On the Fence

Ukrainian Prose in Australia


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ON THE FENCE

An Anthology of Ukrainian Prose in Australia

Translated from Ukrainian
by
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Assembled, with an introduction by Dmytro Chub.

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UKRAINIAN PUBLISHING IN AUSTRALIA

Ukrainian book publishing in Australia is a part of the history of Ukrainian cultural life in this country. These are achievements not only of the Ukrainians, but also of Australia, where the development of Ukrainian culture is by no means impeded; on the contrary, Ukrainians receive material assistance in the areas of literature, the arts, schooling, radio programs and so on. All this is happening at a time when in the USSR, outside the borders of the Ukrainian SSR, there are no Ukrainian schools or publishing houses, and in Ukraine itself the Ukrainian language, the education system and the publishing programs are being progressively curtailed by Moscow to the advantage of the Russian language and culture.

The first manifestation of Ukrainian literary activity in this country is associated with the appearance of the newspaper *The Free Thought* (Vil'na Dumka) in July 1949, for the August issues already carried the literary works of Ukrainian authors. And the last quarter of 1951 saw the appearance of the first quarterly magazine *Nash Visnyk*. Already in this first issue authors such as V. Rusalsky, V. Onufriyenko, D. Chub, I. Stotsky, Y. Haran, N. Hrushetsky and R. Vasylenko presented their works of fiction and publicist literature. This activity later blossomed into book publication.

Ukrainian fiction written in Australia is a conglomerate of sentimental reminiscences of the old country, the past, and also of life in Australia. Although there are some fine novels set in Ukraine's historical past and under Soviet rule, the period spent in Displaced Persons camps in Germany and the emigre experience in Australia has given birth to no more than a few short stories. While older writers sentimentalise about a lost past, younger writers do not wish to stir up the sensitive issues in the community.

It should be said that in spite of the small number of Ukrainians (over 35,000) scattered throughout Australia, they have made a great impact on Ukrainian emigre literature in diaspora. Over 130 titles have been published in Australia, including works of fiction, poetry, drama, scholarly, religious and children's literature. Most of the Australian publications have been favourably received by Ukrainian communities overseas and are now out of print.

This anthology is a selection of mainly fictional works which reflect the whole diapason of Ukrainian literary creativity in this country. The 25 authors included in the anthology are diverse in their subject matter and their skills, yet all are a product of the emigre environment. All have previously appeared in print, either in Ukrainian magazines or almanacs. Sixteen of them have published their own works in book form — as memoirs, poetry or children's books. For most this is the first time their work is appearing in English.

Dmytro Chub.

THE GREAT RACE

Lesia Bohuslavets

Today is a joyous day! Historical, one could say. Australia has won the America's Cup yacht race! What a race it was! I sat with closed eyes in front of the television set and screamed:

"I can't stand it! Tell me when our team gets ahead, then I'll watch."

The Americans swiped this cup from the English and, by hook and by crook, with truths and untruths, they've held onto that cup a whole one hundred and thirty-two years. They fastened it down with a sixteen kilogram bolt and thought that would do the trick, that it would remain theirs for time immemorial . . . One could almost compose a ballad about it:

"But 'twas not to be as they had hoped. For the Australians came from Down Under, outmanoeuvred all their cunning, and won the famous cup!"

To tell you the truth, all this peripetea never interested me before. The kids used to get all enthusiastic, barrack, while I maintained: a foolish head makes for sore feet! Where the hell have they gone off there. The world is in such turmoil: wars are erupting, planes are being shot down, and they play with yachts. Well, each goes mad in his own way!

However, suddenly my attitude changed dramatically. This happened some three weeks ago. I came across an American acquaintance. Actually, she had once lived in Australia and had moved to America. I asked how she was faring, and she began to strew praises about like spring showers.

"We in America possess all the achievements, all the technology. We've got Superman and the America's Cup. Even the sun doesn't just simply shine. By the time it breaks through the layers of progress it looks exotic, synthetically enchanting!" According to her talk, everything there was

bigger, higher, broader! Then she commiserated with us.

"I see nothing's changed here: the kangaroos keep hopping about, the sheep still nibble at the grass, the sun shines away... Everything's so ordinary, so uninvented... Sad and boring, all the same. . . "

Then we got talking about our kids.

"Well," I boasted, "our children are finishing tertiary education too, receiving degrees."

But she burst out laughing: "You call that education. Your degree is worth half ours. What they teach in university here, our children learn in kindergarten!"

"Maybe the Lord hasn't endowed us with brains," I replied, "but all the same, we're a sporting nation. We've already won a world marathon, and next we'll get to your Cup. . . Our goat will grow a tail yet, there'll be a feast on our street yet."

But she was already doubling over with laughter:

"You . . . the cup . . . ha, ha . . . maybe when elephants learn to fly . . . !"

She really got to me with all her talk. I came home and announced:

"Come what may, we must win the Cup!" And from that day on I joined the ranks of the enthusiasts. Early in the morning, at the crack of dawn, I would turn on the radio to see if our team had won.

"Calm down, dear," my husband complained. "You've been tossing about in bed all night long, yelling 'starboard, starboard!' "

For a few days there it really was hard going. This was when our team lost twice in a row, but then everything went like clockwork. "One more win and we'll clinch it," I rejoiced. "We'll make an American Pancake out of that America's Cup yet!"

"Don't count your chickens before they've hatched," my husband reminded me.

And finally that long-awaited Sunday arrived. We waited up all night in vain. Because the wretched Americans kept postponing it, began and then cancelled the race again... And so the race did not take place.

"That's all right," I intoned. "If need be, we'll sit around another three months, but we'll win all the same. Those heathens can even stand on their heads, the victory will still be ours!"

And what do you reckon, those cheeky possums must have stood on their heads after all, for they bucketed sand out of their yacht all Monday long . . . incanted something over it, and then poured it back inside . . . took down their sails, then hoisted them up again . . . Quacks jetted in from all over America, pronouncing portentous words over their yacht . . . Thought it would make it easier to compete with us!

And finally the momentous Tuesday arrived. We crowded around the television and waited.

Meanwhile, seeing that this was no laughing matter, those cunning Americans went and tied up all the winds . . . Try and race in a calm. Might as well sit down and cry! We sat around an hour or two . . . no go!

"Well," I said, "I'm off to bed. Wake me up when they start sailing."

I opened one eye at around four; there was quite a commotion in the house. A lot of walking about, biting fingernails, ohing and ahing, everyone was in a dither. I glanced at the television and there the yachts were barely crawling along on a calm ocean. And woe is me, our boat was tailing the Americans!

And at this critical moment our Prime Minister Hawke appeared on the screen and said: "Fellow Australians! Let's rally together. I've been telling you a long time that only unity and harmony will help us! Whoever treasures our dear Australia, stand up and blow together!"

You should have seen what this provoked! As if one, we all inflated like bellows . . . And just then a family friend from Sydney rang: "Hello there! Blowing in unison?" he asked.

"Ah," I intoned, "we're all blue, but still blowing!"

I looked again and saw the sails slowly begin to billow out, to flap, and our yacht *Australia II* began to sail faster and faster. All the same, they were a little short of victory . . . We sat and waited. But it was neither here nor there . . .

"Eh," I said, "I can see mother has to save the day, as usual." And so I sent an express telegram to . . . the large Ukrainian community in Canada!

'Dear friends, join us, strain yourselves, BLOW HARD, help us beat your loving neighbours!'

A drowning person will clutch at straws . . .

The Canadians took heed, joined us, and we all began blowing together... At once our yacht began to be borne along faster and faster... And it flew across the blue sea like a darling white gull and finally defeated the boastful Americans by a whole forty-one seconds! Small wonder that people say: many hands make light work!

The uproar that followed! Everyone was kissing, yelling, dancing, singing! I never knew that I could jump so high. This day was unanimously declared a national holiday and everyone seemed to have grown an extra metre!

Well, I thought, while everyone's toasting away, let me call our family friend and cheer him up. I dialled the number, heard him answer. "My dearest friend," I said solemnly, "We've won!"

Befuddled by sleep, he became confused, couldn't comprehend a thing. . .

"I'm sorry." he explained, "I haven't been reading any books or newspapers these past few years, and I haven't any time for television or radio." There was a short silence. ". . . So you say we've won!?"

"Of course," I asserted. "We have, without a doubt!"

He suddenly broke into a fit of coughing, then there followed a long silence, and then he asked hesitantly: "What does this mean, then? Packing up. . . and returning home. . .?"

"No," I shouted, "this isn't the victory you're thinking of, we still have to wait for that one, that's something for the younger ones to worry about... Australia has won the America's Cup!"

At last it dawned on him! My friend cheered up at last, regained his composure.

"That's fantastic," he said, "this definitely must be toasted, there's no other thing for it!"

At this point we poured full glasses of champagne, clinked our glasses over the phone, and drank to this momentous occasion.

IN THE WHIRLPOOL OF COMBAT
(An Excerpt)

Yurij Borets

The insurgent unit continued on its way, cutting through forests and fields, with the enemy hard on their heels. Villages were close together here and it was hard to camouflage their movement over the wet earth. They had been marching for three days now in strange territory, through marshes and between strange villages, but because Petia had managed to get some food, the insurgents were in good spirits. The day before they had each had a litre of hot meat soup, each had a fair-sized piece of meat in his bag, so that all were pleased as pie. There was only general amazement that Commander Hromenko was leading the unit so prudently. True, the unit's size had grown much smaller, but even now the single file stretched for almost half a kilometre. The unit was still well armed and had a large number of automatic rifles, although they were short of ammunition for some of the weapons. Commandant Petia only had a few dozen cartridges left for his German gun.

The terrain through which the unit passed had supported a mixed population, however the Ukrainians had been driven out recently and the region became one hundred percent Polish. The Poles took over the fields sown by the Ukrainians, but everyone was interested to see what would happen to the fields where only Ukrainians had lived. The season's crop would probably be harvested by wild animals. And what fruits would the forcibly-removed Ukrainians be harvesting, after being thrown out of their ancestral lands by the Communists, who were raging everywhere now?

Marching with the unit was Commander Bayda with a section of the battalion staff — Doctor Shuvar, the dentist

Zubenko and others. There were no contacts with other units so there was only the hope that the 'dead' contact points would not disappoint them. The battalion command left notes in tree hollows and other prearranged places. Because only a very small number of people knew about such places, it was clear that in the event of their death these points of contact became useless. And yet messages were left at every point, because if some died who knew about one point, then others still lived with knowledge of similar places elsewhere, and in this they placed their hope.

By undertaking this march, the unit had in fact launched a big raid to the west. However a much greater problem faced the commanders — which of the three routes marked on the map should they take? One passed through the Lemko Region and the northern reaches of the Carpathians, two others passed through the south, but they all led to West Germany. The best course to take seemed to be to head for Krynytsia, and then turn and cross the Slovak border, however the command still had to make contact with Commanders Ren and Khrin in Khreshchaty Forest.

In Commander Ren's tactical sector in Khreshchaty Forest and in the vicinity of Tisna-Balyhorod there operated four UPA units and several combat detachments. All fought hard battles with the three hostile divisions under the command of General Mosur, belonging to the general staff of the Polish armed forces. The loss of one of its foremost Communist generals, Swierczewsky, was a great disgrace for the new Communist Poland before Moscow, and so throwing tens of thousands of its soldiers into this small piece of territory, the enemy hoped to destroy all the UPA units, primarily Khrin's detachment, together with its famous commander. The commander of the tactical sector and his staff were all in this region, and it was to them that Hromenko's unit was now marching.

"I've been halfway around the world, but I'll be taking my eternal rest by my home after all," joked Commander Bartel, who was from these parts.

Marching behind the enemy's back, the unit witnessed the

intensive movement of Polish armies. Whole columns would pass close by the unit's camp and many a time an enemy sentry or larger reconnaissance group had to be repulsed with insurgent gunfire.

For a whole week now the unit had been crossing terrain unsuited to partisan manouvres, however up till now things had gone amazingly well. A few days remained till they reached the larger masses of forest where it would be safer, however the endless rain impeded the unit's progress. It not only ruined the weapons and ammunition, but also saturated every stitch of the insurgents' uniforms. And when the sun did finally appear on the morning of 8 June 1947, it brought a smile to soldiers' faces and steam began to rise from their wet uniforms.

The unit stopped after entering a small wood overlooking the village of Volytsia. Command lacked a military map for this area and was forced to use a staff map, with sketchy details about the terrain. Commander Hromenko and part of his retinue made their way up the hill to the edge of the wood, to check out the district and to establish which course to take.

Suddenly gunfire erupted behind the unit. This worried the soldiers, for they found themselves in a very disadvantageous place and also in march formation. The rear sentry was only a few dozen steps away and the enemy was able to come up close to the unit. There wasn't even any talk of taking up good positions, besides, the unit commander and two lieutenants were absent.

Commander Bayda took over command and under his direction the unit quickly assumed strong defence positions. Noticing their quick ninety degree turnabout, the enemy thought the unit was about to retreat and began an offensive, hoping to flush the men out into the open. However the good training and long battle experience helped the insurgents counter the enemy's plans. The unit held their positions like a wall and sent the enemy soldiers to St. Peter with their well-aimed fire.

The most intensive attack took place in the sector of the first formation, however its reformation from sharpshooting posi-

tions to fusillade completely disoriented the enemy, which raced headfirst after the formation and came up to within several dozen steps of it. So as not to mix with the enemy, Imenny's formation began to return fire. The lieutenant rose to his full height and emptied a magazine from his automatic rifle, mowing down six enemy soldiers on the spot. Machine-gunner Slyva could not resist rising to his feet as well, and fired on the enemy line with his heavy machine-gun as if it was a quick-action rifle. The enemy began a disorganized retreat, leaving tens of corpses behind.

The unit's losses were not large, however they were painful. The brave lieutenant Imenny and the distinguished machine-gunner Slyva had died, as well as one of Petia's best Special Branch fighters, Terka. After examining his wounded knee, he pulled out his pistol, said goodbye to his friends, and shot himself in the head.

This tragic scene was imprinted in the memories of those present for a very long time. Terka's brother, Nichny, squatted down beside him and covered his eyes, as tears wetted his face. His friends dug a grave, lined it with pine needles and lay three valiant defenders of Ukraine into it. Chaplain Kadylo farewelled them to their eternal rest on everyone's behalf.

Leaving a fresh grave behind, the unit continued on its way. Doctor Shuvar had been wounded in the leg too, however he could still move along with a limp. Although the enemy had suffered far greater casualties, the unit command couldn't forgive itself for having deviated from the partisan rule-book and not having taken proper safety precautions on setting up camp.

Thick cloud covered the sun once more and it began to drizzle. After marching all night long, the insurgents reached Beskyd Forest in the morning, wet and hungry. Here they boiled up some water, warmed their last piece of meat in it, drinking the hot water too. No one complained that there had been no broth, for the meat and bones had been soaked in the water.

The main road passed through the forest and so, setting up sentries along it, the unit crossed in scattered formation. But as

the sentries were moving out, enemy gunfire suddenly opened up on them and the unit supply officer, Hupalo, fell dead onto the road and Commander Lahidny was lightly wounded; he had taken over unit command after Imenny's death.

The exhausted unit moved through the forest in the direction of the river Oslava. Here they stopped to rest, protecting themselves well, with the soldiers lying down to sleep on the wet ground. The day was quite warm, only the weather seemed to change almost every hour. Dark clouds appeared overhead and it rained cats and dogs, then the sun showed again and dried the water with its rays.

THEY LIKED US FROM THE START

Opanas Brytva

Today all this appears before my eyes as if it was happening now, although twenty years have elapsed since then. Just like the crack of a whip: there was twenty years, and now it is no more.

It's as if someone had filmed it: a ship moored at the pier, the one we had sailed to Australia in, glimpses of faces familiar from the voyage, Pier 13 littered with UNRRA* parcels. Christmas was drawing near then.

It was a famous ship, I recall: during the war it carried sheep, and after the war it began transporting emigrants. We were stuffed into every hole, like herrings into a barrel, there was no air to breathe, the heat was unbearable. However, no one complained, people had grown used to worse things, so why complain?

Had someone tried to do something similar with us today, the matter would certainly have ended up before the United Nations as a case of slavery, or even genocide. But back then all this took place as a matter of course.

True, some dust was raised when we were brought to the Bathurst camp. We arrived by train at night when it was completely dark — no one saw a thing, everyone was napping, waiting for dawn. As soon as it became light, people peered out the windows. All around, as far as the eye could see, there was dry grass, bush, desert. A hubbub erupted, all hell broke loose. Some granny in front of me kept wiping her nose continually and crossing herself, as if to ward away the devil:

"Where have you brought me, to the edge of the world! What will become of us, good people? Oh, for what sins and

*UNRRA - United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

trespasses? Heavenly tsarina, have pity on us. It was my daughter-in-law, she put me up to this, I never wanted to. . . I could sense the grief, I could feel the misfortune in my heart."

She began to let fly, to lament, so that the people couldn't stand it any more and began reassuring her, calming her down, even though they themselves felt an uneasy ache in their chests.

Later we were picked up by some vehicles and brought to the camp kitchen. Our mood changed a full hundred percent when we smelt the fragrant vapours wafting from the kitchen. Obviously not everything was that bad in this country: one could get enough to eat, and this in itself meant something. We went off to the galvanized iron barracks to rest, made ourselves comfortable, washed, and before we knew it, we were being called to the kitchen once more — this time for lunch. After lunch, there was an exchange of impressions between neighbours, and then dinner was upon us. Time began to pass so trouble-free, we felt like heavenly birds. The days drifted along, and people began to invent things out of boredom. After all, man lives not by bread alone, something cultural had to be engaged in, we had to show ourselves before this land's masters.

Naturally, the Ukrainians were in the forefront of this cultural revival. The minister for immigration had just arrived at the camp and they rushed out squat-dancing before him, girls brought the traditional bread and salt up to him, a chorus thundered, sweet speeches of thanks were made. The Australians liked this very much and began to visit nearly every week. At first big game turned up, but they became progressively smaller. And we kept twisting and turning before them — dancing the *kozachok, metelytsia, shchupak, dribushechky*. And the choir launched into folk songs. The tables bent under the weight of bowls filled with borsch, dumplings, potato fritters, chops. All this bought with our first pay packets, for some had already found part-time work.

"Well, how do you Australians like these dishes of ours?" one of the initiators of this one-sided cultural exchange asked delicately, eyes lowered timidly, and they all bellowed in unison:

"Oh, good, very good! We like you Russian people very much, and your food too."

At this point our people very nearly became angry:

"Excuse, but we no Russian, we Ukrainian, please not mix, because we not like this very much. . . "

The Australians saw that they had made a gaffe, so they began to justify themselves:

"Ah, what difference does it make: you're in Australia now, soon you'll all become Australians. What's the difference. . . ?"

And then I remember, Christmas 1950 arrived, our first Christmas without snow and frost. Some spent it dressed in shorts. And then everyone began to leave for their contract work, and then. . . twenty years passed just like that. We became advanced in years, no joke, we became lazy, couldn't go around the corner without a car. . .

As I remember this, it occurs to me that we probably sang and danced in vain then. A pity we didn't eat the dumplings ourselves.

But what can you do: that's the people we are, we love to dance about in front of foreigners, and that's a fact.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Dmytro Chub

This happened in Queensland. There was a heatwave then, so we didn't work between ten and three during the day. After such a break we would come out into the fields and split up into two groups: half the men worked at one end of the field, stacking and loading the cane, while the rest, including me, cut the sugar cane. Four of us did the cutting: a tall thin Australian whom we called Skinny Jim, and three Ukrainians, one of whom was a sports fanatic who knew all the world champions in boxing and wrestling. Each day he would tell us about various well-known fights and daydream — his name was Petro. He was very fastidious and would even take a bucket of water and a towel with him to work, to wash away the streams of swėat. The other Ukrainian was Roman. He had a German wife who was in a family camp in Cowra — we ribbed him about this every day. And finally there was me.

Almost every day we were plagued by the heat, the mosquitoes and the burning salty sweat. To clear away the snakes which sometimes wound themselves around the sticks of cane, we would first burn off the plot of cane before cutting it. On this occasion the cane stood in a wall before us, with softly rustling burnt leaves and smelling strongly of smoke. Tired, we sat down for a smoke-o on the piles of cut cane. Skinny Jim stood nearby, rolling himself a cigarette too. Only our sportsman did not smoke. He had taken off his shirt and, having wetted his towel in a bucket of water, he proceeded to wipe down his sweaty body, gazing at the nearby forest.

At this moment Jim, who was looking down the length of the cane, suddenly shouted:

"Snake! Python!" And he knelt over and picked up his machete. We jumped from our places, as if stung by these

magical words, and grabbed our machetes too.

Because of the talks we had been given during our first days in the canefields, we knew how to deal with various dangerous situations. But it was too late for thinking. Panic-stricken, we saw the giant python crawling towards us, head raised.

Seeing that some of us had become very agitated, the Australians whispered to everyone not to move and to raise their arms. The enormous slithering serpent had already reached us. I could hear the grass rustling as its rubbery body moved closer.

We knew that pythons normally lived in trees, falling on their prey, entwining it and crushing it to death. But this was different. The snake slid up to us slowly, as if tired from its long journey or positive that we would not escape.

Seeming more sure of itself than ever, it reached Jim, raised its flat ugly head even higher and slowly smelt him all over, then fell to the ground and slid over to Roman, who stood on my left. Having done the same with him, it crawled up to me. Its head rose above my waist and I froze in anticipation.

I felt as if only my head and eyes remained alive. The blood was thumping away at my temples and I saw before me the micaceous eyes of the hideous glistening reptile.

I can still picture the scene even now. This procedure seemed to drag on for an eternity, as if the snake was deciding who to claim as its victim. I saw it touch my work-shirt and snort several times. After this it turned its head in Petro's direction, fell to the ground, and slowly slid off towards him.

After the python moved away from me, I heaved a sigh of relief. Everyone's attention was focused on the sportsman, Petro, and the merciless snake which was now raising its head.

Having smelt Petro over, the python began to wind itself around him very slowly, beginning at the knees. I saw Petro turn even more pale, and the tip of his machete began to trace heiroglyphics in the air. He was standing apart from us and without a shirt, as if specially chosen to die. When the python reached Petro's waist I became filled with horror. Another minute, it seemed, and the python would tighten its deathly embrace around our sportsman, his bones would crack, and he

would fall to the ground in convulsions. Agitated, I looked at Jim, but his eyes were peeled to Petro.

Exactly at the instant when the python's head seemed to pause a moment after reaching Petro's chest, the Australian broke the silence:

"Now!" he said softly, but decisively, and at that moment his sharp machete came down like lightning on the python's head. A moment later the grey-brown embroidered spirals of the snake slipped to the ground and I fell back with a scream onto a pile of cane. At the instant it had been struck, the python had whipped out its tail and hit me on the legs as if with a rubber truncheon. Roman and Jim rushed up to Petro with shouts of joy, and caught him as he fell, lifting him away from the still-writhing coils of the snake.

Examining my legs, I rose to my feet and hobbled over to Petro, who had been taken aside and now sat on a pile of cane. A red flower graced his chest — it was the blood which had spurted from the python's slashed head.

In a few minutes our whole brigade was at the scene of the drama. The python was still writhing on the ground, but the boys were already measuring it. It turned out to be twenty-four feet long.

