's help things'll turn to the better, and staying here, at home, you'll get proposed to sooner.' I felt so happy that I jumped up, embraced my mother and kissed her. And that twelve months of work was to end for me right after Epiphany... in about a week's time. Time dragged like it never had before. I hardly saw what I was doing; I couldn't think of work, I thought only of leaving. Once, when it was time to slop down the hogs, I was so deep in my glad thoughts; 'So, soon I won't have to do it... And how does it feel not to be working for someone? How will it go?' That's what I was thinking and took the swill to the chicken coop instead of the pigpen. But then, that last day came, I ran to the landlord and said, 'Thanks be to God, and to you, sir. I'm leaving.' He didn't want me to go at first, but I insisted and he gave me my discharge money: three roubles in cash that were still due me. He even thanked me. 'Thank you,' he said, 'for your good and honest work.' I ran home in great joy. 'Mommy, Mommy, I'm not working for anyone any more!'

"I got my three roubles and added them to the seven that I had saved. I had been saving it for so long, putting away, one time, five kopecks, another time ten, that's the kopecks left from what I'd kept for myself from the money I'd used to give Mother. Now I had money to have a wedding party. I'd buy some meat, bread and vodka, too. I'd have enough. I was so happy, that I felt as if I had wings; the only thing was just to wait for nice people to come by with that marriage proposal. But my mother was worried that we lacked so many things in the house. My younger sister Parasya went to work for hire, but I didn't care. I would spread my sewing on the plank bed and listen for the sounds of somebody coming to the house. The moment I heard something, I'd spring up to the window and look

out to see who's coming. And I'd prayed to God; 'My Good Lord, send me a worthy boy to marry.' And one day, I did see them coming, heading right to our house. My Lord! My heart skipped a beat. I hurried to put on my best vest, and tidied myself up. I really didn't know what else to do to present myself properly. My mother was lying stretched out on the *pich;* she had a stitch in her side, and I rushed to her and said, 'Mommy, Mommy, they're coming, they are!' She jumped headlong from the *pich,* started setting the table, dusting up. Then I see the door open. My God! I had to sit down, all shaking. I took a couple of glances at the party that had come to arrange the marriage. The fellow who came to propose seemed to be so good-looking, can't tell you how great he looked! He had, you know, a little black moustache, was red in the face. His sheepskin was open to show his coat and nice girdle, too. Everybody sat down and started talking about one thing and another and looking at me... And I was... My Lord! I didn't know what to do, how to look, what to do with my mouth, what to do with my hands. I had this sewing in my hands that I turned this way and that. And my heart was going a mile a minute. Then this fellow says, 'Hey, it's stuffy in here. I'd better go outside.' And my mother gives me the sign with her head; get outside with him. I got into my shoes, and walked out. He followed me, and there we stood, behind the door. He got into questions; 'How about this, how about that? Are there any other boys around? Do people round here have get-togethers?' I answered him, but thought to myself, real happy, 'So I'm going to be a mistress of a house, a wife! Good Lord! Is it true?' I was so happy. I wanted to laugh. And then he cleared his throat and asked, 'Are you all set up and ready to get married?' 'Yes,' I said. 'And what've you got?' 'Well,' I say, 'I've got dresses, a sheepskin coat, a heavy skirt and two light ones, and a chest as well.' 'What else?' he asks. And then blood shot right into my temples. 'What more do you want?' 'Well, I heard them say you'd worked for the landlord and you've earned something, right?' 'Well,' I said, 'I didn't work for myself only, see.' And then he says 'Ugh... it's not much, it's not much of a dowry, is it?'. Then he turned and went back into the house. Right then my mother was busy breaking eggs into a pan to treat the dear guests. But they got up, grabbed their hats and were gone."

"It's bad of them," said Yakovykha.

And the girl went on miserably, "And they didn't even stay to eat those nicely fried eggs."

"It's too bad," and the women were back to their own conversation.

The girl cried out, "Wait, it's not all. Listen to what happened afterwards. They were gone, and I was so restless, so sad. Well, after some time, there came to our village a steward from Seleznyov. Seleznyov, that's a big landlord, he's got a lease here of about a thousand *desyatinas* * from another lord. Everything around here's leased to him. All those groves and meadows. And lord Seleznyov himself lives yonder".

The girl waved her arm, pointing across the road. There, rather far away, a huge brick building, barns and stacks could be seen.

"Well, as I was saying, the steward came, hired me to work in the tobacco field for thirty-five roubles up to the *Pilipivka.* I sure was glad to be paid so much. 'For the whole year,' I thought to myself, 'I got thirty-six, that's only a rouble more. And now I'd have to work for a much shorter time.' So I signed up. 'After I get the money,' that's what I was thinking, 'I'll buy a cow, a sheep. Then we'll have a different talk!' With so much money in the offing, my mother started nagging me for those ten roubles I had saved. 'Give us at least five, your brother really needs new clothes; we've got to buy this and that.' And I said, 'No, nothing doing.' I even went and bought myself another sheepskin. A very good coat it was too! Real good!"

The girl brightened up at the thought. "Real good! It was overlaid with gray cloth, and had a black fur edging. I couldn't stop at the sheepskin and got myself a new skirt. What a skirt it was! Nice blue, with flowers all over. Red flowers, they were." The girl smiled happily, sticking out her tongue a little in her excitement.

"Then, that day came when I had to start my work in the tobacco fields. There were several of us who had to work there. It was fast, hard and sweaty work. Manure had to be spread and so many other things done. And the landlord sure looked like a landlord should — bull-necked and pot-bellied. He would come out to the field and urge us on; 'Move it, move it,' or, if he'd be near me, he'd pinch me different places or pat me with his hand. I thought it

* Land measure equivalent to 2.7 acres.

fun, I thought it's something if the landlord liked those little pranks. Soon enough, he told me 'Come to my place as a housemaid. You'll be living there sort of lady-like.'

" 'My God,' I thought, 'how great it'd feel to walk around in a real jacket, a long skirt! And my face'll be clean and washed. Can I really be like that? Real lady-like? My God! Isn't it something to be lady-like?! Figure what the boys will say! Then they'll run to me with proposals!' I got so excited, I could have kissed that landlord, you know. 'Isn't he so kind,' I thought. I started working as a maid around the Annunciation." And when she said it, she choked on her words, tears swelled in her eyes, but she went on.

"This being a housemaid... it didn't work out the way I'd thought. The moment there was no one around, he'd come up to me and say 'I'll buy you this, I'll get you that' and he'd... and he'd... My God, I'm ashamed even now to think of it. And he had a wife, too! And those children! After some time, I told my mother what was going on and she said, 'He's no good. Leave him.' And so I did. And thanked him, too. He didn't stop me, but said 'All right. But now, watch it.' That's what he said. And he didn't say it for nothing. In about a week or so, a man brings some kind of an official paper. 'That's a summons,' he says, to appear in court for trial, day after tomorrow.' 'Court? Trial?' my Mom and I cried. We were scared stiff. Well, the day came, and I went. And mighty frightened I was, too! Everything was so frightening! So they asked me, 'Did you leave the landlord's employ?' What could I say? 'I did,' I replied. I was shaking, shaking all over. There and then they read to me, 'You have to pay back twenty-five roubles.' Pay Seleznyov back." Again, the girl was overcome by tears.

"No matter how much we wailed and moaned, nothing helped. I had to give that money back and back to work I'd have to go..."

"Well, time to move on," someone said. We began packing.

"Oh, you're taking off already?" asked the girl, mixing words with tears. "I can't stand it any longer... can't stand working for landlords any more." Then, after a small silence, she said, "What of it that I can't stand it?" And added, almost in a whisper, "I'm not working yet... maybe..." and blushed, took the hem of her skirt and rumpled it in her hands.

"If.. Sister Parasya could work for the landlord," she said.

Getting no response, she added, "I've got a sheepskin, a very good one, overlaid with gray cloth. I've got two of them."

Vasyl grinned, then glanced at the poor house and wrinkled his nose in disapproval. There were tears in the girl's eyes.

We started on our way. She followed us with her eyes for some time and then burst into a loud wailing.

"How can I get married without having cattle? Am I to dwindle away to nothing? My God! What can I do? Where do I get those cattle?"

* * *

In about a week's time, on our way back from Kiev, we arrived in that same little village. As the previous time, we sat down to rest. I remembered the girl and wanted badly, for some reason, to see her again. I looked around but she was nowhere to be seen. So I said to Vasyl, "Let's go to the house, as if we're looking for a bucket." We walked up to the house, but didn't find the girl anywhere about. We went inside. We didn't find the girl indoors either. There was an old woman all by herself, lying on a plank bed and moaning.

"Could you give us a bucket?"

"Mykola, go find one."

We saw a boy, all in rags, climb down from the *pich.*

Then I asked, "And where is your daughter?"

The old woman sighed very heavily, did not answer my question, but asked in return, "Did you know her?"

"We did."

"Well, then, she's not around any more," and added through tears. "She's married; I married her off."

"You did, did you?"

The old woman said, "It was like this. They came and demanded 'Where's the landlord's money? Give it here!' 'We don't have any.' Then they got hold of those dresses and scribbled something. And she, poor soul, hollered, 'Help, help... there goes my dowry, my dowry's gone! Oh, my sheepskin, my gray beauty, oh my skirt, my blue skirt!' She went on and on like that. She cried and cried until she drowned herself... in the swamp water!"

The old woman buried her face in the pillow and gave way to moaning. "Oh my dear child, oh my little daughter... Where have you gone? What son-in-law will you bring me now?"

We went outside. The boy led the way to her grave. We followed him. The grave — flowers all around, cherry trees, the shining sun, chirping birds, a nightingale's singing. And the girl wouldn't look at us distrustfully, from under her brows.

Rest in peace, brown eyes!

[*1905*]

TO GET A PASSPORT

Once, during the August fast, I went to the *volost* * office on some business. It was one of those fine days when the weather was warm and sunny. Over at the office they even had the windows open — two of them, that is. Through one, a clerk was spitting out the bones of a herring he was polishing off; in the other there was a guard pouring water out of a pitcher. I went to the door and saw a lad sitting on the steps outside. He hung his head low and didn't stir.

"Morning!" I said. "Do you know if the chief is in?"

He sort of started, lifted his face, gazed woodenly at me, and drooped his head again. He was skinny and deeply tanned, his nose was peeling, and he looked pretty dismal. What he wore didn't help any; his coat was all torn, his cap was so worn out that it had got rusty, his pants had patches on the knees, and his boots were pretty far gone. He surely cut a miserable figure. But, actually, he was a rather nice-looking, well-built fellow. Black eyebrows, a smart moustache, fine curls — it was all there.

"Is the chief here?" I asked him again. He glared back at me.

"What?" he said. And then, "No."

"All right, I'll wait then," I said and sat down next to him. Neither of us spoke. Finally, he spat and blurted out, like he was speaking to himself, "Going God knows where and what for!"

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* Small rural administrative unit in tsarist Russia.

"Who's going where?" I asked.

"Down to the coast, that's where I'm going. Never been there before, though. But now I'm going there all by myself, because I just have to. Ah, is that life?" He waved his hand.

"Why are you going?" I asked.

"He just doesn't want to work, I bet," said the clerk in the window. He finished his herring, wiped his mouth and shut the window. The lad blinked like he was going to cry, then swallowed hard, smiled wryly and said, "That's unfair, that bit about me not wanting to work. Because I've been a farmboy as long as I can remember. And that's been ever since my mother died and father remarried."

"So you've been around then?" I encouraged him.

"You'd be surprised," he said. "I was out plowing when I was still so small I couldn't get a rope over an ox's horns. But there I was, stumbling in the furrows all the way across the field. Always barefooted, too, getting my feet pricked and sore and chapping. And then I'd come back from the field and see the landlord's kids screaming and fooling around like well-fed pigs. And I'd hurt all over, but I wasn't even supposed to complain. Nobody gave a damn if I'd had time to gulp down some *borshch.* Just hurry and get the oxen out for the night! And out I'd go before I could even bandage a scratch. That's what it used to be like! Now too, it's the same thing. Look here!"

He showed me his palms and they were all calloused and chapped. He grinned, "See that? 'Doesn't want to work,' he says. And I've been working for the landlord, and how!"

"Which landlord?"

"The one who married the lady from that estate over beyond Bulany Rudka. They say he's actually the city type, not from the gentry. That's the one. They're worse than dogs, that lord and lady, I tell you! And now I've had it. I just won't stand for it any more. Look!" The lad drew closer to me. "Down there they run a machine for threshing, so you've got to work like hell all day long. And that makes you so tired that you might as well drop on the stubble and sleep right there. Now then, night before last I ate some supper and lay down to snatch some sleep. But the steward said, 'Oh, no, get the oxen out to graze.' And I was dead tired, I tell you. So I drove those oxen, but I couldn't even keep my eyes open. My head was nodding and my feet were all numb. I sat down on a mound and dropped off right

away. Then I woke up and the oxen weren't anywhere around. I rushed here and there and they were almost halfway into a field of buckwheat. So I knew at once I was in big thouble. Got scared as hell too, because I guessed I couldn't get away with it. Then, at breakfast time, the steward came over to the thresher. 'Come see the landlord.' he says. I went after him and the landlord was strolling in the garden with his lady. 'You scoundrel,' he says. 'Why did you let the buckwheat get trampled down?' 'Because I was tired and wanted to sleep,' I told him. 'Oh, what a gentleman!' he says. 'Wanted to sleep. Did you really? And what do I pay you money for? Is that what you get paid for?' And he cracked me right across the mug with his hand. And she breaks in, 'Rascal! I didn't like him even before this. Once, he was stacking wheat as I went by, and he didn't even touch his cap!' And she pursed her lips. The landlord says to the steward, 'Well done, Sevastyan! Good of you to have reported him. You get material for a new pair of pants. That'll be a month out of his pay. See to that!' I went back to work but I couldn't get anything done, because I was really angry. 'How can it be?' I thought. What am I — an ox? Is it all right for him to go around slapping me in the face and making all that fuss about paying me money? And how can they expect me to snatch off my cap when I'm so tired I can't even see straight. 'May you rot in hell!' I said to myself. 'You aren't all the world to me.' I just threw aside the pitchfork, picked up my coat and quit. But first I went to see the landlord again. 'So you're taking a month's pay off me,' I tell him. 'Then at least give me what you still owe me for the other half a month.' Because, actually, he hadn't paid me for one and a half months. 'Forget it,' he says. 'All right,' I say. 'Have it your own way. But I'm going — all the way to the Black Sea country.' 'Good,' he says, 'Good.' So I went. I thought I'd rather go and tell Father all about it and ask his advice and figure out for myself if I should go to the Black Sea country right away or stay home for a while and have some fun for a change."

The lad shook his head.

"Oh, boy," he sighed. "I wish you knew how much I wanted to spend some time at home and maybe go out a couple of nights and meet some girls. And this year's call-up is now over, so I've heard. It was just about midday when I came home. There was a din in the house so, for a

while, I just stood outside, listening. It was step-mother nagging Father, 'At least get some oil or fish, because we can't even cook a decent *borshch.* Is that the way to feed the children? Just what kind of father are you to them?' Then Father talked back, 'God damn you and your children! What shall I buy them with?' I went right in and Father was on his feet peeling garlic and looking pretty angry. Step-mother was sitting over the *borshch,* wiping tears and feeding a turnip to one of the kids. The other four kids were sitting all around her, trying hard to fish something out of that *borshch."*

At this point, a man in a straw hat came over to us, asked for the chief and then also sat down next to us. The lad shut up.

"So?" I urged him on.

"Well... So I came in and the old man swung towards me at once. 'Aha!' he says. 'Maybe you've brought some money? Come on, give it to me!' I said nothing to that. I just wondered whether I should give it to them straight. Then I said, 'Wait till you hear what kind of money I'm bringing, Dad.' And I told them everything. Step-mother listened for a while and then whined, 'Oh, dear, dear! He just doesn't want to work, that's what it is. He just can't behave! Now we'll have to feed him too.' And Father yelled at me, 'Just what do you think you're doing? Go back, you dumb fool. Ask them to forgive you. Work and behave, because we've got to live! We've just got to live somehow!' He grabbed a roller and went after me, so I just cleared out. Then I sat in the weeds and I was in a pretty bad shape. That was surely a nice piece of advice I got! 'Go back and ask!' Why should I ask them? They treated me like dirt; they didn't give a damn about me and here I was told to ask them to forgive me! 'Nothing doing,' I thought. Like hell I will! I'd be going tomorrow by all means! So I sat there glancing at the sun from time to time, because I even wanted the time to go faster until it was tomorrow and I could go. Then — wait! Just how would I get there? I didn't have a kopeck. That was a nice fix to be in! Then it was dark, the moon rose, the village boys and girls were singing and laughing at a gathering somewhere, and I was sitting in the weeds. I went to the barn and lay there, turning from side to side and thinking hard. What should I do? Where should I get the money? Borrow it? From whom? Who'd lend anything to a beggar like me? It looked like I'd have

to pawn my Sunday coat — that was the only way. So, in the morning, I got into the closet and took it. It's worth seven roubles, so I got five. Now I have to see the chief and get a passport." *

"May God help you!" said the man in the straw hat.

"Thank you! So that's the way it is with me. Now I'm going, but the winter is already near at hand and what if I don't get a job? Oh, damn this life!" He waved his hand again and hung his head.

"Cheer up, son," the man turned to him. "You should probably know that before the winter is just the right time to go. For the winter, many farmhands leave there for home and I only wish you knew how many cattle and sheep they've got down there. You can't imagine! Now's the time to go, I tell you!"

The lad raised his head and stared at him. The man went on, "You can't imagine! When's the chief coming, I wonder? I'll have a smoke then." He got a pipe and a flint out of his pocket. "You can't imagine! Going there for the winter is surely the right thing to do! Lots of sheep and cattle down there, I can tell you. It's going to turn out just right, do you hear? I ought to know, because I guided blind beggars there in my time, see? You can't imagine! By God, some fellows have struck it really lucky down there!"

He lit his pipe and began his story.

"When I was still a bachelor, I once spent a whole winter down there. Ran across some really fine people, too! It was a small family — just an old farmer, his wife and their daughter, Marusya. They had about twenty *desyatinas* of land. By God, it was really great working for them! I'd work a little, then I could take all the rest I needed. And the grub! Boy, here we don't eat like that even at Easter! They fed me like a pig — meat, milk and the whole works!"

The lad was now all ears.

"That's where I put on some weight, too. You can't imagine! My mug got this big, see? And my neck, too, it got as big as a barrel — just like that, see?" The man showed how big his face and neck used to be and the lad smiled.

"Do you mean they actually give you meat and milk down there?" he asked.

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* Here the author is speaking about an internal passport, not one valid for foreign travel.

"You can't imagine! As much as you want!"

"Is that so?" the lad said admiringly. "And here those *halushkas* * that you almost have to force down is just about all I've been getting to eat."

"Well, it's surely different there! You can't imagine! Down there you'll get beefy fast."

"If only it were true!" the lad grinned. "Because I've gotten pretty skinny, I guess. Also, the girls don't care much for me. A cholera case — that's what they call me!"

"That too is different down there! You still don't know what I had with that farmer's daughter! Well, after some time there, I turned into a really smart beefy guy and she surely didn't miss it. So she started to tease me. She'd pass me and touch me with her hand or something, like it was unintentional, you know. Also she was making calve's eyes at me and smiling too."

The lad flushed deeply and his jaw dropped as he listened.

"And smiling too. And me — I just didn't dare. I had it figured out that she was the master's daughter after all. And me — what was I? But once, we were turning hay and it so happened that there was nobody else around. We sat down to rest and she took a flower and tapped me with it, just like that. So I grew bold and did the same to her. Then she drew close to me, stared into my eyes and then said, 'I love you.' "

The lad even licked his lips.

"Well then," the man went on. "I don't know what happened among the three of them. But after this her old man started to drop hints to me. 'You're a decent fellow,' he'd say. 'We're surely happy with you because you're honest and hard-working and you know how to manage things properly. If only God would send us a husband like you for our Marusya!' "

The man shook his head. The lad asked him, cheerfully, "Do you mean people down there woud actually let their daughter marry a farmhand — like me, for example?"

"Sure, why not?" the man replied.

"So how did it work out for you?" I asked him.

The man scratched his head under the straw hat. "Ah," he sighed. "I was tempted, God damn it! I went to town

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* National Ukrainian dish — bits of unleavened dough boiled in water or milk.

to sell wheat and had the bad luck to run across some friends from my native village. Took them to a tavern of course. Then, of course, everybody got roaring drunk, God damn it. Came back without a kopeck. That was pushing good luck too far, if you know what I mean."

"Well, I won't be tempted!" the lad cried out and sprang to his feet. "I won't, by God! If only some good luck came my way, I wouldn't push it!" He sank back onto the steps.

The man went on to tell us how the old farmer and his wife had taken a dislike to him, how they were paying him off and how their daughter was crying when he was leaving them. But the lad was no longer listening. Some hope or something must have stirred in him, because he couldn't even sit still. He kept fidgeting — now stretching out his legs, now crossing them, and shifting his eyes around. He didn't speak for some time and then blurted out, quite irrelevantly, "I wouldn't push my luck — no, not me! If only I had some luck! It would be just great to be a true farmer and to own land! I bet Father would be really happy then!"

He stroked his moustache, took off his cap, smoothed his curls and giggled, "Now how do they go about wooing a girl?"

The chief drove up. Before he had time to get out of the cart, the lad darted to him, snatched off his cap and beamed at him, "Good morning, sir!"

"Morning," said the chief. "Want something?"

"A passport, sir."

"What for?"

"I'm going. I'll go far — all the way to the coast." He showed with his hand and laughed.

The chief wrinkled his forehead.

"Wait," he said. "What's your name?"

"Pavlo Hrishchenko, sir."

"What? Did you say Hrishchenko? No passports for you! Your landlord has filed a complaint requesting that you not be issued with such. You've left him without his permission. Swine! Go back to work!"

The lad froze in his tracks and stood speechless. His face turned white as a sheet.

Some time passed before he trudged away, dazed.

[1905]

It was on a Sunday last year, shortly after the Easter holiday. I ate my lunch and drifted over to the garden. Now, why did I go there, you may ask me? Actually, I had no business in that garden. I just went to see the trees in blossom.

And blossom they did! Those cherry trees looked like they were sprayed solid with foaming milk, if you know what I mean. Their whiteness was dazzling in the bright sunshine. The bees were making a feast of it. The air was still, so they were humming and swarming all over the place. It was all very beautiful indeed and the smell was sweet, too. It was simply a pleasure, especially when a nightingale started trilling.

But then I heard something crackle not far from where I stood. I wondered what it could be, so I ducked and looked around. And it was Petro, Omelko's son, climbing over the wattle fence into Simin's orchard. The fellow was dressed up in his Sunday best — a new cap set smartly on one side and a new coat unbuttoned and showing a blue waistcoat beneath. He got inside the fence and tiptoed into the orchard. I got curious. Aha! I should've guessed right away. It was Marusya sitting there under a snowball-tree! She looked mighty pretty, wearing flowers in her hair, a bead necklace, a new long vest and an embroidered blouse. She looked like some flower herself with her black eyebrows, her glowing face, and a red ribbon woven into her braid. She sat toying with blue flowers. Petro stole up to her.

"Hey!" he said softly.

She started, raised her head graciously like a swan, and laughed.

"What a one you are!" she said. "Now I'll give it to you!" And she struck him with the flowers on the coat. He shook his finger at her.

"Now, now," he said. "Why don't you come out to the gathering?"

"I'm just waiting for more of them to gather," she said and suddenly tugged at the flap of his coat. He flopped down next to her, put his arm round her neck and she tapped him with the flowers on the face, once or twice, and then leaned over to him.

Well, I don't know what fine words they were whispering there to each other. I only saw that every now and then she

pressed her hand to her breast, looked up at the nightingale and snuggled up to him and he held her close to him. "There are truly happy people," I thought to myself. And then somebody called her. What a pity, I thought. I'd have left them in peace to enjoy each other like that. I looked around to see who it was.

"Marusya! Marusya!" That was Simin, her father, calling from the house. "Come over here."

They both sprang up to their feet.

"Maybe matchmakers have come," Petro said. "Now is the time to send them."

Marusya dusted her clothes, smoothed her skirt, picked some grass and brushed her shoes.

"Mind you," said Petro. "If those are really matchmakers, just give them a pumpkin *. We're still young, so we can go together for a while, just like this. It's really nice, isn't it? And then we'll get married with God's help. And be sure to come out to the gathering!"

"I will, so don't you worry," said Marusya.

She started towards the house, walking carefully, stopping every now and then and looking out from behind the trees.

"Be sure to come!" Petro called once again, climbed over the fence and went to the gathering where the village boys and girls were already beginning to sing. Marusya reached the edge of the garden and froze in her tracks. She just stood there motionless. I took a look at the house and there stood some city type in soiled clothes holding a whip. Father told her to come closer to them.

"Now, young girl, will you work for me?" the man asked her.

"We'll get her to work for you, whether she wants to or not," Simin said.

The poor girl broke into tears.

"It just can't be helped, crying or no crying," said her father. "All this time I've kept you at home without a job only because I've had pity for you, but now it's really time I had you hired out. You're already a grown-up girl, thank God, so you need this and that, you know. The others (Simin also had three younger children) are also growing up and they, too, need things. And then, of course, all of

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* Refuse a proposal (old Ukrainian custom).

us need lots of things, too. And me — just what can I do all by myself? Also, people talk. Such a big girl, they say, and he keeps her at home in such misery. That's how it is. But now this good man has turned up, thank God. He's offering you thirty-five roubles a year plus clothing. Where else shall we get it? Go ahead and take his offer, so you can help us some, too."

Marusya's mother, too, was now wiping tears, but she said all the same, "Get hired, daughter, because there's really nothing we can do about it. The way it is, we're actually lucky to have come across this gentleman. I guess this job must be easier than on a farm or some place else."

"Sure!" said the man. "No sweat at all! We just slaughter calves and do some business. Plenty of time left over to have a walk or just sit around. And then, of course, you'll live in town. Down there we run things in the civilized way." He was really a funny fellow.

Marusya didn't speak. She went into the house and when she came out again she wore plain clothes and there were no flowers and no beads. She got onto the cart next to the butcher and away they went.

As the cart rolled past the boys and girls out at the gathering, Petro saw her and turned chalk white. Marusya covered her face with her kerchief and her whole body shook as she sobbed.

"That's really some fine gathering for her!" I thought to myself.

About two weeks later I went to town myself. I dropped in here, rushed there, and when I was done and it was time to go home, dusk had already fallen. So I was walking home in the dusk and it was also very quiet. I was going down the street and some girl wearing a blouse, a skirt and a kerchief was walking barefooted on the sidewalk. Normally, I wouldn't have given her another thought, but I saw that some town fellows, all dressed up, wearing fancy black jackets and creaking boots or maybe shoes, were tagging after her. They surely looked like decent young men to me, except that they were actually pursuing that girl. They'd look around to make sure there was no gentleman or somebody like that in sight, and then they'd suddenly pretend to sneeze or cough loudly to give her a fright, or else push each other so that one of them would end up bumping into her, like it was accidental. And she was almost crying, poor thing.

"Why are you bothering me?" she kept saying. "What do you want from me?"

I watched it all for a while and then I grew bold enough and turned to them.

"Just what do you think you're doing?" I asked them. "You're townsfolk after all. Aren't you supposed to be civilized?"

They hung around some more, one of them called me a bumkin, but then they quit. I looked at the girl, but she didn't respond. So we went along together. Suddenly I had a feeling I'd seen her before. I had a closer look at her and saw that it was Marusya! She was in pretty bad shape too; her cheeks were drawn and her eyes were glossy and sort of sunken.

"Is that you?" I asked. "How's life?"

"That's just what it's like," she said through tears. "I went out on an errand and ran across them, and they began pestering me."

"But who are those depraved fellows?" I asked.

"Clerks and shoemakers, that's what they are. They get together every night and just look around for some hired girls."

"That's bad," I said.

"It's all right," she said. "It can be much worse, like —" She wept. "Once," she went on, plaintively, "I was sent out to get some bread. I went out and it was so nice outside. The moon was shining, and it was warm and quiet. Also, there are some trees on the street where we live, and the smell of the lilac was so sweet. And then some boys and girls were singing somewhere and — oh, God! — my heart was breaking..."

She didn't finish. I guess she was going to say something about Petro but didn't. Then she said, after a pause;

"There they sat, singing and speaking sweet words to each other. Oh, God! I would've flown there if I could! But I only cried and walked on. And then, suddenly, somebody grabbed me as I was going along the fence. I screamed but they held my mouth shut. It was a lonely street, so they, they — "She didn't finish, covered her face with her hands and broke into sobs. "My God!" she said. "Oh, my God!"

She sobbed like that until she turned the corner and was gone.

[*1905*]

Once, not long before Christmas, I was on my way to a town hospital. It was cloudy, it was well below freezing and it was windy. The wind was strong. Its gusts picked up easily yielding snow from the fields and hurled some of it right into my ears, hissing viciously. There was, though, one good thing about this strong wind. It helped me walk by pushing me from behind. Powerful pushes they were, too. So, I was walking thus in this weather. When it was about... how many *versts?* * Well, I still had some *versts* to go to the town when I caught up with a woman wearing an old sheepskin. She hobbled along, all bent, leaning heavily on her walking stick. I greeted her and then said:

"You're cold?"

And she answered, as if in great pain, "I am, sonny. My chest's sore inside and my head's burning with fever. If... if not for the wind, I wouldn't have the strength to walk, I'd have to lie down right away."

"And where are you heading in this cold and in your shaky condition?" I said.

"Have to see the *zemstvo* ** chief, sonny, have to see him to tell him of my grief and sorrow," and she pulled a handkerchief out of sleeve, wiped her tears and continued.

"Brought up a son, for great misfortune and great sin. That's why I'm crying now; crying for him, and crying for myself. I fed him all right, but never taught him right."

I slowed down to match the tottering pace of the old woman. I was a little disconcerted by her words. It took her some time to overcome her tears and then she started to tell her story.

"Didn't teach him what's right... only did things to spoil him. He's the only one left... the youngest... all the other children died. The only one, and half-orphan too. His father died when the boy was about six. Left his boy who was so little. And I brought my little son up to be a man. But what kind of a man?

"He was so little, and yet, oh my, so smart, well, I tell you, real smart. He would gather some twigs and make a toy house or a barn. Or he'd bring home leaves of thyme and strew them round on the floor ***. Or else, he'd get

* Unit of distance equal to 0.6 miles.
** A local administration body in tsarist Russia.
*** For mint smell and decoration.

green boughs to decorate the house for Trinity Sunday. And if he'd find a beetle, or some kind of a crawler, he'd look at him, and turn him this way and that way, and do no harm to him. My God, he was real smart, my son was!

"Once I remember I was weeding my bean patch and he ran up from the garden like a chicken and brought me a may bug on a burdock leaf. So he brought me the bug and asked 'Mom, what's this?' 'A may bug,' I say. 'And what are may bugs for? Why do may bugs want to live?' 'Bugs don't care. Only people want to live,' I say. 'Does he bite?' 'No, he doesn't,' I say. 'Why is he crawling?' 'He's got those legs to crawl with,' I say. 'And if he didn't have those legs, would he crawl? 'Tear them off, and see what happens,' I say. That's what I said, really and truly; 'Tear them off!' And the boy says 'Is it good to do that?' 'It's all right, never mind.' I say. 'Will it hurt him?' 'He doesn't hurt,' I say. And he did it, my boy. He got down to tearing those legs off, one by one. And while he was at it, he asked, 'Mommy, he's twisting. Why's he twisting this way?' 'Rap him.' And so the boy did. He knocked the bug against the ground and cudgelled him, saying 'Don't twist, don't twist...' And that other time he found a bird's nest with some nestlings. 'What is it, mommy?' 'It's a bird's children.' And he pointed to the nest. 'Is this sort of a bird's house?' 'Yes, that's it,' I say. 'Are birds like people then? With houses and children?' 'Here,' I say, 'you've got it a little wrong; birds are birds and people are people. You can't compare them.' 'What, then, are they good for?' 'To play with, that's what they're for,' I say. And so he took those nestlings and started to maul them. He kept at it till he broke the skin open. He broke the nestling's skin open and said, 'Mommy, there's some blood. Is it right to draw blood?' 'Why not?' I say. And so he, with no more words, went ahead skinning them altogether, and didn't stop at that, but went into breaking their wings off. And I was looking at all that and only grinned. 'There's a good plaything,' I thought, 'for my boy'. And those nestlings, they cheeped and peeped and opened their tiny bills, so full of suffering... and the mother-bird... Jesus Christ! She flew round, this way and that, poor thing, and squeaked and cried, like any human would, and lacked only the words to say, 'Oh, help, help me, there's my dear children, my dear children being killed!' My God, it was real torture for her! Makes me shudder! But then, I had my heart and mind

closed shut. I did. And how could I forget that those living things are from God, and they want to live, exactly the way people do. But I didn't care. I just wanted my Andriy to be happy. Did I know then what my permissiveness would lead to? I didn't but I learnt it recently. Now I see that my child was so very good and that I pushed him onto the wrong path. My God, My God! Then the time came when he stopped building his toy houses and petting bugs and turned to tormenting all he came across... And he didn't ask me any more. And he got to a point, my sonny did, when he rushed once into the house, all cheerful; 'Mommy, mommy, we were playing, and I crammed dirt into Hnat's mouth! I stuffed him with it and he only made funny sounds! I got mad at it and drew his blood. I punched his nose and the blood went drip-a-drip. And I said to him, not at all scoldingly, 'Why do you do such things, my child?' And he said, 'It feels good to do them.' 'Good? Watch, my son, that people don't do the same things to you.' And I patted him on the head. What a fool I was, wasn't I?! 'He's a child,' I thought to myself. 'You can't punish him; he feels so fine doing those things.' God Almighty, what came out of it!

"Well, he was like this in many ways. Once, he saw the neighbour's daughter in their garden. It's right next to ours. He saw the girl and, for no reason, started throwning clumps of dirt at her. For no reason at all! The girl scrambled off and he ran after her. He chased her right into their garden, right into their vegetables. And you know what he did? He started breaking the sunflowers and scattering the turnips. And I saw him do all this, and just stood in the shed, watching and smiling. 'That makes him feel strong,' I thought to myself, and was even sort of proud of him. 'My son won't be a milksop.' And the neighbours weren't at home; they had gone to put in their crops. Besides, I sort of locked horns with them. 'Let him play,' I thought. So he ran round the garden, chasing the girl. He gave her a good chase, got into their cucumbers, and stomped on them, and stomped. Then he bent down, pulled out two cucumbers, and ran back to me. He comes up close and shows me those cucumbers. 'Look, mommy, see what I got! Just pulled them out, I did!' 'And what did you do that for, my child?', I say. 'Well, I can make some kind of little trough or a bowl.' And I didn't tell him it was wrong. 'Let him play,' I thought to myself, 'it'll do him good'. Then,

in a short while, he brought a second armful of cucumbers. And the only thing I told him was, 'Just be careful you don't get caught.'

"Since that time, he got into making off with other people's things, raided fruit gardens. He would sneak into somebody else's garden and would start knocking their apples and pears down. So many of them! You could understand it if we didn't have our own, but we did! He didn't care to get them from our own garden. 'I like them,' he said, 'from someone else's places.' And I thought to myself; 'My sonny is sure going to manage his house and garden well, will count his pennies well, too. He won't be any idler either. Holy Mother, Heavenly Queen, keep my son safe, keep him just alive, just alive.' That's what I thought. But, My Lord Jesus, I'd better... I'd better... I should have strangl... strangled him then... And the woman again gave way to tears. "Oh All-merciful God! Oh All-holy Lord! And when somebody told me that I should teach the boy, teach him right, I'd even get mad at it. 'They want me to torment my child,' I thought. I'd tell them 'When he grows up he'll understand all those things himself.' And he grew up quickly. Soon I took him to school. He schooled only through half one winter and then got kicked out. Why? Well, people told me, 'He didn't study anything. He just kept fighting with other students and stealing their lunches from their bags.' And I wouldn't believe it and would swear at people, 'You speak evil of my son out of your own meanness, you so-and-so!' And his teacher, I thought, said those nasty things about the boy only because he'd wanted his palm greased.

"He, my son, was a fidgety one too. He was restless, couldn't sit still for a moment. And the moment he'd come among other children, they'd scatter in all directions, like chickens hiding from a hawk. Some would just run away, some would begin crying. And I thought to myself, 'That's good, they should all fear my son.' And when he was in his teens, he was just the same way with youngsters. I used to give him some money, ever now and then — sometimes ten kopecks and sometimes twenty-five. 'Take this money, my child. Other boys have fun and you should have some too.' Or, he wouldn't turn up for the night and would sleep in the daytime and I didn't know where he'd been. 'Well, that's alright,' I thought to myself, 'let him get his sleep, my dear son. He should have his health nice and ready

to be a good farmer.' Every so often I'd tell him, 'You, Andriy, could do well if you'd chop firewood, or do this, or slop the pigs.' I didn't have any other livestock except those pigs. But he'd snap in return, 'Can't you do it yourself?' and disappear. Just think of it! When he was small, he wanted and tried to do everything I did. If he saw me get up, he would likewise get up. If I was about to stoke the *pich,* he'd be by my side, watching. He was so good at watching me do things! If I peeled a turnip or rolled a bread roll to put into the oven, he'd hang around and try to do the same. And if I went outside to weed my garden, he went about doing the same. Or if I sat down to spin the thread — for I'm a weaver, thanks be to God —, well, the moment I would sit down to that spinning of mine, he'd watch me and watch me, and then would ask, 'Mommy, let me try, let me!' That's what he was like. So why didn't I teach him further; why didn't I encourage him? Oh, woe betide me! If one doesn't know how to raise one's own children properly, one shouldn't have them at all. Whenever he tried to do chores, I'd say, 'I'll do it, leave it, my child, leave it to me. The time will come for you to do all those things. You'd better get some sleep right now.' When the sharecroppers would bring me my half of the crop — and I have about five *desyatinas* of land — he'd say, 'Mom, how do they unload sheaves, or harness their horses? I'm going out to have a look.' And I'd tell him; 'Why should you? What if they ask you to help them? Don't go.'

"When he was going on twelve, I thought the time had come for him to get used to doing some chores around the house. The chance to get him started came when we had barley brought to us. I went to fetch him and found him sleeping. He was good to look at — broad shoulders and tall, too. 'Well, the time's come for him to start,' I thought to myself. So I shook him awake and said, 'Get up, get that flail and start threshing!' Earlier, I used to hire people to do it for me. He blinked, and what'd he do? He just rolled over! And it was already late into the day. 'Hey, don't do that! Get up, get up, I tell you!' I say. And you know what he did? He just raised his head, by Christ he did, gave me a dirty look and kicked me in the chest with his foot. By Jesus he did! I don't know how that kick didn't send me sprawling head over heels. I dragged myself to the table and bent over it. Tears ran down my face like water. And I felt so sorry for myself, so sorry! Was it right to be

kicked like that for all my love? Good Jesus! Even now, when I come to think of it, I just..."

Her face contorted miserably, her eyes shut. " 'Well, I say to him, 'I'm going to leave you alone for you to do what you please, God help you. And our grain... our grain I leave for the mice.'

"I was real mad, I was, and wanted to keep shut and not talk to him. He put on his high airs for a couple of days, and then I heard him working the flail. I stopped sulking and I was real happy. My son will turn to work now, he will' I thought to myself. As I was stoking the *pich* to make dinner, again I thought, 'After he's finished threshing, he's got to do some repairs around the place. The sheds sure need mending and the barn needs a new roof. Should have been done long ago; everything's falling apart. And then he'll get himself a horse for sure and he's going to work the fields. Life's going to be good!' That's what I thought. They were real glad thoughts and I put two pieces of meat into the *borshch* instead of the usual one. Right, two pieces. 'He deserves a good meal,' I thought to myself, 'he really does, my good little man.' So, I got his *borshch* ready and went to call him. No answer. The barn's open; thet flail's silent. I rushed in only to find chickens in the barn. The grain's scattered everywhere and pecked. 'Andriy, Andriy!' I called. No answer! And he was nowhere in sight either. I chased the chickens out, went back into the house, went out again. Well, some time later, what'd I see? Jesus Christ! There were several people coming my way — the policeman, our village elder and three or so more men. And my son was right in the middle of them. He was white in the face, too, white as chalk. My God, my God! I turned cold with fright, couldn't budge from where I was standing.

"And the policeman said, 'Tell me, good woman, where did your son spend last night?' I was too scared to speak.

" 'Well, he was hanging around the bee-garden,' the policeman says, 'was after honey. He stole one of Ilchenko's hives and bashed in the watchman's head.'

"So they took him away to our village office. And I... I don't know where I found enough strength to get back into the house. And the moment I was inside, I fell down on the bed. There was that *borshch,* sitting on the table, and getting cold. And I started wailing. 'Damned be that meal! Why didn't you get taken to hell when you were

still little? That's the kind of help you are!' Well, I went on wailing and moaning like that for quite some time. 'Oh, just you wait,' I thought to myself, 'just you wait! When you come back, you know what I'm going to tell you? Get out!' Well, he did come back soon. I looked at him and felt sorry for him right away.

" 'Andriy, oh Andriy,' I say, 'what have you done! You're going to get locked away in prison.' And he went on pacing the room, back and forth, and would turn white and then red, and then white and red again.

" 'Prison? Let it be prison,' he says. 'If I get a term, alright, I get a term. But it isn't going be for nothing. Drat it all! Bad luck this time, they got me. But other times nobody suspected anything! Was it ever nice! Stepan and I would pinch some milk or fatback, and then we'd have a nice little feast. Or we'd cook up some gruel and I'd buy vodka to go with it... It was real fun, drat it all!... Or we'd get some watermelons... Prison? Alright, let it be prison!'

"And then something came over him, as if sparks started flying from his eyes. His teeth clenched, and then down on the table he goes with his fist; bang! bang!

" 'Let them take me to prison,' he yelled, 'let them!'

"And I was standing there petrified.

" 'Now I see,' I saw, 'where you were all those nights with that Stepan!' — And this Stepan was a strange fellow and the biggest thief in our village. 'Now I know what I gave you money for — for vodka!' I yelled at my son.

"And he turned his back on me and walked out, banging the door. I was real worried, so worried. I didn't know what to do, or what to say. I was mad at him and sorry for him too. He came from my womb, he was my child." And the woman started weeping again. " 'Come what may,' I thought to myself, 'I've got to help him.' So I went to this Ilchenko man, who had his honey pinched. I bowed before him, and begged for mercy; 'Please, forgive him, out of your kind goodness!' And he did, thanks be to him!

" 'Make me,' he says, 'two pieces of your home-spun cloth, and we'll forget the whole thing. But go to the policeman and ask him not to move your case further up. And go to the old watchman, ask his pardon for his head.'

"I wasted no time and took myself quick to the bee-garden. 'Oh, kind grandpappy, forgive him!'

" 'Alright, alright,' he says, 'I don't grudge it any longer. Just light a candle for Saint Seraphim.'

"Next day I went to the policeman. 'Is it possible,' I say, 'to have the matter dropped? So that nothing happens to Andriy?' 'No, it is not, it's impossible.' I got down on my knees before him and begged for mercy. And he says: 'Well, you know, it'd be different if I hadn't taken any action. But I did, you know. I investigated. No, it isn't possible,' he said and went out of the kitchen. And his servant girl winked at me a couple of times and whispered, 'You grease his palm.' I rushed back home, got a horse, took six or so sacks of rye to a merchant Jew, sold them to him, and then ran back to the policeman with the money. 'Well, alright; alright,' he says, 'we'll see to it.' I even crossed myself then. I came home and said to Andriy, 'Say a prayer to God, Andriy. The story is you aren't going to prison.'

"He cheered up again and even got into a talkative mood. So I asked him, 'Well, tell me, how you went about stealing those bees?'

" 'How? Very simple,' he says. 'It was night, didn't hear anybody moving around, so I sneeked into this bee-garden. Then, that there old watchman springs on me; 'What're you doing here?' I hit him with a stick, grabbed hold of a hive, ran into the forest, and hid it in a pile of leaves. Then, as I was threshing, I got hungry. I went to the forest, pushed away the leaves and, here you go, they got me.'

" 'Well,' I say, 'that's over and done. But don't you ever do it again, my dear son. Don't touch anything that's not yours; don't walk round with sticks.'

" 'You know, that's what I've been thinking myself,' he says to me, 'I'd set myself not to do it, but just couldn't go for long without it. It was like wild horses were dragging me to it...'

"The way things turned out, it looks like he told me the truth. He just couldn't stay home for long. He was always out somewhere. And the things he did, Jesus Christ! He'd come home loaded, stinking of vodka, beaten up, too. I used to give him pennies, you know, but then I discovered that it wasn't enough for him. He began taking stuff from the house to sell. One time, it would be buckwheat, another time, flour. And what could I do, sorry as I was for him? Get him married, that's what. Of course, get him married! Maybe, it'd set him straight! Christmas passed and I kept pestering him to get married. And he'd try to push it off and would say, 'I haven't been free long enough yet.' And

he'd want to do this and he'd want to do that. And I'd keep harping at him, 'Get married, my son!' So I brought him a fine new shirt, embroidered too; brought him pants of fine cloth; I brought him a new cap, real astrakhan, a blue coat, and a wide red belt. All those things I brought him. 'Take these,' I say, 'my dear son. Put them on and go to Omelko. 'Omelko, that's a man in our village. He once told me he knew a girl that'd be nice for my son to marry. 'Go to Omelko,' I say, 'he'll take you to that girl.' He dawdled at first, but then thought better of it and put those new things on. Was I happy! I looked at him this way and that, saw that his coat sat on him nice, and the belt wasn't twisted, and the embroidered shirt collar could be seen. And by God, I liked what I saw after I'd decked him out. He looked real sharp — all dressed up, tall, dark and handsome. Good face too. Those moustaches and brows... 'His wife,' I thought to myself, 'is going to have something to love him for.' 'The All-merciful God will help you. And the Mother of Lord Jesus, Queen of Heaven, too. Go.' And he went.

"Well, they soon came back. 'It's a deal!' Omelko says. 'The girl, the moment she laid eyes on him, wouldn't let go of him. And her old folks fell to your five *desyatinas*. And they promised to give a *desyatina* of land and a couple of oxen for her dowry!' That's what that Omelko man said. 'That's great!' I thought to myself. 'And a couple of oxen! Holy Mary! Now, he's going to take care of the household, whether he wants to or not. And he's going to have to plow a little.'

"Then, we had that wedding and the party. And those oxen they brought were real good animals. They were both grey and well-fed too. " 'Now, my son,' I thought to myself,' you're going to make it and God'll help you.' But you know what? One week passed, then another, and what did my son do? He'd give those oxen a little of this and a little of that to eat, to keep them going, but he kept them hungry all the time and, of course, the poor things started bellowing. And he didn't care a whit. Either he was sleeping or else he was out someplace. So his wife, Yavdokha, had to do all the chores and things all by herself. My daughter-in-law, she was real good, a nice person too. You won't find anyone like her these days. Her father was right, 'You won't be sorry for having taken my daughter. I brought her up to be loved by people and by God.' And

she wasn't idle a single moment. She wouldn't waste any time at all, by God. Now she'd stoke the *pich,* then she'd do the laundry or spinning and all the other things that needed doing. She was always doing something, by Jesus. And she'd never argue, like some do, never grumble or pout, no such thing, she just didn't know what sulking was. She was really something! May God protect her. She deserves it, all right.

"As I saw all this, I told her, 'You should, daughter dear, get Andriy to do those things.' Well, she did try and once she did tell him. That was the time the oxen broke out of their pen. And what a pen it was! Holes all around. She saw that the oxen were loose and said, 'Andriy, drive the oxen in, will you? Do at least that. By Jesus, I can't understand how one can be so given to lying around! Aren't you ashamed of people talking?"

"He flew into a mighty rage. Yelling to beat all hell, he was too. 'You, you so-and-so! What the hell do you think you're doing, telling me that? Shaming me! Damn! Why did I marry you? What for?'

"And she, poor girl, turned red in the face and started shaking all over, shaking from fright. And he hit her on the head with his fist, one time and then another. I rushed to stop him and then he hit me too. He did... His eyes bulged and he turned livid. Jesus Christ! God save us!

"Here's another tale for you. One day, in the morning, around breakfast time, Yavdokha did what had to be done and went to feed the oxen or something. Andriy wasn't home. So, she comes back and says, 'They aren't there, the oxen,' she says. I looked around the barn and in the garden. I thought they may have gone there, but they weren't anywhere.

" 'Well,' I tell her, 'they may have gone into the street. And people are on their way to the market — it was the market day — and they could have followed the people. Lets go,' I say. 'Let's go look for them. You go this way and I'll go that way.'

"So we went. But we couldn't find them anywhere. Where to look? So Yavdokha fetched a big loaf of white bread and went with it to the fortune-teller *. 'Your oxen,' the fortune-teller said, 'went into crooked paths.' We looked in all those little crooked paths but they weren't there

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* The bread taken to pay for the services.

either. We got real worried. As the day moved into evening, Andriy came home. So drunk! So drunk! And there were several other drunks with him too. Making noise, lots of noise.

" 'Andriy, Andriy,' I say, 'you go round carousing, and the oxen disappeared, wandered off someplace. You go look for them right this moment,' I say.