"Well, Petro will make a few pounds on the snake-skin!" the boys laughed, but Petro was still dazed from everything that had happened so suddenly. There was so much chatter around him too. The boys asked him how it had all happened, I showed them the bruises which had appeared on my legs, and Jim said he recalled a similar incident which had occurred some ten years earlier. This time, he said, the python must have been either very hungry, or it had been on its way to the river, for all the streams in the forest had dried up. . .

Two days later Petro was back at work.

"You know," he said, "I've lived through all sorts of things in my life: Stalin's pythons stood me against a tree to be shot, but I don't think that even then I was as frightened as I was in the canefield. . . "

The men continued to talk about the incident for ages, and about the groups of hunters who hunted snakes and pythons in

Queensland. Petro kept joking: "It was my own fault that the python chose to attack me. I had just washed and was clean, while you all smelt horribly!"

Actually we often thought the same thing. Perhaps it had left us alone and selected Petro for that very reason.

CASTLE ON THE VODAY
(An Excerpt)

Serhij Domazar

In the southeast, in Russia, anti-Soviet forces had been gathering strength for quite some time. Now they began to expand rapidly. The huge army of the White Russian General Denikin was fast approaching out town. White Russians forged ahead, relying on the experience their generals had gained in the previous major war and the immense stock of weapons and equipment which they received from overseas. They even made use of air reconnaissance, a luxury no other side in the civil war had ever possessed, which confirmed the rumours that Denikin was strongly backed by the Western Powers.

When the first three biplanes with British markings appeared one day in the clear sky above our town, everyone knew that the Red Army's days were numbered. I became excited with anticipation and set off for a meadow a few miles beyond the city's outskirts, where I spent the whole day lying in the tall grass, watching the railway line and the bridge over the Rula, along which trains with Bolsheviks retreated to the north. It was clear the new forces would take over soon.

We hardly slept on the decisive night, listening to scattered bursts of machine-gun fire coming form the direction of the town cemetery which overlooked the bridge on the Rula. After midnight hundreds of carts bearing the retreating town garrison came down our street, their iron-rimmed wheels thundering over the rough cobblestones.

A tense silence reigned over the town in the morning. Lubhorod seemed to be holding its breath. Excitement had kept me awake, and as soon as it became light I could not resist sneaking off into town.

The street outside the hospital was empty. I was sure that hardly anyone was asleep in town, preferring to stay behind locked gates and shuttered windows. Each courtyard looked like a fortress under siege.

I turned to the right and was nearing the clumsy two-storey building of the Ukrainian cultural centre, when two horsemen, Don Cossacks, rode out of from behind the building. The younger one, about my age, stopped his small shaggy horse: "Hey lad, where are the Jews and the Communists here?"

I knew no Communists, except for one barrister, who was now hiding in our house. He had talked all night long about the possiblity of having to answer with his life before the new authorities, bitterly repenting for having given in to persuasion from the previous power to join their party. As for the Jews, they formed about a quarter of the town's population.

Holding back my disgusted astonishment, I merely shrugged my shoulders:

"I don't know."

The young Cossack eyed me with an expression that promised nothing good. But his companion, an older mustached Cossack, said something to him and they rode off. As soon as they were out of sight, I hurried home and told my relatives what I had discovered about the new power. Prospects were far from good. Our barrister took ill upon hearing the news. Everyone in our house heaved a sigh of relief when he was taken off to hospital. Surely a ward was a better hiding place for him.

Later that same day I called my Uncle Maksym to learn how things were in Kukvyn. My uncle, his wife and brother-in-law were still very pale and shaken. They all lived together in an old house made of hewn logs and topped with a thatched roof, built back in the days of serfdom. The property was fairly large, with an old neglected orchard behind the house and an empty front yard with two or three dahlia beds. It was probably the size of their estate and its location just past the cart bridge which had accounted for a visit from a few Red Army men the night before. The intruders had robbed the family of all the gold and silver pieces they could extort,

including wedding rings and silver spoons.

When I returned home with the news of their misfortunes, my mother exploded:

"What! Heavens above! Couldn't they have spent that dangerous night here with us, or at least have brought their valuables here for safekeeping? What stupidity!"

I exchanged glances with my sister and both of us could not help smiling. Our mother possessed a remarkable ability for knowing exactly what should have been done, always wise after the fact.

A couple of days later the town was inundated with young men of my age, some in new khaki English uniforms, others still wearing school tunics. They marched about or loafed and sang loudly about their 'Holy Russia'. There were rumours that drunken officers had commanded restaurant musicians to play "God Save the Czar", the hated national anthem of the former Russian Empire.

One rainy afternoon two well-known public figures were arrested. As they were being led off to prison one of them, Captain Levchenko, took to his heels in a desperate bid to escape. He received a sabre blow to his head but managed to hop over into the nearest yard and hide. His companion was hacked to pieces on the spot. This was obviously a declaration of war against everything Ukrainian.

Captain Levchenko had been an officer in the czarist army during World War One and was in hiding while the Bolsheviks were in power, for they regarded all former officers as enemies and shot them without exception. Levchenko came out of hiding just after the arrival of the new power. He had behind him his service record as regional military chief during the recent Ukrainian government.

That same night the wounded Levchenko managed to steal across to our place. I saw him pressing a blood-stained handkerchief to his head when he entered our hallway. Mr Topirko bathed and dressed his wound hastily. It was not very deep and presented no danger. Then he helped Levchenko shave off his mustache, gave him some of his own clothes, and took him away to a safe house.

It was against the aware Ukrainians that Denikin instituted his policy of repression. Gallows were erected in the market place. Three corpses were soon swinging from them. I hated going and looking at them. I remembered the same square filled with joyous throngs of people not two years earlier.

It had been in May 1917 when the town's populace had joyously celebrated its freedom. Speaker's rostrums then towered over the people in the market place. The demonstrators marched past in orderly columns.

The main body leading the processions were the Ukrainians under their yellow and blue banners. They were followed by the Jews, bearing blue and white flags with the Star of David. Behind them came the Poles with their red and white colours. After being evacuated from German-occupied Poland, a large number of them had chosen our town as their temporary home, because we had a Catholic church in Lubhorob. A few Russians brought up the rear, marching under the red banners of the Revolution. There was no hammer-and-sickle painted on them, only the inspiring words: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

Two years had elapsed since then and what strange transformation the market place had experienced in that time. An area for military drill for some, a place for public execution for others. Both were foreign invaders and the market place seemed to long for its true master, who would come to erect monuments to freedom.

During these dismal days many of the people asked themselves which was the lesser evil of the two — the Reds or the Whites. It was impossible to decide, there really was no choice to be made. Alien armies came and went, setting up their own conflicting governments. They never asked for the approval of the local citizenry. And the townsman, no matter what his nationality, could only hide behind bolts and locks, shivering with fear because no lock could protect a person against violence and lawlessness.

Life practically drew to a standstill. The markets became empty. And of course the theatre was closed, because it was Ukrainian. Then two weeks after the change of power there

came another night of fear and alarm. I was enjoying my first sound sleep, when Mr Topirko woke me up:

"Up you get, Ivan, there's no more sleep for us tonight."

I shook off my grogginess. The house was unlit, but enough moonlight was entering through the windows for me to see Mr Topirko fully-dressed, with his hat on. I got up and dressed quickly.

"What's the matter?"

"Things are looking bad , Ivan. Denikin's men are raping girls not too far from us. They may come here. We must defend our women."

He took a revolver from his pocket and handed it to me.

"Take this. I have another one for myself."

I checked it briefly. The magazine was fully loaded. We went outside. The night was filled with diffused light coming from the half moon hiding behind wisps of fleecy cloud. It was strangely still, and the night seemed to be listening for something. All of a sudden a woman's shrill scream pierced the silence. The distant cry contained an instinctive fear of death. I felt the hair stir on my scalp. We both froze. Another cry, came closer this time. Then suddenly the shouts of men and women, the howl of a human herd. Then silence again. Blood hammered in my ears.

"Where are Raya and mother?" I asked, squeezing the handle of the revolver so hard that my fingers hurt. "I had better go and wake them."

"No need for that. Raya is hiding in the bushes with some other girls, and your mother is asleep. Luckily she's heard none of this horror. Better let her sleep until it really becomes dangerous. You know what a fuss she'll make if she gets up now."

I agreed. Topirko instructed me what we should do. We had to guard the yard: he took the front, I the back. If either of us saw intruders coming, we were to fire two warning shots. He also taught me a peculiar faint whistle, which was to be used as a signal when approaching the girls, so they knew there was nothing to fear.

I found them in a small frightened flock in thick shady

bushes behind the main building. An entire Jewish family from next door was huddled behind a nearby bush. I told them there was no immediate danger. Then I began my rounds, paying particular attention to the back gate, which would make a good avenue of retreat in an emergency.

A few more screams came from another direction. Then silence descended once more. A hush hung over the hospital park. Again the night was still.

But the night's troubles did not escape my mother. She woke before dawn and saw Raya's empty bed. After waiting a while, she became alarmed and hurried into the guest room where I slept on the sofa. My bed was deserted too, and Topirko's bedroom was similarly empty. Everyone, save her, had deserted the house in the middle of the night. She did not know what to think and hastily dressed, rushing outside into the hospital yard and then up to the main building. Here she bumped into Topirko, who tried hard to placate her. However, she too could not sleep the rest of the night.

At dawn two white-bearded old men from the Jewish community brought their cart filled with wounded and half-dead to the hospital. One family had been completely slaughtered, they said. Roza, a beautiful girl of nineteen, had been raped and bestially murdered just four houses from the hospital.

A turmoil of stirred emotions and snatched thoughts whirled about my head as I slowly made my way along the pavement of the deserted street early that morning.

1933

Klavdiya Folts

Father and mother decided that the children were growing up and that they needed to move to a large industrial city where father could get a better position and provide the children with a better education. This they did.

Arriving in the city, we moved in with a distant relative of ours who had a private home in the suburbs with a back yard. Their house was not a large one, but her husband was suffering from a stomach disorder and they needed the extra money to provide treatment for him. They squeezed into a single room and rented us two rooms. It wasn't very spacious, but we weren't crowded either, and they had quite a large yard and garden. On a bench in the garden, near bushes of lilac and jasmin, the older people gathered late in the afternoon; playing guitars, neighbours gathered, and song and laughter resounded till midnight. It was especially merry when Hanna, our landlady, was visited by her brother Petro and his wife Sofiya. What a good match they were. Both beautiful, robust, energetic, and they were simply experts when it came to joking and singing.

They would come to the market or to buy something in the shops, or simply to visit on holidays, bringing with them a whole symphony of rural fragrance: steppe, hay, wheat, meadows — everything missing in an industrial city. And each time they came, they showered us children with gifts of cherries, home-baked breads and honey. I found their bread extremely delicious: rich and white, with a golden crust, baked on a cabbage leaf.

They had no children, though they lived like two turtledoves, running their small, well-ordered farmstead very adeptly. And so the years passed. Life forged ahead and kept bringing

forever new words which we children did not understand: 'produce allotment', 'produce tax', 'collective farm', 'kulak' and others. Along with these words came harder and harder times. Gradually everything began to disappear from the shops, everything at the market became more expensive. People stopped visiting, stopped singing songs, ever fewer letters arrived from relatives and friends, and eventually they stopped altogether.

The winter of 1933 drew closer. The famine was gaining ground. Cinemas, theatres, clubs, schools and shops began to close, with the exception of the secret distribution centres for the elite. Several bread shops remained open also, where for ration cards one could get a miserly amount of glutinous black bread with awns. This bread often gave people stomach cramps, while the awns became lodged between the teeth and the gums, causing the mouth to turn blue, to swell and bleed. However one had no choice but to eat it, for there was nothing else. People were already eating tree bark, frogs, rats, mice — anything able to be stuffed into the stomach. Everyone wanted to live, for it was frightening to die a hungry death.

We lived in misery too, managing somehow from day to day. We went to bed early to deaden our appetite, but the conversation revolved only around food, for we were incapable of even thinking of anything else.

On one of these winter evenings, while a blizzard raged outside, my parents were talking quietly in bed, recalling relatives and acquaintances. Were they all still alive? They discussed Petro and Sofiya too. At that moment I imagined the fragrant smell of their bread so keenly, that I salivated, and called out to my parents from the girl's room to tell them how hungry it made me.

After this we began reminiscing about honey and cherries, when suddenly something rustled at the window (our windows faced the street, while the host's came out onto the garden). We all fell silent. A moment later there was a soft tap against the shutter.

"Who's there?" father asked.

From outside came muffled mutters, whimpering, and one

could barely make out the person's name — Petro. My parents dressed hastily in the twilight, father went off to the ante-hall to open the door, while mother lit a tiny night-lamp, for it was dangerous to turn the lights on: if anyone saw the bright light through a crack in the shutters they might come here to check what was happening.

In those days no one was safe in their own home at night. The NKVD and the militia entered wherever they pleased, turned everything in houses upside down, seeking who knows what, and arrested people at random without giving any reasons.

Having lit the night-lamp, mother placed it on the table in the kitchen, where father had just entered, bringing in a snow-covered man, bound to the eyes with rags.

When the fellow entered the room he simply collapsed on the chair beside the table. With numb fingers he tried unsuccessfully to unravel the rags, so father helped him. And when he removed the last rag from his head, the man tottered and nearly fell to the floor.

"My God," mother exclaimed, "it's Petro!"

But was this really Petro? A lifeless head stared at us, bone stretched with skin, two black abysses in place of the once gleaming, long-lashed, forever smiling eyes. He had a prickly, bristly beard.

"Call Hanna," he groaned, and dropping his head onto the table, began to sob and cough fitfully. Father moved aside the half-empty wardrobe behind which was a door connecting our two residences, and mother disappeared behind the wardrobe. A minute later she returned with Hanna. Frightened to death, Hanna was trembling, teeth chattering. She rushed up to Petro.But he slid off the chair and thudded at Hanna's feet:

"My dear sister, don't drive me out... I haven't much longer to live... Sofiya died when they confiscated our farm and were shipping us off to Siberia... I escaped from a railway station and have been on the road for almost a year now... Don't send me away, sister... It's hard to die among strangers... Allow me to die near you all..."He mumbled all this, choking on spasms of coughing. We all wept, listening to his tragic

account.

"Get up, brother! No one's sending you off — what will be, will be. And if they learn that we're harbouring a dispossessed person, then we'll die together."

"No, sister, no, I don't want to bring misfortune upon your house, you have other people here, and children too. Lay me outside somewhere in the yard, under the lilac there, where it used to be so merry, remember..." and he burst into tears again and a fit of coughing.

"They say it's easy to freeze to death."

Hanna and father supported him and helped him into Hanna's half. No one could sleep for the rest of that night. In the morning Hanna told us that she had housed Petro in the goat-shed where she had once kept the goat whose milk she used to feed her ailing husband.

There was still plenty of hay in the goat-shed, and they 'buried' Petro in this, throwing a pile of old rags on top for good measure. From then on our bread ration was further reduced, for we gave Hanna a piece for Petro. Hanna also took a piece from her ration and brought Petro the bread at night, together with a mug of hot water. This lasted for about a week. Meanwhile the frost grew fiercer, as if on purpose. The beautiful patterns on the window did not melt all day long.

One morning Hanna came in with tearful eyes, placed a piece of bread on the table, and said:

"He doesn't need it any more. He's suffered enough. Petro has passed away."

A creepiness filled the room: here, beyond this wall, not a few steps from the house, there was death in the goat-shed... Petro's death.

"Well, what do we do now?" mother asked. "The militia has to be notified, how do we bury him? They'll ask who he is and how he got here."

"God forbid," Hanna disagreed. "I think we should wait until it begins snowing, then we can carry him out into the street at night and the truck will take him away the next morning."

A few more days passed in waiting for the snowfall, and the

whole time Petro's frozen body remained in the goat-shed. Finally it became a little warmer and the snow began to come down, so fluffy and thick that it acted as a curtain when they carried Petro's body out. By morning all footprints had been obliterated and Petro's half-drifted body was removed by the truck which went about the streets every morning collecting those who had died of hunger. Laughing and joking, two red-faced young men threw Petro's body like a log into the back of the truck, where several other bodies were already lying.

All this was clearly visible from our house, however we kept our distance from the window (God forbid, lest someone caught us watching!) and wept. Hanna and her husband watched through the window and wrung their hands, weeping. Hanna sobbed quietly and kept repeating:

"Farewell, Petro... Farewell, brother... Forgive me... forgive me..."

THE TWILIGHT OF THIS WORLD

Yevhen Haran

Throughout my entire cheerless life I have sought a person. I have struck matches, as if in the dark of night, and looked attentively about.

Colours shimmered. Faces alternated: goggle-eyed, slant-eyed, pug-nosed, long-nosed, pock-marked, pale, haughty, gaunt, with high cheek-bones, tow-haired, bushy-browed — all lifeless like dolls, as if moulded from wax, all of them not people, but like faces in a puppet theatre.

Their mouths opened and assured me that they were people too. Only I remained alone in the whole wide world and could not find myself a partner.

But then one day I lit a match and spotted a face which struck me with its crystal-clear gaze.

Involuntarily I lifted my hand like a blind man and ran my fingertips over the face, touching the tender lips, which were like spring leaves.

They whispered in a strange language. I listened curiously and thought:

"I definitely must learn this language. Perhaps I have finally met a person, the second in the whole world, with whom I can share my solitude and who will accept my friendly handshake."

* * *

At first there was friendship.

The golden days passed and blew away with the wind. The two of us wandered under shady trees (her left hand in my right), we inhaled, swallowed the eucalyptus scent of the air and swung our arms back and forth.

I talked and talked. I told her about this and that, but said nothing about the important things. About the most important

thing: my first, still unextinguished love, pure and inviolable, which I had secreted deep in my heart for several years now.

There were times when I could talk naively and confidingly about it. The clay waxed faces from the giant puppet theatre of the world listened, grew angry and scoffed. At times they tried insidiously to violate my love. And when they failed to do so, they shouted in powerless rage after me:

"Hey! You daren't love what we're indifferent to."

And I moved away and jealously covered its head with my sleeve; that love was a love towards my distant Fatherland and its tortured people.

In the end I secreted it deep in my heart. It felt cramped there, growing and languishing in isolation. And I no longer told anyone about it, not even my female friend, when we wandered together under the shady trees and swung our hands about.

* * *

The days flew at a furious gallop and that giant clock, which had once announced my childhood and youth, struck three times for adulthood.

I heard its striking in the air, which became still, and in my trembling muscles, and my rising blood. And then came the Word and turned our friendship into Marriage.

* * *

It was after this that I began to ponder the mystery of marriage, the crowning of relationships between people, the great symbol of mankind — the married couple.

I thought for a long time and realised that there would be no clarity or harmony between us two, if I did not share my first big love with my wife.

And so each evening I began to talk about the boundless steppe, the clear water, about the snowdrifted villages and the ancient silent graves of my Fatherland.

My wife usually sat by the fireplace and, holding back her

yawns for the sake of politeness, rubbed cream onto her face.

I would have found it much easier to tell my story had she become enthusiastic about my account and forgotten about those cosmetic exercises which made her skin sticky and oily.

"Obviously I simply lack the gift of the gab," a disheartening thought nagged at me. "I just probably can't explain it all with interest."

And I continued my accounts, trying to recall everything which she might have found interesting or unusual: the bare-bellied children in the dust of collective-farm roads, and socialist competition in a fierce frost, and skiing races in the schoolyard.

I prepared my stories like a teacher preparing for lessons.

"Back home, in my Fatherland, the moon isn't round," I said mysteriously, wanting to make a joke.

"?"

"It's square . . . "

My joke fell flat on its face, without provoking the desired result. My wife showed no interest towards the children in the dust and attached no importance to snow sport. What was she interested in then?

'Perhaps her indifference is feigned?' I thought with growing suspicion. 'Perhaps all this is a far-reaching scheme aimed at forcing me to forget my past and thus, in her opinion, will save our family bliss?'

I could already feel the worm of irritability stirring under my heart. I began to talk point blank about my Great Love, hoping that at least the subconscious feeling of jealousy would provoke a flicker of interest in my wife's eyes.

But in vain!

Her crystal-clear eyes remained calm, beautiful, politely indifferent.

* * *

Where are the matches, with which I've been wandering this wide world? I lit a large candle, brought it up to my wife's face, and saw with despair that it was just like all those other faces — strained, waxed, doll-like, lifeless — not a person, only a face.

A weird thought occurred to me. I stretched out my hand

and — really! — removed that face like a mask. There was nothing behind it, only dark emptiness. And then I realised the reason for her indifference.

The wind breathed and extinguished the candle and I was in twilight again. Only this time I fathomed to the depths of my soul that there was no bottom to my solitude, and all around me there was only a puppet theatre.

Australia.

LOOK AFTER YOUR HEALTH

Nevan Hrushetsky

In Sydney I have an old friend named Semen. We still know each other from Germany, we've met in Australia on several occasions and keep up a correspondence. He's a good soul, one of our people. He's not interested in either political or church affairs, which is why we remain the best of friends. Recently he invited me to visit him, writing: "Come over, we've plenty of room. The children have married, left home. Stay a week, a month — as long as you like. I have many interesting things to tell you. I've become a new person, I feel I've been reborn into this world."

This intrigued me, becaused for some time I myself was feeling a growing need to become a new person. So I went off to visit him. The road was long and hot. Towards the end I was almost sorry that I had left. The one thing which kept up my spirits was the knowledge of Semen's notorious hospitality: I imagined his joy at my arrival, the fine liquer and tasty hors d'oeuvres, the pleasant conversation and relaxation.

At last I reached his front door. The door was answered by some unfamiliar type. "Sorry," I said, "I'm looking for someone else." And this fellow said in reply: "What, don't you recognise me? Is the fat blinding you?" I looked more closely — could it really be?! I remembered Semen as a robust Cossack of a man — but this fellow sooner resembled a weedy old Englishman than one of our people. Skin all wrinkled, cheeks sunken, bones sticking out like a Gypsy mare's — he was a pitiful sight to behold.

"What's wrong with you?" I asked. "You look terrible, like a ghost," but then I stopped, fearing I might have offended him.

But no! Semen's eyes brightened, his face beamed, as if he had heard the best compliment. "I'm on a diet," he informed

me joyously, as if he had won a hundred thousand. "Step inside, I'll tell you about my secret."

We went inside, I greeted his wife (she was haggard, aged, a pitiful sight to behold). I wanted to chat a while about generalities, to ask him about mutual acquaintances, but no way! Semen really was a new person: once he launched into this topic, you couldn't get a word in sideways! He ranted the whole time about health: how it should be fostered, what should be done, what should be avoided.

His wife sat with us a while, then sighed and left. At first I listened attentively, but then I too tired of this. Involuntarily I began to glance in the direction of the dresser where Semen always kept a nice collection of bottles, but their honoured place had now been replaced by books...

At last Semen said: "Oh, I'm sorry, I should treat you to something. However, there are no alcoholic beverages in the house. Scientists have proven that alcohol is a horrible poison. You know the number of brain cells each glass destroys? The very thought is terrifying! Oh, if only I had known that earlier, I would probably have been a genius by now!"

"Well, if that's the case," I said, trying to hide my disappointment, "I could make do with a drink of lemonade."

"Phew, that filth? How can you drink those chemicals? Scientific research has shown that they eat away the stomach lining! And the havoc they wreak on the kidneys!"

"Well, if that's the case, then at least get me some coffee, so that I can recover a little, 'cause the road's really gotten me bushed."