" 'Ho,' he says, 'the oxen? You won't find them. Gone. No, you won't find them. Here's your oxen, here's your oxen.' And he took out his purse and shook it to jingle the coins. 'To hell with them! To hell!,' he says. 'Won't have any more trouble with them... I've sold them! Drat it all... We're going to have a little fun! Get the vodka out, Khoma! Yavdokha! Go get us some grub for the vodka.' There you have it... And Yavdokha, poor girl, burst into tears and wailed.

" 'My dear oxen, oh my dear oxen! Was I ever fond of you! Didn't I take good care of you! I made soft beds for you to lie on. I picked the best grass to bring you...'

"The poor girl couldn't stop crying. She went on and on. Then I had my say, 'That's how you take care of the household, my son?' And then I cursed myself, 'Why have I lived to see all this?' I went on like that for a long time, and then I said, 'Go away, and don't ever come back!'

" 'Ah, you nasty snivelling cry-babies! Come on, boys, let's go someplace else. Let them go to hell!' And off they went.

"Evil things they were, evil. What could I do? What could I say? He's a lost child, lost for ever! And I was sorry for him, real sorry!

"I had to do something to turn him back onto the straight and narrow. But how to do it; what could I do with him? I was real worried. One day, around that time, the neighbour's son, Ivan, came over. It was around Shrovetide. He worked someplace in town, in a store or something, and just wanted to visit with his mother. He'd heard that she was unwell, so he came to see her. Soon after that, she died. He was at her side; he was very good to her; cheering her up. And after she died, he buried her. It was a burial, I tell you; by Jesus it was something special. It wasn't just good, it was, you know... so good I don't have the words to tell you how good it was! The coffin... he draped it in black and silver, a woman from the church choir was singing at the burial... And the eats

for people at the funeral feast, all kinds of it,— boiled and broiled dishes, all so tasty. And the buns were so white and fluffy. By Jesus, it was a real fine funeral!"

The woman shook her head a little.

"Ah, looks like I'm not long for this world... Ah, loosing my breath too. And who's going to cheer me up and tell me nice words? Oh, it's so hard to breathe, like there's something heavy in my chest. It's so hard to talk... but I can't help it... I can't help it. He's the child of my womb; he's my child, he's... My God, my God!" She started wiping her eyes with the loose ends of her kerchief, and went on doing it for quite some time, weeping.

"Jesus, other people have such good children!... Pure gold this Ivan is. He supports his father so well. He gives him ten roubles, sometimes twenty. He really does! And he himself is doing real fine. Just think that when he was a little one, life was so hard for him. He used to go round cold and hungry. He had to tend oxen, (not his family's, other people's). Had only one winter of schooling, then went to town, and see? He's made it! So I thought, 'Maybe I should make Andriy go to work at some store; maybe that'd change his ways.' So, one day I tell him, 'Andriy, join Ivan and go to town with him.' He jumped at the idea. 'Sure I will, sure I will,' he says. 'It's nice in those stores. You don't have to work, really, only eat and drink and walk around in fine boots and coats too. Yes, I'm going!' 'Praise be the Lord,' I think to myself, 'that he's interested. Maybe, with God's help, he'll make it.' Then the time came to get him ready for the journey. Jesus Christ! Was I sorry to see him leave! And what did I put in his knapsack? The best shirts we had, the best pants, and loaves of nice bread and fluffy pies, and fatback, and sausage. And he saw all that and says, 'That'll do.' And I still added some sunflower seeds, and pumpkin seeds, and money. It was a long way to go; he had to take a train. He had about ten roubles on him. That's the money he had left from the oxen, and I gave him some more, from what I'd saved for... for about three months. So I gave him my money, put it into his pocket, I did, and said to him, 'Take the money, my child, don't go hungry.' I wept and wept, and crossed myself and him many times as I was getting him ready for the journey. 'Mother of God, Queen of Heaven! Help him! Help my dear son! Give him good luck! Make his journey happy! And God, All-holy...'

"One week passed after he'd left. One day, I saw the local policeman and I thought, 'Looks like he's on his way to our house; maybe he's got some news from my dear Andriy.' But no word came. We were waiting and waiting, hoping for at least a word from him. Did he find himself a good job? How was he? But no news of him. The winter passed, then spring, then summer came, but we didn't hear anything from him, and we didn't see anything of him either. I was so worried, my God! So, I wrote a letter to Ivan asking about Andriy and why we hadn't heard from him? Ivan wrote back; 'I got him a spot in a small store, but he, right from the start, didn't do what he was told to, and, then, he stole some tobacco, so, they kicked him out and I don't know where he went.' Jesus Christ and Ruler of Heaven! Where's my boy? Fall came and there were lots of seasonal workers coming. And I went around, asking them, 'Did you see my son? Did you hear anything about my son?' Then I went to the fortune-tellers. And so mighty worried I was, my soul was all weary. And those dreams I wish I didn't have! In them, I saw him drunk, dirty or like he was a criminal or... I wish I could forget them! Well, one evening, it was around the fasting time before Christmas, we were having our little dinner with Yavdokha, when there comes a man and says hello. It was Potap Slyva.

" 'Have you heard anything about Andriy?' he says. My heart gave a leap. 'That's news from Andriy,' I think to myself, 'but God save us from bad news.'

" 'No, we didn't hear anything,' I say.

" 'Well, I was on my way from Mariupol,' he says 'and saw him.' We both of us dropped our spoons.

" 'Did you? Where? How was he?' we asked him.

"Potap shook his head a little, then sat down and said, 'I wish I didn't have to be the one to tell you!'

"My heart was beating double time. 'I was at a station, you know, waiting for a train. I was sitting inside the station, at the wall, you know, having my lunch. Close to me, in a corner, was sitting a boy, also having lunch. He was eating a piece of bread and some herring. Then in comes this suspicious fellow, in a ragged coat, and he starts looking people over, sort of searching them with his eyes. Well, there weren't too many people in there either. This fellow walks this way and that at the station and then comes up to that boy in the corner with the

herring and, in a sort of low voice, asks him, 'You, boy, going home?' 'Yes.' 'You can get some work. There's a landlord's estate near hear. I'm a steward, looking for workers. There's some money in it for you, I see you're broke, eh?' And the boy says, 'I've got some money. I've even got me a tenner. I earned it working as a herdsboy.' This fellow sort of licked his lips, for glad he was to hear that,' Potap continued. 'Then this fellow goes on with his line, 'Fiddle-faddle! You're going to earn much more here. In one winter, you'll earn about forty roubles, and the work won't kill you either. You'll be tending calves.' The boy almost leaped with joy when he heard that. 'That's a find for me,' he says, 'I'm an orphan, have no home. Hire me!'

" 'Good, then let's go. Follow me,' Potap continued his story. 'The boy shoved his bread into his knapsack, put it across his shoulders, and out they went. And I start my figuring,' Potap says. 'I tied up my bag and moved over to the people from Kiev who were sitting by the opposite wall. I told them what I'd seen and heard, and asked, 'Did you see that?' 'We sure didn't,' they said. 'We were just having a chat.' 'Well, let's go out and see.' Four men got up to go with me,' Potap said. 'And they were nice fellows, too. So we went. Just as we got out,' Potap said, 'we saw two more "hirers" crawl out from under the railroad cars. One was dressed in a short sheepskin, so worn, you could sort of see through it. And the other was in a kind of long cloak, all soiled. Right after they got out from under the cars,' Potap said, 'they ran after that suspicious fellow and that boy. They were heading right into the open field. And it's winter, you know, and you sure can't see a man in that field. We stopped at the corner of a house and peeped out to see what was happening. The two "hirers", those who'd got out from under the cars, caught up with those other two, the boy and the suspicious fellow, that is, and then sort of walked down and out of sight. We figured they'd gone into a gully, or something.'

" 'So, we darted after them,' Potap says, 'and right then we saw those three searching the boy for money. He was lying on the ground. They saw us and took off... We set after them. Then, one of them, the one in the cloak, slipped and fell. We jumped on him quick and started beating him hard. We punched and kicked him...' "

At this point in her story, the woman burst into a flood of tears. Then, "...My son, my dear son..." 'They punched

him and kicked him... Blood spurt from his nose,' Potap said, 'and poured from his mouth too.'

" 'And then I noticed,' Potap said, 'there's something familiar about that fellow, but, at first, I couldn't see better, because he was sort of hiding his mug, wouldn't let us see his pan. And who was he? We searched for a passport or something,' Potap said, 'and found a half-burnt piece of paper with the name 'Andriy' on it. Of course! That's who that fellow was! Andriy! Your Andriy. Only, much too skinny and black with dirt. We left him, lying there in the snow, and groaning.' "

The woman was in tears once again. "My God, God Almighty! Jesus Christ! Holy Mary! At home, when he was little and had little boils gathering, I'd rub them with onions, and dress them in clean cloth, nice and neat, and... And they... help me, Lord! And, when he was at home and went to sleep, I'd put a little blanket over him and a sheepskin too... And now, him, on the snow, lying there! My God!

"Don't know how I survived that night. It was a long night too, very long, and I didn't sleep a wink. Nor the next night either. I was so worried and hung up! I ached with his ache. And, in the daytime, I couldn't work and couldn't eat either. I went to the neighbours and other people to weep. I cried and cried. And the people'd say to me, 'You should have taught him right. You should have taught him right from his little years, that's what you should have done.' And mighty sorry I was, so sorry! And on Sunday that came round some time after I'd learnt all that, I went to the matins and the other services too, and I made a gift of money to the church. Quite a gift too — fifteen kopecks. Oh, it's so hard to breathe, so hard."

The woman kept a short silence. "And gave one whole rouble for the prayer to be said. For God to forgive me, the great sinner that I am. And for forgive... for forgiveness for my son... After I'd done it, I felt like a load had fallen off me. I relied on His Holy Mercy... I'd take all He, in his Mercy, would give me. I sure would. When I came home from church, I saw Yavdokha, standing at the window. 'Those other men,' she says, 'other people's husbands, looking so nice, dressed in their Sunday best, walking from church... They're going to have their dinners... together with their wives... And I... Oh, why was I born? Why did I get married?' And did she weep! She cried so

hard her bosom heaved. Her fine eyes, real good eyes she had, and cheeks, smooth and fresh... those cheeks were wet like they'd been washed in water... and her kerchief, embroidered and fine, was so wet you wanted to wring it out... to dry it up... And she went on crying... And her child in the cradle started crying too. Jesus Christ, God Almighty! I saw all this and there is no telling how bitter I felt, and again my heart got that ache... So, as I was, in my church best, I rushed to Potap without changing my clothes. I went to him and I asked him through my tears, 'What do I do, where can I go?'

" 'What can you do?' Potap says. 'If you could try and get him back home...' 'But how shall I do it?' I say. 'I don't know either,' he says. 'Ask someone to advise you.' So I went to our village office to talk to a clerk there. I told him my story and asked him, 'What do I do now?' 'The police would escort him here in one day,' he says. 'Escort? What do you mean, please?' 'You don't know even that,' he says. 'I mean what I say. You go see our policeman about it.'

"So I rushed back home, got a fiver, didn't find any more money, and ran like mad to the policeman's house. I ran so quick, I honestly did, so quick, that I didn't have enough air to breathe. I wanted so much to find out about that escort quicker.

"So I got to his house, bowed to him and told him what I wanted. So he asks me, 'And where's Andriy now?' 'God knows,' I say. 'I don't know anything about that.' 'Neither do I,' he says and goes out of his kitchen. I didn't even have time to give him my fiver. So I stand there, waiting and waiting for him to maybe come out again. I was afraid to sit down, just in case he comes out to talk to me. Then in comes his servant. 'Don't wait any longer,' she says. 'He's left, went to see someone, left through another door.' God Almighty! Why didn't You strike him down with Your Might? I felt sort of hot, and then, all of a sudden, I became cold. 'Must I go? What else can I do?' So I went. I wanted to cry so much. Could hardly walk. Walked half-dead... My hands and feet got so cold.... And I got so cold all over. By the time I crawled home, I sort of stopped feeling my body; only my heart ached. I took off my shoes and right away got myself onto the *pich.* And my poor hands and feet! Did they hurt! Did they hurt getting warm! Jesus Christ! I thought my nails were going to fall off. As night

came, I grew so hot all over that I could hardly stand it. The moment I closed my eyes, I'd see that escort and the road writhing like a snake breathing mighty fire. Or I'd see my dear son being beaten... his head bleeding... And I'd sort of hear him groaning, or those bells tolling, and people mourning over him. And, God All-holy, was I scared! And I called Yavdokha, 'Oh, my dear Yavdokha, oh, my dear Yavdokha, help me, oh help me!' And Yavdokha says to me in return, 'You've ruined my life. You knew what kind of man he was. Why did you marry him to me?' That's what she said to me... That's what she meant — why did I have to put somebody I didn't even know into this misery?"

By this time, we had reached the town. "Isn't it scary around here," the woman said. "All those houses with iron roofs, and all those people look like lords. And where do I find that *zemstvo* chief?" she asked.

I showed her the way.

"And how am I going to get near him? I'm so mighty scared of those lords. What if I get a big fright, then I won't be able to utter a word even."

"And would it help you much," I asked, "if you did tell him all that?"

"Maybe... maybe... he'll do something... do something about it." And she started crying again.

Then our ways parted. I began walking faster, because the blizzard was gaining force.

* * *

I don't remember for sure how much time I spent in the hospital, but when I started on my way back, the weather had worsened, and worsened considerably. The snowstorm turned into a real tempest. Within the town, it wasn't too bad yet, but in the open field, it was a snowy doomsday. The wind was so strong, I could hardly walk and, on top of that, it was blowing right into my face. The whole thing began to look nasty to me and I thought that maybe I should turn back to town. But if I did, who would I find to stay with for the night? I didn't have any acquaintances and knew no place there where I could go. As I was standing there and thinking the problem over, I remembered that there was a shoemaker in town I knew. I had once had him make me some boots. So I went back

and spent the night at his place. Next morning, the weather was completely different, as if there hadn't been any storm the night before. The morning was really nice and quiet, full of sunshine, and the snow was sparkling brightly. So I set out for home. Then, right in the open field, a little off from the road, I saw a tight group of people. I went over to them to find out what the matter was. When I got up closer, I saw, lying in the snow, that woman I was walking with the day before. She had found her peace. She'd fallen in a high place and the sweeping wind didn't let the snow cover her body. Because she took dying so hard, or for some other reason, her arms and legs were drawn under her, and her head was resting in filth.

[*1905*]

OLD OMELKO

Just look how things are in this world nowadays... As long as a man doesn't go hungry, others may starve to death for all he cares. By God, that's true. Take me, for example. Want to know how I earn my living? Well, I'm a shepherd and I've got five youngsters to feed and clothe. Now, I ask you, what can I buy them things with, if I graze sheep all summer and all I do in winter is try to collect my pay? Just try it and you'll see for yourself!

And I'm no longer what I used to be, either. The way I used to get things done, it was really different — nothing like the way I am now. Mind you, I'm still young, so it doesn't seem right for me to complain. But what can I do? All that hard work I did for others has surely done me in once and for all. I still remember how I stored Olexenko's buckwheat into his loft. Either my feet got numb that time, or the Devil knows what, but down that ladder I went. And the sack, too, hit me pretty badly. So now, even tending sheep comes hard to me.

There's never been anybody like Old Omelko. That was some man, I tell you! Boy, did he help me out, may God rest his soul! Now a little flour, now some straw, but help me out he surely did. "Brother" — that's what he always used to call me. That's the kind of man he was. Why, he actually called me "brother", may he rest in peace! Ever

seen some other rich fellow who'd call you that? I bet you haven't. Because any other will call you "brother" only if he gets in trouble and suddenly needs your help. I tell you, it was really tough for me this winter without the old man; no food, no fuel and the Devil knows what else. Can't say how sad I was just sitting like that. And on top of it, the children annoyed me — "I want something to e-e-eat! I'm co-o-old!"

"Oh, hang you all!" I thought. "May the plague take you!" Then it was like something snapped in me. I grabbed a rod and went thrashing away at them. My old woman spoke up, so I fixed her too. I would've torn myself to pieces, so mad was I. I worked real hard and even drenched with sweat. Then I sat down and they cried, and there were tears, as big as peas, running all the way down their cheeks. So I felt kind of sorry for them. "Just what did I beat them up for?" I asked myself. "Is it their fault, being cold and hungry and all?"

So I went around to collect my pay, and it was the hundredth time I went for it, for all I know. And I was lucky, because I did collect half a rouble, thank God! Then I thought to whom I'd better go to buy some flour and some straw for fuel — all for half a rouble. Kozlenko was surely too expensive. Lopatenko, too, would charge more than I could afford. That left Yakovchuk. All right, then. So I put an empty sack under my arm and went straight to him.

"How do you do, sir," I said.

"Hullo there. What's up?"

"Just something I want, sir," I said.

"Well?" he frowned.

And I complained a bit and told him this and that — all about my troubles. But he didn't even listen to me. He just stood talking to a farmhand and telling him to do something.

"Will you sell some flour?" I asked. "I'll take a measure."

And he said:

"What? Flour? I don't have any." And then he just started walking away from me.

"Wait, sir," I said. "Then at least..."

"Well?" he stopped, turning one side to me.

"Then at least sell some rye."

"Got no rye either," he said and started moving again. I went after him, cap in hand.

"Please, sir. The harvest was good, thank God."

He snorted. "So what? I don't sell by the measure anyway."

"At least some straw," I said.

"Straw? You can have straw. Come here." He led the way between the stacks and took me up to some heap.

"Take this," he said. "Half a rouble. Good straw."

I took a look. It was all rotten and there wasn't even a full sledload of it.

"Make it a quarter," I said.

"That's half a rouble and not a kopeck less."

"You might as well let me have it cheaper," I said, "because it'll rot here anyway."

"So what?" he said. "At least I'll know nobody buys from me for a song. And that, too, makes me happy, you know."

So I left. His dogs were lapping up thick soup, pigeons were nesting in his stacked crops, and I... I just went, swallowing my tears.

* * *

But wait. One night — that was some time after St. George's Day — I was lying in bed when I heard a bell ring somewhere. I looked out and everything was red outside — trees, houses and all. I ran outside and saw it was a fire. So I threw on my topcoat, grabbed a bucket and raced over. And I'll be damned if it wasn't Yakovchuk's place which was burning! The barns were pretty far gone already and the strawstacks were also on fire. It was a sight to see — fire roaring and crackling, the pigeons fluttering about and Yakovchuk yelling, "Oh, save me! Save me, good people! Oh, my straw — seven stacks of it! Oh, save my two barns! They're packed solid with grain..!"

I heard that and tears rolled from my eyes. And then he saw me and groaned, "Oh, my dear Stepan! Save me, Brother!"

And I thought to myself, "That's what you say when you need help."

That's how it was. That's when they start calling you "brother". Oh, no! Old Omelko wasn't anything like that. You have to say that for him.

Take that time I was resting sheep near his garden. I sat under the willow and ate my lunch, soaking crusts in water. Suddenly, someone called me. I looked around and it was the old man. I went over to him. He had some beehives in the garden. He seated me, cut some bread and got a honeycomb from the shed.

"Help yourself, Brother," he said.

I had plenty to eat and felt so happy that I didn't know how to thank the old man. He was raking hay, and I just found myself a rake and went to help him. There we were, raking together, and everything was so fine. The sun was shining, the bees were humming, and we were talking and feeling so happy. And he said, "How fine everything would be in this world, if only we were kind to each other!"

Oh, yes, that was some man!

[*1905*]

THE "JOYS"

Kirilo Khots was brooding. It was far into the night, but he couldn't fall asleep and kept turning from side to side under his topcoat, making the plank bed groan under him. What should he do in this world? It was winter, the frosts were severe, and he had no fuel. Also, there didn't seem to be much he could do about it. His wife would burn some dung in the *pich,* but it would only fill the house with smoke. Living in their house was now more like living in a barn — the door was swollen, the walls were mouldy in the corners, and the windows never thawed out. Try not to catch cold in such a house!

It was not long since he had buried his little son. The boy had been so nice and clever, but he died anyways. To think of it — this was already his sixth child to go. But what could he do? There was just no way to earn a little money. The day before and the day before that, he had gone to the town in the hope that somebody would hire him to chop wood. There he had stood, shivering in the cold, but nobody had even asked him why he was standing there.

So now Kirilo was really gloomy and dismal. And then Paraska, his wife, spoke from the *pich,* "Kirilo, what's

going to become of us? Just look. The children's feet and hands are as cold as ice — even here on the *pich!*"

"Things do look bad," Kirilo thought. "If only the frost would go away"... He got up and looked through the window to see if the sky was cloudy. That would mean it was getting warmer. But no, stars were shimmering and shining all over the sky.

"Well," he spoke. "What can I say?" He hung his head, brooding, but could not think of anything. Today, he would go to the town again, of course. He lit the lamp and set to sharpening his axe. Paraska climbed down from the *pich* and went to fetch some dung. The children, Olenka and Andriyko, also got down and huddled on the plank bed, staring dolefully at their father.

"What are you here for?" their father shot at them. "Get back onto the *pich* or you'll freeze."

"No, we..." Olenka started, then blushed and said nothing. Kirilo sharpened his axe some more and looked out the window. The sky was turning pale; it would soon be dawn. He'd better get something to eat. He broke off a piece of bread... now, what else was there? He looked into the cupboard, moved a pot and groped about on the shelf. There was nothing.

"Daddy, I'll get something for you!" Olenka said. She leaped down, like a hare, slid under the bench and got a bulb of garlic. "Wait, Daddy, I'll peel it too." Her father even smiled. She finished peeling the garlic. "Here you are!"

Kirilo took the garlic and started rubbing the bread with it. Olenka kept peering into his eyes and then said, "D-Daddy..."

"What?"

"Will you get me..?" She lowered her head, her finger in her mouth.

"Get you what?"

"M-material for... for a skirt."

Kirilo only looked at her. She said, "And I — I'll grow up and make you a shirt."

Andriyko, his youngest, added his. "And for me... and I—I want a pie with raisins..."

Kirilo breathed hard. "Oh, where in hell did you spring from?" he groaned.

"Just look at the Chmels!" Olenka said. "They've bought material for Hanna, and for Ustya too, and I... and for

me...” Her face twisted. She was not much to look at anyway — her eyes tired, her face pale, her shirt frayed. The poor girl wept. Now Andriyko again joined in.

“The Chmels, they have raisins, and pies too, and we... and we don't have any.” The little boy was pretty miserable.

Kirilo lowered his gaze. He felt sorry for the children. He remembered how those others had gone. They would cry and he would sometimes beat them, too... Well, now they were gone, and he only had these two left. Poor kids! He felt so sorry for them he could not swallow his bread.

Kirilo crossed himself, pulled on two shabby coats, one over the other, grabbed his axe, and went off. Outside, day was breaking. In town, about six more men soon gathered and they stood together under a store. All of them wore threadbare clothes which were patched up all over and boots which were falling apart. It was terribly cold. Packed snow sparkled in the sun and crunched underfoot, the crows sat cowering in the trees, and smoke rose from the chimneys in upright columns which were coloured red by the sun. The wood-cutters were stamping their feet and blowing into their hands, their noses blue and their beards frozen. A janitor, clad in a sheepskin coat, came up to them.

“Come along to our landlord...”

Everybody rushed to him.

“No,' said the janitor. “Not all of you. You come with me...” And he pointed to one of them who was the youngest and also the strongest. The rest stopped in their tracks, some of them shrugging, others scratching their heads. The lucky man went after the janitor, grinning. Suddenly, Kirilo envied him terribly.

“It's disgusting,” he said, “the way that blighter's showing his teeth.”

“That's because he's glad to be hired,” said one of the men.

“Sure,” said another. “The guy looks impressive, that's why. I bet he'll get fed, and pocket some cash, too.”

“Oh, yes, there's a lucky one,” Kirilo thought to himself. What was wrong with him, then? Why hadn't the janitor picked him? Was it because he was so unimpressive? Why was he neither tall nor handsome? But, goodness, did it look like he wouldn't get hired today either?

Some well-to-do city woman, wrapped in a large shawl, came up to them. Kirilo:

"I — Take me!"

"Wait! What's so special about you?"' the others snarled at him. "You aren't the only one here!" And they crowded him out.

Tears were choking Kirilo. Should he cry or what should he do?

He hung about some more, then went over to another store and stood there all by himself. Nobody was coming. Oh, God! What was he going to do? He wiped his tears and tried to look more cheerful.

"Look here," he called to some Jew. "Want a carpenter? Come on, get yourself a really fine carpenter!" He managed a smile and even winked at the Jew.

However, time passed. The other men already began to go. Kirilo took a look at the sun and it was already high in the sky. Oh, hell! So he wasn't getting a job after all. Could it be that nobody would hire him today?!

He blew into his hands. Should he try going door to door? He must, because didn't he have kids who were crying? So he went. Now, which house? Should he try that one? He crossed the street and stopped. No, he didn't have the nerve... He was simply afraid. The house was too big... Maybe he'd better try that one. Yes, let's try it!

He went over to the other house and spent some time trying to make up his mind, peering now over the fence, now over the wicket-gate. No, it somehow didn't seem proper. He'd rather go to that house over there... He went and even wiped his face with a flap of his coat, even pressed the latch when a thought struck him. What would he tell those people once they let him in? How would he look into their eyes? No, he'd better wait!

He went back to the store and stood there, bent low and blue with cold, staring hard at every passer-by. Nobody spoke to him, though.

"Oh, damn all those evil, well-fed, fat-faced, hateful people!"

He limped away, passing the store, a house, another house. But where was he going? Back home? What for? With what? What about Olenka? What about Andriyko? He was choking with tears.

"I'll stay here, come what may," he decided. "I'll bow to every one of them, I'll beg them... I'll tell them everything... about the kids who are dying. There comes some gentleman — I'll bow to him... No, he's got too big a fur

coat and that sort of scares me... I'd better wait until I get back to the store!"

He returned to the store and stood there again. "Now... I'll bow to this one. No, his epaulettes are too big. He must be some big chief. Let it be that one... No, his face is too stern. Oh, there comes one who looks kind enough. That's the one... No, that's not right... It makes me ashamed... Oh, hell! All right, let it be that man over there..." The man passed by, then another... "That one — that's for sure!"

But he let that one pass him as well.

"Ah, hang it all! What kind of life is this?" He ground his teeth and plodded away.

He nearly froze to death before reaching home. He was so cold that his heart ached. As he opened the door, Andriyko called from the *pich,* "Did you bring me anything, Daddy?"

Daddy clenched his teeth.

"Bring you! Is that all you want? You plague me, that's what you do!"

He threw off his hat, blew into his hands and began to unbutton his coat. He fumbled with the buttons but they wouldn't undo; his hands were as stiff as rakes.

"Damn those hands!" he grumbled. "Let them wither!"

"Oh, goodness," said his wife. "Why didn't you say something? Let me unbutton you."

"Don't plague me!" he yelled. "Don't torment me!"

"My God, who's tormenting you?"

"The Devil, Satan!"

Paraska drew away from Kirilo and escaped to the *pich.* The children huddled up in the corner of the *pich,* trembling and crying. Kirilo swung over to them.

"You plague me!" he banged his fist against his chest. "You plague me, you!"

"Stop it, for God's sake! You'll scare the kids!" his wife demanded.

"The kids? What kind of kids are they? Get fuel, heat the house, buy them skirts and raisins! 'Look at the Chmels...' The damn stinkers want everything! You plague me, I tell you! Oh, when will I be rid of you at last!"

Olenka sprang up as if hit by something and started to climb down. Mother seized her arm. "What are you up to, for God's sake?"

"I'll go, go and get drowned or... or catch cold..."

"What are you talking about?"

"Because Father's nagging me... At least... at least let me die," she sobbed.

Kirilo sank on the bench.

"Because then..." Olenka continued, "then the Chmels will have their Hanna and Ustya too, and I... and you won't have me."

Kirilo drooped his head.

The door creaked as a man in a long topcoat came in. Kirilo looked up. That was Khoma, Andriyko's godfather. He was in a rather gay mood and smiling.

"Good afternoon," he said. "May the Lord help you!" And then he held out his hand to Kirilo. This was something he had never done before. But there he was now, holding out his hand.

"Afternoon!" Kirilo said and hung his head again, as if he did not see Khoma's hand.

Khoma came nearer to him. "How's life treating you?" he asked.

Kirilo put out his limp hand.

"Oh, man," said Khoma. "Is this the way to shake hands? Here's how you do it!" He gripped Kirilo's hand and really shook it.

"Eh," Kirilo wrinkled his forehead. "I've no use for this handshaking."

"Why?"

"Because it doesn't become us at all, that's why."

"Now it will. Now we too will have some use for gentlemen's ways."

Kirilo said, somewhat rudely, "Gentlemen's ways, you say? And what in hell do I need those gentlemen's ways for?"

"Don't you?"

"Look, the house is freezing, no money, nothing at all, and you're talking about gentlemen's ways!" He clenched his teeth and hung his head even lower.

"Hee-hee!" Khoma chuckled. "Angry, aren't you?"

Kirilo said nothing to that.

"Cheer up, man. The house won't be freezing now."

"Eh," Kirilo jerked his head. "Like hell it won't!"

"Hee-hee, you don't believe me just because you don't know what I've heard!"

Kirilo raised his head.

"Hee-hee," Khoma kept chuckling. "You'd be surprised."

Kirilo shot him a look. "And what is it you've heard?" he asked.

"Oh, never mind... Actually, that's what I've come to you about... And the house won't be freezing..." He patted Kirilo on the shoulder. "It won't, I tell you!"

Kirilo shrugged.

"What is it then? Let's hear it!"

"Want to hear it, do you really? Hee-hee, I've heard something all right."

Kirilo even smiled. "Come on, out with it."

Khoma lowered his voice. "Listen, we'll be choosing electors for the Duma, hee-hee!"

"Hm," Kirilo pouted his lips. "This I know... Big deal!" He waved his hand and frowned again.

Khoma eyed him. "And what? Don't you like it, man?"

"And why should I?" Kirilo said. "A lot of good it does me, that Duma!"

"What d'you mean 'a lot of good'? Know what the Duma is for? The Duma will be deliberating to put things right. Say, now it's cold in your house, right? The Duma will deliberate to make it warm, see? That'll surely do you some good, won't it?"

"Rubbish! Who needs us? And then, all that's only what folks have been gossiping about."

"Oh, no, man, wait! It's not just folks. It's straight from the *zemstvo* chief himself. That's who I've heard it from myself."

"What?"

"The chief told us when I went to the office to be a witness for Semen."

Kirilo drew closer to Khoma. "Tell me all about it."

"Well, it was in the anteroom. There were about ten of us waiting there and talking, everybody telling his own tale. Somebody mentioned poverty, so one man there began to tell about some widow. 'The poor woman is suffering terribly,' he says. 'No fuel, no bread, and her kids are still practically babies.' That's where the chief came out. 'What are you talking about?' he asks. 'It's about poverty,' we say. 'Because life is so hard for us poor peasants, so hard...' 'Wait a little,' he says. 'We'll have the Duma soon and it won't be so hard then.' And he went into the other room. Then he came out again, bringing some letter. 'This,' he says, 'is what the Czar writes...' And he began to read it

to us and read all of it, and — hee-hee — it was all about how well we're going to live. And then he said, 'You see? That's what the Duma is for. Just wait.' "

Paraska lifted her head from the *pich.* "Is this... is this really what the czar writes?"

"That's right," Khoma grinned. "What did you think I was doing, kidding you? Hee-hee... And did you believe me? No, you didn't."

Kirilo also grinned and told Khoma, cheerfully, "No, I didn't. So what? What is it going to be like?"

"Hee-hee... And what do you want it to be like?"

"Well... if only — hee-hee — if only we were treated like people..."

"That's just it! They may say what they like, but if some are treated like human beings, why shouldn't we be? Don't we pray to the same God? Don't we all need the same things to live?"

"Right. But look at the way things are with us now! Some live like they own the earth and the sky and others have to sit tight and keep their mouths shut. Some have everything and more, and others are starving. Chmel has got plenty of straw that's rotting, and I've got ice in the house. Chmel has children, and what do I have — puppies? Oh, boy!" Kirilo drooped his head and tears fell from his eyes.

Paraska, too, rubbed her eyes.

"Oh, Lord," she said. "Aren't we people? Don't we have children?"

"My God!" Kirilo sobbed. "Is this how you want us to live?"

"Enough, enough!" Khoma stopped them. "Just think of the Duma! Now we're all going to be treated like people. Enough!"

Kirilo wiped his tears and smiled. "May the Lord grant it!"

"If only merciful God would grant it..." Paraska said. "And that's what the Czar writes, too... Because we can't stand it any more..."

"We can't really, believe it or not," Kirilo broke in. "Nothing to heat the house with, nothing at all!"

"Hee-hee, take it easy, man," Khoma said. "I've got some oat straw. Take it for fuel, we'll settle it somehow. Just pray that we get the Duma soon."

"Oh, thank you!." Kirilo said. "So if it was only God's will, then... hee-hee..."

Kirilo rose to his feet, looked out the window, paced up and down and smiled. "So they're going to treat us like people, are they?"

"Sure! Hee-hee..."

"May the Lord grant us the Duma then, because right now I can't bear to see the children."

"Yelled at the kids — that's what he did," Paraska turned to Khoma. "As if they were to blame."

"Of course they aren't," Kirilo told her. Then he went up to the *pich.* "Have they stopped crying or what?"

Olenko and Andriyko stuck out their heads, looking cheerful and smiling.

Kirilo said, "So what were you saying, Olenka? 'They'll have Hanna and Ustya and you won't have me'? Is this the kind of girl you are? How could you say something like that?" He went on, "Andriyko, come on, greet your Godfather."

Khoma went up to the *pich* and Andriyko held out his hand to him.

"Why did you cry?" Kirilo asked his son. "Tell me, why?" And he tapped his finger on Andriyko's cheeks.

"Because you shouted at me and didn't buy raisins," Andriyko replied.

"Wait, sonny, with luck we'll buy them yet. We'll also have a coat made for you. You don't have any boots either."

"Will... will you also have a skirt made?" Olenka asked.

"Sure. A skirt, and you'll need a vest as well.."

Olenka clapped her hands. "A skirt, a skirt!"

"Raisins and a coat! Raisins and a coat!" Andriyko began jumping up and down.

Olenka climbed down from the *pich,* held up her arms to Andriyko and also began jumping. Then she hugged and kissed him.

"Hee-hee," Kirilo chuckled. "Get us some seeds, old girl!"

They ate sunflower seeds and they were happy.

[*1906*]

THE SCHOOLBOY

Mikolka, Prokip's son, was a nice little scholar — quiet, shy and delicate like a girl. Also, he looked very pretty with his black eyebrows, his pure white face, his tiny nose, his small well-rounded cheeks and his curls. He was really one for studying, too.

The boy was simply crazy about books, reading practically all the time. But he was happiest whenever he was given something about forests and meadows and such things to read at home for the next lesson. That's what he liked doing most of all.

Once, they were taken for a walk in the woods. He ran into a thicket and stood there, saying, "Oh, how nice it is here! There are little branches... The sun's shining right through the holes... It's like lace, isn't it? Oh, how beautiful!"

Then he picked up a flower, smiled, and pressed it against his cheek, tenderly.

He was also very curious and there wasn't a thing he didn't want to know about. He was always asking the teacher questions, wanting to know about this and that and why it rained and snowed and all. And this pleased the teacher very much. The teacher would often pat him on the cheeks, lightly, just like that. It always made the boy happy and he would then beam with pleasure and offer the teacher those little cheeks of his. That's the way it was with them.

But once the teacher came up to him.

"So, Mikolka, have you learned the lesson?" he asked.

Mikolka stood up and he was smiling, but there were tears in his eyes.

"Have you been crying or what?" asked the teacher.

And Mikolka said, painfully, "No." But then he put his hand to his eyes and his face twisted.

"What's the matter? Has something happened?" the teacher wanted to know.

"He... He gave me a beating."

"Who?"

"Father."

"Why?"

"Because..." But he just cried and wouldn't tell.

Actually, this is how it all happened. That morning, Mikolka got up and did some reading. Then it was time for

breakfast and he asked his mother, "Mommy, what do I get to eat?"

"Well," said Mother. "There's the bread, here's the *borshch.*"

And she gave him some of that *borshch.* Mikolka got himself a spoon and sat down to eat. But that *borshch* was so sour that it stank and it almost turned his stomach. There was no oil, not a bean in it. It was yesterday's stuff, too — cold and shaken up. So Mikolka spent some time trying to eat it, but couldn't force any down. In the end, he gave up, rose from the table and began to dress. He dressed and was about to leave, but his belly rumbled and he turned back.

"Do we have anything else to eat, Mommy?"

"Not that I know," Mother told him.

Mikolka went to the pots and tried them, one by one. Then Father came in from outside, looking pretty worried.

"Bad business," he said. "There's only a little flour left at the very bottom."

"But, Mother, is there anything to eat?" Mikolka kept on.

"Ask Father."

"And other people have fish and oil," Mikolka said.

Father gave him a sharp glance. But Mikolka went on unabashed, "They make pancakes, too. Other children take them to school for lunch."

"What?!" Father screamed. And he grabbed a broom.

"Is that all you want — fish and oil?" he yelled. "Maybe also some skin off my back?" And he thrashed away at Mikolka with the broom — once, twice. The four younger children, who had also been looking around for something to eat, flew at once onto the *pich* like sparrows. Father was screaming at them as well.

"Want to eat, too? Oh, damn you all!"

Then there were also the boots. Once, Mikolka took off his boots and sat turning them over in his hands. Then he said, rather timidly, "These are some boots! They're surely done for. No wonder my feet get so cold."

"What's that?" asked Father.

"M-m-m, there are lots of holes here."

Father took the boots from him, looked them all over and then suddenly lashed at Mikolka's face with the boot-tops.

"Take better care of them!" he said.

Then he patched up some of the bigger holes as best he could, and that was all. And then two or three days after

that, Mikolka came home, looking pretty sad and worried, and didn't even ask for something to eat. He just sat on the bench, blinking. Father was not in the house and Mother was spinning on the plank bed by the *pich.* Mikolka sat like this for a while and then rose, trudged heavily to the bed and stood there hanging his head.

"Is something the matter?" Mother asked him.

"Well, you see..." Then his lips quivered, his face twisted and he only moaned.

"What's that? Is something wrong?"

He stood still and then said, in a hushed voice, "Mother!"

"Well?"

"I — I've..."

"What have you done?"

"Just look." He turned up his foot and showed her. Mother looked at it and the heel was gone. She only sighed and said nothing.

"Now, what'll happen when Father sees it?" Mikolka broke into tears.

Prokip came in and Mikolka held his breath. He sank down onto the bench and sat still, now flushing, now turning pale, looking down before him and trembling. He also kept trying to hide that boot behind the other. Prokip didn't even look his way, fumbling under the bench.

"Where in hell is the hemp?" he grumbled. "With all this cold, a man can't go out without some kind of belt. At least I should make myself a cord or something."

"Hm, it must be somewhere down there," his wife said. "Better let it wait, because we've got something else here." She pointed at Mikolka with her eyes.

"Don't tell him," hissed Mikolka. "Please don't!"

"Why shouldn't I?" Mother said to him. "What will you wear to school?"

"What's up?" Father asked.

"Mikolka's lost a heel."

"What?" Father cried out.

Mikolka sprang up as though something had bitten him and slid under the plank bed, crawling all the way behind the leg. Prokip only glared at all this and breathed hard.

"All right," he said. "Let him be."

He found some hemp and began weaving a belt. His wife watched him for a while and then said, "So what'll we do about the boots?"

Prokip didn't reply.

"Something's got to be done about it fast. Those he's got now aren't fit to make patches of."

Prokip kept silent.

"Can't you hear? It's time we did something."

Prokip shot her a glance.

"Let him become a cripple!" he snapped.

"What are you saying? Are you out of your mind?"

Mikolka whispered from under the bed, "Mommy, hush! Hush, Mommy! Please!"

Mother said to him, "And how will you go to school?"

Prokip snarled savagely, "To school? Want him to learn, do you? Maybe you'd like him to become a gentleman, too?"

"What if he does become a gentleman? What's wrong with that?"

"Don't let him go anywhere near the school!" Prokip hollered.

"Why, oh why? Did I lose that heel on purpose?" Mikolka cried.

"You, beggar!" Father yelled at him. "Here's one who wants to be a gentleman! It's ridiculous to see you come home, get seated at the table, get out a pen and all those books! Just try to go to the school once, you beggar!"

Sobs shook Mikolka.

"But why?" he demanded to know. "Everybody goes to school — Vasyl and Pavlo and the others. It's so nice to learn!"

"Who are you comparing yourself with, you beggar?"

"Why? Is... is my soul any worse?"

"They own horses and plows, you fool! Get a job on a farm — that's all you're good for with that soul of yours!"

"You must be crazy," his wife told him. "Why did you send him to school in the first place?"

"Are you trying to be smart?"

"Wasn't it you who first took him to the school? Wasn't it you who had him enrolled? Then why all this talk now? It's a shame; it's a sin to treat a child like that!"

Prokip seemed to be ashamed a bit. "You'd better watch your language or you'll get in trouble."

"What trouble? Are you going to kill us maybe? Go ahead! Kill us, finish us off!" She put her kerchief to her eyes and also burst into tears. "Oh, God, I do wish we'd die so that you can be rid of us at last. Do we have to be bullied like this forever?" Now mother and son were both sobbing. Prokip didn't say anything. He just sat weaving

his belt. In a little while, he stood up and spoke, rather bitterly, "School... School is extortion, school is robbery!" He threw aside the string and put on his hat. "School makes you sell your last shirt." He beat his chest and said again, almost crying, "Your la-a-ast shirt!"

He banged the door and went out, his head hanging low.

"It's good to learn," Mikolka said. "Then why did he speak about getting a job?"

He got out from under the bed and made for the door.

"Where are you going?" Mother called him.

"To school. I just don't care."

"But you didn't have any lunch. And what about the boots?"

"Never mind!"

Dusk fell and they lit the lamp. As Mikolka came running home, Father was sitting at the table, looking sad, and Mother was working with something on the bed. Tears were rolling from her eyes. Mikolka ran to her.

"Look here," he showed her a pair of boots.

"Where did you get them?" asked Mother in surprise.

"The teacher gave them to me, hee-hee."

"How come?"

"Hee-hee, I was sitting and he asked, 'Why are you so sad?' 'It's because my boots are torn,' I say. 'Cheer up,' he says. 'I've got another pair I don't need.' Then he brought them out. 'Take these,' he says."

Mother took them and looked them over.

"Thank him," she said. "May God bless him."

"Hee-hee, show them to Father too," Mikolka said.

"Come and have a look, Prokip," Mother said.

Prokip's face broke into a smile, but he didn't budge and just sat there as if he hadn't heard.

"Just come and see, do you hear?"

Prokip, as if he had no idea of what it was all about, asked, "What is it?"

"Come here!"

"Why?" He scratched his head and went to them. "So? What's that?" He took the boots. "Are they from the teacher then?" he asked.

"You aren't deaf as a post. You heard it all right."

"Hee-hee, good for us then!"

"And what did you do?" Mother said to him. "Didn't you rush out to get him a job?"

"What are you talking about?" Prokip protested. "Don't

you think I felt sorry for him too? I did rush out, but it was to borrow some money to buy boots for him."

"You did what?" Mikolka asked.

"That's right. I ran about the whole village, but nobody would lend me money. And I also had an empty sack under my arm just in case I could get some flour too. So they told me, 'Looks like you've got nothing to eat and yet you're trying to borrow money for your son. Does he have to go to school if you're so poor?' And Petro Chkhurik says, 'I'll hire him to tend my oxen, that's what I'll do.' And I just thought, 'Why should I be running about and have everybody talk to me like that? I thought about it and then up and got you hired to Chkhurik for fifteen roubles a year."

Mikolka continued his own tale; "Hee-hee. I say, 'My boots got busted.' And he says: 'Take these.' "

"That's fine. And I say, 'Petro, will you please lend me some money?' And he says: 'I'd rather hire him.' "

"Great goodness," Mother turned to Mikolka. "Getting such a nice little boy hired? Not on your life, never!" She took him in her arms and hugged him. "Oh, my darling!" she said. "Make sure you obey the teacher. See what a fine man he is? And study well, too!"

Prokip added, "Oh, yes, do study! Now, get your books here! Have you learned much already?"

"I've finished this one and this one too and this I've learned until here," Mikolka pointed with his finger.

"Till this ring here, you mean? Looks like a ring to me, anyway. What is it?"

"Huh-huh, that's 'O'."

"So it's 'O' then? And what's that one? What's the one next to it, looking like a poker?"

"That's 'Г'." *

"Is it really? Any pictures here?"

"Sure, here's one." Mikolka found a picture and showed him.

"Oh, yes. Are these haystacks or what?"

"They're clouds. Now, Father, do you know what clouds are made of?"

"God knows. How can a man know about the divine forces?"

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* Fourth letter in the Russian and Ukrainian alphabets.

"And I know! They are made of water that goes up in vapour."

"Oh, are they really? Hm, looks like he knows about it all right."

"Then I also know about the lightning and the thunder. That's lictricity that comes from earth when it's hot and then flashes and crashes up there."

Prokip just gave him a long look. Mother said, "Isn't he clever? And it's only his second winter in school."

Prokip said, "Oh, Mikolka! You're surely a smart kid! I'd... I just don't know what I'd do for you. I'd make you a gentleman if I could. I'd make you go all the way... even get you into a seminary! I'd... Eh!" He paused. "Well, let it even be something small at first. Then maybe life won't be as hard on you as it's been on me. If at least... if I could get you through the senior primary school at first."

"Yes, Daddy, please! Send me to the senior primary!"

"My God, don't I wish my child well? I'll manage it, by God!"

Mikolka closed the book, opened it again, rose to his feet, stood for a while, went to the table, then to the door.

"Daddy, I'll go to... to the teacher."

"What for?"

"Hee-hee, because I just want to see him."

He put on his new boots, grabbed his hat and was gone. He reached the school, entered the corridor and coughed once, then again. The teacher came out.

"Oh, that's you, Mikolka! Want to tell me something?"

Mikolka said, "Hee-hee!"

"Yes?"

"Father says he's going to send me to the senior primary."

"Good! Come over here!" The teacher took Mikolka by the arm and led him into the living-room. Mikolka went inside and looked all about him.

"Why are you looking so?" the teacher asked him.

"It's so nice here!"

It was really nice in the teacher's room. The table was covered with an embroidered tablecloth. A lamp in a blue shade was burning on the table. A samovar glittered brightly. There were gay-coloured runners on the floor. The bed by the wall was covered with a red blanket. There were flowers on the window sills and pictures hung on the walls.

"This room you live in... why, it's really beautiful!" Mikolka said admiringly.

"Beautiful?" the teacher smiled. "Learn and one day you'll also live in a place like this."

"Me? And how does it feel to live like this?"

"Just learn and you'll find out. Now sit down and have some tea." The teacher poured him a glass of tea, adding two lumps of sugar. "Sit down!"

Mikolka sat on the edge of the chair, looked at the glass and smiled timidly.

"Huh, is this tea... Is it for me?"

"Of course it's for you. Take a spoon and stir it."

"Huh, is it really?"

"Help yourself to the rolls too."

Mikolka took the glass, smiling, and began sipping the tea.

Meanwhile, the teacher took a violin and played, and it was some really fine playing, too.

"Well, it's..." Mikolka said and stood up.

"Yes?" said the teacher.

"I... I don't know. Only it's so sweet. I'd play day and night."

"Learn and you'll play too."

"Will I? Will I play too? Well, I never!" He looked about him. "How nice such a life is!"

* * *

Next fall, the teacher moved to another village. One day, having dismissed his class, he came home and sat down to rest. A cold and sad autumn evening was approaching. It was nasty and raining outside but, in the teacher's room, it was warm and cozy. Books stood in neat rows on the shelves and a lamp was burning brightly on the table. The tired teacher paced about the room for quite a while. He stopped from time to time by the window and listened to the wind wailing and whining outside and to the drops of rain beating against the panes. Then he sat down to read a book. Presently, he heard the banging of the door and some voices in the corridor. He opened the door to the corridor and standing there was a gray-haired blind beggar, his hand outstretched. His guide, a little boy, stood with his back pressed to the heating stove, trying to warm up a bit. His clothes were shabby and he was shivering

with cold. The teacher took a closer look at the boy. It seemed to him he had seen him before — those curls, those rounded little cheeks...

"Mikolka! Is that you?"

"Yes." The boy's face twisted.

"But how? Why?"

"You see... we've got nothing to eat, no fuel, no clothes..."

"Poor boy!"

"And Father, he's sick... He got sick when the snow was melting and his boots were torn. Now his feet hurt."

"So that's why you..?"

"So I got hired on a farm at first, but I... I was too weak to work. Even got sick. So I started working as a guide..."

The door to the room was open. One could see the table, the opened book, the violin, the pictures. Mikolka looked at it all and wept.

[*1906*]

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

This happened in Kiev. Dusk was coming on and the sky was glowing in the west. Here and there, stars appeared. They were bright stars, the kind you only see in winter. The frost was severe and it was windy. The doss-house had just been opened. Tramps, dressed in worn-out clothing and boots with holes "for air," their noses blue with cold, pushed inside like a swarm of bees. Once inside, the usual chaos started as they all rushed to the bunks. I was one of them. I threw off my overcoat, spread it on a bed along the wall and sat down. So I got myself a place, which was a good thing. There I sat, smiling and watching out in case some gentleman with a face riddled with pock marks suddenly got the idea he could push me out. Nobody did, though. Those who had come too late to get a bed, were making themselves comfortable on the soft damp floor. I thanked the Lord for my luck, took a piece of bread out of my pocket and ate my supper, looking over the quarters. A fine doss-house it was. You couldn't even reach the ceiling with your head. Not unless you hitched yourself up on tiptoe, that is. The ceiling was gray and the walls were

brown-gray. To be sure, the walls were a bit mouldy, and you could see some cockroaches running about, and some cobweb hung in the corners. The windows were painted over. The frames were painted green and the panes were gray. Those windows were sort of round-shaped and actually reached above the ground. Looking at it from all sides, it was a first-rate doss-house. I also wish I could tell you about the smells. Boy, you could almost feel the taste of them in your mouth.

Then they collected our fees. I was already dozing off when something tapped lightly on my boot. I tried to guess who it could be. Was it somebody I knew?

I opened my eyes and saw a tramp standing over me. I couldn't make out his face clearly, because a light was blinking somewhere behind the heating stove. I only saw that he was a rather skinny lad with a small moustache. He had on some rags for a coat and had more rags in a bundle under his arm. He was all bent over and his teeth were chattering.

"Friend," he said. "Just move over to the wall a bit so I can lie down."

I didn't like it. "No room here," I said. "Try the floor."

"All taken up. Nobody wants to make room for me there. Just move a bit to the wall," he said painfully.

"Is that all you want? Don't be so smart," I said. "Don't you see there's moss all over the wall and bugs behind the planks as well? What about getting against the wall yourself?"

He didn't say anything to that. It was just fine with him, I guess. So he just got in, placing his bundle under his head. I had to roll off my back onto one side. I got real angry, I must say. First, because I now had less room for myself and, secondly, because of that shirt of his that I could see under his coat. Not that the coat was any better. "Oh, damn it!" I thought to myself. Where the hell did he come from? I just couldn't lie still. I'd stretch out my leg, and then pull it up again. Then he said, "Hey, friend! Take it easy."

"What do you mean, take it easy?" I asked.

"You just touched my foot."

I wondered what was so precious about that foot of his, so I took a glance at it. It was all wrapped up in rags over top of the boot. The lad's boot must have been ripped, I decided, and now he was keeping it out of sight. And

what would keep him from pulling my boots off my feet when I was asleep?

He sat up, had a look at his foot and moaned.

I thought the lad was just putting on a show. He'd steal my boots, sure enough.

I grew even angrier. Why did it have to be me, of all people? Then I touched his foot again. This time he said nothing, only groaned like it hurt. I couldn't stand it any longer.

"Why are you putting on airs?" I said. And he replied, somewhat bitterly, "Eh, friend, if you only knew my troubles, you wouldn't be so mad."

"Let's hear all about it," I said a bit more easily.

"Better look for yourself, since you don't believe me," he said.

He sat up and began to unwrap his rags. They were filthy and sticky. He took off his boot which was tied up with a rope and then took off another rag which looked like it was soaked with pus. I pushed myself onto one arm and took a look. His foot was swollen like a log and pus was running from the big toe.

"Oh, cover it up quick!" I said. "Poor fellow!" I thought and suddenly wished I hadn't gotten angry at him.

"That's why," he said, "I didn't want to lie against the wall. There's nothing like cold and wet to make it hurt, and I was already pretty cold anyway."

"Let me move to the wall then," I said.

"No thanks, it's all right."

I had a good look at him. "Bad business, eh?" I said. "Where did you get it?"

"Looking for a job," he said.

"How?"

"Here's how. I went to Odessa to look for a job. There I waited at the market place for somebody to hire me. A month passed, then another — nothing. There were lots of us down there. I had a bit of money, but I spent it all on food. My clothes were bad enough to begin with, and not getting any better, either. I didn't know what to do next. Then I thought I'd rather go looking for a job on some estate. So I went... right into the steppe. Then the snow melted away and there was water everywhere. And there I was, tramping about, across the gullies and all. Didn't find a job, though, but got this..."

"You ought to go to a hospital," I said.

"I tried in Odessa. No beds, they say. Hire an apartment, they say, come and we'll treat you. But where do I get the money? Right now, I don't have a single kopeck. I'm still alive only because I look for folks who've got something to eat. I beg them for a piece of bread and sometimes get it. Same with sleeping. Boy, I had to cry to make them let me sleep in this place tonight. That's what it's like without money!"

"Try to get into the hospital in Kiev," I said.

"No way. I was told on the train it was just the same here."

"Well then... Then go back home," I said.

He swallowed hard, like he choked on something, and said nothing. Then he drew a breath, heavily, and said, "I don't have a... a home."

"How's that?"

"There's nobody left. I was born and raised on the farm where my father and mother worked. It's always been someone else's farm. That's where my parents died."

Then he didn't speak. He only covered his eyes with his hand, and there were tears running down from under that hand.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"It's a huge world, but it looks like there's no place for me in it," he said.

He was silent for a while and then continued. "Only I don't know about the monastery yet."

"What's this about a monastery?"

"That's where I think they might help me. Only, I came late today. That's what I've come to Kiev for. Came by rail. Boy, did those train guards give me trouble! But I had to come, you see. I reckon there are lots of monasteries here, so maybe I could just find myself a place to stay — in a hospice or somewhere else... And something to eat, too... I could go to a hospital from there. What's wrong with the idea?"

Then he looked at me and asked, "Aren't they supposed to help poor folks, as God commands?"

I looked back at him. "Why not?" I thought. "What about trying a monastery myself?"

"Look," I said. "Tomorrow let's go together."

"Let's," he said.

He coughed and lay down to sleep. It was already late. two or three men sat there, smoking, and the rest were

sleeping like logs. Especially on the floor, they looked like logs. They were lying all over the place, breathing heavily, puffing and snoring.

When it was daylight, we washed our faces and left. Outside, it was so cold that my moustache froze. The wind was chasing clouds across the sky. The sun peered out, from time to time. My companion stooped low and slowly limped along. I kept my pace slow as well. On the sidewalk, other people were passing and pushing us.

"Where do we go first?" asked my companion.

I took him over to the N. Monastery. It was a big one, its gilded domes glittering brightly.

"Oho," the lad said. "Must be a rich monastery, sure enough."

He stopped, took off his hat and crossed himself. "May the Lord grant," he said, "that I find help here!"

He ran a hand through his curly hair, and into the church we went.

It was Sunday, so there were quite a lot of people in there.

Candles were burning and icon lamps shimmered everywhere. There was also a lot of gold all over the place. The pillars, the carved wood, the icons, the priests' robes, the hat on the priest who must have been in charge there — everything glittered with gold. The deacon was reading from the Gospel and doing a fine job of it, too. "Don't lay up gold or silver," he read. And then, "Don't think about tomorrow," and... No, I just can't say it like he did. But they were some really fine words, all the same.

The lad dropped on his knees and prayed. He whispered his prayers in a really pious way, and his eyes got glossy as he stared at the holy pictures. I, too, did some praying. Then I said to him, "Let's go and see the hospice."

"Not now," he said. "Let the service finish first."

The service dragged on for quite a while, though. I reckon it was pretty rough on him, standing all that time on his bad foot. And me, too, I got footsore, may God forgive me. Well, at least I didn't quit before the end.

I listened to the sermon. Some priest from the monastery delivered it. First, he told us about the prodigal son and then spoke like this, "Now, too, there are people who sin against heaven. Want to know who they are?" he asked. "They are all those nonbelievers, like the Socialists. Those villains have turned away from God and the Holy Church;

they've taken the wrong path and lead sinful lives. Under the guise of freedom, they try to establish their own rule on earth. They kill people, rob them, take property away from them. How dare a man encroach on what belongs to others? How can a man take property away from his neighbour? We must respect other people's property, Brothers. We must love our neighbour!"

The priest stopped for breath, glancing about the church. And my companion said, "See? That's what it's like in a monastery! Did you hear that? We must love our neighbour!"

He crossed himself and his face broke into a smile.

The priest went on: "Love thy neighbour! That's what the Lord teaches us. And they... robbers and cut-throats — that's what they are! They want to destroy the Faith, to destroy the churches and monasteries. Let us pray, Brothers, for the Lord not to forgive them, but to punish them."

The priest got so worked up that his lips quivered and his voice shook. Everybody prayed for the Divine Punishment.

By the time we left the church, we were so hungry that it seemed our bellies had drawn in. The lad said, "All right. Now let's see the hospice. Maybe they'll give us something for lunch."

He cleared his throat and went to ask a monk who was carrying a fried carp somewhere.

"Father," he said. "Where is the hospice here?"

The "father" eyed us charply. "What do you need the hospice for?" he said and just walked away.

"The hospice is locked," an old woman told us. "They'll open it for the night, maybe."

"Locked?" the lad asked in surprise.

"That's right. Not so many pilgrims in winter, they say, so they just lock it up to keep out the tramps who always try to get in because of the cold."

"Gee!" the lad said softly and knitted his black brows.

"So there's no place to sit down for a while?" I asked.

"If that's what you want," the old woman said, "try the tea-house, the one they keep here in the monastery."

"Let's go!" the lad swung towards me.

The woman showed us the way. We passed one big building, then another, then yet another. Inside the tea-house were some pilgrims who sat there having tea. On the wall were pictures of the Last Judgement and of the

Saviour. We saw how sinners would suffer and read, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." That was under the Saviour. Then we looked around for seats. A monk wearing an apron came up to us and asked, frowning, "Want something?"

"Just tired. We'd like to sit down for a bit," I told him.

"What do you think we run — a waiting-room?" he asked. "Move along."

"We run a tea-house," threw in another monk, a fat one, who stood behind the cash-desk, combing his mane.

The lad only blinked. I felt my face flush deeply and just stood there, thinking hard and not knowing what to say.

"All right. So give us tea then," I said.

"For two?" the monk asked.

"How much is it?" I asked.

"Twelve kopecks for two, six for one," he said.

"Oh, hell!" I thought. Weren't we in a nice fix? All I had was ten kopecks and the lad had nothing at all. What could we do? I kept standing, scratching my head.

The monk wearing the apron said, "Why are you standing there like that? For two?"

"All right," I said. "Make it for t... for one."

I got a cup without a handle and a teapot with the spout missing, paid six kopecks and found myself a seat. I sat, having tea, and my belly was rumbling and howling. My companion just stood there, watching.

"You aren't having tea then?" the monk turned to him.

"No."

"Then beat it!"

"But I... it's my foot... I got a foot that hurts," he showed his foot.

"Get out, can't you hear? You don't get something for nothing here!" the fat one barked.

The lad's face got chalk-white. He breathed heavily, spun around and went out.

I left my second cup unfinished and ran out after him. The lad sat just outside the door, drooping his head. I grabbed his arm.

"Come and have some tea," I said. "There's some left." I pulled him inside. "Just go and sit down."

"What do you mean — sit down?" the monk cut in.

"To have tea," I said.

"How's that — to have tea? What about the money?"

"Hasn't it been paid for?" I said.

"Hold on," he said. "That way we'll be getting too many smart customers like you. There's a charge for the seats and cups, too. That'll be two kopecks."

The lad rushed out and just kept on walking. He looked pretty shaken and didn't say a word to me.

"Where will you go now?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he said, heavily.

So I took him to Sinniy Square to a tea-house for common folks. We sat there for a while, until a policeman came and threw us out, us and other tramps. "No free seats here," he said. We got cold and went back inside. After some time, the policeman came back and turned us out again. We got in once more. Then again and again.

Then night came. I bought a pound of bread, broke some off for myself and offered him the rest.

"No, thank you," he said.

"Come on, take it," I said. "You didn't even drink the tea."

"I don't want it." And he didn't take any.

So I stopped outside a store and ate the bread for dinner, and a good dinner it was, too.

"Where do we sleep?" I asked.

"I... I don't know," he said.

And where could we go, indeed? What about the place where we slept the night before? No, it was already too late, anyway. It had to be full by now, I reckoned, because electricity was already burning everywhere. Or maybe..? No, that was out!

"Look here," I said. "Let's go back to that hospice over at the monastery." He didn't say anything to that. I started walking and he trailed behind.

The hospice was still locked. People were leaving the church and quite a few of them stayed to wait for the place to open. They were all of a different kind from us. One was saying, "I'm here to fast and pray." Another: "I've come to court and to pray to God." Yet another: "I've come to see the best doctors here and to pray, if God helps me." Then the hospice was opened. We all trudged downstairs — it was way underground — and headed for the bunks. Everyone busied themselves, preparing for sleep. After a while, a monk with a bell came over, rang the bell and got out a purse.

"Pay for the night now!" he called out, sternly.

Everybody sat up, fumbled for money and paid him.

I, too, dropped in the kopeck I had left over after buying bread. My companion lay still. The monk gave him a push in the back. "Come on, pay!"

He rose to his feet but didn't say anything and only stared at the floor.

"Money!" the monk hollered. The lad didn't budge.

"He doesn't have any," I broke in.

The monk snapped out, "Then what is he doing here?" And he pointed to the door. "Get out!"

The lad didn't say a word. He just picked up his bundle and started for the door. But here one old fellow said, "Hold it, Father. It doesn't seem right to throw him out just like that so late at night with all that cold outside. Let me pay for him."

He fumbled in his pocket and threw some coin into the monk's purse. The monk said, as if to himself, "Lousy tramps. You're of no use to the monastery. You only take up space."

The lad was turned back and lay down again. The monk finished his round and went away. Everybody began to doze off. Some were already snoring. Then, again, a bell rang. Another monk, a younger one, and a policeman with a red moustache came in. The policeman was puffing up his cheeks and trying to look important, like he was an officer or something.

"Get your passports ready," the monk called out.

They went from man to man, the monk tinkling his bell and shaking folks awake and the policeman chanting, "Pa-a-assport! Passport! Your passport!"

He would take a passport, have a good look at it, and scribble something on it with a pencil.

"Time to move on!" he shouted at somebody. "It's already your third night here."

My turn came. I gave him my passport and he scrawled the date on it. Then he moved along to the lad and marked his passport, too. He looked all over those rags the lad had for clothes and suddenly asked, "Just what are you here for?"

The lad didn't answer. He just sat there, looking down.

"What are you here for?" the policeman yelled and even put his hand on his sabre.

The lad didn't seem to hear. His big brown eyes were strangely thoughtful.

"He's come to sleep," I said.

"And you? Who are you?" the policeman swung to me.

"A man," I said.

He gaped at me and then his eyes fell on my bunk.

"Wait," he said. "Got any things with you?"

"Should I? All I have is myself," I said.

"No tramps without baggage here! Pilgrims only! The monastery must have a profit. Get out of the bunks, you dirty bums!"

We got out. The policeman made sure our bunks got occupied by other folks.

"Where do we sleep?" I asked.

"That's none of my business. It's your last night here, anyway."

There we stood, with me looking all round for some place to sleep. We could forget about the bunks — that was for sure. And on the floor, there was an aisle here, an aisle there — the rest was taken up.

"Look," I said. "Come on, get under the bunks."

I thought no more of it, but just dropped on my knees and crawled in there on all fours, pulling my overcoat after me. It was dark as pitch there. A man could see none of those cocoons and spiders' nets which hung there like some fancy decorations. Only the head and also a little of the back brushed against all that luxury. My hands were sinking into soft sand, like the feet of a beauty walking across a thick carpet. I spread my coat and stretched out. The lad was still on his feet, thinking.

"Come over here," I called him.

He stood for a while and then joined me.

I can't really tell you what it was like for him to sleep there. I only heard him wake up every now and then and rub his bad foot hard against the floor. As for me, I had a good night's sleep, I must say. You lay there and felt a bug run across your face. Then it stopped and bit you and you felt the bite swell. After some time, you got another bite on the back, then one more on the belly. You got them sure enough, thank God. It was a strong bed, too — one that didn't bend under you and didn't creak either. To be sure, it felt a bit icy under the coat. It was a stone bed, you know.

And it was a long night, too. I took some time getting some dust, which fell from the bunk above, out of my eye. I just began to doze off when I heard the tinkling of a bell.

"To church, to church!" This was a monk waking us up. "It's two o'clock already."

He kicked us some with his foot. I got up. The lad just lay there, breathing heavily.

I got inside my coat, stuffed my hat into the pocket and looked around for some water to wash my face. There was a bucket in the corner. I tried to push my way to it, but before I got there, other folks had scooped out all the water with their hands. So I was left with my face unwashed. I went back to my companion.

"Get up," I said. "Time to go."

He was kind of dazed, but got up in the end. We went out of the hospice. Outside, it was dark and cloudy. The air was nippy. The wind wailed, driving snow right into our faces.

The lad went over to a wall and stood there, bending over.

"Let's get inside that church," I said. "Just think of the cold."

"N-no,' he said, turning his face to the wall.

"Are you hungry or what?" I asked.

"No."

"Let's go then."

He didn't answer.

"What's eating you?" I asked. He didn't speak for a while and then said, hollowly, "I... I wish somebody would kill me."

"Man, what are you talking about?" I said. "Let's go."

I took his hand, but he just said, "Ah!" like he was mad or something, and shrank away from me.

So he didn't get enough sleep and was probably going to make his way back inside the hospice, I thought. Only how could he manage it? They would surely let nobody stay inside, because they said they were going to lock it up. Well, maybe he would cook up something. After all, it was his business, I decided. I began to feel cold, so I hurried along.

The church was ablaze with lights. The choir in the gallery was singing something. Then the reading began. I went to the middle of the church and stood there. After a while, I felt sleepy, and it was getting worse by the minute. God knows why it came over me all of a sudden. I looked around to see if there was some place to sit down. There was, but people already sat there. Oh, hell! I could

hardly keep my eyes open, and now I was nodding my head, too. Then I dropped off. The choir was singing and it seemed to me somebody was shouting at me and I got stuck under the bunks and just couldn't get out. I also dreamed somebody snatched my hat out of my hand. Then I dreamed up something really wild: two monks came over and started to pull off my boots and I only kicked my feet like I was jumping. So I stood rocking on my heels and then... bang!.. as I fell right across a fellow in a white coat with a mop of hair as big as a Manchurian hat. I guess that fellow had also been sleeping, because he jumped up crazily and looked pretty scared.

"What's this, Brother?! Go kiss the icon. It's the Devil tempting you!"

I woke up, slowly, picked up my hat from the floor where it must have been lying for some time, stepped back into place and kept on standing. Soon it all came back. Oh, damn it! I wished the service would end sooner. Maybe they would open the hospice then? I strained my ears, and they were still reading the Psalter. Oh, no! The monks were going to make me pray to death — that was for sure. I got so angry I could have hit somebody. I wandered about a bit to see if I could sit down somewhere in a corner, after all. Everywhere I looked, old men and women sat napping, some even snoring. It somehow didn't seem right for me, a young man, to go and sit amongst them. But I couldn't help it. So I pushed them apart a bit and squeezed in, and sat near the door. And then it started. Now I played dice with the monks, now I raced with the deacon. The rest I don't remember. I only remember I dreamed that all the priests came out to me, tweaked my ears and went on to administer the vows to me. And I only blinked and couldn't say anything. Then a monk shoved me with a broomstick.

"Get out," he said. "Time to clean up."

I rose to my feet. Ony a few people were still in the church, praying by the icons. I raced to the hospice, ran all around it, but it was locked and there was no light inside. A nice mess it was, what with the night and the cold! Just where could I go? Then a monk told me, "Go to the smaller church for the early Mass!"

Oh, hell! It looked like I was going to pray to death, all right. I wondered where my companion was. Maybe he was at the Mass?

I did find that Mass, but he wasn't anywhere in the

church. So that was it, I decided. Most probably, the lad had drifted off somewhere to the city or was napping in the hospice, after all.

It was already daylight when I came out of the church after Mass. The wind was blowing and the snow kept on falling. And I was angry and annoyed. Where should I go? What should I do?

An old woman with a sack stood under the church, wiping her tears. "My God, oh my God," she moaned. "Where will his soul go now?"

"What's the matter, Grandmother?" I asked.

"Oh, my God! A man hanged himself in that building over there."

My heart sank. I dashed over.

The lad was stretched out on the snow. His face was sallow and his lips were blue. There was a rope round his neck — the same one he had used to tie up his boot with. His foot didn't hurt any more and his teeth didn't chatter. His brown eyes stared no more in that strangely thoughtful way. His black moustache, brows and curls were turning white. A group of beggars stood over him, the wind was wailing above him, and the snow was covering him.

[*1906*]

AT THE HERMIT'S

It was a fine spring morning. The fluffy acacias in the monastery were already blooming and their fragrance was ever so pleasant. The bees were buzzing and the birds were chirping. From behind the church came the warmth of the sun. The grass was green; the pathways were white. Here and there people milled around, some going to the church, some to the Hermit.

The Hermit's anteroom was already filled with them. They waited... Some sat on the sofa and discussed "how to approach him". Some stood around and sighed, remembering their sins. One old man with a cross on his chest pointed his finger at the Last Judgement hanging on the wall. A pilgrim with a forelock and an ace of diamonds * on his torn grey cloak recounted to him his mortal sins. A fair-haired girl in bast shoes examined the

* A marking worn to denote a political prisoner or exile.

whiskered angel who was blowing into the censer in the other picture. Another man, with a pipe in his pocket, was examining a second angel who, with eyes closed, pointed to the sky to the man with a black eye. In the corner by the door stood an old woman, barefoot, in a long torn vest. Her pale wrinkled cheek rested on her hand and she sobbed so pitifully that tears poured down her face.

The door opens. A monk with a ruddy beard enters. His eyes are ever so angry.

"Hey, you!.." The monk hollers.

Everyone starts and turns toward him.

"Enter!" he points to the open door. "But don't come through... Stand to the side."

They clear their throats and wipe their faces with their kerchiefs.

"Don't make any noise, you peasants," he hollers again.

They enter and crowd together on the threshold.

The Father Hermit was not yet there. Only a lectern, covered with a yellow brocade, stood in the middle of the room. Lying side by side on the lectern, so close together, were a handful of small coins, then a small gilded gospel, then a crucifix with Our Saviour. To the right of the lectern stood a chair, then a table covered with a tablecloth. On the table was a saucer of water. Piles of paper lay along and across the top. Another pile lay on the chair which had been pushed under the table. On the wall behind all this hung a huge icon of the crucified Saviour. To the right of the crucified one hung the uncrucified Saviour; then, the Mother of God with sabres across her breasts; then a shelf of small icons. In front of the shelf, an image-lamp was burning. Further, on the next wall, hung a monk crucified on a cross. On the monk's palms small candles were burning. The Holy Spirit flew around his head and inscribed on his forehead was "I suffer for the world". On the left of the crucified Saviour again hung a Saviour with a lamb across his shoulders, again a Mother of God with a child, and then the Saints: Seraphim Sarovsky, Khrol the Ascetic, Yavtukh the Recluse, the Last Judgement. The room smelled of oil.

After a while, the Father Hermit enters. He's a small grey old man. On the Father Hermit's rounded belly hangs a blue brocade apron. On his shoulders and hunched back lie black bands with white crosses and various inscriptions. His bald head glistens.

The people bow to him. The Father Hermit glances at them with a tired look, glances at the crucified monk, sighs, then crosses himself, and yells: "Repeat after me!" He begins: "I confess, O Lord..."

"Don't push, you swine!" the voice of a monk comes from the anteroom.

"Blessed Mother of God and all the Saints".

"For shame, you swine!" is heard.

"And to you, Our Father..." recites the Hermit.

He finishes reciting, sits on a chair between the lectern and the table and says: "And now come to me one by one."

The people approach, bow to him, and whisper their sins to him. The Hermit crosses them and says: "I forgive and absolve you."

They reach out to kiss his hand. The Father Hermit gives it to some, and not to others. He pulls it back and furls his bushy brows. "Don't!" he shouts...

"See!" the people whisper. "He knows who's worthy."

Then the Father Hermit wets his fingers in the saucer and chooses, without looking, a paper — "a blessing" — from a pile: to some from one pile, to some from the other, to some from under the table.

"See!" again the people whisper. "He knows who's worthy of which blessing."

Then, the Father Hermit indicates — first with his head, then with his hand — the pile of coins.

Then approaches the barefoot old woman, the one who'd been sobbing in the anteroom. She falls to her knees before him, bows so sincerely, with respect.

The Father Hermit touches her gently on the head with his apron. "Quicker, quicker," he says.

The old woman gets up, tries to say something, but can't. Only her lips move. The Father Hermit immediately glares at her: "Well, what?" he demands.

"Dear Father!"

"Well?"

"My son... twenty years!.. I wanted to marry him off... He can't move."

The dear Father yawned.

"The police beat him," weeps the old woman.

"Means he deserved it," the dear Father replies.

"O Lord!.. Not at all... He only told the guard, 'There's no truth in the world: some work their hearts out and sit hungry, and others don't lift a finger and live in clover."

The Father Hermit's plump cheeks immediately flush. He blinks and yells: "Shut up!"

"O Lord!.. My dear son always used to point to the Saviour and say: "Our Saviour teaches us...' "

"Shut up!" the Hermit interrupts the old woman. He looks at her fiercely and continues: "Subversives!.. They point to the Saviour... Peasants!"

"O God!" the old woman responds, "but I don't know anything."

"And you don't need to know. That's where those who know sit," the Hermit points to the Last Judgement. "By their tongues, into the fire!" he screams.

"May God preserve us from that!" the old woman crosses herself. "But, dear Father, he's my only child. He's the youngest, and so clever, my dear son, so literate... O dear Lord! I had seven others before him, but they are all in the next world... With their father... Misery drove them there — nothing to eat, nothing to wear..."

"Judge ye not!.." the Father Hermit screams again. "You must pray to God, pay for a litany!"

The Father Hermit reaches for a paper. The old woman adds three kopecks to his pile, takes the paper from him and begins rolling it up.

The Hermit points to the coins.

"Thank you, dear Father," the old woman says to him, "I have a little, people loaned it to me."

"Not that," the Hermit replies. "Did you put some here?"

"I did, dear Father."

The old woman makes her way outside, leans against a linden tree and cries: "Oh, my son, my dear son..."

The pilgrim with the ace of diamonds came up to her and reached for the paper. "Well, what have you here?" he says and unrolls it.

"The Saviour's word to Orthodox Christians," he reads. "Oh, mankind!" he reads further. "What a great and horrible sin it is to covet the property of thy neighbour! This sin is unpardonable, both in the next world and in this. It is a gnashing of teeth, it is a fiery Gehenna!"

"Oh, my Lord!" the old woman weeps. "If only my dear son had something to eat. If only it weren't dry bread alone..."

"What God has given thee, be satisfied with. This is the Holy will. He, the Holy One, knows who is worthy..." the ace of diamonds reads further.

"Oh, save me! What am I to do? Oh, my dear son!" the old woman wrings her hands.

"Well, why are you sulking?" the monk from the anteroom calls out. "Go and pray. They are already signing up for the litany!"

The old woman shuffles off. The bells toll.

[*1906*]

THE LESSON

The church was filled with people. It was a city church, and so beautiful inside. Light flashed off the dome, the candles were burning, the icons glistened, the epaulettes on the gentlemen and the robes of the fathers sparkled. The fathers swung their censers and incanted; "On this day, created by our Lord, we shall rejoice and be exceedingly glad!"

The deacons called out in chorus; "Christ has risen!"

The people milled about and their garments rustled. And they kissed each other three times in greeting. It was joyous. Everybody was smiling.

Outside, on both sides of the steps, people were also milling about. But these people already were not smiling, were not joyous. They probably couldn't hear "We shall rejoice and be exceedingly glad!" These, shabby and bent, stretched out their hands to everyone entering; "Christ has risen!.. Alms for the poor!"

Among them stood one young woman, also shabby and extremely thin and pale. In front of the young woman was a tiny girl dressed in rags and in boots from which her red toes protruded. It was cold outdoors, the wind was cutting and the dark child was slowly freezing because her round cheeks were blue. Her small dark eyes were filled with tears and she couldn't stand still. She shifted from one foot to the other and kept clasping her small hands to her stomach under her rags.

The young woman kept looking at the old men, and did as they did. Now she would bend, now turn her head to the side and open her mouth. But nothing came out, she only blushed.

She cleared her throat and started, very unsurely; "Eh... Christ has risen!.. Greetings on the holy holiday..." and she managed to stretch out her hand.

Nobody gave her anything. But one old man with crosses hanging on his chest commented disdainfully: "And she isn't even ashamed! Look at her!"

The young woman blushed at once and covered her face.

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" she repeated, "won't anybody believe that we're suffering? Won't anybody believe that the child was only fed once yesterday, and only on scraps?..."

"You are young, not a cripple," the old man told her. "You could work and not interfere with us here."

"Dear people!" the young woman replied to him. "Where could I work? I've been waiting, I've been looking. What can I do if there are so many of us, and even without children?"

The young woman wiped her eyes, was silent for a moment, and then continued: 'If I only had something, if only a house, would I look for a place? Would I be standing here?... Oh, my God!..." The young woman again covered her eyes. "He died. By husband died... and he did well."

"My, how you're lamenting!" the old man with the crosses got angry. "Nobody's going to even look at you!..."

The young woman stopped crying, stood still for a while, looked, bowed a few times and said to the girl: "Paraska, my child, you beg!..."

"Mummy, I'm fwozen!"

"Beg, my child! Say: 'Christ has risen!' It's easier for you."

"Mummy, I want to eat."

"Then say that: 'There's nothing to eat,' say you have no clothes."

"Mummy, I'm sweepy."

"Beg, I say, immediately!" the mother angered.

"I'm afwaid."

"Beg! Say: 'Christ has risen!' Now! A gentleman is coming!"

"Chwi... Chwist... has wisen," and covered her eyes with her fingers.

"Why didn't you put out your hand? Oh!.. Give me your hand! Hold it like this!"

The girl responded: "I'm fwozen, so fwozen, an they, an

they..." and she turned away and started crying. She cried so bitterly that she was shaking.

The mother looked on. Tears trickled down her face. She sighed, looked around and again began bowing. She bowed and bowed — nothing.

"Oh, my God," she said. "Let's go, Paraska, where the Easter bread is."

She took her by the hand and led her off.

"Holiday of holidays" could be heard from the church.

There were so many Easter loaves by the church, and all of them so yellow. Amidst the loaves, candles were burning and people were standing and talking loudly. The mother said: "Paraska, go to that lady. Say: 'Christ has risen'."

It was as if the girl hadn't heard. "Mummy, see what a pwetty skirt that girl has!"

"Say: 'Christ has risen!' "

"Mummy, look at that Easter bwead, an those eggs... They're wed, look!" she grinned and pointed.

"What!? What did I tell you?" the mother angered.

"What's going on? Where're you going? Peasants!" a policeman pushed them aside.

After a while, the bells began ringing — they were blessing the Easter loaves. People picked them up and carried them. The young woman stood and watched. Only her tears glistened in her eyes.

"Mummy, wet's go alweady," the girl said. The mother took her by the hand and, sadly, they left.

Everywhere, people pressed together. Everywhere, carts were rumbling. Bells were ringing somewhere. Pennants waved on the streets. The church dome sparkled. And there was not a cloud in the sky, only shimmering stars...

When they reached the market, the mother stopped and thought.

"Mummy, wet's go alweady," the girl said.

"Where will we go?" The mother's mouth twisted, she took the girl by the hand and led her to the attic above the store...

"Mummy, what a pwetty skirt I saw!"

The mother was silent.

"Mummy, I want an egg."

Silence.

"Mummy, will you give me some Easter bwead?"

"And why didn't you listen when I was teaching you? I told you to beg. And did you listen to my lesson?"

The child started to cry.

The mother was silent for a moment, then bent over and embraced her daughter: "My child, let me at least kiss you!"

[1906]

FORWARD — TO THE GRAVE

Already I have only one thought left: forward — to the grave! I'm young and green yet, I still want to live... but what are you going to do? I can't go on.

My poor father and mother! How hard it must be for them to look at me — haggard and sick. How many children have they already buried, seen off to that other world? Hunger and cold, diphtheria and fever... They at least wanted me to live, they had hopes for me. They even borrowed money to give me boots and an overcoat. When I was going to school, they gave me oil and fish. And when I grew up, they sent me to an even higher school. They wanted to make a person of me.

"Learn," they would say, "learn, so that you won't suffer like we did, living day to day from odd jobs."

At that time, I attended a senior primary school in a village near us. It was hard for them to pay my tuition. They were old and weak, but they tightened their belts and paid. At that time, I already knew well that I needed to study and I had already read quite a few books.

And I learned. I would write a composition, or recite a verse and the teacher would say, "Something will become of you." And he would smile at me.

I was so happy. Life seemed so beautiful to me. And I imagined finishing schools, becoming many things. And all for nothing.

In school, I liked to consider many things, to uncover everything — what the sky is, and what the stars are. And when our Father Principal, who also taught us catechism, would start telling us about the annointment with oils, or how a person attains paradise, I would ask, "From whom do I get all this for nothing?"

He glared sideways at me. And when they handed out report cards before a vacation I looked: instead of "5" for behaviour, I had "3.5".

"Why?" I was amazed.

"So you won't philosophize too much," the Father Principal replied.

On Sunday, he delivered a sermon in the church. He preached for piety and mentioned Ivan Chvyr.

"Such a man," he said, "is a pillar of our faith."

Well, I knew that Chvyr, and everyone knew him. He was a rich man, with many fields and livestock. And he attended every church service, and almost every year he presented the church with a new icon or a crucifix. But people complained about him. Just let someone's animal step on his land, and it was impossible to make restitution to him. When winter came and the poor turned to him for bread and straw to heat their houses, he would say, "If you can pay now, I'll sell it to you. If not — better it rot." He would refuse to discuss the matter any further.

When we left the church, I told the boys, "It's a good faith — he can go to church, donate icons, and yet treat people like they're animals."

I said it and thought nothing would come of it. But someone whispered this into the Father's ear. The next day, he entered the classroom and said, "So what's wrong with our faith?" He bared his teeth furiously at me and continued, "Return your textbooks. We don't need chaff in the wheat."

I bid farewell to the school. It was a shame: I was to have graduated that year.

* * *.

"So that's how you learned," my father started on me. "And now what? I ran up debts for you. Earn your living, go and find a job!"

"Yes, that's how it is," I thought to myself. "Has it really come to this, that I have to wander in search of work? Should I go out on my own to be lost in the darkness, in the mire? And what about my learning, my beloved learning? My books, my hopes? What can I do? How do I go on?"

I was alone in the world. I peeped into this corner, then

another. But then I thought, "Stop, I can also study at home: I can prepare to become a teacher!" So I got some books and began. My father shook his head.

"Don't waste time," he said, "You should have shown respect at school! And now, you have to think how to feed yourself, how to dress yourself." And my mother said, "Let him do it his way. Maybe, something will become of him." My father sighed and said nothing.

I prepared. I planned to go and take my examination in the autumn. "I'll pass the exam... become a teacher..." I thought. "A teacher!.. A school, pupils... I'll tell them about humanity, the sky. I'll pat their heads tenderly. God, how nice it'll be! I'll help my father. I'll hire a girl to help my mother, at least with the cooking. Mother is so weak... She's tormented with grief! In winter, she washed rags in her torn boots. She caught cold, and coughed so."

I thought, I dreamed... "Why is life like this?"

Meanwhile, the rumour spread through the village: "Hnatiuk's Petro doesn't believe in God. He was expelled from school because he undermined the faith!"

The rumour was caught up by the rich, for we had them in our village. "We'd better watch him," they said, "for all evil starts from that kind."

They had strikes in mind. At that time, they were occurring in our area. They began to look at me suspiciously. "He's even digging into books!" I heard them gossiping, "What kind of books can he have? He doesn't go to school any more."

I don't know if they would have continued "watching" me for long if I hadn't gone to one of them, Petro Hliva, who temporarily hired me to thresh his grain, For I wasn't always with the books: I had to earn a bit. We threshed rye for him. It was hot, the dust rose in clouds. With us, the temporary labourers, worked Hliva's hired hand, Yakim. He was such an intimidated lad, pale and thin. Once, something happened to him after lunch. He placed a sheaf in the thresher and sat down. He dropped his head and the sweat was pouring off him. Hliva — husky and healthy — looked at him and said, "What's with you, Yakim? You've gotten lazy?"

"I feel sick, so sick... My head is aching."

"Hm, you should work faster."

The hired hand said nothing. He reached for a sheaf, but I said, "He's sick." Hliva looked at me so hostilely,

put his hands behind his back and went off, examining the stacks.

I said: "That's the kind of man he is. Instead of calling the doctor, he tells him to work 'faster'."

He heard that and turned: "What?! You're inciting people?" he bellowed at me. "A democrat, a striker."

"And who are you to drive a sick man so fast?"

And he replied, "Fine. We've been watching you for a long time already."

* * *

It was getting light. I was lying in our barn and heard some noise in the garden. "Give him to us! Where is he?" someone yelled at my father.

I had barely finished dressing when they came for me — a gendarme and two Cossacks with whips. They lashed me several times and drove me to the house. There stood my father and the district police officer.

"Well, where are your books?" the officer demanded.

"Aha, that's where reading has gotten you," my father said, trembling.

They started to search me. They scattered everything in the house and near it. They didn't find anything they could latch onto. Nevertheless, the office yelled to the gendarme, "Arrest him!"

"What for?" my father screamed.

The officer said spitefully, "As if you don't know!... He's a rioter. Why did he incite people at Hliva's?"

The Cossacks mounted their horses and drove me forward. "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" my mother lamented.

* * *

I was tried and acquitted, but what does it matter now? The term of custody before trial succeeded in ruining my health, shattering my hopes and destroying my life.

I remember once when there were heavy frosts. It was cold in the cell. The windows were broken, the snow covered them with white, and there was only token heating — the chimney was cold. At that time, there were eight of us, all peasants, in the cell. Huddled over, we paced back and forth from the door to our bunks.

Everyone's nose was blue, and our hands were numb. Some had coughs, some — head colds, and others had their ears plugged. What could we do? We begged the guards, we begged the warden, *"Please, fix the windows and order them to give us more heat."* *

"Alright."

A week passed, then another — everything was still *"alright"*. How long could this go on? Once, I went to the peephole in the door. "Guard!" I yelled. Nothing. I yelled again. Nothing. I began pounding the door. I heard running.

"Why are your pounding the door?" he yelled.

"How long are we going to keep freezing like this?" I said. Not a word. He left. In a little while, the warden came.

"Solitary for him... three days... bread and water..."

They took me and threw me in a hole. It was damp, dark, and crammed. On one side — a putrid wet wall. The other side was the same. The stone floor was ice-cold, and all I had to wear was a light coat. I stamped my feet. Night came. There was nowhere to lie down, no place even to sit. I leaned against a door jamb, dozing. The third night already, I was still standing, my legs folding under me, my head drooping. I managed to lie down, I don't know how. I lay with my right side on the cold floor, and that did it. My side hurt and hurt. And when I moved — a stabbing pain made me gasp.

* * *

That's what happened to me. I'm young, I want to live, I want to work... If only they wouldn't plague me from all sides. "Aha," the rich rejoiced, "that's what he deserves for being so smart!"

My father's struggling by himself, feeble, tired. The poor man is so sad. Our home is sagging and our outbuildings are falling apart. And there are always tears in my mother's eyes. My poor mother.'

"Oh, my son, my son," she weeps. "And I wanted a daughter-in-law — I thought that you would live, and we, worn out, would live with you, but... And now it looks like we may be burying you!"

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* Here and onward italics indicate phrases written or spoken in Russian.

So feeble, so ill, she brewed linden and camomile tea for me: "Cure yourself, my son."

She sent me to the doctor, to the hospital. I went.

"Well," the doctor said, "this is such an ailment that, if you want to cure it, you have to eat properly: meat, eggs, milk. Avoid catching cold, and get plenty of fresh air."

That's the treatment! Where can I get such delicacies? Pickled cucumbers and potatoes are my delicacies! How can I avoid catching cold? I've nothing to wear, the house is cold, we have only dried dung to burn. The air is smoky and stale... Forward — to the grave!

Kharkivtsi Village,
Lokhvitsya District.

[*1910*]

WASTED LIFE

I

In the village of Verbivka there lives a man and his wife. Maybe, somebody knows him — Mykhailo Panasenko. Here's what he looks like — tall and lanky. He's so pious. As soon as the bell rings, he's in the church. When he was young, he served an educated master and became literate; he can read the *Holy Scriptures* and the *Lives of the Saints.* His wife is shorter than him, but somewhat stouter. Her name is Palazhka. There's no peace in their family. Sharp and restless Palazhka simply hates Mykhailo. He is a bit too dignified; you can't laugh or joke with him. And she turned out to be not overly tidy. She'd leave too many ears of wheat in the field after harvesting, too many weeds in the furrows, her house was often unswept, and things were spilled on the bench.

"You should be tidier," Mykhailo would sometimes mention to her.

"You oaf, monk!" she would retort immediately.

"You're disgraceful, my great sin and temptation!..." That's the way he swears.

She'd show him a rude gesture, or grab a stick and hit him.

That's how they live. And when they got married, it was different. Although, the way they got married... Palazhka was working far away on the estate of one Potipaka, and after having seen each other only once, Mykhailo already approached her with a loaf of bread *.

Incidentally, Palazhka also likes to eat well, and there's nothing there to eat; they only have half a *desyatina* of land. And she's furious.

II

They had a daughter named Olenka. When she was still small, a button yet, and Palazhka would be doing something, like spinning wool, Olenka would touch it with her finger and ask, "And what's this? What's it made of?"

Mykhailo bought her a primer, and made a pointer for her. When winter came and there was some free time, Mykhailo would say, "Well, Olenka, it's time to learn your ABC's."

Olenka, so small, in a long shirt, dark like her father, would put her finger into her mouth and sit down, "This is 'A', This is 'B'," she would repeat after her father.

And when morning or evening came, Mykhailo would say, "Well, Olenka, it's time to pray to God... God will give you bread and health."

The button would kneel and pray with her father. She was such a nice child. But, she cried often. She was scared of her mother when she was angry. And she was so happy when everything was peaceful. She would climb on the table, take her father's book of psalms, or something, and would start, "God bless us, Hallelujah!" And, although that wasn't written there, she would read with her father's drawl.

Olenka didn't play with the other children on the street. "It's sinful on the street, Olenka," her father would say, "God will punish." And she would listen.

And when she got bored with sitting at home, she would run to Grandpa Hnat, Mykhailo's father. When Olenka was just learning to walk, Grandfather lived with Mykhailo. He used to walk Olenka about the house. And then he lived with Vasyl, his elder son, who had a newly-built house next to Mykhailo's. The old man couldn't live with Mykhailo

* Traditional manner of proposing marriage.

because of Palazhka. She was very rough with him and never had a kind word for him. Olenka would run to her grandfather. He would pat her head and give her a treat, like an apple. Olenka made friends with Serhiyko. Serhiyko was Vasyl's son and a bit older than her. Grandfather would make ink for them from acorns and would teach them to draw circles with a straw. He was somewhat literate.

When Olenka got bigger, Mykhailo sent her to school. She was awfully eager to learn. She was always searching for something, always learning. She was already in the third grade. She was to finish her studies after Easter. But, during Lent, something unexpected happened to her.

High Deacon Poliyevkt Sokhanovsky, inspector of clerical schools in the diocese, was passing through Verbivka to visit a senior primary school in a nearby village. On his way, he also visited the parish school in Verbivka where Olenka was studying. She was sitting up front, dressed in a long vest and white kerchief. She was pale and looked so inquiringly. Father Platin, the village priest, pointed her out to Father Polievkt.

"This," he said, "is the best student in all these villages." Father Polievkt — stout, ruddy — addressed her, "Well, girl, recite the Lord's prayer for me."

Olenka blushed, but wasn't afraid. She stood up and recited. He praised her and continued, "And how would you say, girl, in Russian, 'Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread'?" She confidently replied. Further, he asked her something about Adam, gave her a problem to solve, and again she replied confidently. Then he said, "Good. Tell me, girl, do you want to study further?"

And she replied, with a drawl, "Of course, I do."

Father Polievkt continued, "Alright. Prepare a bit more over the summer, come visit the Father, and then we'll send you to a higher school on a scholarship that we have for our diocese. You'll be studying at the expense of the school, you understand?"

Olenka smiled happily. She was embarrassed and turned her eyes down.

Throughout the summer, she went to see the Father. He instructed her on how to prepare herself. She would look after his children and do other things for him, and read, and read.

She would tell the Father, "If only they'd sent me to

that higher school quicker. What kind of books do they have and what do they teach there?" Or she would be quiet, suddenly releasing a smile and asking, "And what will I become?"

III

In the early autumn, Olenka was sent to that school, all the way to Russia. And they say that that school was a senior primary school and had a theological teachers' seminary. And they say they were both in one building.

Shortly, Olenka sent home a letter. She wrote, naturally in Russian, "I am so happy! I passed the entrance examination. Daddy, Mommy! I'll learn and this means I'll be like a teacher. And then I'll be appointed a teacher. Then I'll buy books and paintings, put flowers in the windows, drink tea and invite you for tea. And now I'm taught to speak like the gentry do, and they gave me clothing like the gentry wear. As soon as I came here, I was surrounded by people and they examined how I dressed and listened to how I spoke. I was afraid, and they called me *'Khakhlushechka'*.* The school is so big! It echoes everywhere. And everything sparkles in it — the wooden floors and window-sills. And there's a church in the school, and we live in the school. There are only girls here. There are no boys, like in the school in Verbivka. And we play in the corridors. Through the windows, we can see the city. It's awfully big!"

At the end of spring, Olenka came home for the summer. She had a blue dress, an apron, and high felt overshoes. Her face was washed and so white. She was happy and kissed everyone. She looked everywhere — she ran to the garden, knelt down by the flowers and examined the bushes. She again ran into the house, grabbed the woven basket which she had brought with her, took out a gold-coloured egg, and gave it to her younger sister, Parasya.

"At Christmas," she said, "We had a fir-tree with so many candles on it, and toys."

She brought out some sugar and, offering it, said, "This is what I've saved from my rations."

She took out a blue book and placed it on the table. *"Taras Bulba,"* she said, "a present from the school."

* Feminine diminutive from "Khokhol", a derogatory Russian word for "Ukrainian".

She took out her notebooks and showed them also. "This is my caligraphy," she said, "and this is my dictation." She was chirping merrily. But, she was already using many Russian words which her father and mother couldn't grasp.

She also ran off to Uncle Vasyl. Grandfather Hnat was gone already; he had died the previous summer. She went to see the Father. And when Sunday came, she went to church.

The gossip spread throughout the village. "Look," they said, "at Mykhailo's luck. From nothing, his daughter will become a lady."

Mykhailo grinned with satisfaction. And Palazhka, always so boastful, already had her head in the clouds. "Now, Olenka, don't you mix with simple girls. You'll learn education and marry a gentleman. We'll put up a brick house with an iron roof for you," she told Olenka. And to Mykhailo she said, "Look where my daughter is studying, and I'm forced to wear *zapaska!* * Get me a proper skirt!"

IV

Olenka would come home each summer, but her life was sad. Her food was *borshch* which made one want to throw up. The entire house reeked of potato, onion and garlic. The house was old and lopsided, small and dark. And the unrest in the house grew. Her mother began to nag her father about the garden. And why the garden?

Grandfather Hnat, Vasyl's and Mykhailo's father, had died in Vasyl's house. For him, it had been more peaceful at Vasyl's place than at Mykhailo's because Oryshka, Vasyl's wife, a person of a better nature, was kinder to him than Palazhka had been. Dying, he had told Vasyl to extend his garden two meters more in Mykhailo's direction and told Mykhailo not to interefere. The brothers buried their father and began to divide his livestock between themselves. Mykhailo was sorry to allow his brother to take more of the garden, but that was his father's will. So, he stood aside.

"What's with you?" Palazhka started on Mykhailo. "Such poverty at home and you allowed him!... Your father said so, but he's dead. You didn't have to listen, damn you!"

* An apron (or aprons) worn by Ukrainian peasant women over long shirts and which served in place of skirts.

Angry Palazhka also started on Vasyl and his family. "They ingraciated themselves with the old man," she began to think of them and to spread the gossip among the women in the street. "They ingraciated themselves with him so he'd tell them to take the garden." She even stopped visiting their house, although even earlier she had rarely visited them. She didn't like Mykhailo and didn't like his relations. She even forbade Olenka to visit them. "Don't go," she would tell her, "don't let those bootlickers, those enemies of mine, have a chance to appreciate my dear lady."

But her gossip meant nothing to Olenka. She hadn't seen her uncle's family bootlicking. They had only shown grandfather normal human kindness. She continued to visit Oryshka or Serhiy, who'd grown up. Her uncle's wife was more respectful than her mother. She was small and talkative and would tell her everything she had heard. And Olenka would tell her about the city where she was studying.

"It has everything — electricity," she would say. "They light with it and run things on it. And what the people are like," she would say in wonderment.

At that time, Serhiy was also studying in senior primary school. Olenka could talk about grammar with him. "That grammar, that knowledge," Olenka would say to him. "Educated people are so clever. For example, those teachers who teach us. They're so fine and quiet, and they know many things. When they start talking about things, you just listen. You feel so ignorant compared with them; they know so much more than you. And their apartments are so nice — music playing, books, paintings, the aroma of perfumes, space, light. A chill runs down your spine when you look at their life and remember your own home."

Olenka desperately wanted to have such a life for herself, to become as educated as those teachers. She couldn't be separated from her books. She couldn't get any in her own village, so she would go to Stepurivka, the neighbouring village. There, in an old manor house, was a public library. An old gentry woman worked as the librarian. Olenka would take grimy torn books from her and would read them at a table in their orchard.

She was the same with books in school. Once, she was visited by a school friend and she told Mykhailo about her. "Olenka's like this. She finishes her homework and sits with the book she's taken from the school library. And an

evening of reading is too little for her; she reads at night too. When all the other students are already sleeping, she gets up quietly, because it's forbidden, turns up the lamp and reads."