At this point Semen clapped his hands: "What, you're on drugs now?! So that's the path you're taking? Today it's cafein, tomorrow heroin, right?"

I was quite stung by all this. "Well, forgive me then." I got up, went into the kitchen, picked up a tumbler, and just as I was about to turn the tap to demonstratively pour myself some water, Semen raced up from behind, grabbed me by the arm and tore the tumbler from my hand.

"What's the matter, you crazy? Whoever saw anyone drinking tapwater! Don't you know that the water here is

"ploovorized", as they say? I read recently that this affects the head... makes a person go crazy, you know. Just imagine: when you pour water into a car battery, you use distilled water, and you think your body's any worse than some stupid battery? Wait, I'll get you some pure distilled water. I distill it myself. A good bootlegger, eh?"

"Thanks, don't bother," I grimaced, "I'm not thirsty any more. Better give me some milk, after all, cows are quite natural creatures."

"Aha, let's not joke with such matters, things aren't as simple as they might seem! If you were to drink it straight from the cow, it mightn't be so bad, but by the time they bottle it, they manage to add God knows what to it. What's it called — something to do with pasta... Aha! They pastarise it! However the thing with milk goes deeper than that. Sit down, let me tell you, because this is very important.Well, according to the latest discoveries, milk and dairy products belong to those foods which should be avoided, because they act on the blood in a way which affects the heart. Maybe you've heard of it, Tyrolean cholera? You shouldn't eat cheese, eggs, cream or meats."

With growing enthusiasm Semen attacked those foods so dear to my soul and stomach. Mentally I crossed out those things which I would be able to eat in his home. I became greatly alarmed.

"Wait, Semen," I interrupted him, "it isn't the frightful picture that you paint. Take meat, for instance: not all of it is harmful. They say that white meat such as chicken is not at all harmful."

"Not harmful? Oh, don't remind me of chicken! Did you know that chickens are given those special harmonies so that they grow faster and their meat becomes tender? And science has now discovered that when you eat these chickens you lose your masculinity, you know... Oh, if silly old me had known that earlier I wouldn't have taken a shred of chicken in my mouth, wouldn't have even smelt it!"

He felt so vexed that he became silent for a moment.

"So you must be subsisting solely on fruit and vegetables

now," I remarked sympathetically.

"Oho, you have to be very careful there too!" he livened up again. "They use all kinds of fertilizers and DDTs, and science has proven beyond a doubt that this is harmful to the human organism. I grow my own produce in the garden. Oh, I would have had a good crop, if the damned bugs hadn't eaten everything up!"

"What the hell do you eat then?" I couldn't help uttering.

"Oh, I carefully have a bit now and then. Oh, brother when I recall how we used to eat, it sends shivers down my spine. I used to hove into two bowls of borsch, then a pot of dumplings, or whatever else, until my stomach was fair bursting, and the wife would still say: "Have some more, my dove, don't be ashamed." My word, if I'd been rich, I would have suspected she was trying to get rid of me sooner — but all this is ignorance, our luckless ignorance. And silly old me would grab a second helping sometimes too."

"So what of it, you were as healthy as an ox; you never complained about your health."

"No, I didn't complain! That's exactly what I'm saying, that I was ignorant. I didn't complain because nothing ached. There's nothing worse than when nothing aches. Science tells us that pain is a warning signal which lets you know what to treat yourself for. A stab in the chest — it could be the heart; a pain in the side is probably a liver or some such. And if you're unsure whether it's hurting or not, dash off to the doctor straight away — he knows about more diseases than you can ever read about! But if nothing is hurting, how the hell will you know what to treat yourself for? And then suddenly — pow! — and you kick the bucket!"

"Well, Semen, that may well be for someone else, but as for you, you can rest assured that nothing of the sort will happen."

"Rest assured? Rest like a Gypsy dog perhaps!" Semen swept his hand irritably through the air. "I haven't any peace, brother. I'm always worrying, grieving. I know that one shouldn't grieve, that it's bad for the health. And that makes me worry and grieve even more, stops me from sleeping at night."

"Why should you suffer though, Semen, if you're looking after yourself so well?"

"How can I not suffer? I eat some food and think that it's not harmful. But how do I know that it isn't written somewhere that science has discovered that it is harmful? See, I've got full shelves of books and journals, I pore over them till my head is fair bursting — but can a man obtain everything being written in the world, let alone read it all? Thank God, old chap, that you've come along; you'll help me to suss out more from those books. You'll eat here as science dictates; we'll teach you to look after your health, brother!"

This was enough to throw me into a panic. I began to think feverishly how to slip out of here — and suddenly it occurred to me.

"Oh, forgive me, Semen!" I tapped my head. "I quite forgot to tell you that at the last moment my plans were altered unexpectedly. I've dropped by for only a short while, I have to continue on my way... on to Brisbane, you know..."

Hastily I rose to my feet, said goodbye, and by the time my hosts regained their senses, I was already standing beside my car.

It was already growing dark and, hungry and tired, I still had to find somewhere to stay the night in Sydney.

SON OF A KULAK
(An Excerpt)

Kuzma Kazdoba

We were taken into the prison yard, where we joined a group of some thirty arrested peasants. Later the guards marched us out through the prison gates. Eight carts stood waiting for us, guarded by militia and Komsomol members.

The new guards checked us against the prison list, loaded us into the carts, and we were taken through the streets of Pervomaisk. Armed militia and Komsomol members rode horseback on either side of the carts. People scrutinised us from the sidewalk and from front yards. Women waved white kerchiefs in farewell and wept. Girls gave us frightened glances. Some male passers-by bowed their heads, pretending not to see us, and hurried on their way.

We were driven to a small railway siding in the steppe sixteen kilometres from Pervomaisk. The cart wheels sank deeply into the black earth softened by the melting snow, making it difficult for the horses to move. Still, it was easier for them than for us. I sat lost in thought, still hearing the cruel words of my sentence. God, how terrible I felt. I was being deported from my native country under guard, unable to say goodbye to those dearest to me — my sisters, my brother Mykhailo, their children, and many relatives and friends. I also yearned to visit the small steppe cemetery where my dear mother and elder brother, Polikarp, lay. I wanted so much to stand by their graves and tell them of my grief, of my banishment for life by the same people who had cut their lives short.

I surveyed the steppes where I had spent my childhood and youth. The spring sunshine and the melting snow on the fields cheered me up. For a moment I forgot my cruel fate and

rejoiced at being able to breathe fresh air after eight months in a prison cell.

Father did not speak once during the journey, lost in thought. Three elderly peasants on our cart were overcome with grief. Two of them were crying, while the third, the youngest, let his eyes wander over the steppe as he talked incessantly about his son.

We arrived at the railway siding three hours later. The horror that greeted us there made me long for the gloom of jail.

The station was fenced in with barbed wire. We were entrusted to new guards who took us behind the wire. A long train of freight wagons stood at the siding, guarded by the Russian GPU.

The GPU, the militia and the Komsomol kept bringing cartloads of arrested peasants to the station. Barefoot and dressed in rags, they were dumped into the wet snow. There were elderly, middle-aged and young people, children, and even infants. Some of the women had five and six children, the eldest no more than thirteen or fourteen. Some of the families were without fathers, who had been arrested earlier. Underfoot the snow soon became trampled into a proper spring mud. Mothers held their two youngest children in their arms, while the rest stood in the mud, some barefoot, their hands and faces blue with cold. They surrounded their mothers and held onto their rags, which the Russians had issued them in place of their own warm clothes. These little prisoners tugged at their mother's rags and cried:

"Mamma, mamma, let's go home. I'm cold and my head hurts."

"Mamma, mamochka, I'm hungry."

Some of the mothers lost all self-control. They tore at their rags, buried their hands in their hair and pulled out tufts of it. Others wept and lamented, begging God to take them and their children from this world.

Our group from the jail was kept apart. I surveyed those who had arrived earlier and suddenly my heart missed a beat. In the crowd I spied my oldest sister Anna. In her arms she was holding the twins — Olga and Nadia. Four more of her

children stood in the mud around her. They were all crying and looking in our direction. The two eldest began to walk towards us, but the guards turned them back.

I pointed them out to father. He rushed forward, but the guards stopped him and ordered him back. Father grew deathly pale and froze. With motionless glassy eyes he stared at his daughter. The blood vessels on his forehead and hands stood out. It was the first time I had seen my father in such a state.

Finally father cried out:

"Oh, Lord, why did they take the children? They're too small to be guilty of anything! Lord, have mercy on them!"

The guards ordered our party to move closer to the freight wagon, thereby allowing us to draw nearer to the crowd of peasants: only twenty paces separated us now. From time to time I spotted relatives and friends in the crowd. They were all here with their families.

Meanwhile the Russians, dressed in GPU uniforms, continued to receive families of arrested Ukrainian peasants. When they had finally finished they closed the gates and began dividing the people into groups of fifty to sixty, locking them in dirty, damp freight wagons. Inside there were two-tiered plank beds against each wall. In the middle of the wagon stood an iron stove, but there was not a splinter of firewood.

My sister Anna walked up a plank into one of the wagons with her six children. Two she carried in her arms, the other four trotted along behind her. They cried bitterly and waved their little hands at us.

Finally it was our turn. Our wagon was four down from my sister's. Father would not take his eyes off it. He twice tried to approach it, but each time the guards turned him back.

A GPU official began calling our names from a list. Father walked up the plank, his chin resting on his chest. Then it was my turn. Ascending the plank, I said farewell to the azure sky and my native fields. Once more I glanced in vain around me, and my eyes met those of my eldest brother Mykhailo, who was standing on the far side of the barbed wire. He was weeping and waving to me. I stopped and waved back.

"Get in!" yelled the guard and pushed me into the wagon with a jolt of his rifle butt between my shoulders. I sprawled over the stove and wept bitterly, as if knowing that I would never see Mykhailo again.

The guards began closing the doors of our wagons. Everyone pushed forward to take a last look at the setting sun, at our native sky and sacred land. Then it became dark and we only heard the clatter of locks. For a minute the wagon was filled with a deep silence, punctuated by the cries of children. They were soon joined by their mothers. We could hear the guards moving about underneath the wagon, around it and on the roof. Again silence filled the wagon. Outside some official announced something about shooting people on sight.

The shrill sad whistle of the train sounded above us. The wagon jerked and slowly began to move. Something snapped inside each of us and we all knelt, praying to God to help us return to our country one day , even if only to die.

The wheels of the train spun around faster and faster, racing towards fresh horror.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Zoya Kohut

He walked along, head bowed to one side, as if listening to his own thoughts. From his left hand hung an old, tatty briefcase, the right one was hiding a rheumatic deformity of fingers in the pocket of his well-worn jacket. The corners of his tightly-pursed lips finished in bitter wrinkles on a once handsome, but now merely old face.

Stepan Seliansky, a former lawyer, former teacher, and former hawker, then an emigrant, a locksmith, a sweeper and finally a bedraggled pensioner, card-player and practically an alcoholic... Stepan Seliansky — desired by many, much kissed, often wept over and fervently loved... and now completely forgotten.

He stopped and out of habit looked to the left, then the right, before crossing the street. Actually it was quite unnecessary to take care here, as he had no one to live for, no reason to live. Once he had had a son, slender and grey-eyed... Once he had had a wife, then a second one with a dimple on her cheek... Once he had lived in a large house with narrow windows and bird-cherry had blossomed in his garden in the spring... Once his wife, the first one, from memory, used to bake a poppy-seed roll for Christmas and the house would be fragrant with mushrooms and festiveness...

Stepan Seliansky put down his briefcase, opened the creaking gate, and, holding it back with his foot, entered the yard. The grass in front of the strange house was trampled and quite yellow. His room was at the back, in an extension with a separate entrance, which looked out onto a lone tree. He was grateful for his extension, or more correctly, gratefulness was what was expected from him. However he felt nothing of the sort, just as he felt hardly anything now, apart from a dull

cynicism mixed with exhaustion.

Christmas... Yes, today was Christmas Eve — he knew this only because yesterday, after he had won almost a dollar from him, Herasym Herasymchuk had said in parting:

"Well, see you in about a week. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve, Petro is coming with the grandchildren..."

Stepan did not like Christmas. Not because he was alone and holidays had lost their meaning for him, but because he could no longer understand nor sense the need for these holidays. For children — yes, but for adults? How could he experience Christmas, when he had even forgotten how to pray? How could he believe in the sanctity of this day, when he had long since stopped believing in any sanctity whatever?

Stepan Seliansky opened the window of his hot, stuffy room, which reeked of alcohol and old age, and taking a half bottle of wine from his briefcase, he poured himself some into a plastic cup. The wine was vinegary, bitterish and sharp — Italians made it illegally at home and sold it cheaply. Drinking it made one's head ache and it left a burning sensation in the stomach.

But that came later...

He sat down on the hard mattress of his iron bed and looked at the stained grey wall before him...

At Christmas time in Australia people go to the beach and get drunk on cold beer... In Australia... Last year he had spent Christmas Eve with the Kulyks. Kulyk had continually boasted about his executive position and called the rest of the Ukrainians ignorant rabble, while Mrs Kulyk kept running between the kitchen and the table, affectionately calling her husband Murchyk — Little Purrer... And this year Mrs Kulyk had left her husband and moved to Canada...

A radio hummed away somewhere, the sharp sounds of an orchestra cut into the hot stillness of early evening.

The tragedy was not that he, Stepan Seliansky, was now sitting alone in a strange bedraggled room in a strange house, in a foreign land — the tragedy ran deeper, much deeper. Had this room been in Lviv or Kiev, he would have fathomed the principle of life's destiny... He would even have understood

Siberia. But Australia? For whom and for what had they saved their lives? For the development of the Australian economy, or for their own well-being? Stepan sucked in some warm wine and smiled, deriving a strange pleasure from the thought that his contribution to the Australian economy had already finished. And his own well-being? He looked about, as if caressing his evident misery, voluntarily nursed to appease a far too sensitive conscience. No, he had no desire to live better than the millions of Ukrainians back home, he did not wish to live in luxury only because he had been lucky enough to escape the poverty and misery of his native land. He wanted to demonstrate, at least to himself, that he had chosen this foreign land not for gain and soft beds. Foreign land...

Once he had intended to conquer the whole world for Ukraine (for some reason the wine stunk of mould and plums), once he had been hot-headed and wasted time bickering with party adversaries among his own people, uttering great words with empty meanings... And he believed that all this was necessary for Ukraine. Then he lost this faith — lost it somewhere on the path between the long speeches and the construction of new toilets in the Ukrainian Hall... Stepan Seliansky placed the empty cup on the table and stood up. Once he had entreated the heavens to at least leave him his faith. Now he no longer asked for anything: the sky was not for the Stepans. It was leased by others... And Christmas was not for those who believed in their deserved privilege of stuffing themselves on twelve dishes and raising the hoarse drunkenness of their voices under a foreign sky. He remained silent during Christmas... just like those countrymen back home, only he did so voluntarily.

It was growing dark outside. Foreign birds tousled about on the tree, he could smell roast meat.

Stepan opened the door and sat down heavily on the doorstep, leaning back against the doorpost. The earth breathed of coolness and something long forgotten. He sat staring dully at the darkening sky, expected nothing and desiring nothing — separated from the world by his solitude. Life was hurrying on somewhere, passing in haste, swirling

about nervously, choking on impatience. He had nowhere to hurry. His path would end here, maybe tomorrow, maybe today... The words "may the foreign soil be like feathers for him" would sound hundreds of times (as if it could be soft for anyone), clods of hard clay would fall on a wooden lid — and that would be that. Would it really? What about his thoughts? His love? That strong love for his native streets, the reeds along the river, the fragrant warmth of the earth under bare feet... Would it really be all?

Something twinkled in the dark depths of the heavens, shimmering before his old eyes and glimmering brightly with pure light.

"The first star!" he thought, and unexpectedly felt a warm gush of long-forgotten joy.

"The first star! Oh, God!" And trying to bring together the three disfigured fingers of his right hand, Stepan Seliansky looked happily into the sky, listening in wonder to the Christmas night which became filled with words audible only to him and trickled down his wrinkled cheek in a warm tear.

THE YOUNG JUDAS

Liuba Kutsenko

The first days after the liquidation of the Jews passed under the influence of this horrifying event. No one said anything, apart from: "My God, these are people! To shoot them like animals! These are people, even though they are Jews . . . !"

People told stories of Germans ripping out gold and jewellery from the clothes of Jews, and "local jackals" rummaged about the deserted ghetto in search of gold and valuables.

People recounted that the Jewish mass graves stirred and swelled up, and the occasional concealed person from the ghetto took cover like a hounded wild animal, hiding in ruins, holes, attics and in various nooks and crannies. Hungry, in rags, homeless, without any hope for the future, with the spectre of death in their eyes, they dashed about at night like ghosts, startled by every sound and shadow. . .

The days passed, and with them the initial horror of the mass murders, which had so moved and outraged the local populace. The living thought about living!

The weather that autumn was especially fine. Although the cold nights and misty mornings were a portent of the approaching winter, the warm sunny days with cobwebs floating through the air created the illusion that summer was not yet over.

Stepping out onto the balcony I would always glance involuntarily at the Diachenkos' windows. They were usually closed and not a sound came from there. The closed windows reminded me of their Jewish servant Miriam and her daughter Zosia. I found no peace, thinking what had become of them.

Two weeks passed. Late one afternoon as I was preparing dinner, I heard the din of children's voices through the open

door and the individual raised voices of woman:

"How?! When?! Ihor?!" Then once more the disorderly racket of children's voices. I stepped out onto the balcony. In the laneway next to our building were a group of children emotionally telling several women something.

"... and they took her in the car and drove off."

"The scum!" one of the women exclaimed.

"They also gave him fifty roubles!" the children said in a chorus.

"What's happened?!" I called down.

"The Germans have just picked up Miriam and Zosia!"

"God! Where?!"

"Right here, on our street. Ihor gave them away."

"How?!"

"I'll tell you!" a ten-year-old boy emerged from the group and looked up at me. "We were playing in the street. Right opposite Ihor's place. He didn't want to play with us, said our games were silly. I said he was silly himself."

"Get on with it!" one of the women interrupted impatiently.

"We were beginning to move away, while Ihor remained standing outside his place. Just then some Germans drove up and parked next to Ihor's building. There are some floozies living in his building... As the Germans were getting out, Miriam and Zosia emerged from this lane... We wouldn't have recognised her, she was dressed in peasant clothes and wore a kerchief, but Zosia smiled at us as they passed. We even turned around and watched them pass... When Miriam drew up to Ihor, he took one look at her and immediately addressed the Germans who had gotten out of the car: "Das ist Juden!" and pointed at Miriam. She pulled to one side, as if wanting to run away, but one of the Germans grabbed her by the shoulder and pointed to the open car door... Miriam turned around and said to Ihor: "Ah, Ihor, what have you done!"... And burst into tears. We ran up to the car... Miriam and Zosia were sitting in the car, crying something terrible... One of the Germans slapped Ihor on the shoulder and, pulling out his wallet, gave him fifty roubles... Then they drove off straight away. And that's all."

"When did this happen?" I asked.

"Just now! Maybe a few minutes ago! We're actually on our way to tell Mrs Diachenko."

The children ran off. The women in the laneway burst into talk.

"Poor Miriam!"

"She was probably returning from the Diachenkos."

"Perhaps she just dropped by for some food?"

"Become hungry!"

"Why did she choose such a time? She would have done better to come at sunset."

"But Ihor...! Who would have thought that he could be capable of such baseness?"

"What do you expect from the spoiled single child of rich parents!"

"Why couldn't Miriam have turned back when she saw those Germans?"

"Perhaps she couldn't?"

"Probably never occurred to her that Ihor would betray them!"

"Oh, what are you saying?!" a loud exclamation exploded from the Diachenkos' open window. "Who...? Ihor!"

The news of Miriam's capture by the Germans spread like wildfire throughout the neighbourhood. I don't know why, but it upset me more than the news of the liquidation of the Jews from the ghetto. Perhaps because it almost happened before my eyes. Perhaps because I knew Miriam and was used to seeing her pass by along the lane each day with her talkative child. Perhaps because she was like one of us. She lived among us.

Until late that evening people stood in groups in the street and talked about the incident. Late into the evening one could hear loud voices coming from the Diachenkos' windows and the curses of the mother-in-law, old Mrs Moroz:

"God grant that the earth not carry you, damned Judas! May that money burn you with infernal flame till your dying day! May your arms wither away! May you be contorted and crushed! May you go blind and loaf about under fences... and

may no one give you a piece of bread! May they send their dogs onto you wherever you appear! May you hang yourself like Judas and be damned forever and ever! Just let me catch you!"

A boy of thirteen, Ihor was the son of the owners of the adjacent brick building. Big and fat for his age, he always went about slowly, with head up in the air and a look of contempt in his pale-coloured eyes. He never played with the children, standing to one side and watching their games.

After Ihor's despicable action every single child boycotted him. No one spoke to Ihor, and when they came across him, they even looked away. As I learned later, this boycott had been carried out without any directions from their parents or anyone older, and without any common resolution. Everyone had simply decided to do so on his own! Ihor seemed not to care one bit though.

However one day old Mrs Moroz finally caught Ihor. Who knows how? Perhaps by chance, perhaps she had been watching him, but most likely it was with the help of the children.

Hearing Mrs Moroz's raised voice from my kitchen, I stepped out onto the balcony. In the laneway immediately below my balcony was Mrs Moroz, surrounded by a crowd of kids. Ihor stood leaning against the fence, with his back to me. Beside him stood Mrs Moroz's youngest son Ivan, having a firm hold on his collar.

"Do you realise that you've delivered those people to their death?!" Mrs Moroz was saying to Ihor in a raised voice. "Do you understand what a Judas' deed you've done?"

I could not see Ihor's face, but there seemed to be a certain degree of insolence in his raised head and stance. The children had surrounded Mrs Moroz in a tight circle, and kept transferring their intense gazes from her to Ihor.

"You probably don't even know who Judas was, you stupid blockhead...! I'll tell you! He's the one who delivered Christ to his death! Know what he did later on? He hung himself! And I'll tell you what, go and buy yourself a rope for those fifty roubles you received as payment for human life, and hang

yourself! That's the only proper thing left for you to do!"

Ihor pulled away.

"Hold onto him tighter, Ivan! Let me finish talking to him! If his mother didn't teach him, then let me teach him!"

Ivan pressed the boy against the fence and the children formed up on either side, cutting off any path of escape.

"I'm telling mother!" Ihor grunted.

"Whether you tell her or not, I'll tell her myself that she'll be responsible before the Lord for being unable to bring you up... You performed not only Judas' deed, but Herod's as well! For Herod ordered the children killed! You also delivered a small child to her death! Tell me, you bandit, what did you need their deaths for? What have Miriam and Zosia done to you? You played with Zosia and you delivered her to her death!"

"I didn't want to!" Ihor began to blubber.

"You didn't want to?!" she shook her hand under his nose.

"Don't you tell me stories! If you hadn't wanted to, you wouldn't have betrayed them! Perhaps you'll say that you're small, and didn't understand what your mother told you... Look at these children! They're all smaller than you and they all saw Miriam, but none of them gave her away. Only you, you Judas...! You know what punishment awaits you in the other world! Devils will brand your foul tongue with red-hot iron, and your hands which accepted that money will be whipped with barbed wire until the meat falls away from them... And I curse you and your future spawn to the tenth generation!"

"Hey, Mrs Moroz, why are you setting on the lad so?!" two workers, who were passing through the laneway, called out.

"He's the Judas who sold that mother and her child for death money!" When Mrs Moroz turned her head towards them, with the children following suit, Ihor took advantage of the situation and tearing himself away with all his might from Ivan's grip, darted like an arrow out of the laneway.

"Run...! May you spend the rest of your life running away from people, and they from you!" Mrs Moroz called out after

him. "Ivan, go and wash your hands right away after holding that filth!" she addressed her bewildered son, who was standing with fingers spread apart.

HETMAN ROZUMOVSKY
(An Excerpt)

Mykola Lazorsky

It was growing dark...

On the common pasture and in the fields the Cossacks were milling about. Town artisans, ploughmen... Fires glowed everywhere... Vats of vodka were rolled out, the cooks handed out beef and lamb roasted on a spit. The Sich Cossacks drank the strong spirits, following it down with dumplings, sausages, pies with crackling. They chatted quietly about the morning's event.

The Poltava Regiment had camped near Repalovy Gully on the Ocheretianka River in the steppe, for the weather was just right: warm and so quiet one could hear a pin drop. The Cossacks had gotten several vats, roasted a steer on the fire and were cooking a thick soup *kulish* with bacon. A crowd had gathered around the fire, listening to grey-haired Dorosh Kistohryz. He was sitting on an empty overturned vat, looking askance at the crowd and saying derisively:

"The elections were elevated... on wooden platforms. Haven't seen anything like it in my life."

"Everything is done on wooden platforms, Mister Dorosh: both selection and the chopping of heads," the robust Cossack Stryzhen remarked, swallowing a hot dumpling which he had speared.

"That's true: two heads went rolling on a platform like that in Borshchahivka..."

"A third grieves over them somewhere..."

"Our aristocracy is cautious... pleasing the Russians. At least Mister Abaza waved his mace about as if in battle," the red-haired Cossack Potylytsia piped up.

"So they wouldn't swallow crows gaping, but they lamented

all together."

"The flash Cossack even fired his pistol, might even have shot a crow, it wasn't for nothing that Hendryk smiled," Mister Dorosh continued to mumble.

"Tsk... what the Cossack life has come to. Now, master brothers, the Russian allows the Cossacks to shoot only crows, and even then the privilege is afforded the colonel. For our brother, the common Cossack, it's a spade in hand and off you go digging canals... or scream yourself hoarse, who knows what for," Potylytsia puffed away on his pipe.

"Really, they lamented like drunk grannies... But ask them why, no one will be able to give you a proper answer," the young Cossack Siurkalo brooded.

"They were bid to lament for Rozum," smiled Svyryd Pavych, a well-padded red-nosed Cossack. "Everyone yelled..."

"No one saw him on the platform!" a young Cossack expressed surprise.

"Probably heard about the platform," Mister Dorosh remarked, spitting to one side.

Everyone laughed.

"Visible death is frightening," someone said from the crowd.

"That Hendryk said that Rozum was young, that he was studying somewhere," Siurkalo did not relent. "Can't even hold a sword in his hand, and the Russian asked for him three times — what a to-do! They wanted only Rozum! I heard that he goes about in shining slippers, shaves his mustache, wears some kind of tangle atop his head and babbles in Turkish. He's more a scarecrow than a hetman!"

"Hold your tongue wretch!" Mister Dorosh thundered. "The Russian has allowed only a scarecrow to be elected hetman... So that the scarecrow can be twisted about this way and that, or even tossed onto the platform when it begins moving of its own accord, without asking Hendryk... Do you follow?"

"Yes," the young Cossack replied softly and looked in rapture at Mister Dorosh. "So, if Colonel Apostol or Colonel Dzhalaliy were elected hetman in place of the puppet Rozum

then . . . it might well be that Hendryk could have stood on the Borshchahivka platform to face the executioner's axe, or perhaps even someone higher placed than him? Is that it?"

"I see you're a Cossack with brains, even though you are young," Mister Dorosh smiled and in turn looked in amazement at the young man. "Here, drink a toast to the scarecrow, but all the same, keep your tongue in cheek or someone might nip it off."

"If we drink to the scarecrow, then let it be so," the crowd laughed. "Can't stand in the way of power . . . pour everyone a glass, Mister Dorosh!"

"Still, a scarecrow is better than a Board of Collegians," Mister Dorosh said, wiping his wet mustache with his hand. "The Board is teeming with enough Russians. Though Rozum is young and . . . even though he goes about in shining slippers, still he'll bring only one Russian with him — that in itself is a gain."

"A lousy gain, if any at all," remarked the young Cossack, red from his drink.

Mister Dorosh took the pipe from his mouth and watched the unusual debater in silence.

"What did you say?" he wheezed in amazement. "You a wise weed, or what?"

"No . . . I . . . just . . . "

"No Cossack, flinch neither from the sword nor the spoken word," Pavych joined in and sat down on a stump closer to the young fellow. "I know that you studied at the Academy, you're a learned person . . . explain yourself."

"Let's listen, listen to the academic," the throng buzzed.

Everyone tried to make himself comfortable as close as he could to the speaker.

The young Cossack only shrugged his shoulders, but began thoughtlessly:

"All of you were there by the platform this morning, you heard what the bearded Russian read out, what he said. I, for example, did not miss a single word: it's not often that such a wonder occurs. He spoke not so much about the hetman, as about the 'sincere obedience to the Muscovite throne'. When

he took the mace in his hands, he waved it as if he had trampled the whole of the Hetmanate. First of all he gave us a taste of the Muscovite sceptre, and then the mace — kept pushing his power to the fore."

"Ah yes, yes," and old Cossack agreed, "as if to say: we're superior."

"Moscow has stuck to us like cobbler's tar. Now it'll discharge the Board's collegians, that's true, but in their place it will appoint a resident, that is a person who will twirl us about like a Gypsy playing with the sun. He won't ask anyone anything, for he'll be sitting like the tsarina, and the hetman... well that's just... like a scarecrow."

"They give Rozum some kind of a free hand, it can't be otherwise," the old Cossack mused.

"Oh yes it will," Siurkalo responded acidly. "Moscow has long since eaten the 'decisive points', long since laid them on the shelves of the archives. What are we left with? We're left with the comedy of a hetman's elections and the Muscovite whip."

"That's the bitter truth... with our luck they'll drive us off to work on the canals again or on expeditions to capture foreign lands," the old Cossack sighed.

"Our people know that Muscovite whip very well!"

"Yes," the young man agreed, "we may even suffer a fate worse than expeditions..."

He stopped, and then added bitterly:

"We, we and the Sich Cossacks must beware, for new times are approaching, a new broom might sweep us all into the abyss..."

"Hey, Cossack, what the hell are you jabbering...!" Potylytsia bawled and suddenly looked away to where the hetman's palace loomed in the twilight, all bristling with lights, like a fairy-tale vision. They heard rustles and suddenly there was an explosion in the already black sky, scattering thousands of gold sparks. They slowly drifted down and became extinguished far away beyond the piles of snow-bound oaks. A second and third explosion followed the first.

"Muscovites are sending up fireworks," muttered the old

Cossack and looked wordlessly at Siurkalo.

The fellow buried his eyes in the night's gloom and answered forlornly:

"They're deluding us unseeing men."

"Unseeing?"

"Yes... we haven't seen the rope of a Great Hetman for a long time... Our colonels have lost him and can't put their hands on him again. They've scattered like blind men: one's in the meadow, the other at the plough... And now practically every one of them is being buddy-buddy with the Russians..."

And he nodded his head in the direction of the palace, glistening with lights in the cold gloom.

* * *

The large hall of the palace really was crowded...

Wax candles burned in bronze candelabras, throwing a subdued light on the glistening parquetry, the dark windows and the in-laid rail of the balustrades. Couples in fashionable attire moved about affectedly, bowing, and powdered ladies drank fragrant tea in foyers hung with chandeliers, muffled women's laughter resounded among the feathery palms and the red hydrangeas, and one could hear the witty jokes of the cavaliers dressed in French camisoles and gleaming shoes with high heels.

Against the sumptuous backdrop of this Hluchiv Versailles the Muscovite marquis and marquise saw as an eyesore the long mustache, the forelock wound three times around the right ear, the colonel's coat with a wide Slutsk-made belt, the sullen faces... The Cossack officers' unconcealed hostility, their formidably knitted brows, angry looks and the muteness of tightly pursed lips perfectly complemented the exotic clothes worn by these colonels... All this created fear, especially the barely perceptible pomposity and contempt.

The Cossack officers kept somewhat apart. This hostility upset the concord, forcing the Muscovites to look warily at the 'steppe men'. The tension marred the peaceful tone which some of the officers attempted to foster among the nobility,

and that tension upset the equilibrium, disconcerted their learned manners, insincere politeness. Some of the officers insolently ignored the Russians... The guests divided naturally into two groups, which did not wish to waste words on empty chit-chat and treated each other coldly and civilly. In vain did the commander-general attempt to bring harmony to the whole ensemble, his eyes seeking help from the colonels Abaza and Apostol: both these friends were unable to suddenly change the icy indifference of both sides. Some of the Muscovite ladies were frightened by the much too free movements of the officers, even though Mister Kochubei comforted the scared ladies and guests with choice compliments.

"Esteemed lady!" he said to Countess Hendrikova, placing his hand on her gold-embroidered coat. "Esteemed lady! Our colonels, standard-bearers and ensigns are good and well-behaved. Don't be frightened by their clothes or stern faces... There are many among them who have lived overseas, studied there, they speak foreign tongues... For example, Mister Halahan, the one sitting at the table on the left there..."

"Ah! He has such a long drooping mustache! And... he's leaning against the table so heavily that bottles are falling onto the parquetry," the countess whispered, surveying the colonel through her eye-glass."

"Mister Halahan is a knight, esteemed lady... he faced great danger saving a young lady from death. The colonel is a noble, sensitive person..."

"I believe you, I willingly believe you! But why such a head of hair! My God! What a hair-do! And that grey-haired fellow with the scar across his lip... Who's he?"

"Colonel Mister Dzhalaliy," he hastened to recommend Abaza... He's as tame as a calf!"

"I can't pronounce his name... Tame, you say. Why has he removed his sword, and even laid his pistol on the table? Ah! He's taking his belt off... he is no thorough gentleman..."

"Esteemed lady, these people are warriors. We have such a custom, to remove one's belt and lay one's sword on the table, so all this doesn't interfere."

"A savage custom! Our soldiers don't do that."

"Abaza has knitted his brows."

"A custom of knights throughout the west. That is the right of rest of those who are feared even by the Janissaries. The Janissary is not afraid of your soldier. . ."

Prince Shakhovsky hurried up to them. Smiling pleasantly, he babbled affectedly:

"Please excuse me. Apparently the esteemed count has become a little tired and badly requires your care, esteemed lady. . . "

"Where's the count?" Lady Hendrikova rose worriedly from her armchair.

"In the adjoining room, esteemed lady. . . there. . . "

And offering the countess his arm, Prince Shakhovsky made an indistinct gesture, pointing to the open door. An already drunk Hendrikov was sitting at a large table and yelling, waving his arms about.

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DINGO FENCE

Andriy Liakhovych

It was beyond the mental capacity of Arvin Derett and Frank McKenzie to understand that association with fellow humans had to be learned to be successful, and, once learned, that it could be forgotten. It was also beyond their mental capacity to realise that loneliness could become a habit which was just as hard to break as it was to acquire.

For Arvin Derett and Frank McKenzie were two ordinary men whose daily routine involved following the countless miles of a dingo fence through countryside which did not change with distance, but with the position of the sun.

In the morning the sunlight would chase away the darkness and pursue the shadows until they shrank to clenched fists around the stems of every bush and plant. The distance would detach itself from the horizon and quiver somewhere half-way between the earth and the sky. The dust would rise as if in protest at every movement and hover in the air, reluctant to sink back to the burning ground. Life would come to a standstill and only an eagle would form circles high above, as if looking for its own shadow.

Then the shadows would lengthen, the fists unclenching, searching fingers spreading along the ground, finding others, grasping hands, gaining confidence, emerging from depressions, gullies and rabbit holes, until the last fiery redness gave way to yet another night.

An endless repetition, along an endless fence, in a country which offers its own end only to a car speeding along the highway or a plane above.

For Arvin and Frank there was no end. Their four-wheel drive was heavily loaded with tools and wire, geared specially low to churn through the sandy soil burnt to dust by the sun. If

they covered five miles a day, it was good going. On other days there would be no progress at all, for quite often a willy-willy would pick up a broken branch and smash it through the wires, or rabbits would dig passages underneath, or sometimes several hundred feet of fence posts lay broken on the ground, as if an army of steam-rollers had flattened them.

Arvin and Frank would accept it as part of their job. Silently they would unload the gear, pitch camp and start repairing the fence.

In the first month they used to talk and joke, but then they drifted into silence, for their experiences became known to each other, the subjects of their stories dulled by repetition, and their own recollections became hazy and vague.

They still swore now and again whenever they came across a damaged section, but each knew the job he had to do and words became unimportant and the sounds of their voices unfamiliar. So they thought only the cruel swear words in their minds, and talked to themselves in their minds, and if one sneezed, or coughed, or hissed, or grunted, he looked a soundless apology at the other.

But the fence had to be repaired at all cost, and every strand of broken wire appeared to them as a personal affront. And even that was beyond their mental capacity to comprehend, for how could they grasp that through years of constant care and toil they had developed a love-hate attitude towards the fence which lonely children reserve towards coarse parents.

So they hated the fence with every fibre of their being and they loved it. They swore at it and they praised it. They cursed it and they nursed it. But, most important of all, it was their fence and no stranger's hand had a right to touch it.

When they arrived at the depot and the driver of the supply truck was there, conversation was slow.

"That bloody fence was down for half a mile" or "fixed twenty holes today." But for the driver it was just a fence, and his disinterest was irritating, his offhanded attitude offensive, his questions burdensome.

So when the supply truck was at the depot Arvin and Frank avoided it. Only when it was gone would they pick up what

they wanted, and what they wanted was always there, for they always needed the same things.

When they were close to a homestead they made sure they passed it as quickly and as unnoticed as possible. If the owner drove out to have a yarn, they pretended they were too busy to talk and answered his questions with hostile grunts while feverishly working on the fence, or by the truck, or at anything that would give them an excuse not to be drawn into a conversation. If the stranger offered them the comforts of his home for the night, they would refuse it, insisting that they had to move on in order to meet a time schedule. They would pack their gear in silent haste and depart in a cloud of dust which would hide the surprised stranger who knew that beyond his homestead a man could drive for three days and come across nothing else but what he had already covered. He also knew that in an hour or so the sun would set and they would have to stop and that the distance they had covered today would be lost tomorrow when they had to break camp again. So he would shrug his shoulders and return to his home, retaining a mental image of the two refugees.

"Just as well," he would think, "I've handled some tough-looking characters in my time. But these two! Must be city fellows gone wild. A man who grows up in the bush just gets tough and soily. It's the mark of city man to become wild and dirty like the refuse which overflows from their towns and is dumped in tips in the country."

Arvin and Frank would have been surprised at such thoughts, but only for a short while. They would take such remarks not as a reflection on their own appearance but as a sign of the nastiness of all strangers. And it served them right to get involved in conversations when they had a job to do. Next time they would avoid all strangers completely.

But there was another side to their thoughts. Thoughts mingled with recollections, unspoken thoughts, for each knew what the other was thinking and what the answer to any question would be.

"Why did we refuse the stranger's offer of comfort and good food? The fence! Yes, because of the fence. We have a job to

do. The fence has to be mended. Bloody rot! It's getting dark already, so what's the difference — but a glass of beer. Cold beer on the porch, leaning against a veranda post with some good tucker inside you, like the time in Sydney before this job. Five glasses, and you spin a yarn like a bloody poet. And you're mates — but."

Then it got dark and they stopped the truck and sat around the fire while the full moon threw a false sunrise over the horizon and a distant tree stretched its limbs towards heaven like a crippled hand.

If the two had been dingoes or wolves or dogs with a pedigree, they would have sat on their haunches and howled at the moon until their inner beings escaped through their open mouths and tear-stained eyes. If they had been boars or moose or grizzly bears one could have said that they were experiencing the coming of the mating season.

But they were humans, so they required something more than just instinct to tell them that in another part of the world winter snows were melting and life was awakening and waiting to be reproduced. And this something extra, this tiny touch which made them topple into seeking adventure, came on the gentle wisp of the evening breeze. It was in the form of a page of newspaper which the wind blew down from the truck. It landed at Frank's feet and he picked it up. Slowly his fingers moved along the lines as he spelled one word after another:

"Cook Bi-Cen-te-na-ry Ce-le-bra-tion Dance. Coonabran Hall."

Arvin felt that the rhythm of their routine was somehow being disturbed. He saw his friend's unusual occupation of looking at a piece of paper with print on it, walked towards him and glanced over his shoulder. He followed Frank's finger which started to underline words a second time:

"Cook Bi-Cen-te-na-ry Ce-le-bra-tion Dance."

The impact of a tremendous possibility made him almost sway.

"Yeah," he pressed out, "why not?"

The surprise on Frank's face gave way to admiration. "Me oath," he whispered, then he continued deciphering the

writing.

"It's Saturday," he said, "Coonabran, hour's drive along the old creek road. But the fence?"

"Fence, me bloody rot. Went to them dos in Sydney, lots of sheilas. Does you good." Was Arvin's enthusiastic answer.

"Me oath, yeah, me oath," Frank voiced his approval.

Arvin felt suddenly talkative: "You want to be rested before them dos, dance all night, a sheila in your arms. You dance? Ever danced before?"

Frank shook his head, but Arvin did not even look at him. He stretched out his hands with fingers wide open, hunched forward and jumped three times from one foot to the other. "See, and a sheila in your hand. But you want to be rested. The whole night. So hit your bedroll." He slapped at Frank with his hat and jumped a few more times. "Come on, get to bed, get, get, get! Tomorrow we'll get ready. Shave your beard."

"Me oath," Frank uttered in surprise. He got up and lumbered to the truck to get his bedroll. It was a cloudless night, so he would sleep under the truck. He threw a last glance at Arvin who was standing by the fire. There was a smile fixed on his face and the fire painted cruel distortions on it.

They woke up early next morning and started their preparations. Arvin insisted: "The beards must come off." He felt in high spirits and gave Frank a hacked lecture about shaved faces and gentlemanly conduct at a dance.

They found a rusty razor in the tray of the truck, and after a futile attempt to sharpen it Arvin set out to shave Frank. He hovered over the sitting Frank and attacked each individual hair in turn, until Frank's oaths turned into bloody oaths and began to resemble his face more and more as the shaving progressed. By the time Frank had performed the same deed to Arvin's face the sun was high in the sky.

They opened two tins from which the sun had burned off the labels and which turned out to be camp pie and pickled beetroot, wolfed them down, and set out to Coonabran to buy some 'hard alkihol' and then join the dance. For 'alkihol', as per Arvin's encyclopaedic knowledge of dance etiquette, was a 'must', and not the usual 'alkihol' like beer. It had to be 'Hard

Alkihol'.

The drive was hot and dusty. Arvin was behind the wheel. Frank could hardly keep his eyes open. A pot-hole, larger than the others, shook him up and he glanced sleepily around. All life seemed to have come to a standstill under the midday sun and the truck was painting a dirty dustline along the pale blue sky.

Above the horizon in front of them a glittering iron roof hung suspended by the heat.

"Coonabran."

"Me oath."

Frank seemed to remember something. He searched and found the piece of paper in his trouser pocket. He unfolded it on his knee and stared at it for some time.

"What's them Bi-Centineries?" he asked, after a moment's thought. Arvin just shrugged his shoulders.

Frank continued: "That dance is for them Bi-Centies; them people won't let us in."

Arvin stared at him for some time and the truck left the narrow track, bounded in a wide arc through the salt bush and joined the road again.

"Shut up, we'll get in," he finally said.

Coonabran came upon them. Two houses and a store on the left, a pub and a petrol station on the right. In the distance, the corrugated iron roofs of some farm-houses. They pulled up in front of the pub and steered into the bar.

They retired into a corner and settled down to methodical drinking. No word was spoken between them, but when a group of locals burst into laughter Arvin grunted in disapproval while Frank let go with a half subdued 'me oath' and looked about as if in search of a hidden door through which he could escape.

Then it was Arvin's turn to buy; he asked the barman for a bottle of whisky and another of brandy, and shrugged his shoulders when asked what brand.

"Just whisky and brandy, mate." Then lowering the tone of his voice and leaning over the beer-stained bar he inquired: "The dance tonight, in the Coonabran Hall, where's that?"

"Speak up, mate, I can't hear you for the din," was the bartender's answer. Arvin had the impression that all talk in the bar had stopped and everybody was staring at him. He repeated his question, but instead of an answer the bartender wiped his hands on the towel, told a prospective customer who held out an empty glass, "you just wait," walked around the bar counter and then out through the door. Only then did he turn around and wave to Arvin to follow him. Frank quickly put down his glass and almost ran after Arvin. Was it to be a fight?

But the bartender started waving his arms: "Down the Burke road, two miles; turn left to old Patrick McKinnon's station, that's where the Hall is." He then felt that an explanation was appropriate why a dance hall should be built two miles outside the town, and added: "McKinnon gave the land, so we built it there."

"Tonight, is a big do, mate?" Arvin asked.

"Big do, my oath, it always is," and the bartender disappeared inside. Frank stared after him, opened his mouth as if to say something, and closed it again.

Arvin looked at the door which had just shut, looked up at the sun which was still high in the sky, looked down the road towards Burke and looked at Frank who just stood there with a blank expression on his face.

It was still too early for the dance and he did not feel like making another entrance into the bar, so he went to the truck and sat on the tray. Frank followed him. They sat there with the sun shining into their faces until the heat of the afternoon made them drowsy. Arvin climbed down and sat on the dusty road in the shade of the truck, leaning against the wheel. He was soon fast asleep. When he woke up, it was almost dark. Frank was sprawled in the back of the truck. He shook him awake: "Time to go."

After the heat of the day the coolness of the night made the two men shiver as they sat in the cabin of the bucking truck. The sunset was paled by the night to a grey colour which made their cheekbones protrude and their eyes disappear into dark hollows. There were tools on the floor and with each pot-hole

they added their rattling to the squeaking door hinges. One of the headlights was loose in its mountings and its weak beam flittered from one side of the road to the other. As usual, neither Frank nor Arvin said a word, staring into the darkness ahead.

The bumpy silence was interrupted. First there was a beam of light from behind. It hit the vibrating rear-vision mirror in the cabin and Arvin had to hunch forward to get it out of his eyes. The shadow of their truck stood like a high-legged monster on the lit-up road in front of them and then disappeared as the car overtook them. There was a blare of an angry horn and rowdy shouts, the roar of an exhaust, dust, two swaying tail-lights disappearing in the distance, and the loose headlight darted about in the darkness once more.

As if pulled along by an invisible cord, Arvin had accelerated and was fighting with the steering wheel to keep the truck from bouncing off the road. He finally slowed down. There was perspiration on his face. His hands were cramped around the wheel.

After some time Frank asked in a hoarse voice: "Bi-Centies?"

"I dunno," grunted Arvin and stared at the road ahead. They came around a bend through a growth of trees and the hall shot out of the darkness at them.