V

Olenka already was studying at the theological teachers' seminary and had a scholarship as well. Serhiy, who had begun studying earlier than her, was already working somewhere as a teacher. He had graduated from a senior primary school after spending three years there, and had taken the teachers' exam. He had already gotten for himself various books, and in the native language, at that.

He was stout and fair like his mother. He would come home for the summer. Olenka also started borrowing books from him. She was astounded when she first learned that we are Ukrainians and have our own literature.

"Why haven't I heard of this before?" she asked.

In *The Kobzar* *, she read, "Learn from other folk, but don't forsake your own" and thought about it. She went to Serhiy and said, "Honestly, why should we forsake that which we heard and saw first in our lives?... Why should we forsake that which nature herself has given us?..."

When she began studying in Russia, she'd spoken only in Russian, but now started to use her own language. And, sometimes, she even wore her native clothing. Previously, she used to wear, if not the school dress, then the dress her father gave her. She even began to wear a long Ukrainian vest.

Her mother would tell her, "Learn, Olenka, to dress like the noble people do. Peasant clothes don't suit you any more." Olenka would only grin at her.

She became acquainted with a teacher from Stepurivka, the daughter of the librarian. She began to borrow books from her, as well. She was the type that, whenever Serhiy would mention something which she didn't know yet, for example, the works of Darwin, she would blush and say, "How little I've read!" And then she would get, if not from Serhiy, then from the teacher, that book which they had, and would read it.

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* Collection of poetry by Taras Shevchenko, (1814-61), great Ukrainian poet, artist and revolutionary democrat.

And she was bothered that, in school, they didn't use such books.

She would sew or embroider, something which she had learned to do at school. Her mother freed her from household work, "Do your own things," she would tell her. "Stick to one thing."

Olenka kept a diary. She would write in it, "I want to pull myself out of this mire. I aspire to great things, to achieve something beautiful. I want the humanity and truth in life which they write about in books."

And how she liked music! Serhiy could play the violin a bit. When he played, Olenka listened so intently that she didn't even blink. She would blush and tremble all over, "How this music captures my soul!"

She learned to play the piano; she said that those who wanted to were taught in school. Somethimes she would submerge herself in thoughts.

One harvest time, a school friend of Serhiy died. He was Andriy Bilanenko, a close neighbour of Serhiy and Olenka. As the carpenters were hammering together his coffin, she sat in the orchard and wrote in her diary, "That's all. A boy studied. He was handsome and good and that's it... Now he's being prepared for a cold, silent, dark, tight grave. And that's all. His chest will collapse, his brain will shrivel up... Oh my God! How can this be? Will the same happen to me?... How can it be?... And what is there?... A quiet, blessed paradise; unknown feelings; fire, hell, tortures; or peace and more peace, eternal and terrible. Oh my God!... What is being and nonbeing?... People! Tell me!..."

Once, she read Flammarion about the heavens. She told Serhiy, "That's where all those uncountable worlds come from, that's where the Universe ends."

In the evenings, she would gaze at the heavens, the stars. She liked the colour of the sky and wore blue dresses.

Palazhka became more and more upset that Olenka was visiting her "enemies" and spoke more with them than with her, her own mother. Olenka felt somewhat ill at ease with her mother because of her unsteady character. Palazhka especially didn't like it when, once, Oryshka called Olenka to come over.

"I just fried some delicious mushrooms. Come and try some!" she called to Olenka, who was admiring the carnations in their garden.

Palazhka heard this from the doorway and angered. She

began to think of how she would revenge herself upon Oryshka for this. The next day, while Oryshka was firing her *pich,* she heard the cries of her hens. She came outside and heard that it was coming from Mykhailo's threshing barn, which stood not far from the boundary line. The hens were crying as if someone were cutting their throats. What could it be? Oryshka went to the barn — it was locked. She peeped through a hole and saw her hens. Their feathers were flying. Palazhka was chasing them around the barn with a rod.

"You're crazy, what are you doing?" Oryshka shouted at her.

"Let them not come into my barn."

"And why are they locked in, then? Perhaps, you lured them here!"

Palazhka twisted her mouth and knitted her white brows. "Yes, I lured them," she replied.

"You scum from the manor house!" Oryshka shouted at her.

Palazhka jumped, startled.

VI

Olenka matured, became pretty and slender. True, she was a bit thin and a bit pale, but this didn't harm her looks. On the converse, it made her very appealing and spoke of something spiritual in her. Her dark eyes were so intelligent.

Her heart beat faster and her cheeks reddened when she read about love. She read about a teacher. He was also somewhat pale, dark and thoughtful. And he read a lot. He wanted to know everything in heaven and on Earth. He was kind toward everything living. He remembered that he was human.

"If only I could meet someone like him," Olenka thought. "How I would love him. I would stand by his side and share my thoughts with him."

Verbivka's deacon had a son by the name of Fedir Hryshchenko. He taught somewhere after graduating from a theological teachers' seminary. He was still teaching. The boy was young and unmarried and spent his summer at home. He wanted to become acquainted with her for, in Verbivka, at that time, she was the only educated girl. He

began to visit Serhiy. But Olenka was somewhat shy and wouldn't go to Serhiy's when Fedir was there. She would only stroll around her orchard and look over the sunflowers into Serhiy's orchard, where Hryshchenko was. Between their orchards and houses were flower-beds.

"What are men like," she asked herself, "when they're not cousins, like Serhiy?"

One Sunday, Olenka was sitting in Serhiy's orchard. The birds were chirping and the sun was shining. Under a fluffy guelder-rose, supported on one side, were a bench and table. There sat the young beauty. She was wearing an embroidered blouse and a dark velveteen vest. A red ribbon was woven into her long braid. Serhiy bent down a cherry branch near her and was reaching for the berries. She was reading "Maiden's Nights" from Shevchenko's *Kobzar*.

Suddenly, the gate creaked. She noticed Hryshchenko approaching from behind some poppies. Olenka jumped up like a startled bird, as if she wanted to fly off. But there was nowhere to go. She stood there, embarrassed, red as a berry. Serhiy introduced them and they sat down. Hryshchenko, dark, with a short moustache and dressed in a blue jacket, glanced at her book and asked Olenka, "You're reading?"

She smiled. "Yes, I am," she answered shyly.

"Reading is a fine thing," Hryshchenko said to her.

"Certainly," Olenka replied. "It's spiritual food." She leafed through several pages and stole a glance at his jacket.

"You read and, how should I say it, you see everything," Hryshchenko said.

Olenka wet her lips with her tongue. "Uh-huh. And you become closer to heaven. Sometimes, such feelings..." but she didn't finish. She blushed and coughed. At that exact moment, an argument broke out in her house. Although under the guelder-rose it was impossible to make out the words coming from the house, the noise was distinct. Her mother was yelling these words at her father; "She's enticing my daughter and calls me scum. And you can't even scold your in-laws properly!"

"At least don't shout on a Holy Sunday. There's a stranger there, a teacher. He might overhear."

"And what do I need such teachers for? Is he from the gentry, or what?" she retorted.

Her mother went outside and, from behind the wheat, stared in the direction of the guelder-rose.

"Look how nice the apple tree is," Olenka got up and went behind it.

"Look, she's hiding!" her mother yelled. "She thinks I can't see her. Come home!"

Olenka went so unsteadily that she forgot to say goodbye.

"Don't go there!" her mother let loose at her in the house.

Her father added his, "Really, Olenka, it would be better if you didn't go there."

Although Mykhailo was not as aggressive as Palazhka, he also didn't approve of her visits there. He was afraid that Serhiy might set her "on the wrong track". At that time, rumours were spreading that he didn't believe in God, rarely went to church, didn't pray there and didn't light candles. And that he also told someone that the Earth flies around the Sun and that rain comes from vapour.

Mikhailo had once told Serhiy, "There's nothing like that written in the *Scriptures*. All this comes from unbelievers. Nobody mortal can understand the powers of our Lord. God gives rain, not vapour."

Mykhailo didn't like Serhiy. Because of him, even he rarely visited Vasyl. "Live according to our Lord. Observe the fasts, go to church regularly," he kept pounding into Olenka.

VII

Soon, Olenka again saw Hryshchenko at Serhiy's. She looked at him across the garden. "That time I didn't examine him properly," she thought. "He is so... and he began talking about reading right off."

And she probably would have gone to him, already as an acquaintance, but her mother was sitting by the house, chewing sunflower seeds.

Yet, Olenka had already been visiting Serhiy and her uncle secretly. And, Hryshchenko... who could know what he thought about her after her mother had humiliated her. So that she wouldn't see him, wouldn't hear his voice, Olenka went to the common pasture.

It began just beyond their orchard. It was high and steep land. Here and there, horses were grazing, calves munched at the grass, and windmills stood. Below, lay the village amongst the orchards. Lush, silvery poplars rose upward. Others — dark — hung over the barns. Yet the church, like a small star in the sky, shone amidst the lush greenery. Along the pasture ran a valley. On the far side of the valley was a grove. It reached into the valley and stretched into the field which appeared golden in the sunlight. And the groves in the distance took on a bluish tone.

"Oh my God," thought Olenka, "why am I alone? Why is there nobody to share this beauty with me?"

She heard voices from behind her. She turned and saw Serhiy and Hryshchenko following after her. Her heart began pounding. She straightened the locks of hair which fell from under her kerchief, checked her blue dress, stopped walking and greeted them.

"How beautiful it is down there," Olenka said to Hryshchenko.

"They didn't beat you in the house that time, did they?" he asked her. Olenka smiled and said nothing. It embarrassed her. Serhiy noticed this and changed the topic.

"I read in a newspaper that, in one village, the common boys and girls put on a show together. The teacher and the deacon were in charge. If only we could organize something like this here and donate the proceeds to a worthy cause!"

Olenka stole a glance at Hryshchenko, as if asking what he thought of this.

Hryshchenko, perhaps, thought that Olenka was examining his clothes. He straightened his pressed collar, pulled it a bit from under his jacket, cleared his throat and said, "What an interesting show we had with the Stepurivka deacon yesterday! He's a real devil. I had a brand new deck of cards and he," Hryshchenko burst out laughing, "he just tore them to pieces."

"Why?" Serhiy grinned.

"I won five roubles from him. I warned him, 'You don't know how, don't play' and he..."

"So, he's got cards on his mind," Olenka thought about Hryshchenko. She looked at him. He was so full, red, heavy-muscled. And she thought, "And his face doesn't look anything like the one I read about."

Serhiy looked at the sun and said, "It would be interesting to see the sun through smoked glass."

"However huge is this celestial body, it'll die out some time," said Olenka.

"Look, a stork," Hryshchenko pointed with a stick toward a windmill. "If only I had a rifle! Fantastic!... Once, I shot a crow and it just spiralled down from a poplar."

"And what would happen if I asked why he shot it," Olenka pondered.

They walked for a long time through the pasture. Hryshchenko again mentioned the Stepurivka deacon, told how he drank, how he could walk on his hands. "Interesting," he kept saying. Olenka was quiet most of the time.

Walking with Hryshchenko, she thought to herself, "It's alright. I'll finish school, and the doors will open for me. And I'll find someone to love, someone with a soul."

VIII

In the meantime, Palazhka quarrelled more and more often with Oryshka. After Oryshka had called her scum, she, if she found out that Olenka had paid a visit to the neighbours, would punish her in some way. When she walked along the boundary, she would damage one of Oryshka's sunflowers or break the leg of one of her chickens if it crossed her, Palazhka's, path.

Palazhka ranted at Oryshka and became more and more angry that she, her mortal enemy, had a bigger garden. More and more often she blamed Mykhailo for it. There could be no salt in the house, or nothing to put into the *borshch,* but all the same, Palazhka's tongue always brought up the question of the garden.

"They ingraciated themselves with the old man, and you allowed them." she thundered at Mykhailo. "If only we could sell a single potato plant from that plot which you gave them, that would already be a help!"

Whenever Mykhailo went outside, that plot was before his eyes. "Really," he began to think, "Why did I allow it? On the other hand... that was my father's word... I had no choice... 'Honour Thy Father' the *Scriptures* say, It's... it's Vasyl and Oryshka who are to blame for this. Palazhka said that they ingraciated themselves with the old man, and it's so. Truthfully, in what way was I worse to Father than Vasyl? Why did Father give more of the garden to

Vasyl? Because Father lived with him?... He lived with me earlier!... Perhaps, he didn't like Palazhka for some reason, but am I to blame for that? They got around Father, and that's it."

Mykhailo began to think like this and himself became angry at Vasyl and Oryshka. He stopped visiting them. And when Palazhka would do some harm to them, he would no longer stop her. Sometimes, he himself would grab their hens in his garden and throw them spinning.

Cursings and arguments reigned in the house and outside.

"All evil comes from poverty," Olenka thought. She consoled herself by saying, "It's alright... I'll finish my schooling, I'll have a job, and I'll help my father and my mother. Perhaps then this snarling will cease, at least a bit."

Olenka had only one year of school left. She waited till the end of summer and departed.

IX

After the Feast of the Holy Trinity, a postcard came from Olenka. She wrote, "I passed with honours and was presented a Gospel with a red velvet cover and gilded pages. On such and such a day, come to meet me at the station."

The time came to go and meet her. Mykhailo harnessed a horse and went. It was a happy journey. He hardly noticed that he had arrived in Haidari, a large village twenty *versts* from home. On its outskirts was the station.

Dawn was breaking. Black poplars, as if painted there, stood against the pale sky. The water-tower looked somber. The train hadn't yet arrived. Only baggage cars stood on the siding. Several windows were lit up and a telegraph operator sat in one, dozing. Near the trimmed shrubs, someone was lying on his bundles, snoring. From somewhere, a young gentleman in a wide-brimmed hat appeared. It was becoming lighter outside.

"May I inquire whether the train is due soon?" Mykhailo addressed the gentleman.

"And where are you going? Looking for work?" the gentleman replied. Mykhailo smiled, "No, I'm waiting for my daughter. She's returning from school, from her studies."

The gentleman stopped, "What kind of studies? What kind of school?"

Mykhailo came up to him, "She studied with gentry children."

The gentleman looked at Mykhailo's grey overcoat made of homespun wool and worn-out boots. Mykhailo smiled. The gentleman strolled along the platform with Mykhailo at his side.

The train came, puffed and stopped. Mykhailo immediately became attentive. Suddenly, a basket emerged from the green doorway of the train. It was held by a young lady dressed in blue. Her hands were white and delicate. Her locks fell down in curls from under her kerchief. Her cheeks were rosy. She stepped out and smiled, "Hello, Daddy!"

Mykhailo fluffed the hay together on his cart, covered it with a rough canvas blanket and off they went.

The dew shimmered on the pastures and the sky beyond the willows reddened in the rising sun. The poplars in Haidari turned red, as if blushing. Haidari. Everywhere whitewashed houses stood amidst gardens. Sheds and barns stood along the streets. A herd of cattle came their way, already smelling of milk. The herdsman wore an overcoat of homespun wool and a wide-brimmed hat. "Hey!" he waved his cane. Farther on, on a square, sheep were bleeting and the birds chirped merrily in the gardens, greeting the sun. The song of nightingales made one's ears ring. The song came from one side, then from the other. An oriole sang from a maple tree. Another bird chirped in a guelder-rose. A magpie was chattering.

"It's like paradise here," Olenka laughed. "Paradise, a true paradise!... But there—walls. Look through the windows — rushing, noise, smoke!"

Mykhailo said, "So, this means you're going to be a teacher. Praise the Lord! If only you could get a place in a senior primary school, you'd earn more, you'd be able to help us."

"I can teach in a senior primary school," Olenka answered him. She was silent for a moment and continued, "That's what I was told." She smiled. "I've been to see Father Polievkt."

She told him about her visit there. At the station near the city where Father Polievkt lived, Olenka had had to change trains. She had a long time to wait for her train,

half a day to spend outdoors, so she left her basket with a doorman and went to see him. He was a school inspector and, besides this, an acquaintance. She wanted to ask him about a job. She rang a bell and was admitted. The room was clean and an oil lamp was burning. Father Polievkt appeared — stout, narrow-eyed. He blessed her and, upon recognizing Olenka, smiled. A year had passed since she had last visited him, bringing a book and greetings from her principal. Father Polievkt sat down. Olenka, humble and shy, stood in his presence. Quietly, she told him, "I've finished."

"Um-hm," he said, "and was it hard to study?"

"Not that difficult."

They chatted awhile and then Olenka continued, "I would like to ask you... how can I get myself established as a teacher?"

Olenka expected this from him, as he had launched her into that learning. Father Polievkt smiled and said, "Fine, fine, my dear girl. I'll keep it in mind. Only you mustn't forget God, and respect your elders." Earlier, he had addressed her less formally, more casually.

Olenka hadn't forgotten that she would have to help support her father, and that junior primary schools paid their teachers poorly. "Could I get a place in a senior primary school?" she asked.

Polievkt was silent for a moment, and then said, "You have finished the theological teachers' seminary... it is possible. And there should be a vacancy in one of the schools."

"And how will I find out whether or not there'll be a place for me?"

"I'll write to you in about a month or so... I'll get in touch with someone."

"He's so kind," Olenka said to her father.

They drove on. They came upon a house which could be seen behind a fence. Its walls were white, its roof red and it had a small green porch, overgrown with wild grapes. The flower-bed in front of the house stretched in lines reminiscent of embroidery. The shrubs displayed their greenery. The fragrance of roses was in the air and the orchard seemed to be leaning against the house.

Olenka thought to herself, "When I become a teacher, I'll live like that. I'll have flower-beds like that, and an orchard, and a piano, and books, and paintings and... He'll

be there — thoughtful, dear, fine. We'll teach people goodness and, together, we'll grasp great truths."

Mykhailo pointed to her basket and asked, "And is your Gospel with gilding in there?"

Olenka nodded her head and smiled.

"Take good care of it, and fortune will always smile upon you."

The road continued through a field. The red-gold of the early sun shone upon everything. Here and there in the valleys, the groves seemed to have acquired a reddish tint. A stream sparkled through the reeds. And in the distance stood a white village church. The ravines were dark. In a rye field, a quail sang its melody. A meadow lark called from on high.

"Our Lord's world is so beautiful," Olenka cried joyously.

The road seemed almost blue as it wound its way through the fields of rye. Green waves of young rye glistened in the sun. A fragrant breeze whispered through the field. Blue larkspur looked out from the thickets. And there was fragrant dark hemp. On a grave mound, sweet peas lay entwined... The mound seemed so high.

"That grave mound," Olenka contemplated. "Who has it seen? Tartars with high cheek-bones? Cossack knights with forelocks, or maybe even Scythians? What's happened to everything which used to be here? Does the one who perhaps sleeps in that grave mound at least dream about this beauty? Oh Lord, why should there be such an eternal dreadful sleep when life is so beautiful?"

The sun had climbed high into the sky. They had already passed through Hupalivka with its brick church and thick reeds. They were approaching the windmills of Stepurivka. The village lay to one side of them. And here was the grove. From both sides, it enveloped the road. These were her dear native places! There, near that bush, while picking berries, Olenka had once disturbed a partridge. And there, on a hillock, she used to pick wildflowers.

A light carriage approached them. It was driven by Savka Hnatiuk, a man from Verbivka. Someone was seated behind him. He was young and wore a peaked cap with a blue band. "It's the student* Kochura," Olenka's father told her.

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* Student — in this context refers to university students.

Olenka had heard of the Kochuras. Savka, their driver had talked about them in her father's house in her presence. They were gentry people — rich and educated. Old Kochura was someone in the local *zemstvo*. They lived on their farm not far from Verbivka.

"What would happen if I got acquainted with them," Olenka thought to herself. The Kochuras often had visitors in summer. Savka said that a teacher from the Gymnasium was a frequent guest. He was a bachelor and had a birthmark on his cheek. The Kochuras had a daughter, called Lusia, a student, Savka said.

"If only I could enter a university," Olenka thought. "I would teach... and prepare myself."

Savka greeted them and drove on.

"Oh Lord," she thought, "if only I could meet with them, people with higher education. Such nice things are written about them. It must be like paradise to be with them."

Now they could see houses standing in orchards. Some children were building a sand castle right on the road. A piglet was snorting while it roamed. Amidst the weeds stood a white post. VERBIVKA was written on a small black board.

"Hello, my native village!"

They came to a fork in the road and turned to the left. Who was this? Her mother was coming to meet her; Paraska was running beside her.

"Greetings!"

And here was their fence. The old house looked out from under a pear tree. The orchard was green. In the pasture were thick elms. They came up almost to the barns. A dark threshing barn stood under a maple.

"How everything has grown!" Olenka cried out. "Look how the roses are blooming!"

She entered the house. It was small, with a low ceiling, and the wall where the plank bed stood was crooked. But now this house was so plesant to her. "My dear house!"

Her mother grabbed the brass samovar and was brewing tea out in the yard. Paraska, already a schoolgirl, was getting charcoal for the samovar from the *pich*. Her father unharnessed the horse and rushed to the store for white bread.

Olenka walked around the house, walked around the orchard. She felt so happy because everything was so pleasant and dear to her. Along the pathway through the

garden she rushed to Uncle Vasyl's. And here it started.

"Where do you think you're going," her mother demanded severely from where she stood by the samovar.

Olenka blushed and stopped, "And what is it to you?" she asked.

"Don't go to those riff-raff."

"Stop that already!"

"Don't go, I tell you."

"How long will this go on?" Olenka dropped her arms in frustration and went.

Her mother yelled after her, "I forbid this. A child of mine who has gotten such knowledge cannot go to my enemies." She grabbed a stick and smashed the windows of her house.

Olenka stopped and looked. Her aunt came out. Their houses were close together and the doorways faced each other.

"What's going on?" she called out.

"Don't lead my daughter astray, you riff-raff. Take care of your own."

"Have you gone crazy?" Oryshka rejoined.

"This is for you!" Palazhka made a rude jesture at Oryshka.

Some people, passing in the street, halted and began watching. Mykhailo, having returned with the white bread, also stood and watched. Olenka hung her head and retreated into the orchard. The samovar boiled, but nobody had tea.

X

Once, after this incident, Palazhka was building up the mounds around the potato plants and came up to the boundary marker made out of earth which stuck out like a comb between Vasyl's and Mykhailo's plots. It grated on her. It divided the garden so unfairly and beyond it lived her mortal enemies. "If only to lower it a bit," she thought.

She looked towards Vasyl's house. Nobody could be seen, and she was hard to make out behind the sunflowers. She bent down and, with her hoe, began to dig at the marker. She felt good and worked with great zeal. She made notches in the marker. Digging downward, she cut a trench along it.

"Let it slowly fall to our side," she thought, "and thus

move toward my enemies. Our garden will widen and this will harm my enemies."

The next day, Vasyl chased the hens out of the garden and came up to the marker. He saw it and exploded. He looked so angry with his dark moustache. He ran and grabbed a shovel and began filling in the trench and those notches. And he also took earth from Mykhailo's garden. "I'll show you!" he yelled.

At that time, Mykhailo was in the home with another man. He ran outside. "What are you doing?" he snarled at Vasyl.

"And what is this?" Vasyl showed him the notches. Mykhailo saw what had been done and he guessed who had done it, because he had seen Palazhka by the marker the day before. But he didn't care. All he knew was Vasyl had a bigger plot.

"So?... Nothing there," he retorted.

"It's nothing to you!"

Vasyl was taking earth from Mykhailo's furrows and damaging his potatoes.

"Help!" Mykhailo screamed. The other man came out of his house. This was Semen Ostapchuk, a rich, respected and learned person. He was a judge for Verbivka in the *volost* court. He also came to the marker. He was big, imposing, and his hair was a bit ruddy.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Look at what's been done to this marker!" Vasyl addressed him.

Ostapchuk looked but didn't take Vasyl's side. He didn't like him because of Vasyl's reserved manner and because he was impolite toward him, a judge. And he needed Mykhailo badly at that very time; he had come to hire him to do some work and Mykhailo had agreed. So, Ostapchuk looked, grinned and said, "So? There's nothing wrong here."

Vasyl turned red. "What do you mean 'nothing'?" he yelled at Ostapchuk.

"Why are you yelling?... Who are you yelling at?..." Ostapchuk retorted in anger.

"Why shouldn't I? They are encroaching on my garden and nothing is done."

"And why don't you mention that you have a bigger garden?" Mykhailo joined in.

"What's it to you?" Vasyl thundered at Mykhailo.

Ostapchuk looked at Vasyl's garden, running from the marker toward the street, and at Mykhailo's, running from the marker to the forest. They were both narrow, but it was noticeable which was wider, although not by much. "Yes, yours is wider," Ostapchuk added.

Vasyl reddened even more. "And you... you're also jealous that my garden is wider?" he fumed at Ostapchuk.

"Be polite! Don't forget whom you're speaking to," Ostapchuk replied.

"And what of it?"

"The boor... He says they're encroaching on his garden... Such a person should be encroached upon." Ostapchuk said.

"What? I should be encroached upon?" Vasyl exploded. "You red-haired devil, are you trying to provoke me?"

Ostapchuk looked, reddened and continued, "What's with you? Why are you insulting me in this way?" he screamed. He turned to Mykhailo, "Did you hear him? He called me a red-haired devil. You'll be my witness, I'll sue him."

Ostapchuk and Mykhailo went into the house. Palazhka was also there. She was sitting on the plank bed and pulling the down off feathers. Olenka also hadn't been in the garden; she had escaped from her chores. Palazhka was smiling. She had been listening to the row the whole time through the open window. Ostapchuk had come into the house to get his walking stick and then go home but... he sat down on a bench, looking downcast. He was angry. How could it be? Some lout had insulted him, a judge, a much respected person. For this, he could be held in custody for several days. That's what should be done! He raised his head and asked Mykhailo, "And through what good fortune did that swindler get a bigger garden?"

Myhkailo scratched his head, sat down on a bench and replied, "The old man gave it to him... they ingratiated themselves."

"So he doesn't have any document from the old man?"

"No."

Ostapchuk shrugged his shoulders, "I'm surprised at you. What are you waiting for? You could take this to court and say, 'We're two brothers, it's our father's garden, but it's divided unequally. Please, divide our plots equally.' "

Mykhailo kept silent and looked at Ostapchuk. But Palazhka exclaimed joyfully, "Divide them equally! Thank you... tell us how to win our case."

Ostapchuk smiled. This is how he would get even with Vasyl.

"Well," he said to her, "I'll give you some advice." He turned to Mykhailo and said, "There's only one thing to remember: how it happened. Whether your father gave it to him or what should not be mentioned in the court. Say simply that Vasyl took so much of the garden for himself."

Mykhailo kept silent and looked at the ground. But Palazhka addressed Ostapchuk, "Thank you! I'll do anything for you without pay for this kindness you've done us."

Ostapchuk smiled again. He could yet derive some benefit from this side of it. "Certainly I'm kind. Tell them he simply took it," he instructed Mykhailo. "Only, for the sake of formalities, find a witness who will say the same thing, and it's done. I'll lend you a hand. I can talk it over with my fellow judges... and we'll bring down a decision to move the boundary further into Vasyl's garden... Is that alright?"

"I don't know... if only..." Mykhailo scratched his head.

"If only what?"

"If only it isn't sinful."

Ostapchuk smiled and bent toward Mykhailo. "And what about the boundary? If there's any sin here, it is the boundary itself. After all it has been dug away from your side."

At this, Mykhailo also smiled, kept silent for a moment, and went on, "This is all true, but... the boundary is a minor thing, but this... I have to go against Father's will, against Vasyl, and say yet that he took it. Also, it was not me who dug away the boundary.

Palazhka began yelling at Mykhailo, "Those riff-raff called you names too."

Ostapchuk burst out laughing, "Think about it," he said, picked up his stick and left.

It became a real hell in Mykhailo's house. The only thing on Palazhka's mind was to drive it into his head. "Take back what you lost," she insisted.

Olenka listened to all this and tried to talk her mother out of it. "Mother, what kind of a person are you? What do you need this argument for?"

"And what do you want?" her mother launched at her. "You've finished school. Find a job!"

"Well," Olenka thought, "if I could only find a job quicker. I'll make some money and nothing will get in my way. I'll buy that strip which Father allowed Uncle to have. 'Here it is, Mother,' I'll say, 'now shut up.' "

XI

More than a month had passed since Father Polievkt had promised to write Olenka about a placement. Olenka waited and waited, but heard nothing from him. Could he have forgotten? She began to worry.

Then she heard from Serhiy, who had himself heard somewhere, that Father Polievkt, who always lived in the capital of the province, was now at his father's place. His father lived in a town, a small district center, not far from Verbivka. His father, a grey-haired old man and a retired priest, was quite sick and Polievkt had gone to visit him. An idea struck Olenka. Why not go and remind him of his promise? It was already becoming dark when she heard this news. She waited till the next day, got dressed up and rushed off. It was only seven *versts* to that town.

Noon, in the anteroom of Polievkt's father. It smelled of oil and galoshes. Seated on a bench in the anteroom were Hryshchenko in his jacket, a lady in black and a clean-shaven man in a loose shirt. Obviously, they had also come to see Father Polievkt. Olenka also sat down. Polievkt's voice could be heard from the next room: he was speaking with dignity to somebody.

"Love thy neighbour," he was telling someone, "the love which our devine teacher, Christ, taught us, is a great thing. We, His servants, must remember it in our sermons."

"Kind Father Polievkt," Olenka thought, "what sacred things he concerns himself with!"

Her heart was thumping. What would he tell her about her placement?

An old woman in an apron, who looked like a char-woman, came through the anteroom and entered the next room. Olenka spoke to her, "Inform Father Polievkt that I want to see him. Tell him that my name is Panasenko."

The old woman went through the door, closed it, and made her announcement.

"Panasenko's here as well?" Father Polievkt's voice could be heard. "I remember her..." he began telling someone. "There was no one better than her in school. I was

thanked for discovering such a student. She was not only gifted, but also diligent. She could make something of herself."

On hearing this, Olenka smiled. "If you have such a high regard for me," she thought to herself, "then you'll help me. I wonder what kind of school you'll place me in. Naturally, in a girls' school. I'll work so hard! I'll introduce my students to profound ideas, humaneness, truth. I'll read great books to them. I'll go to this one, to that one, smile at her, pat her on the cheek... Oh Lord, how I'll love them!" Olenka felt so happy that she got up and walked around the anteroom.

A tall, young priest came out from seeing Father Polievkt. He put on his hat and left. Soon after the priest had gone, the old woman peeped through the door and said, "Next."

Hryshchenko jumped up and hurried in to Father Polievkt. The door remained open. Olenka was standing near the heating stove and could see Father Polievkt, dressed in a silk robe, so dignified, sitting at the table. Hryshchenko bowed low to him, folded his hands across his chest, and approached him so fawningly.

"What a show of flattery!" Olenka thought.

"Your Reverence," Hryshchenko began. "I'll offer prayers for you. Help me get transferred to some senior primary school... Here's my application..." He quickly took a paper from under his jacket and passed it to Father Polievkt. Hryshchenko stood humbly before him, his head to one side.

"How he's humiliated himself," Olenka thought. It even embarrassed her.

Father Polievkt examined the application and said, "Alright, my child." Then he placed the application on the table. Hryshchenko again kissed Father Polievkt' hand and left, smiling. Olenka looked at him. "What a puppy you are," she thought, "performing your tricks. Why all this? Although Father Polievkt is our superior, he's still a man, like yourself. Couldn't you be more straightforward with him? Accept the blessing, but without the fawning. Why do you need all this? After all, we're no longer students."

Olenka's turn came. She entered and didn't wait for a blessing. She said "Hello!" and stood there, smiling. Polievkt raised his hand, ran it along the table and let it drop. Then he shook his head. "You've become very wise," he

said, as if to himself. Olenka heard it, blushed and kept silent.

He addressed her coolly, 'What do you wish?"

"You promised me a placement... is there any news yet?"

Father Polievkt knitted his brows and replied, "Not yet."

"And when will you know?"

"I don't know... You could apply somewhere else... Who else is waiting to see me?" he called toward the door.

Something heavy caught in Olenka's throat. Downcast, she left his presence. Hryshchenko was waiting for her on the sidewalk so that they could go home together. He was very happy.

"Praise the Lord," he started talking to Olenka as they went. "He took my application and said 'alright'... It's not that much, but all the same it's much better to teach at a senior primary. An acquaintance of mine, I saw him today, is teaching in a city school. He's got all kinds of buttons... the uniform in that school is not bad. It's not bad in the senior primary, either. They have red piping and a cockade."

"And you're satisfied," Olenka thought about Hryshchenko, "by dreaimng about the uniform! It means that what they say about the gifted isn't true. In reality, although a person is shallow and empty, and only good for shooting crows out of poplar trees, he'll be alright so long as he behaves like a puppy? What's the value of such promises."

In the pasture, the weeds looked red against the sun. Hryshchenko was smiling and cast glances everywhere. Olenka jast walked, her head hung down. "That's how it works," she thought about Polievkt. "That's his 'Love thy neighbour', 'We must remember it in our sermons', but in real life... it's only words... It means that the only love is for the respect shown by that neighbour! If you don't show this respect, he'll cast you off! And you consider yourself a servant of Christ!"

At this point, Olenka recalled a parable about grape growers. Once upon a time, a master sent his servants to get some grapes from the grape growers, but they killed those servants. "Murderers!" she thought. "He'd even kill those who serve him." She also recalled that she had an award — her gilt-edged Gospel. "Why did you bother to gild it?" she asked herself.

The next morning, although it was still early, the arguing started in her home. Her mother launched into her father, "These patched shoes are giving me blisters. I need new ones."

"And why did you ruin your vest with clay," her father retorted. "You should take better care of things when they're so hard to come by."

She again brought up the question of the garden.

"What can I expect now?" Olenka thought. "What should I do? To perish... to perish in this hell amidst this squabbling, this squalor?" She left the house and stood on the threshold. "And what will I do?" she asked herself again.

She went to the orchard, sat down on the bench and rested her head on her hand. "Should I go to Polievkt again?" she thought. "There's no sense in going to such a person... Should I ask to be sent to a different diocese?... Well... They have the same Polievkts there! Perhaps I should try a *zemstvo* secular school..."

Olenka thought about the *zemstvo* and she also thought about Kochura Sr. who, according to Savka, was a somebody in the *zemstvo*. She recalled his son, a student, whom she had met while returning home. She also thought about Lusia and the teacher, who rented a summer cottage, of whom Savka had spoken. She also recalled the gentry whom she had read about in some book. They were educated and wealthy and they helped people who wanted to work or study, but didn't have the opportunity.

"And what if I went to see the Kochuras?" she thought. "They're also wealthy and educated people, although not of clerical schooling, obviously. And isn't the man better who is better educated, and aren't those people better who have contacts? I so much want to live... to live, work, to do something good and great... They'll help me in some way, place me or something. I'll go. But I can't go alone. Wouldn't Serhiy go with me, as a friend?"

Olenka sneaked over to Serhiy's. He agreed to go, all the more so because the younger Kochura, a student, was an acquaintance of his. Once, while going to Knyshivka, Serhiy had helped him, in the open field, to defend himself from a pack of dogs. From that time, they had been on friendly terms. They decided to visit Kochura on Sunday.

XII

Sunday came. In the morning, her father sent Olenka to church, but she refused. Polievkt was on her mind. "Why should I go," she thought, "when the church's servants are like that?"

"Shame on you!" her father yelled. "What do you mean not going to church?"" It's Serhiy who's leading you astray."

"That's it..." Palazhka added from the *pich.* "It's not only Serhiy in the family who doesn't believe in God, but also his cursed mother. God knows when she was last seen in the church."

And it was true that Oryshka hadn't been to church for a long time already. It was difficult for her to walk. Once, when it had been cold, she had been soaking hemp and her legs had frozen. Now they ached continuously. Earlier, Palazhka herself had only gone to church off and on, but now that Olenka had become a "lady", she had started to attend more frequently. She would enter, so pretentiously, take a candle, bite her lip and push her way to place it in front of all the others, as if to say, "Look, people, whose mother I am."

The sun was already high in the sky. Her father had gone to work, and Olenka was getting ready to go to the Kochuras. She took a blue Sunday dress from her closet and also her long velvet vest. What should she wear? Everything was old. She didn't feel like wearing the blue school dress she had on because it didn't suit her. It was short and the elbows were worn through. The blue Sunday dress looked cleanest. She put it on, although it was slightly worn and made of cheap cotton print. "Doesn't matter," she thought. "I'm going to visit educated people. It won't matter to them."

Serhiy, also wearing a cheap cotton shirt, was already waiting for her in the pasture. They set out through the fields. Stacks of rye were everywhere. Livestock grazed on the stubble. White buckwheat flowers were blooming. They smelled of honey and bees were buzzing around. It was pleasant to walk there.

They came to a ravine. Someone on a bicycle was coming their way. He was wearing a white shirt and a white cap with a blue band. It was the younger Kochura, the student, approaching them.

"Hello," he said to Serhiy. The bicycle stopped and he jumped off and kissed Serhiy in greeting *. Serhiy introduced Olenka to him.

"Whew! That ride has left me panting for breath..." He took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead. "I like to exert myself before tea. It tastes better that way. And where are you going?" he asked Serhiy.

"Just for a walk," Serhiy lied to him for the time being.

"You sit too much. Perhaps, too much reading?"

"Not really," Serhiy replied. "There aren't enough good books." He was silent for a moment. "Perhaps we can borrow some from you sometime?"

"Come whenever you want. We have a good library. Besides, we can have some fun at our place. And you also..." the student addressed Olenka.

Olenka smiled happily. This was what she needed. She blushed and cast her eyes downward.

"Don't be shy," the student said, "I've heard about you. Savka told me how you once met, remember?"

"And when definitely can we come for a visit?" Serhiy asked the student.

"Why not right now?"

Off they went. The student walked his bicycle and Olenka walked beside him. She was excited. "And how will these gentry welcome us? Those of whom I've read were so kind. They give a man shelter and entertain him. Certainly, they're educated people. The rich already know how to treat people decently; poverty doesn't debase them. And how will I behave with them? When they say, 'Don't be shy, make yourself at home...' I'll say, 'Thank you.' They have pictures and flowers. I'll see them. I'll ask to borrow books. If they have a piano, maybe I'll play it... I want to so much... I haven't played for so long."

"So, do you plan to teach?" the student asked Olenka.

"I don't know," she replied.

"Why?"

"Well... I'm not having luck with priests. They promise, and then take it back."

"Ho-ho!" the student burst out laughing. "You really knew who to deal with!" he grinned. "Forget the priests. You can find work elsewhere."

"She wants to work for the *zemstvo,*" Serhiy added.

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* Traditional manner of greeting close friends.

"Why not? Women are already employed by the *zemstvo*. She could be a clerk, or something."

"But it's difficult to get a job without knowing someone," Serhiy said.

The student was silent a moment, and then said, "It can be arranged. My father has got contacts there."

"If only I could do something useful for people," Olenka said. "I'd like to teach."

"In the *zemstvo* school? It's a good idea, it can be arranged. You'd better talk to my father."

"Why didn't I turn to these people sooner?" Olenka asked herself. "And I placed my hopes on some priest!"

"And you know what?" the student said to Olenka. "If you really want to do something useful for people, it wouldn't harm to take a course in medicine and become a doctor, like my sister is doing. You could liberate people from death."

Olenka kept looking at the student. "Oh Lord," she thought," what a great thing it is to ease people's suffering, to liberate them from death!"

She was silent for a moment, and then asked, "And how can I get enrolled in those courses? It would probably be difficult with my education."

"Why? You could prepare yourself... Talk to my sister Lusia. She'll tell you how it's done..."

Olenka smiled and thought, "Really, maybe I should talk to Lusia an begin preparing myself. Only... I have to live somehow... And all I have... But won't people help me in this; won't they fix me up somehow so that I can prepare?... What would happen if I said that I want to study but I can't afford it?... When I'm studying already, it'll work itself out somehow... The world is not without good people."

She stole a glance of the student. He was so handsome, dark, a bit thin, and warmth radiated from him. And his bicycle was so nice, as was his shirt and everything. "There is good in the world," she thought. Her heart began fluttering.

They entered a large ravine. Trees grew everywhere and a large white house stood on a rise. There was a pond, too. Willow trees hung over it and the sun was reflected in its waters. There was a dam and lavishly decorated gates. From behind a fence, an acacia tree could be seen. They entered the yard. Walnut trees hung over the path and

bright flowers grew in front of the house. The sound of a piano reached through the open windows. The sound was heavenly. It penetrated Olenka to her very soul. She wanted to cry, laugh, love, aspire to something sacred, divine... "People!" she wanted to cry out. "Why is there evil on the earth?"

The balcony was overgrown with greenery. Through the gap, one could see the masters sitting there, having tea. The samovar sparkled.

Olenka was both afraid and happy.

The student left the bicycle in the yard and led them to the balcony. The table was ever so long and held all sorts of sweets!

"Hello!" Serhiy and Olenka shyly greeted the masters of the house. They stood in the doorway and waited. The masters closely examined their cheap clothes and said nothing.

"Having breakfast already?" the student asked.

"Um-uh," one of them mumbled.

Old Kochura was bald and stout. Serhiy and Olenka recognized him, for he often passed their houses in Verbivka on his way to the town. Chewing loudly, he asked, pointing at Serhiy and Olenka, "Who are these people?"

The student replied, "These are... acquaintances of mine." Pointing at Olenka he continued, "She's a teacher and... wants to work for the *zemstvo*."

"Hm," Kochura mumbled and bit his lip in disdain.

The student blushed, as if embarassed that he had brought home such acquaintances. He mumbled, "Get acquainted," and went into the house.

Olenka also blushed. "Is that the way they greet us?" she thought. "And the student... he talked so politely on our way here, but now... he runs away as fast as he can. These are only words... vain, shallow."

At the end of the table sat a young lady. She wore a pink dress and her cheeks were plump. Clumsily and shyly, Serhiy offered her his hand. Olenka followed his example. The young lady smiled and offered them her fingers. She cast a glance at a man with a bushy moustache and a birth mark on his cheek. They both smiled. Olenka blushed even more. She approached old Kochura. At the time, he was gulping down a piece of toast and didn't see them.

"Hello!" Serhiy addressed him.

The old man looked up and shoved his soft fat fingers

at them. They approached the man with the moustache and birthmark. He was reading a newspaper and treated them the same. They also "got acquainted" with a fat lady, perhaps Kochura's wife. She offered them her fingers ever so graciously. "Hello, hello, my dear," she smiled at Olenka. The two of them stood by the wall and waited.

"Is this the intelligentsia?" Olenka asked herself, looking at the gentry folk. "They're such educated people but... arrogant, indifferent."

The music from the piano ceased. A young lady dressed in brown came out. The student followed her. They also sat down to tea. The student stirred his spoon in the glass, looked at Serhiy and Olenka and said, "Perhaps, you also would like tea?... Sit down."

There was nothing they could do, so they took the vacant seats. The student called the maid. She brought two glasses and placed them before them. The glasses remained empty; the pink lady poured for everyone, but not for them.

"Lusia!" the student said "Pour them some tea."

Lusia poured, smiling. "I forgot," she said.

Olenka drank that tea without sugar or anything. "Why did I come here?" she asked herself.

The man with the moustache began to say something about Persia. Olenka didn't like the very sound of his voice. Their faces were so repulsive. Everything was strange and hostile for her — the jar of preserves, the green balcony and the white doors leading to the house. There was a stench of gentry in the air.

They started to disperse. The man with the moustache and Lusia went out, and the student — into the house. The rest — where they wanted. Serhiy and Olenka were left alone.

"Let's leave this place," she said to Serhiy.

"And what about your job?" Serhiy asked.

Olenka turned white, "What am I, a dog, that I have to ask for a placement from such stuffed and indifferent people?... I won't have anything to do with them."

"But the books," Serhiy said and went to the door. "Pavlo Ivanovich!" he called. The student came out.

"About the books," Serhiy said.

"It's alright... Only I have to tell my dad." He left.

Dad came out and looked at them sternly. "What do you want?"

"To read Byron, if you'd be so kind...' Serhiy replied.

The gentleman closely examined Serhiy's cheap cotton shirt and said, "Some other time, perhaps... or I'll pass it on through somebody. It would be hard to find right now." And he left.

Serhiy grinned, "There's nobody to say good-bye to even."

"Why did I come?" Olenka thought on the way back. "Why did I have to ask them? It's ridiculous! What a fool I am! I didn't learn from Polievkt and tried again... I hoped, daydreamed... How miserable those hopes and dreams are!... How gullible I am to have trusted such people and to seek their help. May the devil take me!"

"This means that now you have to send applications everywhere," Serhiy said.

"Curse those vacancies and those people! I don't want to see them or hear them."

They came to their village. The sun had already passed the zenith. It was hot and sticky in the pasture. Boys and girls sat in the shade by a windmill. Danylo, in a blue vest, put his arm around Hanna's neck, which was adorned with a necklace. Petro, with whom Olenka had once gone to school, leaned on Priska. Everyone was happy. They sang and joked.

"They're lucky," Olenko thought about them. "They sing and have nothing to do with intellectual, educated, stuffed, dense people. What if I became like them — lived at home, sang on Sundays and, during the week, worked in the garden or the fields? Flowers, sun... And everything so simple, close to nature. No educated ones, no dense worthless intelligentsia to deal with... Damn it!..."

XIII

Olenka really started to learn to live at home. She rushed to do things before her mother could. She picked and cleaned beans; she cut the sunflowers and beat the seeds out of them; she did everything. But it was in vain. When she heard squabbling in the house, she would stop eating. It would make her feel so sad.

She was sitting in the orchard once. Serhiy was playing the violin in his house. The doors were open and Olenka could hear him playing. She listened and felt miserable. She recalled the piano which she had learned to play. She recalled what she had recently daydreamed about — him,

kind, thoughtful, and books, and pictures... Where were they?

Once, coming into the house, Olenka saw her father and Yakiv Vasyuk, a neighbour, sitting on a bench. Vasyuk addressed her father, "It's time to pay your debt."

Her father had once borrowed several roubles for Olenka's dress from him. "Wait a bit," he pleaded. "I'll pay as soon as Olenka earns some money." Turning to Olenka, he said, "Keep this in mind, daughter..."

"Poor Father," Olenka thought, "he doesn't know anything about my problems. And what would happen if he did find out?"

She thought and thought, and sent an application to another diocese. She didn't mention a senior primary school already. "At least if I could teach in a parish school," she thought.

Palazhka, meanwhile, was pursuing her own ends. She continued to pester Mykhailo about the garden. Ostapchuk did the same. Whenever he saw Mykhailo, he would ask, "Well, what about the garden?"

"Well, I... I don't know," Mykhailo would scratch his head.

"Think about it."

But Mykhailo had already thought about it from every angle.

Once, about noon, Palazhka came out of the storage room and started into him, "What kind of master of the house are you? I want to make bread tomorrow and there's no flour in the house, but you... Go get me some flour and get that garden you allowed them to take!"

The rye was just being brought in from the field at that time and there was no fresh flour yet. Mykhailo finished repairing his vest, put it on, took a sack and left the house. Where should he go? He had already borrowed so much that he couldn't look people in the eye any more. He stood and looked at Vasyl's garden.

"Should I really take back what I allowed him to have?" he thought. "How many potatoes I could sell from that strip, like Palazhka said, and it would be a big help. And if it's sinful to take it back or to accuse Vasyl of grabbing it, then... Ostapchuk was first to mention this to me... That'll be his sin. And what if it were mine? Is it such a big sin that I can't get it forgiven through my prayers? I do believe in God. It's another thing not to believe in God like

Serhiy there. Even if you do see him in church from time to time, he just stands there like a block of wood... And I... I stand there with piety. I recite the Saints and all, and I observe Lent, and fast many times during the year. And on Palm Sunday, I don't even eat stewed fruit. If Ostapchuk gives me advice, I'll thank him. That's the way it should be. I think I'll go and talk to him and, perhaps, borrow some flour."

His conversation with Ostapchuk on this matter was short. Only a witness had to be found and they didn't have to look far. At that very time, Omelko Bovkun was working for Ostapchuk, chopping his firewood. Omelko was known in the village as a man who would do anything for a drink. Those who like to drink, like to lie. He was a short man with a purple nose. He was called to the house.

Ostapchuk began, "Well, Omelko, Mykhailo and I have decided to give you a bottle."

"What do I have to do?"

"Mykhailo's brother has more of their father's garden than Mykhailo himself, so... Would you be willing to testify in court that, say, Vasyl grabbed it on his own?"

Omelko looked at Ostapchuk, then at Mykhailo, smiled and asked, "Will I be held responsible for this?"

Ostapchuk burst out laughing. "What kind of responsibility?"

"I don't know what kind of responsibility and how it works there... They won't throw me in the cooler, will they?"

"Who's going to throw you? Vasyl, an illiterate peasant? What does he understand about such matters? He'll be mad, and that's all. We'll spit on it. And how did he grab it? We'll say... hmm... why bother? We, the judges, won't question you any further, just so you don't get tripped up."

"Why not then? I'll do it."

Ostapchuk began to write up the complaint because he thought that, someday, he'd get something in return for it. And he knew how to write up complaints, for many had passed through his hands. But because he was short of time at that moment — he was going to gather honey from his beehives — and the next day was Sunday, he told Mykhailo, "Tomorrow I'll take a walk and drop over to see you. We'll write it up together at your place."

Mykhailo took some flour as an advance on the work he would do for Ostapchuk, and left.

XIV

Ostapchuk came to Mykhailo on Sunday.

"Suing is a difficult thing," he began. "One needs a helping hand, someone to show the right road and write the complaint out nicely... it costs something."