Immediately it became clear why the hall was built on McKinnon's station. McKinnon had electricity on his property and he made full use of it. The entrance to the hall stood out against the dark trees like a comet against the night sky. Low, fast cars with black stripes over the bonnets gleamed in shining colours on both sides. Men in black suits and white shirts, in soft shoes, women in fancy dresses, jewellery, culottes, delicate handbags on fragile wrists, laughter, confident voices, recognitions, introductions, greetings, welcomings.

McKinnon's station was the centre of the cattle stations and stud farms in the district; it was a bit of metropolitan luxury reproduced by old McKinnon for his children and their friends whenever they retreated from Sydney or the Gold Coast.

Frank found his presence of mind first, although not his power of speech. So he started pummeling Arvin's arm with

his fist. That brought a reaction from Arvin. He saw the glass doors rush at him, found the brake pedal and slammed down on it. There was a prolonged screech from the dusty brake linings, the barbed wire reels and some drums rattled forward on the tray, and the truck stopped only a few feet short of the entrance.

"What's the big idea?" It was a youth who had jerked the door of the truck open. His foot was on the running board.

"Get this heap out of here."

Arvin saw that the foot was dressed in long dark trousers and looked down at his shorts from which his hairy legs protruded like two stumps of blackened gum trees. Behind the youth stood a girl with long flowing hair, dressed in a white pants suit, like a page boy from olden times, and again Arvin looked down at Frank's and his own naked legs and wished the youth would close the door.

"Dad!" There was impatience in the youth's voice. An older man came through the glass door. There was authority in his unhurried walk. There was understanding in his kind burnt face.

"If you boys have to make a delivery you better use the back door. You're blocking the entrance here."

Arvin found the reverse gear and the truck jerked back. He drove it to the far side of the parking lot where the light threw only dim shadows, and switched off the engine. They sat for a moment in the cabin, facing the dark trees.

It was Frank who made the first move. "Me oath, I need a drink," he said.

Arvin just nodded and started searching for the two bottles among the tools under his feet. He found them and they sat down on the ground, their backs against the wheels of the truck, facing the hall in the distance.

The activity in front of the entrance doors unfolded before them as if on a movie screen. Cars were still coming and leaving, people were arriving, there was laughter, talk, and when the doors swung open the sound of music floated across.

Once a young man got out of a car, tall, lean, a beard hiding his face, and hair flowing down to his shoulders. Frank's hand

shot to his own face where there were still signs of crusted blood. Arvin lifted the bottle to his lips and took a long drink. Some lights behind the trees came on and there was a roar of an aeroplane engine. A few minutes later people emerged through the trees and went into the hall.

"Bi-Centies," said Arvin, in a voice without expression and cleared his throat.

Gradually the activity ceased in front of the hall. Occasionally a man came out, walked up and down as if in search of solitude, smoked a cigarette and went back in again.

The bottles in Frank's and Arvin's hands became almost empty and the ground on which they sat was warm from their bodies and comfortable. The lights and colours around the door drew their gaze like a magnet. The alcohol made their thoughts jump in a disjointed pattern and they sat there drained of all volition, mesmerized by the self-assuredness and togetherness of all who walked into the hall.

Some hours must have passed before the trance was broken. The youth who had told them to shift their truck walked out the door. His movements were jerky, his face distorted with anger. He did not pause, but almost ran around the hall and disappeared into the darkness.

It must have been Arvin's surprised movement of his hand which attracted the girl's gaze as she came running out the door.

"John." She strained to see into the darkness and walked quickly towards the truck. "John, I did not mean to. . ." Her eyes were not used to the darkness so she saw only the outline of the two dark figures rising from the ground. Broad, squatty figures, smelling of dust, with hands held apart as if in helpless surrender, only the eyes reflecting the lights behind her.

"Oh, I am sorry, I thought you were. . . . ."

But their eyes were more used to the darkness. They saw the girl with the flowing hair dressed in a white pants suit, like a page boy from olden times, they saw her tiny hands, the smooth skin, the delicate features of her face, they sensed her strange perfume, they saw her slowly turn and walk back to the hall.

They sat down again in a kind of tired slow motion and stared at the door which closed behind her.

"She was crying."

"Me oath."

Tomorrow morning they would return to their dingo fence and the stupor of their routine existence. They would still swear now and again whenever they came across a damaged section and would unload the gear, pitch camp and silently repair the fence; and when their eyes met they would quickly turn them to the ground, denying the lie that they had danced with the girl with the long flowing hair dressed in a white pants suit, like a page boy from olden times; that they had walked up to her, two handsome young men, smartly dressed, and had taken her onto the dance floor, until she became the envy of all the other girls, until she forgot about her sorrow, until she dried her tears, until she found a new happiness in their arms.

(Originally written in English)

FROM THE OTHER WORLD

Yaroslav Lishchynsky

My greatest pleasure was to listen. At times the raconteur seemed to steal you out of the dark tent, over the barbed wire, and into another world. The world of his story. He recreated the picture of his past so skillfully, he was such a master of fantasy, that you forgot about reality.

We always awaited these stories more than our rations, for we knew that the small ration we received would never allay our hunger, while a good, artful story allowed you to forget the difficult, seemingly helpless position you were in.

Everyone, apart from my neighbour, had agreed to these "literary nights", as we called them. However my neighbour seemed obsessed by some strange mystery. Even after living with him in the one tent for two years, we learned only his name. He spoke very little, had no friends, and for whole days, hands deep in the pockets of his greatcoat, he paced the prisoner-of-war camp. His face was youthful, but his completely grey hair and heavy, exhausted-looking eyes showed that this person had experienced something unusual.

There were twelve of us in the tent. My place was right at the edge, and I called it my bed. Four bamboo stakes driven into the ground and a net stretched between them. Beside it a narrow space and four more stakes driven into the ground – my taciturn neighbour's bed. Six such beds on one side, a narrow passage, and six places on the far side. In the middle was a home-made iron-sheet stove which was hardly ever lit.

Liubomyr, my neighbour, took no notice of our entreaties to tell us a story, and when he tired of our stubborn requests he would leave the tent. We received a loaf of bread for the lot of us in the evening. When the duty officer divided it up that day, I took my piece and Liubomyr's, who was not present just

then. His knapsack hung at the head of his bed and as I slipped the bread inside it my hand touched a book. Normally I wouldn't have taken any notice of this, but because in camp a book was worth its weight in gold, my curiosity got the better of me. Before I could flip through the book a leaf of well-folded paper fell to the ground, and because the figure of my neighbour was veiled in such mystery, my curiosity got the better of me a second time. Carefully I unfolded the paper and at first seemed not to understand what was written there, although it was very clear: "Liubomyr Birsky, date of birth, a grade eight student at the gymnasium, passed away on the eighth day of May on such and such a year. The funeral will take place on the eleventh of May from the Pokrova Church at 10 am. Family grieving. May he be remembered forever." A cross.

My arms were trembling, a cold sweat covered my brow and something had a grip on my throat. It appeared as if I was holding the clepsydra of my mysterious neighbour.

That evening I did not listen to Sviatoslav's account. That night I did not sleep and in vain tried to drive away thoughts about Liubomyr's clepsydra.

It was my turn to tell a story. After the MC had called everyone to silence and ask me to begin my account, I felt lost. I began to fantasize about something, but after a few sentences I realised that nothing would come of it and blurted out: "Liubomyr, why don't you tell us something about your clepsydra instead." It was quite dark in the tent, however I felt his gaze rest on me. He rose from his bed without saying a word and left.

I felt ashamed and sorry for Liubomyr and, grabbing my greatcoat, raced out after him. It was dark outside and a thick quiet rain was falling. However it was impossible to find him among the hundreds of similar tents. Wet, I returned to our tent. It was quiet inside, however I knew that no one was asleep. They awaited me and my explanations. And so, to lessen my pain and somehow to justify myself, I betrayed everything I knew about the clepsydra to them.

He did not return that night and I met him only the

following morning during roll call. After assembly he entered the tent, took off his muddy shoes, and silently stretched out on his bed. Sensing that I was the reason for his night wandering, I carefully removed the wet geatcoat from him and covered him with my dry one.

He stayed in bed all day long. His untouched lunch lay on the cold stove, and towards evening, when the orderly divided up the bread, I slipped his ration into his knapsack so adroitly that I didn't even touch him.

That evening there were no willing raconteurs. And though the orderly called out names, everyone remained silent. It seemed that the evening everyone was looking forward to would be wasted. But then Liubomyr piped up: "Well, all right, I know what you want to hear. Let it be so, listen if you like."

During these stories people usually passed comments, especially when the speaker was our don juan Serhiy, but this time there was complete silence. There was an anticipation of something special. I made myself as comfortable as possible on my bamboo rods and became all ears.

"I was nineteen," Liubomyr began, "and was in grade eight at the gymnasium, preparing for my matriculation. I studied very hard, because in the junior classes I had devoted a lot of time to soccer, and now I wanted to get my matriculation at any price. My parents were not rich and so could not pay for me to live in the city. Therefore I made my way there each day by train from the village. I got up at six and was in class by eight. I would return home late. Though tired, I cheered myself with the thought that in a few weeks it would all be over and I could then relax.

"On the seventh of May I felt especially tired, however I had some difficult mathematical exercises before me and so I set about them without even having dinner, shutting myself off in a separate room. The pages of the book were gradually turned over, the completed exercises grew in number, and time dragged on.

"Mother would come quietly into the room, reproachfully drawing my attention to the fact that it was already quite late, but I kept working on and on. And I went to bed sometime

towards morning, completely exhausted.

"In the morning I heard mother get up, fuss about the kitchen preparing breakfast for me, I heard her call me, assuring me that I would be late for my train. But I could not get up. I heard all this, I was not asleep, however I could not get up. I couldn't even move a muscle. I tried to open my eyes, but in vain, in vain did I try to wriggle my hand and foot. I could feel that my mouth was closed and that my teeth were pressed firmly together. I tried to move my tongue, but it was no use. Out of my whole person only my mind worked furiously.

"I heard mother open the door and pause. My appearance must have seemed suspect to her. She quietly came up to the bed. I felt her warm hand on my forehead and the smell of her plait on my face. But I did not react. I lay a living corpse. I could not understand what was happening to me. The mind sought some kind of alternative, and though it seemed to me that I was screaming, straining every atom of my body, I was in fact lying motionless. At first as if from afar, and then with full comprehension, it struck me: lethargic sleep.

"I began to rebel inside. It was a rebellion of the mind, for the body lay dead. With her scream of "my son!" mother woke father and my small brother, while I became numb and lost consciousness."

Liubomyr was silent for a minute. The wind and the rain seemed to grow silent outside too, as well as the wet guards along the barbed wire. The whole world seemed to fall into a hush, listening to this fantastic story. Only the glow of cigarettes showed that the occupants of the tent were not yet asleep, but listening with the utmost attention.

"The first thing which struck my consciousness was the smell of fresh flowers and burning wax. Someone was reading something beside me, someone was weeping quietly. I was regaining my consciousness completely, and with it the awareness of my hopeless situation. And for the second time I began to fight with myself. In my mind I tugged, screamed, bit myself, but that was only in my imagination. With dynamic force, my brain seemed to strike the walls of my skull. But how could those present have seen this? I rested, and then with what

seemed even greater vigour, attempted to let them know that I was still alive. "I'm alive! Alive!" I let out imaginary screams, however no one heard me. There were no screams, there was not the slightest sign of life. I was lying on the catafalque in my parents' lounge room, amid a sea of field flowers and very high candles.

"My struggle with life must have really exhausted me, for I drifted into a torpor once more. Then my consciousness returned and I could hear familiar melodies, as if in a dream, various songs, and then words sounded right next to me: 'Here is that God who entered hell and tore the fetters of the chained souls, therefore give repose to the soul of your servant.'

"This was something familiar, something I had heard before, and I listened. And then again: 'May Christ, our just Lord who reigns over the living and the dead, take the souls of the deceased into the abode of the righteous, giving him rest in Abraham's bosom and have mercy on him, for He is good and a lover of men.' Yes, there wasn't the slightest doubt. I was being taken for dead. The psalter was being read over me. That meant that I would be buried, buried alive. How good it would be to die now. To commit suicide, a thought flashed through my mind. However reality was returning. If I was to make a single move to kill myself – there would be no need to die. Oh, this movement, one tiny wriggle of the hand – would be a sign of life. However my body lay immobile.

"I was seized with apathy. My thoughts wandered about our small village cemetery. Where would I be buried, I tried to guess. Under the old wild pear on the left there, or perhaps under the ramose ancient oak? 'The birds will come flying to you,' I recalled a song.

"I lost all sense of time. I didn't know whether I had been lying there a minute, an hour or an eternity. Perhaps this was only a nightmare? But no, this was no dream. This was a real, horrifying reality. And I screamed again, but only in my imagination. It was all in vain.

"I heard the singing of the choir. Far away at first, then closer, then right beside me. Yes, I recognised it. This was our school choir. So, everyone had come to pay their last respects

to a friend. I could very easily pick out Lesia's deep contralto voice and seemed to see her large hazel eyes, which were probably brimming with tears, I thought. I imagined I could see the luxurious grey mop of our singing teacher, the conductor of the school choir. Who was now standing in my place among the basses? Who was standing behind Lesia now?"

Liubomyr's voice sounded very tired, sometimes dropping to a whisper. By the light of a match with which he lit a fresh cigarette, I caught the look in his eyes. They seemed to have sunken even further. It seemed to me that he was reliving his false death a second time.

"In our parts there is a custom that the deceased lie at home until the day of the funeral," Liubomyr continued. "The priest then arrives, performs part of the funeral service, and the deceased is placed in the coffin. Then he is borne to the church where the second half of the service is performed. And then, accompanied by the choir, church banners and the faithful, the coffin is taken on the shoulders of close friends and acquaintances to the cemetery. If the deceased is not married, the lid is placed on the coffin at the cemetery, just before internment.

"Just then the priest was reading the first part, so that I had another hour to live. I no longer tried to fight it, feeling only sad. I lay like a corpse, but I could comprehend, my whole life seemed to appear before me. My childhood, my years in the village school, the tempestuous life of a boy, schooling in the city, my parents, my small brother, my friends, Lesia. Such an indescribable sadness and indescribable terror. My brain seemed to be aflame.

"People came up to me to pay their last respects. I heard my mother's spasmodic weeping and felt her last kiss, the heavy calloused hand of my father on my forehead and an almost inhuman groan coming from his lungs, the bitter childish weeping of my little brother. I heard Lesia's quiet 'Farewell, Liubchyk' and her warm tear on my cheek. I heard them, but they did not hear me. They only saw me.

"Several pairs of strong hands lifted me and carefully placed me in the coffin. For the last time I said goodbye to our home,

our yard, the meadow and rode off on my friends' shoulders to the small village church. The choir sang the whole way.

"It was quite a distance from the church to the cemetery. First through the village, then along a field road. I was above people's heads, surrounded by bunches of flowers, hands folded on my chest.

"Back in the church, when my friends had lifted me a second time, I seemed to feel a needle in the smallest finger of my left hand. A moment later a second prick. A spark of hope appeared within me and I began to work on the muscles of my left hand like crazy. I tried to move my fingers and force the blood to flow. 'If only it isn't too late,' I kept thinking. From my little finger I began to work on the next finger and the next, and finally the whole palm of the left hand. My left shoulder seemed to be lying a little lower, and with a superhuman effort I tore my left hand away from the entwined fingers of the right hand. It fell on the head on one of the honorary pallbearers. He must have looked up in surprise and, seeing the deceased's hand on his head, let go of the coffin in fright. Unbalanced, the coffin tumbled to the ground.

"With eyes wide open I ended up in a sitting position on the edge of the freshly-dug grave. Above me swung the branches of the ramose oak. The funeral procession froze in its tracks. Hundreds of people accompanying me on my final journey stood stock-still in fright.

"And noticing this fright I burst into hysterical laughter, and seemed to yell at the top of my voice: 'I'm alive!' "

THE BALLAD OF AN OVERCOAT

Olha Lytvyn

The sun fell behind the old lindens and scattered in slivers among the leaves. The wide shadows of the lindens lengthened, reached across the meadow and became lost in a yard far away behind a leaning fence.

The evening rushed into the house, bringing with it the shadows of the old lindens, and settled in the corners. A solitary sheep bleated somewhere. Late bees hurried to the hive with their honey. A damp cold drifted over from the lake, carrying with it the croaking of the frogs.

The sun collected the last slivers off the lindens, lit them, and began setting with dignity. A few stars appeared in the sky.

"Evening," the young married woman said and drove the cow into its shed.

The woman milked the cow, entered the house, strained the milk and fed her infant.

"It's dark," the married woman thought and lit a kerosene lamp.

The light caused the shadows of the old lindens to hug the walls, crawl under the table, the bench and the plank-bed. The evening crawled onto the oven and stretched out there until morning.

The woman came up to the cradle, adjusted the pillow, took the overcoat off its peg and covered the child.

"Sleep, my teeny darling, lullas have come to rock you!"

A girl came in from outside, drank a mug of milk with some rye bread and went to bed. She lay there a while, became cold, then got up and carefully took the overcoat from the cradle, covered herself with it and fell asleep.

The door creaked and a teenage boy who tended the cows entered the house. He drank a mug of milk with some rye

bread, lay down on the plank-bed, curled up and fell asleep. However he soon woke, shuddered, got up, took the overcoat off his little sister, covered himself with it and fell into a delicious sleep.

A girl came home from the brigade meeting. She sipped some milk, yawned, stretched, took the overcoat off her brother, and yawned one more time. Then she stretched out on the stove bench, covered herself with the overcoat and before she knew it – she was asleep.

Silently, as if stealing along, a swain entered the house, having arrived from his shift at the stables. He cut off a slice of bread, made a wry face at the milk, rummaged about in the cupboard, found the oil, poured some onto the bread, sprinkled it with salt and began his supper. He looked about the house, pulled the overcoat off his sister and went to sleep on the plank-bed. He covered himself with the warm overcoat and fell into a delicious sleep.

The woman extinguished the lamp and lay down on the bench.

At around midnight the door creaked open and the master entered the house, just returned from a meeting of the active. In the darkness he found the bread and milk, who knows whether he ate or not, he swore aloud, lit a match, removed the overcoat from the swain, lay down on the plank-bed and began to snore. He dreamt of unfulfilled plans, rebukes from the regional centre, a candidate's ticket and a bowl of pork aspic. In his dream he struggled between a full head and an empty stomach, tossing and turning from side to side.

The overcoat could no longer endure all this. Quietly it lowered one sleeve to the floor, then the flap, then the second sleeve, and then it slid silently onto the clay floor and rested there in peace until the morning.

A LETTER FROM THE PAST

Fedir Mykolayenko

A letter from Argentina? This was quite a surprise. I didn't know anyone there. The return address told me nothing either, apart from the fact that the correspondent was a Ukrainian, someone by the name of A. Zhurba. Where did this fellow know me from? What did he want?

There seemed no reason to become agitated, but an uneasy feeling came over me. With trembling hands I opened the envelope and looked at the signature at the end of the letter.

Nina! could this really be Nina Nahirniak – my precious friend from my youth? Nahirniak was her maiden name. Was it worth changing it to *'zhurba'* – sorrow? However, perhaps it wasn't her after all.

I read the first paragraph and immediately became convinced that it was indeed her. She wrote saying she had obtained my address through a Ukrainian magazine in Canada.

"Ninochka! My heart, my paradise! How happy I am! And how sad..."

Swallowing a tear by the letter-box, I read on, kissing her handwriting, reading the letter again and again.

Stepping inside, I poured myself a good glass of brandy, sat down at the table, and read through the letter which I already knew by heart. I savoured her precious words, which found a path to my heart. They took me by the hand and led me beyond the distant horizons of space and time, onto the familiar paths of the south-eastern corner of my fatherland.

Old panoramas emerged from the mists of the past, assuming unique colours and tones. Here was the playful Donets River bearing myriads of pearls borrowed from the sun in its apron of blue. The distant sounds of an accordion lured one's eyes towards two sails rocking lazily on a gleaming

stretch of water, like a pair of swans. An ancient forest surrounded a clearing, keeping an earnest vigil over the mercurial and noisy group of two-legged creatures. These were the residents of Luhansk, people from the smoke-bound city and the surrounding collieries, who had come here to drown their fatigue and boredom at least once a week in the clear healing waters of the Donets, to fill their lungs with fresh air, forest fragrances and to hear the bird's song.

Keeping my distance from wearisome company, leaning against a ramose oak, I snacked on a hot pie and admired the old firs at the far end of the clearing. They stood like giant burning candles, swaying with their flaming tops. Careful not to extinguish them, a light breeze breathed at them in jest. Shafts of light broke through the moving lacework of treetops, seeking out their select few in the crowd. One of these shafts fell on a girl's red dress and began to dance prankishly over her in a burning twinkle. Caressing the girl a little, it peaked into her bosom, kissed her lips and disappeared.

Watching this marvellous sight, I had forgotten to swallow my pie and had become somewhat bewildered. I had never before seen such a beautiful girl. By the time I had regained my senses, a bevy of young men had surrounded her.

Cursing myself, I tried to swallow the pie, however my throat had closed its gate and propped it up with a rock. There was little I could do. Turning away behind a bush of sloe, I emptied my mouth and heaped a choice curse at those fellows. This helped like a charm! Breaking free of their insolent encirclement, the girl skipped off into the forest depths. Without wasting a moment, I hurried off in the same direction. I was about to catch up to her when I realised that up ahead lay a "zone" forbidden to men. I had to lie in wait so as not to miss her when she returned.

At last she headed back. But what could I tell her, how would I greet her? In vain did I rack my brain, seeking the required question; the shorter the distance between us became, the more hopeless I felt and finally, like a beaten dog, I left the path.

"Wandering about alone?" the girl's voice sounded in a

golden tinkle.

Turning around I saw her, smiling gently, and felt relief.

"Fate has destined that I be alone," I replied.

"But there's a whole forest of people here. Haven't you any friends among them?"

"Too many. But male company doesn't interest me."

"Freedom to the free, but I think it's better to be in bad company than to be alone. In any case, there are enough girls about too – he who seeks will always find."

Encouraged by her words, I spoke out more boldly:

"I'm very grateful to you for your good advice, young lady, however I can't change my nature. To tell you the truth, once some beauty has enslaved my heart, it becomes impregnable to the rest of the world."

"Your beauty must be the most happy person on earth. I'd be interested to meet her."

"I don't know her name, but at this moment I'm looking into her wonderful charming eyes."

The girl burst into loud laughter, sending echoes through the forest. Checking her laughter, she said:

"You're far too generous with your compliments, but no matter how appealing these compliments are to me, they're quite insincere, they sound comical."

I became confused, but decided not to relent:

"I'm sorry if my words can't convince you, but I know no words which are more truthful."

Changing to a decisive tone, she disagreed:

"Five minutes ago I didn't even exist in your imagination. Don't you think your avowals are much too premature? Or perhaps you think I'm some dumb airhead who believes everything she's told?"

"I swear I thought nothing of the kind. Premature? I'm just afraid that it might be too late. I cannot hide my emotions and don't measure them by the minute, the hour or the year. I assure you that time does not dictate to my heart. And only mine? Anyone lucky enough to look into your eyes even once, will fall in love forever. No, you couldn't know what was happening in my mind long before our meeting, but your

figure and your lovely face have long since become entrenched there. I prayed to all the gods, all the peoples, to make you become a reality for me.

"Now when you are here before me and I gaze into your fervent eyes, do not argue with me that you aren't the answer to my prayers."