"Work at it, please," Mykhailo replied. "I'll repay you for it somehow."

"Yes, yes, you'll do some threshing for me!" Ostapchuk sat down to write up the complaint. From the windowsill, he took Olenka's ink and a pen, and smiled.

"You know what?" he said to Mykhailo. "I'll write it out, but after me someone else has to rewrite it. I'm a judge and it won't look right if my handwriting is recognized on the complaint."

Ostapchuk found a piece of paper in his pocket and began writing.

Mykhailo leaned across the table and asked him, "And who'll rewrite it? Maybe, Olenka?"

"Yes, yes. Does she agree with this suit?"

"I don't know yet."

"It doesn't matter whether she agrees or not. She's our child. She'll rewrite it," Palazhka said with a smile from where she was sitting on the plank bed.

"Yes, yes," Ostapchuk grinned. "A child must think the same as its mother and father..."

Ostapchuk finished writing, looked it over and said, "Now we need her, what's her name? Call her."

At that moment, Olenka was in the orchard. A bird was chirping on a branch and she sat there listening. In front of her lay an open book. Her mother knocked on the window and Olenka came to the house. "Hello!" she nodded to Ostapchuk.

"Hello!" he replied. "Here's a draft for you. Sit down and rewrite it."

"He is a judge, and so impolite," Olenka thought and blushed.

She took the draft and looked it through. It was written pointblank — "Vasyl grabbed the garden..." Olenka certainly knew it wasn't true. She read it through and put it back on the table. "I won't rewrite it," she said.

"Why?" her mother yelled at her.

"Because... 'Do no evil!' " She went to the door.

Her mother blocked her path. "Where are you going?"

she demanded furiously. "What's the good of all your learning?"

And Ostapchuk waved an angry finger at Olenka, "It's sinful to be like that," he said. "It's sinful to be stubborn. Do you know what it means not to honour thy father and thy mother? Haven't you learned the Ten Commandments?"

"I ask you to be polite with me," Olenka said to Ostapchuk.

Ostapchuk grinned, "And just who are you?" "Haven't you learned the Commandments?" Mykhailo also started at her. "Behave as the *Scriptures* demand."

"What do you want from me?" Olenka screamed.

"You have pity for our enemies?" her mother poked her in the back. "Rewrite it, we need it!"

Olenka turned white and stepped back. "Why?... Why such disrespect?"

"And why should we feed you, you lazy girl?" her mother shook her head.

Mykhailo also became angry with Olenka's disobedience. He sighed. "She breaks the fast, and it's impossible to get her to church."

Palazhka, pointing at Olenka, added to Ostapchuk, "She eats fat on Wednesdays and Fridays. We have a little for the *borshch,* but she eats it with bread."

Tears came to Olenka's eyes. She didn't know what to do. She took the draft, pen, and paper, sat down at the table and began writing.

Ostapchuk was smiling. "That's the way," he instructed her. "You should do what you're told. You should keep the fast, go to church, and everything. Otherwise, it's sinful. Because people believe like that these days, God doesn't send us rain."

Olenka finished writing, dropped the pen and went outside. She felt so heavy, depressed. Where could she go? What could she do? She stood a bit in the orchard and then went to the pasture. There she walked.

"Evil, it's evil!" she thought. "Somebody else maybe, but it's my father who's stooped to such a low thing... and he's so pious. That's the true faith!"

To Olenka's side was a cemetery. It stretched along the slope and was covered with trees. "The people there," she thought, "are indifferent to evil." She turned toward the cemetery which was encircled by a ditch. Wormwood and other weeds overgrew the ditch. She went through the

gates. Stubble from the oats covered the bare ground, yellow in the sun. Crosses and fresh graves could be seen in a small grove. Further on was a cherry grove. Grim grey crosses peeped out from it. A black cross lay on the grass. In the weeds, a fallen grave mound resembled the dark lair of some animal. Olenka imagined the skull and bones of this person, once alive, and now lying there.

"Is this the crown of life?" she thought. "It's purpose, repayment for all its troubles and sufferings?"

Further to the side, white birch trees glistened. A cross painted white stood under one of them. Olenka went to it. It read, "Andriy Bilanenko". Olenka had heard from Serhiy that Andriy, dying, had asked to be buried under the birches where there were few graves. He had also requested that the inscription on the cross be written in his native language. He had told them what to write and Serhiy had carved it. "He became a teacher... and found a place for eternal peace," Olenka read.

"So this is the place," Olenka thought. "You can't miss it. What do all those places mean, those which depend on Polievkts and Kochuras? How useless their arrogance is! How senseless it is to ask for their mercy! To seek help from someone? Life — what a worthless thing it is!"

Olenka looked at the birch trees with their luxuriant branches. She looked down and saw the leafy cherries scattered about the cemetery and descending toward the ditch. She saw lindens crowded around the ditch and the village submerged in orchards.

"Andriy rests in such a beautiful place," she thought.

Behind the church, she could see thick green willows. In her mind, Olenka could see the stream running there. It was overgrown with reeds and rushes. Olenka remembered the water nymphs who lived there. She had read about them once in a fairy tale.

"What if I jumped from those willows and become a water nymph," she thought. "I would live under the water in a crystal palace. And when the moon rises, I'd swing on the branches of the willows."

Olenka left the cemetery. The sun was already setting. Serhiy and his mother were gathering pears in their orchard. Looking at them from the garden, Olenka thought, "They're gathering pears and don't know the evil I've done them, that I rewrote such a paper. If I could only do something good for them. If I could only call to them."

She came up to the boundary marker and called, "Auntie, Serhiy, you aren't angry at me?"

Serhiy burst out laughing, "What are you talking about?" and her aunt asked, "Have you done something?"

Olenka turned red and said nothing.

XV

Olenka's father was already asking her about her place. "Why haven't you heard anything from Father Polievkt yet?"

"Ah..." Olenka would wave her hand and leave.

She was always walking about sullenly. She would go to the orchard, the pasture, the cemetery, as if searching for something. And she became irritable. If an argument broke out in the house, or her father would try to send her to church, she would become infuriated and drop whatever she was doing. And in the morning, when it was cold outside, she would walk around the house barefoot and disheveled. She would spend entire days without having a bite to eat.

Once, she smiled bitterly at Serhiy. "Why do some people put an end to their lives?" she asked him.

"Who knows?" he replied. "I read that they do so through cowardice, they're afraid of life."

Olenka shook her head, was silent a moment, and then said, excitedly, "Isn't it also cowardice not to have a goal, or to see the purpose of life, to suffer and to be afraid to avenge oneself on this purposeless suffering? Isn't it cowardice to fear death, to whimper and grasp at the straw of life, having only one purpose — to live not knowing why?"

She became very pale, her face became drawn and dark circles appeared under her eyes.

Her father was waiting; word from Polievkt about Olenka's place could come at any moment. He made some money driving a cart and bought her some calico for a dress. She hadn't asked him to. He gave it to her saying, "Here. Sew, so that you have something to wear when you go to your place." Olenka already knew how to make herself a dress. She examined the calico and put in into her chest.

XVI

The time came to hear the suit over the garden. But things didn't turn out the way they were supposed to. Ostapchuk had thought that it would be easy to outwit Vasyl, the "illiterate peasant", in court. All the more so because when they tried him for the incident of the "red-haired devil" Vasyl kept silent. He had kept silent because he considered himself guilty on this count. But, having seen how people defend themselves after having been a witness for someone else in the court, he began to behave likewise. From the very beginning, he insisted that Ostapchuk play no part in the consideration of this matter, because Ostapchuk already had a matter concerning Vasyl before the court.

For the "red-haired devil", the court sentenced him for a bit more than a week of imprisonment. Vasyl was constantly called to order, threatened with the cooler, but he nevertheless made his point. Ostapchuk was forced to withdraw from the bench.

But Ostapchuk fulfilled his promise to talk the matter over with his fellow judges. Vasyl himself overheard a bit of what Ostapchuk said in the room where the judges were having a bite to eat.

"Such people must be taught a lesson," he heard coming from there. "Otherwise, they won't have any respect for us. They'll all start calling us 'red-haired devils'."

The witness Bovkun, in fact, was not questioned in any depth by the judges. But Vasyl himself interfered.

The red-faced judge, dressed in a blue coat, who sat in the middle, asked Bovkun, "So you know that Vasyl grabbed the garden?"

"Exactly so, he grabbed it."

"Well, no more questions."

Vasyl jumped up from his seat, "What do you mean no questions?" he started at the judge. "Why don't you ask him how I grabbed it?"

"Don't try to teach us!" the judge thundered at Vasyl.

"Why are you doing this?" Vasyl yelled in response.

The judge rang his bell, "Shut up!" he screamed.

"No," Vasyl responded. "Don't try to frighten men. I can appeal higher."

The judge looked at him, bent toward the fat judge in

a black coat on his right, and said, "The bastard! What do you think? He could take this to much higher authorities."

"Aha," the other one replied. "He could make it hot for us."

"Alright then," the judge said to Vasyl and continued to question Bovkun, "Tell us, for example, in what way Vasyl grabbed it."

"Well... like that..." Bovkun wrung his hat in his hands and added nothing.

Mykhailo's suit was rejected.

He came home. "Well, how did it go?" Palazhka asked him.

"How? I'll tell you. They rejected it."

Palazhka, her eyes bulging, looked at him and asked, "What have you done? You should have insisted, begged the judges... How happy this will make our enemies. Oh Lord!"

She shook her head, spat on the floor and went to Olenka, who was sitting in the garden, thinking. "Make contacts with the gentry," she demanded.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you... You're educated. The gentry will back you. You could go to the *zemstvo* chief and petition for the garden."

Olenka turned red and said nothing.

"Why are you silent?"

"Leave me alone!"

Palazhka returned to the house and began cursing Mykhailo over and over again. That screaming tore at Olenka's very soul. She got up and paced about the garden. Where could she go, what could she do? She paced and paced and then, going behing the barn, went to see Serhiy, not knowing why.

Serhiy was at home, going through a bookcase. Hryshchenko was sitting on a bench.

"Congratulate me," Hryshchenko said to Olenka. "Father Polievkt didn't lie to me. Soon, I'll be leaving to teach in a senior primary school."

"So, you're also leaving," Olenka thought. "Look what kind of world it is! It's a world of ambition, grovelling and mediocrity." She thought for a moment and then asked Serhiy, "Play something for me."

Serhiy closed the bookcase, gave Hryshchenko some

music and picked up his violin. "What would you like, a Polka?" he said while tuning his instrument.

At this point, Vasyl entered, straight from the court. He put down his walking stick and kissed Hryshchenko in greeting. But he cast an unfriendly glance at Olenka. Olenka blushed and remembered the document which she had rewritten. "Perhaps, he knows about it," she thought

Indeed, he did know. A clerk he knew in the *volost* office had told him that it was Olenka who had written it out. He had heard it from Ostapchuk himself.

Vasyl had been amazed at that time. "And I believed that she liked us. She often visited us and..." Now he sat down on the plank bed and glared at Olenka.

Olenka hung her head. "How could I have been involved in something so loathsome?" she asked herself.

"Maybe, you'd like to hear a *kozachok*?" * Serhiy asked her.

Olenka was silent. "And I couldn't refuse to rewrite it," she thought. "How worthless I am!"

"So," Vasyl began to Olenka, "you with your father and mother want to take the garden from me. Why did you write the complaint?"

Olenka turned pale. She stared at Vasyl and couldn't utter a single word. She got up and left. At that very moment, Palazhka left her house carrying a pail and saw where Olenka was coming from. Olenka wasn't hiding any more; she was walking straight across the garden.

"You... you..." Palazhka started at her. "You're still going to them!"

"Damn you!" Oryshka screamed at Palazhka from the garden.

"And you," Palazhka retorted. "You don't believe in God, you don't even go to church! For you, the Church is not the Mother, God is not the Father!"

Olenka said not a word to anyone. She stumbled into the garden.

The sun was setting. It was turning the yellow early autumn leaves golden. Summer was already ending. Olenka just stood there looking at the orchard and the sun.

Dusk descended. Olenka entered the house, took a lamp from the table and placed her chest on a stool by the table. She took out the length of calico which her father had

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* Ukrainian folk dance tune.

given her for a dress and gave it to Paraska. "This'll be for your skirt," she said.

Then she took out her school notebooks and diaries, looked through them, tore them apart and threw them into the *pich.*

Her father came in. "Why are you tearing them up?" he demanded. "They could have been useful for something."

"It's none of your business," Olenka retorted.

Then she took out her books which were presents from school — *Taras Bulba* and one about plants. She sat down and inscribed "as a memento" on each of them, one to Serhiy, the other — to Hryshchenko. She took out the gilt-edged Gospel and wrote: "To Father Polievkt Sokhanovsky" and added from the parable about the grapegrowers, "He who thou fearest, shalt thou destroy". Then she took a piece of paper and wrote, "In this world in which evil, falsehood and worthlessness reign, there is no place for anything beautiful and light. Farewell." She took another piece of paper and wrote, "And to you, father and mother, I have these words: belief in God lies not in the act of attending church, and not in the rituals themselves... Bury me where Andriy rests, amidst the birches. Put flowers in my casket."

She tucked these notes under the table cloth, put the books in a corner and her chest back in its place. She started to prepare herself. She washed, combed, but didn't braid her hair. She left it the way the water nymphs wear theirs. She got her blue Sunday dress and began putting it on.

Her mother was twisting hemp by the *pich.* "Where are you going?" she asked.

"To my place," she replied.

Her father was putting garlic on his bread. "Maybe, I should harness the horse for you?"

"Go to sleep. I'm only getting ready."

"When will you come back to us?" her mother smiled.

"You'll see."

She got dressed, tied a red ribbon around her head, and took a long look around the house. There was stubble from the hemp on the floor and a pile of garbage by the *pich.*

"This house is like a pigsty!" she said to her mother. "Clean it up. People may be coming to visit you soon."

She looked at Paraska who was already asleep, at her

mother, at her father... Tears welled up in her eyes. She felt so sorry.

"What can I do?" she thought. She stood for a while, fluffed up a pillow and put in on her bed, which was a stool and a bench pushed together. She lay down. Her thoughts enveloped her.

"Should I keep living?" she asked herself. "What's the purpose of living?" She thought about all her earlier dreams and hopes, about Polievkt, the Kochuras, her mother, her father, Ostapchuk, Hryshchenko...

"What happened to those great and beautiful things?" she asked herself. "They are in dreams, in hopes, in books. But in life — worthlessness, nonsense, evil... Is it worth worrying, squirming, sinking into the bog of evil?... What's the purpose of this?... Who needs this?... Isn't that rest better — eternal, quiet, good — that rest under a tree, the flowers, the grass?..."

The lights in the house had already been extinguished. Olenka got up. On the plank bed by the wall, her father's dark silhouette lay. Further on lay Paraska and, by the *pich,*— her mother.

"Farewell," she whispered and left the house for ever.

XVII

They found Olenka in the water under the willows. They had noticed her kerchief lying on the bank. The sun was shining, birds were chirping, but this beautiful girl was indifferent to all this, to everything. Her dark eyes no longer burned with questions. Her young heart no longer dreamt of love. She was ever so peaceful.

As a suicide, she was buried alone, in an isolated corner of the cemetery, in a barren place far from the birches under which she had so wanted to rest.

A week after her death, a reply came from another diocese. They had a place for Olenka.

Her father, mother, and sister planted lovage, periwinkle and cherry and maple trees around her eternal place. On the small cross made of elm, they hung a small icon of the Mother of God. Her father lights candles in the house every evening. He reads the Book of Psalms in her memory. Her mother laments.

[1910]

Mommy's gone! She lies in a dark silent grave. She lies quiet and peaceful. She lies there and doesn't see the sun shining, the blue sky above. She doesn't hear how people worry, argue, travel, walk, and live. How can it be? Not long ago it was Christmas, and she, ill though she was, was nonetheless alive. She was worrying about things, preparing for the end of the Fast, doing all sorts of things. Not so long ago, she was doing her best to take care of me. "Oh Lord!... He's so weak and exhausted... How is he going to live, become a man?..."

Not so long ago, I cut my finger and she was so worried and bound it for me.

And now she's gone!... Gone... Or maybe this is just a dream? But no. I'm not sleeping. The sun is shining outside, the snow is white and glistening, the sparrows are chirping. But it's so gloomy in the house, so quiet. There's only the two of us — my grieving old father and myself. How can this be? Maybe, she's still outdoors somewhere and will come inside at any moment? She'd be wearing a sheepskin coat; she'd be pale, thin, with sunken eyes. She'd sit on a bench for a moment, rest a bit and then ask me, "Have you eaten anything today? Get yourself some salt pork out of that pot there."

Or she'd ask, "Why are your eyes so glazed? Maybe, you're not feeling well?.. Take care of yourself, my child, dress warmly, don't lift heavy things when you're working."

My dear mother! If only in my sleep I could hear this from you now! Could it be that you're now indifferent to everything — me, the house, my future? Can it really be that you're indifferent to my grief, to my inability to cook properly? *My borshch* is poor, my bread doesn't rise, and everything's covered with dough... Don't you care?

But once... Now I remember everything. I was so small then. I wore a woolen vest and felt trousers. In the evening, the moon rose behind our garden. A nightingale sang from a snowball tree. Beetles flew through the trees, buzzing. The air smelled of honey and young maples. There was a fence. One could hear milk being poured, a calf was lowing in the barn. We stood there; me, Serhiyko in his greasy pants, and Marushka in her bright skirt. They were smaller than me. We watched Mother milking the cow. She bent down, a pail in her hands. She was wearing a blue

kerchief, tied in a turban, and a long vest. She had a fair complexion and dark hair.

"Do you want some, my little dears?" she would ask. "Right away." She would strain the milk and pour in into a bowl for us, crushing some bread into it. Then she would seat us on a straw mat under a pear tree, and we'd have supper. Then she would tell us about God, put us to bed, cover us, and make the sign of the cross over us.

"Save them, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven... Protect them and be merciful..." she would whisper over us.

* * *

We were growing up. They sent us to school so that we would become intelligent, by all means. This one needs an overcoat, that one — boots. Father scratched his head. He didn't know how to get them.

"Oh Lord," Mother would worry. "The children'll catch cold."

I remember that once my boots were badly torn and hers were a bit better. "Here, my child, put them on." She gave them to me, but for herself... Once, in the wintertime, I came home from school. Clean shirts were lying on the bench. Mother was sitting on a stool, taking off what served her as boots. The cloths she wrapped her feet in were wet, water was dripping off them. Her feet were blue, and her toes were stuck together, numb. She was wringing out the cloths and emptying the water from her boots.

Poor Mommy! How often she caught cold because of that!

Strong by nature and energetic, she would become so sick, at times, that she couldn't even get up. And how she would work! She would lift sacks and do everything. It didn't matter to her whether it was day or night. All this weakened her.

Marushka was growing up. She had a full face, dark hair and brown eyes.

"Grow, my child," mother would say to her. "Grow so that you can at least help me a bit around the house, at least with the cooking."

Marushka was growing up, went to school, and was learning to take care of the house.

"This goes like this, and that goes there. Everything should be neat and tidy," Mother would drill her.

Marushka took to it. She would clean the house and already knew how to cook. Mother was so happy. Denysko had also grown a bit. He was the youngest and such a funny child. He would sweep the floor and feed the fire in the *pich* with straw. He would climb onto your lap, would stroke your face, would laugh and chatter. Mother was delighted with him. But, typhus broke out in our village. Just after New Year's we buried Denysko and, a few days later, Marushka. Mother broke down. She didn't know what to do already.

"My little darling, my little helper," she cried for Marushka. "How could it happen, do we have to bury all of you?"

Poor woman. She had to suffer so much grief. After I was born, Marushka was the fourth child to go to the grave. And, Mother told me, about the time before I was born, "Cold and hunger reigned in the house. The first were twins. They died when they had already grown up a bit. After those two, we had four more. They could already walk, but they got some disease and... One week, and all of them were gone. Two girls went the same day. They lay there; one on the bench, the other on the table.

"Can you imagine? I almost went crazy that time," she told me. "One moment I had children — chattering, running around — and the next, they were gone."

She endured all this, and even more.

* * *

We buried Marushka and there were two of us left, Serhiy and myself. Serhiy finished senior primary school (we had been going to school together, it wasn't far from us), and started teaching. But I, of whom they said "he does too much thinking and speaks heresy," didn't finish. I went to work as a clerk. Arrogance, bootlicking and bribery surrounded me... I came to detest my work and moved back home. I was hungry and wore rags, but I was my own master... Forest, field, moon, stars, the song of the nightingale... I dreamt about "dark eyes", a goal in life, about something fine, great and divine... Only, everything bored me. My dreams remained simply dreams. It was 1905. People were stirred up. They were calling for equality, fraternity and freedom. Here I could find my goal in life, those dark eyes and something fine and great. I jumped

at the chance. I talked with the peasants and read books to them. They searched me, and my brother. I was arrested. Mother cried.

October 17 arrived, and with it came the Freedom Manifesto. Lord! Did this mean that there was something to live for? Did it mean that there was fraternity, truth and good in the world?

The Peasants' Union was formed. I began to work in it. I organized the peasants, told them this and that about peace and other nice things. I felt happy, pleased. A goal in life was at my fingertips. And then it happened. I was arrested again... What can you do?... Once again my mother had to suffer. Before they arrested me, the police tore the house apart. I hid. Whomever they arrested, they beat up. Now I hid with relatives, now with someone else. Once my mother told me, "Often, in the middle of night. I heard the Cossacks pounding on the door. They'd surround the house, turn everything upside down, and search the attic with torches. They screamed at your father and myself, 'Where is he? Give the bastard to us!' And once your father said something they didn't like, so they beat him with their whips at the command of the police precinct chief. And they damaged the walls and the ceiling."

At New Year's, the following occurred. I didn't think that anybody would come for me on that day. I was sitting at home, reading a book, when I heard my father shout, "Cossacks!"

I peeped out the window and saw them flying, bent low over the necks of their horses. Where could I hide? I rushed as fast as I could into a closet.

"Oh God, what's happening?" my mother cried.

She locked me in and stood there, looking neither dead nor alive. They came in..

"Is he home?" one of them demanded.

"No, he isn't."

"We'll look anyways." They looked here and there and stopped by the closet. *"Open it!"* they yelled. *"How long do you think we're going to keep coming here?"*

"I tell you, he's not here," she said in a trembling voice. Something made the police sergeant change his mind. *"Alright, we'll go for now."*

The police precinct chief was waiting in a sleigh outside, on the street. The sergeant reported to him, *"He's not there, sir."*

When they had gone, I came out of the closet and looked at my mother. She was extremely pale.

"Whew, I was scared," she said. "They were horrible, with their shaggy hats, their whips and rifles... I thought they'd... Whew, I'm still trembling with fear."

She went out, looked around everywhere, stood there for a moment, and then came back into the house.

"What a nuisance they are," she began. "If you could only hide somewhere else because... The cossacks might be back, they've come before... The rich people, like Dmitro Zayets and his bootlickers, stood at the gate and said, 'He's at home, they just didn't look well enough.' They kept staring at the garden as if looking for you."

It was because of the rich and their hangers-on that the police came looking for me so often. They were reminded of me over and over. And even now, the rich, of which we have plenty, still have it in for me. "You bastard," they say, "you wanted to give land and freedom to those dirty peasants."

I climbed into the attic and hid in the straw. My poor mother, together with my father, kept going outside and coming back in, waiting for the people to disperse faster.

After that incident, I decided to leave the village for good. My mother implored, "Oh God, it's winter, it's cold! Where will you go? How will you survive?"

She was beside herself with worry, but scraped together a few coins for me, as much as six roubles. She found this and that for me, kissed me, blessed me and I left. I wandered everywhere; I was in monasteries, hobo encampments. I was both a tramp and a "servant of God." It was difficult living without a passport. I became weary of this kind of life and so, in the summer, I returned home.

"Where were you? What did you do?" my mother greeted me. "Such things were happening here... fires, robberies... And the rich blamed everything on you. 'It's because of that bastard,' they said. Besides this, others claimed they saw you in Zapadintsi, in Bezsaly, or right here at home. Cossacks were everywhere. 'What will they do if they catch you,' I thought. And when there was a blizzard, I asked myself, 'Where is he now? Maybe he's freezing somewhere. Oh my Lord!' I was so upset. And there was nobody I could share my sorrow with. The rich would say immediately, 'Why does she bother caring for such a bastard? She should have raised him better... but she's the same herself.' "

I hid in the brush near the house. My mother brought me buns and other food, but not for long. Because of all those fires and robberies, the police came to the village more and more often. Who was responsible for all this? That question disturbed me greatly. All that undermined our freedom and tarnished our cause... I was spotted in the brush and caught. An investigating magistrate questioned me about the Peasants' Union, but there was nothing he could do other than place me under police surveillance. But the police, without giving it a second thought, gave me two years of exile and branded me an "anarchist-terrorist inciting unrest amongst the peaceful population." That was for the fires. The investigating magistrate wouldn't allow them to send me into exile, so I ended up in prison. Father brought parcels to me.

"How's Mother?" I would ask.

"Well, you know... she cries. People are saying that you won't be home until you're ready to die. The rich are planning that you and someone else they've pinned something on be exiled for life through public indictment. They are after you in particular... And to get everyone behind them, they're saying, 'That bastard took large sums of money from the dirty Jews and for that he incited others to loot and burn. Never mind the police, we'll teach that bastard a lesson ourselves.' It's horrible. Your mother would come to see you, but it's five *versts*. She wouldn't be able to walk it, and you know there's no money to hire a cart."

By this point, she was already exhausted. She became weak and complained of stabbing pains in the belly, backaches and pains in her head and stomach. And she was coughing. It was especially bad in the morning. Sometimes she couldn't stand on her feet.

Once, my father brought me a new crucifix on a ribbon. He was very sad. "This is a blessing from your mother," he explained. "It looks like we won't be seeing you any more. The rich have already drawn up the public indictment for your exile. Only the way they did it! In somebody's house, they drew up a list of whom they wanted to exile. The police precinct chief came, they gathered everyone together and placed their own men amidst the group of peasants. As soon as the chief asked the crowd whether they wanted such and such a person who was on the list,

those plants would shout from the crowd, "No, we don't want him. We have no use for him' ".

It was only them and perhaps some of their hangers-on who were doing the shouting, but they made it look like it was the common will. Everyone had to sign the indictment. The peasants were uneasy about it. 'Sign!' they would intimidate someone. 'Otherwise, it means you're the same, and you'll be sent away too.' For those illiterate, the clerk signed without their knowledge, taking down their names from some old indictments. That's how they did it! And if somebody asked 'Why are we exiling so and so?' they would shout, 'Exile that one too!' They also put me down for exile because I stood up for you, but for some reason it didn't happen... One man was exiled only because he had vouched for some political suspect. I went to the *zemstvo* chief and made a complaint. But he didn't want to listen. He was pleased with all this. What can we do now? Nothing... Pray for God's mercy, your mother said... Here are some pancakes for you. She was sick, but she baked them."

In the summer, I was transferred from "our" prison to another one. My father couldn't visit me already; it was fifty *versts*. So much time passed. I expected no one. One time, the key jingled and the cell door opened. The warder said, *"Get up, you're having a visit."*

"Who could it be?" I asked myself. I entered the visiting room and who did I see in the corner?... My mother — bent, flushed, exhausted. There were tears in her eyes. "My child!" she threw herself on me.

"No, no, you can't touch each other!" the senior warder near us snapped. My mother put a handkerchief to her face.

"What's new?" I asked her.

She was quiet, and then responded, "There... oh my God... such things are happening... The rich are saying that you've already been sentenced... That you were bound and... shot." She looked at me with pity in her eyes. She wiped them with her handkerchief and continued, "They're overjoyed, but I... I can't sleep, I can't eat... I can't go on... And when I hear an owl hooting, I feel like dying... And when your letter came, it was like being reborn. I baked some patties for you, and white bread. I hired a cart and here I am... Only, my God!... I had to beg the warden to see you, he didn't want to let me. *'No visits today,'* he said. *'Come*

back on Sunday.' I pleaded and pleaded. 'I've come so far,' I said, and the cart cost me so much — three roubles!' *'It's no concern of mine,'* he replied. I begged him so hard that he even started cursing at me... I told him about the patties and the white bread. 'I'll just give them to him,' I said. *'It's forbidden!'* he said, and wouldn't allow to pass them to you. And after I baked them!"

"It's forbidden!" the senior warder interrupted, *"because there's an order. You could be passing over a revolver, or something else, like a bomb. They get enough to eat here."*

"You've become so pale," my mother said examining me closely. "How weak you look, my child!" She just looked at me.

"Finish up, your time's almost gone!" the senior warder interrupted.

"People ask me, 'Where's your son?'... 'In prison...' I answer. Oh my God!... And here I brought you shirts and pants." She started untying the bundle, but the senior warder took it off from her. He shook it and checked the stitching.

"If you would only be so kind and take the patties for him too," my mother begged him. "It was so hard for me to bake, I'm so ill."

"I've already told you once. Do I have to repeat myself?"

"Oh my God! And people are also gossiping that you, my child, don't believe in God, that when you were in church once, you didn't cross yourself. It's so hard for me to listen to this. Pray, my son, pray, because... we suffer now, but in that other world..."

"That's enough! Get out of here, old woman!" the senior warder barked at her.

"Wait, I almost forgot. How are you? When can we see each other again? Or perhaps..." She again put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Get out, get out! Your time's up."

She looked at me so sorrowfully. She shuffled out.

* * *

I sat in prison getting a taste of life. It was spring outside. Somewhere beyond the walls, dark-eyed girls were singing, a nightingale was calling, and you sit there... The disrespect, the stench, dampness, hunger. You sit, gaze at the sun, and wait for nighttime. You wait so you can fall

asleep and forget. You sleep, as long as the lice allow you to. One day is like the next, and no one knows how long it'll drag on... Until the trial at least. And what will the court say? The cruelest thing of all was to think I was serving my exile in prison. Exile, no matter how hard it is, isn't prison walls and bars. I appealed to the governor and the minister: "Don't hold me in prison!" There was only one reply: "You're awaiting trial." I was being held for more than a year already. I also appealed to the judges: "Either send me into exile, or bring me to trial quicker."

I waited and waited, and an answer came: "Your case has been given over for further investigation; another suspect has also been found." What could I do? I again wrote the governor and even to the prosecutor of the Department of Justice. "Decide my case amongst yourselves, because who knows when my trial will be held."

I waited and waited; there was no reply. I didn't expect one already. Suddenly, after eight months — after eight months! — the following came — "Convoy to Vyatka Province." Thank you, Lord! I was happy... I set out, and what?... For close to two months there was nowhere to lie down or even sit in our convoy. There was such a stench that even your eyes itched. I was among all kinds of petty offenders, amongst all kinds of sick people. There were also hardcore criminals amongst whom you were always afraid of being stripped naked. You were so hungry that you treasured even the smallest crumbs of bread... I went through all this. I was in Vyatka Province about a week, only enough to get an idea of how people lived there. Then I was again put on a convoy for trial in Lubny. We marched for about two more months. I barely managed to get to trial on time.

There were witnesses who swore I hadn't been involved in any crime. The court acquitted me. There was only a bit of exile to serve yet. The first, purely administrative exile to Vologda Province, I had long ago served in prison. The second, "the public exile," was yet to be served. I was sentenced to two years of "public" exile. Again the convoy!... This time, I caught typhus in the convoy, and had to spend about a month and a half in the notorious Moscow Butirka prison.

On the first day of Christmas, I arrived in my place of exile. The next day, the term of exile expired.

* * *

After New Year's, I was at home, weak and exhausted.

My mother was worried. "Oh what a fine lad you were—full, rosy-cheeked, and what's left? Your eyes are sunken, you're pale and thin. But praise God you've come home at least. Some people were rejoicing that you would never return. And myself... I barely managed to pull through this winter. It was so difficult for me; I just lay there and couldn't get up. Everything ached. And your father was angry, yet, that you were in prison and I was ill. He let all his frustrations go at me, cursing. There was no heat in the house, nothing. And snow covered the windows, and not a bite to eat. And I was coughing and bringing up blood. That's how it was... I was waiting, waiting for you... Get better now, my child, get your health back and... get someone to help me, get married, otherwise... grief... It's so difficult for me to stumble about..."

Instead of getting better, my health was soon completely ruined. After having typhus during the convoy, I had slept on the cold floor of the Yaroslavl gaol. And during my exile, it was so cold that even the smoke froze. I was "liberated", wearing only a light coat. My lower back ached, and I was sweating all over. After that, I got pluerisy; I was wheezing, had stabbing pains, shortness of breath. I was bedridden.

"That's the way you've gladdened me," my mother cried.

She fussed over me. She fried fish for me, prepared vodka with pepper or horseraddish. She would brew tea for me in a cast-iron pot and send my father to the store for white bread. Or she would send him to hire a cart to take me to a hospital. She searched everywhere to get me some milk. And herself — she would sit on a stool and cough incessantly, barely getting back her breath.

"What's caught there in my throat?" she would ask. "If feels like some dog is scratching with its paws there. And in my chest..." I hated it when she coughed. I was angry at my helplessness. I would lie there and yell at her, "Why don't you stop coughing?"

Sometimes, because of this, tears would roll down her face. I was really mean to her. I hated myself, people, life... But why did I hurt my mother like this? What I wouldn't give now to hear her cough!

I lay like that for about three months. Then I got a bit better. I could walk and do a few things, but I was still

very weak; my side ached and I was still very pale. So much time passed, but there was no change in me.

"Is this the way he gets better?" my mother worried. "Oh my God! How is he going to live? At least I can still busy myself around the *pich,* but what will happen when my arms are folded across my chest? And father isn't what he used to be... That prison has devoured my son!"

She didn't know at the time that I was still expecting to go back to prison. A charge of violence against the district police chief had appeared from nowhere. I had been questioned about this in prison yet. I somehow got around this because I was in exile and they didn't go into it too deeply. But now, I was again expecting a trial and was kept under police surveillance.

My mother continued fussing over me. She sent me to see old women with their folk remedies, and to doctors. And if she managed to find a kopeck, she would give it to me, but I... Why didn't I at least take her to a hospital?

She would say to me, "Go find a cart and take me... Perhaps, it'll be a bit easier for me... perhaps the pain in my chest will lessen a bit. Perhaps, my coughing will also ease a bit."

At that time, I didn't think of what my mother meant to me and what it would mean to lose her. And I didn't believe that the hospital would help her. When she was stronger, she went there herself and later said, "What kind of a hospital is that? They pinch at you, get angry... just to get rid of you."

That's the way it was. But all the same, why didn't I take her there at least once? Oil of turpentine from the store was her only medicine.

In the autumn, I again went to court. "What? Again?" she worried. "Oh my God!" She accompanied me to the gate, mumbling her prayers, "Oh merciful God, protect and save him."

This time, they gave me two weeks in jail.

* * *

Our hens clucked excitedly. A hen would leave her roost, or walk along the path, stop, stretch out her neck and, as if she were a young rooster, start crowing. Or they would all start clucking together for no obvious reason.

"It's a bad omen," my mother worried.

Another time, before Christmas, millet porridge was cooking in the oven. Suddenly, it boiled over, lifting the lid off the pot.

"Hm!" my mother was surprised. "It's as if someone's going to die."

She looked at me sorrowfully as if thinking, "If only not you, God forbid!"

I don't know if there was anything to this, anything mysterious, but that's how it was.

Christmas holidays came. It was frightfully cold outside. The windows were frosted over, the doors warped, and it was intolerable indoors. My mother was wearing one of Serhiy's old blue shirts. She was busying herself around the *pich* peeling potatoes, making *borshch,* doing other things. I looked at her face; it was blue, frozen, but nonetheless happy, because Serhiy had come to visit again and was celebrating the end of the Fast with the family. "She's still lively," I thought.

But on the fourth day, during the night, I heard my mother moaning on the *pich.* That night, I was also feeling poorly; my ears and head were ringing. Perhaps it had been too smoky in the house during the day. She had also complained of a headache during the day. She moaned so painfully. "Something's bothering her," I thought. "But it'll pass."

It became lighter. I noticed that she didn't get up to take care of the *pich.*

"You take care of it," she told me in a weak voice, instructing me on what had to be done. "Serhiy will help you... Give Serhiy something good to eat. Boil some prunes for me... I want something sour."

I boiled the prunes for her. She had a taste but didn't finish them. She was suffering. She looked like she was in pain; her eyes were misty, her lips were parched. With each day, she got worse. She became so wrinkled. She was living only on cold water. She lay there and moaned. And as soon as she would start to raise herself, she started coughing. She asked for the oil of turpentine. All she would say was, "Have you eaten yet? Take care that the *borshch* doesn't boil over. How's Serhiy? He'll remember this visit!... Don't forget to feed the chickens."

Once, she was sitting on the *pich* and I was on the plank bed. She looked and looked at me and then said, "The bread

will dry out in the oven. Take it out... The *kutya* * for Christmas Eve is there. Have you stirred it yet?"

My poor mother! She was already imagining things. There was no bread in the oven, and it was too early to prepare *kutya* for Christmas Eve, for it was only the second day of the New Year **. I looked at her. Her lips were blue; her hands were blue, and thin. She sat there, arranging her hair and tying it in place with her kerchief. But she could barely cope with it. She was no longer able to arrange her turban. She had always been so neat and tidy.

Another woman, Olena, came to visit and also sat on the bed. "How are you feeling?" she asked.

Mother looked at her and replied, "Oh, it's so difficult for me... pains... my back... in my chest... I drink the turpentine oil, but nothing helps. If only I didn't have this cough!" The coughing gave her so much pain! She was silent for a moment and then continued, "Nobody even comes to see me. They don't understand my suffering, neither friends, nor strangers... And the old man... I told him, 'Go to Bezsaly and get Vasilina, his sister... It's as if he didn't hear."

In truth, that's the way it was. Everybody was already used to her illness. It wasn't the first time. She wiped her eyes with her handkerchief and continued, "There, in the chest, are some things for my funeral — a green *krayka* ***, a kerchief, *zapaska,* and a girl's blouse... a girl's... I was a young girl once!..." She became silent. "And now... how quickly everything passes."

"What? Are you thinking of dying already?" Olenka asked her.

"Oh, if only Marushka, my daughter, was alive... She'd be by my side... She'd at least bathe me... She's gone!" She was silent. "Maybe you'll heat some water for me? Come with Nastya tomorrow and bathe me... maybe then I could... I still want to live... I haven't lived, I've suffered... I'd still like to see how the boys, my sons... Well, Serhiy... my greatest hopes are for him... I so much want to have a daughter-in-law... But this one... he's so weak..."

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* A traditional Ukrainian Christmas dish made from wheat, stewed fruit juice, honey and poppy seeds.

** The Church Calendar in tsarist Russia lagged behind the civil calendar by approximately two weeks. Hence, Christmas fell after the secular New Year.

*** Woven belt.

Dusk fell. The village policeman came to summon me to the police sergeant. My mother was horrified. "Oh no, not again!"

I returned from the sergeant. She could barely open her eyes or speak, but nonetheless asked, "What? What happened?"

At that time, the sergeant came to arrest me. I had to serve those two weeks — the court had handed down its sentence. I begged and managed to persuade them not to arrest me, to wait a week or so, until everything was settled with Mother.

* * *

She didn't sleep all that night. She would get up, lean against the wall and lie down again. "Oh my God!" she would say. "Give me some water."

I would get it. She would take a handful of it and wet her chest or the back of her neck. Another time, she would want to move off the *pich.* Serhiy jumped up. The two of us were sleeping on the plank bed.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm burning up."

He helped her get down. She sat on a bench, hung her head and then leaned towards me on the bed.

"It's cold here," I said.

It really was cold there, but the reason I said this was because I was afraid of her, of her illness... I was afraid!... That was why!...

She said, "I won't lie here long."

We helped her back onto the *pich.* Again, she would lie down and then try to rise. "I'm burning up," she muttered.

Another time she said, "I'm frozen, I'm cold... Where's my basin?... Put me in my basin... I told you... oh, where's my Marushka? And where is Vasilina?... I've sent for her..."

Why didn't I go and get Vasilina? Or why didn't I at least call our neighbour, Halyna, to her? She had also asked for her. I thought of waiting a bit... maybe she'd get...

Another time she said, "I'm not full... They've cut me up... Where's my other half?" And her eyes would close and then open again. And when she would have a fit of coughing, her face would lengthen and the coughs would sound muffled.

It was becoming light. She started to ask for water, this time not from Serhiy and myself, but from Father. "Give me some water, they are already tired of waiting by me."

Father, perhaps, hadn't heard; he lay there. Serhiy brought it to her. She began to wash herself. She would put a handful to her face and wipe it... What did it mean? Then she gathered her hair together. She was restless for a while, said nothing to anyone, and then turned her face to the wall. She bent over. Something, as if from her throat, gurgled, and then nothing was heard... Nothing could be heard. Would she rise again?

I looked from the bed. She lay there, motionless. Serhiy jumped up. He stroked her face, her neck, her hands, and then covered her with sackcloth; let Mother sleep and warm up. I also jumped up and ran to her, but... Mother kept sleeping... She wouldn't rise already and nothing, nothing would warm her up. Her closed eyes were now closed for eternity. Her heart, which worried so much about us, had stopped beating for eternity. That's how we were parted from our mother... We didn't even say farewell. May God forgive us!...

It was becoming light outside. It was the third day of the year 1910, an overcast, sad day.

* * *

I placed my dear mother into her coffin... She was dressed in her girl's blouse, a long vest, *zapaska* and a black kerchief. In her hands were a cross and a candle. I touched the towel on which her head rested and her dead face turned in my direction, as if she wanted to ask me, "How are you going to live?" And no matter how much I tried to straighten her head, I couldn't. It remained the way it was.

Evening came. Snow covered the cemetery in white. Bells tolled. A cold wind fluttered the gonfalons. It was overcast. And then, my mother, the mother who had given me life, who had worried about me for so many years and had suffered, my dear mother was coverd for eternity with a heavy coffin lid. The nails were driven in and she was lowered into the grave, beside Denysko. If only a photograph of her had remained!

* * *

Tell me now, dear Mother, will you ever again give us milk? Will you ever whisper your prayers over us? Will you worry about me? At least in millions of years?... Or will this never be?... Tell me, how do you feel there now? You told me to pray in order not to suffer in the other world. How do you feel there now?... Please, tell me... You used to worry how I would make out if I lived. Tell me, now that everything is known to you. For what should I vie? What is the reward for this life of suffering?... Peace, eternal peace, eternal memories? And we've parted from you, we've parted for eternity!

It's horrible, it's sad, Mother!

Sleep... Sleep in peace, my dear mommy!

Kharkivtsi Village,
Lokhvitsya District.

[*1910*]

FAREWELL TO LIFE

FROM THE DIARY OF A SUICIDE

Esteemed Mr. Editor,

Taking my life, I'm sending you several excerpts from my diary with the hope you might publish them. Perhaps they are dull and of little interest, but still... May they be read by those who live happily in this world of ours. May they be read by a girl with hazel eyes, while she sniffs the fragrance of spring, while she listens to the song of a nightingale... May they be read... Below are these excerpts.

March 25. Where could my certificate be? Since I returned from exile, I've been searching for it all over, but nothing's come of it. The precinct police chief told me that it went to the gendarme headquarters together with the books which had been confiscated from me. I got in touch with them. The answer was *"We don't know anything about it."*

"In that case, it's at the Governor's," the precinct police chief told me.

I got in touch with them, too. The answer was the same — *"We don't know anything about it."*

"Then it means that you yourself lost it somewhere," the precinct police chief started on me.

There you go! It cost me so much! My father dragged such a heavy load to make me a teacher, until I acquired that certificate. And what's the outcome? I was dismissed from teaching, arrested, exiled, and my certificate was destroyed. Why? Only because I read books to the peasants and told them about certain things.

That's people — malicious, evil!

Today it's smoky in our house again. It means I'll get another headache. Rotten fuel — it only lets out smoke when you put it in the *pich.* I could open the chimney a bit, but it's cold enough in the house as it is. When will it get warmer? It's already the Feast of the Annunciation. Yet, the wind keeps blowing from the north. How cold and repugnant the north is! It's dark in the house... It's a smithy, not a house. The windows are small and patched all over; the ceiling is sagging; the walls are black. And what the hell do I have to eat? The *borshch* reeks of beet and onions. And why is Father making such a racket on the plank bed? He lay down to rest a bit and is tossing on the bed, as if trying to break it. He's so gloomy.

"That's your teaching!" he often sighs, looking at me. "I thought you would support me, but no... I've only run up expenses."

Our former village teacher, Olexiy Ivanovich, greatly encouraged my father. He used to come right to our house and say, "It's a pity to waste such a serious boy. He reads all the time and thinks a lot. Try your best to help him study. Perhaps, something will become of him."

Damn, I'm writing this while my hands are turning into ice. It smells like something's burning. It's already pounding in my head. The devil take it!

April 4. Why do I feel so heavy, so sad? It's Sunday, and today I went to my mother's grave. Yesterday makes it three months already since she, exhausted by her life of suffering, passed away. My late mother used to cheer me up, "Pray to God, why are you so sad?"

Now, not a word leaves her lips, I went to a grove. It was warm, sunny, beautiful. Blue snowdrops were popping up everywhere. All kinds of insects were basking in the sun; flies were learning to fly and birds were singing. It was so beautiful. Spring was awakening. While I walked, I wanted so badly to share these impressions with some-

body, to enjoy this beauty. I looked around — no one in sight. Suddenly, I saw a couple approaching me from behind a hill.

One of them was a young lady with a pale face. She was wearing a dark dress and blue kerchief.

I wanted to shout, "Oh those hazel eyes, a heavenly creation!"

The second person, moustached, wore a cap with a velveteen cap-band and a coat. These were Marina Petrivna, our teacher, and Prokip Ostapovich, our psalm singer.

"How do you do?" Prokip Ostapovich smiled at me.

The conversation started and I followed them. I began talking about spring. Prokip Ostapovich responded with a "hm", was silent for a moment, and then told me, in a serious voice, "You'd better look for a job. How are you going to live without one? Though, you've got that 'untrustworthiness'..." He sighed.

The teacher looked at me with scorn. "By the way, we had a pay rise recently," she spat through her teeth.

What does it mean? When I was working as a teacher, Prokip Ostapovich was on very friendly terms with me. But now that friendly tone is gone, along with our informal way of greeting each other. At that time, Marina Petrivna was also quite friendly toward me.

But now...

We entered the village. Both of them were restless, as if they felt uneasy walking with me. A crowd of people stood near the administration office. The teacher looked at them sullenly, then glanced at me sideways and turned into a side street. "I have to visit a friend here, yet," she explained.

The deacon quickened his pace. He desperately tried to walk ahead of me, as if trying to show everybody that he didn't have anything to do with me. What does it mean? Either our intelligentsia were ashamed of my unemployed status, or they're scared of my "untrustworthiness". It seems that both are good reasons.

Why hadn't I avoided them in the grove?

April 11. Nature is unfolding. blossoming. The pear and cherry trees are already in bud. The clusters of flowers on the maple tree are already green and smell of honey. Bees are buzzing and circling around them. The young grass in the orchard resembles green silk.

This holy, heavenly nature did the same the previous

year. It blossomed before, and will blossom next year, and the next, and still the next... But I... I have blossomed and will soon fade away. Never, never shall I blossom again! My poor youth, you're irrevocable, you're the only one I'll have. Why are you passing so vainly? Where are those things about which the birds are chirping, about which the spring is whispering and about which I dreamed so much at school? Where is labour for the benefit of mankind, for the benefit of truth, something sacred, great, which I used to dream about when reading books?

Yesterday, I repaired a fence. Today's Sunday, so I'll go to the grove and relax. Tomorrow, we'll bake bread and patch the walls of the barn. Is that all? My youth is passing vainly, monotonously, senselessly. And then, life will be finished with nothing left behind, just a grave. If only I could remember something good about my past. While I studied, I lived with dreams, but as soon as I began teaching, they were denied me. It's heavy and sad... Where could I go? How could I kill my time? Ah, I'll go visit Martin. He's so carefree. "Damn it all!" is his favourite expression.

Martin used to be a miner. He was hefty and sported a large moustache. He had also been exiled and that was where we met each other. Only, he likes to drink too much. *"Drink and sadness will disappear..."* He sings that song beautifully, and the lyrics are nice. Why not visit him? It's good that there are no strangers in his home. There are only two of them — himself and Feska, his sister-in-law. His brother's in the army.

April 12. What a petty creature, what an animal I am! Yesterday I got drunk. Horrible! That's your Martin, that's a friend! "Damn it all!" he said. *"Let's go have a drink!"*

We went to a tavern and started drinking. After tossing back quite a few, we went strolling along the streets. People were staring at us. By Kvach's house, some girls were sitting on a log. We approached them... The devil take me! We just sood near those hazel eyes, near those pink flowers and tried to keep our balance. I, a former teacher, was also staggering... What does it mean? Where was everything beautiful, lofty, sacred? Is it worth living like this? There are so many suicides at present. Any time you go to a reading hall in Korzhiv Yar, all the newspapers have is stories about suicide. And what if I really die beautifully? What if I die when the orchards start blooming and the

nightingales start singing? You just take a revolver, go under a snowball tree and... pop! I'll flow to my mother. Really, where can I get a revolver? It's difficult without money. The easiest way is to put your neck in a noose, or to jump into the water from a bridge. Only, it's not very beautiful... My body will be blue and swollen. Is there any poison which doesn't cause vomiting? So that I could fall asleep in the orchard never to rise again.