Smiling, she said:

"I don't know. The gods don't reveal their secrets to me."

"Try to listen more closely," I suggested. "They speak to the heart, not the ear."

"All right, I'll lend an ear to them. In the meantime, why don't you look about, perhaps you'll come across one who has already heard the Lord's voice. But I have to go now. Goodbye. I wish you success."

She left without hurrying, while I followed.

"I can't believe that such a charming person can be so cruel."

Turning around, she said:

"You're a very talented actor and you'll always have an audience. Goodbye!"

The girl quickened her step, but I hastily caught up to her.

"Dear girl, please tell me your name. Mine is Antin."

She laughed loudly. I was struck dumb, then tried to excuse myself:

"Sorry that my name is so funny. I bear the name given me by the priest. I don't like it either, but what can I do?"

Heaving with laughter, she justified herself:

"I've nothing against your name, but I find the coincidence amusing. It's simple. My name's Antonina (We both laughed). If it was some Ivan or Sashko, there'd be nothing strange about it, but Antins are one in a million . . . and here you come across my path . . . "

"Something has brought us together. At times chance plays a big part. I like my name very much, thanks to this incident. I'll call you Nina, if that's all right with you, and you can call me Antin. Agreed?"

Unfortunately our happiness did not last long. Soon an unprecedented horror shook our land. Mothers lost sons and daughters, wives lost their husbands, and sweethearts were

parted, if not forever, then for long years. We said our goodbyes then too.

Since ages past and to this day the Donets flows past Sviata Hora. And with it flows our life. Straying from its native riverbed, it has wandered into distant and foreign continents, never to return. Nina is already a granny, but in my memory and my heart she remains forever youthful, always smiling, a carefree and enchanting friend from my tempestuous youth. Such beautiful women are to be found only in the southern steppes of Ukraine.

NIGHTMARE YEARS

Nadia Petrenko

It was late December 1929, a terrible winter raged outside. Snowdrifts covered houses up to the roof, one couldn't open a door to step outside.

I was a small child then and stood on a bench with my brothers and sisters, trying to see what was happening outside. We began to melt little holes in the frozen panes with our breath and watched with one eye as father tried to make a path through the drifts to the shed, so that he could feed the cattle, who were already lowing and hungrily awaiting their master, unable to understand what had delayed him.

However he did not have long to work: some fellow, sinking up to his waist in the snow, came up to father, said something to him, and hurried off straight away. Father dashed back into the house and said something terrible to mother. She hastily prepared a bag and gave it to him. Father hugged all of us together to his strong chest, and hot tears fell onto our heads. A minute later he was no longer in the house, disappearing into the blizzard outside.

"Mamma," I wept, "where did dad go and why was he crying?"

But I received no answer. Mother only warned us to be good and began to pack quickly and tie various bundles, taking them to various people to harbour.

A black cloud now seemed to hang over our house, as if a corpse was lying in it: everyone was downcast, wary, awaiting something terrible. We remained in this state of tension until evening. Then mother pulled out the best things from the chests and dressed us in them, as well as tying what she could around our small chests. She put us to bed fully-clothed and, after hurriedly locking the door, went off into the dark night,

although none of us knew where.

In the morning I was woken by a terrible movement and shouts in the house. I sat up in fright, began to cry and call mother. My older sister hugged me and began to placate me. Meanwhile strangers were already fussing about in the yard. With shouts and brutal Russian curses they burst into the house. Nearly all of them were dressed in leather coats and breeches, on their heads they had pointed Budenny hats and pistols hung from their belts. Nearly all of them spoke in a foreign language, which I later learned was Russian. They quickly set about their work:

"Where are your father and mother?" they shouted at my sister. "Their kulak muzzles won't hide from us! We'll find them, wherever they are!"

Like wild animals they began to loot father's hard-earned property. All the cattle, which hadn't been fed for a whole day, were led out of the shed and driven off to the collective farm. They tore off the storehouse lock and carried off the last grain, kept for seed and food.

In the house they were selling a full sack of linen to each other for ten copecks a piece, trying on father's and mother's clothes, and tearing and trampling those that didn't fit them. Terrible curses rang out, they broke into insane laughter – it is hard to convey what was happening. One red-haired fellow in a tatty leather coat rushed up to the oven and began to demolish the chimney with a crowbar, probably checking to see if any of our parents had hidden there. The chimney collapsed in a pile of bricks and clay and the black soot rose in a column to the ceiling, which mother had only recently whitewashed.

Only now did this band of people seem to notice us, in a huddle on the oven. One middle-aged fellow with a scar on his cheek stretched his long arms out to us and threw us down onto the floor like pups, cursing and laughing. We were so frightened we couldn't cry.

Among them was a local Komsomol woman. She spied a large pot of dough on the stove (mother hadn't had time to bake the bread) and grabbed it, laughing, dragging it off home,

bent double.

Then there were long interrogations and threats, all with shouts and curses. They asked where our parents were, but we didn't know ourselves. Now I too realised why father had disappeared so suddenly and why mother had said that we should behave.

After the interrogation the brutal gang threw us outside onto a sleigh, which stood waiting.

"At least don't throw the small children about like that!" my older brother said angrily to a red-bearded fellow. But the fellow uttered a curse, grabbed my eleven-year-old brother with strong hands, and hurled him into a large heap of snow. My brother disappeared into the snow, only his black lambskin hat remained on the surface. The sleigh driver, a local fellow, probably felt ashamed for the Russian's actions, and he pulled my brother from the snow and sat him on the sleigh. Then he jumped on, wrapped himself in father's large sheepskin coat, which he'd pilfered from the house, cracked the whip, and the sleigh set off.

There was a terrible frost outside and we children were being taken somewhere into the blizzard. No one asked us if we were hungry or cold. I don't remember how long the ride lasted, but our sleigh finally stopped ouside a house with no roof. The house stood in the fields and only the tall poplars and the orchard behind it showed that the farmer, who had lived here until recently, had probably suffered a similar fate.

The driver commanded us to get off quickly. A frightful scene greeted us when we entered the house: there was a little straw on the floor and on it sat and lay many kulak children – children of 'enemies of the people'. The children were thin, emaciated and semi-conscious.

We were met by a red-faced Komsomol girl, her hair cut short, dressed in a narrow skirt and a red blouse.

"Ah, some more greenhorns!" she exclaimed, laughing noisomely. "Well, I'll smoke them up a bit so they behave and don't get cold." And she threw some wet stalks into the oven. It immediately began to smoulder, but the chimney must have been closed, for all the smoke billowed into the room and we

seemed to be in a gas chamber. Many of the children were moaning, some asked for water or called their mothers, but no one answered their cries or entreaties. The Komsomol girl sat in an adjacent room. Those children who had found their way here earlier were already dying, for they received no food or water.

Luckily we did not stay there very long, for many of the villagers knew our father as a kind and honest farmer: he helped those in trouble as best he could. That first night a sleigh drew up outside and two disguised people entered the house. They looked about and recognised us. We were lying on the straw, stunned by the smoke. They took us onto the sleigh outside and told the other children to escape, if they had the strength. They went into the adjacent room where the Komsomol girl was sleeping soundly. A terrible screaming and crying emanated from there. We didn't know what they did, but they emerged a short while later, quickly jumped onto the sleigh, and set off. The man in a sheepskin coat who was stroking my hot head, said: "Well, she won't be suffocating innocent children with smoke any more..."

People kept us hidden for a long time, we had to sit in dark cellars so that no one would know where Ivan Vereshchaka's children had gone. The village went on the offensive too: as soon as someone came from the regional party committee to agitate for the closure of the church or for people to join the collective farm, everyone came out against them, and at times the person never returned. The villagers were united in their opposition to any destruction. And even the militia was unable to learn who led this resistance.

Because of their solidarity, there were no denunciations and few others were dispossessed. Those that were, were no longer driven out of their house and allowed a small plot of land.

In 1933 the horrifying forced famine arrived in Ukraine. At the same time the passport system was instituted, which forced mother and us to return to our village, for we had no right to live anywhere else. Mother entreated an old woman on the outskirts of town to take us in and we began to live in her tiny house. The woman gave us four wide boards on which we

slept, huddled together on the floor. And so we resumed our miserable existence in our own village. There wasn't a crumb of bread in the house, and mother struggled to save us, but could do nothing. Soon my sister became bloated and died, while mother fell sick with typhus. We were like skeletons, a frightening sight to behold.

Easter was approaching, and we didn't have a crumb of food. I was sitting in the doorway and remembered my parents' nice clean, warm home, the high fragrant Easter cakes, the colourful eggs and various goodies. I burst into tears. I was too small to understand why such misfortune had befallen us, and who those people were who had taken away our father and destroyed our life. Crying, I got up and said to my brother:

"Let's go and beg in our village. The people know us there, they might give us something..."

My brother refused a long time, but then hunger got the better of him and we set off... My brother would wait by the gate while I went inside alone. The people did recognise me, for I resembled my father a lot, and gave me whatever they could. Eyes brimming with tears, people saw me out of their yards and wished us a happy Easter. When my brother saw how sympathetic people were, he began to accompany me into the houses.

Our little bags were almost full of alms, and in one house we were fed fritters from husks and potato peel. We were returning to mother, going cross-country through the winter wheat, overjoyed that we too had something to eat for Easter. And suddenly we spied a fellow coming towards us with a gun at his side. We recognised him: he was one of the village activists who had helped dispossess us. He stopped us and studied us, and recognising us, asked: "You're the children of Ivan Vereshchaka, right?" We said we were. "Your father was a good man, it's a pity he's disappeared and you're suffering in poverty. Come with me!"

We became frightened to death, thinking that he would take away our begged food from us. He brought us back to his house. He now lived in the nice house of a kulak whom he had

helped to deport to the Solovetsky Islands.

In the house we smelt the scent of delicious food, which brought a tickle to our chests. He told his wife to feed us well, and meanwhile got us a bag of flour, some bacon, eggs, and even a round of sausage, and then saw us off to the edge of the village. We found it a little hard to carry all this, and he stood there a long time, watching us go. And two days later a rumour spread through the village that this activist had shot himself when they had been singing "Christ is risen" at church on Easter Eve.

MY BULGARIA

Bohdan Podolianko

"Roman, where are you?" I heard my grandfather's voice calling me from the house.

I appeared on the doorstep, running out of the garden, where I was filching pods of peas from grandma and eating them on the spot. The peas were sweet.

"Yes, grandpa?" I asked.

"If you're good, I'll take you with me. We'll go to the Gypsies."

I already knew that "going to the Gypsies" meant crossing the Bulgarian-Rumanian border and going to a village called Kaleshti, where grandpa had many friends. My Grandpa Hrytsko always had to see them about some matter or other.

But before I tell you about how we crossed the border let me say a few words about my grandfather. The Bulgarians called my maternal grandfather a Cossack. Cossack Hryn or Hrytsko the Cossack. After I grew up and questioned grandpa why he was called a Cossack, he told me that it was his grandfather who had been the Cossack, having come to Bulgaria from somewhere around Kherson and settling here on the right bank of the Danube, because the Bulgarians were better people than the Gypsies, grandpa said. By "Gypsies" he meant the Rumanians. Grandma Hanka, my maternal grandmother, often made fun of grandpa's Cossackdom, of which he was so proud. She said:

"Romtsio, your grandpa is as much a Cossack as a bullet out of oakum." But I did not understand how one could make a bullet from oakum...

My mother married an Austrian Ruthenian and lived far away from grandpa and grandma, somewhere beyond the Carpathian Mountains, where I was born. But when I was four

or five I was given to my grandparents as a present. Granny taught me to sign my name; she was a very big and very fat woman who practically lived in the vegetable garden, where there was plenty of corn, gherkins, pumpkins and other vegetables. There were also peppers, but granny and I had an argument over them, for those peppers sold in the shop were quite different to those growing in our garden. She drove me away for my observations and said that such dog's seed would not go about teaching her...

The main house and grandpa's barn stood in a large garden and I remember that many a spring the Danube broke its banks and grandfather laughed that there was enough water in the barn to catch crayfish, although he never did catch them. The local boys did not like me because I was unable to talk to them, and they came around only to have a feed in granny's garden, to eat some peas or pumpkin. and granny also gave them strawberries.

While grandpa got ready, I washed my muddy feet and prepared for the expedition to the Gypsies with grandpa. The most interesting part of the journey was the crossing of the large iron bridge over the Danube, so I filled my pockets with stones, to toss them into the wide deep river. Grandpa took along a small barrow – a box with a single wheel at the front, sat me in it, granny wrapped up a piece of bread, an onion or an apple and a piece of bacon, and so we marched down to the bridge to cross over the Danube. There was a guard post on the bridge and each time we crossed the border I was shooed out of the barrow and the mustached Austrian, as grandpa referred to him, fingered the bundle, looking for something. Of course he never found anything, and we continued on our way. Each time grandpa said one and the same thing: though the fellow was an Austrian, he was one of our Ruthenians. And this Austrian really did speak like father and mother.

When grandpa tired of pushing me along, he told me to get out of the barrow and walk on ahead. Pointing to a garden of corn, grandpa enlightened me that it was ours, which was why it was easy for us to cross the border. It was some kilometres to the village, but we came across people just past the bridge, and

when greeting them, grandpa spoke in some language so that I never knew what he said. If only someone would get him a new tongue, I thought...

After staying in the village, where we were treated to delicious bread, thick yellow kasha and sour milk, we returned home on foot, as a rule, and many a time I would plead my way into grandpa's arms once my feet began to ache. Most often I accompanied grandpa on such journeys on Saturday night, so that when we returned home the post on the bridge was unattended and grandfather laughed that "one could even bring weapons across here". When grandpa prepared to leave without me, granny would plead:

"Hrytsko, take the scoundrel with you, 'cause I don't know what to do with him."

And we continued going. But when I was almost ten grandpa and grandma told me that I would go back over the Carpathians to mother and father.

"You're big now," grandma said, "you need to go to school, otherwise you'll grow into such a blockhead that no woman will marry you."

I was put on a train and, after kissing grandma's and grandpa's hand, I settled into my compartment with only one reservation; what would happen if someone stole me along the way?

Grandpa assured me that "the evil don't perish" and this placated me. Along the way the conductors handed me over to each other as if I was some piece of baggage.

After several years of living "at home", I left with great boldness to stay with grandpa and grandma again, because mother said that they were old now, they could die or there might be a war and I would never see them again...

I was already seventeen when I spied old grandma and grandpa on the station in Bulgaria. Granny began to fuss, asking if I wasn't hungry, and grandpa now talked to me as if I was an adult. The Ruthenian Austrian came around to see me too. And so, little by little, we began to recall how I used to travel on the barrow with grandpa to Kaleshti.

The Ruthenian Austrian began to quiz grandpa:

"Hrytsko, see, I'm on the pension now, I've no authority, but tell me like a good neighbour, what did you deal in, since I never caught you with anything on the bridge?"

"Barrows! The Rumanians needed barrows."

We all burst out in loud, good-natured laughter...

I said farewell to Bulgaria, a wonderful land where I spent several years of my carefree youth.

THE STRANGE BOSS

Stepan Radion

Short in stature, ageing, black-haired Les Roberts had been on a drinking spree with his group of workers since Thursday. He was barely able to get up on Monday morning, and without having had breakfast, his head like a barrel, he threw his lunch bag over his shoulder, went outside, placed the trolley on the rails and went off to the workers' hut, where the repair team gathered.

"My God, how I want to drink," he told Frank in the hut.

'Eh, today will be a continuation of the weekend, there won't be any work done once the boss feels like a drink first thing in the morning,' the workers thought, eyeing each other gaily. Meanwhile Frank gave the boss a wink and, without saying a word to anyone, disappeared behind the hut. He hopped over the fence and made off home, which was close by, to have a drink. The boss followed him.

"I sensed you had something lying about at home."

"Only two bottles."

"There's more in the pub."

"I'm not going off after the beer again. I went on Thursday and Friday, now it's someone else's turn. What I've got here will do me."

"We'll drink on our own today, I'll send the rest out of the hut."

"I'm not going," Frank said a little more gently. His lip was trembling for a drink, but he didn't want to drink alone with the boss. Although Les Roberts loved to drink he didn't always love to pay.

"Then you'll go off to work and we'll work like jack-asses," the boss said in a threatening tone, guzzling down two mouthfuls of beer. He licked his beer-wetted lips and looked at

Frank with tilted head. The boss's face looked smaller from overdrinking, his eyes were lacklustre, sunken.

"How can I drink with you when you still owe me money from Friday?"

"I don't owe you anything!"

"Oh, yes you do!"

"Lies!"

"Everyone, except you, gave me back ten shillings!"

"Lies, I gave you ten shillings too."

"When?"

"Before the end of work."

"I don't remember. So I was drunk then?"

"Of course, if you can't remember."

"It seems to me you're arguing just for the sake of arguing."

"No, I gave you ten shillings."

"All right, that's enough of that, I'll go off on my bike and get some. Because we won't quench our thirst with these two bottles."

"I'll finish this bottle and return to the hut to send the others off up the line. Come in about ten minutes, we can finish this beer and then go off for another dozen bottles.

* * *

The embankment slumbered for over a hundred years. Burrowed into the stone, railway sleepers slept a stubborn sleep. They really were asleep, even the trains rarely bothered them with their rails, for only some five or six trains passed over them in an entire day.

On both sides of the embankment there was waist-high grass and thickets of blackberry two people high. They probably would have grown level with the squat eucalypts if the repair team had not burned them down each year. Three workers with the boss's assistant were sitting on the rails, bored.

The boss and Fank arrived late after lunch on the trolleys. Frank was quite drunk, while Les Roberts could barely stand on his feet. Swaying about, he looked about from the top of the embankment. The rails stretched away into the distance for miles, narrowing in both directions, until they disappeared

beyond the horizon.

Sheep lay among the eucalypts in the fields adjacent to the railway fence. They struggled to their feet one after another and summoned the grown lambs to feed. Hundreds of them walked, ran and jumped like stirred-up ants, searching for their offspring. The boss looked at them viciously: "Shut up, you damned bastards!"

"You're not their boss, why are you giving them orders?" Frank called to the boss, smiling.

Les Roberts became silent for a minute and squatted next to the other four men. Frank squatted beside the group too. The boss was mumbling something to himself or someone else. No one paid any notice to him. The workers merely looked at each other and smiled when Les lowered his heavy head with its lacklustre eyes. High, high above them several planes were conducting their daily exercises.

"In the last war, when we heard the whine of the four-engined Japanese planes, we immediately dived into the bushes," Frank began recounting his war adventures.

"You never saw any Japanese bombers, you're just wagging your tongue, lying," Les Roberts said.

He never read anything, couldn't stand those in his group who read. He didn't like those who had been elsewhere, who knew more than him. In his free time he spent days on end drinking in the bar, and at home in the evenings.

For him drink was the beginning and end of diversion, and his ability to repair the railway line was the beginning and end of empty chatter. Therefore it was his custom to object to anything he had not seen, where he had not been, which he did not know himself and which would have been beyond him; through brain or brawn. Those in the repair team who were smarter than him, better educated and more learned, he tried to ridicule and contradict, sometimes jocularly, sometimes seriously, to shut them up. In this way he wanted to seem wise to the more stupid men.

"What? I'm lying?" the drunk Frank was indignant.

"Yes, you're lying!" the boss repeated, rising to his feet.

"I'm lying?" Frank raced up to the boss.

"Yes!" Les maintained with even greater determination. "You're lying. You were never in Malaya!" he finished provocatively.

Frank became enraged. His fists became clenched and he peppered the boss with lightning-fast punches. Without even a squeak Les Roberts fell to the ground, bent double. He lay without moving, as if dead. Frank picked up the boss and placed him on his feet like a child. The boss sobered up straight away.

"Take back what you just said!" Frank demanded, trying to keep calm.

"No, you were never in Malaya and you never saw any Japanese planes," the stubborn boss repeated. He was speaking in a sober voice now.

Frank imediately punched him in the stomach, under the chin, and the boss thumped onto the embankment once more, just like a log.

"Get up, be a man, not like a sissy that falls down at the slightest touch."

Frank picked up the boss once more and stood him on his feet with a sweep. He wanted Roberts to fight him, so that he could really beat him up, for it was neither interesting nor fair to fight a prostrated man. He adhered strictly to the principle: don't hit a fallen man. Therefore Frank stood the boss on his feet once more, trying to make him acquiesce to his demand.

"Take it back and apologise, or I'll shake your guts out!" Frank said, shaking the boss.

"No, you weren't in Malaya, you never saw any Japanese bombers," Les Roberts said in a barely audible voice. His head wouldn't stay up, drooping onto his chest. This made Frank even more furious. In his rage he kept frantically pummelling the boss, who kept falling to the ground. The sooner Les Roberts kept slumping to the ground, the more punches Frank landed on him. The boss fell face-first onto the embankment, lifeless.

Frank looked at the prostrate boss, thought something, and left him alone.

The workers rushed up to the boss, picked him up and stood him on his feet. Looking down, Les Roberts, slipped his bag

over his shoulder and set off home. Frank stood to one side of the group, silent, and gazed in the direction of the bar.

"The boss will probably ring the headquarters and Frank will be dismisssed straight away," his assistant said.

"Sure, sure," the others agreed.

At this the working day for Roberts' repair team finished for that Monday. Without looking about, Roberts moved off down the track.

On Tuesday morning the repair team carried out their work things from the hut and loaded them onto the handcar.

The boss arrived.

"Good morning!" Les Roberts first greeted Frank and then the others. The workers exchanged glances. Frank smiled and began to chat with the boss. The working week had begun on Tuesday.

THE IDIOT

Volodymyr Rusalsky

'Man of iron, why did you deceive me?!'

Yes, really, why? Captain Tumanov could not remember. Through the window he saw the first snow falling – fluffy snow. Heavy and irridescent... He was alone in the staff office. In the garret someone was youthfully whistling a tune. 'Perhaps this happened yesterday?' Well, yes, he remembered: at the dance in the railway theatre Liudmyla had come up to him. Blue-eyed, the new secretary at the staff headquarters. 'Leaves Falling From the Maple' – such a stupid tango. Everything was, in fact. They were playing jazz. It was all the same to Tumanov. But Liudmyla came up to him herself and asked him to dance with her. Well, obviously, Tumanov displayed a stunning tactlessness. He simply answered in a dry, even rude voice: "I wasn't taught such nonsense. I'm a pure proletarian. From the workbench." Those were the words he had used yesterday: 'From the workbench.' Blushing, Liudmyla had disappeared then. It was a sure thing, he had deceived her. And now this truly strange letter with its truly strange beginning: 'Man of iron...' But he, Tumanov, had been that way all his life. Made of iron – that was a fact. 'Eight o'clock, at the semaphore.' Only a woman's hand, Liudmyla's hand, could have written this letter so mysteriously.

Staff lieutenant Pevny walked in. An enormous, handsome fellow. Broad shoulders, a broad smile. Even his eyes had a special healthy glint. Tumanov did not like these eyes. He maintained there was something very feminine about them, and therefore treacherous. Pevny laughed at this and asserted something quite the opposite. Always joking lightly, with a touch of sarcasm. True, they were friends, because they had to be: such were the conditions at work, of course. But something did bind them together.

Tumanov rose. A round head. A bald head. With a crooked neck – that was obvious even to someone who was half-blind. He creaked away with his boots, hands leaning against the table. Pevny grimaced nervously.

"Listen, Tumanov... Why don't you exchange those... idiotic boots of yours? They make my teeth gnash. Funny. And people like this sort of thing!"

"Drop it..." Tumanov muttered. "Oh, ah, what a delicate mademoiselle! Eh?"

"All the same I wish you'd end up in hell – in the women's battalion – and that the faithful descendants of Venus organise a salty bath for you there!"

"And you would rejoice?"

"And how! And it will happen, I assure you! All the misogynists, as is appropriate, find themselves in the women's battalion... And since there aren't too many mugs like yours in this world, there'll be a few dozen Salomes eager to ride you."

"Eh, you're talking nonsense..."

Lieutenant Pevny settled into the armchair opposite Tumanov. The trembling light of a candle struck him at an angle – this probably made Pevny's face seem scarred and even ugly. 'Leaves Falling From the Maple...' Well, yeah. Smiling, Pevny drew up a three-legged stool for Tumanov:

"Sit down. Such stools are built for the nervous and the rheumatics. Mass-produced, with knots. And not expensive, only two roubles."

And for some reason Pevny remembered how Tumanov once walked the dirty streets of Berdychev, assuring all the janitors that he was a resident of Rome and personally knew Pope Pius. Back then a young milk-woman had twice slapped his face for offending her honour, after which Tumanov became sentimental and untalkative.

"I'm not a character for women," Tumanov justified himself. "I'm a mistake."

A narrow forehead. A round head. Predatory eyes. Simply predatory. On the table an uncut, unread copy of Shakespeare. This was how Pevny saw Tumanov.

Tumanov always knitted his brows, drew his head into his shoulders, and in the tone of someone moralising, uttered words which were most often written by self-taught artists on fences behind which lived ageing maids. Coarse proletariat words.

Now Tumanov was imposingly reasonable.

"Woman is a demon of temptation, wouldn't you say so? I reckon you understand this better than me, because... I'm telling you seriously: I'm not the type for women. But I know lovemaking, woman and so on..."

Why deceive oneself when this was the unwritten truth!

"... outside of politics and the art of killing people. That is happiness, as we understand it in life – not from philosophy, or God forbid, from literature. Every person is pursued by some invisible demon of temptation. You had it, of course. Not me. I drove it out of my soul one time, one time when...

"The wind rocked the shutters outside. The guard ensnared the building with heavy footsteps. The shutters creaked on rusty hinges.

"This happened when I was on the verge of my blessed years, one could say, when the flatteringly kind neighbours' women, whose husbands were forever off on trips, vied to invite me in for a glass of tea. It was then that I saw one girl, actually a woman, as she was going up to the second storey. From below I could see all her sins. Believe me – all her sins. I'll tell you, it was so interesting... I felt revulsion. Since then I haven't had the slightest desire for a woman. Just as I don't feel anything for this table. You hear me?"

"Sure."

Pevny listened. Pevny always liked to listen.

"You know, I recall the first years of the revolution. The stations, the markets seething with all kinds of filth. Black marketeers and deserters, monks and pickpockets – the devil himself. They were shown no mercy! There were only two paths open to them: into the cellars of Kiev's Lukianivska Prison, or off to the concentration camps of Kolyma. The women I executed myself – without discrimination. The prostitutes, of course. And those who were simply suspect.

There were no philosophies in existence then. Know why I'm telling you all this?" Lieutenant Pevny noticed something unbalanced, sooner inert, in Tumanov's movements and voice. "The melodrama of my soul is unfathomable. I deserted from temptations. There was nothing in my life which would have provoked a feeling towards women. I sought no attraction in them. I was a soldier on guard. It's a pity to say what there was..."

"And now? What now?" Liueutenant Pevny was smoking, enveloped in smoke. He was smoking coarse Lubny tobacco bearing the lyrical name of *Smychok* – fiddlestick.

"Now, if you like, I'm a soldier without weapons... Yeah."

"Oh, blessed you be, woman! Your repented vagabond has returned to you!" Pevny exclaimed pathetically. "Therefore, as my grandmother once told me, everything is transitory: tsar-killers become teachers of morals, bankers – dealers in drugs, and grave-diggers – the editors of newspapers in the capital. This is brilliant! And you, my luckless friend, are seriously in love?"

"I won't tell you that. Actually, I will, but not now."

Pevny was a volcano of laughter. Sarcasm, eyes filled with sarcasm. He knew what had provoked this laughter, and these feelings, and this unconcern... 'Leaves Falling From the Maple...' This was like a romantic sortie into the world of reality, that which is not forgotten: a jazz whirlwind, blue smoke in the theatre foyer, stamping feet until exhaustion. Till morning.

"I have not loved yet..." A chimerical glint in Tumanov's eyes, simply a mysterious smile under the narrow forehead – a deep streak of contempt. "It's been that way all my life. All the same, I would like to know – between us... Friends never betray each other, you follow? You've loved, right? Tsk, keep your voice down. I've never asked anyone about this. I felt ashamed."

"Well, of course..."

"And this is very... pleasant? Don't understand me somehow... well wrongly. Perhaps physically, yeah..."

The steam engine hooted slowly and quietly beyond the

pumping-station. The clock on the wall paced into the night. 'I'm not the type for women'. And there was still this wind – hell. Ripping off the shutters. Laying a white path on the window panes, a white kingdom, white dreams. When you looked at them... Ah, this boring, blessedly boring sentimentality! It was true: people were funny, each in their own way...

"I'll tell you," Lieutenant Pevny said prophetically. "You remind me of a donkey which is proud of its ears only because they are long. You are deeply convinced of the chastity of your miserable little soul. Funny. People, others of course, politically competent ones that is, shrewd people, who have a real brain in their head instead of putty – build noble careers on this and compose hymns to the almighty Allah, who does not meddle in their righteous matters... Otherwise you might regret having squandered away your life so imprudently..."

"Is this true?"

"It's true."

"Thank you. Now you can go. Even to hell! Because what you've said is a lie. Is that clear?"

The candle was burning low. Lieutenant Pevny left. Tumanov now surveyed the twilight room with such intenseness, as if he was seeking a hole into the other world.

"Man of iron, why did you deceive me?!" Tumanov said these words aloud, a little pathetically. This had happened yesterday, in all probability. He really had deceived her. Women did not forgive the contempt shown them. Tumanov had slighted Liudmyla, and this was a fact whose essence he had grasped only now.

And Pevny? Plainly, he was speaking nonsense. It was funny, funny to be so naive, so very naive, a big child, but the main thing was to believe. As if he didn't know life. As if he was an utter fool. Heh, that's a bit much, comrade lieutenant!

Outside:

Night was a mute hole. Wind and snow. (Petals flew – white and green. White and green. There hadn't been such bad weather for a long time... The snow was fluffy, wet like slippery flies, sticking to the eyebrows, the face,

sticking up the eyes... And the snow-winged wind played. As if on the strings of a smashed grand piano... On a mute, annoying night – above the deaf boundlessness of the black earth...)

The buildings, like giant chafers, had crawled to the sides of the street and fell silent. The sky bristled haughtily with clouds. The moon squashed the puddles on the road. Pasted them over with snow. Trampled them with the mud. And there was now no moon...

Drawing his head into the collar of his coat, Captain Tumanov made his way down the street; underfoot it was wet, unpleasant. The street was empty. Actually someone was walking ahead, on the right. Tumanov turned to the left. The semaphore was nearby. Past the crossing, a short walk along the embankment – and it became visible. Meanwhile, very, very close by was a black wall. 'An azure bay of love, this park on the corner. Chestnuts must have blossomed here in spring...'

Tumanov was not a cynic. He had never even loved. This was true. Forty-five years had gone up in smoke. As if he had smoked them away in a pipe.

And then the first blessed thought occurred to him:

A warm smile, a hot breakfast, conversation about industrialisation, the hiss of the primus, always-pressed collars – this was a wife.

Then a second thought came to him:

A dirty floor, the eyes of the leaders of the revolution gouged out, ink stains on the tablecloth and the books – this was the children.

If the truth be said, Tumanov frankly detested children. He would have gladly given them as gifts to his acquaintances and neighbours, as some people gave away pesky kittens and pups, just like that, without the slightest remorse. But a wife – this was something else. Literally: a wife was something else...

The person walking on the right turned towards the semaphore. The figure stopped under the semaphore. On the hill there, on the line itself. The wind lashed at it. The figure struggled to remain erect. But after standing a minute, it began

to pace back and forth. Back and forth. The steps resounded with an echo. This was not Liudmyla. These steps, this figure, were not those of a woman.

He, Tumanov, scrutinised the unknown person by the semaphore from below. No, this was not Liudmyla. This was some fellow. Tumanov became somewhat uneasy. He did not like such things, and in the event of anything, he wouldn't have known what to do.

The light of a match splashed a metallic blue. The fellow was lighting a cigarette. The fellow was smoking from his sleeve. He was lashed by the wind once more. 'This is a misunderstanding, a stupid coincidence.' She did not come. Liudmyla did not appear. Tumanov walked about for a long time. The fellow paced about too. Tumanov walked about down below and somehow seemed certain that he could not be seen from above.

A long hour of waiting passed. Liudmyla did not come. Tumanov turned around to leave. The fellow turned around too. Then they both walked towards the crossing, came out into the street. The fellow and Tumanov. And here the unexpected happened. Near some building the fellow came within gunshot range of him, even closer, much closer, and asked in the voice of Lieutenant Pevny:

"Have you got your matches, Tumanov? Mine are completely soaked..."

And then in the doorway to the staff headquarters – coldly and coarsely:

"It seems I mistakenly gave you a letter with the evening post... An intimate letter, of course, meant for me..."

"You think so?"

"It seems so..."

Alone in the room, undressed, Tumanov lit a new candle and settled sullenly into an armchair. Lieutenant Pevny entered as he was drawing a flap-eared dog with delicate rickety legs on the cover of Shakespeare's works. The dog's forehead was narrow. Its head round. Eyes predatory. Simply predatory. Lieutenant Pevny looked over Tumanov's shoulders at his simple, miserable art, looked at it and, smiling

imperceptibly, sat down opposite him without saying a word. They did not talk. Like enemies. They simply had nothing to talk about.

"I understand," Pevny began a little later with phlegmatic serenity, as if speaking to no one in particular; he began just as Liudmyla appeared in the doorway, like a ghost of the white night, that seductive courtesan. Like a ghost of the white night – graceful, truly graceful, and truly fascinating, noticeably troubled, with eyes filled with apple blossoms... She said 'excuse me', perhaps not even 'excuse me', but 'allow me' – neither Tumanov nor Pevny noticed. Then she came up to the table bravely and said straight out, the way people say prayers:

"I'd like to ask if any of you, by accident of course, happened to take a letter from my desk?"

"It disappeared from your desk?" Lieutenant Pevny pretended to fuss about.

"Yes. I left it there before the day's end."

"That's strange," Tumanov said significantly, having first glanced in Pevny's direction, then towards Liudmyla. "Who was the letter meant for, if it's no secret?"

"You see..." Liydmyla stammered. "I can't tell you this. It's personal. But we're talking about a letter which has fallen into strange hands, even uncertain hands, in my opinion. Well, I was going to send it to my fiance, the pilot Haryn..."

Lieutenant Pevny nervously flung his unfinished cigarette under the table:

"Well, I thought as much... I suspected this was the work of messenger Yakubovych. He was as drunk as a skunk and I placed him in the guard-house."

"A good thing you did," Captain Tumanov said decisively, and his eyes filled with savage malice. He turned with his whole body towards Liudmyla: "I am forced to do the same with you, madam. I'm arresting you for three days. Yes, yes, for three whole days. So you don't write any more private letters during work hours. That's forbidden. And so that you know: this isn't an Institute for Girls of Noble Birth!"

"You're an idiot, Tumanov!" Lieutenant Pevny shouted irritably now. "You're a real idiot!"

An hour later Captain Tumanov was sitting alone in the room, concentrating on finishing the fourth leg of the rickety dog with a snake's head on the cover of Shakespear's works.

THE PROMISE

Ivanna Sirko

The natives of the seaside settlement of Loniu prepared for a feast. Once a year, after, the planting of the yams, they solemnly worshipped the crocodile, that dangerous ruler of water and land, with the rising of the new moon.

The local natives tattooed the crocodile's image onto their body, the crocodile was the principle motif on their skillfully carved goods and the prow of every newly-built boat resembled a crocodile's head. The final preparations took place towards evening and each inhabitant of the settlement was allotted something to do. The men set off into the jungle in groups. Some were to catch a wild pig, others – to bring back canes of bamboo flowers and decorative leaves, and a third group had to catch a pair of young crocodiles which were to be sacrificed. The women brought various produce from the gardens and the bountiful gifts of the jungle.

The young widow Hahila was finishing braiding some bracelets from the fibres of an orchid. Nine of them already lay finished, but she had no fibre for the tenth. Hahila was adept at braiding, and the bracelets had to be ready for the following day. Without much thought, she took her son Ogi with her and made her way to the cove where there were plenty of orchids growing on the shady trees. It was already late in the afternoon. The shadows were growing longer, the exotic scent of roots wafted from the sun-warmed jungle; crickets chirped in the tall grass, a breeze played with the treetops, and a mighty predator circled over the mountain peak.

On a leaning tree Hahila immediately spied a clump of raspberry orchids, which had grown into the tree trunk with their powerful roots. Part of the root system hung down towards the water, like long ropes. Clapping his hands, Ogi

pointed at the blue butterflies fluttering over the flowers, at the yellowish honey-eater which was sucking nectar from the flowers with its long beak. Hahila gave her son some sugar cane and a handful of shells, so that he could play until she had picked what she needed, and began to clear a path to the tree. Ogi munched on the cane and threw the shells into the water, then lay in the grass and watched a large spider weaving its silver web in the branches. Hahila picked the stiff orchid roots rising all the way to the tree crown. Suddenly she got up instinctively, having heard an ominous rustle of grass and stones. When she jumped down from the tree she saw an enormous crocodile next to her small son.

"Stop, you beast!" Hahila shouted in a terrible voice, looking stubbornly into the crocodile's gleaming eyes. As if bewitched, the monster froze: one paw was resting on Ogi's chest and the jaws remained open, unnaturally wide open.

Hahila plucked up her courage; she realised that she could not allow the crocodile to avoid her intense gaze, and when she moved a few steps closer, she began talking to it: "You dare not injure Ogi, you dare not! You must return him to me, for Ogi is all I have left in the world – he is the blood of my heart! You have many human souls on your conscience! You took away Ogi's father, even though he bore your tattoo, but his son will leave your claws unharmed with the help of my strength and the good spirits of my ancestors."

A deathly sweat poured down from Hahila's face, the knees gave way under her, her heart beat with firm strikes, she was already close to fainting, but she took a hold of herself because she knew that if she gave in, she would lose everything. Realising the terrible danger, Ogi didn't even whimper, only his terror-filled eyes stared widely at his mother.

"Another step and Ogi will be mine," Hahila thought, and without a thought for her own safety she squatted in the grass and silently squeezed her son's hand. The touch of his skin gave her fresh strength, and when she spoke to the crocodile once more,her voice sounded fearless: "Trust me! I know you won't wrong me. You are the ruler of the waters and the land, you are our sign, our symbol, and when Ogi grows up I shall

call him by the ceremonial name of Kroko in your honour."

The monster did not budge, only its head turned to one side and its eyes glinted maliciously. "You are our idol," Hahila continued. "I know I must bring you a sacrifice for the return of my son. Let it be so. In the name of my ancestors I promise you my hand in return for my son." At this Hahila delicately lifted the crocodile's paw away and very carefully pulled her son free.

With Ogi clasped firmly in her embrace, she retreated, still hypnotising the crocodile with her eyes. She turned only after she reached the path, and then ran off home. Before her house she threw her son up into the air, then hugged him once more, saying: "Do you understand, my small son, what I promised the crocodile?" Ogi nodded in silence. In this short time his face seemed to have aged and his eyes became more reverent.

With a proud smile Hahila told her neighbours about what had happened. They marvelled at her, praised her, and of course waited for her to keep her promise.

The next day everything was made ready for the festival. After sunset, when the first stars began to twinkle, festively dressed people gathered around a bonfire.

With the rise of the new moon torches flared up and the witch-doctor ceremonially lit the bonfire. The gods were thanked, there was dancing and singing. The men danced, the women tended the fire and made sure that the food would be ready on time, while the children slept in small groups nearby on the warmed earth. Once the moon had reached the middle of the heavens, Hahila was ready to carry out her promise. Her left hand was tightly bound with vines. Flashes of fire lit up her agitated face and bare breasts, tattooed with the sign of the crocodile. The singing died down, the people gathered around the well-lit stump on which lay an axe, while nearby writhed a pair of bound crocodiles who were to be thrown alive into the fire.

"The hour of the spirits is here," the witch-doctor announced and firmly stepped towards the stump. Hahila stood beside him and preparing to place her hand on the stump, said: "Witch-doctor, free the crocodiles! I, Hahila, sacrifice my

hand for my son, as I promised the crocodile."

The witch-doctor nodded his head and said in a sedate voice: "The promise must be kept, otherwise the gods will punish us. Let the young crocodiles go free! Step up closer, Hahila." Hahila covered her eyes and lay her hand on the stump.

After the hand had fallen into the grass and the blood had spurted, Hahila tottered a little, but then took control of herself and allowed her wound to be dressed.

The witch-doctor pressed a hot stone against the wound to stop the blood, sprinkled it with wood ash, then bandaged the stump with medicinal herbs. During the solemn singing that followed, the chopped-off hand was thrown into the fire and the merriment continued. Despite the pain, Hahila remained with the people until dawn. Ogi woke before the guests had left, and seeing his mother's bandaged stump, whispered sympathetically: "Mummy, does it hurt badly?"

"Only a little, my son, only a little. But it's better to lose a hand than to lose you."

Standing beside Ogi, the witch-doctor smiled, stroked the boy's face, and said:

"Love has blessed love. When your mother dies a bright star will shine over her grave until the end of the world."

Hahila pressed her son to her heart, and when she raised her eyes towards the rising sun, they were full of deep tenderness and gratefulness.

FARMSTEADS AFLAME

Ivan Stotsky

1921...

Black skies, black steppes, black farmsteads.

On such nights the ungirdled revolution sent its sons out hunting.

And savage scraggy men emerged from black holes and shots exploded in the rushes. They were answered by others.

Then the farmsteads began to burn.

* * *

The farmstead was asleep.

It hugged the earth, cowering and immobile. The oaks, sycamores, elms stood like the skeletons of dead men, appearing even blacker in the gloom.

Figures armed with sawn-off rifles crept up like she-wolves.

A bandy-legged figure ran up, paused, and there followed a low whistle... A low bandit's whistle...

Followed by a second, a third, a fourth...

They sensed pickings nearby. Only the farmstead did not realise the impending threat. Exhausted from daily work it froze in sleep.

Drunk devilish figures drew ever closer.

The contours of sheds, houses, barns and storehouses bristled out of the earth.

The murderers checked their weapons.

The night became even blacker.

"Comrades, act decisively and show no pity," came the hoarse voice of the leader.

"Hee-hee... Why, was yesterday that bad?! Hee-hee-hee..."

They jumped the fence and stopped by the house.

Mother oaths and the crash of broken glass. Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle... scattering over the ground. As if weeping: don't kill

him. He's only a simple farmer.

A shot followed the crash of glass.

The night flinched. The farmstead awoke.

Old Nazarenko felt for his pole-axe among the pokers.

"... God damn! Open up!"

Another shot.

A breath of dry air. The stench of rotten eggs.

The children trembled in the corner under the table. Beside them their mother whispered prayers.

Old Nazarenko crossed himself and stood with the pole-axe on the bench by the window. Calm and collected.

"Saints in hell... Open up!"

Volleys of shots pierced the house.

Smoke entered the eyes and gunpowder choked the throat.

"Comrades, in through the windows." A shutter creaked.

Nazarenko trembled and struck with all his might where the creak had come from.

He felt the pole-axe sink into something soft.

On the other side of the wall something thudded to the ground.

Yes, yes, he got him...

"Toss that sword away, you kulak... goddam!"

Shots flashed in through the window.

The gunfire had singed old Nazarenko's face. His skin nipped a little, his eyes blinked and watered.

Suddenly the yard became illuminated and a shaft of light splashed into the house.

"Old man, the house is burning!" the mother exclaimed.

The children dashed out from under the table and screamed:

"Daddy, daddy...!"

Clasping her hands, the mother stood in the middle of the room.

Her instinct told her to do something. But what? What and how?

Nazarenko dashed into the entrance hall, to the door. But the door would not open. He slid the bolt open once more.

Yes. The murderers had latched the door on the outside.

Murderers!

Nazarenko dashed back into the family room.

"Oksana, Oksana! Quick, let's throw the children out the windows...!"

However, no sooner had he sat the first child on the windowsill, when a shot rang out and the limp body of the child slid down onto the ground.

"Animals!"

"Daddy, daddy dear!" the children screamed and pressed close to him.

What could he do?! He paused for a moment, but the children's screams forced him into action.

He grabbed another child and hoisted it through the window.

It fell to the ground, but immediately got to its feet and the father saw the flash of swift legs.

"Tymko, run into the orchard, into the orchard!" Nazarenko yelled.

Shots rang out, straw thatch burst into flame...

And the father kept yelling: "Into the orchard, run into the orchard!"

"Oh!" the old man groaned heavily and his corpse collapsed onto the windowsill.

The children ran about the house, the mother screamed.

The flaming thatch stirred and a sea of flame fell onto the ceiling with a crash. Red tongues jumped towards the sky and became even brighter.

"Help! Help!"

Desperate screams flew out of the house and became silent.

* * *

The sun rose – sleepy and pale. Limply shedding its rays. Cold and slippery, they fell strangely on to the weeping steppe.

The morning was angry and knitted its brows. Because it hadn't slept its fill yet.

Dewy, damp and cold...

A burnt smell emanated from Nazarenko's farmstead. Roosters were crowing in the village.

The sun rose higher. But the dew remained.

It was silent...

An ungreased cart creaked along the Kochubey Trail.

* * *

On the hilltop under a boundary post sat a boy of about eight. Timid, pale, exhausted. Dressed only in a shirt and pants. His eyes peered fearfully from under singed brows. He was crouching and trembling.

An old man in a straw hat was moving along the boundary towards him.

The small boy spotted the old man and immediately drew his head into his shoulders and froze. He had seen a person.

"Don't be scared, little boy."

The boy looked at the old man with fear.

"Whose are you...? Why don't you speak up?"

The child made no answer. Only sniffled every minute.

"Come on, tell me, whose are you? Where are your parents?"

Tears appeared in the boys eyes.

"Over there," he nodded his head towards the sooty roofless walls.

The old man blinked.

Before him loomed the ruins of the farmstead. A heavy column of smoke rose from it.

"What's your name?"

"Tymko."

"You cold, Tymko?"

"Yes, *didunio*."

"Then come with me."

The boy hesitated.

"Come, come. Don't be afraid of me."

The small boy rose and looked at the burnt ruins for a long time.

"I want my mummy."

RAIN

Pylyp Vakulenko

The thirsty, exhausted earth waited for rain. It writhed with dry grass and brown clods under the hot Australian sun, which had been ceaselessly parching it for nine months now. Not a cloud during the day, not a drop of dew in the morning! The endless deep blue of the sky retreated even further, even higher, seeming to fade.