April 23. The orchards are blooming. It's heavenly! The trees are all white. And the fragrance... One can hardly tell one scent from another. The nightingales are so happy. There are so many bees buzzing around that the air itself seems to be quivering. The sun is smiling. But why am I so excited, why is my soul so heavy? It is already Easter and the Feast of St. George. I took a walk through the grove and the meadows. Flowers and greenery were everywhere, and everywhere I felt heavy, so heavy... I went to my mother's grave... She was lying there in peaceful tranquility... If only I could fall ill somehow. If only I could get galloping consumption, or pneumonia, or something so that I could die and hear nothin, see nothing. Eh, I'll go to see Martin.

April 24. What a worthless insect I am! Suicides are normally called cowards. It's not true. A coward is one who, not seeing the purpose and the sense of life, is afraid to get even with life, is afraid of death. A coward is one whom life taunts, on whom it turns its back. A coward is one who's afraid to give life a kick so that it screams at the top of its lungs. A coward is one who is tired of life, but still clutches at it. I'm a coward. I want to die, but I keep living. Look at what happened to me yesterday. Judge for yourselves. I went to see Martin and met there Khristya Stepantseva, a young widow. Ugly rumours about her are going through the village. She was sitting there and giggling with Feska. She wore a long velveteen vest and a silk kerchief. She pouted her lips coquettishly and exhibited herself in front of us. We sat there a while and then Martin said to me, "Why don't we have a party, friend?"

I looked at him, not knowing what to do.

"Look," he said, *"we've got Khristya and Feska... They'll fix us some eggs, we'll find some vodka and... damn it! Drink!"*

I had something like half a rouble — I got it for writing

out a bill of sale for a man — so I gave it for the vodka. The devil take it! We got drunk and the party spun on... Khristya, red-faced and merry, leaned against me and said, "You're so handsome, dark hair, moustache, brows... only a bit pale. Yet... What do you think," she turned to Martin, "would we make a good couple?"

"But of course!" Martin rejoined and said to me, *"Only... Why are you sitting there like a dummy, my friend? What are you waiting for? She's cuddling to you and you just sit there and stare. Don't you know what to do? Here you go."* He came close to Khristya, embraced her, and then grabbed my hand and put it on her breast.

She grinned somewhat bawdily, pinched me, winked her eyes lasciviously, and started singing in a throaty voice. Damn, what does it mean? This is depravity, a mire! That's the kind of love fate has to offer me. Is that the kind of love the nightingales sang about? Are those the hazel eyes available for me? That's my life, its purpose and its sense. The devil take me! Am I really a coward? Will I really be unable to do away with all this? What am I afraid of? An instant? And what do I have to regret in this world? My father? He'll be also there, everybody will be there... Damn, the devil take it! Where... where is my iodine? Hold on a second. I'm leaving this world for ever. What can I leave behind in this dirty world? A message perhaps. Should I write about the vanity of life? Should I ask that my eternal sepulchre be decorated with flowers, that I be buried next to my mother where the cherry trees are blooming and a silver poplar stands high? But why didn't I bury my mother amidst the linden trees? They intertwine so majestically, and that place has a wonderful view of the village. Oh, I've forgotten! They only bury the rich there. Now, with whom do I leave the message? With my father or Martin, both of whom would be barely able to read it? No, it's not necessary... Let me do the following. From the diary which I wrote with so much pain, I'll select something and send it off to an editorial board. Perhaps, they'll publish it. Why not? People will learn of one more suicide. And after I come back from the post office, I'll rush to the orchard and... Farewell to life! Once and for all!

1910

IN PRISON

Keys jangled in the corridor, doors slammed shut. Omelko dreamed that someone was playing the tambourine and the violin for him. And he, dressed up and well groomed, was sitting at a table. He was wearing a blue coat and an embroidered shirt. A silk kerchief was tied around his arm. His whiskers and brows were dark. He was so magnificent. Beside him was his Marusyna — beautiful, dark-haired, adorned with flowers and a necklace. Facing them were the best man and the bride's maid. They looked like poppies, singing a wedding song to them. On the table were a wedding loaf, buns and cornflowers. Everywhere, men and women were drinking, eating and wishing health and happiness to the young couple. The newlyweds, Omelko and Marusyna, were smiling and bowing their thanks.

"Take some bread!" someone shouted.

Aha, Omelko dreamed, this was one of the masters of ceremony dividing up the wedding bread. Yes, yes. He had such a wide embroidered towel tied across his chest.

"Take some bread!" someone yelled again, even louder, in a blunt soldierly manner.

"Yes... but... what's this?" It came to Omelko. He rubbed his eyes and awoke. Where was he? He looked around. By the door stood the baker Vaska, in a pea-jacket, holding rations in his hands. In the doorway stood a red-faced warder, revolver at his side.

"But where's the master of ceremonies, the wedding?" drummed in Omelko's head. He put the rations — dark, clay-like — on the bunk beside him. He sat there and blinked his eyes. That's it... Could he be in prison?... Yes, in prison. There were thick iron bars, stern and dreadful walls with blotches of black paint. Squashed lice had left red splotches on them. There was garbage and mold in the corner, and centipedes. And the stench! His cellmates were snoring. They were so filthy! They covered themselves with greasy rags. And their soiled and stinking shirts looked like bags. How many insects were in them? Same as in his. He had rolled his pea-jacket into a pillow. It was no better! Only his dark whiskers and brows were left to him. Where were his blue coat and his favourite embroidered shirt? It meant that he had only been dreaming. How could it be? He sighed. That's how people are. He hadn't troubled anyone, hadn't stolen anything anywhere, but here he was

in this hellhole. What would Marusya say if she could see him here?... Marusyna... A nightingale was singing, the stars were blinking, a fragrant breeze rustled through the cherry trees and they were caressing each other. It wasn't that long ago. He was already preparing to send matchmakers to her, to live and make a home with her... What a dear, good girl she was! Just try to get her now. What would her father, a shady tool of the rich, say now? He would call him a jailbird. And it's all because of the rich, only because he had an argument with them. But no! They've grabbed half the earth for themselves, have devoured everything, and now they say, *"Don't touch!"* They're plowing the pasture land and fencing it off. A poor man has nowhere to graze his animals. "Eh!" he scratched his head. He glanced at the window. Everything was bright through it. Already the sun had risen out there; people were moving about. He clenched his teeth, pulled the mattress away from the wall a bit and, since there was no table, put his rations there. Then he lay down.

Cockroaches swarmed all over the wall. Further on lay Sashko Maksyuta, a professional criminal. He sported sideburns, was blond, thin and shifty-eyed. Then there was Krol, a Gypsy with dark curly hair and a small beard. He called himself "a knight of the road". At the other wall, scratched and mouldy, lay Yakiv Brovko. He was a pale man with light coloured hair. Omelko had barely covered himself with his "blanket" when the keys jangled again.

"Get up!" a warder yelled somewhere.

"Good morning!" the senior warder hissed.

"Good morning, Sir!" came the response.

The turn came for our boys. They jumped up, hands at attention, and formed a line. A mug with a moustache greeted them, scratched "4" on a board, and went on. They rolled up their mattresses and splashed some water on their faces.

"It's such a drag," Sashko yawned. "At night, freedom doesn't tease you that much."

"At least you dream at night," Omelko responded. He was silent for a moment, scratched his head and went on, "What a dream I had!..." He smiled. "I dreamed about a girl."

"Oho," Sashko grinned. *"This time, I also dreamed of a hustler. She started telling me about some loot and*

things. She was a fence herself. Then we sat and... The devil take it, you only live in your dreams."

Brovko was wiping his face with his "blanket".

"And I dreamed of oxen," he called out.

"You're lucky... You'll go free soon," Sashko said to him.

"My oxen are my freedom," Brovko smiled. "The court will probably acquit me. In truth, our bellies are swollen with hunger; mine, my children's my wife's... I always bowed to those stuffed shirts so that I could at least get enough flour to bake me some bread... But no. So I took it..."

The Gypsy looked at Brovko, green with envy. "Aha, you'll go free, but I..." he sat down on his rolled-up mattress. "And I, fellow, dreamed about cranberry. They'll throw me in stir. But I won't give up. I'll never go to work for those stuffed shirts, and won't stop sitting on the benches."

"Magnificent, Gypsy," Sashko patted him on the back. "Now, tell me truthfully," he asked, "did you manage to pull away many benches in your time?"

"Oho!" the Gypsy roared. "Only God knows how many."

*"Then become a jumper *, like me. That's the line to be in! Move around the city with your rod."*

Omelko looked first at Sashko, then at the Gypsy. Benches?... A rod?...

"What are they talking about?" he asked Brovko.

"Ha-ha!" he burst out laughing. "You really don't know? That proves you're new here. This is underworld talk. I've also learned to talk like that after six months here... Ha-ha! Here it is; a rod is what you call a revolver, a bench is a horse, and cranberry means church."

The cell door opened. A warder came in. *"Alright, bring out your mattresses, clean up, get your mops. Quickly!"*

* * *

With their mops, the boys rearranged the dirt in their cell. It stank like hell. They boiled some water, brewed some chicory, and sat on their bunks, sipping it. Sashko and the Gypsy looked at Omelko's sugar and then exchanged

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* Underworld jargon — thief who jumps off walls to accost passers-by, normally near cemeteries.

glances. They didn't have a single lump, but Omelko was taking it from a pouch and biting it. Sashko coughed, grinned slyly at the Gypsy and said, *"Once upon a time, a peasant sat with us. He was so stingy, a real bastard. People came to visit him, brought him pastries and bread, but he would never offer anybody anything. He got what was coming to him. We took everything he had and stuffed him under his bunk."* He winked at the Gypsy, pointing at Omelko's sugar.

Omelko was looking at them. "What a situation," he thought to himself. "I've got only half a pound of sugar in my pouch, and who knows how long I'll be sitting here. But if I don't give them some, nothing good will come of it. They're scoundrels..." He opened the pouch, smiled and said, "Help yourselves, brothers."

They took chunks of bread and "took tea". Brovko joined them, chewing on a piece of rock salt.

"Now I see you're a real man," Sashko grinned slyly at Omelko. *"If he has something, he shares it! Right, that's the way it should be.* Because now I'm sorry that I didn't carve up that other bum. *He got a stretch, people say, for beating up a thief.* I didn't know that then. The son of a bitch got a short stretch and fooled us all."

They finished "tea".

"What do we do now?" Sashko stretched himself. "A smoke would be great."

"Yeah," the Gypsy rubbed his palms together. "If we only had some straw..."

"Oh yes," Sashko spat. "We'll go for a walk and bum some from the politicals." He paced back and forth, from the bunks to the door, stood still for a moment and continued, "And now what?... Lie down brothers," he said to the boys. He spread his pea-jacket across his bunk and lay down.

"If it's lie down, then it's lie down," the Gypsy grinned. He threw out his jacket and also lay down. Omelko and Yakiv paced around the cell a while. But it was too crowded. They circled around a bit, and then also lay down. It was silent.

"If only somebody would tell a tale..." Omelko soon broke the silence.

"I want to smoke, brother," Sashko spat. Then he was quiet.

"Hey, you, half-Gypsy, maybe you've got something?"

"You must be kidding, daddy. The very thought of it makes my mouth water."

"Look what that spider is doing!" Brovko pointed to the ceiling. No one responded.

"Well, I'll tell you boys, that girl with the politicals is beautiful," the Gypsy grinned. "You take a walk and she watches you so intently from her window, so intently... Her eyes are... ooh," he smacked his lips and straightened his moustache.

"Oh," Omelko scratched himself. "If I could only fall asleep and dream about such things."

It was silent again. Then Sashko broke it. "Brovko, get up and see which cell is taking its exercise period now. When's our turn?"

Brovko lifted himself up to the window. "Ah, it's only cell two."

"To hell with the law and the faith!" Sashko swore and turned over. "If only those sons of bitches wouldn't take the mattresses away during the day."

* * *

The boys returned from their walk extremely sad, especially Sashko. As soon as the warder locked the door, he said to the Gypsy, *"The hell we'll smoke. And you call yourself a knight of the road. You're a rank amateur. They threw you some. Why didn't you grab them?"*

"It's easy for you to say," the Gypsy justified himself. "I tried to grab them, but that snake called out, 'What have you got there? Give it here!' "

"Give it here!" Sashko mocked the Gypsy. *"Now listen you, lout.* You'd better..." He waved him off with his hand. "You're about as useful as an udder on a bull."

Sniffling, he paced about the cell. The Gypsy stood there, smiling. "Don't worry, brother, father," he began. "We'll satisfy our craving yet."

Sashko stopped pacing. "What? Do you have some straw?"

"Yes, buddy, I harvested some butts behind the can." He pulled three whole butts from under his shirt. "Look how much there is."

Sashko livened up. "Give me a light," he grinned. "Where's the flint and steel? We'll get a spark." He rushed

to the window. "And you... Get the book. Where's the book? Roll some cigarettes."

Brovko grabbed an old copy of the *Lives of the Saints* from a bunk in the corner and tore out a page for the cigarette.

The Gypsy jumped up and began to dance, "We, Gypsies are good people; whatever we see, we get. Ho-ho, tra-la-la."

"What are you? A spinning top?" Sashko interrupted him. "If they hear us, we'll smoke like that other time." He was searching for something under the window pane. "What the devil! Where's the flint and steel? I put them here."

Coughing and stamping came from the corridor. Sashko jumped away from the window.

"Why are you throwing tobacco out your windows for the criminals?" came the voice of the senior warder from the cell the politicals were in. *"Only you, because of your sickness, are allowed to smoke. Watch out! You have to follow the rules here. We could take away your smoking privileges, you know. And then you'd send complaints in about us..."* He proceeded along the corridor. *"And you, warder... You should watch them closer. When those ones went out for a walk, I went to the cell and found flint and steel there... Who do they belong to?"* he croaked at the boys through the peephole. *"Tell me! And you, Gypsy-mug, why do you hang around under their windows? Watch yourself, or you'll get it from me..."* He turned to the warder, "Listen to me. No exercise period, and no hot water for that cell and that, till tomorrow."

The boys stood there staring. Sashko turned pale. "You bastards," he whispered.

* * *

They had lunch. It was something dirty. They ate it. It was made from half-rotten potatoes, some kind of a weed and insects together with their wings. Whether it was soup or *borshch,* they couldn't say. They also had some porridge — something muddy, clayish, and slimy. They put the empty bucket in the corridor. Then they went to the toilet. There was nothing else to do. Some wandered about the cell, some just sat around. Omelko stood there sniffing some weed he had grabbed outside near the walls.

"And what if we fall asleep?" Sashko mused. *"Would*

the day go any quicker?" He spread out his pea-jacket. "What a gentlemanly bed I've got, what a divine life I lead." He lay down and the others followed his example.

"Like hell we'll fall asleep," the Gypsy rolled over. "All we ever do is lie down."

Brovko scratched himself. "My sides are already raw from lying down."

The sun was baking the walls and the heat came through the open window. Not even the slightest breeze reached into the cell. It was tiny and had once served for solitary confinement. It was like a hot-house. The filth warmed up and stank even worse.

"If we could only bathe once in a while," the Gypsy said. "God damn it all!"

"Ah," Brovko sighed. "I lie here and see cool clear water... water-lillies, fish swimming..."

"Eh," Omelko joined in. "Our village is like paradise... a river, willows, a meadow... I used to go there." He brought the weed closer to his face and was silent for a moment. "What if we have to sit here for a long time? Perhaps, we should send an appeal somewhere."

Brovko agreed, "If we could contact the prosecutor and get to trial quicker..."

"To hell with all of them!" Sashko retorted. "I've already sent an appeal and I'm still waiting a year and a half for my trial."

"A year and a half?" Omelko was amazed. "In this prison? Oy-oy-oy!" He looked at Sashko with a frightened expression on his face. "Is it going to be like that for me?"

Everybody kept silent.

Omelko continued, "We could yet get sent up for a long stretch." He rolled over and shut up.

"Damn this bloody life!" Sashko cursed. "It makes me sick." He took his pea-jacket and lay down on the lower bunk.

"What's it like for people out there, free?" Omelko asked.

"Damn those bastards!" Sashko hissed.

"It's easier for those who've already been sentenced," the Gypsy sighed. "They let them out to do some work... they're at least a bit free... they can smoke... Wonderful! But for us, with our cases being investigated..."

It was silent.

Then Brovko said, "Damn, that lunch makes me want to throw up!... My liver's burning... If I could only drink some

water..." He got up, ladled some slime from the bucket and drank it. "Damn, it's like sand on my teeth, and warm!" He stood still for a while. "And why do I have this headache?" He grabbed his jacket and lay down next to Sashko.

Again no one said a word. The Gypsy started humming something from his bunk.

"Listen, enough!" Sashko barked at him.

"What?" the Gypsy responded.

"Don't disturb our sleep."

"What am I doing?"

"You curly-haired devil!"

"And who are you?"

"Shove it..."

The Gypsy shut up.

"The devil take these flies," Sashko rolled over.

It was quiet and gloomy in the prison. Only the buzzing of the flies could be heard. Someone snored. Then Sashko began snoring. The boys slept, flinching only when the flies bit them.

"You bastard son of the devil!" came echoing from the corridor. "I'll teach you to sing songs!"

Sashko blinked his eyes. "Damn," he rubbed his forchead. *"My head is ringing."* He stretched, sat up and scratched himself. *"Where's the sun now?"* He reached up to the window. "It's still high." He jumped off the bunk and began pacing. He stepped over Brovko.

"Move your paws," he snapped at him. "Petty thieves! You're only taking up space in prison. For a bag of flour yet..."

"So what?" Brovko grumbled. He got up and scratched himself.

"Ah," the Gypsy stretched himself on his bunk. "I feel rotten, like I've got a hangover. We shouldn't sleep during the day, boys."

"Ah," Omelko got up. "If only we could play cards, or something." He looked around. Was he really in prison? How long would it drag on?

It was quiet. Brovko unbuttoned his shirt and checked his body for lice.

"That's a nice shirt you have," Omelko said to him.

"Yeah," Brovko replied. "It stinks because I'm filthy. Another filthy man probably wore it before me."

Sashko began to hum, *"I met a gal, and decided to take a chance..."*

"Hold on!" the Gypsy jumped up. "I had a piece of charcoal somewhere. I snatched it from under a water boiler." He got it from under the broom. "Now we'll play checkers."

"Come here," Sashko called the Gypsy. He took the piece of charcoal and began drawing black squares on the bunk. *"And you, you bum,"* he said to the Gypsy, *"make some men from the bread.* Somebody keep watch. If the bull comes, sound the alert."

"I'll give you 'alert,'" the warder's voice thundered through the door. *"What are you drawing?* Give me that coal now!"

"What do you mean?" Sashko started. He slipped the charcoal into his sleeve. *"Look, I've got nothing,"* he opened his palms for the warder to see.

"You bloody bastard!" the warder screamed. *"You're going to try to fool me?"* He unlocked the cell and came in. He shook Sashko's sleeve and the charcoal fell out. *"And what's this? You swine!"* He shoved his fist into Sashko's face. *"I told you no games, and it means no games."* He ground the piece of charcoal with his boot. *"Devils! They're always causing trouble."* Then he left.

Sashko lay there, fuming, looking at the door. It was black, made of iron. Somebody had scribbled on it, *"Here was..."* with chalk. She Gypsy sat next to Sashko, peeling dead skin off the sole of his feet. Brovko was scratching the floor with his fingernail. Omelko was doing nothing. He just sat there, head hung. "Eh," he scratched himself. "We're like animals here."

"That's for sure," Sashko joined in. Then, after a moment of silence he continued, *"What are you going to do? They treat you like an animal, and punch your face in yet... Alright... If they're going to treat us like animals, we'll behave like animals."* He crossed his legs. *"You bastards,"* he waved his fist. *"Just wait till I'm free... I'll beat, I'll stab, and nothing else!"*

"That's life," Omelko sighed. "That's how it is..." He spat on the wall, got up, stood there, then climbed on to the bunk to look out the window. He could see everything from the second floor. Below him was a stone wall. Further on, a small hill was covered with lush greenery. A small house stood in an orchard away from the city, which crowded somewhere there, on the other side of the prison. White houses sparkled amidst the cherry trees. A valley stretched

out on one side of them. Reddish water was glistening through the reeds. The willows were green.

"Freedom," he sighed.

On the other side was a meadow. It stretched all the way to a forest, where something gleamed in the air against the sun. People were milling about on the meadow. They were raking hay and stacking it. There were men and women. Omelko scratched himself.

"People are working," he thought. "They're taking care of themselves, but I... I don't have much hay at home, but even that is probably withering under the sun. What can my mother do about it? She's a helpless widow. How is the poor woman making out by herself? She's probably crying, hungry, sad... Ah!.." He sat down, clenching his teeth. He sat for a while and then lay down. He closed his eyes and was overcome with visions: Dmitro Kozolup — bowlegged, tall, in an expensive jacket; Yakiv Sich — grey eyes, red hair, in a blue vest. They were standing in front of the police precinct chief, whispering in his ear, "He's a rioter, sir. He wanted to steal our land. Send him away, sir, please." Those bastards! Rioter... Send him away... They sit in their homes with plenty to eat and drink and watch how people sweat for them. They even laugh, laugh that they live in such luxury while they, Omelko and his old mother, have only grief and suffering... Ah!" What could he do? He ground his teeth, flopped over onto his side on the bunk, lay there and then got up again.

"And still they torture you," he said out loud. "They'd bury you alive, thise goddamn rich! Only they should be allowed to live."

"Ho-ho," the Gypsy roared. *"They really did a number on you."*

"They don't care that people's bellies are swollen from hunger. 'Send him away' is their answer."

"Yeah," Sashko joined in. *"Only they should be allowed to live well."*

"When I get home, how will I be able to look at them?"

"Yeah," Sashko responded again. He was silent a moment. *"It's the same with me."* He leaned on his elbow and stared at the door. *"I hope no one's listening. Alright. Why bother looking at them? Take me, for example... I used to work.* There was so much work that my eyes popped. And yet, I was this, I was that. They cursed me, they pushed me, they didn't pay me properly. *My father had a calf, but*

we were forced to sell it... That's how it was," he shook his head. "They blamed me because their horse died. *I looked at all this and then...*" he again glanced at the door, *"and then I smashed first one guy's scull and then another's..."* He grinned. *"Then I met a guy and began operating in the city."* He looked at Omelko. *"What should I have done?* Let them intimidate me?" He spat and stood up. *"Oh, no! I'm worth more than that, God damn it!"* He clenched his fist, bared his teeth and paced about the cell.

"Well, damn it," the Gypsy joined in, "I'll never forget that bastard who squealed on me. I'll take every last bench he's got. And he's got good benches. It'll be good booty, my friend." He sat silent for a moment and then asked Omelko, "Do you have good benches in your village?"

"Why not?" Omelko replied. "Those guys who put me here have them, and they're beauties."

"That's fine," the Gypsy grinned. "When we're free, I'll come to visit you; we'll come to an arrangement. Did you ever lift benches?"

"No," Omelko smiled.

"Well, now you'll be a fool if you just look at them. Tremendous! You grab it and giddy-up and you're off!... Only you have to know how to fence them. That's where I come in. You just give them to me."

Omelko smiled.

The Gypsy raised himself. "And really, why not? Take from those bastards. You'll have a coin in your pocket, plenty of it. We'll work together, and Brovko too. He's already working with me."

"Ho-ho," Brovko laughed. "So now I'm also a hoodlum. I came to understand it here in prison. Otherwise, ho-ho! I used to bow my head to those greedy swine, but now..." He made a rude gesture with his finger. "Now, take what you can, and that's it."

"That's the way, I approve," Sashko said.

"Ho-ho! In that case, don't say I'm only taking up space in prison."

"Only, a jumper operates differently. You've got a rod, a pen. Do you know what pen means?" Sashko addressed Omelko. *"It means knife. As soon as the son of a bitch starts yelling for help, you stab him in the side, grab the loot and good-bye. And why not? They live — why can't you? They hit — why can't you? And if you can't, there's no sense for you to live. That's the way of the world."*

"Well," Omelko began, "as far as smashing somebody's head with a club goes, I can do it." He was silent for a moment. "I'm not afraid of sin."

"What?" Sashko snapped at Omelko. He looked at him fiercely and went on, *"Come off it! You're still a slob! You still believe in sin?"*

"Ho-ho," Brovko roared as he got up. "All that, buddy, was invented by those rich slobs. *There's no such thing as sin.* Ho, ho! Sit in prison a little longer, you'll know everything."

Omelko just looked at them.

* * *

The red glow of sunset poured through the windows.

"Line up for roll call!" the warder yelled in the corridor. This time the senior warder was accompanied by all the warders. They knocked on the bars, searched the mattresses, frisked the boys and checked the stitching of their clothing. They finished their *"roll call"*. The boys unrolled their mattresses, which couldn't be done before roll call, sat on them and had supper. They gnawed the crusts from their rations. They were covered with ashes and tasted awful.

Sashko said to the Gypsy, "So this is our sausage. *When we went for the mattresses, I peeped through the hole to the politicals, but couldn't mooch any bread. Yesterday, they had a visit, so they've got some."*

"The hell you'll mooch if that bull pounded you in the face for nothing."

Brovko thought out loud, "Maybe on Sunday. Maybe somebody will come to visit us."

"The hell they will," Sashko spat. *"How long have we been sitting here and no one's come?..."* He was silent. *"If only somebody would come to visit me, my girl at least... Nobody will dare to show their face. Bitches! When I get out, I'll teach them how to visit."*

* * *

Dusk fell. A lantern flickered in the window. A warder had cast some light through the peephole. The lice, which had been hiding in the cracks in the walls during the day,

now rushed over the mattresses, the walls and the boys. There were all kinds of insects — big and small, brown and red. Everybody was covered with bumps. It was as if someone had beaten their necks, their whole bodies, with nettle. The rustling of cockroaches could be heard. The centipedes were also out to graze. The stench and humidity were overpowering.

Sashko paced the cell, cursing. Omelko rolled up his sleeve and stood there, scratching himself. The other two were crushing lice. They stunk horribly.

"Sh..." Omelko hushed them.

Somewhere, something began to play or sing, as if in that other world. Omelko jumped up onto the bunk and listened through the window. "There's a cherry orchard by the house..." people were singing from the houses. It was so beautiful, so ringing and clear. Obviously, young boys and girls were singing. It was so beautiful; it filled the body with a warm feeling. And the night was moonlit and quiet. The houses and the cherry trees glistened in the moonbeams. The air smelled of hay.

"Eh," Omelko scratched himself. " 'A cherry orchard... by the house...' Oh, and now they're singing 'A maid stood talking with a young Cossack.' Really... She talked with him... And not so long ago he was also talking with his Marusya... Who was she talking with now, his dear gentle girl, his dark-haired beauty? Near her place, there was a log by the wattle fence. The willows cast broken shadows down to where they were sitting. She was dressed in a long vest, with a white kerchief tied around her head. There were Olena, Palazhka, the boys... They were talking... But he... Something grabbed at his heart and he began to sing in a quiet trembling voice, "Why do I need those dark brows, why do I need those dark eyes?..."

"You there!" came from the yard. *"Why are you in the window, you jailbird? I'll shoot!"*

Omelko jumped to the floor. "Beat! stab! it's the only way," he whispered.

Noise and stamping came from the corridor. "Help me!" could be heard.

"Sh..." Sashko hushed the boys. He ran to the peephole. "Those sons of bitches are already beating someone."

"O-oh!" could barely be heard.

"Those sons of bitches are beating him and gagging his mouth," Sashko turned white.

"Aha, this'll teach you to go to the window, and to argue with the warder." The sounds of the beating could be heard.

"Take him to solitary," the senior warder said. *"This bastard needs to stand in the window, all the more so, after roll call is over. Lie down and don't move!"*

"There is a God, but where is he?" Brovko trembled.

"Here you have it — the law, the faith, God, Christ!" Sashko grated his teeth.

"To hell with the law and the faith," Omelko was also cursing. He was shaking all over. "Alright," he gritted his teeth.

"When I get free, I'll get a rev... or rather a rod, a pen, and... those bastards... I'll take what comes. Accused or prisoner — it's all the same to me." He turned red.

"Give me your hand, friend," Sashko stretched out his.

From there, from beyond the window, they could hear, "A turtle-dove was flying through the orchard."

[*1910*]

IT'S HARD

It's hard for Hritsko. He had looked for truth in people and, for this, was dismissed from the factory. What could he do? Misery, and his family was in the village... He searched about various factories, and hung around labour exchanges. Try as he would, there was no work to be found. One day, he went to the flea market. He was baked by the sun, he looked everywhere. If only someone would take him as a day labourer, he would at least be able to eat. He hadn't eaten for two days already. But his search was in vain. He went away, sulken, angry and sad. Here and there were epaulettes, cockades and insignia; multicoloured gentlewomen of all ages were everywhere. They disgusted him.

"Damn them!" he clenched his teeth.

A street-car clanked, coaches clattered. There was a huge building and gold sparkled in some of the stores.

"The damned rich," he whispered with malice.

Rolls and all kinds of sweets stared at him through the windows. He could almost taste their fragrant aroma. It

made his mouth water. There were yellow, fragrant oranges and lemons. It seemed to him that he could eat even their seeds and peels. There was also a very long stall decorated with wild grapes. Sitting behind tables were gentlemen, wearing white napkins. They sat there chewing something. The smell of meat wafted out from there. It tickled Hritsko's throat. He wanted to eat so badly that his tongue ached.

"If I could only have a piece of dry bread, or a bone," he thought.

At one table, they were drinking something. Drops flew from the glasses. From another table came roars of laughter.

"You stuffed pigs," he wanted to scream.

Servants rushed about, grovelling and scraping. "You're puppy dogs, bootlickers," he thought. He clenched his teeth and went on. He was furious. If he could, he would devour them all, break everything apart. "The devil take this kind of life," he thought.

A girl in a bright-coloured blouse, with a thin pale face, was bowing to pedestrians, offering bouquets of flowers...

"Fresh, fragrant... Take one, sir... Lady, they're beautiful..." She had tears in her eyes. She was cowering. "She's grovelling like an old beggar," Hritsko thought and approached her.

"Why are you grovelling so, falling at their feet?" he asked.

"I want to live, sir, live," she responded.

"Damn this misery," Hritsko thought. She wants to live and so she grovels in the dust under the feet of those satiated swine... Damn!"

A man dressed in rags, carrying a hurdy-gurdy, entered a yard with a small boy. He stopped by some windows and began playing an old sentimental tune. The boy took off his jacket and began performing acrobatics. The hurdy-gurdy droned on and the ragged man looked at the windows, waiting for coins to fall.

"We don't want any, we don't want any. Go with the grace of God," somebody waved from the window.

They looked so pained, the boy and the ragged man. They looked so pitiful and both were upset. They stood there hesitantly and left with nothing.

"Damn!" Hritsko shook his head. "What is this? Should one grovel, play games, for those stuffed pigs, just in order to live?"

* * *

The shadows cast by the houses were lengthening. The air was becoming fresher. The sun was setting.

"Where am I going?" Hritsko thought. "I have to spend the night somewhere, but where? I gave my last five kopecks for a spot in a doss-house last night. That's life!" He scratched his head.

Out of a side street came a group of pilgrims carrying their sacks — two old women and a man. They were heading for a monastery not far away. Its golden cupolas were beaming.

"Why don't I join them?" shot into Hritsko's mind. "Perhaps, I'll be lucky enough to get a place for the night and even something to eat from these pious folk. Why not?" He greeted them and they went off together.

They came to the monastery's hostel. It stank of rotten rags. There was a central passageway and bunks on each side. Old women lay on them, sighing and dozing. A robust, grey-haired, old man stretched out his overcoat and was busy searching it for lice. Another man was looking for something under his shirt. A wanderer, with greasy, unkempt red hair, was explaining to a dark-haired young woman about "saving the soul". He was leering at her. Hanging on the wall opposite the door was an icon with a scratched face. Its eyes were closed, giving a blessing. An oil lamp was burning in front of it. Our old man and women were crossing themselves all over, bowing and kissing the icon. Hritsko just took off his cap and stood by the door. From the bunks, the old women and the wanderer examined him up and down. They scrutinized his reddish pants, his faded jacket and his thin, long, unshaven face.

"Why are your eyes bulging out like that? May they fall out!" Hritsko thought.

One old woman was already shaking her head. The wanderer beside the dark beauty began muttering something about "nonbelievers". Hritsko got the idea. He quickly crossed himself and began zealously bowing before the icon. It tired him out. Then he sat on the bunk and looked around to see if there were any crusts of bread or other leftovers to be had.

A plump, full-faced monk came in. *"You, children of God, get moving. It's time for evening mass."*

Everyone began to move. They tidied themselves up and left.

"Why are you sitting there like a rock?" the monk addressed Hritsko. *"Go and pray. I'm locking up the hostel."*

* * *

Hritsko stood in the church, praying. The poor man scratched his head and cast secret glances at the door. Would they end soon? Would they soon be going back to the hostel? Maybe, he'd still be able to find some crusts to eat. His stomach was already grumbling; he could already feel it grab his liver. It seemed to him that he could even eat those candles, burning white. They smelled delicious. How long could this service go on? His eyes were already blurring over; his feet were numb. Besides this, he had to keep getting down on his knees to cross himself. If he didn't, those hooded ones standing at the back would notice and not let him back into the hostel. He kept shifting from one foot to the other.

"Faster already!" he angered inside.

Detachedly, the monks read on. They read a lot; they dragged it out. As soon as they'd stop reading, they'd start singing.

"Well fed, aren't they?" Hritsko whispered to himself in anger.

* * *

The service finally came to an end. An oil lamp was burning in the hostel. The old women were eating dried fish with bread. The old man was gulping down a herring with white bread. People were having supper. Hritsko paced up and down the passageway, looking at them.

"If only, just once, someone would give me just a morsel," he thought. "The old man has so much bread... half a sack... Should I ask him for some?" He stopped in front of the old man, cleared his throat, and... "Should I ask?.. Hm... I'll ask a bit later..." He paced on.

The wanderer, who'd been leering at the young woman, came in. He crossed himself before the icon, looked around, at the old man's white bread and herrings, and said, *"Bread and salt to you, Grandpa."* *

* Traditional; in this case, "Bonne appetite".

"May God be with you," the old man replied.

"Have a nice supper. Oh, these sins..." He sighed, shook his head, and sat down next to the old man. He was silent for a moment and then continued in broken Russian, *"When I look at you, Grandpa, you seem very familiar. Did we, by chance, meet at Father Ioann's in Kronstadt?"*

"No, I've never been there."

"God's will didn't take you there? It's a pity... That's *a man!... Understand?..."* The wanderer cast a quick glance at the white bread and shifted closer to the old man. *"Understand, if I could only tell you about him."*

"Please, do."

"Well, he's a holy man, you understand... Perhaps, I could trouble you for a small piece of bread?"

"Why not? Have some herring, too."

"May God bless your kinfolk." The wanderer began eating and recounted his tale to the old man.

Hritsko, looking at him, could only swallow his saliva. What else was there to do?

"How can I hope to compete with such devils," Hritsko thought. "That red-haired satan! And that grey-haired devil is all ears... Bastards!..."

"And you understand," the wanderer said, smacking his lips, *"here the two of us are, and he's also here... that servant of God..."* The wanderer wiped away a tear. *"But, sinful people can't see him... except... oh, these sins..."*

"He's a real devil!" Hritsko angered. "Just listen to them... May you perish, you unclean forces, devils!" He spat. Then he climbed onto a bunk, into the corner, into the shadows. He pulled his jacket over his head and lay down. He couldn't lie still. Anger boiled up inside him. It was sickening, hard. Something caught in his throat. He tossed from one side to the other.

"Oi, oi!" came from another dimly lit corner. Someone else was tossing and whimpering. The old women became restless.

"What's wrong? God be with you!" They moved away from there and crossed themselves.

One of them lamented, "Give me the black shawl, please... To cover her... It's the black sickness..."

"Oi... oh, no!" A girl came out of that corner. "I want to eat... Two days, two whole days, I haven't eaten a thing!"

Hritsko took a closer look — a bright blouse, a pale face.

It was the girl who had grovelled at the feet of the gentry, trying to sell them flowers. "Aha," he thought. "She wants to live. That's life for you!"

"What about your flowers? Didn't you sell any?" he asked her.

"No... I took them from the graves in a cemetery. I took them and felt guilty. What if people had seen? I crawled on my knees... but I couldn't get a single kopeck for them." She cried.

Hritsko shook his head. "Is this what you call life?" he asked himself. He thought about the girl, about himself, and even recalled the organ grinder. He felt so disgusted with this kind of life. "Are we really people? We're poor, misfortunates! We vegetate, and why? Wouldn't it be better to lie there in the cemetery? To hell with this kind of life!"

Three day later, the newspapers reported; "Yesterday, in the presence of bystanders, Hritsko Kudelya, peasant, threw himself under a train. He was cut in half. The reason for his suicide is unknown."

[*1910*]

ONE'S OWN KIND

A SKETCH

Uncle Pavlo has already been in the city a long time. After he got out of prison two months back, he started hanging around the market, and is still there. Now he's walking. For some reason he was called in by the police. The city isn't really that big, but it's one big rush. Some rush here, some rush there — Jews, gentry... It sure isn't a village.

Trees hang over the passers-by. They used to be green, but now they're all yellow. Here's the *monopolka* *, here's a bakery, and there's the tall white building where his trial took place. A new coach stands in front of it. A coachman, in some kind of cloak, is dozing on the driver's seat.

* Tavern or liquor store under state monopoly in tsarist Russia.

The horses are fantastic! They're grey, healthy, and harnessed in pairs — two in front and two behind. Some people live well.

The doors into the corridor of that building are open. Some lady, with a bird attached to her head, is going up the stairs. And there's a gentleman in a coat... What's going on? Maybe, somebody is on trial. Pavlo would also like to go and have a look. Besides, he could warm up. Outside, it's overcast and cold. He froze himself, cutting through the fields. And it seems a long way yet to the police station.

Pavlo enters the lobby. There are fur coats hanging everywhere. They're all beautiful — brown, raven astrakhans. They glisten. They're all expensive. Galoshes lie about everywhere. Two gentlemen are standing beside a bookcase in the corner. Both wear striped jackets and shirts with white collars. They're talking and smoking. *"Yeah,"* one says. *"That's our zemstvo meeting... It tossed out the proposal of raising teachers' salaries."*

Aha, it's *zemstvo* meeting. Pavlo straightens his forelock with his fingers and goes to the door where one can hear someone speaking. The doors are slightly open, and he can see benches at the back of the room and chairs in front of them. The benches are empty, but ladies and gentlemen are sitting on the chairs. There, under the portraits of the royal family, the *zemstvo* council seems to be meeting. Numerous gentlemen are sitting at tables. They're bald, fat-bellied and wear epaulettes... All sorts of them. Behind one of the tables at the back of the room, amidst some gentlemen in grey jackets, sit some of the rural worthies. They seem to be quite affluent. They're wearing blue coats. Some gentleman, tall and lean, is babbling on and on about something. Pavlo itches to go in and listen to what those gentlemen are chattering about. But how can he go in? Obviously, one is allowed to: that's what the benches are for. Those others are sitting on chairs. But he's afraid, with only gentry around. He stands there peeping through the doors. On the other hand, why be afraid. Isn't he also a man? Is he any less worthy just because he's peasant? He's acting like a frightened little boy. Under different circumstances, he has stood up to other gentrymen: he's been tried by the district court and has sat in prison for over a year. Forward! He puts his hat under his overcoat, wipes his moustache with the palm of his hand, and enters... It seems that everyone is looking at him. Let them look...

Where should he sit? There are chairs and benches. Forward to the chairs — all men are equal. He sits down. Now it doesn't matter... He looks around. In front of him sits that lady with the bird on her head... Everything she has on is black and glistening. Herself — she's a cow. Sitting beside Pavlo, a chair away, is a young lady. A pleasant fragrance comes from her direction. A lot of people are sitting ahead and to the side. Nobody is paying any attention to him. It means there was nothing to be afraid of. Everyone is well aware that a peasant is also a man.

Already another bald gentleman in epaulettes is speaking from a table. *"We should introduce into our school gymnastics and military drill..."* he's saying. *"We should educate not rioters, but good soldiers."*

Pavlo shakes his head. He remembers *"good soldiers"* and *"military drill"*.

He's a poor man. During a snow storm, he had been working on th Redka estate. Redka had a lot of people working for him at that time. He was a rich landlord, and himself a healthy man. They had demanded a raise in pay from him. One time, they gathered in his courtyard. They expected the landlord to come out and talk to them. He didn't. Instead, soldiers appeared. *"Disperse!"* they shouted. "Why?" they replied. Word followed word... "Bang!" the soldiers shot at them. The dead and wounded lay everywhere. Pavlo had been so scared. Gentlemen!... And now they want *"military drill"* in school! But as far as raises for teachers go, they tossed them out, as they said.

The gentleman keeps babbling and his voice disgusts Pavlo. What a mug he has! His lard is rippling. His mouth is black like that of a vicious dog. Gentlemen!... Behind another table sits another stuffed face. His cheeks are crimson and his eyes are narrow. His jowls are shaking... Honest to God! But where did this stuffed face with eyes like an ox come from? He has to carry his belly when he walks — a peacock! He stops by the lady with the bird on her head, bends over and kisses her hand... no, her glove. Strange people! And she still pretends not to notice him. He proceeds over to the stove. It's a huge one. Whole logs burn in it. It stands on legs and has a toothed rim around the top. Someone is stoking it. He has a velveteen jacket and a ruddy beard — a soldier. Yes, he's from Penky. They worked together the previous summer in a blacksmith's shop. Pavlo had been sent there to work from prison, and

that man was there on his own free will. But what is he doing here?

"Well? Did you go and get my cigarettes?" the gentleman demands from him in a harsh hoarse voice.

The man jumps. *"Nn-n... I just got here... I had so much to do. I had to go to the police station, the post office..."* He takes out a handkerchief and wipes his sweating forehead.

"But what did I tell you, you swine!" the gentleman spits through his teeth. *"Right away,"* the man bows and rushes off.

Pavlo observes all this. How can you call a man a swine?... That's how it's done! He's got a moustache, perhaps he's got children at home, but he's called a "swine" and is forced to run errands.

The gentleman sits down beside the lady and gives a broad smile, *"He's a watchman, you understand, from the zemstvo administration. But he's such a lout."*

"So, now he's a watchman," Pavlo is surprised.

"I didn't recognize you, Neonila Stepanovna," the gentleman says in a quiet voice. *"I come closer — and it's you. How do you do, my dear? I haven't seen you for ages... Ha-ha!"*

"You're such a puppy," Pavlo angers. "You talk to one one way, to another, another way. Ah, it seems to me this is the wife of a member of the district court. I once saw them walking arm in arm. Yes."

"So," she addresses the gentleman, *"are you still a member of the zemstvo administration?"*

"If you please, yes," the gentleman grins.

The watchman appears. Submissively, he approaches the gentleman. *"Allow me..."* he bows, gives him the cigarettes and returns to the stove.

Pavlo stares at his back. "That's life..." he thinks. "They have no respect for you, you run errands for them, you bow to them... The poor man, how can he endure all this? What does he think?... Who could have imagined he'd end up like this?"

In the summertime, when they were carrying bricks into the blacksmith's shop, Pavlo told him some things — about Redka, and about why he had been imprisoned. He told him that some were wounded, some were killed, and some were being suffocated in prisons. He accepted it. And when the prisoners were on their own, with no guard around, he also cursed the landlords: he called them everything. Naturally,

he was one of their own kind, a peasant. What would happen if Pavlo talked to him now, greeted him? Perhaps he wouldn't recognize him, since he hadn't noticed him yet. But why not greet him? Why not? He'd suffered so much, and for what? Pavlo was not a thief: he should know it. And it would be easier for him as well, if only he had been luckier.

Pavlo had suffered enough, but something had perhaps turned up again. Why else would the police summon him through the village elder? Somebody, perhaps, had informed on him because of how he had referred to the village rich during a meeting on Sunday. "We should all stand as one," he had said, "and nobody, no rich man, will be able to defeat us." At that time, the rich had begun discussing a new tax scheme for their village — not according to the amount of land owned, but per household. They were clever. And what do you think? They'd win. But if everybody stood as one... This watchman had also said, in the summertime, that if all stood as one... Obviously, he was a good man. During his service, he said, he had struggled, and the police and the officers, he said, were afraid of him.

"Yes, yes," the gentleman continued babbling to the lady in a quiet voice. *"Why does the peasant need all that philosophizing, all these gimmicks? He needs more discipline; he should be kept in hand."*

"See?" Pavlo shakes his head. "See how the landlords care for their fellow man?"

Pavlo wants badly to talk to someone, one of his own kind, or at least to exchange glances with him. He looks at the watchman, who's standing by the door, studying the duty book.

"The poor man doesn't have time to straighten his back," Pavlo thought. "If he would only look at me once, I'd smile at him. He also must have heard that *'should be kept in hand'*, because he seemed to smile at it. What does he think about it?"

The watchman closes the book and stands at attention. He looks and looks at Pavlo's grey overcoat and his large boots and then approaches him. Pavlo smiles, embraces him, offers him his hand... But...

"What are you doing here?" the watchman asks him sternly, just like the landlord had once asked him. *"You're not allowed on the chairs. Go back, sit back there."*

Pavlo looks at him and turns red. "Don't you recognize me?"

"What's it to me?... Only gentlemen sit here, can't you see?" Saying this, the watchman casts a glance at that gentleman. The gentleman is blowing smoke. He turns around. The lady turns around, as well as some others. They all look so pleased. The watchman grins and smacks his lips. Downcast, Pavlo gets up and makes for the door.

[*1910*]

HOW CAN IT BE?

Today, Tanya Sakhnenkova received a letter. She was so glad to receive it. She hadn't yet gone to classes when they brought it. She read it through. When she returned from classes, she rushed to read it again. The lamp was burning and once again the letter was in her hands. She couldn't take eyes off it, she couldn't stop reading. "My dearest one," it began.

Ah, dear Sasha. It meant he hadn't forgotten, hadn't dropped her. And what hadn't she been thinking of already. She had been angry and had cursed him. The leaves had still been on the trees when they had last seen each other. They agreed to write each other and he had left. The leaves were already gone and nothing was heard from him. "So I'll miss him more," she thought. Oh that scoundrel! She almost gave in. She had already wanted to be the first to write, but somehow... It was good that she hadn't written. It was better that he wrote her first.

"My little red poppy," he wrote. Tee-hee! It's nice to be beautiful. She was dark-haired, with rosy cheeks... And wasn't it so? Tanya turned up the lamp which was sitting on the table, took a mirror from behind some books and began admiring herself.

"It's true... Look at my eyes. They're hazel. My cheeks are full and rosy. It's nice to be like this! Only, it's still not perfect. My lashes should be darker yet, and my cheeks should be peaches and cream."

She put the mirror aside and picked up a medical textbook. But she couldn't read.

It's wonderful when men fall at your feet. But what does

it mean? There were so many running after her, more handsome and richer than Sasha, but no, something's not right. There's something different about him. He's pensive, loves nature and there's something in his look. His eyes and his dark whiskers seem to smile. He always seems to be smiling. His student uniform fits his slender frame perfectly.

And what did he admire most in her? Her beauty, of course. In the summertime, she had made herself pensive in his presence. She had used her eyes and lips just so... She had talked about the evil in life, there was so much of it, and the purpose of life. Tee-hee! It seems he loved her that way. He was so much fun, he cuddled with her. She should write more about this in her letter... And why shouldn't she write him about it? "I wait with impatience," he wrote. Aha, but he was silent for so long. Now it's your turn to wait, so long.

She should also write to Poryadinsky. It was already a fortnight since his letter had come. He was funny.

With others, he was so pretentious and arrogant, but with her... "You're an angel sent from heaven," he wrote. "I dream of you each night." And this one is much richer than Sasha, more handsome, so husky, ruddy. But he didn't appeal to her. But somehow, he's... It seems that the only thing in his mind is to stick his nose in the air. She should keep him angling. Why not?'" If Sasha only knew that he was sending such letters to her. Tee-hee!

Tanya got up and walked about. She was happy and felt good. The lamp under its blue shade shone somehow mysteriously. Gogol and Turgenev hung on the half-lit wall. It was as if they were smiling at her. Behind a side door, which was blocked by a wardrobe, she could hear the squeaking of a shoe. Some student was renting a room there. He was so pale and thin. For some reason, he also felt the need to walk about.

And it seemed that Poryadinsky had fallen for her, completely. In the summertime, he had been so happy when she treated him kindly. Oh summer, dear sweet summer!

The village, the grove were so lush and green. Oaks, lindens and poplars stretched out their branches invitingly. Hazel-bushes were growing all around. A thick green bush was blooming merrily. Amidst all this were students. There were so many of them. And there were summer cottages. The students were roaring with laughter, chatting, and

stealing kisses. It was beautiful. The rays of the sun peeped through the thick branches. Dragon-flies were buzzing in the air. One of them would spread its wings and hang motionless. A fragrant breeze rustled through the delicate leaves. Here and there berries ripened.

And here, the reddish cap of a plump mushroom peeped out from behind a bush.

On one occasion, it was all laughter. Sasha had found a mushroom and was showing it to Nadya Levchenko. He was chatting with her and smiling. At that moment, Tanya was behind a bush and he seemed not to notice her. They had come to the grove hand in hand. He had led her there and their bodies had been touching. Just wait! Poryadinsky was not far away, rustling about and muttering something. "Ivan Ivanovich!" she called to him. "Have you found something?" He rushed to her. Tanya chatted with him and giggled. But it was nothing. When they came into the open, she took him by the arm, as if in jest. They were walking like that. Sasha, all alone, was walking on the grass to one side. From time to time, he would pick a flower, smell it, and cast glances at her and Poryadinsky. She was teasing him. Tanya also picked a flower and hit Poryadinsky on the shoulder with it. The idiot loved it, but Sasha's heart ached...

Tanya went to the window. She was high up, on the fourth floor. Electric lights sparkled in the street. A tram rattled, striking sparks. People were lost in the shadows. It was noisy and busy. Just yesterday, all this was so repugnant to her, foreign. But today... Why was everything so beautiful and close to her today?

She left the window and again began pacing about.

Summer had had everything. They made porridge often and there had been one beautiful night. Silence had reigned everywhere. Nothing moved in the grove. It was as if everything was transfixed. The moon was reflected in a pond, like a golden coin. Willows towered over it. A light shimmered under an alder tree. Noise, laughter — and the porridge was boiling. On a rise, Sasha and Tanya were sitting on the grass under an oak tree. Lacy shadows cast by the moon enveloped them. The fragrant scent of honey came from somewhere. A shrub was silhouetted in the half-light, and a nightingale sang in it. Tanya's breasts rose and fell, and she was breathing quickly. And now... Sashko was leaning on her. "I love you," he whispered...

Tanya went to the table and sat down. A cricket was chirping under the wardrobe. A din came from beyond the door.

"The devil take it," came the lifeless voice of the pale student. "The summer's wasted and I'm wasted too. I run around looking for tutoring jobs, and I've nothing to pay my university tuition with. I did a few things, paid my rent, and the money's gone.

"What should I do? Take it from my father? I can't any more. I've been sitting on his back for too long already. How much can he make selling herring? And here, on top of that, you can't even find a tutoring job. They'll expell me from university... Life!"

Tanya listened. "The poor boy," she thought. "His summer's wasted and he's got no money for tuition. Hm!"

For her, it was only the question of studying. Her father didn't sell herring: he had an estate.

"Don't worry, my friend," an unfamiliar bass voice said merrily. "Whether they expell you or not, life's results are the same." The lifeless voice was silent for a moment and then continued, "It's alright for you, you've got a tutoring job and fine things at home."

"What? Ho-ho!" the other replied. "And what if I didn't? Drink, that's the best way. I've already poured some down my throat, buddy."

"He's a loser," Tanya thought. She picked up her letter and again glanced through it.

Her eyes came to rest upon the line, "We'll see each other at Christmas, and then, there's Easter, nightingales, and the orchards will be blooming."

If it would only come sooner, Tanya smiled. And then, it'll be summer. Oh God! The grove, moonlit nights... And then they'd finish their education and get married... If it would only come true! He'll be an engineer, and she, a doctor. He'll have an estate, and she... Live and enjoy life! Tanya blinked her eyes from the happy feeling these thoughts gave her.

"It's good to be rich," came the voice of the pale student. "Take Ivan Poryadinsky who was with us in the first year. What does he have to worry about? He's the son of a rich landowner. He doesn't rack his brains wondering how to pay his debts. His life's one of women, the opera and parties."

The bass was silent for a moment. "So what?" he began.

"What goal does he have? What are the results? Where is everything now?"

"What do you mean 'where'? He was transferred to Petersburg, to the university. He's got everything there."

"Listen, friend," the bass sighed. " 'A moment — and the fairy tale is over' — no Petersburg, no Kiev." He was silent for a moment. "He was transferred to where true reality is eternal, impenetrable darkness, eternal cold silence. That's the purpose of our lives, the result of our worries, operas, women, parties."

"What? How?"

"Heart attack. It happened over a week ago. A friend wrote me, 'It's as if there had never been a Poryadinsky on this earth.' "

"Oi!" Tanya was frightened. "He's dead? How could it be? It must be some other Poryadinsky. But they said 'Ivan' and 'transferred to Petersburg'... No! It can't be him."

"Hm," the pale student was flabbergasted. "There you go! He was so handsome — his nose, eyes, brows — like in a painting. He was so rich. They had a huge estate by the Ryadkivky's, a two-storeyed mansion..."

"Oi!" Tanya's heart jumped. " 'Near the Ryadkivsky's, a two-storeyed mansion.' It's him. Oh God, how could it happen?"

It was silent beyond the door. The cricket was doing his own. A muffed din came from the street.

"How can it be?" pounded in Tanya's head. Summer wasn't that long ago and he had been so healthy, lively. He had smiled at her and had brought her flowers... Oh God! Why had she behaved that way with him, why had she mocked him in front of Sasha? And she had been planning to tease him with the letter! How unkind she was!

Poor, dear Poryadinsky.

"Hm," again came the astonished voice of the pale student. "So Poryadinsky is gone! What a dandy he was, proud as a peacock. He could boast of his wealth. He used to go walking, wearing a pince-nez, although his eyes were perfect. His clothing was lavish, his moustache was perfectly groomed. He always had his nose in the air."

"So, what was the point of that proud nose under the pince-nex, and that well-groomed moustache?"

"Oh God!" Tanya trembled. "And he had such beautiful curly hair. How can it be?"

"And at parties," the pale student went on, "the beauties

swarmed around him. And he was always so merry, so full of life."

"Listen, friend, you know the song 'Evening Bells'?" the bass continued. "I love it. Especially the lines 'And many a heart that then was gay, within the tomb now darkly dwells.' " He slowly hummed and his voice trembled.

"It's true," Tanya realized fully.

"And many a heart"... How many were there like that, who once strolled, were merry, handsome, but now... Take them for example. In the summertime, they'd gone for walks, gathered mushrooms, played tag and other games... But will they also have to die? Here they are...

Tanya stood up, took the shade off the lamp, and went over to the bed. A photograph of a group of students hung over it. They were sitting, standing and lying in the grass. Behind them were trees and shrubbery. In front of them lay a carpet covered with all kinds of foodstuffs and drinks. Everybody was so carefree, happy. And this, would they also be gone? All of them? Oh God! How can it be? It can't be! They had all been to Poryadinsky's birthday party... They had danced, the musicians had played wonderfully... Poryadinsky had been the life of the party... There he was in the photograph, his hand on his hip, his head turned to one side and his eyes seemed to be saying, "Stop, Sun!" And now he was gone. And there was Tanya, sitting on a tree-stump, smiling. And there was Sasha, standing there and staring straight ahead. And they'll also be gone some day, both her and Sasha. How can it be? A nightingale had sung, the moon had shone, and they had sat there. And all this would be no more? The nightingale would sing again, the moon would shine! Sasha would be an engineer, and she, a doctor. They'd have an estate. It had to be!

The deep bass stopped. Tanya put the shade back on the lamp and paced about the bluish half-darkness. She could see, through the window, a star blinking in the heavens. She went to the window. There were fewer passers-by on the street, less noise. What star was this? Vega? No. Sasha had pointed Vega out to her, it was bluer. But there, oh God, was so much space, so many unknown worlds in it. There was one star, a second one... Where did they all come from?

"And so t'will be when I am gone" the bass resumed humming from beyond the door.

"And so t'will be," Tanya shivered. "When I am gone." And the stars? Oh my God, they just twinkle and are indifferent to all this. Why do they twinkle? You die, and they don't care that you're a rich beautiful student. Why is life like this? Why are we born?

She left the window and sat down on the bed. "How can it be? You live, enjoy life, study, fall in love and then, sleep, sleep 'within the tomb'. You sleep without words, without awakening. You sleep soundly, so soundly. Neither storm, nor thunder can awaken you... It's not a year, or even two, but..." She hid her face in her hands.

"Eh!" the bass came from behind the door. "Let's play the fiddle."

The fiddle played, it wept, it laughed.

"Oh my God," Tanya was disturbed. "How heavenly it sounds. Death, nothingness... and such sounds. What are they? Why should they be so beautiful when there's death, death?"

She got up, walked about and sat down again. The music will play, the stars will twinkle and you will sleep. The sun will shine, a nightingale will sing in the grove, moonlight will shimmer in the pond, and you will sleep. And you will sleep not under a warm flowered blanket, in a clean dry room, but in a cramped dusty coffin, a cool damp grave. And you'll be alone, all alone. There'll be no Sasha, no one. And what will you look like there? Your eyes, which now shine so proudly and confidently, your eyes which radiate such charm...

She again hid her head in her hands. Your eyes will fall out. Your healthy pink cheeks will become wrinkled. Your teeth and bones will turn yellow... Why be born, why live? What's the point of all our visions, joys, dreams? And your warm passionate breast, which is now so disturbed, panting, will sag, there in the grave. Oh God! She buried her head in the pillow. And there's nothing, nothing you can do!

It was silent. Only the clock on Tanya's table seemed to be ticking away the time remaining. The fiddle beyond the door was singing, "You'll die! You'll die!"

[*1910*]

GLORY BE TO NONEXISTENCE

I

The peal of the monastery bells is spreading, setting off vibrato echoes. Men and women are emerging from the hospice, and what a sight they are! In coats and outlandish cloaks, boots and bast shoes. But they look pleased and content, making happy noises, crossing themselves, moving toward the church. Petro Krivenko makes his appearance. He is in the blackest of moods. What's he to do? Where's he to go? He is dreadfully sick already of having to put on the guise of a devotee, a man of prayer.

This going to church, crossing himself, genuflecting. And what for? Just to have a chance of finding a roof over his head for the night.

The sun is high, a ball of quivering fire in the heavens. The church domes are glittering. Tall, leafy lime-trees lean over the tea-shop. Birds are twittering in the trees, and wind is rustling in the foliage. And what a delicious smell of freshly baked bread is in the air! What a treat the bread must be! Petro walks over to the tea-room. Never mind that tolling, let them go on with it. Petro sits down on a bench by the tea-shop.

Oh, how hungry he is! He went to bed last night, supperless. There had been a chance to get a bite to eat; a monk brought in a pail of slop, all sorts of things mixed together. And those damned carpetbag votaries landed on it like vultures. Nothing was left. Every one of them had a spoon, or a cup which they thrust hurriedly into the pail, spilling the food and soiling themselves. Petro could only look. You couldn't scoop that swill with your hand, could you? A plague on you all!

Petro is watching the worshippers who file by. Look at that! There are even girls among them! Fair-haired and good-looking too! In bright dresses. See how they cast glances around and make eyes at people, and smile. Aren't they happy! They'll walk around and fast a little in preparation for Communion. They don't have anything else to worry about. How different it is with them. His worries take his thoughts elsewhere. From behind that tall brick fence yonder came the din and clatter of the town he has come to to look for a job. With no results. He's been hanging around the monastery, jobless, for more than a week already. And how much longer will it be like this?

Yesterday, and the day before yesterday, he bummed around the town, and what? His feet got sore and his shoes, well-worn and full of holes as they were, got further ruined on the cobble-stones. And what is he to do now? Where shall he go in search of a job; who shall he ask where to look?

But is he famished! His empty stomach is crying pitifully for relief. And he is to go without food until the refectory opens, which is not going to happen until after the service. Yet it's good luck to have this refectory here. Though, if one thinks of the great dainties they serve!... Shredded cabbage and beets. But it's better than nothing at all; a couple of spoonfuls can be shoved in. But you have to be there right on time to squeeze in through the door. There are too many who want to get in. Soon enough they'll begin to move into position around that door. Everyone wants to live, even the ugliest. And how horrible some of them are to look at — mouth-twisted, noseless. Hearken, that's it, time to go into the church. The tolling of the bells has stopped.

He's off. At a shop, selling crosses, tiny gospels and small icons, a monk is sweeping the road with a broom. The monk is chubby-faced, his beard is light brown. Yesterday, a religious pilgrim begged him for bread and got even two slices. Looks like a charitable monk. And his aspect doesn't seem to be too forbidding, does it? What if he, Petro, tries his luck? Petro makes a little coughing noise and comes up to the monk.

"Father," he says to the monk, "I'm really starving! Bless me with a piece of bread, would you, please?" Petro puts on the smile he saw on the face of that pilgrim.

The monk is looking him over, taking in his worn out, colourless coat, his young beardless face, the small bundle in his hand. The monk knits his brows.

"Hm," he growls out, *"for how long are you going to fast here?"* Petro turns red.

"Well... I... er... well... I'm..."

"It seems to me, that you, a servant of God, are abusing our charity." The monk casts another glance at Petro, then falls silent. *"Behave yourself, or you can be arrested and exiled. Worshippers often report that their money gets stolen. Get yourself out of here."*

Petro breaks into a cold sweat which starts running down his spine. There you have it! Money gets stolen! As if

he were responsible. To save it from being pinched he never lets his own bundle out of his hand! There you have it! He never dreamed things would turn out this way. He is standing immobile, looking helpless. What'll become of him? Looks like he'll lose his dinners in the refectory and he won't have a place in the monastery to sleep, will he? Oh, that damned, long-haired scarecrow, how did he come to think of pinning it on him?! Maybe he, Petro, was not humble enough, did something wrong? That pilgrim, yesterday, took his hat off before he talked to the monk, asked to be blessed. Why didn't he, Petro, take off his cap?

The monk continues his sweeping. The dirt flies at Petro.

"Well, why are you standing there?" snaps the monk.

Petro makes a wry face and thinks, "That's it, I've got to find myself a job", then takes a firmer grip on his bundle, stoops and is gone.

II

Now Petro is tramping through the town. The din, clang and clatter are overwhelming. And what a staggering amount of people all around! Rich men and ladies. Some of them walking, some of them riding in that hellish thing, driven around with what? No steam engine, that's for sure. And all of these people are dressed so fine. And mighty fine buildings around too, with so nice-to-look-at eaves. It's frightening even to walk through all these splendours, to say nothing of looking for a job.

In his village of Vovkova Dolina, everything is quite different. It's made up of peasant cottages, treshing barns, cattle-sheds. It's quiet there too; piglets run around. The building, housing the *volost* offices, stands near the common. There are windmills close by. He should have stayed! Now, he could be penning something at the clerk's side, couldn't he? Why couldn't he keep quiet? Why did he have to ask for higher wages? And, of course, when that damned red-haired boy turned up, he Petro, was sacked. And, for all his misfortunes, Ivan Smahliyiv is to blame. Devil's vomit, that's what Ivan is. He happens to be a shop assistant in town. He came to visit Petro's father and started this loose talk. "Why don't you," he says, "go to a big town, there's a lot of all kinds of offices there. If your handwriting's good enough, you can easily make

forty roubles a month. You'd have nice clothes, like mine. Say, you'd buy yourself an overcoat and rubber galoshes. How can one live on six roubles?"

And Petro was foolish enough to follow his advice. Now he's bumming around, like a lost soul.

Here is the signboard: CITY HALL. But where can he find the courage to walk in? The building is huge, like a very big monastery. He's never seen anything like it before. And what a majestic gentleman has just gone in. He has a wedge-shaped beard and his overcoat, or whatever you call it, looks so grand. And his hat looks like a round stovepipe. How could one approach such a person, what could one say?

Maybe, he, Petro, should go on rambling like this a while longer and then go back home? But what's he to do at home? He missed his chance of doing some clerical work for that old bag in the *volost* office. His father sweats blood, slogging at the land that he has to rent from the rich. His father is half-dead from work, his hands are chapped. Must Petro doom himself to such a fate? After a much more noble kind of work he had? Why did he abandon his *volost* office work? He remembers how he used to sit at his desk, with outgoing papers in front of him, his pen behind his ear. Somebody would come in and say, "Good day to everyone," and would bow. And sometimes, one or another superior would shake hands with the head of the office and with him, too. Wasn't it good?! And the girls outside would sometimes make eyes at him. Yes, they did! But how great it would be to appear at Christmas in this overcoat and galoshes! No, he just must look for a good place to work. It would be so great to find a job that would give a uniform to wear, with a cap and shining buttons, wouldn't it?"

And now there's the REVENUE DEPARTMENT. Build up your courage, Petro! What a phaeton at the curb — fine horses, and the building itself is so huge! Come what may! Petro coughs nervously into his hand, touches his fluffy young moustache, takes hold of the door handle, and what a handle it is — made of glass! Petro gently pulls one door open and then the second. He takes off his cap and smoothes down his hair. What a smell! It smells of the rich life. And there are so many hats, and coats hanging on pegs, and a lot of doors. Which of these doors is his, to enter? Petro, undecided, doesn't move. A side door opens

and a somebody walks out. Who knows what kind of functionary this person is? He's dressed in a sort of a cassock or an overcoat.

"How do you do", says Petro very respectfully. He bows.

"What is it?" says the functionary, frowning. He takes note of Petro's coat, mended shoes, the bundle.

This functionary seems to be a real big shot, the chubby face is well-cared for, and he glares at Petro in a stern fashion, like a lord should. "Errr...' Petro tries to say something. The functionary, meanwhile, goes on looking for something in an overcoat which is hanging on the stand.

"Yes?" says the functionary brusquely.

The man talks in a lordly manner, too; he sort of speaks through his nose. *"Be so kind,"* says Petro in broken Russian, and bows, *'could you... could I... err... you know, a place... a job, you know?"*

The functionary doesn't answer and keeps searching for something in the overcoat.

Ivan said there were "commissionaires" — or some such name he used to call them — in towns and they were dressed very strangely and were to be seen in houses. Is this man here one of those? Definitely a big wheal he is; he wouldn't even look in Petro's direction.

At last, the functionary has found what he wants and pulls a paper out of the overcoat pocket.

"What is it?" and turns irritatedly to Petro.

"A place... I'd like..."

"What kind of place you want?"

"A place to work, you know, for... I can write well, you know, a clerk... I'm poor, you know, no money..."

"What kind of clerk are you talking about?"

"The kind you know, who writes."

"What?"

"To write papers... I'm poor... there's nothing to eat at home... starving, you know. Please, be so kind, show some kindness!"

"Ha, that's what you want!" snaps the man. *"He wants to be a clerk. It's a little too much for you. We have had much better candidates,"* and with these words, the man walks back through the same door from whence he appeared. Then he puts out his head again. *"You still here? Beat it. We've got those coats here."*

Petro becomes faint at these words. "That's what comes of asking to be hired. The Evil One be with you! Coats

here! As if I came to filch something from here," thinks Petro, putting on his cap. There is sort of constriction in his throat. He turns and is gone.

III

Once in the street, he is bypassed and pushed. It seems that everybody, all of them, are so joyful, well-fed, and fat-faced. There goes a moustached red-faced man, dressed in white. He's got shoulderstraps, spurs, a saber. And beside him walks a beauty, her cheeks flushed. That guy sure is lucky. The man smiles at the girl, telling her something. Oh, damn him! And there's another one, with something like sunflowers on his shoulders. Damn them all!

Petro seems to forget about his hunger. He is overwhelmed with bitterness and is about to cry. What if he really burst into tears on this very spot? Started wailing, even dropped dead? Would there be aynone to take pity on him, to take care of him? All of these passers-by are so indifferent. Their faces are vacant. What a terrible heartache has seized him!

His buddies will soon be well established in life. Vaska Viznyk will soon become a bailiff or something. Pavlo Matiyko, thanks to his bottle business, managed to buy himself good high boots and was seen to court the juror's daughter. And he, Petro, is he destined to dig the fields, and wield a flail in winter? What if his superiors from the office, or the girls, see him at that work? What a crying shame! Help! He doesn't even have the money to return home! He absolutely must find a job in town!

A row of big stores lines the street. What if he tries to get hired at one of these stores? Ivan did. Petro looks in through the windows. Not a damned chance! They look so rich with those bottles, books and paintings so nicely displayed behind glass. And the insides of the stores are like in church. Look at those guys in the stores — so smart in their collars, and with smiling mugs. What grins they have! The cunning foxes! And the glass of the shopwindows is no worse than mirrors! He can see his reflexion all right. Hollow-cheeked, with his nose peeling, black like a Negro, parched lips... and that crumpled and soiled cap? Who will want you, you scarecrow?

What's this one? GROCERY. There's no pretense in the arrangement of the shopwindows — everything looks

simple enough. It's several steps down from the street level. Looks like a cellar. Petro, try this one. His mouth dry, he coughs, wipes his hands across his lips and enters the store. Once inside, he takes off his cap. "Good afternoon."

There are so many boxes around and a cunning fox of a clerk at the counter.

"Good afternoon," says the clerk. *"May I help you?"* Petro is seized by panic again, even here. Such a smart coat the clerk has on. And there's another pot-bellied idler in the store. There is a smell in the air. How should he start?

"Well... err... could I have... I...", mumbles Petro, coughs a little and stops. Looks at some small white boxes.

"You want cigarettes?", says the clerk at the counter.

"Err...', Petro squeezes out an inarticulate noise. "If I may...", he blushes and falls silent.

"Here it is," the clerk wraps up a box of cigarettes and hands it to Petro. *"Fifteen kopecks, please".*

Petro looks baffled.

"Well, I didn't... Or... well, all right!" He takes out his coin purse, opens it, and holds out the money.

"Pay the cashier, please." Petro leaves the store.

Oh, damn it to hell! He has such a small amount of money, and yet he has bought cigarettes! What for? He doesn't even smoke! Oh! He clenches his teeth and walks on. His head is spinning, there is a buzzing in his ears; the world has gone dark before his eyes.

A huge church, shimmering in the sun, comes into view. "God damn it!" he grinds his teeth. Here is a little public garden on his way. It has benches in it. Petro turns into the garden. There are two well-dressed girls, sitting on a bench, talking animatedly, laughing. "Ugh, you, fat ones! A plague on you!" He walks further into the garden and sits down. He had forty kopecks, and now? He takes out his coin purse and counts the money: five, ten, twenty-five... Only twenty-five kopecks left! "Oh, Christ Almighty, help, help!" He turns away from the chattering girls to hide his face and bursts into tears.

"What can I do, how'll I live?"

IV

The setting sun turns red. Petro is exhausted by his incessant walking and can hardly move his feet. He passes through a market, with hawkers' stands all around — loaves of white bread, slices of fatback. A boy is hawking a basket full of muffins. Petro hesitates, deciding whether to buy something to take the edge off his hunger. Say, for about five kopecks? No, he shall not. There is a bitter taste in his mouth, something weighs on him, he is vexed and disconcerted. Where is he headed? He feels like slumping down. To lie unheeding and oblivious of everything seems a blessing to him.

Petro asks a boy the direction to a flophouse; the boy indicates the way.

The first house Petro sees is a gray dump with two rows of windows. There are wagons and timber in the yard. The gate is kept open. A shabby squat house further in the back of the yard looks like the place Petro wants. A sturdy bearded man, his shirt outside his trousers, asks Petro to show him his passport and then points to the backyard house Petro has spotted.

There are two doors into the house. Petro enters the one closer to him. The place is all grimy; the ceiling and walls of the small room are stained and battered. The window near the door is covered with greenish mildew. Muck has accumulated on the plank bed by the wall. There's a small brick *pich* against another wall. The *pich* doesn't seem to have been lit for a long time; the hearth is covered with cold aches. There are two bottles, sitting on the mantlepiece. Bread crumbs litter the windowsill; there's garbage on the floor. Smells mix to produce a hardly bearable stench — something putrid, something sour, vodka.

Petro stands there, observing it all. "What a place," he thinks, "it's even worse than the hospice at the monastery. They had more space in the room, icons in the corner, oil lamps. But how could one sleep here? And for the night he would have to pay through the nose — five kopecks, at least. How many kopecks would be left him?" Petro sighs.

A shuffling noise comes from the *pich*, coupled with the sound of yawning. Petro takes his cap off. "Good evening!" he says, humbly coughing and trying to see who is there.

Someone gradually appears from the *pich*. He's quite weird in appearance — shock of tousled hair, a wan flabby

face, still sleepy. The man's eyes are bloodshot. He's young and has a small moustache, beardless. He gets off the *pich*. Now Petro can see that the youth is shirtless, naked to the waist. Only trousers cover his nakedness. What is he? The man grins, revealing his teeth.

"Good evening!"

He does look scary. He has bulging muscles on his arms and chest. And the trousers are no more than patches. He sits down on the bench and smiles at Petro. What is this, anyway?

"Well, friend," says the man suddenly in a deep hoarse voice. "You here for a night?"

"Well... sort of", mutters Petro, eyes downcast.

"Now, you've had it," he thinks. "They say there are ruffians in town, spooky, ragged. This one here is surely one of them. A real criminal this one seems to be." Petro casts an alarmed glance at his bundle. "There's my shirt and pants in it. Is this ruffian out to beat me up and take away all my possessions? What if the thug cuts my throat? They're said to be easy with that, too."

"Hey, sit down, friend. Why stand?" There's nothing else to do. "Damn it all," Petro tightens his hold on the bundle, his cap crumpled in his hand, and sits down on the edge of the plank bed, keeping his distance to feel safer. "I wish to God I could get out of here, but where would I go then?" Petro heaves a heavy sigh.

"Why so heavy, friend?" the man asks.

"Well... that's how it is."

When Petro was leaving home, he said he didn't give a damn for his job in the *volost*. And what does he have now? What would they say if they saw him now?

V

It is getting quite dark in the room. The man lights the lamp on the mantlepiece, scratches his unkempt head and sits down again. It grows quiet. Only the distant noise of the street can be heard. Muffled conversation comes from behind the wall where the *pich* is.

"Hey!" a voice is heard from behind the door.

The door is thrust open and a man rushes in. He wears a reddish cap with blue edging on his head; his coat, full of holes, is much too short, his trousers are worn through at the knees, his boots are shabby, with cut-off tops.

"Another one!" thinks Petro and tries to squeeze his bundle still tighter. He fingers the purse in his pocket and moves to lean against the doorpost. So far nothing awful has happened. Petro risks a further look at the newcomer. He's skinny and pallid, with a red moustache and fair beard. He's panting from brisk walking and holds, in his hands, white bread and herring.

"We've been unloading iron bars today", the newcomer begins addressing the shirtless man. "Enough left for you to move tomorrow. Big bars, they were." The newcomer gasps for air and continues, "With those bars on my shoulder, I had these stitches in my side going all the time". The man puts the bread and herring on the plank bed. "And, see," the newcomer continues, "one of our guys lost his footing and fell straight into the water. He got out, but wet all through, of course. Ha-ha!" Then, he takes a quarter-liter bottle of vodka out of his pocket and dexterously knocks the bottom of it against his palm. The cork pops out. "Get your glass."

The other one on the *pich* holds out a cup with the handle broken off.

"Here." He fishes out a coat, all in shreds, puts it over his naked body and leaps down on to the floor. "Hey, let's have a libation."

They drink, break the bread and tear pieces off the herring with their fingers. They shove the morsels into their mouths.

Petro's nose is affected by the smell of food. His mouth begins to water.

The door opens once again and a man, who turns out to be the same one who asked to see Petro's passport, enters.

"How many of you here?" asks the man. *"Pay for your night."*

The two eating men search their pockets and give the proprietor some money.

"And you," he turns to Petro, *"ten kopecks. Quick!"*

Petro rises from the plank bed.

"Ten kopecks!" He falls silent in desperation. "Good uncle, have mercy, I'm poor..."

"So what?"

"Kind uncle, you can do with five from me, can't you... I'm poor." Petro hangs his head and assumes a very humble countenance.

"For five kopecks you stay over there," and the proprietor points to the door behind the *pich.*

Petro reluctantly puts on his cap.

"But, mind you... afterwards don't go around complaining".

"Listen, friend, there are real toughs there," says the shirtless man. Tearing a piece off the loaf, he adds "And they'll take away your coat."

Petro does not move.

"You going?"

Petro hands out his ten-kopeck piece and sighs. Then he sits down again with a wry face.

The money-collector is gone.

The shirtless man says, addressing Petro, "I felt ashamed for you. Why humiliate yourself so much? 'A poor man,' 'have mercy'...'"

"Why... because..." Petro is on the verge of tears, "Because I'm jobless, and with the money I have... I've been looking for a job for days."

"Foolishness! A job? Come with us tomorrow. You'll have a job and money for it. My friend here will take a rest and I'll go. So, you can join me, if you want."

Petro does not say anything in reply. His eyes are fixed on the floor. A fine job that is, to carry iron bars!

"Cheer up, friend. Does it matter what you do? The main thing's to live from hand to mouth and have a place to sleep. Thou shalt not aspire to greatness."

"Here, let him take this. It'll lift his spirits," says the skinny one, wiping his herring-soiled hands against his trousers and pouring vodka into the cup. "Drink this".

Petro smiles and thinks that these men are not as scary as they seemed to be. And yet...

"Well, I don't... Thanks," and shakes his head.

"How do you like that! Forget your airs. Nobody cares for that sort of thing here, brother. Down it. First you drink, then you eat something."

VI

Petro swallows half a cupful of vodka. His stomach is empty for want of food, and the vodka agrees with him, producing a dulling, quietening effect. Petro licks his lips, looking at the herring and bread.

"Why look?" says the bearded one. "If you want to eat, eat; don't wait for invitations."

Something light and soft pushes itself inobtrusively into Petro's head. He puts aside his cap and bundle and reaches for the food.

"Feels good." The food seems to be delicious. But at the same time, his palate feels like it's losing its skin and his throat is constricted. "I sure am hungry. Yes. You know, if I could have something, you know... to write, that is to..." Petro addresses the shirtless man. "I was a clerk in the *volost* office, you know, not long ago".

"Foolishness," replies the shirtless one. "I was a seminarian at a theological seminary till quite recently."

Petro looks at him incredulously. This scarecrow of a man hardly looks like he's been a seminarian, ever. Anyway, big deal, a seminarian — shining buttons, cockades. Back where Petro comes from, he saw a seminarian with the parish priest.

"A seminarian? You?" Petro asks.

"A seminarian, right. And this one," the speaker points to the bearded man, "was a village school teacher."

"You're kidding me!"

"No kidding. Absolutely."

Petro shrugs his shoulders. Maybe what they say is true. He heard people say there are tramps in town who once went to school, even sons of the rich! That's what people say. How could one be so stupid to become so down-and-out?

"And why did you, sort of become... like this?" Petro pursues the subject.

"Like what?"

"Like, you know, a seminarian... Could sort of get a nice place."

The shirtless one turns scarlet and looks hard at Petro. "What's that?" he lets out severely. "A place? What do you mean by a place? What would I have a place for?"

Petro wears an embarrassed smile. "Well, you know, to live, sort of better... And you could have a sort of cleaner job."

"What's that? To live? A cleaner job?" cries out the man, goggle-eyed. "Ah, now I see why you want to humiliate yourself so much," the former seminarian shakes his head and falls silent. He finishes his herring, wipes his hands against his trousers and leans toward Petro. "Before you

want to live, my little dove, you want to know what you live for. And before you start whining, whimpering, worrying about life, you've got to ask yourself — what is life?"

Petro breaks off another piece of bread. "Well, you know. People live, somehow."

"They do, eh?" the seminarian waves his hand in a gesture of dismissal, then gets up and starts pacing the room. "Well, cattle live, swine live, don't they?" He sits down on the bench. "A place to work?" he smiles, "What is that place? To look for it is to senselessly seek a favour from a no-good piece of meat, really no better than I am myself. Senseless, good-for-nothing worries. 'A cleaner job' you say! Pshaw! To wriggle, make a fool of yourself, what for?" The man shakes his head, spits, leans against the *pich* and falls silent.

The other man, the former teacher, throws away the piece of paper in which the herring was wrapped, gets a cigarette out of his pocket, lights it with the oil lamp and puffs at it. Coughing incessantly, he climbs on the plank bed and sits down against the wall.

"Damn it," he says, addressing his hurting side. "How dare you ache!" He strikes himself with his fist on the side which is in pain. There's silence for a moment, and then he says, "I got it when I was in jail; still with me".

"What's the matter with you?" Petro asks him. "Go to a hospital. You're so thin."

"What?" the teacher frowns. "Why should I go to a hospital?"

"Well, they could give you some medicines. One could die going on like this."

The teacher shakes his head a little and smiles. "You can't cheat death, can you? Do you think those who are in hospitals all the time don't die? They do!" He coughs and continues "You can't avoid it, brother."

Petro wipes his lips and flops on the plank bed.

"Err," Petro begins, but hesitates to continue. "It's a pity they do. Other people enjoy their lives. They eat well and wear fine clothes."

"To hell with it!" cries out the seminarian from the bench. "Pshaw! 'Eat well... Wear fine clothes...' " He gets up from his bench. "That's the thing. Everybody's fighting for it," he spits and takes a few steps about the room. "To eat well, that's to stink and rot better in the grave, to be dressed... well... that's to... show off, to cover up one's

worthlessness. Do you call that a goal in life?" He thrusts his hands into his trouser pockets, his naked belly exposed under his coat, and paces the room. With each step of his rough calloused feet on the littered brick floor, a slapping sound can be heard. "Do you call that life? It's senseless idling only for the sake of stuffing your belly and donning fancy clothes."

VII

"There's a good cure for me," says the teacher. "It helps my health a lot to smoke or to carry iron loads on this side."

"Life's hard on you," says Petro, addressing the teacher. "Your eyes are so sunken and it's blue around them. You're young, aren't you? It's a bit early... you know."

"A bit early for what? To die?" the teacher says to Petro. "Does it make any difference whether one dies today or tomorrow? It surely does not." He inhales the cigarette smoke deeply and coughs. "It makes no difference, brother, not at all. It's even better to die earlier. When you're dead you don't have to be sorry or repent for anything."

Petro stares, incredulous. "Then it's better to kill yourself."

"To finish up with everything at a stroke? Well, you'd have to be pretty much in despair and scared out of your wits by the world's wickedness to want to do that, wouldn't you? Should you, maybe, go on living just to tease that wickedness? Life is evil. Man is a beast, trying to satisfy himself."

"Ugh, what's that?" yelps Petro. "Did it bite!" He gets a flea out of his sleave. "Look at that!" He flicks it on the floor. "What does it live for? Just to make trouble."

"Everything's like that," says the teacher to Petro, "and man does exactly the same."

" 'Eat well... wear fine clothes,' " the seminarian starts up again. "Pah, brainless beasts! Such a lot of worries. How then can you hope to find anything really holy, anything great in a man's soul?"

"That's it", the teacher stretches out one leg. "No hope at all. Here's a story for you. A man to look for a soul in. I was going on foot back here.There was this guy barging right on me. A huge paunch he had and a neck like a bull. What a sight! A general he was too, with shoulder straps

and stripes of rank on the sides of his trousers. And he was breathing so heavy, because of his fat. And he was looking straight through you with a 'make-way, everybody-and-everything, the sun-and-the-moon, I'm-coming-through' sort of look. People did go round him to avoid the collision. I too, stepped aside, just a little, but not enough for him to pass. You should also step aside a little, I thought. But he didn't and bang — we collided, ha-ha! *'You oaf!'* he growled."

Petro asks, in disbelief, "And weren't you scared to go against that lord?"

"What's that?" the teacher's face changes colour in indignation. "What do you mean, 'lord'?"

"What the hell!" the seminarian spits out. "He's a pile of dung, has a lot of dough, has a couple of country estates and you are obliged to bow to it, to be timid before it. And what's the use of that pile? Idling, stinking away, jeering poor people and sucking blood like a flea. I knew one such lord..."

"To hell with it!" the teacher cries out and tosses away his unfinished cigarette. "The rich... the poor... No use in all that and, anyway, who cares to find any use... Who? Maybe, there is some use to those who are like fleas, who are just idlers, who are grabbing everything they can... Anyway, all of them, both rich and poor, are the same. The rich are evil and the poor are evil." He tucks his stretched leg under him again. "Now, I'm going to tell you about the poor. Now, think of it. I wanted to help them somehow, wanted to do something good for them... It was so painful to see all those people who were just skin and bone, hungry and in rags. Their children were so worn out, always in tears; all of them so dismally poor and miserable. They worked day and night, trying so damn hard to live better. Well, I began talking with them, telling them this — 'You should at least demand higher pay for your work.' It was a big estate and the landlord was very wealthy. They did start clamouring for higher wages. I organized one strike, then another. Things were getting better. They were fed and paid better. But the landlord got wind of who was behind all this and I was arrested. 'That's all right,' I thought. 'Though I've lost my job and here I am in prison, I've fought for the right cause. I haven't done too much good for the people, but something did get done.' And I was in excellent mood. 'After they release me from prison,'

I was thinking, 'I'll keep doing it, that is, helping people in this manner. That'll be my goal in life. Oh, God,' I thought, 'what a great thing it is to have a goal in life, to do good for the people. They will not forget me even if I die here, in prison.' Time passed, and I was still expecting somebody to come and see me in prison, bring me some sugar, tea. But no one came!" He stops, overcome by a coughing fit, grips his side, turns red. His eyes acquire a feverish glint and beads of sweat appear on his brow. He takes a deep breath and continues, "What a fool I was! Does it pay to do good for others? Are these people worth it? It's like doing good for the sake of evil. Is it worth pretending to have a goal in life, to suffer for the sake of... swine?" The teacher again takes a deep breath. "Doing good only made me sick. It was cold in that prison, and damp, and I was placed beside the wall. I ruined my life, brother. And I had been a teacher, used to dream about things. There was this girl, also a teacher... And my poor hapless parents, how happy they were to know their son was a teacher. What do I have now? Ugh, damn it!" He gets a flea from behind his collar, flings it away, gets another one from under his shirt, revealing how dirty it is, scratches himself and picks up his story again. "So, there I was in jail, waiting for my charity tea and things that never came... A year passed and then another six months, and then I received this bill of indictment. When I examined it, I saw a whole list of witnesses, all giving evidence against me. Who were those witnesses? What did they hold against me?" There's a short silence. "When I read it, I saw that there were all those people — Pavlo Trush, Mykola Kostenko, Ivan Svys — all those who, in former days, backed me, crying 'Let's do it, let's do it!' They used to stay at my place too, and borrow my books, and I would make tea for them... kind people... Testified against me, that's what they did! I spent two more years in prison. After my release I met this Kostenko. 'Aren't you ashamed,' I asked him, 'to have given evidence against me? And the vicious way you did it — 'He incited us to rob the estate,' Did I really, I ask you?' Ugh, well, he failed to say anything and walked off. Later I learnt that this Kostenko worked as a foreman for the landlord. Aha! That was it. In former days, he would come to me all hunched up and ask humbly, 'Be so kind, lend me fifty kopecks. That'd buy me at least some flour' and now you could hear him — *'Hey, move it, there,'* and to others *'Shut up and do it!'* And

then I understood the philosophy — I'm better off now and the hell with you. Rot! A man is a beast, a pig! Vermin. There's evil everywhere. To hell with all this!" Suddenly he gets up from the plank bed. "I'll be back," he shouts and rushes through the door.

VIII

"Well, that's how it is," the seminarian scratches his head and lowers himself onto the bench. "Not so many fleas here." He yawns and starts whistling a tune. From where he is on the bed, Petro says, "Aha, I've got you... Here you go..." He's catching fleas, which are crawling over his trousers and flicking them onto the ground to trample them under the soles of his boots.

It grows very quiet. One can only hear laughter from behind the wall and something hooting in the distance.

"Hell of a lot of them here!" says Petro, speaking again of the fleas. "Here on the bed, there on the walls".

The trembling flame of the smoking lamp and the dirty, fly-specked window don't give much light and yet Petro can see their seething masses moving this way and that way. There are smears and smudges on the walls where the vermin were crushed and smeared with fingers. As Petro turns to look at the windowsill, he sees myriads of cockroaches feeding on the crumbs, covering them up almost completely with their bodies. A couple of centipedes come into sight, crawling towards the crumbs.

"Look at that", says Petro, with a wry smile. "Those crawlers have their own worries; they live, push to get grub. But why are they all like this; what are they made for? If you ask me, for nothing."

The teacher bursts in with a bottle of vodka and a loaf of bread in his hand. He takes a deep breath. "Just think, my mother and father, both old, have to look for jobs to support themselves... Damn! To hell with this life!" He pours himself a cup. "Glory be to nonexistence! Here's to it." He swallows the cupful in one gulp, sits down and bites into the food.

"And do you think", he again addresses the seminarian, "that a man is beastly only because he is benighted? Not at all. Take those with education. There was a guy in our village, the son of well-fixed parents. He studied hard, was

so ardent in demanding equality, goodness, simplicity in relations amongst people. He graduated from his university and became a police inspector. He's a different man now! Absolutely! You don't even dare approach him! That's a story for you, brother. There's nothing good or kind in life or in men. Everything's pretense, deception and evil."

The sound of something crashing, of yelling and swearing come from behind the wall.

"Yes," says the seminarian from his bench. "It can't be any other way. The very root of life is evil itself. To say nothing of man, take this flea, even, err... take a plant, a flower, if you want, or any thing. It's a sight very nice to look at, inspiring poetry, divine... But what's it good for? It grows, enjoys itself, and never misses the chance of choking you, the other plants, that is. It's always trying to get the best out of any situation, of pushing for a better spot. And it's like this everywhere and always. Now, I can tell you a story. One summer, I got acquainted with a girl. There's a landlord who lived close to where I used to live. The landlord had a daughter who was preparing for some kind of exams and needed training. So this girl I'm talking of, who was attending some higher school for girls, came in for help with private lessons. She was a striking beauty. I just can't describe how lovely her eyes, brows, nose and figure were. But her beauty was not the most attractive thing in her. The main thing was the way she would smile and look at you with her wonderful eyes and intone, 'Oh, how wonderfully mysterious God's world is.' Or she would say: "I'm surprised how indifferent people are to wonders of the world. Take the landlord's wife. Her only concerns are eating well and dressing herself in silks. What's she living for? Oh, how repugnant and vile wealth is! There's nothing great or sacred in it. How's one to live in the midst of all this? What is this life?' And she would make a wry face, would purse her shapely lips in a very peculiar manner. And I, fool that I was, would pipe this sort of tune: 'All sorts of wonderful and miraculous things are all around us, I can hear them in the whisper of tiny leaves, in the chirping of birds. I can see them in the glow of the moon and the twinkle of the stars. In these things is hidden everything wonderful and sacred that I've been so much attached to ever since my childhood... You are divine!' I fell in love with the girl. And I loved her madly, rapturously. An evening was as good as waisted, if I didn't

see her. And she would tell me as much. 'Death alone will separate us.' Now look at me," the seminarian shakes his head. "A great fool I was! How could I believe in people so blindly, how could I see so much good in them!" The seminarian falls silent. "And what became of all this? One of the landlord's nephews came to visit him. A dude and an idler he was. He was a student at a university, but didn't care a bit for his studies. After his arrival, I began to notice that my girl, Olya, avoided my eyes and when we met, our dates were shorter and she could hardly wait to leave. She seemed nervous all the time, her eyes were on the lookout, as if she were afraid to be seen with me. At first I couldn't understand what was afoot. And then, soon afterward, I heard the news that..." The seminarian smiles very sadly. "Soon afterwards, the news reaches me that, without any hesitation whatsoever, my Olya decided to marry that nephew! That's her 'repugnant wealth' and her amorous sighs! The moment she spotted a bag of money for herself she moved quickly... All her best intentions evaporated. That's how it is with people." There's another short silence.

"How well I remember one night. The moon, everything so quiet... blossoming cherry trees... a nightingale singing his song... Oh, damn!" He pulls sharply at his small black moustache. "To hell with that!" The seminarian springs up and reaches for the bottle. "Glory be to nonexistence!" The seminarian is drinking from the bottle and one can hear the gurgling sound of vodka in his throat. Then he spits.

"All's lies and pretense," he says, pacing the room. "Why don't you drink?" he turns to Petro. "Drink!"

"Well... I don't feel like it. Thanks, anyway."

"Look at him!" says the teacher. "We're enjoying our drink and he has to swallow his slobber! We're not moneybags, we can share."

"That...," Petro is hesitant, "that costs you money, that drink."

"What's that? What do you mean 'money'?" the seminarian cries out.

"Well, you know..." Petro stratches his head. "If you don't have it, and can't get it anywhere..." Petro smiles a little, "What do you do then?"

"Pshaw!" snorts the seminarian." 'What do you do then?' What does it matter in the face of death? It'd be a different thing if we didn't have death... But we do... and

still, some hellish thing makes you go on living, though there's always a chance to end your days." The seminarian again takes a few paces around the room. "And wouldn't it be a hell of a great thing to put an end to your own life when you're still young! You'd live through a lesser portion of evil and would do fewer evil things, too."

"You're kind... but why do you talk like that?" Petro asks the seminarian. "I'm sorry for you."

The seminarian explodes. "What? That's something new, eh? What do you mean you're sorry?" He looks at Petro very angrily. "Everyone should be sorry only for himself, should lament his own no-good ways. All right, if you don't drink, you don't drink, I can't force you." He sets the bottle down.

Petro ponders the situation for some time, then reaches for the bottle, pours himself some vodka and drinks it down in one gulp. "Well, you know... it's all right... Good, eh?" He giggles.

The seminarian goes on eating, and says to the teacher, "After all that, I went about like a lost soul. I didn't care about anything, didn't want anything. And my theological school didn't matter any longer. I flunked all my courses and dropped out!"

Petro also reaches for food, chortling. "Haw-haw... Well, my head tickles, and there's a buzzing in it. It's fine..." He gets up and takes a few unsteady steps around the room. "Haw-haw!"

"Aha," the teacher guffaws. "That's how it works!"

"My father, he's a deacon, was nagging me all the time," the seminarian continues his chattering. 'You're an idler and ne'er-do-well...' Haw-haw! Let's drink!" He takes another swig from the bottle. "That's how it is!" Then he resumes pacing the room, staggering and smiling to himself.

The teacher also takes a swig. "Drown it, drown the evil!" He is sitting on the plank bed, smiling and nodding from drowsiness, his legs dangling.

Petro is devouring the bread. Then he puts the remainder aside.

"Ah... and I'll... also Glory to... Cheers!" he drinks the vodka remaining in his cup.

The seminarian begins to sing: *"It's not the autumn drizzle..."* He moves closer to the teacher. *"Falling down... through the fog."* His voice is low and jarring. The teacher

picks up the song in a high voice. *"...Shedding bitter tears."* They embrace each other by the shoulders, swaying.

"Drink, and your melancholy will flee, drink," they go on singing. Petro joins in.

"Drink!... By God! Haw-haw!" He jumps to his feet. "Feels good!" He moves falteringly to the door. "Tra-ta-ta!" He puts his hands on his hips, ready to dance to his own music. *"Oh there, beyond the grove..."* and he bursts into dance, kicking up his legs.

* * *

Petro has ceased looking for a job ever since. Now, he remembers with disgust how he bowed before the doorman, wept in the little garden... and what for? For the sake of just having a place "to live and work." Shame!

[*1910*]

IN MAN'S CLUTCHES

I

Andriy Lutsenko was arrested and at the police station declared to be "...a leader of a gang of anarchist-terrorists."

Now he was sitting in jail with a broken heart. So there he was! What was going to happen now, what sentence would he get? "He'll be hanged, he'll be hanged," the wealthy yelled. Maybe he would be, too. Kept in an isolated cell with no visiting rights. And besides, so many people did get hanged those days....

"Leader of a gang...." That is, they harmed the rich of the village: destroyed their fences, broke their windows, burnt down Savenko's windmill — and he was held responsible for it all!

"Freedom, equality, fraternity!" No outrages like this would bring it about, he used to say. He himself had hollered: "Who's behind it all? This way we only hurt ourselves!"

So, the blame for everything was thrown upon him.

Those rotten rich people had had a grudge against him long before that.

Naturally! Instead of going to them to get hired, he had lived at home, got some books from somewhere to read — had leisure time for that. Instead of becoming one of their grovellers, he had tried to find out "where God lives" — staring at the stars. He would walk to the woods, showing off: listen again and again to the birds, gaze at flowers.

But what brutes there are in the world! How it stung their eyes, all this: enlightenment, freedom....

Maybe these outrages had been a set-up game; still, it was him that they locked up. And now he was being detained and detained. If only he knew who was back of his detention here. He had written to one place then another — no reply. Something was being cooked up, something was coming, coming... The rope? Hard labor? Recruitment? Oh my woods... My lovely flowers, my sweet ones...

Thus it went, and Lutsenko languished in jail a whole six months. At last, in the seventh, he was called to the warden's office. The warden, always so severe to him, was now grinning. Why was that?

"Well, Lutsenko," he began, more sweetly than ever before, *"actually it's nothing much, you'll be exiled for two years to the Vologda Province. Dating from November 26. Sign here! You're lucky. Apparently they've found no proof."*

A week later, with a smile on his lips, Lutsenko was on his way to the first transport jail. At least there was nothing dreadful to expect any more! No choking in filth, no feeding the fleas. He was headed for freedom, whatever sort it was, but freedom of some kind. What would it be like? A strange land... the North....

In about two months he was in the north. Dull, monotonous. Forests.

He was brought to a village. Not up too much... no yelowish huts here, along the streets no straw-topped fences, no cherry trees behind them or sunflowers, no apple or pear trees. But at least it wasn't a jail!

The police sergeant "set him free"; he went out on the street and stood there, holding a small bundle. What should he do next, where could he go without money? He had hoped the sergeant would have given him a month's grub-money right away, like they had told him on his way here. But the sergeant: *"Wait, the precinct chief will come in a month — he will bring it."*

Hm. How's that? And what would he eat till then? And what about lodging? On his way here they had at least given him a ten-kopeck piece, and now.... He had had a rouble when he left home, but even that remained in "his" jail, "the escort" had not let him take it along.

The sergeant had told him there were other exiles here too. Well! But could he go and live off them when they also were probably living in poverty. Other exiles... Fine, if political exiles. He had seen all sorts of them on his way here. Oh, there were...

It was cold, cloudy; the rain was drizzling, and how hungry Lutsenko was!... He had to look for the exiles.