"We need rain, oh how badly we need it!" old Dolia said to himself as he surveyed his small farm. A sad picture stood before him: the sheep had already begun to die, half a dozen cows could barely move among the eucalypt scrub, plucking off the last leaves. They were so thin and emaciated that they swayed in the wind. Petro looked at his cattle, the winter wheat which had wilted after barely breaking through the soil, looked at the blackened orchard, and a hard ball welled in his throat.

Ten years of hard work! And everything was lost! No, it wasn't lost yet, but another week or two – and that would be the end of it. He would be forced to leave it all behind and seek work in a factory.

He turned around and went into the house. He did not know what to do with himself: emerged from the house, returned, then stepped outside again. He just couldn't put his hands to work. Although there really was nothing left to do, he merely walked about, as if running away from himself. He had already forgotten why he had entered the house and was about to leave, when old Olena asked:

"What are you going to do with those sheep? You'll have to drive them into the sea, just like Joe Stirling."

"I can't do such a thing, I can't, do you understand? Better they die out in the fields, but I'm not driving them into the sea! And from a cliff at that."

"I only . . . so they wouldn't suffer . . . " Olena began and did not finish.

"I'm off to order some hay with our last five pounds, and after that may God's will be done!" her husband interrupted her.

"How many times I've asked you to sell this wretched farm. But no, you put your foot down!"

"Just listen to me, woman!" Petro began in exasperation. "What am I to do in old age? Pick and shovel work? You know that the farm is all I know, what I've worked at all my life. Who expected another misfortune in old age?"

Slamming the door shut behind him, he headed across the gully to Stirling's farm to make a telephone call. Running past two ancient gums, the path descended into the gully, past the dam which held back a large pond in good times. Now there was only a dirty puddle beside which lay two dead sheep. All around everything was dry, scorched, not a blade of grass! The sun had already turned north and a yellow-red aureole appeared around it. A hot north wind gusted, bringing with it a canopy of dust. Heavy blue clouds rose. It became dark. 'A wind from the desert to top it all off!' the old man thought and made his tattered, faded, wide-brimmed hat more secure. By the time he reached Stirling's house, the wind had strengthened, driving yellow dust into his face.

"Hullo Peter," Joe greeted him. "A duststorm, eh?"

"Hullo, Joe," Dolia replied in greeting. "How are things?"

"Bad, very bad!" Joe remarked sullenly and shook his head. "Looks like it might be blowing up some rain, but it's too late. Heard what I did yesterday? I couldn't get enough hay for such a large mob . . . Five hundred head . . . I feel like a murderer . . . " Joe reproached himself.

"Perhaps it's better this way," Dolia said for something to say. "I've got only fifty, and already seven have died. I've come to order some hay with my last money."

"All right, Peter, I'll ring up."

While they were talking the wind had subsided, the first droplets of rain began to fall, pea-sized drops. Like bullets striking something hard, they raised small clouds of red dust,

which covered Stirling's yard.

"I'll be off then."

"See you later, Peter," Joe called out to him.

The drops of rain began to fall faster, thicker, and then merged into a single mighty stream, as if the heavens had opened up. Dirty streams began to run, mixed with dust. Old Dolia began to hurry off, but suddenly he waved his hand and slowed down.

"Let it rain, let it wet me! Haven't I gotten wet before?" he thought and smiled. This was the first smile in many months. He remembered the thunderstorms back in Ukraine, how he was caught in the steppe on his native field... He remembered how as children they had run inside during a thunderstorm and covered the windows and doors. And when the thunder struck the panes rattled in the windows and the whole house shook! Oh, he hadn't heard thunder a long time! Here there was rain without thunder, only sand from the desert... But let it pour, even without the thunder, as long as it did not stop... for some reason he also remembered how they had conjured up rain as children:

Fall, fall, rain,
I'll cook you some borsch...

Old Danylo was wet to the bone, but who worried about such trifles? Drops of rain fell from his wide-brimmed hat, ran onto his neck, his weather-beaten face, but he took no notice. On the contrary, he exposed his chest, raised his hat – his grey hair was wet enough already – exposing his head to the warm, even rain. The wonderful, life-giving rain!

He walked slowly and his heart filled with joy. Like a snowball, the hard ball in his throat melted away. And the old man was as glad as a child. Who knows if it was only water dripping from his grey hair, whether there were not tears of joy mixed with water rolling down his face, falling in warm drops onto his wet clothes, his windburnt chest, onto the thirsty, cracked Australian earth...

THE GIFT OF LOVE

Hrytsko Volokyta

Petro Tsilushka walked along and thought almost aloud:

"The priest said in his sermon to give something for the cardinal as a 'gift of love'. To reach eighty years is a fine old age! So many years of suffering in concentration camps for our faith, and now the struggle for our right to our Patriarchate . . . ! Our Cardinal is a fighting fellow! My God, it's worth giving something to someone like that! And Tsilushka will be on the list, and people will say: 'Look, even he gave!'

"Bah . . . the old woman only banks it! When she puts her foot down, it's fare ye well! You can't extract a cent from her any more! True, a man doesn't have two left hands, and can always make a little on the side, but . . . you have to smoke, have to have a glass of beer, and sometimes you even have the urge to pull the devil by the tail." This was his reference to the poker machine.

Tsilushka stopped, took the change from his pocket and counted it. Eighty cents. There was nothing to hurry and donate, but to try his luck at the pokies was another matter. As they say: whether one buys or not, one can bargain. And Tsilushka limped off to the club.

There he stopped in front of a poker machine, pulled out his change and announced loudly: "Well, Cardinal, if I win, the money's yours. If I lose, forgive me!"

And what do you think? No sooner did he pull at the lever, than coins began pouring out as if from a sack. A whole thirty dollars!

"Ho, ho!" Tsilushka jumped for joy. "Cardinal, no one will give you this much money. And you wouldn't have the heart to take it all from poor Tsilushka. Right . . .? Well, so no one is wronged, let's split it down the middle. Fifteen dollars for you,

and I'm putting it into my right pocket. Fifteen dollars for me – in they go into my left pocket."

Tsilushka divided the money carefully and the machine sprung into action once more. But not all his Christmases came at once! Each time Tsilushka pulled the handle, nothing came, and when it did, it was only a dribble. He pulled and pulled at the handle until, before he knew it, his left pocket was empty.

Tsilushka bowed his head guiltily, scratched the back of his neck and muttered under his breath:

"Ah, when there's no luck, there's no fate. The heck on it." His hand involuntarily touched his right pocket. Petro hesitated a moment, but the hand caressed the pocket once more.

"What if, with your pardon, Cardinal, I was to try your luck?"

There was no answer. Before him stood the machine with its eternally hungry muzzle, gleaming and full of promise...

The hand greedily reached into the pocket and to this day Tsilushka does not know how it happened. He whistled away everything to a cent. When he regained his senses, the pocket was empty. He looked about fearfully. An Australian acquaintance was moving up to him.

"Hey, Jack! Lend me a few bob!" he shouted to him instead of a hello.

"Eh, no..." Jack laughed "I won't lend you any money because I don't want to lose a good mate, but I'll shout you a beer."

After the drink Jack went up to a poker machine, threw in a coin and pulled the lever. Money poured out... Tsilushka took one look and dashed out of the club in despair and sorrow.

And people still wonder that Tsilushka is not on the list. How could he be, with such luck?

THE POWER OF BEAUTY

Vadym Zhuk

Soviet periodicals are notorious for the poor quality of their colour reproductions. Judging by them alone, it is difficult to form a proper opinion of the artistic merit of the original. One can perceive only a general overview of the concept and the compositional decisions. Only from this point of view can one talk of a painting, which portrays a scene from the last days of World War Two: Soviet soldiers coming across the treasures of the Dresden Art Gallery hidden by Hitler's government in underground bunkers.

On the left, with his back to the viewer, a soldier has pulled aside a heavy curtain with his left hand, and with his right he is directing the light of a lamp onto the painting of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna.* The idea behind the work – the timelessness of art, the power of beauty over a person, even someone totally exhausted and made savage by war – is embodied principally in two figures who stand motionless before the canvas, eyes riveted to the Madonna's face. One of the soldiers is holding his helmet, removed as if out of respect; the other, wounded, seems frozen in mid-movement. I have encountered the artist's name only under this reproduction and so his name has not been retained in my memory.

"A typical made-to-order Soviet socialist painting! The Soviet army and art? A blatant piece of propaganda!" I've heard many say.

Perhaps so, to a degree. However, I would like to believe that the artist did not have in mind the Soviet army in particular, but rather man in general. At this point I would like to share an experience.

The ridiculous evacuation of Kiev on 19 September 1941 finished in the blood-soaked marshes near Berezan. Albeit

passively, I too took part in this tragedy. In his book *Wild Honey* Pervomaisky gave quite a faithful account of these events. I'll mention only that on the third day after leaving the city, everything which managed to survive the destructive bombing near Boryspil and the strafing of assault planes, stopped on the edge of these impassable marshes, hemmed in from three sides by the Germans.

Several tens of thousands of people and hundreds of various vehicles, a strange mixture of civilian and military – departments, families, organisations and scattered remains of army units – were wedged into a small piece of hard ground, something like a peninsula, surrounded by marsh from all sides, except for a narrow isthmus. Closing off the exit, the Germans waited for three days to see what this concentration of people would do without food, organised leadership, and with only a small number of firearms.

It was amazingly beautiful weather – a sunny, peaceful autumn. From far away, in the direction of Yahotyn, we could hear cannon fire from time to time; this lent a veracity to the command's intention to break through the encirclement. They hurriedly built a road across the marsh, pushing car after car into the water, together with furniture, loads and trees – everything possible. To the left, beyond the marsh, where the station of Baryshivka stood, we could see something burning to the ground – possibly the remains of bombed trains. A narrow sand spit stretched away from there, divided from us by a sheet of water perhaps a kilometre wide. A German vehicle drove out onto the spit perhaps twice a day; it would stop, the soldiers unloaded a mortar, set it up and fired two to three mines in our direction, then moved to another place and fired again. The mines whined eerily as they flew through the air and exploded among the vehicles. Having fulfilled their norm, they returned to Baryshivka calmly, without hurrying, as if out on exercises.

Both the German mines and the shooting which flared up suddenly from the isthmus and died away again, did not somehow suit the soft air, the gentle sunlight, the fragrance of mouldy leaves and marsh plants, seeming as unreal as a stage

backdrop: they failed to provoke thoughts of possible death or maiming.

On the third day, when the road had stretched out halfway across the marsh, the Germans began firing on the entire peninsula in the evening. Mine and cannon shells struck among the packed vehicles; sometimes petrol cans thrown up into the air exploded like frightening rockets, sending a fiery rain onto the earth. The night became illuminated by fires. From the isthmus, where a handful of soldiers and sailors of the sunken Dnieper Flotilla had created a defence line, one could hear machine-gun and automatic fire, rifle shots. The word was passed from man to man – to retreat across the marsh. Before dawn political instructors wielding pistols were driving everyone towards the road through the marsh, shooting those who tried to hide and remain behind.

I was one of the last to leave, when German could clearly be heard and only a few light machine-guns and automatic weapons held back the advance stubbornly and sacrificially, no more than a hundred steps from the shore. All around there were only soldiers, not a civilian was to be seen. Dawn began to break. The Germans had transferred their fire onto the marsh, but they fired haphazardly, and only the occasional shell or mine struck the marsh road or somewhere near it. Before I had covered even half a kilometre the resistance had stopped; the Germans had come out onto the shore and the machine-gun and automatic fire became insufferable. Fortunately the fog had grown so thick that it was possible only to fire at random, however from time to time someone would slump to the ground. Some would be helped up by neighbours, other simply disappeared into the water. No one will ever know how many people remained behind in that marsh.

Though nothing special, the roadway ended; people made off cross country, one minute up to their waists in water, the next almost on dry ground. Dropping in up to their necks, they had to swim short stretches. It became lighter and lighter, only stray bullets whizzed through the air, but it seemed there would be no end to the water. In the fog each person only saw three to four people ahead of him and moved along mechan-

ically, not caring about his direction or goal.

At last something black loomed up ahead. A few more steps and the water was up to the knees, a little further and one could see the start of a forest. The marsh was finishing. The fog was becoming thinner, and only behind hung a solid wall, from which, as far as the eye could see, appeared exhausted, mud-covered figures. The people called out to each other, trying to renew lost contacts. Someone attempted to organise something, but the soldiers kept pacing towards the forest, silent or snapping back viciously. The fresh morning air became permeated with filthy language.

A narrow, though fairly deep ditch had been dug before the forest. The first rays of sunlight had already lit up the treetops and slowly fell lower and lower. Having dried off a little above the waist, I had no desire to take another dip and sought out a comfortable crossing with my eyes. Suddenly the voices around me seemed to grow silent as people's attention became focused on something. I looked in the same direction.

On the far side of the ditch, on a small mound, stood a naked young women. At this moment the sun's rays dropped lower, hugging the erect figure with soft morning light. She was wringing the brassiere and panties she had removed, sending a stream of muddy water to the ground. She stood there unmoving, indifferent to her surroundings and the dozens of male eyes fixed on her. Facing the marsh, with tightly pursed lips, she stared with wide-open eyes in the direction of Kiev.

With a classicaly built body, this woman or girl was inexpressibly beautiful, however this was no commonplace, arousing beauty, but something serene, pure, even somewhat tragic.

And the unexpected happened. Loud conversations became quiet. That same soldier incapable of uttering a sentence without salting it well, for whom a woman was only the subject of crude stories, lowered his eyes after a long, almost sad stare, and continued on his way in silence. I did the same.

Ask me about her age or the colour of her hair – I couldn't tell you. But even after all these years I can still see the picture

before me – a figure of pink marble in the first rays of the sun against the backdrop of the dark forest.

Who was she? A girl grieving for her fiance? A wife or a mistress? A nursing sister? A worker, secretary, or a talented actress?

Why try to find out? For dozens of people she granted a minute, only a single minute, which touched something deeply hidden, immortal, retained even amid the horror and blood, and thus became imprinted in their minds for life.

I will never know if the artist had merely executed a commission, whether he had been a witness or had merely dreamed up the soldiers before Raphael's canvas.

However, this could have happened, for these are people, and I believe him.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Bohuslavets, Lesia. The pseudonym of a woman born under the sign of Cancer in 1932 in Poltava Province, Ukraine. Arrived in Australia as a refugee at age sixteen. Worked in hospitals, factories, as a typist. A mother of four, loves travelling, reading.

Began writing satirical stories in 1976, publishing her works in emigre Ukrainian publications. Her books include *The Work Shows the Workman* (1979), *A Pilgrimage to the Native Land* (1984). The author's style is characterised by a liberal use of proverbs and folk sayings.

Borets, Yurij. Born 1922 in Lubno in the Lemko region of Ukraine, he belongs to that generation forced to defend their homeland against invaders during WW2. Although a businessman from youth, he has recorded for posterity the insurgent struggle as seen through the eyes of a soldier. Having created a sound financial base for himself in Australia, he has assisted the emigre community through generous donations of time and money. *In the Whirlpool of Combat* (1971, English 1974), *Raid Without Arms* (1982).

Brytva, Opanas. The pseudonym of Orest Barchinski. Born in 1923 in Zolochiv, Western Ukraine, he arrived in Australia in 1950 and now resides in Sydney. Began writing poetry in 1944, and later turned his pen to humour. *I take buvaye* (1980).

Chub, Dmytro. The pseudonym of D. Nytczenko. Born in the Poltava region of Ukraine in 1906, the son of a farmer. Graduated from the Kharkiv Pedagogical Institute. During WW2 evacuated with his family to West Germany, emigrating to Australia in 1949. Worked as a storeman for the State Elecricity Commission until his retirement in 1972. Resides in Melbourne. An indefatigable organiser of Ukrainian literary

life in Australia, he has been a long-term contributor to many Ukrainian newspapers and magazines in diaspora.

His first poem was published in 1925, thereafter he contributed regularly to various publications. His first collection of poetry (*Vault,* 1931), was followed by another and a book of short stories.

Since arriving in Australia, Chub has published 16 books in Ukrainian, including *Paths of Adventure* (1975), *In the Forests Near Viazma* (1958, 1983) and scholarly and children's books. He is the initiator and compiler of the five-yearly almanac *The New Horizon* which has appeared regularly since 1954. His books in English include *So This Is Australia* (1980), *New Guinea Impressions* (1981), *West of Moscow* (1983), *Shevchenko The Man* (1985).

Domazar, Serhij. Born 1900 in Pyriatyn, Poltava Province, into the family of a village medical assistant. After the revolution lived by translating from German; worked as a proof-reader by night in Kiev and Kharkiv until 1937. Then taught German in Kiev. Arrived in Australia in 1949, where he worked as a compositor. His major work of fiction is *Castle on the Voday* (1964, English - 1971).

Folts, Klava. Born 1919 in the Azov-Black Sea region into the family of a mechanic. Unable to finish theatrical school because of the war. Worked in German theatres after the war. Arrived in Australia in 1955. First published in emigre magizines in 1966 under the pseudonym L. Samokhval.

Haran, Yevhen. Born 1926 in Ukraine into a family of school teachers. Arrived in Australia as a refugee in 1949. After graduating from Sydney University, he became a teacher. Publishes in emigre newspapers and journals, usually subtitling his works "eugenics".

Hrushetsky, Nevan. Born in Czechoslovakia in 1930 of Ukrainian parents. The family fled to West Germany after the Soviet invasion during WW2 and thence came to Australia. Working full-time, he was still able to obtain the degree of Bachelor of Commerce from Melbourne University. His short

stories have been published in *The New Horizon* almanac and his verse has appeared in *From Under the Gumtrees* (1976).

Kazdoba, Kuzma. Born in 1907 in the Kherson region of Ukraine. Arrived in Australia in 1948 and lived in Adelaide, where he passed away in 1984. Was active in the Ukrainian community there. His book *The Drifted Road* (1974) depicts the period of forced collectivization in Ukraine and his own traumatic experiences in exile in Northern Russia.

Kohut, Zoya. Born 1925 in Sumy, Ukraine. Arrived in Australia in 1949. Completed 7 semesters of Philosophy at Freiburg University. Began writing at school. Loves to travel abroad and now writes mainly poetry. The author of *Curly Smoke* (1974) and *Cultural Arabesques* (1969).

Kutsenko, Liuba. Pseudonym of M. Mychailiv. Born in 1910 in Poltava Province, into the family of an army officer. Arrived in Australia with her husband in 1949. Her stories have been published in *The New Horizon.* Author of *Ukrainian Embroideries* (1977). Died 1984.

Lazorsky, Mykola. Born in 1890 in Poltava Province. Studied law at Kharkiv University. A magazine editor before WW2. Several of his works were published in Ukraine. Arrested in the 1930s and exiled to Siberia for ten years. Began writing his first historical novel in Germany, finishing it in Australia in 1961. Apart from *Hetman Kyrylo Rozumovsky* (1962), his other novels include *Stepova Kvitka* (1965), *Patriot* (1969) and *Svitlotini* (1973). Died in Melbourne in 1970.

Liakhovych, Andriy. Born in 1933 in Bobiatyn, Western Ukraine. Has a Bachelor of Commerce and a B.A. from Melbourne University. Began writing at 14. *"Dingo Fence"* earned him a prize in an Australian competition.

Lishchynsky, Yaroslav. Born 1925 in Ukraine. Obtained a secondary education. Arrived in Australia in 1957 from England. Began being published from 1970. A member of "Slovo" (New York). His short stories have been published in emigre newspapers, *The New Horizon* almanac. Resides in Melbourne.

Lytvyn, Olha. Born in 1905 in the Podillia region. Received a higher education in Kiev, worked as an art teacher. During the war worked at hard labour in Germany. Arrived with her son to Australia and settled in Albany, WA. Contributed articles to emigre magazines. Died in 1969.

Mykolayenko, Fedir. Born in Lozovyi Yar, Kiev Province, in 1920, into the family of a farmer. Arrived in Australia in 1950. *Letter From the Past* is his first short story. Lives in Perth.

Petrenko, Nadia. The pseudonym of a mother of two, born in the Poltava region of Ukraine. Arrived in Australia in the great wave of post-war migration from Eastern Europe. Now lives in Adelaide.

Podolianko, Bohdan. Born 1921 in Lviv. Obtained a secondary education. A member of the Ukrainian underground, for which he was arrested in 1939. In 1949 arrived in Australia and helped set up the first Ukrainian newspaper in Berri, NSW. Began writing in Australia. The father of two daughters. Worked as a compositor for a major newspaper. Now a pensioner in Sydney. Author of *A Passion For Life* (1982).

Radion, Stepan. Born 24.7.1912 in Sylne, Volhynia. First began writing in 1930. In 1939 moved to the West after the Soviet occupation of Western Ukraine. Arrived in Australia in 1949. Completed the Australian School of Journalism. Has published scholarly works. Fiction includes *The New Crusade* (1954), *Nicolaus Bereza* (1956). Lives in Melbourne.

Rusalsky, Volodymyr. Born Ivan Hevelenko in 1911 in a village near Uman, Ukraine. Worked as a newspaper journalist in the Kiev region. Arrived in Australia in 1948 and settled in Adelaide. Died 1957. His books include *Moonlit Nights* (1945), *Sunshine Bells* (1946), *Iscariot's Laugh* (1947) and *After Surrounding of the Town* (1951).

Sirko, Ivanna. Born Indra Beatrice Souskova, in Czechoslovakia. Worked as a nurse near Prague. Arrived in Australia with her husband and after two years at the Royal Hospital, worked as a welfare officer in New Guinea for 17 years. Also

writes in Czech. Her books include *Flying Gems* (1957) and *Voice of Blood* (1961).

Stotsky, Ivan. Born 1905 in Radivonivka, Poltava Province. Finished one grade of an agricultural school. Arrived in Australia in 1949 and now lives in Northern Queensland. The author of several books: *I Am No Traitor* (1948), *Trampled Grain* (1954), *Klepachivsky Raid* (1968), *A Cinema-Film Expedition* (1970).

Tkach, Yuri. Born of Ukrainian parents in Melbourne in 1954. Graduated as an engineer, but in 1979 turned to translating and publishing full-time. Worked as a freelance translator in Canada 1981-83.

Vakulenko, Pylyp. Born in Nova Sofiyivka in Kharkiv Province in 1923, into a family of wealthy peasants. Began teaching before WW2. Deported to Germany in 1942 for forced labour. Arrived in Australia 1948. In 1950 graduated from a correspondence course with the Melbourne Art Training Institute and began work in the printing industry in Adelaide. Works as a freelance typesetter. Began writing in Australia for Ukrainian newspapers. Published several children's books with his own illustrations. Author of two books on the Great Barrier Reef and Papua New Guinea.

Volokyta, Hrytsko. Pseudonym of Jaroslaw Maslak. Born in 1909 in Berezhany, Western Ukraine, into the family of a court adviser. Arrived in Australia in 1949 and headed a Ukrainian theatrical group in Sydney. Began writing plays and songs in 1932. His collection of short stories and plays *The Gift of Love* appeared in 1983.

Zhuk, Vadym. Born 1911 in Perehudy near Kiev into the family of a teacher. Graduated as an engineer in Kiev in 1938. In 1943 left Kiev for West Germany and after the war came to Australia in 1949. Worked at the University of NSW as head of the Chemistry Demonstration Unit. Organized many visual displays in the Ukrainian community. Died 1980.

On the Fence presents the works of 25 Ukrainian authors who migrated to Australia in the late 1940s. Their stories tell of the difficult life back in the old country or their experiences in this strange new homeland.

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