There was a log house on the outskirts of the village, grey and ramshackle. He went in. At once he was hit by the stink of vodka and foot-cloths; and the smoke — terrible! Bunks lined the walls. People were huddled round one of them — playing cards.

'It's not likely that *they're* political exiles!' Lutsenko thought to himself.

"Hello!" he said.

Everyone looked at his bundle.

"Hi! You an exile?"

They looked at his coat, his black moustache and eyebrows.

"Where're you from?"

"Poltava."

One of them, with a long and thick moustache, with embroidered cuffs, raised his head and stared.

"From Poltava? A fellow-countryman..." He grinned.

"A fellow-countryman then," grinned another, with a black beard and a very short coat. He was silent a moment. *"We two are also from the Ukraine... Sit down, friend."*

Lutsenko sat down on the lower bunk opposite the door, put his bundle down at his feet and smiled... Fellow-countrymen!

"You're a thief, ain't you?" a man with a pock-marked face asked Lutsenko.

"No."

"What about the escort?" the bearded fellow-countryman cast a glance at Lutsenko's high boots. *"Have you smuggled any money?"*

"N-no."

"You'll have a rough time." He was silent a moment. *"From the Ukraine then..."* he said and fell silent again.

"Some other people are here from the Ukraine... at Gordeyev's place."

They went on playing. Lutsenko looked about. Filth everywhere, the bedding flung every which way. As to his fellow-countrymen... the one with the moustache had a black eye, and the bearded man's eyes looked like a mongrel's — as if he might grab your coatskirts any moment. The pock-marked man had one sideburn longer than the other.

"And where can I find Gordeyev?" Lutsenko began.

"Fonka! Hey, Fonka!" the pock-marked fellow called out.

"What?" came from the upper bunk over Lutsenko's head.

"Take this friend to Gordeyev!"

"What? Take him yourself."

Lutsenko's face grew red. "I'll go alone, I will..."

There was another log house, grey and small, one room with three beds. On one, the lower bunk, sat a beardless youth wearing a yellow Circassian vest and sewing a patch on something. On another lay an old man in an overcoat and high boots, yawning. On the last, sat a bearded man in a red shirt, with a lock of hair curling down; he was whittling something.

Bit by bit it turned out that the old man came from the same district as Lutsenko, and was a distant relative besides. A cousin of Lutsenko's was married to the man's nephew in Chaplinka.

The old man set up the samovar, the rest dug out some milk and *barankas* *...

A real delight!...

All three were political exiles. "We stood for freedom," the old man said. The house was tidy. Speckled wallpaper strips covered the wall above the lower bunks, green pine twigs decorated the black unplastered walls and were stuck into the upper bunks.

'Well, what way could I possibly get to stay with these people?' wondered Lutsenko. 'How should I bring it up?' He was silent.

"S-say...," he began. "How is it here with grub-money? Will they bring it after a month?" he asked the old man.

The old man smiled ironically.

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* Ring-shaped rolls.

"Sometimes they don't bring it for three months. Last May some people weren't paid at all. They wrote petitions—all for nothing. Have you got any winter clothes?"

"What?" Lutsenko cried in surprise. "But you're given money for clothes here, so they said."

"Given!" sighed the old man. "Winter's coming, and they haven't even given anything yet for summer clothes. So when will they for winter things? And winter here, comrade.... Oh-ho!"

Lutsenko stared at him.

"What'll I do?"

The old man cackled and slapped him on the shoulder. "Don't lose heart! You'll receive your grub-money, get some old furs, cheap, from somewhere..."

"And food?"

"Food... all we have is pooled. When nobody's got money, we borrow a grubstake from shopkeepers till we get our pay; so far they've trusted us, anyhow. The criminal exiles here cause trouble, often they don't pay up... So, settle in with us. We'll build a new bunk, or maybe you'd like an upper one."

Lutsenko smiled...

* * *

So they lived together. Those who had settled in first grew to love Lutsenko terribly. He would talk about all the good things he knew, tell them things he had read. If there was any baking, cooking or washing to be done — he never shirked his turn. If he was going to the forest, it was always — 'Let's go, comrades!'

Forests everywhere, forests! And what forests — no lindens, no maples. On one side of the village there was a river — no sweet-flags, no pussy willows. He would walk about. Hm-hm! And he was here... for freedom, for truth.... How good to suffer for such things!

He could have done some reading here — no books... And how much he missed them!...

What if they actually had some books here.... Lutsenko began to brood over this all the more often. 'They are needed, needed here. The local folk are so ignorant. And those exiles in the first house!... Bandits — horrible!... It's because of them the villagers look on all exiles as enemies. No wonder! Well, the cons drink hard, get into fights —

but all the other things they do? Like the time they chased after one woman in the forest — people saw them; or took somebody's sheep and roasted it in that forest; or smashed the window in one house.'

And all this had happened since Lutsenko came. What a shame!

Books were needed, books! Maybe he could try to set them on a better road...

His mates scrounged up enough money for stamps, and Lutsenko sent a letter home asking them to send out his books; he also wrote to an editorial office whose address he knew asking them to send newspapers — for exiles, naturally, free of charge.

He often went on walks in the forest, dreaming: newspapers, books.... Then he would read and talk and tell them about such fine, grand things... He would read aloud to the villagers, too. He kept on dreaming.

The sores on his feet had not yet healed after the long march here, when suddenly a guard once more arrived.

"Get your things together!"

"Where am I going?"

"To town."

Lutsenko stared at him.

"With all my things, for good?"

"How do I know? To the police station."

Why him, Lutsenko? What was going to happen now? He stood staring at his bundle — should he take it or not?

"Hurry up, mate!"

"S-say, but my things! I need a cart to carry them in."

"What cart? Nobody told me anything about any cart."

"But on my way here a cart was provided for carrying things. A hundred and fifty versts...."

"I don't know anything. You're from the Ukraine?"

"Yes."

"I served in the Force in Kiev. I know it... Hurry up, mate. No time to waste."

Lutsenko rummaged in his bundle. So, where would they take him? Would he come back here? Should he take along a shirt? He would put in one thing and take out another. And then... He hadn't received the grub-money, of course; had eaten at the expense of his friends... What if he didn't come back?

Two of his mates, the bearded and the young one, were standing nearby sadly looking on.

"Ah," Lutsenko told them, *"I owe you money."*

The older one smiled.

"It's nothing, nothing..." he said and fell silent. *"Ah, such a nice mate you were and... where are they taking you?"*

Lutsenko tied some of his underclothes into a bundle, putting in a cup, a spoon, tied a tin kettle to it, and began to get dressed.

The old man came running up, from somewhere.

"Take this, take this!" He said to Lutsenko, "I borrowed it from a shopkeeper..."

"How can I? I'm in debt to you without that...."

"Take it, it'll help with tea at least, with sugar for a time. We're not strangers, we'll square things up after."

He handed over some silver coins: ten, fifteen and twenty-kopeck pieces. Lutsenko left the guard-room, after shoving the coins underneath the insole of one of his high boots to stop anyone from taking them. Real trouble!...

They said good-bye....

The old man added, "Newspapers, books will come..." but he broke off.

"You'll come back!" came the cry. "It's probably nothing serious."

Forests lay all around, swamps. And mud without end! The guard was riding a horse.

"Hey, faster, faster!" he kept urging Lutsenko.

Autumn, cold. But Lutsenko's shirt was soaked with sweat, his breath came in gasps — he hurried after the horse, stumbling, splashing through the mud.

Three days later, towards evening, they reached the police station. Without asking questions or telling him a thing, they locked Lutsenko up. Now he lay on a bunk, his body a mass of aches and pains — his arms, his legs. And how thirsty he was — his heart was on fire. If only he could get a mug of tea. His ribs were rubbing against each other! If only he could get something to eat!

The ten-kopeck piece was the only coin left from the money the old man had given him.

The guard had given him no money on the way here. "They'll give it to you at the police station," he had said — so Lutsenko had spent his own. He rummaged in the high boot, found his last ten-kopeck bit, went over to the peep-hole. His legs felt as if they weren't there. A guard was in the corridor, picking his hose.

"Could you buy me a loaf of bread, please?"

"What?"

"Bread," Lutsenko said.

There was a pause.

"I've no time."

"Well, then maybe I can ask you for a glass of tea at least?"

Again a pause.

"No tea."

In the corner stood a barrel, he peeped in — the shine of water and a battered mug lay at the bottom. He drank some — it had a sticky taste, something gritted against his teeth. He returned to his bunk.

Filth everywhere, stinking smells, cobwebs, a smoking lamp, cold. His wet shirt grew cold and stuck to his skin. Again and again he tried to do up his jacket, his coat. The fleas jumped, cockroaches rustled.

Would it all last long or not? What awaited him? He kept tossing from side to side.

Lutsenko was let out the next day. In the corridor the guard, holding a notebook, said, *"Hey there, let's go..."*

"What's the matter? Go where? *The grub-money, please,"* Lutsenko told the guard.

"What good is it to you now!"

The prison looked huge, dirty, such walls.... It was something horrible. 'Just look, is this were they'll put me?' Lutsenko's heart missed a beat. 'Really, what for?'

"Keep up!"

He was searched and seated among the convicts to be transported. He would probably be moved somewhere else? But where, why?

He spent the night there. The escort looked in the peephole. The warder opened the cell.

"Come out!" he told Lutsenko.

He was right: he would be transported!... Although... he'd been given a bread ration. It couldn't be only for today. And there was no convoy from here today. Still, he tied up his bundle.

"Leave it," said the warder.

Again it began.

The escorts searched him, dug into his pockets.

"Would you please tell me," he asked them, *"where you are taking me?"*

"You'll know when you get there."

It was a two-storied building, made of logs. Nearby stood gloomy pines. INSPECTOR'S OFFICE read the plaque on the building. They headed for it.

'What's this? What for?' he thought.

An inspector with a light-brown beard was seated at his desk.

"Well," he began addressing Lutsenko. *"I've been told to interrogate you... Tell me, please, about those fires and disorders in your village..."*

"Mm... well... There was something like that."

"And what about that flour-mill of — what was his name?" — he consulted some papers, *"of Savenko... Where were you on the night of October the twentieth?"*

Lutsenko looked at him. He turned very pale. That meant... they were blaming him?

"I was at home, asleep."

"Prove it."

"Father... Mother..."

"We need non-relatives who saw you asleep."

Lutsenko shrugged his shoulders, saying nothing.

The inspector wrote something down.

"Well," he began. *"I, the court inspector... er... have resolved: suppression measures to be taken... hm... you'll be taken into custody pending trial. Sign here."*

Lutsenko put down the pen.

"Will you please tell me," he began, addressing the inspector, *"what term I'll get? Maybe... even hard labor?"*

The inspector looked at Lutsenko's young face, though haggard by this time, and remained silent.

"Ye-yes," he sighed.

"But I did nothing, nothing."

"Well, so what?" the inspector shrugged.

"But what shall I do now? My things have been left in the village."

"I've nothing to do with that."

"Well, let's go!" the warder gave Lutsenko a push.

Another night was spent in the room for convicts to be transported, again he was called into the corridor.

"Change here," the warder told Lutsenko. *"Clothing's over there,"* he pointed to something greasy and grey near the wall.

"Why that?" asked Lutsenko in surprise. *"I'm a political exile."*

"Stop talking!"

"Call the warden."

The senior warder approached from the far end of the corridor. *"Call who? We'll give it you,"* he glanced around, with clenched fist. *"We'll give you what the political exiles get!"*

Lutsenko stared at him. What real bandits they were! And he would have to do time under them! He picked up the clothing. Oh, how sticky and how they stank! He unbuttoned his coat. How horrible here at night, how frightening the walls were, and such a narrow corridor! And how fat the warder was, and how frightening!...

"What are you sneaking a look for?" the senior warder turned to one of the peepholes. *"I'll bash in your ugly mug."*

'What kind of prisoners were here? If only they won't put me in isolation. Oh, how I need to see a sincere soul, a sincere soul!' ran Lutsenko's thoughts, as he put on the pea-jacket.

"Will you please tell me if there are political exiles here? You might at least put me in a cell with them."

"All the exiles here are political," snarled the warder.

Over one of the cells a sign read: No 8. UNDER INVESTIGATION. The bar clanked, and this was where Lutsenko was pushed in.

It was a small narrow cell. With three convicts. All looked at Lutsenko. He said 'Hello.'

"Newcomer, right?" asked the man with a crew-cut and small moustache who stood smoking near the wall-stove.

"Right."

The other two were sitting on bunks. The first, a hefty man with red hair, was also smoking. The second, sort of dried-up with narrow eyes and a thin beard, was coughing.

"Come in, fellow," said the red-haired man in a deep voice.

"Come in, friend," smiled the one with the crew-cut.

Lutsenko walked to a bunk, put his rations on it, the towel — black and dirty — that had been given him, his grey cap, tea kettle, cup and spoon. He sat on the edge of the bed and simply stared.

'He must be a political exile,' he thought, looking at the man with the crew-cut. 'His face is so white, smooth, he looks like a teacher.' Lutsenko smiled.

The man walked around the cell, and also sat down.

"Well, comrade," Lutsenko turned to him, *"how is it doing time here? Tough?"*

"Oh, doing time here," the man nodded, and fell silent. *"Doing time here..."* he cursed obscenely and fell silent again.

'His curses don't sound like a political exile's,' thought Lutsenko glumly.

The man with the crew-cut looked at Lutsenko.

"His face isn't like a simple thief's, it's not tough," he remarked to the red-haired man in a muffled voice. *"Are you a thief?"* he asked Lutsenko.

Lutsenko's face grew red.

"No," and he smiled.

The man bit his lip, glanced at the other, but said nothing.

A bell for lunch rang. A tin pot filled with something muddy was brought in. All three grabbed their spoons; Lutsenko stared at them.

He hadn't eaten anything so far, but now he wasn't hungry. Then he took his spoon and tasted it just the same. It was sort of salty and astringent.

So he would have to live on that!

The man with the crew-cut cursed, the red-haired man cursed the food too, they threw their spoons on the bunks in one corner, started walking about the cell. The man with the narrow eyes set the pot by the door and sat down; Lutsenko sat down too.

"Are you from distant parts or a local?" the red-head asked Lutsenko.

"I'm an exile."

"You were caught embezzling?"

Lutsenko's face grew red.

"N-no," he shook his head.

"Don't be ashamed, mate," grinned the red-head. *"We belong to the underworld, don't we? Nothing to do with politics."*

Lutsenko kept silent.

"He doesn't use swear words. He's a freir," the fellow with the crew-cut mumbled to the red-haired man.

Lutsenko heard this; he knew that *freir* in criminal slang meant a man that convicts loved to milk, or even jeer at — his face grew even more red.

The crew-cut was silent for a while, then he grinned at Lutsenko: *"Have you got much money in the office?"*

"Depends if a money-order comes," Lutsenko smiled.

"You're a Pole?"

They walked about the cell a bit longer and sat down.

"Enough to make your heart ache, make your heart ache," the crew-cut began.

He turned to the man with the narrow eyes, *"Tartar, give me a bit more bread."*

"N-n," came the protest, *"gimme, gimme, but if it's yours... you don't gimme sugar."*

"Look at him, and he tries to wiggle out of it, yet," and the crew-cut rolled his eyes, *"damn his soul, anyway!"* He moved on the Tartar. *"Give me some!"*

The Tartar untied his bundle. They broke his loaf apart, and each took a chunk.

Lutsenko stood by the wall-stove, looking on.

And he would have to do time with people like these!

The crew-cut man's eyes looked vicious rather than like a political exile's, the red-head's even were somewhat bloodshot. The poor Tartar did nothing but cough. Why the cough?

Just look, consumption! It was catching, too.

They finished the bread and again began roving aimlessly around the cell.

"There you are," said the crew-cut, *"so many friends outside, but if Father doesn't send something — no one will. Just wait..."* and he raised a threatening fist.

"Let's smoke, what d'you say?" said the red-head.

The two smoked coarse tobacco, walking around the cell, puffing away. The Tartar kept coughing. Lutsenko stood watching them. He didn't smoke but even without that his temples were throbbing away from the smoke-filled air.

He asked which bed was free; they pointed to one near the wall — damp and mouldy. Putting his cap under his head, Lutsenko lay down.

Why should all this trouble fall on him? Why? What for? He wanted so much to live, to love everybody... If only they had brought political charges against him, but they... fires, disorders — and here you were! He was a criminal, and among criminals! If only he weren't with criminals like these. Besides that, his term was pretty long. And on top of that, no tea, no sugar. But why was he sent so far from home! Father could have come to see him some day at least... Father... poor thing... how was he getting along all alone, without help, working hard for other people. And Mother... She was so happy... waiting for a daughter-in-law... How were they back home? Most likely they didn't

even know anything about the trial. Though... evidence was being looked for there. How could he relieve their minds? What could he write them about? "Don't worry," he could write, "everything's all right." He must, he must write a letter.

Prisoners were allowed to send letters, petitions, twice a month from here; and twice a month a warder — a "marketeer" — came up to the peepholes to ask what they needed. It was good that Lutsenko had the ten-kopeck piece left, given him by the old man. Paper was not provided in the jail. And what if he hadn't had the coin? How could he pay? What if they had found out where it was hidden?

So, he took the coin out of his high-boot — his boots hadn't been taken away — went up to the peephole and stretched out a hand: *"An envelope and paper for a letter please, a sheet of paper and a stamp for seven..."*

The marketeer grinned, and quickly rushed away from the peephole with the coin. Why was that?

Soon the bolt clanged on the door and a senior warder with three or more warders dashed into the cell.

"Where did you get the money from?" the senior warder asked Lutsenko.

"I had it."

"In your high-boots? You dirty scum! You were searched; why didn't you turn it in?"

"I was thinking of something else."

"Search him!" the senior warder told the warders. And rushed off. They removed Lutsenko's high-boots, took out the insoles, ripped the lining....

The senior warder came running back. *"A month with no mail and a third of your money to the poor-box,"* came the order.

The cell was locked. Lutsenko looked at his high-boots, then looked again.

"Ah," he turned to his mates, *"what bad luck..."*

The crew-cut gave a neighing laugh, *"No mail!"*

"Yes," grinned the red-head, *"you kept it in your high-boots all the time, thought we'd pinch it."*

Lutsenko sat down on his bunk, looking glum.

Some fun for him! What would he do now? Who could he turn to? Oh, if only he could meet political exiles!

"Why aren't they taken for exercise on this side of the prison?" he began without rhyme or reason.

"What do you mean by they?" asked the crew-cut.

"Political exiles."

"Hm," grinned the crew-cut and fell silent for a while. *"Skunks.... All they do is cause trouble for our kind. All over them, there's so many guards."*

Ah, if only there were some books here, some books. He'd be able to forget all this perhaps.

One evening the warden came to make a check-up — he was a tall man with a red face.... Several warders began banging at the bars, looking under mattresses.

"Mister warden," said Lutsenko, *"any chance of some books, please?"*

"Wha-at?" the man looked at Lutsenko maliciously, *"what kind of mister am I to you? You don't know! You should call me sir!"*

They left.

Lutsenko lay down; nothing to do. Fleas tormented him, cockroaches crawled close to his face. Two of his mates kept poisoning the air with their smoking, air poisoned enough without that.

Why should such trouble fall on him? How to live through it? Oh, where did his sleep go to? Why couldn't he at least sleep? If he fell asleep he wouldn't be aware of anything. Or... he might dream, maybe about... something, anything but this. He could, at least, live in a dream.

Once he did have a dream. As if he were walking in a pasture. So good it was. Calves browsing, the sun shining, bees and flies humming. His native village drowned in orchards; green, green village... and... a grove of trees... right in the middle. Poplars silvering there in the grove.

Dear Radkivka! All of a sudden there was a meadow — gleaming brightly in the sun. Sunflowers on a small hill, farther a swamp, pussy-willows, and so many flowers!...

"Bring out your mattresses!" a voice rang out. Where? What? Lutsenko started up... A dirty window, thick bars, walls. A tub, more mud than water, near the door, a stinking mop. Lutsenko simply stared.

If only he could see what was going on outside the window bars. He pulled himself up to the window-pane — everything outside looked so strange. Log houses. The bluish taiga. What it was like here! Only September, yet snow everywhere. Br-r! How cold it was!

Someone coughed in the corridor — Lutseńko let go of the windowsill and sat down again.

Why did they lock him up in a strange land? Would he ever see his native parts again, the meadows, the groves... 'Ah!' he gave a sigh, lay down, closed his eyes and it rose before him.

It was Sunday. Birds, sunshine. Young men in Ukrainian national coats; girls with ribbons in their braids... A path through a grove, flowers, grass — girls and boys sitting on the ground, singing. Why hadn't he joined them more often? What an old bear he had been! He hadn't known how to make up to... girls. He had always kept to himself, with books. Broadening his mind. And now he had landed here.... Lutsenko turned on the other side. Freedom... freedom... oh, if he could at least talk about it. He lay for some time, then rose. The crew-cut, lying nearby, gave a sigh.

"So good to be in the forest, in summertime," began Lutsenko, turning his way.

"Ye-es, not bad. It's the forest that saves our kind. Do you remember the time," he went on, turning to the redhead, *"we slipped away from the police?"*

"Yes." And they went on about their thievish escapades.

How repulsive! Oh, if only the penalty month would soon be over and he could send a letter.

At last the time came. Lutsenko asked for permission to go to the warders' room, where he wrote a letter home to the prison about the rouble they kept back. Then another to his father and mother describing how he had arrived here, what he had seen. He also wrote about his arrest. "Well, but that's nothing," he went on, "don't be upset." What else could he write them about. Perhaps... maybe they could find witnesses — for his defence. Why not? Though, wait! The letter would go through the prosecutor. If he wrote the wrong thing, it could be added to his case. Ah, no. Perhaps he'd better send regards to his fellow villagers? But again... again suspicion might arise.

"Hey hurry up," the senior warder told Lutsenko, *"you aren't the only one here..."*

Lutsenko wrote: "Say hello to the pasture through which I used to walk, to the green village, the meadow where I picked flowers, strawberries...." Then he wrote his return address on the envelope and gave it to the senior warder.

"Well, on your way!"

Lutsenko was locked up.

He began walking about the cell.

Well, he had sent it at last!... His fellow villagers would

get to know where he was. The devil with.... He smiled to himself. If he was done for, he was done for. The people would remember him with a kindly word at least. They knew what he was suffering for. The rich men were the only ones who hated him. But they were only a handful; the poor were a lot more.

'Forget it!' he told himself, walked around a bit longer and then sat down. 'What if... the poor men were a lot more — if they got together and went, in a body, to the police inspector... "He, everyone says, is such and such a person... God save us, he wouldn't burn anybody's place down...." And maybe... maybe that's just exactly what was going on over there. There were villagers who were smart and determined. Or what if the judges kept pecking away at Savenko in court? They could get him all mixed up. And what was it like in court? If the judges tried to trap Savenko one way or another. He should ask, probably... Hm-hm.

After Christmas, Lutsenko received a letter from his father. He was just stamping from one foot to the other, shivering — the cold was terrible — when a small envelope appeared through the peephole. How happy he was!

He read it, standing in a corner:

"To begin with," then "thanks t'God..." and so on and so forth, farther: "As to the green village and the meadow with strawberries and the pasture, you'll never..." — what? — "never see them again." So it was hard labour then. "Big evidence." His hand started to shake. "Today, here, nobody dares to even squeak. Police..." Then a whole two lines marked out with heavy cross-strokes, obviously at the prosecutor's. "And when the rich found out you're not to be hanged but exiled two years only, their minds seemed cracked. They started running to town to...— blacked out.— They started yelling in public: he is bad man in the village, he must be exiled for good by public sentence."

What Lutsenko found out further from the letter was as follows. Someone came to the village — who came was crossed out everywhere — putting the villagers up to saying the same as the rich men: to exile Lutsenko for good. The villagers began protesting right away: "What?" everyone said, and "How?... We know nothing and... it's not enough for us to come, but we've got to pay money for support." The man came for the second time. "You won't have to pay anything." There the rich men told the clerk: "Whoever is against 'exile' is as bad as Lutsenko and

should be exiled too. Take down the sentence." "Well, at least we don't have to pay any money," said the villagers.

The arson case started this way: Young Mykola Synyak, a relative of Lutsenko's, was best man at a wedding one day. That rich Savenko was also there and they were both a bit tight.

Mykola asked Savenko, "What do you want the man exiled for?"

"What d'you mean, what for?" the man trust out his belly. "He burned down the mill."

"You saw him do it?"

Savenko's face grew red. "How dare you speak to me like that?"

This gave the authorities something to get hold of. And Savenko, not to make a liar of himself, talked his farm hand into backing him up.

Evidence was being looked for.

"That's how it is," the letter ended, "you are exiled by the village community and not for two years, but for good. That's them for you, fine people, except when it comes to... you can die, as long as they're left alone, and don't have to pay money out... Mother got sick because of it. Keeps to her bed and doesn't get up. Put your hopes on God, nothing else to do."

There was a lump in Lutsenko's throat. He shuffled to the bunk and lay down. How could it possibly be?...

One day, during Shrovetide, Lutsenko was called to the warden's office. The clerk read: *"...to Vyatka Province. Due to the clemency of the minister — exile for two years. Dating from December 27."*

Lutsenko smiled.

"What kind of clemency?" he said, apparently to himself.

"Presumably you are not exiled on public funds support, and the charge is grounded on the agrarian question, as before."

This news was poor consolation to Lutsenko. One way or another he had nonetheless been exiled from his native village, and not once but twice. Well, as to the first one... forget it... But the second! People were both bad and good... but they had all abandoned him. As long as they didn't have to pay money.... There was people's decency for you, there was their kindness! Even if they had been threatened, they.... But there was a whole village of them, yet none had

figured out what could have been done; they had been frightened by a bunch of rich men. Why had they been so determined then? "We" and "we!" they had cried. They simply didn't want to defend him. What if somebody else started bothering them, if somebody else... Better let him die.

Soon Lutsenko received two roubles from his father. As to the rouble held back, there was no news of it. To be alone was very, very hard, though... he had received some money. "Don't be upset," he wrote home the news: "it was cancelled." He had sugar and tea. But he didn't especially want them.

Sitting in jail, Lutsenko waited for trial. What would be, would be.

In the cell opposite Lutsenko's there were two convicts: father and son, waiting to be transported. Common peasants. The father had a big beard, the son's moustaches were only beginning to show. They had been convicted for the murder of a forester. When they passed by Lutsenko's cell, he heard only the clink-clank of shackles.

Chills ran down his spine. The same awaited him.

Once he pulled himself up to the open *fortochka*, held his cap outside the windowpane and looked at his reflection.... If only he didn't get consumption.

Blood came from the Tartar's throat one day. Lutsenko looked at him. Here it was. Consumption! No doubt consumption! And they were all in one cell, eating from one and the same pot. In addition, the Tartar's bed was near his — when he coughed the spray reached his face... He was lost, he was lost. Oh, when would the trial come!

One day the prison doctor with a shaggy beard came to the cell. He wore a greasy overcoat.

"Is everyone all right?" he asked.

"N-n... I'm sick," said the crew-cut.

"What's wrong with you? Show me!"

Lutsenko darted a glance... Ulcers, ulcers!...

'Syphilis!' flashed across Lutsenko's mind. 'And here I am! Oh, what will come of it? I'll have to rot from *that* yet.'

The doctor moved his head in sympathy, promising some kind of lotion, and went away.

'Oh, my life's done for, my life's done for,' thought Lutsenko with a breaking heart.

In August of his second year of exile, an escort came for Lutsenko to take him somewhere into town. Where, they didn't tell him. Though he guessed himself. The trial was coming up.

Holding rifles with set bayonets, soldiers surrounded him. He was scared to death. Bayonets, but what if shackles were added!

He was taken outside the prison walls.

How was it outside? What was freedom like? People were walking... by themselves... without escorts, and were not in grey. How did they feel? Birds were chirping and flying... They were happy! The sun was shining... Dear sun! And pine trees... Was it possible... was it possible they'd convict him!

* * *

A week after the indictment had been read, Lutsenko's clothing was brought to him.

"Change here; you're to be transported..."

Where to, they didn't say either. Lutsenko just guessed, his heart missing a beat.

How fine it was! His own jacket, his overcoat... all his own... He put them on and looked at himself.

"Hm-hm...."

He was on his way to the transport jail.

"Shackle his hands!" the escorts would cry out, each time it was Lutsenko's turn.

'So it was hard labour then....' Villages were seen in the distance, fields... All of them strange to what he was used to, however, strange to him.

Lutsenko was barely in time for the trial. He arrived at "his" jail as late as the middle of October, on the very day the trial began. He hadn't slept for many nights, and now, when he had scarcely had a chance to doze, the escort wakened him again.

"Get your things together!"

What was going to happen? There was no counsel for the defense, no witnesses. He'd certainly be convicted.

Lutsenko was led along the middle of the street — drizzling rain, mud. A number of peasants driving carts made way for them. Some richer folks were on foot. What were they feeling? What were they thinking about?

And now the courthouse: big windows, policemen at the

door; then a small stooping old man... and how he stared!... Father! How grey he'd got, and how stooped he was. He made for Lutsenko.

"Hello!"

"Keep off!" said the fair-haired young escort.

"I'll just," he showed his bundle. "It's my son, I've not seen him..."

"Move off," cried the other escort, moustached and with a stripe on his sleeve.

Lutsenko had a lump in his throat.

"You could be human," he told the escort and fell silent, lost in gloom.

Now they were in court. Lutsenko sat on a bench near the wall, flanked by bayonets. He looked at Savenko. Savenko and his farm hand were sitting nearby.

Savenko sighed and champed his jaws.

'Most likely, due to his conscience... Aha!' thought Lutsenko.

No judges as yet. Just a red cloth on the table and sheets of paper. Savenko leaned over toward his farm hand. Lutsenko heard him whisper:

"The oath, you know, I'll probably not... I'm afraid... like it was with Sich — his mouth was paralysed, his children died... he gave his oath."

Lutsenko smiled to himself.

Savenko was called to the witness stand.

"Mm... Your... Honour... I don't remember... It was... long ago."

'So free and and easy in the village, but here...' ran Lutsenko's thoughts.

The farm hand's evidence was no better.

"Acquitted!" they announced to Lutsenko.

And he had been afraid, had been so depressed. The judges... what good people they were.... Medals, crosses and stars on their chests — how beautiful they were. The jury in Ukrainian national coats... the ladies and gentlemen on the benches. His father was standing over near the door, smiling. There was justice on earth after all. He'd been exiled. Well, what of it? People were ignorant, downtrodden, intimidated... Take Savenko for instance... How ignorant he was!

Lutsenko was led to jail.

"May I, please..." the father asked the escorts, "It's long time... and... his mother's sick."

"On your way!"

Savenko's farm hand was beside the old man.

"Well, not bad, eh?" he grinned at Lutsenko. "You owe me a drink. Well, me and the old man," he pointed to Lutsenko's father.

Lutsenko nodded.

'A drink! But how long he had been in jail... and whose fault was it? And now, too... they were just afraid of being struck with the palsy. Oh, forget it... Good thing he'd been acquitted after all... The town, his town! Over there was the market, and there the bookshop...

"Keep up!" the young escort told Lutsenko.

His father was not let in the jail to see his son. He hadn't a note from some authority. But they did pass on the sugar and patties to Lutsenko.

After about three days, a group of exiles was transported from the jail, Lutsenko with them, to the Vyatka Province.

December! Twenty seventh! Soon now... From the railway car he could see meadows, groves... Oh, God! Though there was a little snow-cover now... Well, but spring would come, then summer.... And then he would be back home, back home... How would he feel then. But Mother... poor Mother. She was sick, if only she didn't die... But what if he'd been convicted?

II

They reached the province capital. The whole group was moved to the transport jail.

What would it be like, now that Lutsenko wouldn't be languishing in jail, wearing paths in the cement floor, lying on a bunk; when he wouldn't feel squeezed in on all sides, wouldn't choke from the filth!

And what would it be like when he didn't have to listen to disgusting swearing, to talks about blood-spilling; would no longer be scared.

Oh, those criminals! When he'd been exiled for the first time, he'd seen many political exiles on his way there, and the criminals had to be satisfied with the little they could sneak from someone on the sly. But this time.... A cell of the same sort. Bunks along this wall and that; an aisle between. Walking about the criminals cast glances here and there, boldly, hands behind their back.

"Well..." began one of the criminals with a small bush of a beard below his lips, who wore bottle-shaped high-boots and a calico shirt. *"My palms are itching to lick some freir."*

Another, with sideburns, shoes and a pea-jacket, said:

"You start, I'll help."

"Hey you, Vaska, have you tasted the blood of a freir?" asked a criminal with heavy jaws and darting grey eyes, who wore warm boots and a jacket. *"Not bad, you know."* They grinned at each other and winked.

Peasants lay on their bundles, some on bunks, others on the floor, saying never a word.

One day several criminals walked about the cell, grinning and looking at the peasants now and then. All of a sudden one with red hair and a cap said to his friends in a muffled voice:

"What if we say: Hands up!"

"Go and grab, without that," growled out one with freckles and a smashed in nose.

A new thick felt coat lay covering one fellow; the man in cap caught hold of it and pulled.

"What's up?" said the man in fright.

"We'll just try it on."

The one in the cap put it on and kept walking about. The man said nothing, remained only in his vest, and simply sat there scratching himself. The criminal grinned, pulled something greasy and ragged from the pile of his belongings and brought it over:

"Here, take it, man, and remember my kindness."

There was a bundle on the floor by the wall. They untied it, pulled out shirts, sugar and tea. The man who was sleeping near it started up:

"Hey, d'you hear? What're you doing?"

"Oh, that you, darling? Remember how you sneaked on one of our men in Kremenchuk?"

"Who? I was never there in all my life."

"Well, mate, now you're hooked! Shut up or... you'll get more."

Lutsenko lay on his bunk, watching what was going on, and shaking with terrible fury.

Once a criminal came over to him, too. While his grey eyes stared down, he touched Lutsenko's high-boots. It even took Lutsenko's breath away. What if he took them off?

'The soles are all in holes,' and he left the high-boots alone and looked at the coat.

'Too old...' He noticed some sugar in the bundle, climbed on the bunk and took it all away.

Lutsenko wished his father had never given it to him.

And what a trick had been played on him three days before! It was hard to believe such things could happen.

One man was left without his bread ration.

"Who took two?" the senior warder yelled. *"Give it back, or else you'll be searched and sent to an isolation cell,"* he kept yelling and ran off.

He was soon back, accompanied by warders. *"Everyone stand in the aisle, with his own ration!"*

They stood. The warders started to search each one's belongings. And there it was: under Lutsenko's bundle... they found it.

"Whose things are these?" they began.

Lutsenko stood paralysed with fear.

"Whose things are these?"

"They belong to this man," one of the peasants pointed to Lutsenko. "But he never could have done it, on getting his ration, he never went near."

"No, no, he's not the sort..." others caught up.

The senior warder looked at Lutsenko, at his face, overcoat, high-boots, and said nothing. He left the cell.

"Just wait!" he yelled to the criminals.

The morning before this happened, Lutsenko had had a dream. As if he were standing somewhere — in a field or perhaps not; there were cliffs, grey and somehow black — he was standing and simply staring. Suddenly two shots rang out — somebody from behind the cliff was shooting right at his head. The first bullet barely grazed him, but with the second the blood ran; he could hardly stay on his feet. He had sat up, already awake, but his head still ached a lot.

Lutsenko didn't believe in dreams but now, when the cell was locked up after the search, he sat down, sunk in gloom.

'It really struck home,' he thought. 'A real bullet. What people there were in the world. As far as he knew he hadn't annoyed anybody, yet someone had played a dirty trick like this on him. There was probably only one reason: he'd been faster than one of the thieves to get hold of a free bunk at an early stopover on the way here. Was it

this fellow who'd tried to fix him, or maybe someone else and for no particular reason, so long as it wasn't found among *his* things? Dreams... Well, there was something mysterious about them.... Or was it simply coincidence? Ah, if only he could get to Moscow soon. Big city — a lot of political prisoners there. His situation would be better, a bit at least.

The day was coming for them to start off to the next transport jail; again Lutsenko was uneasy. It was winter, cold outside, but he had only a jacket and a light coat to keep him warm. And the marches from railway station to transport jails were rather long. How cold the weather was in the north! True, the coat was of heavy cloth, but very short and worn out, and the sleeves were too short. Should he ask the senior warder for a cloak? He wouldn't give it, though, to those who had coats. What could he do?

On the day of their departure, the senior warder ordered those who needed clothing to put on what they had, bundle up their things, and stand in a row in the corridor: he'd see for himself who needed what.

'What if I hide my coat in my bundle,' flashed across Lutsenko's mind. 'And go out only in the jacket? Why not? Though... it would look dishonest; well, but... what could be done?...'

The senior warder walked along the row, checking.

"You're in a vest, and your bundle is so big," he said to one man. *"Show me what's in it."*

The man untied his bundle, inside was a smaller bundle and... an overcoat.

"You scoundrel! Who are you trying to fool?"

The warder threw the man's things into the cell, and the man was taken to an isolation cell.

Lutsenko's heart missed a beat, and then another. What if the same thing happened to him? He pressed the bundle under his arm. The bundle was small, so it went off all right.

The senior warder distributed the cloaks — cloaks so new that he grudged giving them.

Lutsenko was so happy: not only had he got a new cloak, but he would also be leaving the place.

He was taken to a transport jail in Moscow. A huge jail.

'Here I'll breathe freely at least,' Lutsenko thought. 'Here I can rest from my fears.'

Poor creature! He was destined now to experience things more terrible than he could ever have imagined.

Where didn't you meet them, such criminals, disgusting and heartless brutes, and in looks too, and what weren't they ready to do!

He was locked up in a room on an upper floor. Bunks ran along the walls, and through the middle with aisles on both sides. Crammed. Lutsenko stood holding his bundle, looking around for political exiles. They were here, thank God. They were all on the other side of the bunks past the second aisle. First he saw blouses, jackets, then, over there near the window, collars, double-breasted jackets, pillows, blankets, and overcoats. He went there.

The bunks nearby were all occupied, also those farther, by the wall. Lutsenko found a place near the middle row of the bunks, right opposite the people in collars. He sat down on his cloak, pressing his hands to his head for it ached a bit. He smiled.

Only recently he had been among robbers, and now he was here, near such good people!

People were walking back and forth along the aisles. A Russian peasant sprang up from nowhere. He had on bast shoes and a grey overcoat, and a lock of hair curled on his brow; a bag was under his arm. He stood looking around for a while, then sat down on the edge of a bunk near those in collars.

"Now what, fellow?" asked a blond with a pointed beard. *"Where're you going, where've you been?"*

"I've been in Kiev."

"To make a living?"

"No. I was making a pilgrimage."

"Good for you. Then what happened?"

"Political guys... pinched my passport!"

"Imagine, and then what?" came the laughing answer.

'Political guys... pinched my passport.' This really surprised Lutsenko! He stood up and went over to the peasant:

"You, grandpa, do you think political guys would pick your pocket?"

"Who else? I know what they're like. There's a lot of them in our Vologda Province, in exile — they steal and beat people up."

Lutsenko smiled, turned to the blond.

"What ignorance! He mixes up criminals with political exiles."

The blond narrowed his eyes and stared hard at Lutsenko.

Others fixed their eyes on him too.

What was wrong? Aha. They probably wanted to see how a simple fellow like him, Lutsenko, would defend them.

"Grandpa!" Lutsenko began, even more zealously. *"Political guys are people who stand for the truth, for a better life for the poor. But things like that are done by others, called criminals: thieves, pickpockets, swindlers."*

Those in collars and jackets moved uneasily. Came some grumbling, some whispering and filthy cursing... not typical of political exiles.

Lutsenko's face grew red, he simply stared.

"You rotten cur, you cur," began the blond addressing Lutsenko. *"You're sicking the peasant on criminals!"*

A chill ran over Lutsenko.

"What d'you mean? Who's sicking who?"

"All right," said the blond casting a glance at the distant bunks that were close to the corridor, and grinned ominously. Tousle-haired people were sitting or lying there all in dirty clothing.

"You mean criminals are to be beaten up, and killed," went on the blond at the top of his voice, addressing Lutsenko.

"What's wrong with you? Who said that?"

"You did, just now."

Lutsenko shrugged, again pressing his hands to his head — now it ached more than ever. Again he sat down on his cloak, falling into gloom.

It was really too bad! Well, what could you do after all? He hadn't even hinted at such a thing. To think there were such people in the world.

"Now then, who's to be killed?" came from somewhere near the blond.

Lutsenko looked in that direction — there stood a young man with severe-looking eyes, wearing an unbuttoned blue shirt and pants too short for him.

"We are, we criminals.... That's what this scoundrel teaches the peasants," the blond pointed at Lutsenko.

"You ask that old man," Lutsenko said to the blond, *"if I said that. Grandpa, did I?"*

"Shut up," the blond bared his teeth.

The old man was silent.

The one with the too-short pants looked with enmity at

Lutsenko and walked down the aisle, passing so close to Lutsenko that he even rubbed against his knees, then climbed onto a bunk at the far end.

"So it's that one, that one?" began others by the far wall, pointing to Lutsenko.

"Kill us, he says? Aha... all right."

The sweat stood out on Lutsenko's forehead. *'All right...'* Lutsenko caught up the words. Well, to be sure! That meant — just wait... He pressed his hands to his head. Oh, what could he do now, who could he turn to? There was a buzzing in his ears, and his temples throbbed. 'Why does my head ache so much? On my way here I lay down beside a sick man who was raving, feverish... Oh, what would come of it all? Oh! There's a bullet for you!'

"He'd also make a wonderful stool pigeon!" came from those wearing collars.

Lutsenko raised his head.

"But he is *a stool pigeon, I've been watching him all the time,"* grinned one man wearing a tie. *"Look how he's taking everything in."*

Lutsenko choked with a bitter feeling and grew even gloomier.

What was it all about? What did these people want of him?

"What? Stool pigeon? Where?" could be heard from another side.

"There he is, the rotten cur!"

Lutsenko again raised his head. All of them, sitting on speckled blankets and soft pillows, were staring at him from the far bunks.

"Stool pigeon, stool pigeon," came the words in Polish; apparently they were Poles.

One fat man with a wedge-shaped beard and grizzled hair, wearing a jacket and pants tucked into long stockings, with shoes on, was sitting on a bunk dangling his legs.

"Ugh, *psia krew!"* * he turned to Lutsenko.

Lutsenko thought gloomily: should he scream, weep or what?

A fat man walked the aisle, Lutsenko got up and approached him.

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* Damn you! (Polish).

"Look here," he began. *"What kind of a stool pigeon am I? You see..."*

"We suffer," the fat man said in a muffled voice, *"our wives, children — all suffer... You squealed on us, tailed us... Now it's your turn to suffer!"*

"How can you say that?" Lutsenko answered. *"Just think, what kind of stool pigeon would I make? How can you... you should make sure first..."*

"Even if you eat dirt or chew cement, I'll never believe you. Your kind have worn us out, right to death. Remember: your grave is here..." he pointed to the floor. *"Ugh, damn you!"*

Lutsenko said not a word. Returning to his bed on the floor he leaned back on his cloak.

Oh, what was that all about? Was it a dream or true? 'Your grave...,' he repeated to himself.

"The bastard must be finished off, throttled for sure," came from the far bunks.

Lutsenko got up and shuffled towards the other aisle. The lights over the aisles already on: they flashed and dimmed before his eyes — his head was splitting with pain.

People were lying or sitting down or walking about. Two men were perched on a bunk near the wall, not far from the window. One had small moustaches and a light-brown beard; he wore spectacles, grey student's pants and a jacket. The other had black hair and wore a motley-colored shirt. Lutsenko went over to them.

"Good souls," he began in a muffled voice. *"What can I possibly do? I told the old man that stealing isn't done by political exiles but by criminals and those people over there made out I was a stool pigeon because of it and..."*

"We heard a bit of it," said the man in glasses. *"I heard what you said to the old man too, I was just passing by. You see, you shouldn't have talked like that in front of those people. Anyway though, don't lose heart, there's a lot of political exiles here too."*

"Aha, the sneak's looking around for someone to take his side," came a yell from the other aisle. *"So the cap fits and he knows it!"*

Lutsenko was gloomy.

"Who are those Poles?" he asked.

"Political exiles, too."

"Political exiles?" repeated Lutsenko in surprise. *"Then*

why did they believe what those thieves said... and so fast? The fat one threatened me with the grave."

"Impossible," the man in glasses smiled. *"Why would he? He simply... But let me go and have a talk with him."*

"You won't get away with it, mate, you won't," yelled those on the far bunks. *"This night will be your last. Sneak! Stool pigeon!"*

The man in glasses came back.

"He says he didn't tell you anything of the kind."

Lutsenko pressed his hands to his head again: it ached terribly. He felt hot in one place, cold in another.

"You're sick. Your eyes look dull and your face is dark, your voice is weak."

"Yes, I've got an awful headache."

"I'll let them know about it. Come along with me."

They went over to the door and the man called the warder. Immediately people flocked towards them from the other aisle. Greedy to hear.

"Sick... It looks like typhus," the man in glasses told the warder. *"He must be sent to hospital. Look at his face."*

The warder growled something out and left. The people went in groups back to their aisles.

"Typhus! What sort of typhus! It's a trick," they yelled. *"Ugh, political bastards, they want to save that cur. Be a good thing to finish them off, too."*

"I knew it," came from the blond. *"He's a real stool pigeon. First he sits down, then holds his head, and now makes his eyes look sick."*

A few of the men started making up their beds: some on bunks, others on the floor.

"Come here and lie down, comrade, and don't be scared of anything," the man in glasses told Lutsenko. *"You'll probably be taken to hospital; if not, then we'll see everything, for we don't sleep at night. Play checkers most of the time."*

Lutsenko shuffled away. He returned with his cloak, and looked down to make sure there were no globs of spit on the cement.

"No place for him, no place." The men on the bunks by the wall moved uneasily.

A man wearing a blue jacket sprang up from nowhere. He came over to the middle row of bunks and perched on the edge, right over the place where Lutsenko was going to make his bed.

Another man appeared, wearing a coat.

"Shall we have a game?" came the question.

"Yes, lie down with me." The man did so, putting his face in the lap of the other and one hand face-up behind his back. More and more men came up, striking his palm. That's what their game was like.

"Hey you, don't squeeze up to make room for that bastard," someone told those who had made their beds on the floor. *"Let him lie near the shit-pail."*

Lutsenko got his things together and shuffled away. There stood the fat Pole. He grinned ominously at Lutsenko:

"Aha, so you've found some lawyers for yourself! Sick! You won't get out of it, mate!"

In the aisle where Lutsenko stood, they made room for him. Wiping some spit up with one of his foot-cloths, Lutsenko spread out his cloak on the floor. Not taking off either jacket or high boots, he then covered himself with his overcoat and lay quiet. People were pressed tightly on both sides. Lutsenko breathed very heavily.

For a long time Lutsenko kept himself from falling asleep, afraid somebody would sneak up on him. Finally he dozed off. He was just sinking into a heavy sleep when something struck his stomach, and then again. Lutsenko started up: a big fellow with tousled ash-grey hair rushed off to dive under a bunk. Lutsenko's face twisted and he felt a hard knot of pain in his stomach.

"What's that, what for?" he began. The political exiles raised their heads, the one in glasses got up.

"What's wrong?" they asked.

Lutsenko told them what had happened. Some shook their heads in sympathy but remained silent.

Meanwhile, in the other aisle and on the far bunks they started terrible carryings-on. First came a loud laugh: *"Good for you, Vaska!"* And another laugh. *"Hey, you sneak, how's your stomach?"*

After that Lutsenko couldn't sleep until daybreak. In the morning he moved his things towards the wall near the window, spread his cloak beside someone's bundle, put his own under his head and lay down with his overcoat on. He felt bad. The bread rations were brought in, someone took Lutsenko's share for him; he couldn't get up. Everyone drank tea. He would have liked to drink some, too; his throat was so dry — but he had no sugar. Maybe someone

would give him some, but he'd have to ask and it was too hard to make up his mind.

Lutsenko neither ate nor drank anything the whole day. When it grew dark, a doctor came to see him, felt his pulse and gave him some powders, saying something about a hospital.

That night Lutsenko was given room on the bunk by the wall, rather far from the window. On one side of him lay a bearded man in a shirt topping his trousers, on the other a red-haired man with a crew-cut. They both looked at Lutsenko with enmity. He gave them his ration, promising to do the same the following day — they were mollified. But the fleas... they tortured him from all sides! Like a swarm of black flies, they were on the wall, on the bunk... He turned from side to side, grew tired and began to doze.

The next night he was given room in the middle row of the bunks, close to the window, right opposite the man in glasses and the one wearing the motley-colored shirt.

Beside him was a huge man with a flattened nose, wearing a high fur cap. When he lay still it wasn't bad, but whenever he turned over his body would pinch Lutsenko's in one place or another.

"The devil sent you here, damn you," the man growled out.

"We may get in trouble over him!" said a young man lying on the other side of Lutsenko.

'Political exiles, too,' the man in glasses had called them.

Lutsenko tried to keep on the alert. All the time his eyes kept snapping open to see if anyone was creeping up to strangle him. His head touched that of a tousle-haired fellow whose legs stretched towards the other aisle. The middle line of the bunks was wider with aisles on both sides, so people could sleep in a double row.

'What if somebody grabs me?' If he opened his eyes, he saw nothing but blackness, butterflies and strange spots....

On the third day after his arrival, a warder came in holding a notebook.

"Gather your things," he said, *"you'll go to the hospital."*

Lutsenko was happy, so was the one in glasses who saw him out of the room....

[1911]